



WORD OF LIFE INTERNATIONAL

On WOLI leadership, ordination and clergy

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The purpose of this document is to clarify the basic view and policy on leadership, ordination and clergy within the international Word of Life movement (WOLI).

On leadership in general

Historically, the WOL movement have had a positive and important emphasis on leadership. It has been, and still is, a central thought to us that **leadership is absolutely essential for the spreading and consolidation of the Kingdom of God**. It is therefore a key matter for us to **train and equip leaders**, and to emphasize a leadership that is **strong and clear**, yet **humble and attentive**.

Leadership, according to our definition, is **about authority combined with responsibility**. The words of Christ and the overall teaching of the New Testament is very clear on this point:

"But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28)

"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2-3)

As we use the term 'strong leadership', it is therefore of utmost importance how this is defined within our movement. The strength of our leadership is **not**



WORD OF LIFE INTERNATIONAL

primarily found in the personality or the spiritual gifts of a leader, but rather in the fruits of the Spirit, good character and a genuine love for the Lord and for the people God has appointed the leader to care for (Titus 1:6-9, 1 Tim 3:2-7).

A true leader has great boldness in what is his/her strengths, and the same level of humbleness in regard to his/her weaknesses and limitations. The position that leadership provides can and should never be used to excuse lack of character.

Our ambition for the future should be to **maintain a strong and bold emphasis on leadership, and our calling to train the leaders of tomorrow**, yet at the same time we need to **clarify the framework and the structure of leadership**. Not to limit freedom but to create clarity, ensure long term quality and limit the risks of unhealthy elements or the abuse of power, within our movement.

Therefore, we suggest clarifications and a **common, international WOLI policy** in the areas of:

- 1. Clergy - theology and terminology**
- 2. Qualifications for pastors**
- 3. Routines for ordination**
- 4. Regulations for governance and mentorship**

1. Clergy, theology and terminology

The New testament provides a lot of information regarding church leadership. However, not in a way that one could clearly identify one certain structure or method as the one and only biblical pattern.

Some of the most central terms found in scriptures on New testament leadership, that has been the foundation for our line of reasoning and our suggestions, are:

- **‘Episkopos’** (Tit 1:7, 1 Tim 3:2), ‘bishop’, overall leadership
- **‘Presbyteroi’** (Acts 15:6, 1 Tim 5:17), pastor/ministry gift/local leadership



WORD OF LIFE INTERNATIONAL

- **‘Diakonos’** (1 Tim 3:8, Rom 16:1, Fil 1:1), ‘church servant’, leadership within a certain area.

- **‘Proistamenous’**, referring to the common local leadership, translated in 1 Thess 5:12 as: ‘...those who stand in the front line of the church and lead the way’.

- The lists of five / eight **Ministry gifts**, representing the variety of functions within the church leadership:

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12)

“And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.” (1 Cor. 12:28)

Historically, the WOL movement has taught and **emphasized the variety of ministries and gifts in the church** - especially the fivefold ministry gifts - but **have only ordained one function: the pastor**. For the future, we both see the need for two clarifications/additions regarding this:

- a) **A clearer definition of the pastoral ministry that we ordain.**
- b) **Policies on ordaining more functions than this one.**

Regarding a) Definition of the pastoral ministry:

Our common view is that the ministry and the office we refer to when a pastor is ordained within WOL, should not be limited to the ministry of the ‘shepherd’ (Greek ‘póimen’), mentioned as one of the fivefold gifts in Eph. 4:12, but rather **a church leader in a wider perspective**, more equal to ‘Presbyteroi’ / ‘Proistamenous’.

This means that the person being ordained, though referred to as ‘pastor’, **does not necessarily have to stand and work within the ministry of a shepherd**, but could - for example - also serve **in the ministry of a teacher or evangelist**.



WORD OF LIFE INTERNATIONAL

Common for all who are being ordained within our movement should be:

- **They stand in an acknowledged, spiritual position of leadership within the local church**
- **They minister Gods love, Gods word and Gods Spirit to the sheep**
- **They are good role models for the believers**

We all suggest one and the same **ordination** for these. After ordination, the person is **appointed** a certain function/ministry in the local church (for example senior pastor, assistant pastor, teacher, evangelist etc.). This appointment can be changed without the need for a new ordination.

Regarding b) Ordination of other functions/ministries:

According to above, we suggest that the ‘Presbyteroi’ ordination, that is already being practiced in our movement, is clarified and defined to include the full fivefold ministry gifts, the gifts of inspiration in the church. Apart from this, we also strongly suggest that the WOL movement defines its relationship to the more governing ministry of ‘**Episkopos**’ and ‘**Diakonos**’.

1) Episkopos (from now on translated ‘bishop’)

We fully believe in the strength and potential of the local church, and in great freedom for its local leadership to hear Gods voice, take initiatives and act boldly according to its vision. However, during our relatively short history, we have already seen examples of how churches within our movement have perished and died because of lack of help and support, and of abuse of power from leaders.

Thus, we see a strong need for a clearer defined **bishop ministry, to support the local churches and ensure that our overall movement will flourish and grow.**

The bishop would **represent, but not personify, the apostolic mandate of the WOL movement.** Not to rule over or control it, but to carry the overall responsibility in ensuring that the WOL churches in a certain region **get the help and support they need** and making sure the movement **grows and develops according to the theology, vision, DNA and culture** we have defined.



WORD OF LIFE INTERNATIONAL

Since we have not yet had this defined function within our own movement, the term 'bishop' already exists within some of its regions - for example within the system and structure of a union that part of our movement is member of. This, we need to acknowledge and respect. What we are suggesting here is a **definition of the ministry of bishop, ordained and certified within our own WOL movement, from now and onwards.**

The WOLI board have already accepted the definition that **Uppsala, Moscow and Yerevan are its three main centers**, and stated that **every WOL church should be connected to one of these** - either directly or through a regional or nation 'hub'. According to our present situation, it is therefore natural that **the three pastors representing the leadership of these centers, carry this responsibility and this certified office** within the WOL movement.

We can ordain more bishops for certain geographical regions or distinct areas of our vision and ministry, for example Missions. Caution should be taken to avoid confusion and inflation (1 Tim 5:22).

The ministry of bishop should absolutely not be about titles or positions of power, but rather about **responsibility**. The office of bishop within our movement should have an **acknowledged mandate** to support churches and regions, and to act when local/regional problems, needs, conflicts and challenges occur. The office should, however, be **limited to act only within the overall guidelines regarding theology, DNA, culture and values that we have defined for our movement.**

To further underline this, the practical aspect of the office of WOL bishop should be carried out by an **apostolic team** appointed for the geographical or visionary area that its mandate relates to. The office of WOL bishop therefore **represents, without too strictly embody**, the apostolical mandate God has entrusted our movement.

2) Diakonos (from now on translated 'Deacon')

In our churches and centers there are many people who stand in a **central function of responsibility that is not necessarily connected to pastoral ministry or the sacraments**. They can be, for example, executives, central administrators, leaders within social work, counseling and many other functions.



WORD OF LIFE INTERNATIONAL

Since we do not see it as necessary, or even preferable, that all leadership in the WOL churches is exercised by pastors/ministry gifts, we also find it important not to give the impression that these other functions are less important or less spiritual. On the contrary, we want to underline that we see them as central in the governance of the church and want to give them public acclamation as important leaders within it.

Therefore, we suggest that the WOL churches should also be able to **ordain deacons** that meet the criterias we define together.

2. Qualifications for pastors/ministry gifts (Presbyteroi)

We suggest the following criteria for a pastor/ministry gift ordained within the WOL movement:

Personal level:

- **A personal experience of a calling to ministry**
- **A genuine love for, and willingness to serve, the sheep of God's flock,** leading the church as a body, but also of ensuring that all members receive the personal care they need (counseling, pastoral care and confession).
- **Personal gifts for ministry,** for example ability to preach and teach, lead, build teams etc.
- **Commitment to, and passion for, the spiritual characteristics of WOL (DNA, culture etc.) and a commitment to live and serve according to its Code of Ethics**
- **Good character, acknowledged by others** (1 Tim 3 and Titus 1)
- **Intellectual and practical knowledge**
- **Interest and knowledge in theology**

Education and experience:

- **One-year studies in at Word of Life Bible School (knowledge in our vision and DNA)**



WORD OF LIFE INTERNATIONAL

- **Theological training equaling:**
 - Introduction OT
 - Introduction NT
 - Church history A
 - Church history B
 - Dogmatics (Dogmatic history, Systematic theology)
 - Counseling
 - Historical-practical theology
 - Ethics
- **Faithful, long-term serving as a volunteer in a WOL church**
- **The trust of the church, and of the rest of its leadership**
- **An established mentor relationship with an older and more experienced minister within the WOL movement.**

3. Routines for ordination

- 1) According to the scriptures in, for example, Titus 1:5, 2 Tim 1:6, Acts 13:2-3 etc., we believe that a spiritual leadership mandate is recognized and a spiritual gift for the ministry is transferred **through the laying on of hands in faith**. This takes place in an invisible and supernatural way, beyond the obvious and what is fully possible to fathom.
- 2) Ordination of pastors/ministry gifts, bishops or deacons should always take place **in a service or conference**, to mark the **holiness of the moment**, the **spiritual aspect of the office**, and as a **public acclamation before the church of the mandate given to the ordained**, to stand in the office he/she is ordained for and carry that responsibility.
- 3) **Ordination of pastors/ministry gifts** within WOL should be done by the **bishop** or by **pastor/ministry gift that represents regional/national leadership**. This is to ensure a proper level of quality in the person being ordained. Ordained pastor should spend a few months in ministry before being given a license.



WORD OF LIFE INTERNATIONAL

- 4) **Ordination of bishops** within WOL should be done with **two other bishops present**, alternatively with **one bishop and the approval of the WOLI board**, to point out that we work and build as a team.
- 5) **Ordination of deacons** should be done by **local pastor/ministry gift**.
- 6) We see it as favorable, especially for ordination of pastor/ministry gift and bishop, that this - if possible - is done **in connection to one of the main conferences at the WOL centers**. This communicates that the movement backs up the ordained, which emphasizes his/her mandate and responsibility. It is also an **important expression and celebration of the unity and common identity of the WOL movement**.
- 7) The whole WOL movement should use the **same basic liturgy for ordination**, for the sake of quality and continuity. This should include that the one being ordained **acclaims the Apostolic creed and the responsibility of the office**, then also the **laying on of hands**.
- 8) The one ordained for ministry and office in the WOL movement should be given document - a **license, card or diploma** etc., that proves he/she has the trust of the movement to stand in that position. This proof should be taken back if the ordained have abused the leadership and the position or have shown moral corruption and no repentance when rebuked.

4. Regulations for governance and mentorship

Every leader must live and work in full awareness that the office and the function also will lead to **special temptations** from the flesh and **special attacks** from the enemy. As leaders we will one day be judged more harshly (James 3:1) - a fact that should evoke caution and the fear of the Lord in our lives.

Because of this, we want to stress the following within our movement:

- a) Each leader should, on a personal level, live in **full openness, honesty and transparency toward one (or more) mentor/s**.
- b) Each leader should, on a ministry level, be **fully accountable to someone who has the right to make investigations and demand any answer regarding any matter**. This person should have the right to **correct the pastor** and if necessary **remove him from ministry**, permanently or for



WORD OF LIFE INTERNATIONAL

a time. This could be a person/person from outside the local church of the pastor, or a board within the church. Preferably both.

c) Each WOL church should assure itself of a structure that ensures proper **control and accountability functions** concerning the mandate and decision making of its leadership.

This is, of course, in no way a complete statement of all that could be said regarding these matters, but an initial outline for further processes regarding these areas of our common movement.

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