

# My Convictions About the Church and Church Leadership

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As a pastor in training, there are many things I must know about how my church works. Many of this is new to me, and there is still much more to learn, but it is necessary. I must know the background of my denomination, the Assemblies of God, the background of my church, Peoples Church, and I must know how things are done in the government at the church level and the denomination level.

Peoples Church is an Assemblies of God church and is one of the largest churches in the city. They have a church board and deacons, and a great team of pastors, leaders, interns, and volunteers. They're not perfect, but they have much to be admired—as does the denomination itself.

The General Council Assemblies of God started in 1914, but the Pentecostal movement is what led up to it. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many people weren't feeling a strong connection with God, but wanted it—the “on-fire” for God type of passion (“Brief”). These people joined evangelical and Holiness churches and began “experiencing biblical spiritual gifts” because they “earnestly sought God” (“Brief”). They looked for inspiration from the Great Awakening revivals and people like Dwight L. Moody and Martin Luther (“Brief”). The Pentecostal movement officially started in 1906 with a Holiness church in Los Angeles called Apostolic Faith Mission (“Brief”). The movement was originally called the “Azusa Street Revival,” named after the street the church was on (“Brief”). Many people attacked the church because it preached “racial reconciliation and the restoration of biblical spiritual gifts,” but it flourished nonetheless, attracting people from all over the country (“Brief”). As the Pentecostal movement spread, many Pentecostals started to want better accountability and organization (“Brief”). A group of these people met in Hot Springs, Arizona in 1914 to create an organization that would allow them to accomplish common objectives together (“Brief”). This became known as the General Council of

the Assemblies of God. They organized unity and doctrinal stability, established legal standing, put together a mission enterprise, and established a ministerial training school, as well as starting the First General Council (“Brief”). This council had three hundred members from many states, mostly in the south (“Brief”). Their first doctrinal conflict concerned the Trinitarian theology and was solved with the “Statement of Fundamental Truths” in 1916 (“Brief”). With evangelism, missions, and leadership training being the center of focus in the denomination, the Assemblies of God spread over the globe (“Brief”). It is now one of the largest Pentecostal denominations (“Brief”).

The Assemblies of God would not have been made possible without the “trend” of Pentecostalism in America (Graham). Indeed, it is a unique organization because it “provides an excellent lens on the wider world of Pentecostalism,” thanks to its “size, affluence, and influence” (Graham). In fact, most of American Pentecostalism has “interacted at some point with the Assemblies of God” (Graham). It has always drawn people from different denominational backgrounds together, which is something that not many denominations are able to do (Graham).

However, the Assemblies of God is a denomination that adapts to—and changes with—the evolving culture (Graham). To a degree, this is beneficial, but some churches tend to go overboard. There four stages of adaptation: the restoration in the 1920s that led people in the Assemblies of God to view themselves as “fundamentalists with a difference,” the post-World War II characterization of Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement that brought renewal to the church, and the growing predilection for popular culture since the 1970s (Graham). “The Assemblies of God also moved from an identity based primarily on Christian experience to a self-understanding in which the demand for doctrinal orthodoxy threatened to nudge experience

from the center” (Graham). Denominations like the Oneness Pentecostals stayed “more ‘Pentecostal’” than adaptive denominations like the Assemblies (Graham).

Every denomination has its strengths and weaknesses. In general, there are issues with charisma versus institutionalization, weakness in diversity inside the denomination, and a hard time regulating conflict (Ebaugh). At Peoples Church, there are several things I have noticed over the years. The first one—though I can never decide if it is good or bad—is the changes the church makes to adapt to the culture. Peoples Church constantly tries to look “cool,” or at least the youth ministries do. Sometimes it seems like they focus too much on making themselves look attractive, and the fact that they don’t preach head-on about controversies only makes them look worse. This is, however, a trait of the Assemblies of God in general; it doesn’t always stick to its Pentecostal roots (Graham). There is also the incredible diversity within the church. In many ways, some diversity—like racial diversity—can be good. However, I’ve always thought it to be important that everyone in the church is on the same page spiritually and doctrinally. For example, sometimes the supernatural isn’t preached in the main service, but is set aside for a small Sunday school class—for those “who are interested.” Things like this are vital to the denomination’s—and the church’s—Pentecostal roots. Peoples Church should make sure they are teaching the same thing to everybody, from a young age and in the different languages offered. I also think that the church lacks in evangelism; not the pastors or necessarily the leaders, but the church members. I believe the church should provide more instruction, support, and opportunities for its members to evangelize.

There are a few things I admire about the Assemblies of God, such as the unity of races, denominational backgrounds, and generations. I see this all the time in Peoples Church, and it makes me proud! I know people that were once Catholics, Baptists, and Lutherans that now

attend this Assemblies of God church. I am also proud of all the work the Assemblies and Peoples Church does in missions. The church alone sponsors so many projects around the world. Another thing I like about the Assemblies of God is the longing for organization and accountability (“Brief”). This started with the founders, but I still see it today.

The main difference the Assemblies and Peoples Church has from other denominations is the normality of the “paranormal” (Ebaugh). The “paranormal” includes glossolalia, religious healing, receiving and interpreting prophecies, charisma, angels and demons, and much more (Ebaugh). This is amazing, to be sure, but it also often puts a block between the church and those they want to reach. People are very hesitant to accept paranormal things because they view it as the world does: crazy. However, for church members and those that eventually come around, the paranormal can greatly strengthen their relationships with God—and with the further evangelism of the unbelievers.

I am committed to furthering the kingdom of God and doing His works. I want to minister to unbelievers and coach Christians into being stronger. I have a strong desire to become stronger myself and have a closer relationship with God. I believe that you can never stop growing; there is never a limit to your relationship with God. I want to always be growing and changing, making myself better. I am dedicated to God and to the work He has for me. It has been my focus my whole life—even when I don’t know what that work is.

I plan on developing myself in every way possible. A great foundation is the disciplines of self-awareness, self-management, and self-development (McNeal). Self-awareness will help me understand myself; I will know my limits, which will help me in the growing process, and I will know my strengths, which will help me know what to do in certain situations (McNeal). As an avoidant, I need to learn how to put myself out there for people and for the mission (McNeal,

22). I need to be able to not give up on tasks that I have committed myself to—and I need to learn how not to be alone. This is my first step to self-awareness.

Self-management is how I will develop my self-awareness; I can start by managing my emotions—most of which are anxiety (McNeal, 36). I also need to have realistic expectations of myself and others—and I need to know what God expects from me (McNeal, 44).

From there, I will develop myself into the person I want to be, both as a pastor and as a believer. The first step in self-development is learning—something that I can't live without. I will always be pushing myself to learn, and I need to learn how to befriend people who have the same interests as I do. As much as I want to strengthen my weaknesses, I must remember that God has called me because of who I am, and that I should strengthen my strengths first (McNeal, 68). One of my weaknesses is that I have a hard time accepting failure (McNeal, 76). McNeal says to “admit the mistake...accept responsibility...make restitution...reassess life vision and values...mourn your loss [failure]...move to closure...accept direction...establish new behaviors and accountabilities” (76-80).

When I think of being a leader, I think of all the leaders I know—mostly the good ones, but a few bad ones as well. My pastors and my experiences in JROTC are what first come to mind when I think of leadership. I, like most people, learn by watching others; their successes and mistakes and leadership styles help me know what kind of leader I want to be.

The first and most important part about being a leader in ministry is being a good Christian. You can't teach and lead if you aren't teaching and leading yourself first. A great leader trains and changes themselves before trying to train others; doing this can also avoid hypocrisy. I want God to be the center of all my leadership strategies. Moses got all his instruction about leadership from God, and that was what made him able to lead a multitude. Without the constant

training from God, he would never have been able to lead or fulfill the task God had set before him. It is important to make sure you are sound as you lead and minister to others.

Conflict is one of my weaknesses. I tend to turn and run the other way, or avoid conflict altogether at all costs. Perhaps that is what made me an optimist; for whatever reason, I give people the benefit of the doubt. When someone says something harsh, I chalk it up to them having a bad day and I dish out care and understanding around them, rather than forming a grudge. I used to form grudges—sometimes I still do. They're the poison of relationships and your decisions when the person is involved. I know that you can't run from conflict; conflict will always happen. It's a matter of how you react to conflict. I think benefit of the doubt combined with prayer is a great way to first approach conflict.

One of the conflicts that gets to me the most is when someone speaks out against God, Christianity, the Bible, or Christians. I used to "argue" with these people and try to tell them what the Truth is, but I learned that those people don't listen and that my pushing only made it worse. Every conflict is different and requires a different approach. Sometimes it is good to be silent and pray. Sometimes you need to speak out strongly. Only communing with the Holy Spirit can improve the ability to handle the above conflict—and many others.

My favorite part about church administration is the pastor's "network"; the deacons, elders, and other administrators ("Qualifications"). They do a lot of the leg work that pastors don't necessarily need to do themselves, thus freeing up the pastor to do pastoral things ("Qualifications"). I also like the idea of councils; one person in charge can usually lead to bad things, like pride, dictatorship, and selfishness, but a council of people—especially heads from each department—making decisions together is very efficient. Nobody is the same in a council; they have different backgrounds, they're from different departments, and they have different strengths and weaknesses, but they're all treated equal (Maxwell). Each council member has an

equal part in the decision-making process—and their individual strengths make up for others' weaknesses, creating a strong group of people.

The administrators in the church protect the pastor and ministry, both from the church members and from the public eye (Jakes). They also represent the church to the public and are constantly aware of risk areas (Jakes). By doing these things and much more, they take the weight off the pastor's shoulders, ensuring that everything that needs to be done by each person in the ministry gets done (Jakes). Other people, like deacons and advisors, are there to support the pastor spiritually, emotionally, and mentally ("Qualifications"). It's like the pastor has his/her own support network within the church! These people are often members of the council as well.

I have enjoyed learning about my church and my denomination, as well as how to be a good leader—both to others and to myself. I look forward to discovering even more about my church. Perhaps I'll one day be able to take part in making it better; you see, strong Christians and strong leaders don't make a strong church. It takes a great deal of teamwork, prayer, and people answering God's call and listening to His guidance to make a good church. Above all, every Christian, in or out of ministry, should learn the benefits of conviction. Conviction is what makes us better—if we listen to it.

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