



**April 30, 2025**

# MESSENGER

## QUOTE FOR TODAY

"That's the thing about a living Jesus who is not a dead body anymore.

Jesus shows up!"

Pastor Connie in this week's sermon

## INFO

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## HOW THE CHURCH CHOOSES ITS LEADERS

Most of us never heard of a conclave before. Then a movie came out with that name. And then Pope Francis died, and we're reading all about it.

In the Roman Catholic Church, whoever is recognized as the Pope is the spiritual Head of that entire body of Christians worldwide (today, approximately 1.4 billion people). Since the year AD 1274, the Pope has been elevated to his position by an election among the "College of Cardinals," head Bishops leading every area where there are Catholic churches. The current College of Cardinals includes 135 voting members, the largest number in history. As many of these as is possible will be gathered in the Sistine Chapel in Rome, where they will be isolated together until they have come to a two-thirds vote on who the new Pope will be. The Latin word conclave means "with key"; that is, only they can unlock the door, and only when they're finished. In modern times, the longest conclave lasted five days.

That's one way of choosing a leader. Other groups, including Orthodox, Anglican and Episcopal denominations, follow a similar hierarchical pattern, but without the mysterious conclave drama.

Various Protestant groups have elevated their leaders based on three kinds of criteria:

1) Education – Training in theology, Biblical languages, Church history and communication skills are taught in Bible Colleges and Seminaries to prepare people for roles as Pastors. That same training and often more is essential for elevation to new levels of leadership. This is the way clergy have been cultivated for ministry in Methodist, Lutheran, Congregational and most Baptist churches, including ours.

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2) Apprenticeship – In groups where formal training has been less accessible, clergy have usually emerged through a long-term apprenticeship. In many African-American churches, a Pastor gathers promising young “ministers” whom he would mentor while they served under his guidance, often still supporting themselves through a secular vocation over many years. When the Pastor retires, dies or moves away, the most accomplished of these ministers sometimes emerges to be the new Pastor.

3) Giftedness – This is tricky. A leader may gain a following because of Holy Spirit-inspired charismatic gifts (healing, miracles, prophecies) or because of a charismatic personality (charm, power and attractiveness), and it’s often hard to draw a line between the two. Churches in the Pentecostal tradition emphasize the Holy Spirit gifts, while modern mega-churches seem to focus on the personality kinds of charisma. The New Apostolic Reformation movement emphasizes a call coming through a “prophetic word” (often a dream or vision) revealing that God is assigning this person to one of four leadership offices (Apostle, Prophet, Pastor or Teacher). It’s hard to test such a claim, so people who say they have received a prophetic calling usually gather impressionable followers.

**Accountability** is important to the leadership of any organization. There’s usually a clear “chain of command,” so that those who have roles in the system are answerable to others. This is true in churches as well, though it sometimes isn’t obvious. The major accountability difficulty in churches is usually at the top: To whom is the Pope, or the Pastor, or the Prophet accountable? The answer is, of course, to GOD! But since that top leader is the one (supposedly) in direct contact with God, it’s hard for anyone else to question what he/she says. That’s why we’ve seen such awful scandals come to light in church groups

of all denominations and all sorts of leadership styles over the past few decades. Serious patterns of abuse have often been covered up for decades before finally being exposed by some courageous whistle-blower or an accidental social media post.

These issues are so important in our modern world that Pastor Connie and I have decided to preach on the topic of “Church Leaders in Our Day,” beginning this Sunday. We’ll attempt to answer questions such as:

“What Qualities Should Church Leaders Have?”

“How Should They Be Selected?”

“How Should They Be Held Accountable?”

“What Should Be Done If They Mess Up?”

“What Role Models of Good Leadership Can Be Found in the Bible?”

“What About Examples in Church History?”

We promise that each week we’ll be turning the spotlight on ourselves as well, asking the Lord to reexamine us as Pastors of the Lord’s flock at ABC.

Pastor George Van Alstine