

CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

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Dear Brethren,

The issue of leadership development isn't new to the Church of God. The four Gospels describe the training of 12 disciples (students) in preparation for the founding of the Church. In the modern age of the Church, back in the 1800s, articles on leadership development appeared in the publication *Hope of Israel*, which was the forerunner of the *Bible Advocate*, currently published by the Church of God (Seventh Day).

In 1946 Herbert Armstrong sought to establish a college for the purpose of providing a biblical education and leadership training for young people. Because of financial difficulties that year, Ambassador College did not open until the fall of 1947. For the next five decades the Church relied on Ambassador College (in later years renamed Ambassador University) to provide a biblical education while teaching leadership principles. But that came to an end when the college closed in 1997, 22 years ago.

The challenge of training new leaders, both ordained and not ordained, is daunting for the Church today, especially in congregations outside the U.S. But every congregation of the Church, wherever it's located, deserves the best, most loving and dedicated pastors, elders and spiritual leaders that the Church can provide. This challenge has produced numerous leadership initiatives over the years. The International Leadership Program is the most recent.

In November of 2017, after the Church lost two pastors to death (followed by a third in early 2018), it became obvious that we needed a focused program for the development of future leaders in congregations outside the U.S. Business and organizational guru Simon Sinek is the author of the book *Start With Why*. His premise is that every organizational leader, before starting a program, should always ask *why*, forcing himself to consider the purpose behind his actions.

When you first came into the Church, you were challenged with this question of why. One of the early booklets produced by the Church was titled *Why Were You Born?* Articles in our early magazines also used this technique, asking: Why do men suffer? Why do we keep the Feast of Tabernacles? Why be baptized in water? Why do we eat unleavened bread? Why marriage—soon obsolete? Why did Christ die? And possibly the most famous “why” was repeated each year at the Feast of Tabernacles: “Why are you here?”

So, why do we conduct leadership programs in the Church? A companion question has to be, where will the future pastors, elders and congregational leaders come from, if not from within the Church? We won't go to a Baptist seminary or Catholic college to recruit new pastors. Spiritual leaders in the Church must come from within the congregations. Should these potential leaders receive any sort of training, or do we appoint individuals without any preparation? Let's see what Paul had to say.

In Titus 1:5 Paul writes to his protégé Titus, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” Is Paul instructing Titus to go into a congregation in a city and randomly choose someone to be

appointed as an elder? Keep in mind that in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 Paul gives a list of clear qualifications that are required before someone is ordained. It would seem foolish if Paul were now to ignore those qualifications. So what is he instructing Titus to do?

Notice verse 9 in that list of qualifications: “holding fast the faithful word *as he has been taught*, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.” Here Paul confirms that these individuals have been “taught” in advance of being ordained. We don’t know what type of training or teaching these individuals received, but they received some instruction, in fact, enough that they could be appointed as elders in local congregations.

In planning leadership programs we want to be clear regarding our purpose, what we expect to accomplish and how we plan to do it. This is the case for the current International Leadership Program. We are confident that it is needed, and we are confident that it will benefit the Church in areas outside the United States.

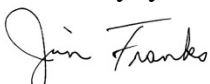
After completing nine out of 10 regional leadership conferences, we have collected the names of over 400 men and women for an international leadership database. There are three requirements for participants to complete this first phase of the new program: (1) be invited to and attend the weekend seminar in their region, (2) view the seven follow-up classes from the leadership website, and (3) view the 24 Foundation Institute classes on the Fundamental Beliefs.

I am writing this letter from the latest regional leadership seminar in Runaway Bay, Jamaica, while watching the news of two mass shootings back home in the U.S. The news of innocent people being randomly shot is always difficult to process. Christ warned us that the end time would be like the days of Noah, which were filled with violence and evil (Genesis 6:5; Matthew 24:37). We sympathize with those who are suffering, and we pray more fervently for Christ to return. As violence spins out of control, man has no answers. While the perpetrators of these most recent shootings appear to be mentally deranged, the results of their carnage are no less tragic. The killer in El Paso, Texas, is reported to be 21 years old and from Allen, Texas, where our leased office was located and several Church families live. It is all surreal.

It is sad to read such tragic news, but I want to focus our attention on the positive news from the work of the Church. The completion of our new office building earlier this year has been very encouraging. The response to our weekend seminars has been overwhelmingly positive. Wherever we have gone, the brethren and participants have been positive, friendly and receptive to the program. We have made a good start in closing the leadership gap in congregations outside the U.S.

Leadership development is ongoing and, in fact, will never end. Even when Christ returns, we see that education and training of leaders will continue. The Feast of Tabernacles reminds us each year of a time when the firstfruits will become “kings and priests” reigning on the earth (Revelation 5:10). This proves that education and leadership development are essential components of God’s plan for mankind. In the face of evil and violence around the world, let’s pray for God’s protection and the day when evil will be eliminated! And let’s be thankful for our calling and our part in God’s plan of salvation for all mankind!

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,


Jim Franks