

Church of God
of Prophecy

101ST INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY

July 20–24, 2022



Biblical Doctrine and Polity
Committee Report

Introduction

We welcome every member and friend of the Church of God of Prophecy to the 101st International Assembly, convening in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. We have assembled here from across the globe as brothers and sisters to worship the God of heaven, engage in vision casting, clarify our purpose, appropriate the business of this Church, and fellowship with one another.

The members of the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee (BDP) count it an honor to serve this worldwide body and its constituents. We do not consider ourselves to be the final word on any matter of theology, doctrine, biblical interpretation, or governance polity within this global movement. As a committee, we reaffirm that the International Assembly is the highest governing body of the Church of God of Prophecy. We are, however, aware of the significant task to which the BDP has been assigned.

Accordingly, in 1994, the following responsibility was entrusted to the BDP Committee at the 88th Assembly. “The committee is appointed by the General Overseer to serve the Church by preparing an exposition for dialogue on universal matters of biblical doctrine, theology, ethics, and polity for Assembly consideration.”¹ We accept the somber duties of this assignment and have proceeded in our deliberations with an eye focused on the Scripture, a heart given to prayer and the worship of our Lord, and an intellect attentive to theological, ethical, and policy matters.

This report is a compilation of the 2020 BDP report and additions for 2022. The cancellation of the 2020 International Assembly due to the pandemic resulted in the 2020 report being referred for consideration in the 2022 Assembly. The Committee², however, did release a large portion of the 2020 report in October 2020 for Church³ constituents to read. The sections released included a “Notice of Study of Term Limits.” The 2020 notice is included in this report as an addendum for archival purposes.

Admittedly, this report is somewhat lengthier than previous reports. However, the compilation of the four years of work and the nature of subjects under consideration have warranted a detailed report. The report is arranged as follows:

1. Recognition of individual leaders (Sections One through Three)
2. Statements from the BDP for the Assembly (Sections Four through Six)
3. Studies and recommendations (Sections Seven through Eight)
4. Notice of Study (Section Nine)

Recognitions

Section One Recognition of Bishop Sam and Linda Clements

The term *servant* is an accurate description of Bishop Sam and Linda Clements. The selfless ministry and leadership of the Clements is beyond question. The Clements’ devotion to the lordship of Jesus Christ, commitment to the gospel ministry, and support of the mission of the Church of God of Prophecy is evident throughout their decades of service.

¹ 88th Assembly Minutes, 1994, 150–151.

² Where the word *committee* represents the longer title, *Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee*, it is capitalized in this document.

³ Where the word *church* represents the longer title, *Church of God of Prophecy*, it is capitalized in this document.

Sam N. Clements was born August 4, 1942. He received Jesus Christ as his Savior at the age of twelve. In 1962, he accepted God's call into Christian service, and began full-time ministry in 1963, being licensed as a minister in the Church of God of Prophecy. He was ordained as a Bishop in 1972. He completed studies at the Church's Bible Training Institute and has extensive experience working with the Church's international, state, and regional boards and committees.

Bishop Clements was a Pastor for 28 years, serving congregations in Oklahoma, Michigan, and Tennessee. In 1991, Bishop Clements was appointed as Overseer to Arkansas. In 1993, he was appointed to both Arkansas and Oklahoma. In 1998, Bishop Clements was appointed as State Overseer⁴ of North Carolina. In 2000, being recommended by his colleagues in North America, and with the endorsement of the International Presbytery, Bishop Clements was selected as General Presbyter for North America. Bishop Clements served as North America General Presbyter under the administration of two General Overseers, Bishop Fred S. Fisher Sr. and Bishop Randall E. Howard.

When the office of General Overseer became vacant in April 2013, Bishop Clements shared directly in the Church's international governance from the end of April 2013 to July 2014, being selected by the General Presbyters to be chairman for the plurality team until a General Overseer was selected. In the closing prayer session of the International Presbytery meeting, July 29, 2014, the presbyters sensed the confirmation of the Holy Spirit upon Bishop Clements to be the General Overseer. During this session of Spirit-anointed prayer and Spirit-led affirmation, Bishop Clements was identified as a "leader among leaders." He was presented to the 98th International Assembly as General Overseer select, where he was subsequently accepted in a one-accord decision, becoming the sixth General Overseer to serve the Church since our inception in 1903.

As he began his tenure as General Overseer, Bishop Clements announced, "I am praying for God to change our little mindsets and give us a vision of the lost souls. Let us go forth and do the work that Jesus Christ has called us to do. This is our time, our day—we must not miss what God is doing." This passion for the unevangelized, along with his admission that the Church of God of Prophecy is not in competition with any other ministry, describes his vision of the Church's approach to ministry in the twenty-first century. Bishop Clements conveys that we should embrace a cooperative approach to ministry, partnering with others in the kingdom, knowing the mission field is too large for any one church group to reap the harvest alone.

Anyone who is blessed to spend time in the company of Bishop Clements will discover his humble disposition, sense of humor, delight in the Word of God, love for God, and his genuine regard for people. He claims that his faith and confidence does not stand in the wisdom of man but in God, the great "I AM." Bishop Clements has often been heard to comment, "His will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else."

Bishop Clements has ministered and led with the support of his loving wife, Linda. As the First Lady of the Church of God of Prophecy, Linda emulates the Proverbs 31 lady. Sam and Linda were joined in holy matrimony in 1961. Lady Linda has modeled the loving care for her husband, family, and the ministry. She is both an encourager and a prayer intercessor. She willingly demonstrates her love for people and commitment to pray on the behalf of the Church.

The Clements' life and ministry have not been without challenges and grief. However, in the midst of their deepest grief, the Clements modeled a confident faith and trustworthy resolve in the lordship of the sovereign God.

During his tenure, this Church body has been motivated, encouraged, and witnessed numerical growth and spiritual advancement. Bishop Clements' global passion is clearly visible. He has visited every continent where the Church of God of Prophecy ministers. He is not only an accomplished leader in this movement but has been recognized within the greater church community as a leader of leaders. In 2018,

⁴ The BDP wishes to show the Committee's utmost respect to the honorable leaders of this movement throughout the world. For that purpose, ministerial and administrative titles will be capitalized in this document except where they are not capitalized in citations from other sources.

Bishop Clements presided over the historic centennial Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, leading a pre-Assembly rally at the Fields of the Wood where thousands participated.

In a joint meeting of the General Presbyters, Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee, Finance and Stewardship Committee, and International Offices personnel, Bishop Clements announced on October 16, 2019, his transition from the office of General Overseer. However, with the cancelation of the 2020 International Assembly due to the pandemic, the leadership of this Church requested that Bishop Clements continue as General Overseer through the 2022 International Assembly. Bishop and Sister Clements graciously and humbly accepted this task and have modeled true servant leadership during this global crisis. Now, his leadership journey brings him to another phase. However, the Clements will continue to be servants until the Lord calls them home. This leader and family anticipate hearing the Master say, “Well done, good and faithful servants.”

The Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee, on behalf of Church of God of Prophecy ministers, members, and friends, recognize the invaluable service and leadership of Bishop Sam and First Lady Linda Clements. In recognition of the Clements, this Committee rehearses the instruction of the New Testament writer of Hebrews, “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Heb 13:7 NIV). There is no mistaking, the Church of God of Prophecy is indebted to the Clements for their selfless servant-leadership. This Church is better because of the Clements family.

Today, on behalf of the 101st International Assembly, we applaud the leadership of Bishop Sam N. Clements. Additionally, we invite this Assembly to rise to your feet and join with us in an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving for the ministry of Bishop Sam N. and Linda Clements.

Section Two **Recognition of Dr. Elías Rodríguez**

Dr. Elías Rodríguez was first appointed to the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee (BDP) under the administration of General Overseer Bishop Fred S. Fisher, Sr. in the International Assembly of 2006. He was reappointed to the Committee under the administrations of General Overseers Bishop Randall Howard and Bishop Sam Clements. Dr. Rodríguez served a total of twelve years on the Committee, being rotated off the Committee in 2018, at the 100th International Assembly. Dr. Rodríguez served as secretary of the Committee for eight years (2010–2018).

Dr. Rodríguez highlights two key passages that pose a challenge to the Church of God of Prophecy in regard to the hard work of studying, interpreting, and applying the Scriptures in our Church culture. The first is Matthew 22:37, 38 (NKJV): “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment.” The second key passage is 2 Timothy 2:15 (NKJV): “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Dr. Rodríguez states that Pentecostals do not seem to have a problem loving God with all our hearts, but we have not always loved God with all our minds. Among the Christian community, we have been criticized for this neglect. Dr. Rodríguez continues, “If we don’t study the Word of God, for me, we are not loving God with all our minds, and in consequence, we are breaking the first commandment. . . . There is no way of interpreting and applying the Scriptures if we don’t study them. . . . I think that if we want to break the cycle of biblical illiteracy, we must teach our people how to study the Word [for] themselves.”

Dr. Rodríguez practices what he preaches and teaches. During the twelve years he served on the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee, he was also pursuing biblical and theological education. He earned his Master of Divinity (MDiv) from Pentecostal Theological Seminary in 2007 and his Doctor of Ministry (DMin) from Gordon-Conwell Seminary in 2014. He is presently studying for a research doctorate (PhD).

Dr. Rodríguez believes that his greatest accomplishment during his time of service on the Committee was to bring Hispanics to the discussion table, thus enriching the Committee by broadening perspectives

and worldviews. “It was always amazing,” says Dr. Rodríguez, “to see all of us working as one; nobody trying to impose their worldviews upon the others, but thinking [about] the field, how our brothers and sisters around the world [would] receive what we produced in that room.” Another accomplishment, for which he is grateful, was his participation in the writing of the “Footwashing” document, presented in the International Assembly of 2018.

When asked, “What words [of advice] would you now give to the BDP Committee, based on your personal experience?” Dr. Rodríguez responded, “Based on my personal experience, I would tell my dear [colleagues] that, even though the job of the Committee is hard, time-consuming, even tedious at time[s], it is very rewarding. It has direct consequences on how the Church’s businesses are conducted; how people around the world are represented and given voice; [and] how our people can have a better understanding of our doctrine, which translates to freedom from spiritual bondage for many. I think that the work done by the Committee has eternal consequences for our Church.”

Those of us who had the honor and privilege of serving on the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee with Dr. Elías Rodríguez were saddened when he was rotated off the Committee in 2018. We miss his academic scholarship, his discernment and wisdom, his experience and resourcefulness. We miss his sense of humor. We miss his companionship. We still consult him from time to time, and he is always willing and eager to help.

We, the current members of the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee, now invite this International Assembly 2022 to join us in honoring Dr. Elías Rodríguez for his valuable years of service to the Church of God of Prophecy on the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee.

Section Three Recognition of Dr. Delroy Hall

Dr. Delroy Hall, hailing from Sheffield, England, served on the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee from 2014 until 2020. Dr. Hall was awarded his PhD in Pastoral Theology from Birmingham University in 2013, as well as a diploma in Counseling from Leicester University. He is a published author, both in prestigious academic publications and in a recent title in SCM Press. During his service on the BDP Committee, Dr. Hall was able to articulate insights through theological, psychological, and sociological lenses. He drove us to deep thought, but his unique sense of humor often elicited stress-relieving laughter as we engaged in tedious discourse. The members of this BDP Committee express our deep appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Delroy Hall for his invaluable service to the Committee and this Church. We extend to him Godspeed in all his endeavors for God and the kingdom.

Positional Statements

Section Four Statement on Sexual Harassment

The Church of God of Prophecy embraces biblical principles regarding holiness, sexual morality, and a lifestyle of purity. Sexual immorality, in all of its expressions, is not consistent with godly living (1 Cor 5:1; 6:9, 10; 7:2; 10:8; Gal 5:19–21; Eph 5:3–5; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:3–5; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6; Rev 21:8). Consequently, the Church of God of Prophecy is committed to a zero-tolerance regarding sexual misconduct, harassment, and abuse. Every leader in this Church, whether volunteer or paid staff, is called to a lifestyle of holiness and purity according to biblical principles.

Recommendation

We recommend the above statement be included in the *Ministry Policy Manual* of the Church of God of Prophecy.

Section Five Statement on Human Trafficking

Today, “Every nation in the world has laws abolishing slavery, yet the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 21 million men, women, and children are exploited for profit.”⁵ The reality is that human trafficking is globally pervasive and is considered to be one of the fastest-growing criminal enterprises in today’s world. Human trafficking is experienced by three out of every 1,000 people. The Global Slavery Index proffers that actual human trafficking is closer to 45 million persons.⁶ Human trafficking includes forced labor, sexual exploitation, organ removal, domestic servitude, child soldiers, forced marriage, forced begging, and the selling of children.⁷

Recommendation

We recommend this statement be included in the *Ministry Policy Manual* of the Church of God of Prophecy:

The Church of God of Prophecy unreservedly denounces all forms of human trafficking, bondage, and enslavement, both past and present. We herald the biblical and theological truth that every person, no matter their gender, race, ethnicity, station, health, or mental capacity, is created in the *imago dei*, the image of God (Gen 1:26–28; 5:1–3; 9:6). We echo the pronouncement of the apostle Peter at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, after he ministered to the Gentile household of Cornelius (Acts 10), that God “did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9 NIV). We embrace the proclamation of the apostle Paul in his sermon at the Areopagus that God “has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26 NKJV). And we champion the salvific truth that “in Christ . . . you [we] are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26–28 NIV).

Section Six Statement on Race Relations

We, the global body of the Church of God of Prophecy, stand against the malicious presence of racism, classism, xenophobia, chauvinism, extreme nationalism, sexism, and all forms of bigotry and prejudice in this world. We mourn with those who are mourning and are suffering at the ugly hands of injustice. We stand against hatred, bigotry, gender biases, and racial prejudices of any form and confess that it has devalued our minority brothers and sisters across the world. We must commit ourselves anew to teaching, preaching, and ministering a gospel of hope that promotes justice and freedom from fear. “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation” (Eph 2:14 NKJV).

Through the church, God has created a reflection of His kingdom here on earth, and we convey that we see great intrinsic value in building deep and abiding relationship with one another. His Word explicitly shows us that He has reconciled racially and culturally divided groups into “one new man” (Eph 2:15). He has united us into one body, thus making peace, so that the church can function in unity. The church is the place where race, gender, and class distinctions are no longer to be used as tools of division and disunion.

We celebrate the diversity and differences of God’s creation through race, ethnic groups, culture, and

⁵ Wendy Stickle, Shelby Hickman, and Christine White, *Human Trafficking: A Comprehensive Exploration of Modern Day Slavery* (London: SAGE Publications, 2020), 2.

⁶ Stickle, Hickman, and White, *Human Trafficking*, 1, 2.

⁷ Stickle, Hickman, and White, *Human Trafficking*, 8.

language. As the church, however, we can no longer allow these differences to separate us. We will not permit differences to overshadow the fact that God’s kingdom values all people regardless of race, gender, or culture. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28 NKJV). God’s people, when joined together, are more complete, balanced, and whole in Christ Jesus.

Recommendation

We recommend the above statement be included in the *Ministry Policy Manual* of the Church of God of Prophecy.

Topical Studies

Section Seven Proposed Change in Title of Overseer

Words are the building blocks of effective communication, conveying ideas, sharing emotions, posing questions, providing instruction, and fostering comfort. Although words have etymological derivations and lexical meanings, how words are utilized by society at large and within conversation particularly, help to regulate their practical and contextual usefulness. The reality is some words undergo an evolutionary process in meaning. Accordingly, the study of linguistics commonly refers to this occurrence as semantic shift or semantic change. In a semantic progression of a particular word, the meaning of the word may be altered either slightly or significantly. At times, specific words can become archaic and obsolete.

Nuances of specific words and their usage may connote something entirely different by the hearer than is meant by the speaker. A simple example of this is clearly evident in the word “mouse.” A speaker may say, “There is a mouse in the desk drawer.” The hearer may envision a furry rodent while the speaker may actually mean a hand-held wireless device used as an input device for a computer. The context in which a word or a set of words occur helps to determine its intended lexical meaning. However, word usage varies based upon culture, education, ethnicity, familiarity, and the speaker’s native language. Consequently, a word spoken in one cultural setting may denote something not meant by the speaker in a different cultural setting. Words are powerful not only in the sharing of ideas but also in the eliciting of emotions. Words can both express comfort and transmit discomfiting baggage. “Language is a medium of *action* [italics in original]: words, when used in different ways, *do* different things.”⁸

Linguistic and Historical Rationale

Speech act theory proffers that in the philosophy of human language, through the medium of words, three actions occur, namely, 1) the locutionary act, 2) the illocutionary act, and 3) the perlocutionary act. Specifically, a locutionary act occurs when an individual vocalizes phonemes or the conjugation of phonemes into a sentence structure. A locutionary act is the utterance of a word or the formation of words into a sentence. An illocutionary act refers to what the speaker intends to be the result of his/her utterance. An illocutionary act includes both asking and answering a question, providing information, extending a warning, making an appointment with someone, ordering a command, granting a promise, asserting a position, etc.⁹ Finally, a perlocutionary act refers to the effect that the words uttered by the speaker have upon the hearers. This includes parameters of thoughts elicited, beliefs embraced, and emotions felt by the

⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 139.

⁹ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2018), 98, 108. See also James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 141.

hearer. The perlocutionary consequences may be either intended or unintended by the speaker.¹⁰ That is, a speaker may intend to elicit a particular outcome (illocution) by the words spoken (locution); however, the result may be an unintended consequence (perlocution).

The lexical meaning of *overseer*, according to the *Merriman-Webster Dictionary* of the English language, is “a person who watches and directs the work of other people in order to be sure that a job is done correctly.” An overseer, in this definition, is a person who supervises, gives instructions, and manages within an organization or a company.

In the English language, the word *overseer* dates back to the fourteenth century, with an original meaning of a “supervisor, superintendent, one who looks over.”¹¹ In the 1570s, William Tyndale in his work titled, *An Answer to Thomas More’s Dialogue*, used *overseer* in an ecclesial context. He observed that “Those ouersears [overseers] which we now call Byshops [Bishops] after the Greke [Greek] word, were always biding [biding] in one place to gouerne [govern] the congregation there.”¹² Tyndale acknowledged, in close proximity to the date of the 1611 King James Version, the reference to the use of Bishop rather than overseer according to his understanding of the Greek.

However, the word *overseer* also connotes a negative meaning, especially as it relates to the atrocities of human slavery. The *Learner’s Dictionary* defines an overseer in the context of the historical institution of slavery as “the person who was in charge of the slaves on a plantation.”¹³ Paul Escott, in his book titled, *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives*, describes the relationship between an overseer and the enslaved as follows: “Between the field hands and the overseer or master, a continual tugging and pulling took place. Some masters openly sanctioned this context by requiring the overseer to establish his own dominance over the hands [slaves].”¹⁴ From Escott’s description here, and from other historical sources, it becomes evident that the role of the overseer in the context of human slavery was one of control, harsh rule, and the domination of human beings. History indicates that within the context of slavery, the overseer exercised an aura of superiority, supremacy, exacting fear, intimidation, dehumanization, and often brutality. The oversight of forced daily tasks, enforcement of punishment, and allocation of food and clothing was relegated to the overseer by the slave owner: Theoretically, it was the overseer who claimed the last word on when the bondpeople got up, when they went to bed, when they worked, when they could rest, whether or not they could amuse themselves at parties or through other forms of entertainment, and whether or not they could talk the languages and practice the religions that they had brought from Africa. It was the overseer who could disrupt relations between members of enslaved families . . . by suggesting family members for sale. Women lived in fear of rape by overseers flaunting all the venal authority that accrued to them. Their husbands had little redress or outlet for their anger since laws ensured that attacks on overseers could be punishable by death. . . . The overseer purchased food for these people and distributed clothing and shoes when their owner saw fit to send them. But although these measures went some way to keeping the men and women healthy, they represented little more than another means used by the overseer in his quest for control over the bondpeople. . . . And so all the while the bondpeople labored on the plantation, the overseer stood

¹⁰ John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 24. See also J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 106 and James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 141.

¹¹ www.etymonline.com/word/overseer, accessed February 18, 2020.

¹² “Overseer” in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second ed., vol. X (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 1116.

¹³ <http://www.learnersdictionary.com/definition/overseer>, accessed April 9, 2019. See also www.etymonline.com/word/overseer.

¹⁴ Paul Escott, *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 86.

above them, whip in hand, his dark presence intended euphemistically to “keep them at their work.” Enough people had experience of the overseer’s lash to understand the real meaning of term: the tattered backs of men, women, and children underlined it.¹⁵

The barbarities of human slavery and bondage is an ancient scourge upon the history of mankind. For millennia, some classes of people have sought to enslave their fellow human beings. History indicates that human slavery dates back to the ancient Near East, and is a global scourge practiced in Sumeria, Babylonia, Egypt, China, Rome, and Greece. The Hammurabi Code of the eighteenth century B.C.E. references human slavery.¹⁶ The reality of the enslavement of Hebrews in Egypt, and institutionalized slavery during the Greco-Roman period of the New Testament, is apparent to Bible readers. There can be no question that human slavery certainly has stained the modern history of Europe, the British colonies, the Americas, including the United States.

Additionally, “The multinational character of the Atlantic Slave System, from Sierra Leone to Cuba and Connecticut”¹⁷ helped to foster a climate for the pernicious treatment of the enslaved. At times, the dehumanizing of fellow human beings was inflicted by their own countrymen, but certainly by those who considered themselves of a higher class. The institutionalized nature of Antebellum slavery “was a heterogeneous institution, and the slaves faced a wide diversity of conditions. Some lived on large plantations and toiled under the watchful eyes of overseers and drivers, while others, on small farms, worked beside their owners.”¹⁸ Consequently, history indicates that owners and their employees (overseers) treated slaves brutally and inhumanely.

Biblical and Theological Rationale

In their exegesis of Scripture, our Church forefathers appear to have adopted the term *overseer* from the 1611 King James Version of the Bible. Specifically, in Acts 20:28, the apostle Paul charges the elders in Ephesus, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood” (KJV). The word translated in the King James Version as overseer is επισκοπος (*episkopos*). In the original Greek, επισκοπος may be translated as overseer, guardian, or Bishop.¹⁹ However, in this particular context, the inference of the επισκοπος is dealing more with the function of overseeing, as Paul articulates in the shepherding role of feeding the flock of God, rather than an ecclesial office or status. Accordingly, the “validity lies in their (the overseer’s) exercise (shepherding the flock) and not their occupation as offices.”²⁰ Wayne Oates observes that Paul’s inference of the word επισκοπος, as rendered by Luke in his writing of the Acts of the Apostles, connotes the act of seeing to the needs of the flock, rather than a status, office, or ministerial position. In fact, the verbal construction, επισκοπέω (*episkopeō*), means to “take care, oversee, care for.”²¹ Consequently, Paul instructs (locutionary and illocutionary acts) the

¹⁵ Tristan Stubbs, *Masters of Violence: The Plantation Overseers of Eighteenth-Century Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2018), 1.

¹⁶ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2006), 37, 38.

¹⁷ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 4.

¹⁸ Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2003), 99.

¹⁹ L. Coenen, “Bishop, Presbyter, Elder” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed., Colin Brown, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 188.

²⁰ Wayne Oates, “The Holy Spirit and the Overseer of the Flock,” *Review and Expositor*, 63, no. 2 (1966): 187.

²¹ L. Coenen, “Bishop, Presbyter, Elder,” 188.

elders of Ephesus to see to the needs of the flock. As the King James Version translates, elders are to oversee. The overseer's function was to be "responsible for guarding it (the flock) against those who sought to lead people astray. They were to shepherd the church of God, bought with his own blood (Acts 20:28–31)."²²

The word *επισκοπος* occurs five times in the Greek New Testament (GNT). In the King James Version, the word is translated as bishop in every verse, except Acts 20:28.

- Philippians 1:1: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons."
- 1 Timothy 3:2: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach."
- Titus 1:7: "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre."
- 1 Peter 2:25: "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

Admittedly, in the passages listed above, there are other English versions that do translate *επισκοπος* as overseer (see New American Standard Bible, New International Version, *et al.*). The translation committees of the various versions may have focused more on function rather than office in these particular passages. Additionally, there is a credible argument that the office of Bishop became more formalized and developed in church history in the years after the first century.²³ However, the oldest non-canonical extant Christian document, the *Didache* (circa, 96 CE), instructs in chapter 15, "Appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons who are worthy of the Lord."²⁴ Noted church historian Justo L. González describes the influence of Bishops in the second century as "the link joining the churches together."²⁵

In the pastoral epistles of 1 Timothy and Titus, the apostle Paul is utilizing a literary genre known as *mandata principis*, which means, "the commandments of the ruler." In Paul's first letter to Timothy, the apostle was outlining church order and structure. Specifically, the apostle addressed the purpose of his letter when he wrote, "if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15 NIV). Consequently, in this literary genre, Paul instructs Timothy regarding the ministry, particularly the prerequisites for Bishops and Deacons.

In 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul writes, "This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (KJV); *Didache* (circa, 96 CE), instructs in chapter 15, "Appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons who are worthy of the Lord The word translated as *office* or *position* is *ἐπισκοπή* (*episkopē*), is referring to the office of Bishop or Overseer in the church. This term, *ἐπισκοπή*, was "newly coined on the basis of the title *ἐπίσκοπος*, which had meantime established itself in the early church."²⁶ According to

²² C. G. Kruse, "Ministry" in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, eds., Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 1310.

²³ Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 235. See also Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* in *The Anchor Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001), 212.

²⁴ *Didache*, 29.

²⁵ Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), Loc. 105, Kindle.

²⁶ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* in *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 154.

biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson, “This is the only place in the NT where *episkopē* appears in reference to a position within the community.”²⁷ Therefore, the biblical and ecclesial distinction of the office of Bishop seems warranted instead of the title of Overseer.

A brief word study of *overseer* is also noteworthy in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, particularly as it relates to Joseph in Genesis 39. After having been sold into slavery by his brothers, Joseph was transported to Egypt and became a slave of Potiphar. Joseph eventually became the overseer of Potiphar’s household. “And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand” (Gen 39:4). The King James Version translates the Hebrew word פקיד (paqidh) as overseer. As a slave himself, Joseph was placed in a supervisory role over others in the affairs of Potiphar’s household.²⁸ In the role of overseer, it appears that he may have supervised other slaves as well.²⁹ It seems plausible that the ministerial title *Overseer* has historical baggage in relation to slavery.

Biblically, the term *Bishop* better describes the title or the office of those entrusted with the oversight of both churches and ministers. Theologically, the function of the Bishop is to oversee; first, in an apostolic calling, and second, in administrative duties.

Ecclesial Rationale

Within our ecclesial tradition, the title *Overseer* has been used for men who have been entrusted with the care and supervisory responsibility of leaders and churches. The inherent responsibilities of an Overseer have traditionally included both apostolic ministrations and administrative duties. Specifically, the Church of God of Prophecy has used the title *Overseer* at the general, national, regional, state, and district level.

We acknowledge that due to the negative and inhumane actions of the past, the term *overseer* as historically utilized in human slavery may still elicit cultural sensitivities. Admittedly, this may not be everyone’s experience; however, it is reality for others. In human slavery, the term *overseer* has connotations of privilege, power, and abuse attributed to a particular class and to those who are identified as being in a superior position.

This Committee does not subscribe to the belief that the title *Overseer*, as used historically and traditionally by the Church of God of Prophecy, was intended to elicit distinctions of class and privilege in our ecclesial usage. Nor do we believe that our forefathers in this movement selected the title *Overseer* as a racially insensitive, pejorative, or controlling measure.

The title *Overseer* was first used in our ecclesial nomenclature in 1910. The term *General Moderator* identified the leading officer of the Assembly from 1906 to 1910. In the fifth General Assembly (1910), the title *General Overseer* was adopted to replace *General Moderator*.³⁰ It appears the growth of the Church and the consequent apostolic and administrative duties were becoming increasingly time consuming, warranting the need for someone to oversee the ministrations of the Church rather than simply be the Moderator of the Assembly.

As the Church continued to grow, the need of State Overseers was recognized. In the sixth Assembly (1911), State Overseers were selected. The Overseers appointed in this Assembly consisted of a few U.S.

²⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* in *The Anchor Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001), 212.

²⁸ C. Mark McCormick, “Overseer” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 347, 348.

²⁹ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* in *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), Loc. 18772 Kindle. See also Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 459, 460.

³⁰ *Book of Minutes: The Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), 39.

states and the Bahama Islands.³¹ In the twelfth Assembly (1916), the term *State* was omitted because the Church was increasingly expanding to the nations of the world.³² In the thirteenth Assembly (1917), the role of District Overseer was introduced in a report titled, “Systematic Arrangement to Conserve the Work in the States and Local Churches.” The report stated, “Each district shall be under the care and supervision of a pastor or overseer, appointed by the overseer of the state.”³³ With the passage of time, the terms National/State/Regional Overseer became common ecclesial nomenclature.

Lexically, the term *overseer* does indeed refer to one who both watches over and sees to the needs of others he is leading. However, we concede that the title *Overseer* may emit unintended negative feelings and never-intended historical mental images, admittedly a perlocutionary effect. The World Language Department (WLD) at our International Offices utilizes the Spanish word *supervisor* as the title for an Overseer serving at the general, national, regional, state, and district level. The Spanish word *capataz*, which is a Spanish equivalent to the English word *overseer*, means a taskmaster in charge of laborers. In some contexts, *capataz* can be associated with the owner of a *hacienda*, similar to a plantation. For several years, the WLD has been correctly sensitive to the negative connotations of the word *capataz* and has used the word *supervisor*. The French word *évêque*, which means Bishop, is used for the designation of those serving as an Overseer.

The Ministry Policy Manual (MPM) of the Church of God of Prophecy articulates the responsibility of an Overseer:

The office of a “servant-leader” (overseer) is a biblically based function in the church. To fulfill the office of overseer is an awesome responsibility. There are many overseer leadership challenges, but none surpasses that of one’s total commitment to caring for, nurturing, protecting, and leading the ministry of an entire nation/region/state.³⁴

It is important to note that the **office** of Overseer is described in the *MPM*, in terms of its **function**, which is the shepherding role of caring for, nurturing, protecting, and leading the ministry. Admittedly, the *MPM* identifies Overseer as an “office.” However, the *MPM* under the rubric of “Bishops” acknowledges, “It is important to realize that individuals **function** [emphasis not in original] according to their giftedness within an office. The Bishop is one of the eldership offices that provides oversight leadership to the Church.”³⁵ The nuance of office and function reflects the earlier stated premise of Acts 20:28. Oversight is the function of the office of the Bishop who is entrusted with the care of an area of churches and administrative supervision.

Ultimately, this report is not recommending a change in the function of what we have historically referred to as Overseer. The report is addressing the title of the office. Our Church forefathers utilized the King James Version, in selecting the term *Overseer* for general, national, state, and, subsequently, regional leaders. While the function of these leaders is to see to the work over which they have been assigned by “caring for, nurturing, protecting, and leading the ministry,”³⁶ the office they fulfill in their

³¹ *Book of Minutes: The Church of God*, 67.

³² *Book of Minutes: The Church of God*, 234, 235.

³³ *Book of Minutes: The Church of God*, 289.

³⁴ “The Role of Overseer” in *The Ministry Policy Manual: Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing, 2018), 27.

³⁵ *Ministry Policy Manual*, 104.

³⁶ *Ministry Policy Manual*, 27.

function of oversight is best referred to as Bishop. In fact, a man who is appointed to National/State/Regional Overseer, or selected by the Assembly to be General Overseer, is to be an ordained Bishop.³⁷

Recommendation

We recommend a change in the formal title from General Overseer to Presiding Bishop. Our constituency should recognize that there is only one Presiding Bishop in the Church of God of Prophecy. Presiding Bishop refers to what we have traditionally and historically understood as the General Overseer.

We further recommend a change in the formal title for National/Regional/State Overseer to National/Regional/State Bishop. The designation of Bishop of a particular nation, region, or state is also appropriate. For instance, referring to the office and person as the Bishop of Australia, Bishop of Mid-Atlantic, Bishop of Alaska, and so forth, is also appropriate.

We also recommend a change in the formal title for District Overseer to District Supervisor. We note that there is no ecclesial polity prerequisite that a District Overseer/Supervisor be an ordained Bishop.

Finally, we do not recommend any change in the title of General Presbyterian. The title of Presbyterian infers that he leads other Presbyters (National/Regional/State Bishops) within his assigned presbyterial area.

NOTE: These recommendations pertain to a shift of ecclesial nomenclature from Overseer to Bishop. The above recommendations do not change any recognition of the ministerial distinction and ordination of a Bishop. Many local Pastors, Evangelists, and retired Ministers are ordained Bishops in this Church and should be accorded the respect and honor that being a biblical Bishop warrants. There is no change in their ordination status as a Bishop. Additionally, in countries of the world where the Church of God of Prophecy operates within a state-recognized church system, the title National Bishop might be viewed as an affront to the state-sanctioned church. In these, or other similar nuances, flexibility is granted to the General Presbyterian and his plurality team to make necessary adjustments to the title of the National Bishop as may be appropriate to that nation.

Observation

We understand that old habits are difficult to change. We recognize that it will take time for the term *Overseer* to be completely replaced by the term *Bishop*. However, in many locales this is already being observed. In increasing numbers, constituents are referring to their Overseer as Bishop. Out of habit, Church members may still refer to leaders as General Overseer or National/Regional/State Overseer. This is to be expected and should not be met with rebuke but with a teachable attitude. Our goal should be to educate and assist members in their understanding that we have made a formal change in titles. With the passage of time, the title *Overseer* will be used less and less. For instance, some will recall the ecclesial nomenclature of this Church in reference to “auxiliaries.” Auxiliaries were formalized to be the helps or ministries of the Church. Youth ministry, at one time, was called Victory Leaders Band, and small group ministries were referred to as Assembly Band Movement. The term *auxiliaries* and its unique vernacular is merely a historical recollection today. Over time, our constituents will refer to the leader of the Church of God of Prophecy as the Presiding Bishop.

Additionally, attention will need to be given, as appropriate, to legal, financial, and corporate documents that may need to be updated regarding the formal change in title. The function of the Presiding Bishop and National/Regional/State Bishops is the same as what we have referred to as Overseer, which is general oversight.

³⁷ *Ministry Policy Manual*, 104, 130.

Section Eight Term Limits

The BDP Committee received a request from the General Overseer and General Presbyters in 2018 to engage in a study of term limits for all positional leadership in the Church of God of Prophecy. The Committee indicated in our “Notice of Study” statement released to the constituency of this Church in 2020 that we were engaged in research and invited correspondence from members and leaders in the Church. As of December 31, 2021, the BDP is not in receipt of formal written correspondence directed to the Committee from either constituents or leaders relating to this topic. However, both constituents and leaders have engaged Committee members in conversation in support of the study of term limits. The research by the Committee has included both leadership literature as well as interviews with denominational leaders not affiliated with the Church of God of Prophecy whose polity includes term limits. The culmination of our study and recommendations is included in this report.³⁸

The document includes the following:

1. A Theology of Leadership
2. A Biblical Rationale of Leadership
3. Leadership in the Ecclesia
4. Leadership Pipeline
5. Leadership Vacuum
6. Incremental and Specific Implementation
7. Exit Strategy
8. Recommendations for Term Limits: Phase One
9. Assessment Recommendation in Preparation for Phase Two

A Theology of Leadership

Leadership theory espouses the maxim that everything rises and falls on leadership. This truth is apparent in a myriad of group dynamics, inclusive but not limited to the family unit, governments, corporations, educational entities, and ultimately in the church. Leadership does indeed matter. Theologically, the need for anointed and gifted leaders is fundamental to the healthy operations of the ecclesia.

Two components of ecclesial leadership are noteworthy. One is calling. The second is confirmation. Calling is personal. The Triune God calls individuals into service, into ministry.³⁹ The dynamic of calling is witnessed repeatedly throughout both the Old and New Testaments. God called Moses (Ex 3:1–22), Samuel (1 Sam 3:1–21), Gideon (Jud 6:11–24), David (1 Sam 16:1–13), and Isaiah (Isa 6:1–8). Jesus called the disciples, the twelve apostles, who accompanied Him in His ministry (Mat 4:18–22; Mark

³⁸ Readers should be aware that each of these sections could be expanded; however, that would necessitate the report being a lengthier document. The goal has been to identify and succinctly address each of the rubrics, which comprise the study, rather than provide an exhaustive report.

³⁹ The BDP recognizes that God calls all believers. Believers are called to be saints, to holiness: “To the church of God at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called as saints, with all those in every place who call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—both their Lord and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2 CSB). Additionally, all believers are called to service. Believers are empowered with grace giftings by the Holy Spirit to offer in service: “Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10 CSB). We also embrace that the Triune God does call some individuals to specific ministry assignments. Consequently, in the body of this report we utilize the term “calling” to specify individuals called to ministry giftings as stipulated by the apostle Paul (Ephesians 4:11–13; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9).

3:13–19; Luke 5:1–11; John 1:35–51). Calling is personal. It is the individual’s responsibility to answer the call of God upon his or her life (2 Tim 4:5). Theologian H. Richard Niebuhr identifies this as the “secret call . . . that inner persuasion or experience whereby a person feels himself [or herself] directly summoned or invited by God to take up the work of the ministry.”⁴⁰

Confirmation of the call is public and occurs within the dynamic of the ecclesia (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 4:6). Consequently, it is the church’s obligation to discern if indeed the call of God is upon an individual (Acts 13:1–3). Once the call of God upon an individual is discerned, the church then has the responsibility of equipping the called for acts of service and ministry within the body of Christ and to the world at large (Ephesians 4:12). For instance, the newly converted Saul, whose name was changed to Paul, was embraced by Barnabas. He (Barnabas) took Saul to the apostles for their endorsement. “But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus at Damascus” (Acts 9:27 NASB). Saul remained with the apostles and demonstrated his genuine call and commitment to the gospel (Acts 9:28). This model illustrates that when an individual has proven himself or herself (1 Tim 4:5), it is the church who publicly confirms the called and provides an opportunity for servant leadership (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

As people who fully embrace the leading of the Spirit, some may be tempted to simply accept a public confession of calling by an individual. However, the ecclesia is tasked with discerning the call. Discernment is one of the charismata gifted to the church by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:1–11). Yet, discernment is not only supernatural. There are measures of discernment. “Unless there are external standards by which a calling is tested and confirmed, we lack the means to discern whether a person is truly called by God through the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁴¹

Theologian Gregg R. Allison, in his book on ecclesiology, addresses the theology of leadership in the church. Specifically, Allison contends

Leadership capacities energized by the Spirit are activities and ministries oriented toward covenant keeping and community formation and development: discerning God’s will for the church and effectively communicating this vision to its members; conceptualizing, designing, developing, and executing ministries; motivating and equipping church members for ministries; managing people and their activities; achieving substantial consensus; anticipating and resolving problems and conflicts; and other similar administrative elements.⁴²

Admittedly, hundreds of definitions from various vantage points and orientations are proffered in leadership theory in an effort to articulate what constitutes a leader and effective leadership. Effective leading is much more than wearing a title, occupying an office, or securing a position. Leadership, simply stated, is influence. Yet, within a leadership construct, identifiable positional leadership is warranted.

A Biblical Rationale of Leadership

Leadership is an unmistakably biblical premise. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul identifies ministerial gifts deposited within the church. Specifically, the gifts mentioned by Paul are “apostles,

⁴⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper, 1956), 64.

⁴¹ L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 83.

⁴² Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, ed., John S. Feinberg (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 417.

prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers” (Eph 4:11–15).⁴³ Additionally, the Pastoral Epistles indicate ministerial roles of “elders,” specifically, “bishops” (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9) and “deacons” (1 Tim 3:8–13). Accordingly, Titus is instructed by Paul to appoint “elders in every city” of Crete (Titus 1:5). –

The ordination/appointment of elders/leaders appears to be the practice of a construction of leadership in the first century, apostolic church. “When they had appointed elders for them in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23 CSB). Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, addresses the saints/believers of the church, and their leaders, the Bishops and Deacons (Phil 1:1).

The focus of this biblical rationale is on the positional and service role of Bishops, in particular. Consequently, Paul proffers the prerequisites for Bishops who lead the church in various manifestations of hierarchical positions. J. Oswald Sanders, in his book titled, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer*, provides a helpful categorization of the biblical prerequisites. They are: 1) Social Qualifications, 2) Moral Qualifications, 3) Mental Qualifications, 4) Personality Qualifications, 5) Domestic Qualifications, and 6) Maturity.⁴⁴

Leadership in the Ecclesia

As acknowledged in the section titled “A Theology of Leadership,” it is the Triune God who calls individuals into service. This call of God to ministry in general, and a specific assignment in particular, has historically been seen by CGP as theocracy. Simply stated, theocracy is the rule of God. While the principles of theocracy are biblical, the application of theocracy can become skewed given human/sinful nature. That is, not all actions labeled theocratic are indeed the will of God. With this admission comes the challenge to seek God’s will with an open heart, discerning His leading informed by the principle of safe discernment within the multitude of counselors (Pro 11:14; 15:22; 20:18).

In the Church of God of Prophecy, two types of positional leadership processes are identified: 1) Selected Leaders, 2) Appointed Leaders. The two terms are integral to the research, discussion, and recommendations in this report. Consequently, the focus of this section is on Bishops who fulfill a positional role either as a selected leader or an appointed leader.

Selected Leaders

Selected leaders are individuals who are chosen to occupy a particular positional office by a constituent group within the CGP. These leaders are not appointed to their positional role by a supervising hierarchical leader. Selected leaders include: 1) The General Overseer [Presiding Bishop], 2) General Presbyter.

1. The General Overseer [recommended change of title to Presiding Bishop (PB)]. The General Overseer [PB] is selected according to the process outlined by the International Assembly. Details of this process are enumerated in the “Governance Document” of the International Presbytery. Succinctly stated, the General Overseer [PB] goes through a selection process within the governance of the International Presbytery. Once a final candidate has been selected, he is presented to the International Assembly. The General Overseer [PB] is ultimately selected by the International Assembly in a one-accord process. He is not appointed.

⁴³ CGP understands apostles and prophets to be foundational positions of leadership in the construction of the church. While we do not recognize apostles and prophets, we do concede that individuals do, at times, function in an apostolic and/or prophetic manner.

⁴⁴ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 44–52. Rather than add to the length of this document, readers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with these qualifications as outlined by Sanders.

2. General Presbyter. A General Presbyter, who in conjunction with the Presiding Bishop has oversight of a particular area of the world, is selected and confirmed by the International Presbytery according to the parameters outlined in the “Governance Document” of the International Presbytery. His confirmation to that role is announced to the International Assembly. General Presbyters assist the Presiding Bishop in his respective duties, providing counsel and support. However, there is only one Presiding Bishop in this Church. Since a General Presbyter is not selected or confirmed by the International Assembly, the body of the General Presbytery is not the office of the Presiding Bishop. General Presbyters are selected, not appointed.

Appointed Leaders

Appointed leaders include all remaining leaders in CGP. Structurally, appointed leaders include International Offices Executive Directors and Trans-Local Directors, National/Regional/State Overseers [name change recommendation—N/R/S Bishops], Pastors, local leaders, and other staff.⁴⁵ Appointments are made by the supervising leader while engaging in consultation.⁴⁶

Presbyteries

The governing structure of this Church, as approved by the International Assembly, is as follows: 1) International Assembly, 2) International Presbytery, 3) General Presbytery.⁴⁷ The International Assembly is the highest oversight body of this Church. The International Presbytery provides oversight of the General Presbytery. The General Presbytery is comprised of the General Overseer and General Presbyters and provides day-to-day oversight as outlined by the International Assembly and International Presbytery.

International Presbytery

The International Presbytery is comprised of the General Overseer, General Presbyters, National/Regional/State Bishops, the two Executive Directors at the International Offices, and Trans-Local Directors at the International Offices.⁴⁸

General Presbytery

The General Presbytery is comprised of the General Overseer and all General Presbyters.⁴⁹

Summary of Selected and Appointed Leaders

There are two positional leader constructs in CGP. One is selected. The second is appointed. Leaders who are selected include only the General Overseer [PB]⁵⁰ and General Presbyters.

⁴⁵ Please note that term limits, if accepted by the International Assembly, do not apply to National/Regional/State Office staff/appointees, District Overseers, Pastors, and local church staff and appointees.

⁴⁶ *Ministry Policy Manual*: 2018, 31.

⁴⁷ *Ministry Policy Manual*: 2018, 8–20.

⁴⁸ “Governance Document of the International Presbytery” 2016, in the *Ministry Policy Manual*: 2018, 125.

⁴⁹ *Ministry Policy Manual*: 2018, 19.

⁵⁰ The title General Overseer and Presiding Bishop (PB) are used interchangeably in this document. The 2022 International Assembly will be considering a recommendation to change the title from General Overseer to Presiding Bishop. Consequently, this document uses both terms. The final Term Limits document, if approved by the Assembly, will reflect either General Overseer or Presiding Bishop.

Terms of Leaders in the Ecclesia

A discussion of leadership in the ecclesia encompasses duration of tenure. Theoretically, open-ended tenure has been practiced by this Church for decades. The open-ended nature has been pragmatic, at best. Currently, a term of six years applies to the office of General Overseer. However, the rationale states that he is selected for an indefinite term (*MPM*). The term of a General Presbyter consists of four years. The term of appointed leaders (International Offices Directors, N/R/S Bishops, Pastors) is for a two-year term. Each of these terms are theoretically open-ended. While the Committee applauds longevity, especially in the local pastorate, we must not ignore the potential for habituation. That is, longevity alone, in any leadership role, does not guarantee productivity. Admittedly, a long-term leader can provide stability to an organization. However, stability unaccompanied by visionary leadership often results in calcification. “The culture of the church can stiffen, lessen[ing] the ability to change, become inwardly focused, and lose any missional momentum that was prevalent early in the . . . [leader’s] tenure.”⁵¹

To be sure, there is no mandate in Scripture for term limits. Yet, in the Old Testament economy, the Levites did seem to practice a form of term limits. The two primary duties of the Levites included 1) guard duty: the dismantling and reassembling of the movable tabernacle, and 2) guard duty around the perimeters of the tabernacle (Num 8:23–26).⁵² It is noteworthy that entry and exit ages for the Levites were not static. Age requirements changed from time to time and even from pre-exilic to post-exilic times (Num 4:3, 23, 30; 8:23–26; 1 Chron 23:24, 27; 2 Chron 31:17; Ezra 3:8). From these adjustments, one might infer that Israel was able to customize the age requirements as was appropriate for the specific time and need. Commentator Timothy Ashley suggests that Israel may have “found that men of thirty years of age were generally more spiritually mature than men of twenty-five, and that this spiritual maturity was necessary in the work of carrying the holy things (the job for which the age limits apply).”⁵³

While the BDP is not suggesting the Levitical method as a hermeneutic for term limits, we do recognize the descriptive nature of the Levitical term limit. Again, we do not embrace Numbers as being prescriptive but descriptive. Yet, within the descriptive aspect there is the admission that the practice of the Levites is worthy of reflection. Additionally, there simply seems to be certain latitudes for methods and models of leading afforded the people of God. This has certainly been the practice of this Church throughout our history. Models that served this Church well for a time have been replaced by fresher methods more appropriate for the seasons in which a particular generation leads. Every detail and leadership method are not succinctly outlined in Scripture. For instance, in 1983 in the 78th Assembly the Questions and Subjects Committee (now the BDP) recommended the following: “Sensing the need for enhancing the stature of the office of Bishop in the Church, we recommend that the minimum age for a Bishop hereafter be set at age 30 [thirty]. ‘Not a novice’ as mentioned by Paul as a requirement for this office would indicate the need for maturity. . . . Those who already have been licensed as Bishops . . . would not be affected by this recommendation.”⁵⁴ Accordingly, the Assembly approved the recommendation establishing a minimum age requirement for a Bishop. Thirty years old continues to be the minimum age requirement for Bishop ordination.⁵⁵ There is no scripture that can be cited to indicate this is the biblical age. Indeed, if we tried to cite one, we would be guilty of proof-texting.

⁵¹ William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 62.

⁵² Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, eds., R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 174.

⁵³ Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 174.

⁵⁴ *Assembly Minutes* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Press, 1982), 137.

⁵⁵ *Ministry Policy Manual*: 2018, 104.

Consequently, age requirements and tenure are metrics adopted by the ecclesia and may evolve from time to time as the need and leadership culture dictate. Term limits afford present leaders a potential maximum period of leading in a particular role allowing them to strategically plan not only for their leadership tenure but also for their transition. Additionally, it provides hope for next generation leaders who are gifted and in the process of becoming equipped for future leadership opportunities. Every arriving leader will one day be a leader who is departing. “It’s not a question of if, but when.”⁵⁶

Acceptance of life cycles and embracing the seasons of leadership are fundamental to the integrity of the *imago dei*. Both the individual leader and the ecclesia can effectuate this goal not only celebrating beginnings but by also celebrating and normalizing endings. “Life is composed of life cycles and seasons. Nothing lasts forever. . . . When we accept that as a fundamental truth, we can align our actions with our feelings, our beliefs with our behaviors, to accept how things are.”⁵⁷

Leadership Pipeline

A leadership pipeline ensures a continuity of leadership, especially during seasons of transitions. When a healthy and robust leadership pipeline exists in an organization, it aids in the overall goal of leadership development. Consequently, the end result becomes the developmental process of potential, emerging, and current leaders rather than simply leadership placement of warm bodies into vacant roles. When the “demand for leadership greatly exceeds the supply”⁵⁸ a shift in intentional leadership development must occur. In order to achieve this goal, however, it requires the “creating and curating of a church or organization’s distinct culture.”⁵⁹ Integral to this process is a healthy discussion and implementation of succession planning. Succession planning is “the intentional process of the transfer of leadership, power, and authority from one directional leader to another. Succession is when one senior leader intentionally transitions and hands over leadership to another. Succession planning is creating a plan for what will happen once you need a new leader, something all organizations face.”⁶⁰

Specifically, the term “leadership pipeline” refers to the intentional strategy of recruiting and investing into potential, emerging, and current leaders in order to develop quality leadership traits and skills for leaders at all levels. Succession planning is incumbent on any institution that desires to be effective across generations. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of General Presbyters to identify, discern, and recruit current Pastors who may possess the effective potential to step into the role of National/Regional/State Bishop.⁶¹ Potential leaders of this caliber will need a process of equipping and training for the responsibility of this role. Certainly, each General Presbyter will rely on his plurality team to assist in this process. In fact, we encourage more experienced National/Regional/State Bishops to be partnered with new appointees as mentors. Seasoned Bishops will be able to provide a wealth of wisdom, experience, knowledge, and practical suggestions enabling newly appointed Bishops to “grow horizontally through

⁵⁶ William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 137.

⁵⁷ Henry Cloud, *Necessary Endings* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 40, 41.

⁵⁸ Ram Charan, Stephen Drotter, and James Noel, *The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership-Powered Company* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 1.

⁵⁹ Todd Adkins, *Creating and Curating a Recruiting Culture* (Nashville: Lifeway Christian Resources, 2018), 4.

⁶⁰ William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, 10.

⁶¹ The “Role of the Overseer,” including responsibilities, principal function, his appointment, relationships, qualifications, administrative duties, supervisory duties, promotional duties, and appointive duties are outlined in the *Ministry Policy Manual*: 2018, 27–32.

[these] alliances and partnerships.”⁶² The leader primarily tasked with populating a leadership pipeline for future National/Regional/State Bishops is the General Presbyter. No other import is more fundamental than the ability to maintain a leadership pipeline populated of next-generation leaders. “Developing other leaders is, or at least should be, a major part of every leader’s job.”⁶³ The ability to effectively identify, discern, and recruit gifted leaders to assume oversight is crucial to the homeostasis of church leadership.

As well, the ability of a General Presbyter to identify, discern, and recruit leaders who will likewise be effective as National/Regional/State Bishops authenticates the effectiveness of the General Presbyter as a leader himself. Paul counseled the young Bishop Timothy, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2 CSB). Leadership experts observe that an effective leader is often identified by ability to attract, develop, and retain in the organization gifted people. This leadership people acumen is evidenced as such “because the people working under that person [the leader] are of high caliber, are energized, and have a natural affinity for the leader and want to see him or her succeed.”⁶⁴

Finally, we caution that not every effective Pastor is necessarily called to the apostolic and administrative duties of a National/Regional/State Bishop. This does not lessen the value of the leader. He/she is an *imago dei*. Leaders are simply called to differing roles. Just because an individual is effective in one aspect of leadership does not mean that he will be effective in a differing role of responsibility. Intentional development and strategic implementation of the leadership pipeline is crucial for the health of any organization.

Leadership Vacuum

A leadership vacuum occurs when there are more positions available than there are qualified and properly vetted potential individuals to fill those positions responsibly. Currently, there are approximately 100 Bishops serving in the International Presbytery. According to statistics supplied to the BD&P Committee by the office of the General Overseer, the average tenure of appointed offices is as follows:

⁶² Charan, Drotter, and Noel, *The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership-Powered Company*, 3.

⁶³ Charan, Drotter, and Noel, *The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership-Powered Company*, 10.

⁶⁴ Charan, Drotter, and Noel, *The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership-Powered Company*, 47, 48.

Table TL-1: Tenure and Age of N/R/S Bishops by General Presbyterial Areas

Position	Average Years Served	Longest Tenured Years	Shortest Tenured Years	Average Age	Youngest	Oldest
General Presbyter	12.3	24	6	61	55	69
Africa	15.5	23 (x2)*	1	59	52	74
Asia, Oceania	10.6	29	3	55.6	41	70
Caribbean, Atlantic Islands	12.5	29	1	64.7	57	69
Central America, Mexico, Caribbean Spanish	12.9	46	2	63.18	54 (x2)	75
Europe, CIS, Middle East	8.7	23 (x2)	1 (x2)	52.1	40	69
North America	15	47	1	63.5	43	77
South America	8.9	21	1	53.6	41	65

*x2 means there are two Bishops who match this numerical value

Based upon this information, it is conceivable that in a construct of term limits, a third to a half of N/R/S Bishops could be rotated in a given Assembly appointment year. This high percentage of leadership transition, in one year, has the potential of negatively affecting the homeostasis of leadership continuity and the overall progress of the Church. In order to avert the possibility of a leadership vacuum and to ensure homeostasis, it is the conclusion of this Committee that the implementation of term limits should be incremental. The first implementation is to selected leaders from the International Presbytery (PB and GPs), Executive Directors at the International Offices, and Assembly Standing Committee members. Once this implementation is completed and applied to PB, GPs, Executive Directors, and committee members, additional knowledge and fresh insights, inclusive of both challenges and successes of term limits, may be gathered and then applied to the implementation of term limits to N/R/S Bishops.

The incremental and specific implementation approach not only addresses the homeostasis and leadership vacuum, but it also provides for a period of intentional formation for a leadership pipeline supply that identifies, educates, equips, and mentors potential leaders for future leadership roles. Below is a graph indicating the ages of N/R/S Bishops currently serving under appointment by General Presbyterial areas.

Table TL-2: Age Categorization of N/R/S Bishops by General Presbyterial Areas: 2021

Position	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79
General Presbyter		2	4	0
Africa	2	10	8	1
Asia/Oceania	4	3	4	2
Caribbean/Atlantic Islands	0	1	8	
Central America, Mexico, Spanish Caribbean	0	5	3	3
Europe, CIS, Middle East	3	3	6	0
North America	1	6	12	7
South America	1	7	2	0

Incremental and Specific Implementation

In an effort to apply term limits incrementally to ensure a healthy homeostasis of leadership at all levels, an intentional strategy should be employed. Consequently, applying the process of term limits to the smallest ratio of leaders, with ongoing subsequent assessments, and then moving to the larger population of leaders is most appropriate. In both a hierarchical and visible approach affecting the smallest ratio of leaders, the impact and assessment can be best measured with the goal of ensuring homeostasis. The ultimate goal is that term limits will be applicable to both selected and appointed leaders.

The following table indicates the population size of the various leadership positions in which term limits are to ultimately apply.

Table TL-3: Numerical Composition of the International Presbytery and Assembly Standing Committees/Board

Leader	Number
• Presiding Bishop	1
• General Presbyters	7
• International Offices Executive Directors	2
• Trans-Local Directors	6 (may vary)
• National/Regional/State Bishops	100+ (may vary)
Assembly Standing Committees	
• Biblical Doctrine and Polity	7
• Corporate Board of Directors	12
• Finance and Stewardship	8

Consequently, this report will recommend that term limits be first applied to the office of the Presiding Bishop (1), the General Presbyters (7), Assembly Standing Committees, and International Offices Executive Directors, with ongoing assessments to be made by the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee. Once the assessments are completed, the BDP may then recommend a secondary implementation of term limits to the International Assembly for Trans-Local Directors at the International Offices and National/Regional/State Bishops.

Exit Strategy

No matter how gifted, effective, and articulate a leader may be, every leader will transition out of his/her present role. In order to implement and manage term limits in a healthy and productive manner, the subject of the rotation of leaders and their exit from a particular office/role must be considered. In this context, exit does not necessarily imply retirement from a public leadership role, although depending upon one's age and personal preference, exit and retirement could conceivably coincide. However, it is very likely that in a substantial number of instances a particular leader, who has fulfilled his/her statute term limit, will have continued gifts, talents, and years to offer in service to the Lord and this Church in an appointed role of leadership. In the rotation process of implementing the guidelines of term limits, individuals serving in either a selected or appointed role should be able to actively, strategically, and with dignity serve the continued leadership needs of this Church.

A healthy focus of an exit strategy requires the participation of the leader, those in supervising roles, and the wider ecclesial community. Exit strategy does not begin in the final months or even the final year of a leader's tenure in a particular assignment. Exit strategy begins on the first day the individual assumes a new assignment. In fact, in reality, it should predate even a new assignment. Term limits presupposes that there will be a day where the individual will no longer serve in a particular assigned role. Every

leader, whatever his or her position, is an interim leader.⁶⁵ Leaders have predecessors and successors. Wise leaders plan for the day when they will transition from one positional role to another.

Consequently, exit strategy requires that while the individual leader fulfills his/her duty in an assigned role with dignity, passion, and faithfulness, the leader must recognize his or her personhood as an *imago dei* beyond the identity and conflation of a particular role. Accordingly, a leader is a person of value and worth not because of his/her title or leadership role; he/she is a person and value of worth because he or she is an *imago dei*. Our identities, value, and self-worth must not be enmeshed with an assigned role. There is calling, valuable contributions, leadership opportunities, anointing, and purpose prior to any specific appointed or selected leadership role. There will be a continuation of these same personal qualities following one's fulfillment of a particular term limit. In other words, the office must not create the value of the leader. The leader has intrinsic worth, not the office, *per se*.

With that being said, the Church of God of Prophecy has an ethical responsibility to intentionally create a system of appreciation and opportunity for significant continued service to those individuals who have willingly offered their time, talents, and service in strategic leadership assignments in this Church. Consequently, exit strategy must not only be the responsibility of the individual, exit strategy must also be the obligation of the institution, the ecclesia. In many cases, leaders did not go through any type of application process, as is common in business/professional environment. Leaders with supervising responsibilities recognized qualities within the leader, which matched the current need of the assignment, and requested the individual to leave their existing role of leadership in order to assume a new assignment. Because of their love, devotion, and willingness to advance the Gospel and the mission of this Church, many willingly accepted assignments, relocated family, and even received a lower financial package in order to accept the request of those over them in the Lord or from the greater ecclesia. In some cases, these assignments have been more difficult than previous assignments. In other cases, these assignments have resulted in leaders having "hazarded their lives" (Acts 15:26).

Peter's response to the Lord, "we have left all to follow you" (Matt 19:27; Mark 20:28; Luke 18:28), could be echoed by many who have faithfully served the leadership needs of this Church. Consequently, it is a matter of integrity and dignity that this Church engages in a process of exit strategy that recognizes faithful service, provides the opportunity for continued service, and considers the financial needs of leaders transitioning, while proceeding with grace and dignity. The biblical maxim of "one another" applies here without question. "Love one another" (John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5). "Honor one another above yourselves" (Rom 12:10 NIV). "Have equal concern for each other" (1 Cor 12:25 NIV). "Carry each other's burdens" (Gal 6:2 NIV). "Encourage one another" (1 Thess 4:8; 5:11; Heb 3:13; 10:25). "Love each other deeply" (1 Pet 4:8 NIV). No leader in this Church should justifiably feel that their service has been a utilitarian expedient and they are no longer valued by this ecclesial community. Our Church culture must embrace the worth of the individual. Jesus succinctly stated this principle in what is traditionally called the Sermon on the Mount. "Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Mat 7:12 CSB). This biblical injunction should govern the Church's creation of a healthy exit strategy of leaders. This requires that transitioning leaders be given ample time to prepare for the next path in their leadership journey.

Additionally, it is incumbent upon the leader him/herself to be intentional in constructing a personalized exit strategy. In other words, a leader should not simply relegate his/her exit from positional leadership to the organization. Leaders should plan and prepare for their own exit from an appointed and/or selected position in this organization. A personalized intentional approach not only includes a financial plan, but a strategic overview that puts in place a conceived exit from positional leadership. The exit strategy may include rotation to another appointed role in which the leader will find creative and fulfilling ways to continue to minister and effectively lead within this Church by utilizing his/her talents and giftings. Opportunity for continued service within this Church should be made available to proven

⁶⁵ Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works*, 9.

leaders who transition/rotate from a positional leadership role into another due to term limits. Second, the term limit may include retirement. Retirement from positional leadership responsibilities should be celebrated in this Church and not viewed negatively. On the note of retirement from full-time Christian leadership service, Christian professor Gary M. Burge observes: “Many factors weigh into the retirement decision: finances, health (mental and physical), job satisfaction, general vitality, interest and other opportunities that may be calling us elsewhere. The calculus in the decision always has to take these into account and is never easy. For some, early retirement might be best. Others are effective till they are seventy or more.”⁶⁶ Burge’s noble counsel to those considering retirement from teaching in a Christian educational institution is also instructive for those in any type of Christian leadership, including church leadership. He continues his sage advice by urging his colleagues and Christian leaders to Retire before you have to retire. . . . Retiring before you have to retire means students and colleagues will miss you, they will not breathe a sigh of relief. There will be a celebration, and you will feel fit to get on with something new and interesting. But what is true about effectiveness is doubly true about health. We want to bring our healthiest selves into retirement.⁶⁷

A denominational study discovered that only one out of every four Pastors (25%) had incorporated plans for a full retirement. Additionally, slightly more than one out of every four (27%) indicated that they did not plan to retire at all. The reality, however, is that even when Pastors desire to retire, or are forced to retire because of failing health, many have not planned well for retirement.⁶⁸ Consequently, we encourage all leaders to engage a reputable financial planning firm/advisor in preparing for inevitable life cycles. The reality is that leadership transitions are challenging and involve many differing variables. Transitions are not “cookie cutter” processes as each individual leader will deal with emotional, leadership, and financial nuances. However, a combined strategy for transition and/or retirement, both by the leader and the Church of God of Prophecy, can assist in mitigating these challenges. The goal should be to transition with dignity and grace. Those tasked with overseeing leadership changes are to regard and treat others as they desire to be regarded and treated. The guiding principle for transition should be: “Am I treating this leader the way I want to be treated when I transition?” Again, each of us is an interim leader.

Recommendations for Term Limits (Phase One)

We offer the following recommendations for consideration and the collective wisdom of the International Assembly with respect to term limits with the caveat that the implementation will be incremental.

1. Recommendation of Term Limit for the Office of the General Overseer (Presiding Bishop)

A Presiding Bishop’s first term shall be for six years, with the possibility of a second term of four years allowing for a potential maximum tenure of ten years. Ten years is the maximum, not the guarantee upon selection to the office of General Overseer. The PB is selected and installed for a term of six years.

During the fifth year of his tenure, the Presiding Bishop shall be evaluated by the members of the International Presbytery, according to the directive of the *Ministry Policy Manual*, in accordance with the parameters of the “Governance Document.” At the conclusion of the evaluative process and the subsequent decision of the IP, the Presiding Bishop may be reaffirmed by the IP for an additional term of

⁶⁶ Gary M. Burge, *Mapping Your Academic Career: Charting the Course of a Professor’s Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 126, 127.

⁶⁷ Burge, *Mapping Your Academic Career*, 128, 129.

⁶⁸ Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works*, 12.

four years. In such case, the IP will present the Presiding Bishop to the IA for its approval and installation for an additional four years. The International Assembly is the entity to approve and install the Presiding Bishop.

The rationale for a maximum of ten years is based upon the following historical information of the tenure of General Overseers:

- A. J. Tomlinson 1903–1943
- M. A. Tomlinson 1943–1990
- Billy D. Murray 1990–2000
- Fred S. Fisher, Sr. 2000–2006
- Randall E. Howard 2006–2013
- Sam N. Clements 2014 to present

A pattern has emerged over the recent four administrations of General Overseer that the longest serving has been for a ten-year tenure, i.e., Billy Murray. We believe that this evolution of a decade of service in this office is a good pattern to adopt. One of the challenges that has surfaced during past administrations is the issue of an open-ended tenure. Specifically, this was a concern voiced by some during earlier administrations. By providing a fixed term, the Presiding Bishop can work within the framework of a beginning and ending period.

A PB is not obligated to serve ten years. He may elect to serve only one term or a portion of the maximum ten years. Additionally, the IP may elect not to reaffirm the sitting PB for consideration to continue as the PB for a second term. In the event of a global, continental, or expansive regional upheaval due to a pandemic, war, extreme disaster, or if a new PB cannot be discerned, the PB term may be extended up to two years beyond the prescribed limit. However, the General Presbyters will need to recommend the extension in consultation with and guidance by the BDP. The recommendation will then be made to the International Presbytery and will be considered ratified with one-accord support of expressions made by the IP. If the International Assembly convenes in this same year, the Assembly would either approve or not approve the recommendation for the PB to continue for a two-year term. If, because of extenuating circumstances, the International Assembly does not convene in said year, the ratification by the IP will be sufficient.

Upon leaving the office of PB, consideration may be given to a PB to transition to a National/Regional/State Bishop or to a local pastorate. He should not make an immediate transition to an appointed role as either an Executive Director or a Trans-Local Director at the International Offices, or General Presbyter. A transitioning PB should not appoint himself to any position upon his transition.

Ideally, all candidates who are considered by the members of the International Presbytery for selection to the office of Presiding Bishop should have, at minimum, five (5) years of faithful lead pastoral experience, with an additional minimum five (5) years of faithful experience as a National/Regional/State Bishop. The above stated experience is the norm for candidates to the office of PB. There may be a rare and unique extenuating circumstance in which a candidate may not have the above stated experience. In this event, the potential candidate would need to have proven exceptional leadership and the concession is to be recommended by the General Presbyters in consultation with and guidance by the BDP Committee. If agreed upon, the candidate may then be vetted and proceed in the qualifying process for consideration by the IP.

These requirements apply to all General Overseers [Presiding Bishops] selected from 2022 forward.

2. Recommendation for Term Limit for the Office of General Presbyter

a. Term Limits for Newly Selected General Presbyters (GPs) in 2022 and Beyond

A GP's term shall be for four years with a maximum of tenure of three (3) four-year terms, or twelve years. A GP is selected and installed for a term of four years. In the third year of his tenure, the General

Presbyter shall be evaluated by the Bishops under his direct oversight (N/R/S Bishops) and by the members of the International Presbytery and Executive Directors according to the directive of the *Ministry Policy Manual*, in accordance with the parameters of the “Governance Document.” At the conclusion of the evaluative process and the subsequent decision of the IP, a GP may be reaffirmed by the IP for an additional term of four years, with a maximum twelve-year limit.

The term limit of a GP is not a cumulative effect of selected or appointed leadership. The maximum twelve (12) years applies only to the time he has served in the office of GP. Years served in other selected and appointed positions do not apply to the twelve year, three-term, maximum. The term limit provision of three-terms/twelve year maximum, if approved by the IA, becomes effective immediately with the acceptance of this report and applies to any newly selected GP in 2022.

A GP is not obligated to serve twelve years. He may elect to serve only one term or a portion of the maximum allotted years. Additionally, the IP may elect not to reaffirm a GP for consideration to continue as a GP for a second or third term.

With respect to term limits, a GP may transition to either a local pastorate or a National/Regional/State Bishop. Consideration may be given to the transitioning GP to become a N/R/S Bishop or a local Pastor. A transitioning GP should not appoint himself as a N/R/S Bishop. The appointment decision is left to the discretion of the incoming General Presbyter, in consultation with the Presiding Bishop and the General Presbyter’s plurality leadership. Also, he may become an Executive Director or Trans-Local director at the IO upon appointment by the General Overseer. Additionally, all candidates who are considered by the members of the International Presbytery for selection to the office of General Presbyter should have, at minimum, five (5) years of faithful lead pastoral experience, with an additional minimum five (5) years of faithful experience as a National/Regional/State Bishop. In the event of a global, continental, or expansive regional upheaval due to a pandemic, war, extreme disaster, or if a leader cannot be discerned for a particular area and the transition threatens to pose a significant adverse effect on the continuity and cohesiveness of a GP area, a GP term may be extended up to two years (one time only) beyond the prescribed limit. However, the General Presbytery will need to recommend the extension in consultation with and guidance by the BDP. The recommendation will then be made to the General Presbyter’s area for approval and will be considered ratified with an eighty percent (80%) support of expressions made by the General Presbyter’s area. This extension will then proceed to the International Presbytery for final approval following the agreed upon guidelines of the IP “Governance Document.”

Additionally, in keeping with the spirit of selecting General Presbyters from among seasoned leaders, we recommend that the minimum age of a General Presbyter in this Church be forty-five (45) with the maximum age being seventy-two (72).

Please Note: Pastoral experience and age qualifications do not apply to current General Presbyters. These requirements do apply to all General Presbyters selected from 2022 forward.

b. Term Limits for Current General Presbyters

Term limits will begin to apply to current General Presbyters in 2024. The following is the criteria for the term limits of current General Presbyters. (Note: current does not apply to any GP selected in 2022 and beyond).

- i. General Presbyters who have served 20+ years (2022) in their respective role as General Presbyter will conclude their service as a GP in 2024, in accordance with term limits.
- ii. General Presbyters who have served 16–20 years (2022) in their respective role as General Presbyter will conclude their service as a GP according to term limits in 2026. The provision applies only if the GP is reapproved to serve during the evaluation process as outlined by the “Governance Document” of the International Presbytery.
- iii. General Presbyters who have served 12–15 years (2022) in their respective role as General Presbyter will conclude their service as a GP according to term limits in 2028. The provision applies only if the GP is reapproved to serve during the evaluation process as outlined by the “Governance Document” of the International Presbytery.

- iv. General Presbyters who have served less than 12 years (2022) in their respective role will conclude their service as a GP according to term limits in 2030. The provision applies only if the GP is reapproved to serve during the evaluation process as outlined by the “Governance Document” of the International Presbytery.

NOTE: As alluded to above, the projected dates apply to General Presbyters as long as they are evaluated and re-endorsed by the International Presbytery. It is conceivable that a GP may not be re-approved prior to an above projected date. In that case, the General Presbyter’s tenure would conclude at the time of not being re-approved. With respect to term limits, a current GP may transition to either a local pastorate or a National/Regional/State Bishop; however, in this event, he should not actively seek such an appointment as a N/R/S Bishop. The appointment decision is left to the discretion of the incoming General Presbyter, in consultation with the Presiding Bishop and the General Presbyter’s leadership team (GP plurality team or corporate Board). A transitioning GP should not appoint himself as a National/Regional/State Bishop.

The calculus provides all current GPs an exemption from the three-term or twelve-year maximum service. Depending on when a General Presbyter was first confirmed and the current length of his tenure, the exemption provides for a potential continuum of service as a General Presbyter. On the lower end of the continuum, it is fourteen (14) years. The highest end of continuum, twenty-six (26) years. Consequently, each of the current GPs have already or have the potential to serve as a GP longer than the recommended twelve year maximum.

3. Recommendation of Term Limits of Executive Director

a. Finance (2-year terms via appointment: maximum of 14 years)

- i. The Finance and Administration Executive Director (ED) is appointed for two years by the General Overseer. The fourteen-year term limit is a maximum, not a guarantee. Executive Directors serve at the appointment of the General Overseer.

The Finance and Administration Executive Director is responsible for managing funds contributed by local churches. Therefore, the ED is to have five (5) years of faithful pastoral experience prior to appointment as the Finance Executive Director. The above stated experience is the norm for EDs. There may be a unique extenuating circumstance in which an individual may not have the above stated experience. This would be a rare occurrence and not the norm after due consideration is given to others who may serve in this position with the above-stated experience. In this event, the concession should be entered into by the Presiding Bishop and the General Presbyters with the guidance of the BDP Committee. It is appropriate for the International Presbytery to be informed as to the extension and rationale.

- ii. Due to the unique expertise required of the Finance and Administration Executive Director, the BDP is not formally making a recommendation of when the term will expire for the current ED. We recommend that the BDP collaborate with the new General Overseer to come to an agreement as to when term limits apply. However, we do recommend that it be no later than the completion of Phase One in 2030.

b. Leadership Development (2-year terms via appointment: maximum 12 years)

- i. The Leadership Development and Discipleship Executive Director (ED) is appointed for two years by the General Overseer. The twelve-year term limit is a maximum, not a guarantee. Executive Directors serve at the appointment of the General Overseer.

The Leadership Development and Discipleship Executive Director is responsible for providing opportunities, curriculum, oversight, etc. in the equipping and training of leaders, Ministers, and Pastors in this Church. The Assembly has emphasized the primacy of the local church. The Church of God of Prophecy is a local church movement.

Therefore, the ED is to have five (5) years of faithful pastoral experience prior to appointment as the Leadership Development and Discipleship Executive Director. The above stated experience is the norm for Eds. There may be a unique extenuating circumstance in which an individual may not have the above stated experience. This would be a rare occurrence and not the norm after due consideration is given to others who may serve in this position with the above-stated experience. In this event, the concession should be entered into by the Presiding Bishop and the General Presbyters with the guidance of the BDP Committee. It is appropriate for the International Presbytery to be informed as to the extension and rationale. The term limit indicated in this recommendation is applicable to the current Leadership Development and Discipleship Executive Director.

Please Note: Pastoral experience does not apply to current Executive Directors. These requirements do apply to all Executive Directors appointed from 2022 forward. The term limit of the Executive Directors is not a cumulative effect. That is, an ED may have served as an Overseer, General Presbyter, etc. The term limit as specified above only relates to time served as an Executive Director.

4. Recommendation of Term Limits of Assembly Standing Committees

The recommendations in this section apply to all Assembly Standing Committees, unless otherwise noted. Assembly Standing Committees,⁶⁹ as stipulated by the International Assembly, are as follows:

Biblical Doctrine and Polity (BDP)
Corporate Board of Directors (CBD) (Formerly known as Administrative)
Finance and Stewardship (F&S)

a. Term Limits for Newly Appointed Committee Members in 2022 and Beyond

Committee members may serve a continuous consecutive term of five terms (2-year appointment term) for a total of ten years on the same committee/board. Once a member no longer serves on a committee or board, the committee/board member should not serve on any Assembly Standing Committee (F&S; BDP; CBD) for a full term (two years). After the two-year rest period, an individual may serve on another committee or board. To return to the same committee or board, the individual is to have a four-year (or two-term) hiatus. No person may serve concurrently on two or more Assembly Standing Committees.

Note regarding the constituency of the Corporate Board: The Corporate Board composition is to have equal representation of members who 1) serve as General Presbyters and/or Executive Directors, or others at the International Offices and 2) those who serve as a local Pastor, overseer, or another leadership capacity. As an example, if the General Presbytery and International Offices are represented by seven (7) board members, an equal number of seven (7) must come from outside the General Presbytery and International Offices. The above example is not the total limit of board members (14) permitted but is offered for illustrative purposes. The Corporate Board is to also follow the transition and term limits of all its members as indicated in this report of Assembly Standing Committees.

b. Term Limits for Current Committee Members (BDP; F&S; and CBD)

⁶⁹ *Ministry Policy Manual*: 2018, 10–15. For a description of Assembly Standing Committees and their responsibilities, see the above reference. Additionally, the *MPM* will be updated to reflect any approval of the above recommendations that may be accepted by the International Assembly.

Term limits will begin to apply to current committee members in 2024. The following are the criteria for the term limits of current Assembly committee members.

- i. Committee members who have served 12+ years (2022) in their respective appointment will conclude their service as a committee member in 2024, in accordance with term limits.
- ii. Committee members who have served 10–11 years (2022) in their respective appointment will conclude their service as a committee member in 2026, in accordance with term limits.
- iii. Committee members who have served 8–9 years (2022) in their respective appointment will conclude their service as a committee member in 2028, in accordance with term limits.
- iv. Committee members who have served 6–7 years (2022) in their respective appointment will conclude their service as a committee member in 2030, in accordance with term limits.
- v. Committee members who have served 4–5 years (2022) in their respective appointment will conclude their service as a committee member in 2032, in accordance with term limits.
- vi. Committee members who have served 1–2 years (2022) in their respective appointment will conclude their service as a committee member in 2034, in accordance with term limits.

NOTE: All committee members serve at the appointment of the General Overseer. The above formula is not a guarantee of appointed years of service. The formula indicates maximum years permitted.

5. Recommendation of Exit Strategy Focus

We recommend that the Finance and Stewardship Committee provide an intentional strategy of a financial remuneration for those having served in an appointed/selected leadership role as it relates to Presiding Bishop, General Presbyters, Executive Directors.

We recommend that the F&S Committee and the Corporate Board of Directors collaborate with the BDP on exit strategy goals. The collaborative effort is to afford that the spirit and the parameters of exit strategy, both in this report and the intent of the BDP Committee, are assured. Consequently, the exit strategy will not be left simply to the discretion of the F&S or the Corporate Board. Exit strategy and its implementation will be a joint decision with the BDP shepherding and leading the process as polity is the responsibility of the BDP Committee. Collaboration is the valued goal here rather than creating a silo territorial response. We are better and stronger when we work together, and our leaders will be better cared for as we work together in this effort.

6. Guiding Principle

The Church of God of Prophecy is unapologetically a movement and people of the Spirit. The mission statement of this Church stipulates that: “The Church of God of Prophecy is a Christ-exalting, holiness, Spirit-filled, all-nations, disciple making, church-planting movement with passion for Christian union.”

Accordingly, we embrace the empowering Spirit baptism of believers and the continuation of the *charismata*. “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who worketh all things in all” (1 Cor 12:4–6 ASV). The variegated nature of the *charismata* administered by the Holy Spirit orients the *ecclesia* towards a *pneumadynamic* life and ministry. “Created, gathered, gifted, and empowered by the Holy Spirit,”⁷⁰ the Church then fully embraces not only being Spirit-filled but being

⁷⁰ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, 117.

Spirit-led. Policy and polities are guidelines to provide both assistance and protection in the proper administration of responsibilities and ministries, while providing standards of accountability and accepted practice. Yet we must always be sensitive and flexible to the leading of the Spirit as discerned in the dynamic of a multitude of counselors (Prov 11:14; 15:22; 24:6).

The metrics and formulas contained in this document are intended to assist in the discernment process of leadership giftings and anointing. If accepted by this Assembly, the parameters, and guidelines for term limits in this document are formalized and become our practice. However, in every decision, it is unmistakably the desire of this Committee and this Church to discern the will of God as we fully rely upon the Holy Spirit. While we should seek to follow these guidelines for term limits, we welcome the Holy Spirit to lead in all matters. The Holy Spirit, like the wind, cannot be contained. Jesus stated, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8 ESV).

Additionally, we are instructed in Scripture to be flexible. “No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved” (Mat 9:16, 17 NKJV). God is sovereign and polity does not preempt divine intervention when biblically and supernaturally discerned. “The church is not constituted by human intentions, activities and institutional or structural forms, but by the action of the triune God, realized in the Son and Spirit.”⁷¹ We, therefore, recognize both divine and human ecclesial action. Indeed, the Spirit works within human abilities. “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor 4:7 ESV).

John Webster articulated, “Divine action is sheerly creative, uncaused, spontaneous, saving and effectual; human, churchly action is derivative, contingent and indicative.”⁷² Consequently, there are structures and polities that are humanly inculcated into the life of the church, which should not necessarily be considered devoid of the unction of the Spirit. Admittedly, there may be moments when the church discerns the Spirit leading beyond the parameters of a particular stated policy. Should the International Presbytery, in session, discern in one-accord that a sitting Presiding Bishop should continue for a one-time extension of two years, and should said Presiding Bishop agree with that discernment, the IP is then at liberty to bring this discernment to the Assembly floor. The International Assembly would then either ratify or not ratify that discernment in the biblical dynamic of a multitude of counselors for a clearly specified period of continued service. This discernment by the Church and continuation of a sitting Presiding Bishop is understood to be directed uniquely by the Spirit and not become the norm for a Presiding Bishop to continue in office beyond the indicated term.

Assessment Recommendation in Preparation for Phase Two

This review, report, and recommendations are a collected and collaborated effort. Assessments are not currently offered due to the reality that the discussion regarding term limits is in the initial stage of potential implementation. Should the International Assembly approve the recommendations to adopt Phase One of term limits,

1. We recommend that the BDP Committee be commissioned with the responsibility of ongoing assessments, adjustments, and accountability processes. This recommendation includes the BDP engaging in a thorough study and assessment once Phase One has been implemented and the completion of Phase One has occurred. After the completion of Phase One in 2030, the BDP should finalize their assessment, study of ecclesial

⁷¹ John Webster, “The Self-Organizing Power of the Gospel: Episcopacy and Community Formation,” in *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2001), 195.

⁷² John Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics*, 196.

homeostasis, development of a leadership pipeline, and the implementation of a positive exit strategy as it relates to Phase One of term limits. As in any assessment and study, both the positive and/or negative implications of Phase One should be specifically identified and thoroughly discussed. The purpose of the study is to identify how term limits may affect the overall health and homeostasis of the Church of God of Prophecy in general, organizational and leadership structures, and leaders. Assessment will accompany the incremental implementation of term limits and the process of going forward with the goal to apply term limits to National/Regional/State Bishops. Incremental implementation is essential to ensure that a significant number of transitions from the IP does not occur in an Assembly-year cycle. If the BDP in their deliberations deem it appropriate, they may then bring to the 2032 International Assembly (or a subsequent Assembly if more time is needed) a recommendation for term limits, rationale, and specifics for National/Regional/State Bishops. This recommendation does not require the BDP to make said recommendation. It provides for the possibility.

2. The exit strategy recommendations of this report will also apply to N/R/S Bishops should the BDP recommend, and a future Assembly approve Phase Two of term limits. Consequently, we recommend that the F&S begin the process of a calculus for a financial remuneration for N/R/S Bishops, given the above stated parameters, for implementation of term limits to N/R/S Bishops.

Notice of Study

Section Nine Notice of Study

In keeping with the tradition of issuing a notice of study from the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee of upcoming topics, the Committee informs the Assembly of the following:

Polity Studies

1. Study of the Evaluation Process

Requests have come to members of the BDP regarding a study of the effectiveness of the present evaluation process for Pastors, National/Regional/State Overseers, General Presbyters, and the General Overseer. The present evaluation process seems confusing to many and cumbersome in implementation. Therefore, the BDP has on its agenda to study the evaluation process. If the BDP deems it appropriate, we will either issue a statement, conclusion, report, and/or recommendations to the 2024 International Assembly.

2. Assembly Business Procedures

The BDP has been active in studying the Assembly Business procedures for some time. We will continue this study. If the BDP deems it appropriate, we will either issue a statement, conclusion, report, and/or recommendations to the 2024 International Assembly.

Doctrinal Studies

The BDP has been engaged in a study of the ordinances of the Church. In 2018, the Committee shared a report on the ordinance of Washing of the Saints' Feet. We continue to study the ordinances of the Lord's Supper/Holy Communion, and Water Baptism. If the BDP deems it appropriate, we will either issue a statement, conclusion, report, and/or recommendations to the 2024 International Assembly.

Afterword

The BDP serves the International Assembly and all constituents of the Church of God of Prophecy. We appreciate the cooperation and collegiality extended to us by the General Overseer, General Presbyters, and members of the International Presbytery, as well as all our leaders and members. As this Committee continues to serve the needs of this Church, issues arise, from time to time, which may require attention by the Committee without the convenience of a notice of study. Thank you for understanding.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Phil Pruitt, Chairman

Dr. Tim Harper, Secretary

Daryl Clark (appointed to Committee in 2020)

Dr. Delroy Hall (rotated off Committee in 2020)

James Kolawole

Dr. Sonia Martin

Dr. Rahadames Matos

Nelson Torres

Addendum

Notice of the Study of Term Limits (2020)

The Biblical Doctrine and Polity (BDP) Committee has accepted an invitation from the General Overseer and General Presbyters to study the subject of term limits. The Committee launched the study in 2019. However, due to the potential and significant modifications that a proposed implementation of term limits would have—not only in leadership composition, but also in ecclesial structuring and governance, as well as the personal impact on individual appointees and their families—additional time is needed to ensure a thorough and informed study. The subject of term limits is both complex and organic in nature. Pertinent topics of consideration include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. A theology of leadership
2. A biblical rationale of leadership
3. Incremental and specific implementation of term limits in order to assess the process and to make adjustments in the process as they arise
4. Creating a climate which protects against the possibility of a leadership vacuum
5. Formation of a leadership pipeline that identifies, educates, equips, and mentors leaders for future leadership roles
6. Exit strategy of leaders
7. An assessment of how term limits may affect the overall health and homeostasis of the Church of God of Prophecy in general

Based upon our deliberations and preliminary research, the Committee members have expressed unambiguous opinions regarding term limits; however, prior to making an official recommendation, we feel it is incumbent that we continue to engage in a methodical study in order to adequately assess both positive and negative implications of limiting tenure. Once we have completed our research and formulated a recommendation regarding the possibility of term limits, we fully intend to introduce a robust report to the International Assembly for consideration.

The Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee invites interested members of the Church to dialog with the Committee. We request interested parties to write and submit to the BDP informative papers espousing a biblical, theological, leadership dynamic and a pragmatic position either in favor or opposed to term limits. The Committee will be accepting papers on this subject until March 1, 2021. We do request that the papers be research-oriented and not simply opinionated, random thoughts. Additionally, we remind our Church constituency that the International Assembly has accepted, as a matter of practice, that positional papers should not be circulated among the Church body. Papers should be directed to the chairman and secretary of the BDP. As well, in the spirit of this policy, we caution our constituency that creating social media sites in an effort to persuade Church constituents on this or any other subject both violates the spirit of this Assembly policy and circumvents the purpose of the BDP and the counsel of the International Assembly.

As a note of informative transparency, the Committee is currently considering term limits as it relates to the selection of the General Overseer and General Presbyters. The Committee is also considering term limits as it relates to the appointment of Executive Directors and Trans-Local Directors at the International Offices, and National/Regional/State Overseers. Within the scope of the study of Term Limits, the Committee will also be considering prerequisites for those selected or appointed to the above stated leadership positions.

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