



GC2 equipper

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The monthly ministry development newsletter of Grace Communion International

Dear minister with Jesus,

It is reassuring and humbling to know that the ministry to which we are called is not our own—it *belongs to Jesus*. Our calling is to *participate with Jesus* in what he is doing in the Spirit to fulfill the Father's mission in our world. As noted last month, Jesus is *responsible*, and we are *responsive*.

In our responsiveness, we seek first to discern how and where Jesus is presently ministering; and then we seek to join him there. In an article titled, *Can You Hear God Now?*, Ruth Haley Barton presents this response as our "capacity to recognize and respond to the presence and activity of God both personally and in community." I encourage you to read her full article online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2008/summer/1.90.html>.

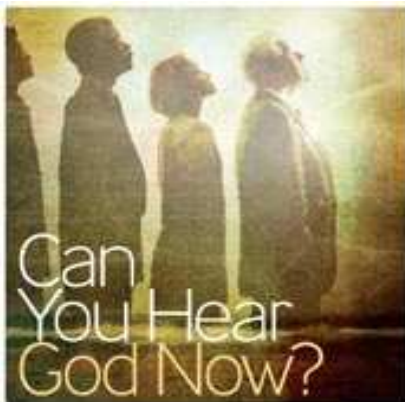
It is our joy and privilege in ministry development to provide resources that help ministers accurately discern and faithfully participate in what Jesus is doing within their congregations, communities and families. Of course, not everything we provide applies to all, but we seek to address issues of common concern. We also provide helpful articles on the Grace Communion website at <http://www.wcg.org/> and equipping resources on the following websites:

- **Ministry Development** (<http://www.wcg.org/mindev/>). Equipping pastors and ministry leaders for disciplemaking ministry with Jesus.
- **Church Multiplication Ministries** (<http://cmm.wcg.org/>). Equipping for starting new disciplemaking churches with Jesus.
- **Generations Ministries** (<http://genmin.wcg.org/>). Equipping for ministry with Jesus to children, teens, young adults, families and older adults.
- **Office of Reconciliation Ministries** (<http://atimetoreconcile.org/>). Equipping for ministry with Jesus that brings healing to personal and institutional divisions related to race, ethnicity, gender, etc.
- **The Surprising God Blog** (<http://thesurprisinggodblog.wcg.org/>). A forum for discussing trinitarian, Christ-centered theology.

In this issue of *GC2 equipper*, we point out some common legal pitfalls that can derail ministry. We also present some marriage counseling resources. We hope this material is of help to you as you participate in ministry with Jesus.

In the Master's service,

Ted Johnston, GCI-USA ministry developer



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Avoiding common legal pitfalls

Knowingly or unknowingly, congregations deal with various issues with significant legal ramifications. Through its legal department, Grace Communion International (GCI) seeks to help its congregations avoid legal pitfalls. From time to time, GCI legal counsel, Bernie Schnippert, posts legal alerts in the pastor general's *Weekly Update*. We highlight here a couple of key legal issues. This material was compiled by GC2 equipper staff and edited for accuracy by Bernie Schnippert. Questions may be emailed to legal.office@wgcg.org.



Leasing and improving commercial facilities

Many congregations rent or lease commercial facilities in which to meet. The landlords often offer long lease agreements – in some cases calling upon the congregation to pay utilities, taxes and all upkeep (including heating/cooling systems that can cost tens of thousands of dollars to replace). We *strongly* recommend that congregations have leases reviewed by the legal department *before* they are signed. On a related matter, some congregations are building out the interiors of rented commercial space at their own expense. Again, we recommend that the pastor consult with the legal department before contracting for such work to discuss appropriate costs, arrangements for contracting construction, and the like. It is important that such work not over-extend the congregation either financially or legally.

Pastoral counseling

It is important that pastors not overstep legal, ethical and professional boundaries in offering counseling services. On occasion, pastors of some churches of other denominations have been sued for malpractice when the advice they offer does not work out. Certainly, it is appropriate for pastors to give spiritual (religious) counsel, but they should NOT overstep into areas for which they are not qualified and/or not legally licensed to provide counsel.

Pre-screening children and youth ministry workers

Churches appropriately rely on volunteers to conduct their ministries. In the case of adults involved directly in ministries serving minors, it is GCI policy that they be carefully pre-screened (including conducting a criminal background check)—please see the prescreening requirements in section 6.8 of the *Church Administration Manual*.

Political activity

Pastors take great risks when they step from the religious into the political. In the United States, there are laws that expressly prohibit churches from supporting or opposing candidates for office, no matter what their positions (or religious affiliation). It is express GCI policy that congregations NOT participate in partisan political activities.

Renting your church facilities to others

Congregations that own or lease their facilities must be very cautious about renting out those facilities to others. Earning rental income can unwittingly produce *unrelated business income* (see note below) and jeopardize a congregation's tax-exempt status (including exemption from paying property taxes on property owned by the congregation). There are also concerns about liability related to the use of the property by the renters. It is strongly recommended that before renting to others, the congregation first consult with the legal department



Unrelated business income

Congregations are often involved in fundraisers. This can be a meaningful way to add to the congregation's regular donation income. However, congregations need to be careful that such income does not become what the IRS classifies as "unrelated business income," which may be subject to taxation, or have other negative consequences. For more about this important issue, please see section 3.1.8 of the *Financial Management Manual*.

Marriage counseling tools by Doug Johannsen



In the 1990s, many GCI (WCG), USA pastors were certified to use the PREPARE-ENRICH system for premarital (Prepare), and marital (Enrich) counseling. We still highly recommend this counseling system, and want you to know that it has been updated to include a new online version. Though the old print-based version is still available, we recommend that pastors who actively use PREPARE-ENRICH acquire the new version. It may be purchased at www.prepare-enrich.com for about \$70. The material you will receive includes orientation to the new version's use and a refresher in couple counseling.

With the new (online) PREPARE-ENRICH version, couples complete the relationship inventories online and pay for them online by credit card (or your church may establish an online account to cover couple usage). As the couple's counselor, you will access and print out their inventory online, then proceed with couple counseling sessions as before.

Note: If you have not been certified to use the PREPARE-ENRICH couple counseling system, you can go to their website (www.prepare-enrich.com) and click on "training," then look for a facilitator training/certification session in your area. They also have a new marriage-mentoring program.

Couple Checkup



PREPARE-ENRICH now offers at www.couplecheckup.com an online program called "Couple Checkup." The program assesses the couple's current relationship, accounting for the circumstances of the relationship: whether they are dating, engaged or married; their living situation (cohabiting or separate), their age, and whether or not children are involved in their relationship (including the issue of stepchildren).

The Couple Checkup evaluation assesses up to 25 areas in a couple's relationship including eight core scales (communication, conflict resolution, role relationship, sexual relationship, etc.), four couple and family system scales (closeness and flexibility), five personality scales, and between four to eight scales relevant to the age and stage of the couple based on background questions (i.e. cohabiting, children from previous relationships, and intergenerational issues).

The goals of Couple Checkup are to:

- stimulate discussion about the couple's relationship
- identify and build relationship strengths
- identify and resolve relationship growth areas (issues)
- teach effective relationship skills
- empower couples to turn stumbling blocks (issues) into stepping stones (strengths)

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a new church or
becoming a pastor?***

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August 24-28.

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www.wcg.org/events/.