

Questions About Our Leadership

The following questions were addressed to Dave Huston of Carlisle, PA, by an apostolic pastor in August 2005. We felt that Dave's answers would provide practical insight into how an elder-led assembly functions.

1. Who pays the bills? Who has signing authority on checks or who can tell the signers to cut checks?

We have a secretary who processes the bills and writes out the checks. She prepares weekly and monthly financial statements for the elders. Every month all the elders review all expenditures and sign off on them. If anyone has a question, that's usually when it gets asked. One member of the elder team has been delegated the responsibility of overseeing the administrative aspects of the church and making spending decisions for everyday sorts of things. Any extraordinary expenditures go to the elders and must be agreed to by all of them. Our checks require two signatures. We have four authorized signers, none of which are the secretary or the elder who oversees the administration. Two signers are members of the elder team and two are other church members.

2. Who collects a salary/tithes? Do the elders split offerings/tithes equally or does someone get the lion's share? Who determines how much to pay evangelists?

All of the tithes go into a fund which is used for ministry in general. Currently, one elder receives a salary due to the fact that his responsibilities require a full-time effort. Our secretary also receives a salary. These are determined by the elders and have been agreed to unanimously. They all feel that this arrangement is presently what is best for the church. The other elders work full-time jobs and are making more than the one being paid by the church. The elders periodically discuss what to pay guest speakers and follow some basic guidelines. They also discuss and agree on charitable giving to people in need.

3. How long has your church government operated in this way? How long have you served as pastor of that church?

I founded this church in 1992. We transitioned into our present leadership system about two years ago after about two years of equipping and practice.

- 4. Is the Glorious Church to be a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation? Is the church in Carlisle incorporated? If so, does it not legally have to have a President, which would identify who the “chief of the equals” actually is?**

Our assembly is non-profit as is every other church in the U.S. unless the IRS has stripped away that status. It is incorporated under the non-profit laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which allows an organization to structure itself nearly anyway it wants to. Our bylaws identify the elders as the board of directors and the one member who handles administrative matters as the president. They specifically state that the president’s powers pertain only to administrative matters assigned to him by the elders. In actual fact, he has no more spiritual authority than the other elders and the administrative authority he has can be taken from him any time the elders decide to assign that work to someone else. If you sat in on one of our meetings, you would definitely know that the president is not a chief.

- 5. Do all the elders claim to be clergy to the IRS so they can take advantage of the housing allowance benefits – or is it just one or two men? Is there any increased risk of an IRS audit with this non-traditional church structure?**

There is no increased risk of an IRS audit. We comply with all laws and accepted accounting practices. Every member of our church has the right to examine the books and we hand out a detailed financial report every year. Concerning the clergy, we do not believe in the clergy-laity division. We believe that the leaders of an assembly are members who have been given gifts and experience that qualify them to provide the assembly with leadership. From an IRS standpoint, all of our elders could qualify for a housing allowance if they were being compensated by the church. As we grow we expect to see that happen.

- 6. How are the egos and power-plays kept in check amongst the multiple pastors and (maybe even more so) their wives? Even with sanctified folk, the flesh can certainly rear it's ugly head in a structure like this could it not? Is there a preventative mechanism in place?**

The preventative mechanism is a lot of preaching on the Cross, plus up-close, in-your-face accountability. We do not let each other slide on bad attitudes, wrong motives, or unkind or ungodly actions. We are fully prepared to rebuke publically any elder who commits serious sin. I think we avoid most of this stuff because we teach leadership as a gift of service rather than a position. We play down the honor and glory of leadership and play up the sacrifice. This helps keep everyone humble and service-oriented.

7. **Very seriously I must ask, what would be an example of “up-close, in your face accountability” that has been done with the elders and their wives? I believe in your sincere desire to apply biblical concepts, but I must inquire of some specific “how-to’s” on this subject.**

We meeting regularly with our wives in an informal setting, often having dinner together. We then talk about where we are spiritually. We ask the wives to be prepared to talk about their marriage and any related issues. Each person gets to say whatever he or she want to about any other person. Of course, we do this gently and in love. Our purpose is not to injure anyone but to help each other grow. Most of the things we have dealt with have had to do with parenting deficiencies, marital problems, poor spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, Bible reading), sloppy leadership practices, and so on. We also critique each other’s preaching. At time that stings, but it is certainly helpful. To date we have not had to deal with any sins of immorality or that sort of thing.

8. **It seems that it could easily slide into a weird scene if handled improperly by “the group.”**

I don’t know what you mean by a “weird scene.” Please explain.

9. **Who determines which sins are gross enough to merit the public rebuke of an elder? Have any elders of their own accord publically rebuked you, and if so, was there any congregational fallout?**

The elders would determine this based on Scripture and the impact of the sin on others. I have been rebuked by other elders but not publically. I have never done anything warranting public rebuke.

10. How often is the Administrative Elder/President selected? Has any sort of congregational ratification ever been necessary?

There is no set time when the elder handling administrative matters has to change. It is at the discretion of the elders. And no, the congregation does not ratify the elders decisions, although the elders can call for a vote of the congregation if they believe it is important to see where the people stand on a matter or whether they are willing to get behind a project.

11. Is there an objective standard for what qualifies as “an extraordinary expenditure” needing elder board approval versus what the Administrative Elder/President is able to spend at his own discretion (every day sort of things)?

We have not set a dollar amount because that would necessitate useless discussion. For example, suppose the limit was five hundred dollars but the administrator wanted to pay for all the fuel oil for the season in September and that was \$1000.00. The elders trust the one handling these matters to make a wise decision. But to spend \$1000.00 for new carpet in the foyer, that would get discussed by the elders. The nature of the expenditure has a lot to do with whether it needs to be brought up to the full eldership. If it is ordinary, no. If it is extraordinary, yes. Obviously some degree of judgment is required, but we trust each other.

12. Does the Administrative Elder/President have access to a church credit card, and if so, is he the only one of the elders authorized to use it independently?

All the elders and the secretary can use the church credit card for church expenses as needed. A few others can as well.

13. If the other elders disagree with an expense incurred by the Administrative Elder/President, how is he disciplined?

The others have never disagreed. We trust each other because we are all pulling in the same direction. To date this has never been a problem and we do not anticipate it becoming one. One reason for this is the fact that we are all very conservative in our spending. I think we treat the church's money more carefully than we do our own..

- 14. Since we are talking about a United Pentecostal Church, are all the elders UPC-licensed? If not, what happens if you were to resign?**

Our church is not affiliated. Two of the elders are currently licensed with the UPCI. The others could be but we see no reason to do since they are laboring only at our local assembly at the present time. Our bylaws do not require that any pastor or leader be licensed with any particular organization.

- 15. Who made the determination that the church's ministerial endeavors required one elder who draws a full-time salary?**

The elders.

- 16. Could the elder board determine to just add more elders to spread out the work responsibilities and utilize that one salary for other things?**

Yes, although we do not consider the elders to be merely a board. We are a team of qualified pastors working together to oversee and provide pastoral care to the local assembly. To us, this is an important distinction.

- 17. Would the full-time elder recuse himself from a vote on that matter since he would have a conflict of interest?**

The other elders would not allow him to recuse himself. We are an eldership. We are all involved in every decision. We would not view this as a conflict of interest. We are all willing to do whatever we need to support our families. No one is lusting for a salary from the church. This has been done in the best interests of the assembly. We believe that for a church our size, we need someone to be available during the day.

- 18. Doesn't the congregation naturally gravitate to the full-time elder as primary leader since he is the one they see doing most of the ministerial work?**

Some people do, but most do not. Since our elders are all presently leading a home group, the people in their groups usually go first to them. It often depends on the nature of the problem. I have written a book about inner healing, so people with those kinds of issues often seek counsel from me. People needing financial counseling go to one of the other men. Most of the

time we meet with people as a group (or two or three of us as part of the group).

It is quite normal that people (especially new people) would come to me, since I am older than the others and do more of the congregational teaching. But that is not an issue with us. Everyone knows that in most circumstances, when they speak to one elder they are speaking to the whole group. This is because we strategize together on how to best help people. But this has no bearing on the fact that we make all decisions concerning the church as a whole as a unified group.

19. Is there ever a seasonal change where the full-time elder returns to secular employment and a different elder assumes the responsibilities that require a full-time church salary?

No, but we would not preclude such a possibility. It is also possible for an elder to step off the team for a period of time if he feels it is necessary.

20. So if I understand you correctly, only the president currently is able to claim a ministerial housing allowance with the IRS? If that's the case, I find it somewhat dubious to say that your church doesn't believe in a ministry-laity division. Perhaps not "in-house" – but certainly in regard to the government's take, would you not agree?

A housing allowance only makes sense if you are receiving income from the church. The church must declare the amount of the allowance. But if any of the others started receiving salary from the church, they could get housing allowance too. My understanding is that any number of pastors at the same assembly can have a designated housing allowance. I fail to see how that very nice tax break creates any kind of clergy-laity division.

21. What are the distinctions between the "administrative authority" and the "spiritual authority"? Details could definitely make a difference here.

Administrative authority pertains to determining which bills will be paid and when; working with the secretary in handling purchases; keeping records and preparing reports; and that sort of thing. Spiritual authority has to do with preaching, teaching, leading services, selecting people for various tasks, equipping the saints for ministry, praying for people, counseling with

people, structuring leadership and ministries, planning and strategizing, and anything else that would potentially affect the spiritual lives of the people of our assembly.

- 22. And the elders can appoint a new president at any time; however, if a unanimous agreement must be reached to do so, do the bylaws demand that the current president recuse himself from such a vote or does he retain a UN Security Council-style veto?**

No. We trust each other and would not allow one elder not to participate. I think we would all prefer NOT to be the administrator. The job is nothing but a lot of work without much spiritual fulfillment. In the future we may pay someone to handle all administrative matters (which we see as primarily a deacon function) and assign one of the elders to simply oversee that person. That would definitely be my preference.