

Memo

To: International Presbytery

From: Bishop Dr. Phil Pruitt, Chairman
Bishop Dr. Tim Harper, Secretary

Date: August 28, 2020

Re: Selected sections of the 2020 BDP Report

Fellow Ministry Colleagues,

The present pandemic has affected each of us. Please know that the members of the BDP are praying for our global church family and grieving with those who have suffered loss.

The extraordinary times have resulted in the need for flexibility and innovation. Due to the cancelation of the 2020 International Assembly, the release of the BDP report was temporarily suspended, as certain time sensitive sections would no longer be applicable. However, in the wake of the Global Address on July 11, 2020, it was felt that other sections should be released, first to the International Presbytery, and secondly, to the greater church constituency for transparency, review, and to invite response. Particularly, the BDP is now releasing the 2020 version of the following sections, which would have been presented in their current form to the 2020 International Assembly:

- Section Three: Notice of the Study of Term Limits
- Section Four: Statement on Sexual Harassment
- Section Five: Proposed Change in Title of Overseer
- Section Six: Statement on Human Trafficking

Readers should note that these sections are not a reactionary response to the current social and political unrest that is being witnessed on the global stage. They were written prior to the pandemic and subsequent social pressures being felt throughout the world. These are topics that the BDP sensed a deeply compelling need to address.

Additionally, section three is simply an announcement of the BDP's present and ongoing study of the efficacy of term limits. As indicated, we invite response and request that it be rendered in the format and due date mentioned in the body of the report. Once the BDP has arrived at a recommendation concerning the *possibility* of term limits, that recommendation will be included in a forthcoming report.

Sections four, five, and six are provided for the purpose of an informative review by our church constituents. These sections contain recommendations and will thereby require Assembly approval. Currently, it is the BDP's intent to include these three sections in the 2022 BDP report to the International Assembly. However, section three, since it is only a notice of study, will not be a part of the official report to the 2022 Assembly, but will be included as an addendum, since it now fulfills the purpose of notification.

The BDP reserves the prerogative to edit and/or omit these sections as it deems appropriate before the final release of the 2022 BDP report for the 2022 International Assembly. As always, we serve our Lord through the medium of this church body. Our research and report is not the final statement on any issue. We invite any response or question, in writing, by March 1, 2021.

**Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee
2020 Report
To be Released to the International Presbytery
And General Church Constituency**

**Section Three
Notice of the Study of Term Limits**

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.

Contact BDP Email: BDP@cogop.org

Mailing Address:

BDP Committee

P O Box 39

Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91729

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 Corinthians 5:1, 6:9–10, 7:2, 10:8; Galatians 5:19–21; Ephesians 5:3–5; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6; Revelation 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 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.”¹

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.² Finally, a

¹ James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 139.

² 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.

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 hearer. The perlocutionary consequences may be either intended or unintended by the speaker.³ 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.”⁴ 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 bidying [biding] in one place to gouerne [govern] the congregation there.”⁵ Tyndale acknowledged, in close proximity to the date

³ 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.

⁴ www.etymonline.com/word/overseer, accessed February 18, 2020.

⁵ “Overseer” in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second ed., vol. X (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 1116.

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."⁶ 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]."⁷ 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:

⁶ <http://www.learnersdictionary.com/definition/overseer>, accessed April 9, 2019. See also www.etymonline.com/word/overseer.

⁷ Paul Escott, *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 86.

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 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.⁸

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.⁹ The reality of the enslavement of Hebrews in Egypt, and institutionalized slavery during the Greco-

⁸ Tristan Stubbs, *Masters of Violence: The Plantation Overseers of Eighteenth-Century Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2018), 1.

⁹ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2006), 37–38.

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”¹⁰ 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.”¹¹ 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

¹⁰ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 4.

¹¹ Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2003), 99.

Version as overseer is *ἐπισκοπος* (*episkopos*). In the original Greek, *ἐπισκοπος* may be translated as overseer, guardian, or bishop.¹² However, in this particular context, the inference of the *ἐπισκοπος* 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.”¹³ Wayne Oates observes that Paul’s inference of the word *ἐπισκοπος*, 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, *ἐπισκοπέω*, (*episkopeō*) means to “take care, oversee, care for.”¹⁴ Consequently, Paul instructs (locutionary and illocutionary acts) the 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).”¹⁵

¹² 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.

¹³ Wayne Oates, “The Holy Spirit and the Overseer of the Flock,” *Review and Expositor*, 63, no. 2, (1966): 187.

¹⁴ L. Coenen, “Bishop, Presbyter, Elder,” 188.

¹⁵ 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.

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 Timothy, 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 behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach."
- Titus 1:7, "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, 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.¹⁶ 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."¹⁷ Noted church historian,

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ *Didache*, 29.

Justo L. González, describes the influence of bishops in the second century as “the link joining the churches together.”¹⁸

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 Timothy 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); “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work (NKJV). The word translated as office or position is ἐπισκοπή (*episkopē*), 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.”¹⁹ According to biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson, “This is the only

¹⁸ Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), Loc. 105, Kindle.

¹⁹ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles in The New International Greek New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 154.

place in the NT where *episkopē* appears in reference to a position within the community."²⁰ 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 in his hand" (Genesis 39:4 KJV). The King James Version translates the Hebrew word פֶּקִיד (paqidh) as overseer. As a slave himself, Joseph was placed in a supervisory role over others in the affairs of Potiphar's household.²¹ In the role of overseer, it appears that he may have supervised other slaves as well.²² It seems plausible that the 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 secondly, in administrative duties.

²⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* in *The Anchor Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001), 212.

²¹ C. Mark McCormick, "Overseer" in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, ed. Katharine Doob Sakefeld (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 347–348.

²² Kenneth A. Matthews, *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

Ecclesial Rationale

Within our ecclesial tradition, the word overseer has been used as a title 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 term 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 term 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.²³ 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. states and the Bahama Islands.²⁴ In the twelfth Assembly (1916), the term state was omitted because the Church was increasingly expanding to the nations of the world.²⁵ 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."²⁶ 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 term overseer may emit unintended negative feelings and never-intended

²³ *Book of Minutes: The Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), 39.

²⁴ *Book of Minutes: The Church of God*, 67

²⁵ *Book of Minutes: The Church of God*, 234–235.

²⁶ *Book of Minutes: The Church of God*, 289.

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 actually 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.²⁷

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

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

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."²⁸ 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,"²⁹ the office they fulfill in their 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.³⁰

Recommendation

We recommend a change in the formal title from general overseer to presiding bishop. Our constituency should recognize that there is only one

²⁸ *Ministry Policy Manual*, 104.

²⁹ *Ministry Policy Manual*, 27.

³⁰ *Ministry Policy Manual*, 104, 130.

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/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 that 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 presbyter. The title of presbyter 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 warrant. 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 presbyter 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 term 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 in regard to 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.

Section Six 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.”³¹ 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.³² Human trafficking includes forced labor, sexual exploitation, organ removal, domestic servitude, child soldiers, forced marriage, forced begging, and the selling of children.³³

Recommendation

We recommend the following statement on human trafficking:

³¹ Wendy Stickle, Shelby Hickman, and Christine White, *Human Trafficking: A Comprehensive Exploration of Modern Day Slavery* (London: SAGE Publications, 2020), 2.

³² Stickle, Hickman, White, *Human Trafficking*, 1–2.

³³ Stickle, Hickman, and White, *Human Trafficking*, 8.

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 (Genesis 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” (Galatians 3:26–28 NIV).

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Phil Pruitt, Chairman
Dr. Tim Harper, Secretary
Dr. Delroy Hall
James Kolawole
Dr. Sonia Martin
Dr. Rahadames Matos
Nelson Torres

Sources Cited

Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2018.

Book of Minutes: The Church of God. Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1922.

Coenen, L. "Bishop, Presbyter, Elder." In vol. 1 of *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986.

Didache. Kindle version.

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

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

Etymonline. "Overseer." Accessed February 18, 2020.
www.etymonline.com/word/overseer.

González, Justo L. *The History of Theological Education*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015. Kindle.

Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*. Ancho Bible Commentary. New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001.

- Knight III, George W. *The Pastoral Epistles*. The New International Greek New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992.
- Kolchin, Peter. *American Slavery, 1619–1877*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2003.
- Kruse, C. G. "Ministry" in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, 1310. Edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997.
- Learner's Dictionary*. "Overseer." Accessed April 9, 2019.
<http://www.learnersdictionary.com/definition/overseer>.
- Matthews, Kenneth A. *Genesis 11:27–50:26*. The New American Commentary. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005. Kindle.
- McCormick, C. Mark. "Overseer," in vol. 4 of *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 347–348. Edited by Katharine Doob Sakefield. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009.
- Oates, Wayne. "The Holy Spirit and the Overseer of the Flock." *Review and Expositor* 63, no. 2 (1966): 187–197.
- The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed, vol. X. "Overseer." Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- "The Role of Overseer." *The Ministry Policy Manual: Church of God of Prophecy*. Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing, 2018.
- Searle, John R. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Smith, James K. A. *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.
- Stickle, Wendy, Shelby Hickman, and Christine White. *Human Trafficking: A Comprehensive Exploration of Modern Day Slavery*. London, UK: SAGE Publications, 2020.
- Stubbs, Tristan. *Masters of Violence: The Plantation Overseers of Eighteenth-Century Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2018.

Witherington III, Ben. *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.

88th *Assembly Minutes of The Church of God of Prophecy*. Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing, 1994.