

## APEST In Practice

It is good to consider God's explanation of His coMISSION and crucial that we investigate how God desires to energize it. But, we must never settle for only an intellectual exercise of thinking through these things without ever taking the next step to engage them for ourselves. Not only do we want to be good hearers of the Word, but we also want to become faithful doers of the Word. We must now consider practical ways to engage in the coMISSION.

Consider the following questions:

1. How do we take this information from an intellectual exercise to a reality within the Church?
2. How do we keep moving forward, not losing focus on the mission?
3. How can we prepare for long-term growth?

## Leadership Organization

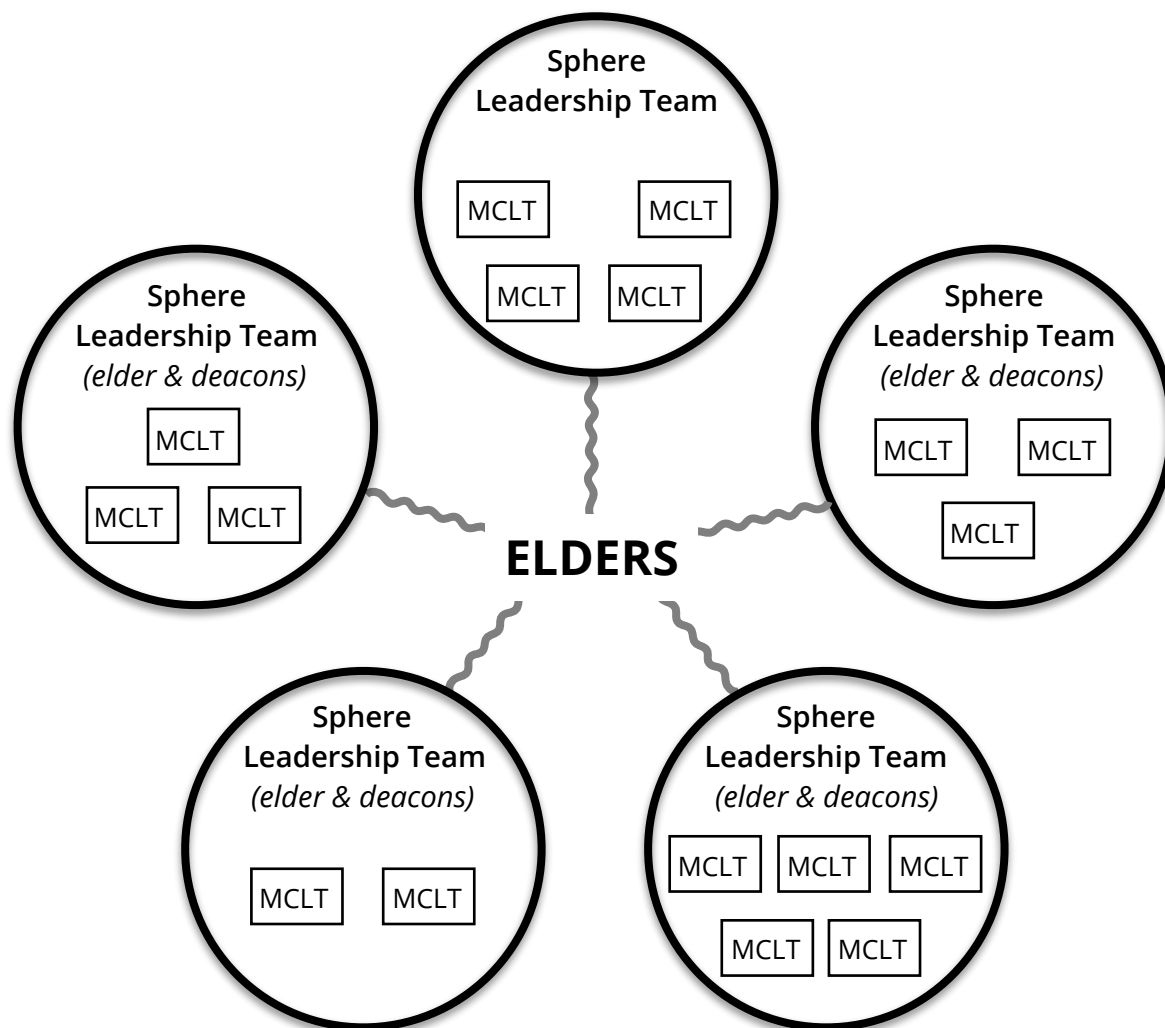
The leadership structure of a Church can either help or hinder the forward movement of the coMission. Paul's charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 gives us a biblical principle to consider for organizing ourselves in a way that allows the APEST values to propagate through the Church. Paul invested into Timothy who was to invest into Faithful Men, who would also be able to invest into others. We know Paul invested into many "Timothy's" who each in turn invested into many Faithful Men who each in turn invested into many others. This is the biblical principle and process of multiplication.

This principle gives us a way to organize the leadership of the Church so that the gifts given to the Elders<sup>1</sup> can radiate through a majority of the Body. Hope Community Church currently has four elders and six missional communities (MC). Imagine over time as each MC grows and births two or three new MC's. This could turn into 20 groups or more within a few years. If each group contains 10 to 20 members, the elders now become responsible for nearly 300 people or more. It's unfeasible for four or five or six elders to directly invest deeply into 300 people.

The diagram below demonstrates how the gifts from the Elders can propagate through 300 or more people.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is assumed that the Elders are given responsibility to oversee the spiritual development of the Church.



Each MC is overseen by a Missional Community Leadership Team (MCLT).

A Sphere consists of several connected MC's and would be overseen a Sphere Leadership Team (SLT). This team would be comprised of an elder and deacons. Deacons would be recognized and raised up from the pool of MCL's in that particular sphere as they demonstrate faithfulness as a disciple of Christ and MCL.

The Elders would use their gifts to invest into the Deacons who in turn would invest into the MCL's who would be able to invest into the MC Members. In this way, the values from the APEST gifts could propagate through a majority of the Church.

Paul → Timothy → Faithful Men → Others

Elders → Deacons → MCLs → Members

There are several benefits to structuring the leadership this way.

- The values from the gifts of the elders can propagate through the Church for the equipping of the Church.

- It provides a means to groom and raise up leaders. As a MC member is learning and growing and demonstrating faithfulness in their walk, they may be brought on as a MCL. Over time, as the oversight needs of a Sphere grows, that same person, who now has been faithful in leading their MC, may be raised up as a Deacon to join the Sphere Leadership Team. In this way, the new Deacon is given more responsibility in overseeing a broader range of people and needs. Then, over time, as the need for more elders grows, a faithful Deacon would be considered for the position of Elder for the Church.
- It provides a process for counseling. As people are reached and begin growing, special needs become apparent for which personal counseling may be necessary. This structure provides a process for how to go about receiving the needed counseling. The leadership team of the MC in which the person/couple/family belongs would be the first option. If the MCLT feels that the need is beyond their abilities/gifts, the counselee(s) would be referred to the Sphere Leaders. If the need can not be met at the Sphere Leader level, it would go to the Elders. If the need is beyond the Elders to counsel, the person would be referred to a professional counselor.

## Vision Casting

Proverbs 29:18 tells us that, “Where there is no prophetic vision, the people cast off restraint”. This seems to indicate that, without a clear vision of what we are to do and how we are to do it, by default, people will simply go their own way in various directions. If we apply this principle to our discussion on the coMISSION of God, we are faced with a sobering reality of its potential impact to our missional communities. We will either establish a clear vision for the coMISSION of God into our missional communities and thrive, or we will lose that vision and flounder in ineffectiveness.

If we desire to thrive, then we must embrace the Proverbs 29:18 principle as missional communities. It begins by clearly defining and building our missional community ethos around God’s vision at the outset. Building with this clear vision as our foundation is key.

Not only do we need to establish this vision as foundational from the beginning, but we also need to regularly revisit the vision and strengthen it. This process of constantly revisiting and restrengthening our vision will help us to stay focused and provide a more healthy culture of evaluation in our missional communities. Clarifying the vision will also cultivate a better leadership culture where strategies, ideas, and processes will continually be evaluated accurately.

Considering the leadership structure above, the Elders will continue to revisit and restrengthen the coMission with the Sphere Leadership Teams. The SLTs will be charged to do the same with their respective MCL’s who will keep the vision before their members.

## Equipping

The meat and potatoes of missional community leadership will be devoted to equipping the community into the full collective expression of the life and love of Jesus which is making disciples. This will require a thorough understanding of and intentional leading into a balanced expression of the APEST values. Healthy missional communities have a regular diet of input from all the values listed: apostle (expanding mission), prophet (integrity in mission), evangelist (gospel in mission), shepherd (community in mission), teaching (training in mission).

If these God-given values are needed for healthy communities on mission, then it is the responsibility of the MCL's to see that these values are built up within their MC's. This does not mean that every MC will have leaders who are gifted in every area of APEST, but that the group is lead into an ever increasing expression of all the APEST values.

It is the responsibility then of the Sphere Leadership Teams to work hand in hand with Missional Community Leaders who are recognizing areas of weakness in certain values of APEST within their missional communities. This might be assisting them stepping in to instruct in a particular value of APEST, demonstrate it to the group, or call in the help of a gifted elder in that value if need be. Any and all options should be considered to meet the need of the MC.

As leaders of missional communities (MCLT and SLT), we must seek to equip our groups to grow and increase in the expression of all these values. It is our responsibility to evaluate our groups regularly and to get the help we need in a timely fashion to build up areas of weakness that we find.

## Evaluating

One of the most important qualities that effective leaders can develop is that of Evaluation. This quality is necessary in maintaining alignment to vision and purpose. Thankfully for us, God has not only provided the blueprint for how we are to energize His coMISSION in us, but also the framework for how we evaluate our progress.

If we look at the APEST model in reverse, we find a simple and effective tool for evaluating the trajectory of any missional community. In other words, if God gives the positive direction of a missional community through the APEST model, then we can evaluate any missional community based on how it is growing in each of those areas.

If we see areas of need in any particular value of the APEST model, then we can zoom in more closely on it and intentionally direct our efforts toward growth in that area. For example, let's say that your missional community regularly struggles in identity truth. If, through your evaluations, you have pinpointed teaching as an area of weakness for your group, then we can devise a plan to begin to work on that area. We should seek the help of resources, tools, and outside people (SLT, elders) to assist in meeting this need and building growth into that area. This is not humiliating, rather, it is a mature way to lead by recognizing needed growth in key areas of your missional community's life.

## Conclusion

Strategically organizing the Church will help to keep the vision in focus, provide a means to propagate the APEST gifts throughout the Church, promote regular evaluation of each MC with respect to the APEST values, and sustain long-term growth.

Through time, our effectiveness at participating in the mission of God should increase as the Church becomes better equipped and the life of Jesus is manifested in and through each MC.