

Apostolic team input: principles and practice

How should an apostolic team bring input to local churches? What should they focus on? How should they relate to local leadership?

1. Function (in principle)

Extension

Fostering a vision for mission – i.e. keeping local leaders and churches focused on growth
Resourcing church planting through training, on-the-ground-support, evangelism, etc.

Laying foundations

Asking “what’s in place?” and “what’s missing”
Advising at key points of development
Teaching and envisioning
Doctrinal and ministry foundations, including resources

Leadership training and appointment

Training leaders – initial and ongoing
Identifying and appointing elders
Ongoing help in identifying and training Timothys

Problem solving, e.g. sin, doctrine

Pastoral support and advice for the church leader
Pastoral support and advice for the local team
Regular communication (inc. minutes)
Emphasis on ‘doctrinal problem solving’ rather than ‘centralised doctrinal definition’, avoids denominationalism

Promoting unity

Intervening in relational squabbles between leaders and people, that are unable to be resolved locally
Fostering relationships to other networks and denominations

Imparting the supernatural

Bringing a supernatural dynamic in ministry, preaching and teaching.
Those in apostolic ministry are particularly to function in healing the sick, casting out demons and performing miracles!
Apostles were often used in a special way to impart the power of God to other believers.
Bringing correction when churches become weak in charisma

2. Relationship and flexibility

The apostolic is a fathering ministry, working alongside church leadership to bring maturity of leadership. The apostolic takes risks, understanding that a church needs 'fathering', not 'mothering'. The apostolic is not a 'super elder' but a ministry who comes in and impacts churches, helps them begin the necessary processes then leaves them to work it out.

Apostolic teams will be put together to serve local churches, either for an occasion, like the laying on of hands for Eldership, for a specific task or over an extended period of time. We are not looking for a one-size-fits-all model, but to find the mind of God for a particular church¹.

The relationship between churches and the apostolic is a two-way relationship, and initiative must be mutual! The local leaders must ask for help, advice and input, and the apostolic will initiate regular input strategies.

In particular, the ministry needs of churches vary according to the life-stage of that church:

- A new plant – which needs much more regular and on-the-ground investment and foundation-laying²
- A developing church – which needs eldership appointing and training to take proper responsibility
- A mature church – which needs ongoing provocation to 'think big' and to release Timothy-leadership to other settings
- A church in difficulty – which needs careful and hands-on help to find a way through whatever problems are being faced

3. Practical ideas...

In practice, apostolic team input needs to be based upon the scriptural concept of 'being amongst' people (e.g. 1Thessalonians 1:5) – it should not be an annual fleeting visit but an ongoing fatherly relationship.

It may well include...

- Public ministry
 - Preaching – either one-offs (ideally as part of local series/strategy) or longer series
 - 'Holy Spirit' meetings – imparting the supernatural. In particular seeing breakthrough in 'stuck' situations.
 - Midweek church meeting or visits to small groups, or particular groups (e.g. youth).
- Ministry to leaders
 - Leaders' meetings – It is more helpful to work team to team here rather than just to the senior leader. This may be a one-off or several visits working through a particular issue.
 - Meals with key members of the leadership team and/or church – an opportunity to build relationally and find out what is really going on, as well as offer one-to-one coaching and input on discovering the gifts and graces of members.
 - Ongoing communication and consultation about what we are doing across the family of churches. The apostolic teams should provide a special cohesive factor.
 - Leadership training. Recognising both need and particular gifting and ensuring this is consistently being trained into place.
- Support for particular seasons of development or extension
 - Apostolic reviews (or mini-reviews of one aspect of church life). This can include recognising 'ministry gaps' in a church which need filling by such gifts being regularly sent in with a view to raising new ones in that church.
 - Evangelistic work and support, e.g. ground-breaking work
 - Prayer for the church and its region. Both for new breakthroughs and in times of attack and crisis.

¹ Paul and his various teams spent long and short periods in towns; he sent envoys for various periods of time; he wrote letters and spoke positively of the work of other fivefold ministries who invested into 'his' churches.

² The nature of input also depends on whether the plant is (a) 'new territory', (b) 'filling in a village' (cell plant?) or (c) a homogenous (cell) plant within an existing town. (b) and (c) may be more connected to a particular local church than (a), which may require more intense apostolic support.