

ARMIDALE CHURCH OF CHRIST PROTOCOL FOR USE OF PROPHECY & TONGUES*

**‘Follow the way of love...’
‘...everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way’
1Cor.14:1,40**

We take seriously our responsibility to provide active and positive pastoral oversight in leading this church into ongoing change in which the Holy Spirit transforms us to be like Jesus, equipping us to take up His mission. We embrace the fact that this journey includes providing opportunities for people to use the Spiritual Gifts they have been given, and to seek those which we see as needful and that the Spirit chooses to bless us with.

We also take seriously the call to hold central the guiding principle of love, and the call to edify the body in a fitting and orderly manner. To this end protocols for the use of Prophecy and Tongues/Interpretation have been developed. Other gift protocols will be provided if warranted. We ask lovingly that the spirit of these guidelines be thoughtfully applied *across the whole life of the church*. Though they are not fixed in stone for all time, they are what is considered to be appropriate for the present circumstances of our church. As circumstances change, and more confidence, trust and experience is gained, it may be that these protocols will change and develop¹. The guidelines provided may also be suspended on certain occasions by the Elders or Pastor, where it is deemed appropriate to do so.

GENERAL BACKGROUND OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Definition: ‘Spiritual gifts are any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the individual Christian and the church as a whole.’ New Testament. spiritual gifts are potentially available to all today, irrespective of age or gender (with the exception of Apostleship as originally given); every person who knows Jesus has at least one particular gift - others can be sought, but all are subject to the sovereign choice of the Holy Spirit, and asking with right motives. In so far as spirituality and gifts go, you don’t have to be ‘spiritual’ to get gifts or keep them; having them does not indicate you or the church are particularly spiritual or blessed. While gifts can contribute to spirituality, they will not create it - in fact gifts require maturity or ‘spirituality’ for their healthy use. In terms of the diversity of gifts: it is divine not demonic; for the good of all; arranged by the Holy Spirit; and is in fact deliberate and necessary. No one person therefore has all the gifts and no one gift is given to all. Almost all spiritual gifts are simply intensifications of much of what the individual Christian experiences in diluted or spasmodic and irregular form. They are common workings of the Holy Spirit in focused form.

1 These guidelines were established in 2006 and have been reviewed and updated by the elders – Jan 2015.

GUIDELINES FOR PROPHETIC WORDS & TONGUES

(Although this protocol refers to prophetic messages, it can also apply to 'words of knowledge', and 'words of wisdom' with the added proviso that if the material is sensitive, it must be treated *very* confidentially.)

1. PROPHETIC WORDS RECEIVED PRIVATELY

Where someone has received a revelation which he or she believes has application to the church as a whole, the revelation should be written down and handed to the Pastor or an Elder. Messages of correction or direction for others should also be checked out with the Pastor or an Elder.

If a prophetic message would be likely to have a *significant impact* on the church in terms of encouragement, edification or exhortation, it would be appropriate for the elders to consider it collectively.

2. PROPHETIC MESSAGES RECEIVED IN HOME GROUP MEETINGS

Home group facilitators should periodically meet together with the elders to share what God is doing in their group in relation to spiritual gifts.

Home groups provide a good setting in which a prophetic gift can be tested and developed. We would like to encourage people to share what the Lord is doing in their lives or saying to them in such settings as a matter of course. Over time, anyone with a prophetic gift should come to be identified and recognized. However, the home group facilitator also needs to ensure that everyone is okay about experimenting with or using this gift in the group before doing so. The way of love and the surrendering of rights is to be upheld (1Cor.13, Rom.14:13).

The home group leader also has the responsibility to ensure that any 'prophetic word' is 'tested' (evaluated). If he or she, with his home group, is unable to evaluate a particular message adequately, the word should be passed on to the pastor or an elder for evaluation. This should also happen if the word appears to have application to a wider group, or to a person or people outside the home group.

3. PROPHETIC WORDS RECEIVED DURING PUBLIC CHURCH SERVICES

Where a person present in the service suspects or believes that they have received a prophetic word which may be appropriate to present during the service, he or she should first submit the word to the pastor or an elder present in the service. If the word is considered appropriate for the service, the worship leader will be informed. It will then be the worship leader's decision as to when in the service to have the word presented. It is recognized that some words not considered appropriate for presenting at that service may still be regarded as valid prophetic words, to be presented at a different time or in a different setting.

In the event that approval is not given for the presenting of a prophetic word in a service, an explanation should be offered, together with any appropriate advice and encouragement.

TESTS OF PROPHECY

This list is a brief summary only, intended as a quick reminder to those who have an adequate understanding of this subject.

(1) TESTS OF VALIDITY

The life of the prophet is honouring to God. (1 Jn. 3:9,10,15)

They are to be known to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and Christ, the Son of God who has come to us in human form. (1 Jn.2:22,23; 4:2,3)

The message is consistent with Scripture. (Gal.1:9, Rev.22:18,19)

The message is edifying, not destructive. It brings life, not death. (Jn.10:10; 1 Cor.14:3,4).

(2) TESTS OF QUALITY

If a word of prophecy fails any of the above tests, the prophecy should be rejected. If it passes all these tests, it should be further assessed for quality (1 Thess.5:19-22). Possible outcomes of this process are:

- This word may be trusted as a message for us here and now which is helpful and should be heeded.
- This word is useful in a general sense, but the Divine content is uncertain. At the present time this word does not seem to have any application; the possibility that it could become relevant in the future is not ruled out.
- This word is not useful now, and there is no reason to expect that it may become useful in the future.

There are no absolute tests that can be applied; but factors to consider include:

- Does the word connect with the present realities of the church?
- Is it consistent with what God is doing in the church?
- Is it consistent with any other trusted prophetic words that have been received?
- How useful is it in terms of edifying those to whom it is addressed?

GUIDELINES FOR TONGUES/INTERPRETATION:

1. TONGUES USED PRIVATELY

If people use this gift privately it has great potential to build them up (1Cor.14:4,18), but people should not use it exclusively. Pray normally also (14:15), and don't let it displace normal engagement with Scripture (2Tim.3:16), or other devotional helps. During a public service, people are welcome to pray in tongues freely and quietly to themselves and God at any time during prayer or worship.

2. TONGUES IN HOME/SMALL GROUP MEETINGS

Home group facilitators should periodically meet together with the Elders to share what God is doing in their group in relation to spiritual gifts. Home/small groups can potentially provide a good setting in which tongues can be used, either quietly to themselves and God (1Cor.14:28), or audibly if someone can provide an interpretation. Interpretation will obviously require an occasional experiment, but we ask that permission of all in the group be received first.

The home group facilitator has the responsibility to ensure that everyone is okay about either option, and if not, to avoid the use of tongues in their group at that time. The way

of love and the surrendering of rights is to be upheld (1Cor.13, Rom.14:13). The facilitator is also to try to avoid developing a tongues-only, or no-tongues only, small group. All people need to feel welcome to their small group, not made uncomfortable and unwanted.

3. TONGUES DURING PUBLIC CHURCH SERVICES

'If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but don't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or clanging cymbal.' 1 Corinthians 13:1

We, the elders, recognise that the use of the gift of public tongues has a long history of causing much strife in churches. Indeed, the first recorded version of this is found in 1 Corinthians 14 where the Apostle Paul is "laying down the law" to the Corinthians who have clearly been carried away with the use of this gift. It is from this passage that today many churches (including ours) take guidance on what the role of tongues should be within church life.

We encourage the use of this gift primarily within small groups as it is easier to recognise that people might not understand what is happening and to explain it to them. It is also easier to facilitate interpretation of tongues in a small group setting. It is important to note that the use of public tongues in the early church would have occurred within smaller house churches which are similar to the small groups that we have today.

While seeing small groups as a more appropriate space for this gift, the leadership team does not feel that it is right to forbid the public use of tongues in our Sunday service (as per 1 Corinthians 14:39 "So, my dear brothers and sisters, ... don't forbid speaking in tongues"). This is providing that the guidelines outlined by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14 for the use of this gift are followed in how the tongues occur. These guidelines include the need for public tongues to be used with consideration of others (especially visitors), delivered in a way that is proper, orderly, self-controlled and interpreted.

We believe that if tongues are to become a more visible part of our public worship time, then we would first see evidence of their use in small groups which would include credible interpretation also occurring.

We also believe that if God would move us in this direction, then he will do so in a way that is consistent with his character (i.e. in a loving way that builds up all of His children), and that is consistent with the purpose of His gifts (i.e. to equip people to help build up His body).

Finally it is important to affirm that just because tongues (or any other spiritual gift), is or is not operating in a public service is no test of whether God is or is not present or at work. After all, His word says that he will be with us for "... where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20).

4. TONGUES INTERPRETED

a. The Spirit-given ability to interpret tongues is God's counterpart to the gift of languages (tongues) 1Cor.12:10-11. Those who have this gift are enabled to understand what the tongues-speaker has just said, and are then able to share that with others present. Like with the gift of prophesy, this gift is under the control of the interpreter, allowing for direction, discretion and opportunity to share what they believe the speaker has just said 1Cor.14:27,27.

b. Substance of any interpretation: A message in tongues should consist of praise, thanks and prayer spoken to God (1Cor.14:2). It is God-directed, and when interpreted, it should be like listening in on someone talking to God i.e. praying joyfully, or earnestly, or worshipping, praising or petitioning God (cf. 13-17, cf. Pentecost: the disciples 'declaring the wonders of God' in various languages Acts.2:3:11 cf. Acts11:46.) The gift of tongues is not another version of prophecy.

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Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem 1994
Showing The Spirit - A Theological Exposition of 1Cor.12-14, D.A.Carson, 1987

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