

Home Missions Handbook



Presbyterian Missionary Union

Declare his glory...His wonders among all people — Psalm 96:3

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HANDBOOK

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Information, and an Invitation

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*The General Synod's Stated Clerk no longer supplies publications, as such.
Minutes Books and Constitutions can be ordered at www.lulu.com/bpchurch
The cost for Constitutions is \$8.07 plus shipping. Downloads are free, at the present time.*

Are you looking for a church home? We invite you to consider becoming part of the Bible Presbyterian Church. We are a Reformed Bible-believing witness for Christ.

To Ministers and Churches: Perhaps your search for those of kindred spirit in the tenets of biblical Presbyterianism has brought this information into your hands. We invite you to consider affiliating with the Bible Presbyterian Church.

To Individuals and Families: If there is a BP Church in your area, please take time to visit and become acquainted with their ministry and witness for Christ. To those who live in a city where there is no Bible Presbyterian Church or other faithful, Reformed witness, we urge you to consider starting a BPC church in your area.

A minister or church wishing to explore the possibility of uniting with the Bible Presbyterian Church can begin with any one of three contacts:

1. If known, contact the nearest Bible Presbyterian Church and make your interest known.
2. Contact the clerk of the presbytery nearest you as listed in the Synod minutes or on our website.
3. Call or write: **Dr. Leonard W. Pine**
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lpine@presbyterianmissions.org

The Presbyterian Missionary Union is prepared to work with you at any level – a beginning Bible study, a group already meeting for worship, an organized church or other ways that are appropriate to the situation.

Interested ministers begin by seeking entrance through one of our presbyteries. Whether newly ordained or an experienced minister, God may have a place for you. Church planters and missionaries are especially needed.

Section 1: The Purpose of this Manual¹

Even as interest in new churches increases, it is clear that a general knowledge among Bible-believing Christians of the skills, practices, and competencies required to establish a new Reformed congregation is minimal. Our local churches, Presbytery home missions committees, and the General Synod have expressed a common desire for a practical manual to put in the hands of those who are involved in doing the work. The request has come for a document which articulates sound ecclesiastical attitudes and practices and which reviews accepted and time-tested methods for establishing new congregations. So this manual is intended to tell you what you need to know and do as an organizing pastor, as an interim elder, or as a member of a presbytery home missions committee working to establish a congregation that will be committed to the standards of doctrine, government, discipline, and worship of the BPC.

In producing this manual, Presbyterian Missionary Union has made a choice about its focus. Rather than serving as a general study of church planting, this manual will be about starting Bible Presbyterian (BP) churches. While that focus may appear to limit its audience, PMU believes that Christ's Church is best served by one of its branches being very specific about the principles, policies, and procedures which govern its church planting activities.

Two terms which will be used throughout the following pages need careful clarification at the outset: *Presbyterian* and *Reformed*. In these pages, these terms do not refer to the historic and geographical identities of two ecclesiastical expressions of Calvinism, one from Scotland and the other from the European continent. Nor are they to be understood as synonyms for each other. Rather, the term *Presbyterian* will consistently refer to the governmental structure and the connectional nature of a church, while the term *Reformed* will refer to a church's doctrinal commitments and its way of approaching the Scriptures and all of life.

This manual also makes several important underlying assumptions about the process of planting Presbyterian and Reformed churches. The first assumption is that Presbyterian churches work differently from other types of Protestant churches. They are ruled collectively by a group of elders, rather than by a single, visionary pastor/leader. That joint rule and oversight by a session also means that the congregation does not see itself as setting the agenda for its own ministry, nor does it necessarily follow the vision of a single leader. And the connectional nature of Presbyterian churches, with their graded systems of review and control, means that neither strong, assertive leaders nor outside "experts" will be able to make significant changes in the ministry of a congregation without the concurrence of a number of ministers and elders who mutually share responsibility for the well-being of that local church.

This means that those who are involved in establishing Presbyterian churches should be warned that the majority of church planting materials available today are written from a nonconnectional perspective. Such materials view each local church as an independent entity which chooses its own structure and purpose and is headed by a strong, natural leader. They advocate leadership models based on the assumption of a general lack of interest in, or importance of, the governmental structure of the church. If the principles and methods of such materials are followed indiscriminately while attempting to start a Presbyterian church, those involved will almost certainly find themselves in conflict with some of the basic biblical foundations on which they are working to establish the church.

The second assumption this manual makes is that Reformed churches think differently from other Protestant churches. They hold to strong sets of confessional beliefs, which determine much of the

¹ Ross Graham, *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, 2008), "Introduction."

outworking of their ministries. They also see themselves fitting within a long, rich history of the Church, rather than developing something new from scratch. Their Reformed commitments also demand a depth and fullness of ministry that touches all of life.

Those who are involved in establishing Reformed churches should be aware that most church planting materials available today are written with the assumption that a new church must, over time, create *de novo* its own statement of beliefs and commitments. Many such materials also assume that doctrinal beliefs do not play a significant role in the planting and development of a new church. And some of these materials go so far as to suggest that a congregation's strong commitment to a set of doctrinal beliefs is an impediment to its growth and outreach as a church. If concepts and methodologies garnered from such materials are indiscriminately employed while attempting to plant a self-consciously Reformed church, those involved often become frustrated and angered. They discover that the methodologies employed and the ministries that result often conflict with their system of belief and their ways of thinking about the Scriptures.

The third assumption this manual makes about the process of planting Presbyterian and Reformed churches is that the emphases with which a church is begun determine how it will believe and function in the future. If we want our new BP churches to be Presbyterian in structure and government, it is imperative that when we begin them, we provide them with a group of competent and caring elders who will take the time and have the energy to shepherd and oversee them. If we want them to be Reformed in their doctrinal commitments, it is important that means and methods are devised to ensure that they hear doctrinal preaching and confessional references from the pulpit and that such matters as catechetical instruction are a part of their ministries from the earliest days.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to our sister Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, for the work that they have done in this area. Much of this manual will unfold around the assumption that the way in which God has seen fit to expand the OPC and increase the number of its congregations will also be the normal method employed by us in our church planting efforts. Indeed, a great deal of their manual, *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, is quoted verbatim or nearly so in these pages with their permission (sections that are lifted from its pages are indicated by footnote at the beginning of that section. Changes unique to the BP situation have been made throughout where necessary.) For almost a decade, that method has been that a group of committed believers is raised up by the efforts of a regional home missionary, or by the efforts of a local pastor along with his session and his congregation, or even by divine intervention apart from the efforts of a local session or presbytery. By whatever means these groups come to the Church, they have been embraced by sessions and presbyteries and assisted with the beginning of worship services and other ministries. They are provided with elders on loan (in some cases, with the entire session of a BP congregation) to be their shepherds and overseers. And as the young congregation develops over a period of between three and twelve months, an evangelist is found to be their organizing pastor. It is readily admitted that this is not the only way to begin a new Presbyterian and Reformed church. But it is the method God has used to expand the OPC and the one which will be assumed throughout the pages of this manual. Changes have been made in various places throughout which reflect the particular character and methods of the BPC without indication, since this is intended to be an in-house book that will remain unpublished. To ascertain the OPC's specific approaches on these matters, please consult their manual directly. Other methods will also be discussed from a BP perspective in the recognition that God deals with his elect in mysterious and varied ways, and so we will actively employ methodologies that accomplish the goal of establishing conscientiously Reformed and Presbyterian churches in accord with the principles of the Word of God.

Section 2: What is a Bible Presbyterian Church?

GENERAL FACTS

- **BIBLE PRESBYTERIANS** are a small but vigorous group of people who seek to maintain a strong connection to our separated, Reformed roots. We also desire to faithfully minister to the Body of Christ and win souls both at home and abroad. Love of missions, evangelism, and sound Bible instruction stir the hearts of our people.
- **WE BELIEVE** Reformed doctrine is historic Christianity in its emphasis upon the sovereignty of God and trustworthiness of the Bible. It was the compromise of the truths of Scripture in the early decades of the twentieth century that led to the formation of the Bible Presbyterian Church. As theological liberalism moved into Presbyterian seminaries and out into the church, it became fashionable to question or reject fundamental tenets of Christianity such as the inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth and deity of Christ, His supernatural works, the atonement on the cross, and even His resurrection from the dead.
- **WE BELIEVE** that God has raised up this denomination to take a faithful stand for the historic Christian faith and to be a light in the darkening days of compromise and apostasy. The Bible Presbyterian Church adopted the Westminster Standards in its organizing synod held September 6-8, 1938. Year after year the BPC has reaffirmed its belief in the biblical doctrines of historic Christianity that are outlined in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms.
- **THE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH** is unique among American and European Reformed churches, maintaining eschatological liberty while being predominantly an historic pre-millennial church. We are free to walk under the Presbyterian principle that “God is the Lord of the conscience,” so our local congregations all have a flavor of their own in worship and ministry activities. The Scriptures provide our only “regulations” when it comes to worship. BP worship is marked by a vibrancy that comes from each communicant bringing his or her own offerings before the Lord with a full heart, within the bounds of the Word of God.

PRESBYTERIAN GOVERNMENT

- **THE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH** operates under a Presbyterian form of government because the Apostles established a representative form of government where the elected spiritual leaders, called elders or presbyters, make up the session of the local church to oversee affairs of the church.
- **THE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN** denomination consists of one synod, four presbyteries, and more than twenty-two local churches. Each of these courts has its own distinct function in the worship of God, the promulgation of the faith, and the discipline of the church. The denomination adopts the Westminster Standards (Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms) along with the Book of Discipline and Form of Government as its Constitution

Local Churches

Each church is governed by a session, composed of the minister(s) and ruling elder(s), which administers the affairs and discipline of the church. Congregations approve or disapprove sessional recommendations such as extending calls to ministers and church budgets. Each congregation owns its own property and approves by-laws that help apply the Constitution to the local situation.

Presbyteries

A presbytery consisting of ministers and elder delegates represents each congregation in a certain geographic region. The Presbytery’s duties include:

- o Receiving and ruling on all appeals and complaints brought before it from sessions;

- o Oversee the spiritual welfare of the local churches in the region;
- o Providing accountability for ministers and local churches;
- o Examining, ordaining, installing, and judging ministers and missionaries;
- o Ministering together in mutual projects across the region, such as church planting efforts, camps, seminars, evangelistic efforts and so on.

General Synod²

The General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church consists of every minister and elder delegates from each church. The Synod is the ultimate governing body of the denomination. The Synod's duties include:

- o Receiving and ruling on all appeals and complaints brought before it from presbyteries or sessions;
- o Laboring toward the bond of union, peace, correspondence, and mutual confidence among all our churches;
- o Representing the denomination to, and corresponding with other branches of the Christian faith;
- o Serving as the primary outlet for the official views and positions of the BPC regarding the application of Scripture truth to the visible church and society at large.

CONCERNING ECCLESIASTICAL FELLOWSHIP

A witness for biblical Presbyterianism is preserved in this church body. We believe in missions and evangelism. It is the good news of the gospel that saves sinners. We believe all are lost and under the wrath of God and that all believers are “ambassadors for Christ,” (II Corinthians 5:20) as spoken by the Apostle Paul.

It is our firm belief that missionary work and evangelism must always be practiced within a biblical context. Our methods and message both arise from the Bible. We further believe evangelism should issue forth into discipling new believers and planting churches.

This church takes seriously the command of Christ to preach the gospel at home and abroad, for God's elect are to be found among all nations, tribes and tongues.

The BPC has a strong commitment to a Scriptural purity in association. Such purity has been important to the character, activity, and development of the denomination from its inception. This commitment has guided our fellowship with other Protestant denominations that hold to the essential doctrines of Christianity and recognize the Bible as their only infallible rule of faith and practice. We oppose ecumenicity that seeks to bring together all churches without regard for their doctrine or faithfulness. At the same time, we especially extend the hand of fellowship and cooperation to other Reformed churches and ministries that endeavor to remain faithful to the Word of God.

² The General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church is incorporated in the state of New York and has been granted group tax-exempt status for all churches in the denomination by the Internal Revenue Service under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code. The Synod is funded by contributions from local churches and individuals.

Section 3: Our Vision

* The chief passion of the Bible Presbyterian Church is to behold God, pursue godliness, and proclaim Christ to the entire world.

* To "Behold God" means that I rely on His Spirit as I consider and think about how God has revealed Himself in His Word. It means that I meditate upon, and am captivated by, His beautiful nature and wonderful works. God expects me to rightly know Jesus Christ, the full revelation of Himself, in all of His glory. God expects me to appreciate His greatness and supremacy. God expects me to be pleasure-filled when I meet with Him in public and private worship.

* To "Pursue Godliness" means that I engage in the personal conquest of holiness, pleasing God. It also means that I earnestly contend for the faith in my congregation, denomination, and in the larger context of Church as a whole in the midst of a fallen society. I want to live what I know to be true about God and what He requires of me! To reflect His glory is a joy, not the burden of law. No matter if it is in the quiet thinking of my mind or the active words of my mouth, I want to daily strive toward pleasing God. In essence, I want to joyfully live the two greatest commandments (loving God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love my neighbor as myself).

* To "Proclaim Christ to the entire world" means that I continue in the footsteps of the Apostles by proclaiming the Kingdom of God to all men. There is no other name under heaven by which a man can be saved but through the person and work of Jesus Christ. I am called to make Him known through my actions and my words. I accomplish this by serving others in Christ's name and by telling them of the hope that is within me. The Gospel is not intended to remain in the sanctuary of the local church but it is to be expressed in my life, in my city, in my country, and in the entire world. I look to the Church for encouragement, leadership, and greater opportunity as I stand as a witness to Jesus Christ.

Some Practical Implications of these values:

* We Believe Reformed doctrine is historic Christianity in its emphasis upon the sovereignty of God and trustworthiness of the Bible. We are Presbyterian and confessional (meaning we believe the Westminster Standards are a good summary of Scripture that defines what we believe) by conviction and in our practice. We strive to exhibit and rejoice in a living, warm-hearted Calvinism.

* The BPC affirms the Presbyterian principle that "God is the Lord of the conscience," so our local congregations all have a flavor of their own in worship and ministry activities. The Scriptures provide our only "regulations" when it comes to worship. BP worship is marked by a vibrancy that comes from each communicant bringing his or her own offerings before the Lord with a full heart, within the bounds of the Word of God. The freedom that results from that commitment, within the bounds of confessional faithfulness, is exhilarating.

* The BPC is surrendered to the absolute and final authority of the Word of God, and strives to follow God's Word in every area of life.

* The BPC loves the exegetical preaching of the pure and simple truth of the gospel.

* The BPC longs to live what we preach.

* Having received mercy and experienced the love of Christ in our own hearts, we are compelled by the love of Christ to be zealous for doing the work of biblical evangelism in every land and to every people.

* The BPC takes seriously covenant obligations to raise our children in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

* The BPC operates under a Presbyterian form of government because the Apostles established a representative form of government with elected spiritual leaders called elders or presbyters overseeing the affairs of the Church.

* The BPC is committed to disciplining fallen members of the body in a spirit of love and humility, with the purpose of restoring them to communion and fellowship with the body.

* The BPC rejects the social gospel, seeker-driven messages, and political correctness in favor of the power of the finished work of Jesus' blood sacrifice on the cross.

* The BPC will oppose and speak out against false teachings, churches, and religious leaders, desiring to take a faithful stand for the historic Christian faith and to be a light in the darkening days of compromise and apostasy. We oppose ecumenicity that seeks to bring together all churches without regard for their doctrine or faithfulness. At the same time, we extend the hand of fellowship and cooperation to all visible branches of the Christian Church that endeavor to remain faithful to the Word of God, but especially to other Reformed churches and ministries.



Section 4: Doctrinal Position of the Bible Presbyterian Church

The Bible Presbyterian Church adopted the Westminster Standards in its organizing synod, held September 6-8, 1938. Year after year this Reformed church body has reaffirmed its belief in the basic doctrines of historic Christianity.

We believe Reformed doctrine is historic Christianity, in its emphasis upon the sovereignty of God and the trustworthiness of the Bible. We are a confessional church.

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave purpose to this His Church by giving it a commission to go forth in His Name preaching the gospel, to evangelize the lost, while nurturing the saints – making disciples of all nations, defending the faith. May we bring glory to God our Father by the effective achievement of this, His mission for us; and

Be it further resolved that:

This His Church is fully committed to the system of Reformed doctrine as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, along with the basic principles of Presbyterian Government.

—Adopted 1987, 51st General Synod

It was the compromises of these truths by the mainline Presbyterian Church in the early decades of this century that led to the formation of the Bible Presbyterian Church. As theological liberalism had moved into Presbyterian seminaries and out into the church, it became fashionable to question the fundamental tenets of Christianity. The inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth and deity of Christ, His supernatural works, the atonement on the cross, and even His resurrection from the dead were called into question. The Presbyterian Church ordained ministers and sent out missionaries who either called these doctrines into question or rejected them outright.

We believe God has raised up this church body to take a faithful stand for the historic Christian faith and, further, to be a standard bearer to these truths in darkening days of compromise and apostasy.

The Bible Presbyterian Church continues to this day “for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ,”

Revelation 1:9

Section 5: The Government of the Bible Presbyterian Church

Believing the Scriptures give us a pattern for orderly church government, the Bible Presbyterian Church operates by a representative system common among Presbyterian church bodies. A Form of Government was adopted soon after this church came into being. In an introductory note to Chapter 1, “Preliminary Principles”, this statement is given:

The Bible Presbyterian Church in setting forth the Form of Government which it maintains as being founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God, reiterates, by way of introduction, several great principles which are basic to and regulative of our form of church government.

Our church sessions are made up of ministers and ruling elders.

Presbyteries consist of the particular churches within geographical areas across the United States and Canada. Churches are represented by their minister(s) and one ruling elder (more for larger churches) at each meeting. Meetings are held twice a year or three times a year by some presbyteries.

The General Synod meets annually in one of our churches. Representation includes all ordained ministers and a ruling elder from each church (more for larger churches) at each meeting. The synod meets near the beginning of August for its six day sessions. Families are often in attendance and visitors are encouraged to attend.

The Form of Government, Chapter IV, par 3 tells us: Believing that synods and councils . . . when Scripturally conducted, such courts are an aid to the faith and life of the flock of Christ . . .

Each congregation calls its pastor without interference from outside (that is, ministers are not appointed) and each church owns its own property without ties to the denomination.

Section 6: What is a Synod Meeting?

“The General Synod of this Church shall consist of every minister and of elders from particular churches . . . The General Synod shall have power to organize and conduct its business in a democratic and Christian manner.” So states the Bible Presbyterian Form of Government.

The Synod meets each year in one of our churches for six days. Each day is a balance of conducting the business of the Church, time in prayer, hearing the word preached, and considering issues and needs in panels and seminars.

Resolutions are presented and adopted and agency reports are given. A service of communion and a memorial service are held each year.

The moderator, elected in the opening session, serves in the chair, seeking by fair judgment to see to the good order of the proceedings. A stated clerk and an assistant clerk serve and are kept busy with the roll, handling communications, recording minutes and serving the body. A treasurer also serves, interim the financial matters of the body.

Upon his election, the moderator of synod names a vice moderator to assist him and appoints members to eight standing committees that operate during the synod. While one committee prepares resolutions, another examines presbytery records and another handles various “bills and overtures.”

Music, fellowship, worship, food, and long days, fill the mix of a day at synod. The final day closes with a banquet and an enjoyable time for all.

One of the highlights of synod is the Lord’s Day. The moderator preaches in the morning, and a memorial service is held in the evening. On Sunday afternoon, a sacred concert is presented.

Section 7: Why Bible Presbyterians Use the Term “Fundamentalist”

By Rev. Morris McDonald, D.D.

It was a dark and stormy night – within the church world! On May 21, 1922, a controversial minister stood in the pulpit of New York City’s First Presbyterian Church and preached a sermon titled, *Shall the Fundamentalists Win?* In his sermon, Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick asserted that views such as the virgin birth, the literal return of Christ, and biblical inerrancy were nonessentials which he rejected.

Do you suppose the modernist Fosdick had in mind Pentecostal fundamentalism, or Independent Baptist fundamentalism? We are not left to uncertainty, for in the 1910 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA, (North) five doctrinal basics were adopted as biblically essential. Although not specifically called “fundamentals,” they closely followed the emphasis of the series of widely distributed pamphlets sent across the country beginning in 1909, called, *The Fundamentals*. Leading Bible believing Presbyterian men contributed some of the articles in that series. Later general assemblies of the church reaffirmed the 1910 position.

By the 1920’s the ecclesiastical struggle became known as “the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy.” Many Presbyterians prominent in the Bible and prophecy conferences of the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, (a forerunner of “fundamentalism”) were James Brookes, William Moorehead, Nathaniel West (editor, *Premillennial Essays*), William Biederwolf, J. Wilbur Chapman, John T. Duffield, Henry Parsons, Arthur T. Pierson, Albert Erdman, DeWitt Talmage, and Charles Trumbull.

Until the late 1920’s, fundamentalism was largely of a non-conformist nature. The conservatives who held to the foundational truths of Scripture remained within the mainline denominations hoping to weed out modernism by strong writing and preaching. Unfortunately, although still in the majority, they failed to use the courts of the church to bring modernists to account, thus allowing unbelief within the church to continue its cancerous growth.

By 1930, the modernists were in control of church agencies such as colleges, seminaries, publishing, and mission boards. At this point the much heralded “love” liberals like to talk about mutated into a militant crusade against Bible believers. The Presbyterian Church held trials in an effort to bring “fundamentalist” pastors into conformity with denominational “modernism”. Failure to conform resulted in their being unfrocked. A few of those who were put on trial were J. Gresham Machen, J. Oliver Buswell and Carl McIntire.

At this point fundamentalists became separatist in nature. Conservatives within the church had practiced separation from worldliness, but now a new phase was setting in: those who loved Christ and His Word began to separate from churches that espoused anti-Christian beliefs. It became the view that if a church makes room for even one modernist, that church has denied its biblical foundation and is unworthy of the support of God’s people.

Fundamentalism is a standard, not a faction. It is a heritage passed on to future generations to carry on in the face of compromise and apostasy. The Bible Presbyterian Church came into being in the midst of the conflict in the mid 1930’s. Our stand was upon biblical, creedal fundamentals and with the fundamentalists.

Today, “fundamentalist” is a misunderstood word, but there is a good reason why we Bible Presbyterians claim it. We stand for the fundamentals of historic Christianity. Our Reformed heritage is vital to our existence.



Section 8: Six Principles of Church Government

A Biblical Defense of Presbyterianism

1. **Church officers were chosen by the people, the offices having their origin in the Lord Jesus Christ:** Apostles – Acts 1:23; Deacons – Acts 6:3; Elders – Acts 14:23
2. **The office of *bishop* and *elder* are the same office:** Acts 20:17-28, Titus 1:5-7 the titles are used interchangeably, and further are never found joined together as “a bishop and an elder,” as a designation of two people
3. **There was a plurality of elders in each church:** Acts 14:23; 20:17 – government was exercised in an associate capacity. See also Phil. 1:1 “...all the saints... with the bishops (plural) and deacons.”
4. **Ordination – the laying on of hands, was an action of the presbytery:** 1 Tim 4:14, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the *presbytery*.” Acts 6:6; 13:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:22.
5. **The privilege of appeal to a higher body** (an assembly of elders) and its right of government in corporate character: Acts 15, 16 – the Jerusalem council; a church member to the session, the church session to the presbytery, the presbytery to the general synod.
6. **The only head of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ.** There is no place for monarch or pope acting as ecclesiastical head. Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 1:18; 1 Peter 5:3-5

From *The Apostolic Church: Which Is It?* by Thomas Witherow, professor of church history, Londonderry, North Ireland, 1856, republished by the Free Presbyterian Church, 1983



Section 9: Notes on Acts 15, 16 – the Jerusalem Council

Ten Important Principles

Presbyterian church government is representative in the biblical sense, meaning it has its origin in the headship of Christ and is erected on the two-fold premises of, a) the priesthood of believers and, b) the accountability of every man directly to God.

1. False teaching became a threat to the Antioch church: 15:1,2,5,24
2. A local matter, but could become a danger to the whole church: 15:2,3
3. Brought before a church assembly of apostles and elders: 15:4
4. The apostles and elders met and worked together as equals: 15:2,6
5. The assembly met in public deliberation: 15:12
6. Assembly included inspiration and instruction: 15:4,12
7. Decision based upon the Word of God: 15:7-21
8. An assembly decision, not by a few insiders: 15:22,25,28
9. Churches yielded submission to the decision: 15:23-31
10. God blessed and gave the increase: 15:30,31; 16:4,5

Section 10: Understanding the Work of Church Planting³

The Spiritual Nature of Church Planting

The work of church planting is from first to last a spiritual undertaking. It is the implementation of all that the Bible teaches concerning the nature and purpose of the church. It is the application of the power and work of the Holy Spirit, who draws men to the Savior, unites them together in the church, and gifts and equips them for the work and witness of the body of Christ. And it is a frontal assault on the forces of Satan. Those who set their minds and hearts to establish a new church of the Lord Jesus Christ invite and must expect the opposition of the Evil One. But they also have the great privilege of being used as tools in God's hand as He gathers His people and builds a habitation for Himself among them. No methodology conceived by man adequately reflects the depth of the spiritual nature of church planting. Those who involve themselves in this work regularly stand in awe of the power of God and the truth expressed by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church."

The importance of a Biblical ecclesiology

It is vital for the church planter and those who work with him to have a well-thought-out concept of the nature and purpose of the church. The doctrine of the church must be a well-studied subject for those who have responsibility to steer and guide the development of a new church. The Reformed faith presents a deep and robust understanding of the nature, purpose, work, and structure of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. These biblical concepts impact every aspect of the work and ministry of church planting. So it is important from the beginning of the process to stress what the Bible teaches about the kind of local church Christ intends to build.

Some implications of a Scriptural theology of the church

It is not the intent of this manual to set forth even a summary of the Reformed doctrine of the church. But it is important that all who involve themselves in the work of starting a new church have a clear, working knowledge of the doctrine they are implementing. Here are some aspects of this doctrine which impact the work of establishing a new church so significantly that they illustrate the need for church planters, interim sessions, and presbytery home missions committees to keep it always fresh in their minds.

- Because *the church is the body of Christ* (1 Corinthians 12:12-31), those who are involved in starting a new one must be ready to embrace those whom God sends as needed and useful members. And they must be ready to demonstrate the love and concern of Christ to the community of which they are a part, even when they are small and weak.
- Because *the church is the bride of Christ* (Ephesians 5:22-33), those who are involved in starting a new one will face competing realities. On the one hand, they are working toward an ever-increasing measure of sanctification in their lives as members and in their corporate life as a faithful bride waiting patiently for the return of the bridegroom. On the other hand, God is adding to their number people from other theological traditions and those who are being saved. For these the need of basic instruction is great, and for some their level of maturity is small.

³ Chapter 1 of *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*

- Because *the church is the building of God* (1 Peter 2:4-10) which He is in the process of completing, those who are involved in starting a new one will face discouragement more than others as they observe the disarray of the "construction site" and as they experience long delays waiting for the arrival of more living stones.
- Because *the church is a foretaste of heaven* (Hebrews 12:18-24), those who are involved in starting a new one will constantly face heavenly scrutiny to see that they are carefully following the plan laid down in God's Word, so that the church's worship, preaching, fellowship, and ministry will welcome His people to heaven.
- Because *the church has a God-given order and government* (Ephesians 4:11-16), those who are involved in starting a new one must be careful to follow it rather than the structures and strategies developed by men. And they must be willing to see the "keys" of discipline used for the new church's blessing and benefit, even in its earliest months.
- Because *the church has a God-given mission* (Matthew 28:18-20), those who are involved in starting a new one do not have the luxury of waiting until they are larger, stronger, or better equipped before beginning their missionary work of evangelism and discipleship.

A spiritual assault on the gates of hell

But the work of church planting must also be seen from the enemy's perspective. Of all the projects undertaken by men, the one that Satan must surely fear and oppose the most is the involvement of believers with their Savior in the work of establishing a new church. Listen to Jesus' words in Matthew 16:18: "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." The church is attacking. Satan is defending. But the gates of Hades are not strong enough to withstand the onslaught. Satan and his forces are defeated by the Church of Christ. Therefore, those who are involved in the work of starting a new church should not be surprised when community opposition is fierce, when meeting locations are hard to find, or when financial instability threatens the future of the work. Satan and his forces will do all they can to prevent one more taste of Zion and one more safe haven for the saints of God from appearing on the scene. So a new mission work of the BPC should expect to face the fiery trials of opposition and difficulty as a part of the spiritual nature of the church planting process.

Understanding Church Growth

At the beginning of the discussion of the process of planting a Presbyterian and Reformed church, it is necessary to address the subject of church growth. To some, the term describes what happens naturally when God's people gather for witness and work (Acts 5:14; 6:7; 9:31). To others, it identifies a destructive emphasis on numbers and on methods of attracting people to church meetings. The modern Church Growth movement has certainly had an impact on churches and denominations around the world. So today, as we work with core groups and send out church planters to do the work of establishing new Presbyterian and Reformed congregations in North America, we are aware that what they think about church growth is an important aspect of how our new congregations develop. What follows here is an analysis of church growth from a Reformed perspective. [...]

When PMU talks about the importance of the growth of our mission works in size and maturity, it is not thinking about the employment of sociologically derived methodologies to gather people, but about the appropriate, biblical functioning of the church. And when we discuss methods of planting new churches, we are not thinking about organizational science, but about the practical outworking of a biblical ecclesiology. Consider the biblical issues of church growth and church planting:

This is the age of the harvest

Jesus said, "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35). "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field" (Matthew 9:37-38). He was signaling the dawn of a new age in redemptive history, the age of the harvest. As the book of Acts records this harvest growth, it always reminds us that God is in charge of it. "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). "And all who were appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). We can therefore be optimistic as we plant new churches. We are the harvesters, and this is the age of the harvest. [It is not up to us to decide that any] rebellious, sin-hardened individual is beyond hope, because the Sovereign Lord can, and often does, soften the hardest of hearts.

God uses our efforts

"Preach the Word," Paul said to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:2). "Be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction." He went on to tell Timothy, "Keep your head in all situations, endure hardships, do the work of an evangelist, discharge the duties of your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5). The importance of the Word of God in the work of evangelism and biblical church growth cannot be overemphasized. "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). The salvation harvest occurs only as people are confronted with the lordship and saving work of Jesus Christ. But that requires hard work on the part of God's people. God uses our diligent efforts to bring in the harvest.

God causes the growth

"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6). Paul concluded, "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (verse 7). God from all eternity has purposed to save a multitude of people through the sacrifice of His Son and to assemble them into local expressions of His body called the church. The importance of the divine initiative in biblical church growth was confirmed when Jesus said to the confessing Peter, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). He did not say, "Men shall build my church," nor to Peter, "You shall build my church." What He did tell us is that the church is supernaturally generated by the triune God. Biblical church growth is from beginning to end the work of God as He brings in the harvest.

The Distinguishing Characteristics of an Organized Congregation

In a chapter that presents an introductory overview of the work of church planting, it is appropriate to lay out the hoped-for end result of the process. What will a biblically founded and ordered Presbyterian and Reformed mission work look like when it is ready to be organized as a new and separate congregation of the Bible Presbyterian Church? It is assumed that the Protestant "marks" of a true church, as delineated by Calvin and other Reformers, are already present, namely, the true proclamation of the Word of God, the right administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of church discipline. What follows are some of the time-honored characteristics which collectively describe the nature of a mature church of the Lord Jesus Christ, toward which all church planting efforts are pointing.

Self-sustaining

A mature church of the Lord Jesus Christ is one which is able to sustain its ministry with sufficient people and finances without assistance from outside sources. Its members are committed to biblical giving

patterns, and it has enough of them to meet its financial obligations, to pay its pastor, to sustain its discipling and outreach ministries as a congregation, and to provide care for the poor and needy.

Self-governing

A mature church of the Lord Jesus Christ is one that has found and chosen from within its number a group of qualified, God-appointed elders. The congregation has come together around the leadership of a session and a pastor whom they respect and to whom they willingly submit. Their leaders, also possibly including some deacons, are men who have shown themselves to be godly examples to the congregation and to be committed in belief and practice to the doctrinal standards of the Bible Presbyterian Church.

Self-propagating

A mature church of the Lord Jesus Christ is one that is shouldering its responsibilities both in the area of covenant faithfulness and in the area of Great Commission implementation. On the one hand, the congregation is seeing its own covenant children professing faith in Christ and taking up their responsibilities as communicant members. On the other hand, the congregation is consistently reaching into its community with gospel witness and is seeing previously unconverted men, women, and children professing faith in Christ and becoming responsible members of the church. In addition, the congregation is also taking up its responsibilities to go beyond the borders of its own community with a worldwide outreach, and is both assisting financially and seeing some of its members physically going into the world harvest field.

Self-consciously a church

A mature church of the Lord Jesus Christ is one that understands its ecclesiastical role and has defined its ecclesiastical commitments. It understands itself to be a church and not a collection of individuals and the causes they embrace. It is informed about the multitude of theological opinions within the Reformed system of doctrine and has consciously chosen to be confessional without adopting a set of its own special emphases. It has learned as a congregation how to defer to one another in love in its decisions and in its conduct. And it has freely and happily chosen to be part of the Bible Presbyterian Church and to own and embrace her heritage and values.

Establishing the Right Precedents

It is said that when George Washington became the first president of the United States, he went out of his way to ensure that every act of his public office was carefully considered beforehand, since he realized that everything he did was establishing a precedent. Those involved in planting a new church should be aware that the way things are done and said in the earliest days of the church planting process often become the expectations and the stated norms for years to come. Careful thought about establishing the right precedents in the following categories could make a significant difference in the progress of the development of a new mission work:

In theology

There is nothing more practical in the life of a new church than sound theology. A young congregation's theological undergirding in its earliest days protects it from error and keeps it on a steady course. But because the Reformed faith is so all-encompassing in its scope, specific aspects of it can be overemphasized, and certain extrapolations of its teaching can inadvertently become normative practices.

Care must be taken early on that the full-orbed system of doctrine of the Bible Presbyterian Church, and not side implications of it, becomes the theological foundation of the new church.

In polity

If the new church is to be Presbyterian in its government, then it ought to function that way from the beginning. For instance, it is unwise to create a steering committee at the inception of a work for the purpose of "involving people" and "encouraging men to lead," and, soon after, for the presbytery to appoint a group of borrowed elders as an interim session to provide shepherding for the people and oversight and direction for the work. That is a formula for conflict. With careful instruction, submission to a borrowed session can be instilled from the beginning of the work, and it can progress from the start as a Presbyterian church. This is not to say that a steering committee cannot be erected in situations where great distances are involved that make it difficult or impossible for an interim session to regularly meet or deal with daily mundane matters. It does mean that the interim session be established by the presbytery first. The steering committee's duties must be clearly delineated, must not involve spiritual oversight, and must understand from its inception that its duties are limited and its nature temporary. All steering committee decisions are subject to review and approval by the interim session. Furthermore, is it not wise at the beginning of a mission work to make decisions by congregational majority and later to make the shift to sessional decision making.

In administration

At the beginning of a new mission work, familiarity and friendly informality are often the rule. Communicating information, counting and depositing tithes and offerings, arrangements and decorum in the room where worship is conducted, and a host of other matters are cared for in an informal manner without much thought to precedent. But it will not take long for offense to arise over such matters as the inappropriate counting and handling of money, or apparent disrespect in the preparation or disposal of communion elements. And it is important that the members of the mission work volunteer to help and are actively involved in the multitude of tasks that need to be accomplished for the effective operation of the church's ministry. Matters of propriety, decorum, and administration are discussed elsewhere in this manual.

In tradition

Precedent and tradition often go hand in hand. In the work of establishing a new church, so much of what is done is new to those involved that a sense of the lack of permanence becomes apparent. It is sometimes helpful to utilize the regular practice of carefully thought-out activities or procedures as a way of engendering a sense of permanence in the new work. Holding a monthly fellowship meal, presenting a Scripture challenge to each new member at his reception into the congregation, participating in an annual presbytery-sponsored family camp, and holding an annual church banquet to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the church are examples of the positive establishment of traditions to encourage a sense of permanence in the mission work.

Section 11: Beginning a Mission Work⁴

Sound Reasons for Beginning a Mission Work

One of the most basic questions asked of anyone who is involved in church planting is, "Why are you starting a new church?" Implied is the question: "Aren't there already enough churches here?" It is neither biblically correct nor wise to answer, "Because these folks can't get along with others in their present congregation," or, "Because they just don't like the other churches in town." It is even hard to find biblical justification for saying, "Since there is no Bible Presbyterian church here, we should start one." There are, however, at least three examples of biblical justification for starting new churches which can help to clarify and direct our church planting efforts.

There is a special opportunity to plant this church in this place at this time

The founding of the church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-26) is an example of this reasoning. The rapid influx of a large number of believers into that city and their effective Gentile-reaching ministry made it obvious that the planting of a new church should be the result. In Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10), on Paul's second missionary journey, the circumstances were very different, but the reasoning was the same. The response to the gospel led to the planting of a new church of which Paul could later say, "And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.... Your faith in God became known everywhere" (1 Thessalonians 1:7-8).

So when a large number of believers move into a distant community or when conversions begin to be the result of a Bible study sponsored by a local church in another town, there is biblical reason for concluding that there might be a special need for this church in this place at this time.

This center of population and influence needs the ministry of the new church we will plant

Philippi was identified in the Scriptures as "a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia" (Acts 16:12). For some reason, the Holy Spirit made a specific point of commenting on the stature of a city in which the planting of a new church was about to take place. It is appropriate to conclude (1) that leading population centers are important places at which we should look as we lay plans to plant new churches, and (2) that the design of this kind of church planting is to bring the influence of the gospel to bear on the whole cultural framework of the area. The church in Philippi served as an important source of support for Paul's church planting ministry (Philippians 4:15-16), and it was to that church that Paul could write from another leading city to tell them that he was chained as a prisoner for Christ and that the palace guard and everyone else in Rome knew of it.

It should be pointed out, however, that not every population center is automatically a church planting target. Paul preached a powerful message in Athens, but the Scriptures record no beginning of a church in that city through his ministry. Thus, we may deduce that there is nothing that makes the planting of a church in a center of population inherently advantageous, nor is the opportunity for growth or greater effectiveness of ministry enhanced by the size of the population of the community in which it is

⁴ Chapter 2 of *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*

established. But where centers of population and influence exist throughout the United States and Canada, there is reason to conclude that such places might be where we should focus our church planting efforts.

These fellow believers need our help to carry on what Christ has begun among them

The churches in Corinth (Acts 18:2) and Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7) both had small groups of believers in place before Paul came to town. A single family (Aquila and Priscilla) became the nucleus for the founding of the church at Corinth. Twelve men (and presumably their families) who knew and followed only the teachings of John the Baptist formed the core group of what eventually became the strong and vital church at Ephesus, which would later be pastored by Timothy. Both of these churches seem to have been planted because wise elders recognized a compelling obligation to help fellow believers carry on what Christ had begun among them. Similar circumstances have presented themselves to us over the years, and a number of churches in the BPC today were planted when pastors and presbyteries came to the aid of fellow believers in distant communities where Christ was obviously building His church.

Gathering a Core Group

The idea of using core groups as a method of starting new churches has fallen on hard times. It is argued that these groups have their own "agendas" and preferences, that they are made up of people who are out of sync with the unchurched around them, and that they slow the process of the development of the church. But Paul gathered such groups wherever he went, and by so doing he seems to be showing us a biblical church planting methodology.

"As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue and reasoned with them from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2). The Apostle Paul made it a standard practice to start his ministry in a new place with a visit to the local Jewish synagogue, where God was worshiped and His Word was honored. Follow him through his first three missionary journeys (Acts 13-20) from Cyprus all the way around to Ephesus, and this standard method of operation may be observed in all of his church planting efforts.

But Paul was appointed to bring the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Galatians 2:9). Why would the Holy Spirit make a special point of telling us that Paul's methodology was to start by bringing his message to the Jews? It appears that the practice had to do with the Apostle's understanding of the nature of the Church—that it is the covenant people of God gathered for worship, instruction, and fellowship.

So according to Paul's custom he went first to those who would know of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He went to those who honored God's Word, knew the character and joy of worship, and looked for the coming of the Christ. He proclaimed Jesus as Messiah and invited them to study the Scriptures with him. In the process, Paul showed us a time-honored church planting methodology: he formed core groups of believers who knew God and His Word in every town he visited. These core groups formed the worshiping and discipling nuclei for reaching the lost.

It is difficult to know the exact equivalent of "going first to the synagogue" as new churches are planted today. But it appears likely that it has to do with beginning them with groups of people who are grounded in God's Word and who are ready to form new worshiping covenant communities.

Methods for gathering core groups

Forming a core group as a method of starting a new church is not the only way the task can be accomplished. But the presence of a group of believers who want to see a new church established and who are committed to helping with the process is compelling evidence of God's presence. If recent experience in the Bible Presbyterian Church continues, our presbyteries and our regional home missionaries will not be involved as much with gathering core groups as they will be with discovering them. What follows are some practical considerations for finding and gathering interested families and individuals into an informal collection of believers who are exploring the possibility that God may be calling them together to plant an Bible Presbyterian church.

Follow up contacts—The phone and e-mail at the PMU offices bring news almost daily of another family interested in seeing an Bible Presbyterian church established in their community. These contacts are promptly passed along to regional home missionaries and home missions committee chairmen around the country. Contacts also come to presbytery clerks and to local BP pastors. By whichever means they come, these "Macedonian calls" have been a humbling experience for us as we watch God choose the places and gather His people.

Conduct an information meeting—It has also been our experience to watch God supply contacts in a specific area who had not previously known each other. Additionally, groups of believers will make contact with us about the possibility of starting a new Bible Presbyterian church in their area. By whatever means the group of contacts is identified, it is important that they be given complete information about the BPC, usually by holding an informational meeting led by a representative of the presbytery in whose bounds the potential new church would be located. At such a meeting, the history and doctrinal distinctives of the Church are usually discussed in detail, along with a review of the procedures that are normally followed to establish a new mission work. Presbyterian Missionary Union keeps on hand a ready supply of materials about the ministry and history of the Bible Presbyterian Church and about procedures for receiving and developing mission works for distribution without cost at such meetings.

Lead a Bible study—Usually the next step in solidifying a number of contacts from the same area into a core group is to conduct a home Bible study. Led by a representative of the presbytery in whose bounds the potential new church would be located, the study allows the group of believers to become familiar with each other and to learn together about the BPC and its approach to ministry. The study is usually held on a weeknight and runs for a duration of between four weeks and three months. It generally encompasses examples of the exegetical and theological approaches of the BPC and significant issues facing the Church, often focusing on Paul's letter to the Ephesians or Peter's first general epistle.

Hold a seminar—The presbytery's sponsorship of one or more seminars to introduce the group to a subject of Reformed doctrine (such as the covenant or the authority of the Bible) or an aspect of the work of the church (such as catechetical instruction or biblical worship) is also becoming more frequently employed in the work of solidifying the commitment of a core group. Such seminars have the advantages of being in-depth treatments of a specific subject and of providing a public venue which may be advertised and to which visitors may be invited.

Conduct evening worship services—These services are usually sponsored and conducted by the presbytery in whose bounds the potential new church would be located after a clear indication is received that the group is unifying around the purpose of becoming an BP mission work. They give core group members the opportunity to sample the kind of preaching and worship they would experience as part of the BPC, and

they also allow family members and friends to be invited to hear the preaching of God's Word and to sing His praises on the Lord's Day.

Procedures when working with core groups

A core group, which is an informal collection of believers exploring the possibility that God may be calling them together to plant an Bible Presbyterian church, has no membership, and usually few or none are members of the BPC [unless the group has come en masse from a local BP congregation for the purpose of starting a new church]. And some who are part of it, though knowledgeable about the Bible and the Reformed faith, may not even be members of an organized church of the Lord Jesus Christ. So care must be taken by presbytery representatives who work with such groups. They must neither expect nor promise too much. But they must also be aware that God may be very much at work in the lives of this group that He has brought together. So they must serve as wise and gentle shepherds. Here are some procedures to follow when working with core groups:

- *Present the whole church to them*—At some point in their information gathering, the group will need to know more than just the basics of the history and testimony of the BPC. In order to make an intelligent decision about whether they want to petition their local presbytery to receive them as a mission work, they should be provided with a full picture of their potential church family. On the one hand, they will need to know about how the church functions. Telling them about our foreign missions structure and the expectation of their participation in it will be important. Describing how a session, a presbytery, and the General Synod function in the BPC will also be important. On the other hand, they will need to know about the diversity of views and opinions in the BPC. They will need a review of the controversies of the past few decades. And they will need a personal explanation of how unity within the BPC continues to thrive in the midst of this diversity.
- *Arrange for them to meet with others*—It will also be important to expose them to more than just one or two ministers and elders from the BPC before they make their decision to seek affiliation. If possible, encourage them to visit other BP churches, and bring in a diversity of Bible Presbyterian pastors and elders to minister to them. It may even be appropriate to put them in contact with other Reformed churches, so that their choice will be informed and satisfying.
- *Propose an oversight structure for them*—It is assumed that an explanation has been given to them about the fact that an BP presbytery routinely assigns an oversight structure for each of its mission works. But before they become a mission work, they should be given a clear picture of who those elders will be, what care and oversight those elders will provide, and what will be expected of them as a mission work.
- *Set the "agenda" for them*—Many core groups approach the BPC with a preconceived notion of what she is and how she works, learned mostly from reading historical accounts and listening to selected personal experiences. Some groups found each other by first working together on the promotion of such causes as a home schooling network or the opposition to abortion. It is important for representatives of the presbytery in whose bounds the potential new church would be located to state clearly that the BPC is a church and not a cause, and, among other things, that ministries of outreach and evangelism are assumed and expected, and that acceptance into the group must be based on one's credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and not on his political party affiliation or his views concerning the education of his children.
- *Let them decide*—From the earliest days of a presbytery's work with them, the group must know that there will be no coercion to join the Bible Presbyterian Church. The work of church planting is a spiritual undertaking, and the presbyteries of the BPC believe that God determines those with whom they work. As servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, representatives of the presbytery in whose

bounds the potential new church would be located can freely and in good conscience give themselves to assist an emerging group, even if that group later chooses not to become part of the BPC.

Forming a Group into a Mission Work

Elsewhere in this manual you will find the governmental process by which the Bible Presbyterian Church takes an unorganized group of believers, organizes them at their request into a mission work, provides them with the oversight and supervision of borrowed elders and the temporary services of an evangelist to serve as their organizing pastor, makes it possible for them to develop and mature as a church, and finally organizes them into a particular congregation.

Assessing the group

Thus far in this chapter, the process of finding, forming, and working with an unorganized core group of believers has been detailed. But in order to actually begin the work of establishing a new Bible Presbyterian church, the group must willingly commit itself to the process of being formed into a mission work. By BP definition, a mission work is a group of believers meeting regularly for worship on the Lord's Day under the jurisdiction of a session or presbytery and not yet organized as a particular congregation of the Bible Presbyterian Church. But how does a presbytery decide whether a group is ready to become a mission work? Here are some diagnostic questions to consider:

- *Is the group ready to work together?* Every group of believers has members with strong opinions. Some want to replicate a previous church ministry from which they have benefited. Others are more concerned to avoid abuses which they have observed in past church experiences. Still others have been shut out of leadership roles in their previous church. These and other circumstances make it difficult for some groups to make mutual decisions and to defer to one another. But other groups quickly find joy in working together and form strong bonds of fellowship.
- *Is the group willing to follow elders?* At its beginning, a mission work must be what it will become. If it is to become an Bible Presbyterian church, the core group cannot have a problem submitting to elders with whom it does not agree on every aspect of theology and practice. It is important that this attitude be observed in practice among the members of the group.
- *Is the group sacrificially working to establish a new church?* Starting a mission work requires much energy and sacrificial labor. It is the people of the core group who must roll up their sleeves and do the work if the new church is to be established. And it must be undertaken by a group of people who are sufficiently gifted by the Holy Spirit to be capable of doing the work that is required.
- *Does the group want to be an Bible Presbyterian church?* The group should have enough information to make a decision about its potential new church affiliation if the suggestions above about providing clear and complete information have been followed. But desire is also an important factor. Some groups are less interested in being part of the BPC than in separating from some other organization. Others are willing to tolerate affiliation, but do not desire it.

Assisting the group

Determining whether a group of believers should petition the presbytery to be received as a mission work is a decision which should be reached mutually by the members of the core group and the representatives of the presbytery in whose bounds the potential new church would be located. But once that decision is made and the group is received as a mission work, its presbytery takes on the important role of assisting it through all the steps necessary to receive members and form a congregation, train church officers, prepare

the necessary documents which relate the mission work to the BPC, and satisfy the presbytery that it has reached the ecclesiastical maturity necessary to conduct its own ministry, choose its own church officers, call its own pastor, and affiliate with the Bible Presbyterian Church.

In its role of assisting the new mission work, the presbytery helps the emerging church to develop into a mature congregation which can stand on its own and be able to take its place and shoulder its load in the ministry of the regional presbytery. There are four kinds of temporary assistance provided to a mission work to help it develop and mature:

- *Borrowed elders*—Since the young church is just developing and not enough time has elapsed to identify, choose, and train godly men as elders, the presbytery provides some of its own ruling elders and ministers to serve on a temporary basis as an interim session. In that way, the emerging congregation can function as a Presbyterian church right from the start, and that temporary session can protect and guide them until they are able to choose their own elders from within their own membership.
- *An organizing pastor*—Churches have pastors who preach and teach the Word to them and who visit, counsel, comfort, guide, organize, and lead their congregations as their special calling from God. But a new, developing church has not had the time, nor does it usually have the resources, to call its own pastor. So in order to provide the skills and services of a pastor right away, the presbytery provides its mission works with temporary organizing pastors until the emerging congregation is ready to choose its own elders and call its own pastor.
- *Financial and prayer support*—A new mission work is usually small in size and limited in resources. But in biblical fashion, congregations of God's people can pool and share their financial resources to send the help where it is needed for the support of a new mission work (Philippians 4:15-16). And in a similar way, a broad base of prayer support can be mustered for a newly planted church (Acts 14:27). This kind of outside support can last only for a time, but while it does, the new, young church is able to function as if it had many more families than it actually has, in order to be able to pay its organizing pastor and allow its ministries of discipleship and evangelism to develop and mature.
- *Advice and evaluation*—The Apostle Paul provided special supervision and support systems for the young churches he helped to start. They enjoyed the advice, visits, and financial assistance of believers in other parts of the world. And, as Paul's letters to the Corinthians and the Galatians indicate, he spoke the truth in love to them. In a similar way, our new mission works receive visits from wise and experienced ministers and elders from their presbytery and from the staff of Presbyterian Missionary Union, who are able to bring godly wisdom into difficult and rapidly changing circumstances. In addition, by participating in PMU's monthly reporting system, our mission works are provided with the accountability of knowing that someone is caring and watching.

Finding an Organizing Pastor

Providing a new mission work with the services of a competent organizing pastor (or, "church planter") is one of the most important things a presbytery does to assist with its development as an emerging church. An entire section of this manual (Section 13) will be devoted to the unique work of this specially called man of God, who is gripped so intensely with the significance of the doctrine of the church that, at the bidding of his presbytery, he is willing to move to a place where he is needed and to love and serve a group of people temporarily as God builds them into a mature body of Christ, and who is then able to consider his

work completed if they determine to call another man to be their pastor. But to find such a man requires much prayer and a reliance on the hand of God working through the efforts of His people.

What makes a good church planter?

Presbyterian Missionary Union believes that a good church planter need not specialize in that work, nor must he have extensive special training to serve as an organizing pastor. However, a combination of the following five ministry strengths seems to be present in the men who most effectively serve as church planters in the Bible Presbyterian Church:

- *He is a caring pastor.* He is a mature man of God who loves his people. He spends time with them. He encourages and instructs them from house to house. But his love for them is not sentimental; it is based on the deeper love of the Good Shepherd. So he is also willing to confront them and to spur them on to a renewed obedience to God.
- *He is committed to biblical preaching.* He believes it is the primary way in which Christ builds His church. Regardless of which Reformed homiletical method he employs, it is always Christ who is preeminent in his preaching. Because he is convinced that God speaks to His people and builds His church primarily through the preaching of the Word, he works hard to make his sermons both clear and meaty. And he is a good preacher. However, his reliance on the efficacy of preaching does not have to do with his skills of preparation and delivery, but with the Holy Spirit who speaks the Word through him.
- *He has a mature grasp of doctrine.* He recognizes that neither he nor his people can approach the Bible without it. He carries the system of doctrine with him in his mind and is deeply committed to, and appreciative of, the Westminster Confession of Faith and its Catechisms. His mind is not quickly captured by new theological or methodological proposals. He genuinely believes that nothing is more practical than sound theology. And his grasp of doctrine permeates his preaching and his pastoral leadership.
- *He is a man of faith.* He is able to see the Church in the small core group of people who have helped to begin its ministry. He finds it easy to trust God for his and the congregation's needs. The depth of his commitment to Christ is evident in every aspect of his ministry. And he has an unshakable and contagious confidence that Christ is building His church among the people he is serving.
- *He is a leader of people.* He understands the tasks of the ministry of a church planter and the needs of people to whom he ministers and is able to enlist and delegate with confidence and tenderness. People are drawn to his leadership and follow him because of his godly character and loving heart. He is a self-starter who initiates proposals and accepts responsibility. But his leadership is always characterized by a servant's heart, and he takes the lead to shepherd, guide, and protect without lording it over those who have been entrusted to his care.

Considerations when searching for a church planter

Finding a skilled and competent church planter is not easy, and the task is complicated by the number of people who are involved in the selection process. Because only organized congregations of the BPC may call their own pastors, the mission work must rely on its presbytery to find and call a qualified and gifted minister to be an evangelist, laboring with the mission work as its organizing pastor. When additional funding is needed from outside the mission work, PMU stands ready to serve in that capacity if at all possible. In this regard, it is best to keep in mind that PMU has a policy that it will not support a man who is not in turn supported and credentialed by a BP presbytery. PMU, as an independent agency, does not involve itself in the selection process. Once a man is selected, and additional funding is deemed necessary, the presbytery and/or the organizing pastor may request such funding from PMU, which will duly consider

such requests and act as it deems best as a good steward of the resources God has provided. And because every mission work has its own unique character and interests, it is vital that the people of the developing new church have a say in who is called to be their initial shepherd and leader. So this special calling process must be balanced by two governing commitments which can appear to be in conflict with each other:

The presbytery will not call an organizing pastor without the concurrence of the mission work. It is vital that the people of the mission work not merely acquiesce in, but enthusiastically endorse, their presbytery's call of the man who will be their organizing pastor. They must have confidence in him. They must be able to receive the Word of truth from his mouth, they must have confidence in his leadership and his abilities, and they must be able to enthusiastically introduce him to their neighbors and family members. If the members of the mission work cannot conscientiously do these things, then the presbytery will continue its search until it finds a suitable man in whom the group has confidence.

The mission work will recognize its limitations and will trust the presbytery to recommend for call as its organizing pastor only men it believes will serve them well. The nature of a mission work is that its people are new to each other and to the work of church planting. Many are new to the BPC and some are even new to the Reformed faith. They must acknowledge to each other that they may not always make good decisions about the development of their work or the choice of their organizing pastor. They must admit to each other that it will be easy for them to find weaknesses in the men the presbytery recommends. And they must acknowledge that the presbytery and others who are assisting with the suggestion of a carefully selected list of men to be their potential organizing pastor are in a better position than they to know what they need.

Procedures for calling and employing a church planter

In the process of calling and employing a church planter, the presbytery, working through its various committees (i.e. Candidates and Credentials or Home Missions), will supervise the development of the mission work and the call and employment of a church planter. This can be done through a local church Session as a mother church, but should still be in close cooperation with the Presbytery. First, the presbytery committee identifies a candidate which it believes is qualified to serve as an evangelist of the presbytery to labor in the mission work until it is organized and is able to call its own pastor. Then, after seeking the concurrence of the members of the mission work, the committee determines whether or not to draw up a call to the candidate. Finally, if it decides to call him and the candidate indicates his willingness to accept, the committee draws up a formal call to the man in accordance with the Form of Government, which is then presented to the presbytery for its action, along with supporting budget recommendations to cover the cost of his salary and benefits.

Section 12: Overseeing a Mission Work⁵

The Nature of a Mission Work

Young churches are different from mature ones, just as young children are different from adults. The Apostle Paul recognized that. To the young Galatian churches he addressed a simple and chiding message about the sufficiency of God's grace in salvation. To the mature church at Rome he spoke of "the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God."

Paul also had special ways of caring for young churches that he helped to start. He loved to visit them (Acts 15:36; 18:23). When he could not go himself, he sent trusted men to do the work of encouraging and directing (Acts 19:22; Titus 1:5). He would routinely receive reports about people and circumstances within those churches (1 Corinthians 1:11; Colossians 1:7). And his correspondence to seven different churches indicates that he was active in coaching and encouraging them in their work and development.

Consider these unique characteristics that set mission works apart from mature congregations:

The body is still maturing

There is a time in the life of a new church which corresponds to infancy. Paul spoke lovingly but chidingly to the people of the first churches he helped to plant in the Galatian region: "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you ..." (Galatians 4:19). Before Christ has been fully formed in them, in the early days of a new church, the people of a mission work often make poor decisions and lack wisdom and unity. They are more given to factionalism and open to doctrinal error. This is not necessarily to their shame. It may simply describe a maturing process within a newly formed church. But it helps to explain why the BPC Form of Government goes to great lengths to protect their rights as members of the church, but does not recognize the new mission work as a functioning body and does not make provision for them to choose their own officers or to make other kinds of corporate decisions. That must wait until they are organized as a particular church.

Leaders are still being identified

Paul warned Timothy that an overseer should not be a novice, lest, being puffed up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil (1 Timothy 3:6-7), and not to lay hands hastily on a man, presumably in an act of ordination as an elder (1 Timothy 5:22). A new mission work is a place of great need, which often has a vacuum of leadership. Those who help to start them are often unqualified or not yet ready to assume leadership in them. Additionally, those who want to lord it over others often gravitate to newly established churches. And even when mature, qualified men are part of the group, it takes time for the church to recognize them as such.

Resources are still being developed

The small size of the group and the fact that many have not yet been challenged with the blessing and importance of tithing often mean that finances are not sufficient to maintain the entire ministry of the

⁵ Chapter 3 of *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*

church. In addition, many core group members have not been trained to teach or serve in even the most basic ministries of the church.

The Interim Session of a Mission Work

Moses instituted a formal structure of elder rule among the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 1:9-15). Elder rule was formalized in the Jewish synagogue system of the Old Testament, in which there was always a group or plurality of elders in charge. During the time of our Lord's earthly ministry, it was the chief priests and these "elders of the people" who opposed Him (Matthew 21:23; 26:3). But when it came time to structure the New Testament churches which had been planted in Asia Minor, the apostles understood that God had already given them direction about caring for the spiritual needs of His people. They appointed "elders" (Greek, *presbyteroi*) for them in each church (Acts 14:23). The work of these elders was further clarified when they were referred to as "overseers" (Greek, *episkopoi*) (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7), whose duty it was to "take care of the church of God" (1 Timothy 3:5). It is this concept of elder rule that forms the basis of Presbyterian church government.

Beginning a mission work with the right structure is very important. Young churches routinely face two difficulties that the right structure can help to overcome. First, because they are new to each other and usually small in number, the people who help to form new churches often lack godly and mature leaders to help them solve problems and to provide wise counsel. Second, because they are in new neighborhoods or communities where the other churches are not of their "kind," new congregations often feel isolated and face serious trouble when internal strife arises.

Paul took many traveling companions with him on his missionary journeys (Acts 18:1-5). It may be that they provided the initial elder structure while new churches were being formed. The Bible Presbyterian Church does the same thing. When a new mission work is established, the plans for the work always include how God's newly gathered people will be cared for by an interim session. One individual pastor alone providing all the care, wisdom, and oversight is not God's design for His church. Experienced elders or even whole sessions from other congregations are "loaned" to new churches to provide the wise counsel and oversight as God's care structure.

Selecting interim session members

Sometimes the entire session of a local church in another community is appointed by the presbytery to be the interim session of a mission work. Sometimes several members from the same session, together with their pastor, are appointed for that purpose. But more frequently individual elders and ministers from various congregations are appointed as a committee of the presbytery to serve as the interim session. In recommending to the presbytery ruling elders and ministers for appointment as borrowed elders for a mission work, there are four criteria that the home missions committee can apply to each of those whose names may be suggested:

He has a heart for the extension of the church. He shows interest in the church planting efforts of the presbytery. He is involved in outreach and evangelism in his own congregation.

He has usually served as an elder in more than one congregation. He has had the experience of working with several pastors and sessions and has learned that there is more than one way to do something in the BPC.

He is able to think conceptually about the church. He has demonstrated within his session and presbytery that he is able to understand a situation or solve a problem within the church, even though he has not faced it in his own experience.

He has a servant's heart. Much time and energy will be required for this work. He will usually maintain oversight responsibilities in his own congregation and will take on even greater ones with the new mission work. Unless he has demonstrated a sacrificial servant attitude in his present oversight responsibilities, his service as a borrowed elder will usually not be effective.

Structuring an interim session

A new mission work, even with all the things it lacks, is an emerging church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its members are members of the Bible Presbyterian Church. Its needs are those of any body of Christ, however youthful or immature. So the elders who have been assigned to provide oversight have a twofold responsibility. First, they are to care for all the members and their families individually. Second, they are to care for the emerging body as a new corporate organism. The new group's small size and lack of organization do not make it any less a church, nor should the care provided by the interim session be any less formal or intensive. In fact, because the new church needs much help to develop the right patterns and practices, it usually takes more time and energy to provide care for a mission work than it does for an organized congregation. Here are three guidelines to keep in mind when organizing the work of the interim session of a new mission work:

It should meet regularly and separately. A theme of this manual is that good patterns should be set for the new church from its earliest days. But one of the tendencies of those who have been assigned the spiritual oversight of a new mission work is to approach that responsibility informally, making occasional visits to the work and holding occasional meetings when something needs to be decided. Members of a mission work are justified when they ask their borrowed elders, "Is that how your session works?" The session of a mission work should organize itself into a formal structure, with a moderator and a clerk; and it should hold regular, stated, announced meetings on the site of the new church. There is much work to do, which will be discussed below, and biblical patterns of review and control must be established and a good system of record keeping must be set in place.

It should know the flock. One of the main difficulties faced by the borrowed elders in the early days of their care for a mission work is that they do not know the people well. It is vital that a system be established early on of regular, intentional visits by the members of the interim session. Some of these can be on the Lord's Day, but it is also important for them to be with the individual members of the mission work at times other than the occasion of the stated services of the church. The plan should include how individual elders can be in the homes of the member families of the mission work to become acquainted with them, to learn of their abilities and their needs, and to encourage them.

It should constantly remember its unique, temporary task. The interim session of a mission work has a delicate task. It is working itself out of a job even as the need of the mission work for wise oversight increases. The elders are keenly aware that they are providing spiritual guidance and direction to believers who have not chosen them or called them to that task. The work of this session is different. It involves setting patterns, developing maturity, and identifying leaders. And it is temporary, lasting only until the new body of Christ reaches sufficient maturity to be able to choose its own officers wisely and biblically.

The Work of an Interim Session

The borrowed elders who have responsibility for the spiritual oversight of the members of a mission work must recognize that the mission work is a church itself. It is developing a separate identity as a body of Christ. They must also be aware that their work may or may not involve the responsibility for supervising the development of the mission work into an organized congregation. That job is sometimes retained by the home missions committee of the presbytery. So the remainder of this chapter will deal with the specific shepherding responsibilities of an interim session in regard to the spiritual care of the members of a mission work and the care and encouragement it provides to the organizing pastor. Along the way, it will be noted how these responsibilities differ slightly from those of the session of an organized congregation.

Receiving members

The interim session prepares prospective new members, examines their credible professions of faith, and receives them into membership in the same way it does in an organized congregation, only with the specific purpose of establishing the charter role. Some core group members will naturally retain their membership in an established BP church in the presbytery until such time as the charter role is established, when the responsibility for their oversight shifts solely to the interim session and away from their home church. The interim session must keep accurate records of those who are members of the mission work for the purposes of spiritual nurture, congregational decision making, presbytery record keeping, and the eventual organization of the mission work as a particular congregation.

Providing spiritual care and nurture

Designated members of the interim session should attend the meetings of the mission work often enough to know the members and be accepted as elders by them. Those elders should also visit in the homes of the members and friends of the mission work along with the organizing pastor and should seek to build a good working relationship of mutual respect and appreciation between the mission work and the presbytery or between the mother and daughter congregations (depending on the oversight arrangements).

Filling the pulpit

The interim session must exercise care in providing sound pulpit supply, both before the call of an organizing pastor and in his absence. Just as in an organized congregation, it is the session which gives or denies permission to preach in the pulpit, and that responsibility should not be delegated for the sake of convenience to those in the mission work.

Developing sound and acceptable worship

At the outset of its ministry with the mission work, the interim session must develop sound, biblical, and acceptable guidelines for worship, and regularly review and refine them with the people. Matters such as the type of music, the order of service, decorum, special music, the Scripture version, the observance of special days and seasons, the kinds of communion elements to be used, and the length and time of services should be dealt with early in the church's life, while still giving the organizing pastor as much latitude in these matters as possible after his arrival.

Administering the sacraments

The interim session determines the frequency of observing the Lord's Supper, the proper fencing of the Table, and the kinds of elements to be used. It should also provide one of its members to serve along with an officiating minister for the proper administration of the Supper. The interim session determines the occasion of baptisms of covenant children and professing adult believers not yet baptized and should provide one of its members at the time of baptism as a proper witness and testimony to the session. It

should be noted that the sacraments are especially valuable as instruction to the members of the mission work and should be offered regularly at the location of the mission work.

Exercising church discipline

The interim session should anticipate that problems of a disciplinary nature will arise as the mission work develops and matures, and should be prepared to take the time required to instruct and correct effectively. It must make clear to people upon their reception as members that it, as the session which guarantees the full rights of members of the Bible Presbyterian Church, also has full responsibility and authority to exercise discipline and correction. In cases where an adherent in the mission work is still a member in good standing in another BP church in the presbytery, disciplinary cases should be referred to that member's court of original jurisdiction – his home church.

Making congregational decisions

The interim session should recognize that congregational decision making in the life of a mission work is often a difficult matter. In the early days of its life, the mission work may often become polarized if asked to make decisions about secondary issues such as a change of name or meeting location. And even on primary issues, such as the selection of an organizing pastor or the purchase of land, the group often has not yet formed sufficiently deep relationships with one another in order to make mutual decisions. It is for this reason that the BPC Form of Government does not make provision for a mission work to decide these matters formally. So the interim session needs to make provision for informal discussions of important matters between themselves and the members of the mission work.

But as time passes and the mission work matures as a body of Christ, they can and should be expected to make some of these decisions. As they near readiness to become an organized congregation, it is important that the members of the mission work convene as a congregation to allow them to begin to mature in their own decision making. The interim session would do well to make provision for these matters before problems arise. Forming a charter role and adopting the BP Constitution and local by-laws are preliminary steps. You do not have a *congregation* without a *covenant*.

Section 13: Doing the Work of an Organizing Pastor⁶

Those who take on the role of an organizing pastor are involved in a unique kind of work. As was discussed briefly above, an organizing pastor is a man who is specially called of God and is so intensely gripped with the significance of the doctrine of the church that, at the bidding of his presbytery, he is willing to move to a place where he is needed, and to love and serve a group of people temporarily as God builds them into a mature body of Christ and provides them with their own session and pastor.

Consider four special traits that God builds into the life of a man who serves effectively as an organizing pastor:

He has a special call. He is drawn not to a group of people he knows, nor to a place where he will stay, but to the idea of the body of Christ that God will build through his efforts. That call is so intense and specific that his confidence in it is undeterred by disappointments and discouragements.

He is gripped by the doctrine of the church. He understands the unique privilege of implementing the Bible's teaching concerning the nature and purpose of the church. He takes great joy and pleasure in watching his labors be used as tools in God's hands to build an individual manifestation of the body of Christ.

He makes a deep commitment to a place and a people. He quickly becomes a part of the community in which the new church is being planted and develops a deep sense of compassion and concern for his neighbors. And he commits himself without reserve to the believers that God gathers around him, showing them the love of Christ and an example of faithfulness.

He serves without the promise of permanence. He recognizes that his work is to serve an emerging body of Christ, and he knows that when it matures, it may no longer need his ministry.

What is this work that so powerfully grips the life of an organizing pastor that he is willing to make the sacrifices necessary to see it accomplished? The remainder of this section is written to and for the church planter about his ministry in the mission work to which he has been called. But what follows is not so much a job description of what he must do as it is a list of concerns and values which are a part of him and which he must impress upon his people.

Set in Order What Remains

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you" (Titus 1:5). This was the job description that Paul gave to Titus and has, in effect, become the job description of every church planter. You are to "set in order what remains." That is a difficult phrase to translate from the Greek, but the implication is clear. As a church planter, your job is to do whatever is necessary to overcome the present weaknesses and deficiencies of the group that prevent it from being a mature body of Christ that can stand on its own.

⁶ Chapter 4 of *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*

Bring the church to maturity

Yours will be the job and the privilege of seeing God bring about the words of Ephesians 4:11-16 in the life of the mission work He has called you to serve. You have the confidence that Christ has made you a pastor and teacher for these people, and you are watching as He equips them for the work of the ministry. Your ministry is pointed toward doing anything and everything necessary to bring them to unity in their faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. And you marvel when they no longer act like little children tossed about by the trickery of men and the perversion of doctrine, but begin to grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ. But it will not be easy. Harsh words and deceitful scheming are part of what you are to expect, because you will also be called to serve as an example of suffering in the process of their coming to the unity of the faith and to a measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Find their God-appointed leaders

Your task is to find those whom God has appointed to be the leaders of the new church. You have confidence that God has called you to do this work. You have confidence as well that if it is to be done, He will raise up those men. So your task is not to make unordained men into elders by your winsome persuasion and skillful training. Rather, it is to do anything and everything necessary to make all the conditions right for those men to be found, challenged, and equipped, and for the people of the new church to be taught how to choose and follow them.

Care Deeply about People

If you do not care deeply for people, if you do not get along well with them generally, and if you find yourself not liking them nearly so much as you like your books and your study, then the work of church planting will not go well for you. Nothing else in Reformed ministry works very well, including preaching, if you do not care deeply for people. 2 Corinthians 1-4 reveals a tenderhearted Apostle Paul caring deeply about the Corinthian believers and about how his harsh, corrective letters were being received by them. Your work as a church planter must be one of caring for people. Here is a minimum checklist of how to care for the people of a mission work:

Shepherd them

"I am the Good Shepherd, and I know my sheep," says Jesus in John 10:14. As a shepherd of a mission work, it is vital that you care for and protect an expanding flock of God's people. You must know who they are and where they are both physically and spiritually. Know what they do for a living and the location of their workplaces. Know the condition of their marriages and their family relationships. Know what provokes them and what encourages them. Know the needs of the little ones and the elderly ones in the church. Then use this shepherding knowledge to be there when they need you, to preach in such a way that they will understand you, and to encourage wisely and rebuke at just the right moment. But be aware that some in the flock have never experienced a shepherd's care, and they may resist it until they learn that your love and watching come from your desire to please the Lord Jesus.

Visit them

Spend time with them in their homes, as Paul did with the Ephesians, teaching from house to house (Acts 20:20). Get to know them where they live. Learn their strengths, their weaknesses, their preferences, and how they relate to others. Read the Scriptures and pray with them there. Encourage them and counsel them when they face difficult decisions. Visit them when they are in the hospital, and read the Scriptures and

pray with them there. Generally spend time with them to give them a clear sense of your pastoral presence and love for them.

Pray for them

Your care for the people of the mission work must go beyond your knowledge of them and your presence with them. Praying for them is an absolute pastoral necessity, which cannot be neglected. It is just as much the work of a pastor as is the preparation and delivery of sermons. So develop a system to pray for each member and family of the mission work regularly. Make the system flexible enough so that new people can be added as the church grows. Also, make the time and do the praying, remembering that such unseen work that shows no immediate result is often tempting to omit from a busy schedule. And let the people of the mission work know that you are praying for them, not as a means to win their love, but to show them a pattern for what they need for their own spiritual well-being and for the blessing of the developing church.

Assimilate them

The word *assimilation* is often identified as a Church Growth technique. But it is really a biblical concept when linked with that of caring for the flock. When God adds to the flock, as is anticipated often in the life of a new mission work, some important Scriptural dynamics come into play. The new sheep in the flock need to know when and where their feeding will take place. They need to know how the flock behaves when danger threatens. And because they are loved by the Good Shepherd, the other sheep of the flock need to be taught to accept and trust them. Assimilation is really just the constant work of seeing to the needs of the flock as the Good Shepherd enlarges it. A wise organizing pastor knows the addition of new families often poses a threat to the stability of the flock. But his care for people extends to assimilating new families fully into the life of the mission work and using their Spirit-given gifts to bless and further mature the developing body of Christ.

Be Concerned for What Is Believed

In Galatians 1:8, Paul says, "Even if we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." It does not appear that Paul would advocate, in the name of reaching the lost, that we should soften the message and dilute the Reformed faith to only its most basic elements in order that it not be rejected. As the organizing pastor of a mission work, you must never compromise the truths which you hold dear in order to reach people, or you will have sold your birthright. Be bold and caring at the same time. Work out the best means of articulating the whole counsel of God both to those in the community and to those in the mission work. Here are three aspects of what it means to be concerned for what is believed in the life of a mission work:

Prepare well-balanced meals

The metaphor of pastor as shepherd is usually the one employed when discussion centers around feeding the people of God. But being a wise organizing pastor sometimes means being a good mother to God's children. Mom plans the menu well in advance and spends much time preparing both tasty and well-balanced meals. You must preach and teach the whole counsel of God and not just your interest or specialty. You must remember that your goal is to bring a young body of Christ to maturity, and that requires a healthy and well-rounded diet of teaching.

Be self-consciously Reformed

As a church planter, you must make it plain from the beginning of your preaching and teaching ministry that the rich doctrinal teaching of the Reformed faith is necessary in order to understand the Bible in all its fullness. Make the Westminster Confession of Faith available to your people and refer to it in your public ministry. Help them to memorize the Shorter Catechism. Let them know that being "Reformed" is being "biblical." Introduce them to books about the doctrines of the Reformed faith, and let them know that it is not being sectarian, divisive, or unbiblical to be identified as a Reformed Christian.

Integrate your doctrinal standards into church life

As the organizing pastor of an Bible Presbyterian mission work, you already have a sound tradition of doctrinal beliefs to undergird its ministry. Your people do not have to spend months or years coming to conclusions about how to interpret the Bible. The Confession of Faith and Catechisms embraced by the BPC supply a framework of biblical understanding that allows a mission work to be unified in its doctrinal belief from its earliest days. But if they are to have the time-honored beneficial effect they were intended to have, the BPC's doctrinal standards must be integrated into the life of the church. Refer to them in your sermons. Explain them when you visit in the homes of your people. Comment on portions of them in church bulletins and newsletters. Do all you can to help your people appreciate the rich doctrinal tradition they have inherited.

Reach Out to the Unsaved

The unchurched, the pre-Christians, the unbelievers, the pagans, or however they are referred to, are not Arminians, Baptists, dispensationalists, or charismatics. With these you do not have deep theological discussions to win them over to your way of baptizing. With these you talk about basic truths and ultimate issues. Do you believe God can change their hearts? Can He call an unbeliever tomorrow afternoon from darkness into light? Yes, He can! As a church planter, you should care deeply for those outside of Christ because they are candidates for the kingdom, just as you care deeply for those who are in Christ because they are members of the kingdom. Here are three things you should keep in mind about outreach as a church planter:

Be in contact with the unconverted

It will be easy and tempting to spend all your time with believers. But you are also an ambassador of Christ, imploring men to be reconciled to God. That means you must intentionally and purposefully spend time with unbelievers, forming relationships with them, getting to know their needs and concerns, and building rapport so that they will listen as you declare God's truth to them. You must have a plan and stick to it until it becomes a natural part of your ministry life. Your motive in this is to reach out to the unconverted out of love and concern because you are following the example and the instructions of the Lord Jesus.

Be clear that the issue of growth is faithfulness

If you are consistent and effective in spending time with unbelievers, the people of your mission work and other Christians will soon learn of it. You must be clear with yourself and with them about what you are doing. You are not doing this so that the church will have more people in attendance at worship services. Your activity of cultivating relationships with unbelievers does not have to do primarily with the growth of the church, but with being faithful to God.

Encourage others to follow your example

Reaching out to the unsaved is not just the responsibility of a pastor or a Christian leader. It is the responsibility of every believer to bear witness to the grace of Jesus Christ. So let your example serve to encourage others to do the same. Make clear to your people that not everyone in the church is called or gifted to be an evangelist, but that is not what this is about. Show them through your example the significance of being salt and light, and stress the importance of faithfulness rather than success.

Be Concerned for How Things Are Done

In the midst of addressing problems in the church in Corinth which appear to be far outside the norm of what we have come to expect today concerning Christian conduct and ecclesiastical practice, Paul makes two astounding statements in 1 Corinthians 14: "God is not a God of disorder but of peace" (verse 33), and, "Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (verse 40). He was advancing a biblical attitude that spoke to the servant-leaders of the church about their need for organizational skills and the personal character traits of integrity, propriety, and excellence. Such an attitude will be shown in today's Reformed church by a pastor and people who give attention to the details of public gatherings and show respect and consideration for people. As a church planter, you should be concerned about how things are done in the mission work in which you serve. Consider these aspects of public ministry which require your constant attention as an organizing pastor:

Worship decorum

One of the guiding principles of Reformed worship is that worshipers must understand what they are doing and why they are doing it. The regulative principle of worship, set forth in WCF XXI.1, requires that when God's people gather for worship, they are to be both active and knowledgeable. This manual makes no attempt to prescribe specific elements or circumstances of Reformed worship. But worship decorum is an important aspect of your work of establishing sound worship practice in a mission work. Here are three aspects of worship decorum that are important to consider from the earliest days of your work as an organizing pastor:

Plan worship carefully. From the salutation to the benediction, the parts of worship should be planned so that they fit together to form a dialogue between God and His people. Select with care the Scripture passages which will be read publicly, and practice reading them aloud. That which is sung should be chosen both for the content of the words and the appropriateness of the meter and the melody. Plan and order the petitions of your public prayers as carefully as you prepare your sermon. Make the time in your busy schedule for the planning of worship, just as you make the time for other important aspects of the conduct of your ministry.

Lead your people in worship. Knowledgeable, Reformed worship does not merely rely on an adopted order of service. The people of God should be carefully and wisely led in their worship by the one who has taken the time to plan and prepare for what will actually be read, heard, prayed, and sung. Consider it a privilege to lead your people in the worship of God, providing appropriate rubrics to announce the parts of worship and tie them together, and keeping them informed about the purpose of each thing that is done.

Speak and act appropriately in worship. Your leadership of the worship service must be done in such a way as to point the people of the mission work to God while avoiding calling attention to yourself. Your words should be chosen carefully. Grammar, voice inflection, and pronunciation all matter. Your movements and

gestures should be measured and thought out beforehand. And your clothing should be chosen to reflect the care with which you have planned the worship service.

Printed materials

With the availability of today's computer technology, there is no excuse for poorly printed materials. But choosing the right words is still a difficult process, and creating an attractive format to blend with those words takes time. In a larger, more mature church, there are often gifted people who are assigned the task of ensuring that the congregation's printed materials are produced with quality and effectiveness. But in a mission work, the job of ensuring excellence in printed materials often falls to the organizing pastor. Since it is often difficult to decide how to convey necessary information in the right way, consider these suggestions for choosing the appropriate print format:

Church bulletins announce. Keep them factual and make sure people of all ages can read them. They are rarely kept for more than a few days, so their content should be written for immediate use. But they may be the only introduction to the ministry of the mission work that newcomers receive, so their design and format are important.

Letters inform. They convey both facts and explanations. Keep them concise and anticipate that they will be retained for several weeks. An attractive and informative letterhead is important.

Newsletters communicate philosophy. They serve both to announce events and ministries and also to express what the mission work is about. Because of this dual function, they must be carefully written, usually with the help of others. Since they are often retained for a month or more, their standard formatting should contain much factual information about the church.

Brochures convey purpose. They express to interested outsiders the aims and desires of the mission work. They should be written in such a way that outsiders can comprehend how the new church's aims and desires apply to them. And they should convey enough factual information to substitute for your business card.

Congregational communication

In the life of a maturing body of Christ, the need for good congregational communication is important and the opportunities for misunderstanding are many. As the organizing pastor of a mission work, you must work hard to ensure that communication is done well. Keep your people informed about decisions which have been made on their behalf by others. In the early days of a mission work, many such decisions are made by the borrowed elders. You must work hard to announce them carefully, both in writing and from the pulpit, so that misunderstanding will not arise. And it makes sense to continue this kind of informative communication throughout the life of the church. You should also structure venues for your people to discuss church life with you and the borrowed elders of the mission work. It is important to be able to talk through the issues of congregational development, officer training, and church decision making in a "town hall" kind of meeting, where matters can be discussed without the pressure of conducting a business meeting. This kind of congregational communication is an important aspect of building and preserving the peace and unity of the church.

Structuring productive meetings

Gathering for worship is not the only time the people of a mission work or their elders get together. Holding meetings to discuss, review, evaluate, or decide are routine parts of life for an organizing pastor.

But often those meetings produce few results and much frustration. Here are some suggestions to consider when you have responsibility for leading or moderating a meeting:

Plan meetings carefully. Think through what needs to be accomplished and what actions will probably be taken. If possible, arrange the order of business so that quick, easy, and mutually agreeable decisions can be made near the beginning of the meeting. Allow enough time for the discussion of difficult questions, but do not hold all sensitive matters until the end of the meeting. Do not try to manipulate or control the meeting, but rather assist everyone in their decision making with a good meeting plan.

Allow time for new ideas to be evaluated. If you or someone else wants to make a proposal for something new to be undertaken, allow for a brief introductory discussion of the idea, but with no provision for a decision to be made on the matter. Then schedule further discussion on the matter at a later meeting. Good ideas often take time to gain mutual acceptance, and the implications of bad ideas often take time to assess. In either case, a decision on the matter is not harmed by waiting.

Summarize the decisions made at a meeting. At the close of a meeting, it is often helpful to note what has been decided. This provides attendees with a sense of accomplishment, and it clarifies what has to be done as a result of the meeting. In session meetings, this practice also allows all members to come together in ownership and articulation of their decisions.

Ensure that decisions are implemented. It is often assumed that the minutes are a sufficient reminder of what needs to be done as a result of the meeting. But following a meeting for which you have responsibility, it is wise to make a list of the actions taken and the decisions made. Then assign each item to yourself or to someone else for implementation.

Meeting place ambiance

The meeting place of a mission work is almost always a borrowed building. But during the time it is being used as your worship location, the room and its surroundings reflect directly on your theological commitments and your personal understanding of the nature and purpose of worship. As the organizing pastor, it will often fall to you to ensure that the functioning and the ambiance of the meeting place reflect the Reformed character of the mission work.

The room where worship is to be held should be carefully and neatly arranged. The chairs should not be crowded together, and locations for greeting people and displaying literature should be selected. Flowers and plants often help to make a stark facility a more hospitable location. Musical instrumentation in a rented facility often poses a significant challenge.

There are also other considerations concerning the use of borrowed or rented facilities for worship. External signs should identify the church's meeting location and should be large enough that their wording can be read from a distance. And there should be enough external signs so that some of them may be used to point visitors directly to the entrance of the facility. Internal signs should clearly mark all meeting areas and rooms that are being used by the mission work. If child care of some sort is offered, whether it be a full nursery or a play area for children following worship, great care must be taken that it is well supervised, that parents know where to find their children, and that caregivers are screened and formally approved for their work. Additionally, restroom facilities need to be checked for cleanliness and serviceability during their time of use by the mission work.

Encourage the Church to Grow

The natural tendency for the conscientious Reformed pastor and session is to care for the flock they already have. They have counted their hundred sheep and know them well. And precisely because so much time and energy was spent to bring the straying ones back, they are not very enthusiastic about seeing their flock double in a decade. Reformed sessions and pastors must see numerical growth as something biblical, vital, and necessary. As the organizing pastor of a mission work, it will be your job to keep before both the elders and the people the message of Ephesians 4:16, that Christ is causing the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Biblical, numerical growth is something you must sincerely desire for the glory of God and for the sake of His kingdom here on earth. And you must be willing to do the extra work, to provide the extra hospitality and nurture, and to do the simple teaching that will be necessary to encourage the church to grow. Here are three things to consider in your role as the encourager of the numerical growth of your mission work:

Carefully analyze your harvest field

Your harvest field is the circumference of that geographic area surrounding your meeting location from which interested families and persons are likely to travel to visit your public services of worship. Remember that your harvest field overlaps with the harvest fields of many Bible-believing churches which the Lord is also using to gather in what He has planted and tended. These churches are not to be seen as "the enemy" or "the competition," but are to be accepted as part of God's harvest plan. While never compromising the consistency of your Reformed beliefs as you do your harvest field analysis, your focus should be on identifying and working to reach three distinct types of people in your harvest field. There are the misled, who have been exposed to wrong doctrinal teaching and need to know the truth. Then there are the underfed, who have never feasted on the depth of Reformed teaching. And there are the spiritually dead, who, though they may have a formal relationship to a church in your community, do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Overcome the internal obstacles to growth

It will also be necessary for you to dispel misconceptions and fears about numerical growth within the body of believers. Some will argue that holding consistently to the doctrines of the Reformed faith prevents the church from growing and that small size is an indication of faithfulness. But the Scriptures do not teach such a concept. Rather, 1 Corinthians 3:5 teaches that God gives the increase. The size of a local church is God's business and not ours to determine. And others, fearing that numerical growth will result in a lack of spiritual care or pastoral attention, or suffering from a lack of desire for the growth that God may be providing, or believing that preaching is the only acceptable form of evangelism, will oppose ministries of outreach. You must state God's case clearly to those who oppose the proper, biblical growth of the local church.

Lead the church to growth

Leading the church to growth means articulating the Bible's vision of a bountiful harvest and a growth in numbers that is caused by God. It also means articulating the Reformed faith's zeal that all people may know the truth. But all of this must be applied by making plans for the mission work to see itself as part of God's harvest storehouse, by taking concrete steps to reach out with the gospel, and by making provision for more people to become part of the church.

Manage Yourself and Your Family

The qualities and spiritual traits of an overseer expounded by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 must be abundantly evident in the life of a church planter. No amount of skill and education will be able to compensate for a lack of godly Christian character which is described in this passage. Nothing which this manual equips you to do as the organizing pastor of a mission work will prove effective without your prior preparation for, and continuing devotion to, your personal development as a man of God. Here are five aspects of personal management of yourself and your family which are vital to your effectiveness as a church planter:

Conduct your ministry with integrity

In order to understand and appreciate fully this aspect of personal character development, you are wise to observe it in the lives of godly ministers who are senior to you in years and experience. No amount of discussion on the topic of integrity in the ministry can replace the personal experience of watching godly servants of Christ react to trying situations of ministry with the demonstration of the character traits of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Conducting your ministry with integrity involves being a man who stands on principle, whose word can be relied on, who uses the Scriptures honorably and respectfully, and who has a clear conscience before God. And it will show itself in your ministry by your ability to shepherd the whole flock which Christ has entrusted to your care, including the weak and difficult ones.

Avoid impropriety, temptation, and sin

Following the godly example of mature Christian servants and learning to conduct your ministry with integrity also means that you will work hard to actively avoid sin and conscientiously refrain from practices that might lead you into temptation or compromise. The life of a Reformed pastor is one of constantly serving as an example to other believers. But this means that others will often assume that you have mastered sin and temptation in your own life, and you may even start to believe it yourself. The ministry is fraught with temptations and opportunities to stumble or to fall into grievous sin. It is imperative that you guard yourself from these. For instance, when visiting, counseling, or working with a woman, give serious consideration to doing so in the presence of her husband or when accompanied by your wife or other mature members of the congregation. Be very circumspect in your ministry to children, and ensure that others are always present when you are counseling or teaching them. Say no to the various forms of pornography that are available on the Internet and in your community. Paul's words to the Romans should speak to the heart of every man who ministers the gospel amid the temptations of the twenty-first century: "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Romans 13:14).

Be a servant-leader

Jesus reminds us in Matthew 20:25-28 that our leadership style in the church is to be in contrast to the leadership style of the world--"Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant." The church needs leaders who will set an example for people to follow, show the way through difficult circumstances, take responsibility for the care of Christ's flock, and hold firmly to sound biblical principles of conduct and ministry. As the organizing pastor, you must serve in that leadership capacity or the mission work will falter. You must take the initiative and do what needs to be done when others are in doubt or unwilling to help. You must set a godly example and lead the people of the mission work to discover and operate on the basis of sound Presbyterian polity and Reformed doctrine. And you must ensure the sound ministerial and administrative functioning of the church. But the way you deliver that leadership makes all the difference. You must excel in service to your people, helping them to live godly and productive lives, and styling every aspect of your work as service to Christ on their behalf.

Manage your time well

The rigors of pastoral ministry are doubled for the organizing pastor. Not only do you have all the responsibilities of a pastor, but you must also care for all the necessary details of the initial structure and operation of a new church. As the organizing pastor of a mission work, the demand on your time will be significant. It will be imperative for you to keep a calendar and operate with a schedule. But being a wise manager of your time also means allowing for interruptions to alter that schedule, since it is not actually your time that you are managing, but the conduct of your ministry. Furthermore, it will be important for you to keep some form of a list of tasks and responsibilities and to incorporate them into the scheduling of your time. And finally, it will be vital for you to learn to distinguish between the things that are urgent and those that are really important as you budget the 168 hours in your ministry week.

Shepherd your family

Of all that is required of an organizing pastor, nothing is as important as utilizing all your shepherding skills in the care of your own family. You should consider your family to be your most treasured possession and their care to be your highest aim, as well as an opportunity to showcase the Reformed concept of covenant theology. If your family life is not sound and stable, your ministry and the mission work you serve will suffer. Spend time with your wife. Talk to her. Be her friend. Enjoy her company. Spend time with your children as well. Take an interest in their personal lives as well as their spiritual development. Be the spiritual head of your home and set the tone for your family in the love of God and the conduct of life. In order to do and be all these things, it will be necessary for you to take appropriate days off and vacation time. In the work of shepherding your family, you must do anything and everything necessary to care for their spiritual and physical well-being.

Section 14: Developing a Mission Work into an Organized Congregation⁷

Governing Commitments for the Development of a Maturing Reformed Congregation

There is discussion in many church planting circles today about the need to be "culturally relevant" in worship and "where people are" in ministry in order to reach them. However, our modern, secularized culture bears striking similarities to the pagan culture of the first century. Now, as then, the secular culture that surrounds Christians is not friendly toward, or supportive of, the things we believe or value.

"The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch" (Acts 11:26). As the history of the New Testament Church unfolds, it appears that for well over a decade after our Lord's resurrection and return to heaven, His disciples were not identified with a special group name. Some spoke of this new faith in the Son of God simply as "the Name" (Acts 5:41). Saul (later Paul) identified the disciples he was persecuting as those "who belonged to the Way" (Acts 9:2).

Why did it take several years and a place far removed from Jerusalem for Jesus' followers to be identified as "Christ's ones"? The probable answer is that in Antioch the disciples were seen as different from the culture around them. In Jerusalem, most people had Jewishness and culture in common. It appears that in Antioch it was recognized for the first time that being a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ gives one a new set of values and puts him at odds with his culture.

The new Christians had seen the life-changing power of the gospel in their lives and recognized that they were now valuing different things than their old cultural norms encouraged. And they were anxious to share this life-changing message with others, so that the pagan culture around them would be transformed, one new Christian at a time.

The process of developing a mission work into a mature, organized congregation is one that takes time and requires careful evaluation along the way. New Testament church planting practice provides us with a number of observable governing commitments made by young churches in Asia Minor that can be of help in evaluating the developing maturity of our mission works today.

A commitment to godliness of conduct

Godliness of conduct was a characteristic of the young churches of the New Testament. Paul even addressed the errant Corinthians as "the holy ones" (1 Corinthians 1:2). And he spoke of how the people of the church in Thessalonica became examples to those who believe (1 Thessalonians 1:7). The church in Antioch knew how to translate its beliefs into actions, and though it shared little ethnic common ground with the people of Judea, it understood that some of those for whom their Savior had died were suffering, and it quickly came to their aid. Its teachers were committed to prayer and fasting for the work of the church. Now, as then, the godly lives of its people are a church's main way of influencing the culture around it (Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3). Newly planted churches should be focusing their efforts on building godliness into their people as the goal of all teaching and discipling, because growing in godliness is a governing commitment that characterizes a maturing Reformed congregation today.

⁷ Chapter 5 of *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*

A commitment to a covenant community emphasis

When Peter explained the gospel on the day of Pentecost and urged the crowd to repent, he went on to tell them, "The promise is for you and your children" (Acts 2:39). When the Roman jailor in Philippi begged to know what to do to be saved, Paul told him to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and "you will be saved—you and your household." Later that same night, the jailor and his whole family were baptized (Acts 16:31-33). To the largely Gentile church established there in Philippi, Paul reminded the believers, "It is we who are the circumcision" (Philippians 3:3). And he reminded the Ephesians that at one time they were "excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise" (Ephesians 2:12).

God's gathered people in the New Testament functioned together very much like His called-out people in the Old Testament. In theological terms, it may be said that they embraced covenant theology and functioned as covenant communities. But in many church planting circles today, the refinements that covenant theology has brought to the functioning of the church have been largely set aside, and churches have become known more for what they do than for what they are.

The Reformed church ought to be a place where God's high view of the family is emphasized and fostered. Infant baptism is not only a means of grace, but also a tremendous teaching tool about God's covenant faithfulness from one generation to the next. And in this age of individual interests and values, newly planted churches have a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate that the local church is, itself, the family of God, because consistently functioning as a covenant community is a governing commitment that characterizes a maturing Reformed congregation today.

A commitment to God-centered worship

A church that is functioning as a covenant community has its focus clearly on the God of grace and holiness. When the covenant people of God gather for worship, it is He whom they seek to please. In many church planting circles today, worship has become another form of outreach ministry to meet the needs of people. But within a covenant community, the salutation draws the people of God out from among their guests and visitors to be the congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ, gathered for the high privilege of worship. Their gathering together becomes a foretaste of heaven, and their corporate worship becomes a meeting of God with His people. The benediction ends their active focus on corporate worship, and their ministry to each other and to those guests and visitors who have been watching continues. That is the implication of Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 about what happens when unbelievers or those who are "uninformed" are present when the church gathers for worship. And such God-centered, covenant community worship is a powerful witness and testimony to the reality of Christ's indwelling presence in the lives of His people. Newly planted churches must focus their efforts on worship for God's sake, because such God-centered worship is a governing commitment that characterizes a maturing Reformed congregation today.

A commitment to constancy in prayer

"The church was earnestly praying to God for him" (Acts 12:5)—and Peter was released from prison. The New Testament makes it clear that churches are planted and run on prayer. God's work done in God's way is done through prayer.

While Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John, the other disciples faced a real problem. A man had brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus for help (Mark 9:2-29). However, nothing the disciples tried seemed to help, even though they had been successful at casting out demons in the past (Mark 6:13). Finally, Jesus returned to the nine and healed the boy himself. In explanation of their

failure, He said, "This kind can come out only by prayer" (Mark 9:29). They had forgotten to pray! Having experienced success in ministry in the past through the power and authority of Jesus, they had now begun to rely on their own abilities. The result was not only ministry failure; they also caused others to doubt the power and authority of their Lord.

The work of establishing a new church is from first to last the work of God in storming Satan's stronghold and finding God's chosen people. God works through our efforts, but He does the work. Prayer is more than simply words brought to God or time spent. It is a statement of our absolute reliance on God to do the work with us and through us and sometimes in spite of us. The church that is not built, operated, and sustained by this kind of praying is relying on its own abilities. And worse yet, its pride and failure may even raise doubts in some minds about the power of God.

It is folly for a new church to rely on the abilities of its pastor or people, or on certain ways of doing things, or on its denominational affiliation, or even on its doctrinal beliefs as sources of numerical growth or spiritual unity. Believing, expectant, submissive praying is a necessity for the newly planted church. Consider the value of such praying:

Prayer brings the young church together. One of the most difficult things for a newly planted church to attain is a sense of unity and love. Paul prays, "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a sense of unity among yourselves ... so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5-6).

Prayer unites the young church against the forces of Satan. Paul reminds us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12). To establish a new church is to take a stand against the devil's schemes. It is a spiritual work of confrontation. That is why prayer is listed not as a piece of the armor of God, but as one of the primary activities of the Christian warrior (Ephesians 6:18). It is vital for the young church to sense the spiritual nature of its battle.

Prayer encourages hearts in the young church. Paul encouraged the Philippians, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6-7). As the congregation prays, they understand that God does the work, an especially important reminder for the sometimes discouraging work of establishing a new church. That may be why Paul reminded the Philippians that "the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Newly planted churches must focus their attention on prayer, because constancy in prayer is a governing commitment that characterizes a maturing Reformed congregation today.

A commitment to changed lives

The church in Antioch knew that the end result of their ministry in that city was the changed lives of people (Acts 11:21). That "God had opened the door of faith" to people in Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium was what they rejoiced to hear from the report of Paul's travels (Acts 14:27). It will not be enough for the people of a newly planted church simply to go about the duties of church life. They must have a commitment to seeing changed lives result from their ministry.

However, changed lives require ongoing ministry to people with significant needs. New believers need the milk of basic truths, and they need to be taught devotion to God, how to love their spouses, their children, and their parents, and a host of practices and beliefs that mature believers take for granted. Such training

and discipleship take much time and energy. And mature Christians often find it difficult to sustain a diet of the basic milk of foundational principles of the Word and of the Christian life when they need the meat of the deeper truths of the Bible and Christian living. They want sound examples for their children and a challenge to greater godliness. But the worldly habits and attitudes of new believers and their exuberance over the discovery of simple spiritual truths provide just the opposite.

Faced with this difficult problem, it is argued in many church planting circles today that newly planted churches must decide whether their ministry is to provide discipleship for the changed lives of previously lost people or to provide pastoral care and oversight to mature believers. But a church that functions as a covenant community sees itself as an enlarged family of those who rejoice together in God's grace which is at work in their lives, regardless of how old or young they are in the Lord. In fact, a Reformed, covenant community emphasis gives a newly planted church the hope and expectation that God has established their presence in their town to call some of His own out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). It is because of the vast differences in maturity levels and cultural backgrounds of believers whom God has gathered together into local congregations that the writer of Hebrews encourages the churches to "consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" and "not give up meeting together ... but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25). The abilities to disciple people of all ages and maturity levels and to exercise loving discipline when they err are strengths of a covenant community focus. Newly planted Reformed churches will naturally give much attention to the deep, doctrinal truths which are their confessional foundation. But they must also focus their attention and their prayers on the changed lives of previously unsaved people, because a commitment to changed lives is a governing commitment that characterizes a maturing Reformed congregation today.

A commitment to a world vision

It appears from the record of the Book of Acts that it was the church in Antioch, not Jerusalem, that was the model of ministry that God used to take the gospel to the world. From Antioch, unfettered by religious pride and assumption, they were sent. And to Antioch they returned with encouraging words and stories of God's power at work (Acts 13:3; 14:27). The task of Christ's Church in implementing the Great Commission today is the same two-pronged task that faced the first-century Church (Matthew 28:19; Galatians 2:9; Romans 1:16). First, it is to proclaim Jesus as Lord to their own children, to those within their evangelical and Reformed circles, and to those within the tradition-bound and liberal churches of their culture. Second, it is to proclaim Jesus as Savior and King to those without that knowledge, wherever in the world they may be. New churches should be planted with a built-in vision that what God has done among them, He will do elsewhere. They should, themselves, be planning to plant other churches. And their vision for reaching a lost world should mean that they are enthusiastically and intimately involved in the work of foreign missions.

Newly planted Reformed churches should, by their nature, have a vision for the world which their theology tells them God has made and into which He sent His Son to be the Savior of His elect. Deep concern for the spiritual well-being of the people of other geographies, along with earnest prayer and bold plans to reach them, should characterize a congregation that has made a commitment to a world vision because such an attitude is a governing commitment that characterizes a maturing Reformed congregation today.

Some Practical Preliminaries

The purpose of this chapter is to review the characteristics of a maturing mission work and what it takes to develop a group of people into an organized congregation. Having first looked from a biblical perspective at some of the specific commitments made by young churches in the New Testament which signaled their

developing maturity, it is necessary to deal with the practical matters of what must be done, who is to do it, and how it is to be accomplished.

Who does this work?

It is necessary to understand that developing a mission work into an organized congregation is a process. It is not a series of formal steps, and there is not a simple list of things to do that makes it easy to accomplish. The training up of a child into an adult is probably the best analogy to use in describing the process. Some things need to be taught. Other things need to be modeled and observed. But no amount of training can make an infant into an adult without the necessary passage of time to allow the child to mature. It will usually take between two and four years (depending on the composition of the group) for a sufficient number of things to be accomplished and a sufficient amount of maturity to develop in order to convince a group of ministers and elders from the presbytery that the mission work is ready to stand on its own. The goal of the process is not the organization of the church, but a functioning, mature body of Christ which is able to take its place among the other churches of its presbytery.

Who does this work? Much of it falls to the church planter, whose organizational skills are assumed. Some of the work is undertaken by the interim session. But the people of the mission work are intimately involved in a huge set of tasks, many of them fulfilling a number of roles as the mission work develops its ministries of spiritual growth, outreach, mercy, and administration.

Working with groups, committees, and sessions

There is a management saying that is helpful to understand in light of the many tasks and ministry responsibilities required in the process of developing a mission work into an organized congregation: "Boards authorize, committees evaluate, people implement." The interim session of the mission work, as the "board," makes the determination concerning when and how it is wise to undertake an aspect of ministry and authorizes it to be done. The usual scenario that follows is that the task is delegated to a committee composed of members of the mission work for them to implement. But unless the committee is exceptionally well organized and motivated, not much will happen because it is people who implement. Another management saying that bears on this is "Committees for conference, but individuals for action." Spurgeon is quoted as saying, "The best committee is composed of three members with one sick and one absent." All of this is to indicate the wisdom of careful delegation by the interim session and the organizing pastor to individual members or, if present, the steering committee, of the mission work to carry out assigned aspects of ministry and report regularly on their work as an established means of accountability.

A word about "programs"

It has become fashionable in Reformed circles to be opposed to the use of "programs" in the church. It is thought by some that ministry programs are modern Church Growth techniques and that the church does not need programs in order to be and to do all that God expects. While this manual makes no attempt to advocate a program-oriented ministry for mission works of the Bible Presbyterian Church, neither does it succumb to the temptation to deny the appropriate use of programs to carry out biblically mandated ministries in a local church. Any organized implementation of the development of a ministry is in fact a program. And for a mission work to develop into an organized congregation, it is vital that ministries of spiritual growth, outreach, mercy, and administration be well planned and implemented.

Develop Means to Promote the Spiritual Growth of the People

Worship is the foundation of all that is done in the life and ministry of a Reformed church. Developing a mission work into an organized congregation implies that rich and robust God-centered worship, which includes the preaching of the Word of God, is leading the way in the development of every aspect of the new church. The development of ministries of spiritual growth, outreach, mercy, and administration all flow from the mission work's commitment to the practice of God-centered worship. And because Reformed worship is regulated and prescribed by God, it has a specific function to fulfill in the lives of the believers He is gathering into His church. In order for them to effectively worship as maturing saints, they need to be given training and opportunity to serve their God. And the end result of God-centered worship is that the children of God are happily about their father's business. So all that will now be discussed points to and flows from biblical and effective God-centered worship.

Sunday school

Informational Bible training is essential for people of all ages. Without the foundation of Bible knowledge, much that goes on in Reformed worship will not make sense to them. And without that foundational Bible knowledge, parents and children will not be able to appropriate the printed materials and the verbal instructions they need for sound Christian living in the home. Whether it is called Sunday school, church school, Christian education, or something else, it is vital that training by the church for the church take place at a separate time from worship. Many families and individuals who are new to the Reformed faith require basic and sustained doses of information in order to live godly lives and be good church members. The whole church must be involved in their training and discipleship if effective worship and ministry is to be sustained. And a conscientious interim session will often conclude that a robust Sunday school ministry is one of the best ways to care for the whole flock.

Catechetical training

Doctrinal training is also a central part of promoting the spiritual growth of God's people and providing an undergirding foundation for their understanding of, and participation in, congregational worship. Catechetical training is a time-honored form for infusing that information into the minds and the lives of the church's people. Whether it is structured in a formal program or conducted family to family and house to house, the memorization and use of a catechism for children and the Westminster Shorter Catechism play a significant role in the establishment of a Reformed church. And though such catechetical training is usually understood to be for the children of the church, teenagers and adults who come from other theological backgrounds also need this kind of information lovingly and patiently provided to them. There are many ways to structure this kind of training: for a suggested alternative utilizing the catechism in the Sunday School, see the Resources section.

Bible study

People need to know how to learn from the Bible. They need to observe how the Scriptures are used and applied personally in real-life situations. They require this kind of information because without it, personal and family worship will not be very effective and their participation in public worship will be limited. Nothing outside of the preached Word is as effective as a well-led and carefully prepared inductive Bible study in the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry.

Gathering for prayer

Since a commitment to constancy in prayer is one of the indications of a maturing congregation, time should be scheduled or some provision regularly made for the church to be in prayer about its needs and about God's work in the world. Whether this is accomplished on the Lord's Day or on another day of the week, whether it is with the whole church gathered together or groups of families and individuals gathered for the purpose, some specific venue must be structured for consistent, regular praying for the sound establishment and ongoing ministry of the church.

Fellowship activities

In some church planting circles, the concept of fellowship is identified as a separate ministry activity. However, it seems more appropriate to identify fellowship activities as one of the means to promote spiritual growth among the people of the mission work. The people whom God has drawn together to form a new church need to know each other and enjoy the sweet fellowship of the saints in order to grow and serve effectively. It is not sufficient to assume that such gatherings will take place automatically or spontaneously. Fellowship gatherings need to be structured, planned, and intentional; if they are not, the mission work will run the risk of allowing factions to develop along the lines of friendship or age. At the same time, an Acts 2 concept of ongoing, daily community fellowship on an informal basis ought to be fostered, avoiding the compartmentalization that is so common in many churches that sees an fellowship outside of one or two days a week as a burden to the schedule. A family ought to be happy to be together as much as possible!

Ministry to and for young people

By their teenage years, covenant children have developed unique needs and require special care and attention. If they are to marry in the Lord, they need to become familiar with others who share their faith. If they are to minister as members of the body of Christ, that ministry is often most effectively developed in their teenage years. And as they seek their place of work and occupation in God's world, they need discipleship and counseling that is directed toward their specific questions and concerns. Since Christ has built His church generation after generation by calling young men to the ministry and young women to be the wives of pastors and missionaries, young people need to be given special opportunities to minister and to test their gifts for a future of service in the kingdom of God. For these reasons, it is important for the mission work to structure specific ministries to and for its young people to promote their spiritual growth and development. To expand these opportunities beyond the doors of the mission, the Presbytery may very well be enlisted to help bring the youth of the Presbytery together to reinforce the truth that the Church is one, not divided.

Other possible means and methods

Means to promote the spiritual growth of the people of the mission work are far more numerous than those listed above. The sponsoring of groups to study specific subjects or theological concepts, the planning of Bible, theological, and missions conferences, and Reformation Day celebrations are examples of additional methods of promoting the spiritual growth of the church's people.

Develop Ministries of Outreach and Evangelism

A new mission work is usually small in size and needs to grow in order to provide care for its pastor and its people. But a pragmatic need for numerical growth should not be a motivating factor in the church's

outreach and evangelistic efforts. Such efforts flow, rather, from a commitment to being faithful to the Word of God and to the work of Christ's Church.

Governing definitions

In this manual, a distinction is made between the concept of outreach and the practice of evangelism. For purposes of discussing the development of ministries of outreach and evangelism in a mission work, the following definitions will be used:

Outreach is any gospel activity or ministry which brings the work of the church before the people of the community in which the congregation ministers.

Evangelism is any gospel activity or ministry which brings the righteous requirements of God and His plan for the salvation of His elect before the people of the community in which the congregation ministers.

Outreach ministries

Outreach ministries have to do with making the church and its work known. They include the following:

Advertising comprises the various forms of outreach that have to do with letting people know about the church, its location, times of services, ministry emphases, and other pertinent facts and details that will allow them to know they are welcome to visit and will inform them about how to do that. Such outreach can take the form of newspaper advertisements, listings in the yellow pages, flyers, brochures, or Web pages. The purpose of advertising is to get people to visit the church's services of worship, where they will be exposed to the preaching of God's Word. Therefore, such advertising must be factual and easily and quickly read.

Newsletters are forms of outreach that allow people who have already had some contact with the ministry of a church to learn more about it and its beliefs and particular ministries, so that, if and when the Holy Spirit quickens their hearts, they will know how and where to avail themselves of that ministry. This kind of outreach requires regularity and consistency and allows many believers to use their gifts and skills on a regular basis to reach out.

Public meetings, seminars, and conferences are forms of outreach which, when announced and promoted properly, convey a church's interests and concerns and offer to people outside the church the opportunity to sample its ministry at times other than the stated services on the Lord's Day. This kind of outreach includes studies of specific biblical subjects, the invitation of noted or otherwise well-qualified speakers to address subjects of concern or interest, and the viewing of films or video series. Such outreach requires meticulous planning, careful and timely advertising and promotion, and a system by which the names and addresses of contacts may be captured for follow-up.

Radio and television preaching and teaching opportunities are forms of outreach that allow the teaching and preaching skills of a church's pastor to be shared with those outside the church, so that they may hear the gospel and sample the teaching and preaching ministry of the congregation. This kind of outreach requires careful organization and constant hard work to maintain quality and consistency.

Evangelism ministries

Evangelism ministries are any kind of direct gospel communication that have to do with making the righteous requirements of God and His plan for the salvation of His elect known to people outside the

church. They differ from outreach ministries in that their focus is not pointed toward drawing people to the organizational ministries within the church, but toward presenting the gospel "in the marketplace" in such a way that God's elect may respond and the reprobate are left without excuse. Such evangelism ministries may take many forms and may be divided into at least the following three categories:

Gospel dialogue is a form of evangelism which allows trained believers to interact directly with unbelievers about the Word of God. It may take the form of personal conversations with friends and neighbors, door-to-door calling, neighborhood Bible studies, or manning a booth at a street fair or a flea market. The goal of this form of evangelism is to present clearly the righteous requirements of God and His plan for the salvation of His elect to those to whom He gives the opportunity to speak. Such evangelism requires careful training, faithful commitment to the task, prayer support, literature for distribution, and a system by which the names and addresses of interested persons may be captured for follow-up.

Literature distribution is a less intensive form of evangelism, by which well-written and carefully selected books, pamphlets, and tracts, along with Bibles and Bible portions, are made available for free distribution at public venues such as street fairs, flea markets, and shopping centers, and by personal distribution to contacts when the opportunity arises. The goal of this kind of evangelism is to allow the literature itself to present the gospel. Therefore, such literature must be carefully selected, and those who distribute it must be intimately familiar with its content and purpose. For this to be effective as an evangelism ministry, the materials must be marked or stamped with information about the church sponsoring the distribution.

Street or public forum preaching is the most direct form of gospel communication, using the proclamation of the Word to convey the righteous requirements of God and His plan for the salvation of His elect. It is done routinely and effectively by those who are gifted and called to it. But it also requires the assistance, support, and prayers of many others who labor with and for the evangelistic preacher. The goal of such public forum preaching is to present the gospel powerfully, succinctly, and cogently, so that hearers have a clear understanding of what is required of them and offered to them. For this form of evangelism to be most effective, the one who speaks and those who assist in prayer and support must be ready to dialogue with those who have heard the message, must be familiar with appropriate literature that may be distributed, and must have a method for capturing the names and addresses of those who have shown interest, so as to allow for follow-up at a later time.

Develop Ministries of Mercy and Concern

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). With these words of the King in the parable of the sheep and the goats, our Lord Jesus set the standard of compassion for His Church to follow. Are there those who are hungry or thirsty or sick? Are there those who are in prison or without clothes? As we serve them, we lovingly and willingly serve our King.

The New Testament Church modeled this kind of compassion with a spirit of generosity and a variety of ministries of mercy. When food for widows was not properly distributed, the church sprang into action (Acts 6:1-6). When the church in Antioch learned that their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem would soon suffer from a famine, they immediately took up a collection for them (Acts 11:29). As Paul recounted his early experience with the other apostles, he noted that they especially requested him to remember the poor (Galatians 2:10).

Such genuine concern for people and their needs has always been a characteristic of God's people. Paul summed it up in Galatians 6:10—"Do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of

believers." But when new churches are planted, there is often so much emphasis placed on reaching people and organizing the work that ministries of mercy are overlooked or placed on hold until later. That is a serious mistake for a mission work that is maturing into an organized congregation. Churches practice ministries of mercy in at least three ways:

Hospitality

It is not just pastors and elders who are to be hospitable (1 Timothy 3:2; Hebrews 13:1-3, 7). They serve as examples to the whole church of what it means to be hospitable. Without Lydia's hospitality to Paul and his traveling companions, the church in Philippi would have been much more difficult to plant (Acts 16:15). With today's cultural emphasis on privacy and individual happiness, newly planted churches need to demonstrate that kindness, coupled with a warm welcome to the family dinner table and an open home in the name of the Savior, is still practiced by Christians.

Compassion

With our Savior's example of compassion for the physical needs of men (Matthew 9:35-36), coupled with the concern that the Galatians had for Paul (Galatians 4:15) and the challenge to do deeds of mercy in James 2:14-17, we need little more information to know what God expects of us. However, the emphasis of the liberal social gospel throughout the decades of the twentieth century has led Bible-believing Christians to react by stressing only the spiritual implications of Christ's love. But the self-centeredness of today's secularized culture presents tremendous opportunities for the newly planted church to demonstrate what Christ's compassion looks like when it identifies community needs, such as homelessness, child abuse, broken marriages, and care of the elderly.

Giving

The Philippians' gift for Paul's work (Philippians 4:14-16) is an example of yet a third kind of mercy ministry: generosity. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). Too often, giving is linked only to duty, obedience, and tithing. But giving, coupled with care and concern, takes on a deeper dimension. The budget of a newly planted church can be structured to encourage generosity as a pattern of giving. It can make provision for a deacons' fund for the care of the poor and needy to be administered by the interim session until deacons are chosen by the people. It can make provision for giving to the causes of home and foreign missions from the start of the new church. It can make provision for special giving to approved ministry causes. And special giving to meet special needs should be encouraged long before deacons are in place to help with that work.

Develop Sound Administrative Practices and Procedures

A new mission work needs to develop sound administrative practices from the start of its ministry. But often, such administrative practices and procedures are not given a high priority because of the spiritual nature of the task involved in ordering worship and developing ministries to and for people. Developing a mission work into an organized congregation necessitates that great attention be paid to things that are often thought to be business oriented. While a Reformed church should never be thought of or administered as a business, the same careful attention needs to be paid to the establishment of its administrative practices and procedures as is paid to the development of every other part of the ministry of a mission work. What follows are descriptions of several necessary aspects of administrative practices and procedures.

Handling offerings

The handling of church offerings is one of the most obvious and public displays of the administrative organization of a mission work. Clearly identifiable offering plates, bags, or baskets should be obtained and used right from the start of public worship services. A consistent procedure needs to be followed in rented or borrowed facilities for handling the collection and temporary storage of offerings. A plan should be in place to ensure that offerings are never counted in an informal manner or in a public location, and that they are always counted and recorded by more than one person. It is also important to have a clear procedure in place for how offerings are deposited and how and where records of offerings and contributions are kept, including a schedule detailing specific persons responsible for those tasks. The organizing pastor should not handle the money if it is at all possible to avoid it.

Managing finances

The person who writes the checks for the financial obligations of the church should preferably never be the organizing pastor. A system of safeguards needs to be set in place, so that the role of the financial secretary or church treasurer is known among the members of the church. Many new mission works today have begun to operate with an appointed financial secretary, rather than a treasurer. The responsibilities of the financial secretary are more clearly understood as being those of carrying out the policies and instructions of the session, under specific guidelines established for that purpose and made available to anyone who asks. The work of such a financial secretary should be reviewed regularly, and the books of that person should be examined or audited quarterly for the first year, semiannually for the second year, and never less than annually thereafter.

Budgeting

In order for a mission work to develop into a mature congregation, it needs to operate within the well-constructed guidelines of a budget from its earliest days. The initial budget of a mission work should be constructed by its interim session in consultation with the members and should then be reviewed regularly and publicly. It is best to describe the budgeting process of a church as a challenge to giving and a guideline for spending. The budget should include both income and expense projections.

On the income side, the offerings of the people of the mission work, the financial assistance from the presbytery and/or PMU, and other sources of support should be listed separately and then totaled. On the expense side, the pastor's salary and remuneration allowances (such as housing and medical insurance) should be kept separate from ministry expenses. Ministry expenses such as facilities rental, materials purchases, equipment operations, and advertising may be broken into separate categories, but they should all be clearly identified as the work of the ministry. In addition, many churches now provide for their pastor's travel and automobile operation costs as ministry expense items. A final section on the expense side of the budget should be for benevolences and other forms of missions giving. Once the budget is constructed, it is important that it be reviewed by the interim session and the people of the mission work on a regular basis and that it be used as the operational basis for the church's financial commitments.

Benevolent giving

As a part of the budget mentioned above, the mission work from its earliest days should be involved in benevolent and missions giving. Such giving is not superfluous and should not wait until the church can meet all its financial obligations without outside assistance. It is anticipated that God is building into the life of the new mission work a growing understanding of stewardship and a greater maturity in the area of shouldering its responsibilities to care for the work of the kingdom outside the confines of its own needs

and local concerns. Many mission works today have begun with the ambitious goal of channeling ten percent of local tithes and offerings to the benevolent causes of their presbytery and denomination, which are paid "off the top" on a monthly or quarterly basis. However benevolent giving is handled, the maturing mission work needs to demonstrate an ever-increasing love for the work of the church outside its local ministry and a correspondingly increased level of giving to those ministries and causes.

Establishing sound legal safeguards

A mission work must see itself as an employer of at least a pastor and perhaps a number of others who receive some remuneration for their services from church-generated funds. As such, it needs to apply for an employer identification number (EIN) from the Internal Revenue Service. Talk to the PMU office for instructions on the process to be recognized as an official part of the BPC denomination. As part of its obligation to handle the gifts and offerings of its people and to appropriately receipt them, it needs to understand and articulate its status as a 501(c)(3) organization under separate Internal Revenue Service rulings and documents. In order to appropriately care for its people and their guests as they gather for worship and for other church ministries and functions, and in order to protect its people from individual liability in case of an accident, adequate liability/property insurance should be obtained from the earliest days of the church's public ministry. These and a number of other financial and administrative details are described in documents maintained, updated, and distributed to BP mission works when they begin receiving financial assistance from Presbyterian Missionary Union.

Establishing good member care practices

Members and regular attenders (adherents) of a mission work should be able to expect that administrative practices and procedures will be set in place to keep them informed about such things as changes in meeting location or time of services, opportunities for ministry, prayer needs of the people of the church, and a number of other needs which require timely communication. In addition, the absence of regular adherents from services on the Lord's Day should be noted with the mailing of a church bulletin and acknowledgments of concern by other church members. Plans should also be in place for how to care for the families and friends of the church in time of sickness, disaster, or death. And policies and procedures need to be in place for the creation of a church directory and a mailing list of members and adherents in order to establish and maintain good communication within the church.

Making good property and investment decisions

God often favors a mission work with special gifts. Some of these may be designated for the purchase of property or buildings. Others are for the general assistance of the church's ministry. The handling of gifts over and above the regular tithes and offerings of the people are an important aspect of good administrative procedure. The interim session of a mission work should give attention to procedures for what would happen if such gifts were given. Should the moneys be invested? If so, what investment instruments should be approved, and who is authorized to make those investments? Should property be purchased? If so, what location should be chosen, given the current temporary location of the mission work? While it serves no useful purpose to have detailed plans and procedures in place for every possible eventuality, it is wise to establish general guidelines for such situations early in the church's public ministry.

Section 15: Organizing a Mission Work as a Particular Congregation⁸

Discerning a Mission Work's Readiness for Organization

Organizing a mission work as a new congregation is the culmination of a long process. From the time the first believers met each other in a Bible study and determined to become an Bible Presbyterian church, through the reception of their group as a mission work by the presbytery, and all during the process of the development of their ministry with the assistance of the organizing pastor and the interim session, they have been growing and maturing as a body of Christ. And this is a process that takes time. It takes time for people to get to know each other well. It takes time for them to learn to trust each other and their leaders. And it takes time for them to grow together in their knowledge and love of Christ and the work of the church. It must also be remembered that this maturing process is a spiritual work done by God. The efforts of the presbytery, the interim session, and the organizing pastor allow the building of Christ's Church to be laid and built on a firm foundation. But Christ himself does the building, and no manner of effort, however well intentioned, can make a group into a church without His presence and power.

In this discussion of organizing a mission work into a new congregation, it must be understood that the word *organize* does not in any way imply that the church has been disorganized, poorly structured, or in some way deficient. Rather, the words *organizing a mission work as a new congregation* serve as shorthand for the long process that takes two to four years. But those words also describe the activities at the conclusion of the organizing process, during which the presbytery gains sufficient confidence that the hand of God has produced both a group of mature believers and a unified congregation (Form of Government III.1; IX.4).

Criteria for judging a mission work's readiness to be organized

"Until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19) is the basic concept that is at issue in determining a mission work's readiness to be organized. The presbytery, along with the interim session and the members of the mission work themselves, all need to be asking honest and loving questions concerning their readiness. Do the members of the mission work love, respect, and defer to one another? If they do not, it will be difficult for them to stand together as an organized congregation in future years. Do they respect, submit to, and obey their temporary, presbytery-appointed leaders? Are they simply waiting to be organized so as to get out from under the intrusion and interference of outsiders? If such attitudes are prevalent, the patterns are not yet set for them to embrace and follow leaders whom they have chosen and whom God has called and appointed. Does their worship of God as a congregation unify them and encourage their hearts? If they hold strong differences of opinion about the elements of worship and are simply tolerating the present order and practice of worship, they may not yet be ready to walk together as a unified body of Christ. Are they growing in spiritual maturity as a result of the ministry of the church? Are they reaching out to their neighbors, relatives, and friends, and is God using their efforts to gather more of His elect into the church? Are they demonstrating a concern for the needs of those in their community, and are they involved in ministries of mercy? It is vital that positive answers to these questions be forthcoming from the members of the mission work about the ministry of the church that God is building there. Otherwise, those who are involved in its establishment are little more than participants in a theological club

⁸ Chapter 6 of *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*

or a political interest group. Do they understand what the Bible Presbyterian Church is? Do they share the BPC's interests and concerns? Are they actively involved in praying for, and financially supporting, her ministries of home and foreign missions and Christian education? Are they appreciative of the work of their presbytery on their behalf? Criteria such as these are used by all concerned to make a judgment about a mission work's basic readiness to be organized as a new and separate congregation of the BPC.

Evaluative questions for the interim session and presbytery committee to ask

The kinds of evaluative questions asked by presbytery representatives in their attempts to discern a mission work's readiness for organization differ widely because of the makeup of the mission work itself, the place in which it is planted, and the gifts and strengths of those who have been charged to make the evaluation. So, instead of providing a list of evaluative questions, PMU has provided this manual for review with the mission work throughout its development and especially at the time when a decision is to be made about organizing it as a new and separate congregation. Those involved in the process are therefore especially urged to review Section 14 and to draw wise and objective conclusions about the maturity of the congregation. Are the governing commitments observable in a maturing Reformed congregation, listed in Section 14, present in the mission work? Are ministries of spiritual growth, evangelism, and mercy in place and effective? And are sound and biblical administrative practices and procedures being followed?

The Training of Office-bearers

According to Presbyterian polity and the Form of Government of the Bible Presbyterian Church (FoG VII, VIII, XII), a mission work is not ready to be organized as a new congregation until it has qualified and prepared elders. But the role of the organizing pastor and the interim session is to do far more than identify and train elders for election by the congregation. Too often, the training of officers is seen as the most urgent work performed by the organizing pastor, and the plan is to get the church organized as quickly as possible. However, the church is much more than its elders. A word of caution is therefore issued in this discussion of the training of office-bearers, that their roles and responsibilities must be kept in proper perspective within the overall process of organizing the mission work into a new congregation.

Identifying potentially qualified men

The qualifications for an officer-bearer found in 1 Timothy 3 deal almost entirely with the matter of godly character. Paul's use of such words as "blameless," "temperate," "sober-minded," "hospitable," and "reverent," along with his prohibitions against being violent, quarrelsome, covetous, or greedy, indicate the kind of godly character that the church is to look for in the men whom God is calling out to be its servant-leaders. Being able to teach is only one of many character traits of an overseer, but it is often given undue prominence in the training and qualification of men who serve as ruling elders. A balanced approach to training in all areas of Reformed life and doctrine is important, especially for the church's first set of indigenous office-bearers. But even among those who appear otherwise qualified, it is often the case that God is not calling them to such service as office-bearers. It quickly becomes apparent that the men whom God is calling fit the profile of the acronym FAT—they are faithful, available, and teachable. They are men who, over time, have demonstrated that they are faithful to the church's ministry and stated services, who accept responsibilities willingly, and who give generously. They are available to help, to grow, to train, and to meet when the busy lives and priorities of other men keep them from such availability. And they are teachable, open to instruction and study, imitating godly examples and practices.

Teaching the congregation about church office and officers

It is important that the congregation be taught about church officers and their qualifications from the earliest days of the mission work's public ministry. That teaching should be organized and presented around biblical principles and practices. Too often such information is conveyed only as a necessity for the organization of the church and only as a matter that has to do with the church's form of government. It is vital that the people of the mission work have a proper biblical expectation that God will provide the congregation with the men whom He has called to be their servant-leaders, and that when He does so, the people of the congregation are fully prepared to submit to their authority and to follow their lead.

Demonstrating worthiness for office

The first officers of a mission work need to recognize that they must show themselves worthy and qualified for office if they are to be identified and chosen by the people. They must in certain respects "run for office" by demonstrating godly character, hospitality, and effective service to the church. They must be recognized as those within the congregation who are encouragers and trustworthy counselors, holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. The necessity of demonstrating worthiness for office even extends to the organizing pastor, if he senses God's call to remain on after the mission work is organized as the pastor of the people he has grown to love. The biblical principle that officers are chosen by the people can never be short-circuited as the church nears the time of its organization.

Some methods of training

Candidates for the offices of ruling elder and deacon, regardless of their past ordination and experience, should undergo a period of training and preparation prior to their election and installation as the first officers of a newly organized congregation. Decisions about the nature and duration of that training are properly left to the interim session of the mission work. The particular training materials and methods used are matters for interim sessions to decide, but there are some specific considerations which need to be discussed when training officers in preparation for the organization of a mission work as a new congregation:

Duration—The training should be long enough to allow ample time for covering a wide range of material, but short enough so that the progress of the men being trained can be observed by the people of the mission work and so that the length of the preparation time does not cause undue concern for the progress of the organizational process. A duration of six to nine months is usually sufficient.

Intensity—The training of the church's first officers serves a dual purpose. First, it is to equip the men with all that is necessary for them to serve as effective elders and deacons. Second, it is to set a high standard for office-bearers, so that the newly organized church will be able to maintain a strong biblical leadership standard for its officers in the years to come. Decisions must be made with regard to the intensity of the requirement to be apt to teach and what it means to be of good report. But whatever method or materials are used, it is important that all officer trainees be equipped with sufficient training so that they may in good conscience hold fast the faithful Word and so that they will be able to evaluate problems and situations which arise at the congregation and presbytery level. In addition, they should be exposed to all areas of ecclesiastical ministry, including theology, church history, polity, and the rudiments of biblical counseling.

On-the-job training—It is vital that the gifts and effectiveness in ministry of officer trainees be tested and demonstrated within the life of the congregation. It is also necessary that they be given close and personal access to the ministries of the organizing pastor and the interim session during the time of their training. Their first visits in the homes of the members of the congregation they will serve should be made long

before they are elected and ordained. And the interim session should at some point in their training incorporate officer trainees into regular meetings of the session for the sake of both exposure to meeting protocol and continuity with past actions and decisions.

Developing Congregational Documents, Policies, and Procedures

A congregation's constitution and bylaws are seldom referred to and are rarely needed in the ongoing life of the church until a problem arises. Then those documents which were carefully crafted long ago and stored for safekeeping are located and meticulously exegeted. It is usually as the mission work nears completion of the process of becoming an organized congregation that they write those necessary documents which describe how the governmental standards of the Bible Presbyterian Church interface with the particular work of the local church. This work of carefully wording the church's constitution and bylaw (if it chooses to have both) becomes an important exercise, not just for the organization of the church, but for the future of its ministry.

The purpose and importance of official documents

The official documents of an organized congregation of the Bible Presbyterian Church, usually identified as its constitution and bylaws, are the statements which relate the local church to its denominational affiliation and identify the governmental documents that will be used to order the church's ecclesiastical life. These documents define the responsibilities of the congregation, how the church chooses its officers, how it makes decisions, and how it handles jointly owned property. As was stated earlier, the documents serve most often during a time of crisis or in order to carry out duties and responsibilities which are not regular occurrences. So it is wise to plan the details of these documents carefully and ensure that every member knows that they exist and that they will be used when needed.

Some methods and procedures for constructing official documents

There are two methods or philosophies of structuring a church's bylaws or operational rules. The first favors the production of a brief, official document which refers most issues and matters of controversy to the standards of doctrine, government, discipline, and worship of the Bible Presbyterian Church and regulates only those matters left to the congregation to decide. The second method or philosophy favors the production of an extensive document which describes in detail the responsibilities and obligations of the members of the congregation and how delinquencies in doctrine or life on the part of members will be dealt with by the session and the congregation. Most mission works prefer the shorter and more simplified construction of their initial official documents and leave open the possibility that more details may be added later.

Policies and procedures to consider

Every congregation of the BPC must have some kind of official document that includes a clause relating it to the Bible Presbyterian Church, General Synod, and identifying the BPC's Constitution (including the Westminster Standards, Form of Government, and Book of Discipline) as that to which it will adhere. Each congregation determines the method by which office-bearers are nominated and elected and identifies whether they are to be elected for terms of service or for lifetime service (within the bounds of FoG XII.5-7). The congregation also sets the number of elders and deacons which serve at any one time and identifies which officers may be chosen to the corporation's board of trustees (if there is a corporation). The date of an annual meeting must be selected, and the quorum for meetings of the congregation must be chosen. More recently, some congregations have included procedures about how finances will be handled or stipulations regarding members who work with children. In all of these matters, the Session should invite

congregational involvement and comment while retaining its own prescribed duties of oversight and governance.

The Involvement of the Presbytery

The presbytery is a wonderful friend and helper in the process of organizing a mission work as a new congregation. The organizing pastor and the interim session should work hard to ensure that the mission work understands the process and sees the benefit of having a collection of wise ministers and elders available to review what God has done in growing and maturing them into a congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Understanding organization as a process

The actual organization of a mission work into a new and separate congregation of the Bible Presbyterian Church is a brief, formal process that takes between two and six months to complete. It is important for the congregation to understand that, in this last phase, "organization" is something that is done to and for them by the presbytery in response to their request that it be done. There are three aspects to that organizational procedure. First, the presbytery determines the readiness of the mission work to be organized as a new congregation. This usually involves a meeting or a series of meetings to discuss the views and desires of the people, to review the wording of their official documents, and to evaluate the readiness of the men who have been trained to serve as the church's first elders and deacons. At some point in this first stage, a charter role should be formed. Second, the presbytery sponsors, supervises, or in some other way ensures that appropriate meetings are held for the church to elect its elders and deacons, to adopt its official documents, and to call a pastor. It is during this stage that the church's own elders (assuming there is more than one) should be installed by the interim Session, which would then be dissolved. (The organizing pastor remains the moderator of the Session until either he or some other man is installed as the pastor.) When a pastoral call has been properly made and received, the presbytery will then arrange for the installation of the pastor at the earliest convenient opportunity in accordance with Form of Government XIV. Third, after all these details are acted upon and reported to the presbytery, the presbytery officially recognizes the church as a particular congregation of the BPC.

Utilizing the objectivity of the presbytery

The very presence of the presbytery and its responsibility and authority can be helpful in the organizing process. Sometimes there is a desire to write the church's documents hurriedly, in order to complete the organizational process. Sometimes there is a hope that a well-loved, but minimally qualified or poorly trained man might be elected as a church officer. Sometimes it would be wiser if the one ruling elder candidate available to be trained and elected were augmented on the newly organized session by one or two seasoned elders appointed by the presbytery. With a competent and authoritative presbytery in place, there is usually a willingness on the part of the people of the mission work to take the time necessary to maintain high standards and listen to wise counsel throughout the organizing process. But in order for the presbytery's authority to be accepted by the people of the mission work, it is important that they become acquainted with the functions, the work, and the men of the presbytery from the very start of the mission work.

Preparing petitions and calls

In the life of a mission work, there are three times when official communications from the emerging congregation to their presbytery are anticipated and expected.

A petition to be received as a mission work is sent to the presbytery at the very beginning of their official relationship to the presbytery. This is usually a letter signed by the individuals who comprise the group and to which the presbytery responds by receiving the group as a mission work and assigning an interim session for their care.

A petition to be organized as a particular congregation is a formal document that comes to the presbytery near the end of the development process. This is usually a letter signed by the members of the mission work, asking that they now be allowed to choose their own officers and call their own pastor.

The call to a pastor is a formal document that is acted on at the organizational meeting of the congregation in which the man of their choosing (most often the organizing pastor) is formally and officially called by them to be installed as their first pastor.

A sample petition that can be used for either of the first two situations above is provided in the Resources section of this manual. The call to the pastor may be found in Form of Government XIV.6.

Section 16: Leading the Particular Church into Its Future⁹

Once a mission work is organized as a new and separate congregation of the BPC, it becomes, in Form of Government terms, a particular church. As such, it enjoys all the rights and responsibilities of every church in its denomination. However, the goal of planting a Presbyterian and Reformed church is not its organization, but its permanent ministry and the contributions it makes throughout its lifetime to the work of the kingdom of God. Those contributions involve a number of roles and relationships, one of which is an increasing involvement in the life of the Bible Presbyterian Church as a denomination.

Being Part of Your Denomination

Within the evangelical world today, denominationalism and denominational loyalty have become unfashionable. But a Reformed church has little difficulty understanding the pervasiveness of sin even in matters of ecclesiology. Put negatively, a church denomination is an accommodation to a sinful world, which touches every aspect and organization of life, including the Church of Jesus Christ. No amount of wishing it were otherwise or glossing over glaring differences in theology and practice among believers will bring about a true organizational unity. But those who come from a Presbyterian and Reformed perspective are unwilling to forsake the structure, order, and unity of the church in favor of unofficial gatherings of Christians who share particular interests and goals. Put positively, being part of a denomination like the Bible Presbyterian Church allows believers to continue to sense the unity of the Church and provides them with opportunities to implement biblical practices to the greatest extent possible. Because of its commitment to the Westminster Confession of Faith and its Larger and Shorter Catechisms, members of the Bible Presbyterian Church are able to share true unity of faith, which reaches beyond the limits of their local church and provides a platform from which they may dialogue with believers of other denominational groups, wherever they are in the world. And because of its emphasis on connectionalism, believers who are part of the Bible Presbyterian Church may become intimately acquainted with fellow Christians and their needs in congregations in other geographical regions far from their own homes, in much the same way as New Testament believers were able to share their concerns for Euodia, Syntyche, Tychicus, Onesimus, and Epaphras (Philippians 4:2-3; Colossians 4:7-12). Rather than being apologetic or embarrassed about denominational commitment and loyalty, Bible Presbyterians have reason to celebrate being part of the heritage and ongoing ministry of their church denomination.

Participate in its ministries

Before He ascended into Heaven, Jesus gave us His great commission to go into all the world and make disciples by baptizing and teaching both Jews and Gentiles alike to observe all that He has commanded (Matthew 28:18-20). Therefore, the Bible Presbyterian Church offers means and methods for implementing our Lord's directions, not just on a local level, but nationally and globally as well.

Through its local churches, presbyteries, and independent agencies, the BPC seeks to carry out its vision in the presence of our Lord. Local churches are the front line of our testimony through the preaching of the Word of God, training and discipling God's people, exalting God's name in biblically appropriate worship, and evangelizing their fields of ministry. Presbyteries host conferences for young people throughout the year to aid in their spiritual development, undertake the care of those called to the ministry, and oversee the

⁹ Chapter 7 of *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*

work of church planting in their boundaries. Western Reformed Seminary provides a thorough, and thoroughly Reformed, education and preparation for ministers and elders, and other lay leaders in the church. Fundamental Presbyterian Publications provides materials to equip our churches for evangelism, enhance their understanding of their God, and to stand firmly for the “faith once delivered to the saints.” Through the BPC’s missionaries, the gospel is preached authoritatively in distant places, and new churches of His people are begun and strengthened in various parts of the world into which He has told us to go. But this is just the outline of the work. Every congregation of the Bible Presbyterian Church is invited and urged to shoulder this ministry of church planting and worldwide outreach by praying for it, supporting it financially, and being open to God's call for some of its people to go.

Celebrate unity within its diversity

The Church of the Old Testament, as well as the Church of the New Testament, were diverse in their composition. The stranger and the alien were always as much a part of Old Testament Church life as the pure-blooded children of Reuben or Zebulun. In the New Testament Church, the Jew and the Greek worshiped together and confessed that the barbarian and the Scythian could also be of the household of faith, because they shared one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father who is above all and through all and in all (Colossians 3:11; Ephesians 4:5-6). Its confessional commitment allows the Bible Presbyterian Church to maintain true unity of belief and purpose, though methods and emphases may differ widely. Rather than seeing such differences as dangerous or divisive, those who understand the nature and purpose of the church know that there is reason for celebrating such diversity within unity in Christ. The church must constantly examine her beliefs and commitments, and healthy, celebrative dialogue is a sign of life and vitality. It is something that every congregation of the BPC can enjoy and appreciate.

Respect its culture

Every denominational grouping of churches has its ways of doing things and reasons for its preferences and concerns. Such matters may be identified as a denominational culture. The Bible Presbyterian Church has a rich heritage of commitment to a Reformed and evangelistic expression of Christianity and to a thorough applying of sound doctrine in its preaching and teaching ministry. It places missions as a high priority in its ministries. It zealously contends for the faith in the midst of a perverse and crooked generation. It rejoices in musical expressions of worship in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, as well as instrumental music. It desires to do things “decently, and in order,” without sacrificing action on the altar of governmental perspicuity. It values the autonomy of the local church while at the same time prizing denominational connectionalism. It tries to do all of this with a minimum of denominational machinery. These are part of a denominational culture that no local congregation is asked to formally adopt, but which each particular church can and should appreciate and value highly.

Being Part of Your Presbytery

Students of Presbyterian polity agree that the middle court, the presbytery, has always been the strength of the Presbyterian system of government. This is because it provides both oversight and protection to the lower court and the ministers in its ranks, legitimate credentials for ministers of the gospel, regional activity beyond the scope of the local assembly, and support for the national testimony of the Synod.

Value connectionalism

Presbyterianism operates on the basis of a biblical understanding of the sinful nature of man. It recognizes the need for accountability and distrusts individual judgment. The flawed reasoning powers of the believers and their officers in a local church need the adjustment of interaction with outside ministers and elders.

Without such accountability and submission to brothers, a new idea or the overemphasis of a certain doctrine or aspect of Bible teaching has the potential to tear the church apart. But through the concept and practice of connectionalism, the church is kept healthy and strong. Connectionalism is the positive side of accountability. It is most easily seen when ministers and elders from other churches of the presbytery visit to review the work of the congregation. But it should also be noticed with the enjoyable visits of friends and acquaintances from other churches who come to help or encourage or just to worship together on the Lord's Day with their fellow believers. Value such connectionalism. Welcome such visits and help from the presbytery. Offer hospitality and get to know the people and leaders of other churches.

Share your ministers and elders

The organizing pastor of a mission work is often encouraged by his presbytery to devote all his labors to the work of establishing the new church. Because fellow presbyters know that the work is difficult and time-consuming, they shoulder more of the ministry of the presbytery themselves and allow the organizing pastor to immerse himself in the labor-intensive ministry of church planting. But as the mission work is organized as a particular congregation, it may be time to free the newly organized congregation's pastor and elders to shoulder greater responsibilities for the other churches of the presbytery. Do not be surprised if they are asked to help, and be encouraged when they are. Those who have just been involved in the establishment of a new church have gained much expertise that can be shared with others who are beginning the process themselves.

Be an active part of your Presbytery

Some presbyteries are more active than others. Some hold joint worship services or retreats for various groups in a central location. Each presbytery is involved in at least some intensive work of ministry to and for their young people, and some have family camp ministries and some form of cooperative outreach efforts. Get to know about the ministries of your presbytery and plan to participate in them. And make it your goal to learn the name of each pastor and several of the people in each church of your presbytery.

Think to the Future

Just as the needs of families change as children are born and as the little ones grow older, so the needs of churches change over time. A congregation that is five years old must plan carefully for its future with respect to its facilities, ministries to specific age groups, and a host of other concerns. Often, the church planning analogy has been drawn from a business model, where goals are set and plans are laid for an ever-enlarging organization. But when the family analogy becomes the model for church planning practice, it becomes apparent that wise forecasting is necessary if plans are to be laid for a permanent home for the congregation's ministry, for the employment of an assistant or youth pastor, for the establishment of various outreach and evangelistic ministries, and eventually, for replication in establishing another church.

Serve as a ministry center

Reformed churches, because of their commitment to biblical authority and doctrinal preciseness, can excel as centers of ministry resources. Bible Presbyterian churches can function in just this way with great effectiveness for the kingdom. They make a significant impact on their neighborhoods while serving the needs of the broader Christian community in their area. Consider some of these types of ministry center services as options for the future ministry of the newly organized congregation:

Training—A Bible institute could be organized, using the skills of local Reformed pastors to offer courses in theology and biblical studies.

Instruction—Actual seminary classes could be organized and offered to those pursuing formal theological education by extension. Additionally, ministry center instruction could be designed for the ongoing training of pastoral interns.

Christian education—A home schooling resource center could be offered, with a library and training materials made available, and specialized classes for older school-age children could be arranged.

Ministries of mercy—Providing ministry to the homeless, a clothing bank, a food pantry, a nursing home visitation ministry, or sponsoring a Christian counseling center or a crisis pregnancy center are examples of mercy ministries that could be offered.

Foreign missions—The world has become a smaller place, due to advances in travel and communication. Our shrinking planet has made it possible for churches to send their own families or young people not only to sample missionary labors in remote parts of the world, but also to be actively involved in a specific project or ministry which provides significant aid and assistance to a full-time career missionary.

Think about a church building

It usually takes about ten years for a church to grow to sufficient maturity and stability to possess sufficient resources in people and finances to be able to begin a building project. But many churches of that age look back with regret for failing to lay plans sooner for constructing or buying a church building.

Some good reasons for having a permanent location—The family analogy again comes into play when discussing good reasons for having a permanent location. While the family is not defined by its house and may move from place to place, every family needs the stability of a permanent residence. A church, in the same way, benefits greatly from a permanent location where members can gather and where ministry can take place. Congregations which, after many years, have finally obtained their own meeting facility marvel at how special a tool such a building proves to be as a base of ministry. The community around the church will also take notice of its greater permanence, and its facility can provide inroads into the homes of previously unchurched people to whom God reveals His Son as Savior and Lord.

Sources of help with building plans and programs—PMU is happy to provide counsel and advice concerning building plans and programs and provides no-interest loans to build or purchase worship and meeting structures.

Be a mother to new churches

Of all the churches in its presbytery, the newly organized congregation, which still remembers its experiences as a mission work, understands more of what is involved in planting a new church than do most of the others. "Where might God want to use us to plant a new church?" should be on the lips and in the prayers and plans of every newly organized congregation. In light of the growing immigrant population in the United States, BP churches should not ignore vast mission fields from other countries that have come here to search for a better life. Planting churches in Hispanic or other ethnic communities is part of our mandate to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

Move Forward in the Strength of the Lord

Newly organized congregations of the Bible Presbyterian Church must see themselves as having completed only the first stage of their development. They now have a greater degree of confidence that Christ, who

has established and blessed them, will continue their ministry for work which they must accomplish in future years and for which they must move forward in the strength of the Lord. Now they are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom they also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Section 17: Development Overview from the book of Acts

Foundation

1. Commission to go with the gospel - Acts 13:1-4
2. Cultivation for the gospel – Acts 13:14-16
3. Proclamation of the gospel – Acts 13:26
4. Blessings in the gospel – Acts 13:38,39

Formation

1. Reception of the gospel – Acts 13:43-48
2. Opposition to the gospel – Acts 13:45-50
3. Strategy in the spread of the gospel – Acts 13:46,47
4. God’s purpose in the work of the gospel – Acts 13:48,49

Organization

1. Extension of the gospel outreach – Acts 13:49
2. Multiplication of gospel reception – Acts 14:1
3. Building up the body – Acts 14:21, 22
4. Providing for leadership within the body – Acts 14:23

Maturation

1. Commendation of the work – Acts 14:23
2. Declaration of the work – Acts 14:26-28
3. Correction of the work – Acts 15
4. Protection of the work – Acts 15:36; 16:5

Church growth is today’s catchword for what is often an excuse to enter into compromise. The Bible emphasis is upon *‘saints’ growth*’!

The modern church growth movement places the emphasis upon “marketing” the gospel; reaching as many as possible by any means and preaching to “felt needs.” None of the church growth experts in this country are known for biblical separation or a strong defense of Bible doctrine.

Why people come to church has been studied and the reality is that people may walk in, may respond to a pastoral visit, may come as a result of church visitation, but more than likely over 75% of newcomers are a result of personal contact by someone in the church.

Section 18: Additional Models for Establishing Churches

Summary of the Presbytery Model

Step 1: **Identify needy areas.** Specifically, look for areas without a strong Bible-grounded, Reformed testimony and pray concerning them specifically. Wait and pray, working faithfully where you are in the meantime.

Step 2: **Contact interested families.** Encourage them to attend Bible studies in the area (if they are unfamiliar with BP's or Reformed faith) or to establish a church immediately. We recommend taking the Bible study route as it allows time for all concerned to get to know each other and pray more diligently for the Lord's direction. A meeting with the Presbytery's missions committee can be arranged if desired by the local people.

Step 3: **Present to Presbytery.** When it appears that the studies are leading to a more permanent arrangement, the work should be approved as a mission work of the Presbytery. The Presbytery should at this time appoint a minister or licentiate to be the preacher at the mission (usually the individual who has been conducting the studies). Presbytery should also appoint an interim session to aid in the administration and implementation of the affairs of the mission. The interim session should appoint a treasurer from among the local people at its soonest opportunity and begin keeping minutes of the affairs of the mission.

Step 4: **Write by-laws.** See the Resources section of this manual for a good general example. The by-laws of other churches in the Presbytery ought to be consulted in the process to assure a measure of continuity while applying the principles of the Form of Government (found in the BPC Constitution notebook) to the local situation.

Step 5: **Find a meeting place.** Be prepared for Sunday services.

Step 6: **Establish a charter role.** Interim session interviews prospective members.

Step 7: **Call a congregational meeting.** The interim session calls this meeting for the purpose of adopting the by-laws and establishing a steering committee made up of the heads of households in the mission for efficient handling of local matters [if needed due to the demands of distance in the presbytery]. The minister of the mission should chair the meetings of this committee, and all of its decisions are subject to review by the interim session.

Step 8: **Begin regular services.**

Step 9: **Ordain elders.** As the Lord raises up qualified men, the steering committee should present their nominations to the interim session. The session will interview these men and present candidates to the congregation at a duly announced congregational meeting. Upon their approval by the congregation, elders may be immediately ordained to the office by the interim session. When two elders have been ordained, the interim session is dissolved and the affairs of the church turned over to the local elders and the Session's moderator. The steering committee is also dissolved at this time.

Step 10: **Call a Pastor.** At the soonest opportunity, the Session. should draft a formal pastoral call to the minister appointed by the presbytery to the mission, if such be their desire and the Lord's clear leading. This should be done with the full approbation of the congregation. The form of that call is found in the Form of Government. This call should be presented at the next regular meeting of Presbytery for ratification. If the man is a licentiate, plans for his ordination should be made.

Step 11: **Apply for membership in the Presbytery.** At the next regular meeting of Presbytery, a church with a duly called pastor and at least two elders may apply for membership in the Presbytery as a particular church, with all the rights and privileges that apply to that status.

“Mother Church” Model

Step 1: **Base (“Mother”) Church** makes a commitment to establish a work within a reasonable distance of their fellowship. The church should work with the Presbytery to determine where the best locations are in the region with the most likelihood of success.

Step 2: Make **initial contacts** in a city within an hour or so of the hub congregation which have no faithful, Reformed churches (see “Sound Reasons for Beginning a Mission Work,” p. 19, above).

- Contacts can come from advertising in newspapers or on radio, other common avenues for announcing news and events in a community, or from personal contacts already established, or from people in the base church that live in those areas and travel at a distance. Also, participating in community events in a public way, such as putting up a booth at a local fair, etc., can generate contacts. Evangelism campaigns should be conducted in a manner appropriate to the local situation (canvassing, special meetings, radio broadcasts, personal work at community events, hospitality, etc.). Some may also come through independent agency contacts.

Step 3: **Establish Bible studies** during the week. Bible studies would be in the evenings, probably Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday evenings would be best. The church planter’s days would be spent in the office preparing studies, generating and corresponding or visiting with local contacts, prayer. He could also be involved on Lord’s Days at the base church until the Bible studies develop sufficiently to hold Sunday services.

Step 4: Base church **Session oversees** the studies and coordinates their priorities with those of the church planter, in cooperation with the presbytery which will have to approve the work for missions status eventually.

Step 5: Pick the Presbytery-driven model at Step 7 from this point forward.

Apostolic Model

Commissioned by the church in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas (later, Silas) went at the Spirit’s leading to various cities and preached the gospel first in the Jewish community and then to the Gentiles. With the Council at Jerusalem, the commissioning and authority shifted from local churches only to the regional body, at least in part. Nevertheless, the point is that they did not go at anyone’s invitation, without any real contacts for the most part. They simply went into a needy area and began to preach and teach as publicly as possible. We could do the same using the media outlets available to us. This could be initiated either in a local supporting assembly or in the Presbytery itself. A person or small team would be sent out to make the effort. This is similar to what our Lord Jesus did in regards to Samaria, for example. He had need to go through Samaria in order to evangelize the area. He did not come at anyone’s invitation.

In all of these cases, sponsoring local churches must not usurp Presbytery authority regarding establishing churches or raising up preachers within its bounds. Presbytery, on the other hand, cannot dictate to local assemblies regarding the level of their involvement in a particular planting effort, including the “loaning” of elders for oversight in any given mission station.

If more than one of these studies or evangelistic efforts develops into a church, the church planter would simply pastor them on a circuit basis until the Presbytery can field another pastor to step into one of the pulpits in accordance with the principles outlined in the previous pages of this manual.

Section 19: Resources

ABOUT CHURCH RECORDS

It is important to carefully maintain church records regardless of the size and newness of the church. Following are items that must be carefully preserved and, since a new, small church might not have a secretary the responsibility for maintaining church records will likely fall on the pastor.

Minutes of all meetings – these *must* be meticulously preserved. (see *Managing Church Minutes*, pg. 19)

Correspondence – copies of official correspondence dealing with policies, functions, personnel, and church plans.

Membership and Baptismal Records – baptismal records should be dated and membership records should record how the person was received and from where received if transferring membership.

Financial Records and ledgers – most bookkeeping is now done on a computer. **Back up** the data.

Publications – newsletters, annual reports, directories, etc. should be preserved.

Legal papers – deeds, mortgages, contracts and any other papers of a legal nature.

Orders of service – general and special services.

Building and ground – blueprints, property lines, sewer lines, water pipes, electrical, etc.

Equipment – instructions and warranties.

Inventory – a list of all church property such as office equipment, computers, copiers, faxes, worship materials, etc. Any personal equipment should be labeled with your name.



Petition for Church Entrance into Presbytery

The Congregation of _____ (name of church) _____ Church of _____ (address) _____
Meeting in a duly called and noticed congregation meeting on _____ (date) _____ has voted
To petition the _____ Presbytery of the Bible Presbyterian church for entrance as a
_____ (mission or particular) _____ Church.

In testimony and in behalf of the congregation, the Session of this church, represented by the undersigned,
certify requirements for the meeting as well as the vote are in order. The meeting was presided over by
_____.

Moderator of the meeting

Clerk of Session or other elder

SAMPLE CHURCH BY-LAWS

The blessing of connectionalism found within the BPC is based in each church's adherence to the Constitution of the BPC, General Synod. As encompassing as the Constitution is, it is designed to act as only a general pattern for how a church should be governed according to the Word of God. It does not typically address individual issues that a particular church faces on the local level. Each church is different due to locality, ability, and legality, and therefore must address its specific situations locally if it is to faithfully and orderly serve the flock. By-laws are the solution for applying the rules and practices of the General Synod on the local level. Because every church's situation is different, By-laws function to apply the principles of the Constitution of the BPC to the local setting.

Following is an *example* of church by-laws. The Constitution adopted is that of the BPC, General Synod, without adaptation or amendment. You should consult your local presbytery for counsel on particular details and review of proposed by-laws to ensure that the new church is consonant with the governing practices of the other churches in the presbytery. Furthermore, there may also be specific requirements unique to your state. It is wise to consult with a knowledgeable attorney in your area. This particular example, with a few changes made to make it more general, was drafted in 2001 by the Grand Island BPC in Grand Island, NY. It reflects an up-to-date understanding and consideration of current church law, as well as promotes good Presbyterian principles. So, it is a good starting point. We're thankful for the permission to use the Grand Island BPC by-laws as the basis for this example. The Grand Island church's official by-laws may be found on their web site. Changes have been made to their original document to make this example more broadly applicable to any State or situation. Keep in mind that by-laws are primarily a legal, not a theological, document. Those that we present here are designed to take into account legal and practical considerations as you apply the theological parts of our Constitution (the Confession of Faith and Catechisms) and the ecclesiastical parts of our Constitution (the Form of Government and Book of Discipline) to your local situation.

By-Laws of the Bible Presbyterian Church of _____

These Bylaws are subject to arbitration pursuant to the rules of the Institute for Christian Conciliation. [Required statement by NY law: your state's requirements may vary. Good idea to have it in any case.]

Article I: Name

The name by which this organization shall be known in law shall be "Bible Presbyterian Church of _____." [or, "_____ Bible Presbyterian Church"] referred to herein as "the church."

Article II: Constitution

The Constitution of the Bible Presbyterian Church, which is subordinate to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, consists of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) and Larger and Shorter Catechisms (LC & SC), the Form of Government (FOG) and the Book of Discipline (BOD). Whenever possible, these Bylaws shall be interpreted so as to be consistent with the Constitution; should any bylaw be found to contradict a provision of the Constitution, the Constitution shall control.

Article III: Organization and Incorporation

The church shall be organized as a non-profit [or, "not for profit" – NY] corporation under the laws of the State of _____.

[These by-laws assume that you will pursue incorporation, the benefits and risks of which you should research for yourself in consultation with a competent attorney in your particular state.]

Article IV: Purpose and Limitations

The purposes of the church are:

1. To bring glory and honor to the Triune God by promoting true worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness. (FOG 3:3)
2. To preach the whole Bible as the Word of God and to stand for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.
3. To operate exclusively for religious, charitable, and educational purposes within the classification of legal charities; and no part of the net earnings of the organization shall inure to the benefit of any individual; and no substantial part of the activities of the organization, or any receipt of its funds, shall be utilized for any other purpose except those purposes mentioned above;
4. To handle affairs pertaining to property and other temporal matters as required by the civil authorities
5. The church shall not have or issue shares of stock, and no dividends shall be paid. No part of the income or assets of the church shall be distributed to any member or officer without full consideration. The church is prohibited from lending money to guarantee the obligation of a member or officer of the church. No member or officer of the church has any vested right, interest or privilege in or to the assets, property, functions, or activities of the church. The church may contract in due course, for reasonable consideration, with its members or officers without violating this provision.

Article V: Location of Office *[Required if incorporated]*

The registered office of the church shall be located within the state of _____ at the address of the church's registered agent. The Board of Directors or a majority of the members may change the registered agent and the address of the registered office from time to time, upon filing the appropriate statement with the Secretary of State.

Article VI: Membership

1. The membership shall consist of all communicant members and covenant children, all of whom have the privilege of pastoral oversight, instruction, and government by the church (FOG VII:6; BOD 1:2). Communicant members are those who have been baptized, have made a credible profession of faith in Christ, and have been received into membership as provided in section 6.b. Covenant children (non-communicant members) are the baptized children of communicant members.
2. A person may be received into membership by a letter of transfer from another church of like faith and practice approved by the Session, by reaffirmation of faith, or by confession of faith. In order to be received into membership, a person must complete the membership course, submit a Membership Application, sign a Membership Commitment, and be accepted by the Session.
3. All communicant members who are at least eighteen years old and in good standing in the church shall be voting members. ("Good standing" means that a member is not presently under the censure of suspension or deposition.) Any voting member in attendance at a duly called meeting shall be

entitled to one vote on matters brought before the congregation. Voting by proxy shall not be permitted.

4. Members may be removed from membership at their own request by informing the Session of their intention to withdraw and their reasons. If a member requests to withdraw because of specific problems or disappointments with the church, the Session shall attempt to resolve those matters so that the member may remain in the church and enjoy greater fruitfulness and personal spiritual growth. If it appears to the Session that a member has requested removal merely to avoid church discipline, that request shall not be given effect until the disciplinary process has been properly concluded (see Matt. 18:12-20).
5. Members may also be removed from membership by order of the Session when they: persistently, over an extended period of time, and without adequate reason absent themselves from the stated services of the church; unite with a church of another denomination; cannot be found for a period greater than two years; or are removed by excommunication for persistent impenitence. Covenant children may be removed from membership with their parents or when they reject the covenantal responsibility of submission to home or church and neglect the ongoing exhortation of the Session to profess faith in Christ.
6. A complete roll of the church membership shall be maintained by the Clerk of Session.

Article VII: Ruling Elders and Deacons

1. Ruling elders and deacons must be male voting members. In order to be eligible for election, a man shall have been a member in good standing in the church for at least one year, shall have received appropriate training under the direction or with the approval of the Session, and shall have served the church in functions requiring responsible leadership. They shall be elected at the annual meeting.
2. Ruling elders, individually and jointly with the pastor, are to lead the church in the service of Christ. They are to watch diligently over the people committed to their charge to prevent corruption of doctrine or morals. Evils that they cannot correct by private admonition they should bring to the notice of the Session. They should visit the people, especially the sick, instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the covenant. They should pray with and for the people. They should care for and seek to help the pastor in his labors.(FOG VI; XII:1)
3. Deacons shall show forth the compassion of Christ in a manifold ministry of mercy toward the saints and strangers on behalf of the church (see FOG VII). As delegated and directed by the Session, they shall minister to the temporal needs of members and friends, manage the Deacons' Fund, and see to the care and maintenance of church property. This board shall make a quarterly report of its activities, including its disbursements, to the Session (see FOG. XI:3). They shall be elected at the annual meeting.
4. Any voting member may propose to the Session nominations for the offices of elders and deacons. The Session shall certify those nominees whom, upon examination, it judges to possess the necessary qualifications for office. An elder or deacon who had been previously certified but who resigned from or was divested of the office must be re-certified. At least one Lord's Day preceding the date appointed for the election the Session shall announce to the church the names of those it has certified. Election shall be from those certified. Voting on the election of elders and deacons shall be done by secret ballot, and each vote shall be cast either in favor of or against the election of each candidate, and those candidates receiving the vote of a majority in favor of their election shall be deemed elected. Elders and deacons shall be elected for three-year terms of service (see FOG. XII:7). If an elder or deacon is elected at a meeting other than the annual congregational meeting,

his regular term shall expire at the time of the second annual congregational meeting following his election.

5. An elder or deacon may be divested of his office by church discipline for an offense in doctrine or life (see BOD 12:7). He may also be divested if his services are not edifying to the congregation; such divestiture may occur only upon a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the congregation (see FOG XII: 5,6). An elder or deacon also may resign from his office for reason of age, infirmity or incapacity (see FOG. VII: 5).

Article VIII: Pastor

1. Election of the Pastor shall follow FOG XIV.
2. It is the charge of the pastor to feed and tend the flock as Christ's minister and with the other elders to lead them in all the service of Christ. It is his task to conduct the public worship of God; to pray for and with Christ's flock as the mouth of the people unto God; to feed the flock by the public reading and preaching of the Word of God, according to which he is to teach, convince, reprove, exhort, comfort, and evangelize, expounding and applying the truth of Scripture with ministerial authority, as a diligent workman approved by God; to administer the sacraments; to bless the people from God; to shepherd the flock and minister the Word according to the particular needs of groups, families, and individuals in the congregation, catechizing by teaching plainly the first principles of the oracles of God to the baptized youth and to adults who are yet babes in Christ, visiting in the home of people, instructing and counseling individuals, and training them to be faithful servants of Christ; to minister to the poor, the sick, the afflicted, and the dying; and to make known the gospel to the lost (see FOG V).
3. If the church desires to be relieved of its pastor, it may, through a duly called congregational meeting, ask him to resign. If the pastor agrees to do so, the presbytery shall be requested to dissolve the pastoral relationship as of a mutually agreeable date. If the pastor is not willing to resign, the church may petition the presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship and may send representatives to the meeting to support the request. The presbytery may grant the request, but only after giving the pastor opportunity to present his reasons for not concurring, or it may urge the congregation to reconsider its action (see FOG §XXIV:2). The decision of the presbytery shall be final and binding, except when that decision is appealed to the General Synod (see FOG §XIV:5).

Article IX: Session (Board of Directors)

1. The Session is the governing body (Board of Directors) of the church (FOG VIII: 6) and consists of its pastor, its ruling elders, and its duly-called and ordained full-time ministers.
2. The Session shall be comprised of from one to nine ruling elders, for a membership of 100. Thereafter, an additional three elders may be elected for each 100 members. Elders are to be elected by the congregation from among its male members. Their terms of office shall be for as long as they remain members of this church and continue otherwise qualified.
3. The Session shall have the power and authority to make rules and regulations not inconsistent with the laws of the State of _____, the Constitution, and these Bylaws, as they govern church affairs. The Session shall manage the business affairs of the corporation, oversee all matters concerning the conduct of public worship, and concert the best measures for promoting the spiritual growth and evangelistic witness of the congregation. It shall receive, dismiss, and exercise discipline over the members of the church, supervise the activities of the Board of Deacons and all other organizations of the congregation, and have final authority over the use of the church property (see FOG VII:6; XI: 3).

4. The Pastor of the congregation shall always be moderator of the Session; except when, for prudential reasons, it may appear advisable that some other minister should be invited to preside; in which case the Pastor may, with the concurrence of the Session, may invite such minister of this Church as then may see meet to preside in that case. The same expedient may be adopted in the case of the sickness or absence of the Pastor(see FOG VIII:3). The Session shall choose its own Clerk annually from among its members.
5. The Session shall have final authority for affairs pertaining to property and other temporal matters as required by the State of _____ and or federal laws governing non-profit [not-for-profit] corporations. In particular, the Session shall be responsible for the acquisition and disposition of church property, which includes the management of its financial resources. Neither the Session nor its delegates shall have the power to buy, sell, mortgage, pledge or in any manner encumber any church property worth more than \$2500, nor to incur any indebtedness exceeding the sum of \$2500, unless first authorized to do so at a congregational meeting, through the adoption of the annual budget , use of designated funds or by special action of the congregation.
6. The Session shall elect annually from its number three trustees on the first Friday in May.
 - a. The Trustees shall annually elect from their own number a president, secretary and treasurer.
 - b. The Trustees shall advise the session on all temporal matters.
 - c. The Trustees shall execute issues relating to the temporal affairs of the church at the direction of the Session.
 - d. Other members of the Session, though not members are not to be excluded from attendance at or discussion in meetings of the Board of Trustees.
 - e. The Bookkeeper of the Church and financial secretaries shall be elected annually by the congregation from among its members and shall serve at the direction of the Board of Trustees. The Bookkeeper shall:
 - i. have charge and custody of and be responsible for all funds and securities of the church;
 - ii. receive and give receipts for moneys due and payable to the church from any source, and deposit all moneys in the church's name in banks, trust companies, or other depositories that the Session shall select;
 - iii. submit the books and records to a Certified Public Accountant or other accountant as directed by the Session; and
 - iv. in general perform all of the duties incident to the office of treasurer and any other duties that the moderator, Session or Trustees may assign to the bookkeeper.
7. The Pastor has power to convene the session when he may judge it requisite; and he shall always convene them when requested to do so by any two ruling elders (FOG VIII:7).
8. If there are more than nine ruling elders, the pastor and at least 1/3 of the ruling elders shall constitute a quorum. If there are three to nine ruling elders, the pastor and two ruling elders shall constitute a quorum. If there are less than 3 three ruling elders, the pastor and one ruling elder constitute a quorum.
9. When the church is without a pastor, the Session shall request the presbytery to appoint a minister, normally of the same presbytery, to meet with them, or shall itself invite such a minister; he shall have the right to vote, and to be elected to moderate the meeting. When it is impractical without great inconvenience for a minister to attend, those present may conduct business, but the grounds for the call of such a meeting shall be reviewed at the next meeting at which a minister is present When the church is without a pastor and is to hold a meeting without

a pastor present and there are more than nine ruling elders, five shall constitute a quorum; if there are five to nine ruling elders, three shall constitute a quorum; if there are less than five ruling elders, two shall constitute a quorum. If there is only one ruling elder, he does not constitute a session, yet he should take spiritual oversight of the church, should grant letters of dismission, and should report to the presbytery any matter needing the action of the church court (FOG. VIII:2).

10. The act of a majority present at a Session meeting at which a quorum is present (when the vote is taken) shall be the act of the Session. A pastor or elder shall be deemed to have approved of an action taken if he is present at a meeting of the Session unless: (1) he objects at the beginning of the meeting (or promptly upon arrival) to holding it or transacting business at the meeting; or (2) his dissent or abstention from the action taken is entered in the minutes of the meeting; or (3) he did not approve the action and he delivers written notice of dissent or abstention to the presiding officer of the meeting before its adjournment or immediately after adjournment of the meeting.
11. If at any time there are less than three persons on the Session, the congregation may elect from the Board of Deacons and, if necessary, from among the voting members, individuals who will temporarily serve as directors of the church for the purpose of carrying out any required corporate business. The terms of such temporary directors shall expire when sufficient elders have been elected and ordained to bring the number of the Session to three or more. If the Session shall cease to exist or become so small as to prevent it from working effectively, presbytery shall provide for the election and ordination of elders from within the congregation, or, with the consent of the congregation, may appoint ruling elders or ministers, or both, normally from within the same presbytery, to be an acting Session or to augment the existing Session temporarily.
12. The Session may meet by means of a conference telephone call or similar communications equipment, provided all persons entitled to participate in the meeting received proper notice of the telephone meeting, and provided all persons participating in the meeting can hear each other at the same time. A member participating in a conference telephone meeting is deemed present in person at the meeting. The moderator of the meeting may establish reasonable rules as to conducting business at any meeting by phone.
13. The Clerk of Session shall be the secretary of the church and shall in good faith: (1) create and maintain the minutes of the proceedings of the members and of the Session; (2) provide that all notices are served in accordance with these bylaws or as required by law; (3) be custodian of the church and corporate records; (4) subscribe the minutes of all meetings of the members and of the Session; (5) when requested or required, authenticate any records of the church; (6) keep a current register of the post office address of each member; and (7) in general perform all duties incident to the office of secretary and any other duties that the moderator or the Session may assign to the secretary.
14. The Board of Directors may establish such committees as it deems necessary for the work of the church.

Article X: Board of Deacons

1. The board of deacons shall consist of the pastor and up to twelve deacons, who shall be male members of this church and otherwise qualified under the provisions of the Constitution. They shall be chosen by the congregation, and their terms of office shall be for as long as they remain members of this church and are otherwise qualified.

2. The Board of Deacons shall be charged with the preservation and care of church property, care of the poor and unfortunate and distribution of collections made for their benefit. Other forms of service for the church may also be committed to the deacons. The moderator of the Board of Deacons shall be the Pastor. The other officers shall be chosen from the membership of the board annually (see FOG. XII:3).
3. The pastor and one third of the deacons shall constitute a quorum. Regular meetings shall be set as agreed upon by the church session and the deacons shall report its activities to the session as may be requested. The Board of Deacons is expected to keep a record of disbursements.

Article XI: Congregational Meetings

1. An annual meeting of the church shall be held each year on the first Friday of May at a place to be determined by the Session, within the State of New York. At the annual meeting, the voting members shall elect ruling elders and deacons, adopt an annual budget, and transact any other business as may come before the meeting.
2. Special meetings of the church shall be called at a date and location to be determined by the Pastor or the Session whenever the Pastor or the Session deems it to be in the best interests of the church or when requested in writing to do so by one-fourth (1/4) of the voting members of the church in good standing.
3. The date, time, and location of all congregational meetings must be announced orally or in the church bulletin at least two (2) Sundays prior to the time set for the meeting, or by letter mailed at least ten days prior to the meeting. The purpose of such a meeting must be stated at least 15 days in advance of the meeting. If the voting members adjourn any congregational meeting to a different date, time, or place, notice of a new date, time, and place need not be given if the new date, time, and place is announced before adjournment. A member entitled to a notice may waive notice of the meeting, by a writing signed by the member. The member must send the notice of waiver to the church (either before or after the date and time stated in the notice) for inclusion in the minutes or filing with the church records.
4. The purpose of a meeting shall be announced in advance if it involves: a proposed amendment to the bylaws or articles of incorporation; the election or removal of officers; the calling or removal of the pastor; the dissolution of the church; or a question regarding the church's denominational affiliation. When a meeting is called for the transaction of specific matters of business, no business shall be conducted except that which is stated in the notice.
5. A member's attendance at a meeting: waives the member's right to object to lack of notice or defective notice of the meeting, unless the member at the beginning of the meeting objects to holding the meeting or transacting business at the meeting; and, waives the member's right to object to consideration of a particular matter at the meeting that is not within the purpose or purposes described in the meeting notice, unless the member objects to considering the matter when it is presented.
6. Ten percent of the voting members shall constitute a quorum at congregational meetings. A majority vote of those in attendance, a quorum being present, is sufficient to decide any matter.
7. The moderator and the clerk of the Session shall serve as moderator and clerk respectively in congregational meetings.
8. Voting members shall consist only of those who are communicant members of the congregation in good and regular standing, and who are at least eighteen years of age. Voting by proxy shall not be permitted.

Article XII: Church Records

1. The Session shall keep the following records: (1) minutes of its meetings, including a record of the administration of the sacraments and changes in the membership of the congregation (FOG VIII:8); (2) rolls of the members in the congregation (both communicant and covenant children), with the dates of their reception (see FOG VIII:9); (3) minutes of the meetings of the congregation;(4) resolutions adopted by the Session; (5) Budgets and appropriate accounting records; (6) its articles or restated articles of incorporation and all amendments to them currently in effect; and (7) its bylaws or restated bylaws and all amendments to them currently in effect.
2. The clerk shall grant extracts of the minutes whenever properly required. A member shall be entitled to an extract provided the Session finds that the member has a proper purpose and is acting in good faith. The Session may limit access to any records that contain confidential information about a particular person or persons.

Article XIII: Biblical Counseling

1. All Christians struggle with sin and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships (see Rom. 3:23; 7:7-25). Whenever a Christian is unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviors through private efforts, God commands that he should seek assistance from other members, and especially from the pastor and elders, who have the responsibility of providing pastoral counseling and oversight (see Rom. 15:14; Gal. 6:1-2; Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 3:16-4:2; Heb. 10:24-25; 13:17; James 5:16). Therefore, this church encourages and enjoins its members to make confession to and seek counsel from each other and especially from our pastoral counselors.
2. We believe that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life. Therefore, our counseling shall be based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry. Neither the pastoral nor the lay counselors of this church are trained or licensed as psychotherapists or mental health professionals, nor should they be expected to follow the methods of such specialists.
3. Although some members of the church work in professional fields outside the church, when serving as pastoral or lay counselors within the church they do not provide the same kind of professional advice and services that they do when they are hired in their professional capacities. Therefore, members who have significant legal, financial, medical or other technical questions should seek advice from independent professionals. Our pastoral and lay counselors shall be available to cooperate with such advisors and help members to consider their advice in the light of relevant scriptural principles.

Article XIV: Confidentiality

1. The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (see Matt. 7:12). It also discourages harmful gossip (Prov. 16:28; 26:20), invites confession (see Prov. 11:13; 28:13; James 5:16), and encourages people to seek needed counseling (see Prov. 20:19; Rom. 15:14). Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of this church, all members are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others. In particular, our pastor and elders shall carefully protect all information that they receive through pastoral counseling, subject to the following guidelines.
2. Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible, there are times when it is appropriate to reveal certain information to others. In particular, when the pastors and elders of this church believe it is biblically necessary, they may disclose confidential information to appropriate people in the following circumstances:

- a. When a pastor or elder is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from other pastors or elders in this church or, if the person attends another church, from the pastors or elders of that church (see Prov. 11:14; 13:10; 15:22; 19:20; 20:18; Matt. 18:15-17).
- b. When the person who disclosed the information or any other person is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (see Prov. 24:11-12).
- c. When a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to institute disciplinary proceedings (see Matt. 18:15-20 and Bylaw §16) or seek the assistance of individuals or agencies outside this church (see, e.g., Rom 13:1-5).

Article XV: Conflict Resolution

1. This church is committed to resolving in a biblical manner all disputes that may arise within our body. This commitment is based on God's command that Christians should strive earnestly to live at peace with one another (see Matt. 5:9; John 17:20-23; Rom. 12:18; and Eph. 4:1-3) and that when disputes arise, Christians should resolve them according to the principles set forth in Holy Scripture (see Prov. 19:11; Matt. 5:23-25; 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 6:1-8; Gal. 6:1). We believe that these commands and principles are obligatory on all Christians and absolutely essential for the well-being and work of the church. Therefore, any and all disputes in this church shall be resolved according to biblical principles, as provided in these bylaws.
2. When a member of this church has a conflict with, or is concerned about the behavior of another member, he shall attempt to resolve the matter as follows. (1) The offended or concerned person shall prayerfully examine himself and take responsibility for his contribution to a problem (Matt. 7:3-5), and he shall prayerfully seek to discern whether the offense is so serious that it cannot be overlooked (Prov. 19:11; see also Prov. 12:16; 15:18; 17:14; 20:3; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13; 1 Pet. 4:8). (2) If the offense is too serious to overlook, the offended or concerned person shall go, repeatedly if necessary, and talk to the offender in an effort to resolve the matter personally and privately, having first confessed his own wrongdoing (Matt. 18:15). (3) If the offender will not listen and if the problem is too serious to overlook, the offended or concerned person shall return with one or two other people who will attempt to help the parties resolve their differences (Matt. 18:16); these other people may be members or officers of the church, other respected Christians in the community, or trained mediators or arbitrators (conciliators) from a Christian conciliation ministry. At the request of either party to the dispute, the church shall make every effort to assist the parties in resolving their differences and being reconciled.
3. Conflicts involving doctrine or church discipline shall be resolved according to the procedures set forth in the Bylaws on Church Discipline and in the Book of Discipline. If any party to such a dispute is dissatisfied with a decision reached by an official judicatory (court or ruling body) of this church, he or she may appeal that decision to our presbytery or general synod as allowed in the Book of Discipline.
4. If a dispute arises within the church or between a member and the church and cannot be resolved through the internal procedures described above, it shall be resolved as follows:
 - a. The dispute shall be submitted to mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration in accordance with the *Rules of Procedure of the Institute for Christian Conciliation*, and judgment upon an arbitration award may be entered in any court otherwise having jurisdiction.

- b. All mediators and arbitrators shall be in agreement with the Westminster Confession of Faith and our basic form of government, unless this requirement is modified or waived by all parties to the dispute.
- c. If a dispute submitted to arbitration involves a decision reached by an official judicatory (court or ruling body) of this church or of our presbytery or general Synod, the arbitrators shall uphold the highest judicatory's decisions on matters of doctrine and church discipline.
- d. This section covers the church as a corporate entity and its agents, including its pastors, officers, staff, and volunteers with regard to any actions they may take in their official capacities.
- e. This section covers any and all disputes or claims arising from or related to church membership, doctrine, policy, practice, counseling, discipline, decisions, actions, or failures to act, including claims based on civil statute personal injury, or other tort, etc, to the extent permitted by law.
- f. By joining this church, all members agree that these methods shall provide the sole remedy for any dispute arising against the church or its agents, and they waive their right to file any legal action against the church in a civil court or agency, except to enforce an arbitration decision.
- g. If a dispute or claim involves an alleged injury or damage to which the church's insurance applies, and if the church's insurer refuses to submit to mediation or arbitration as described in this section, either the church or the member alleging the injury or damage may declare that this section is no longer binding with regard to that part of the dispute or claim to which the church's insurance applies.

Article XVI: Church Discipline

Church discipline shall be carried out according to the Book of Discipline of the Bible Presbyterian Church.

Article XVII: Ownership and Distribution of Property

1. The church shall hold, own, and enjoy its own personal and real property, without any right of reversion to another entity, except as provided in these Bylaws. Should the church decide to withdraw from the Bible Presbyterian Church as provided in Form of Government III:2, the church shall retain ownership of its property. Such withdrawal shall not be considered to be a dissolution.
2. "Dissolution" means the complete disbanding of the church so that it no longer functions as a congregation or as a corporate entity. Upon the dissolution of the church, its property shall be applied and distributed as follows: (1) all liabilities and obligations of the church shall be paid and discharged or adequate provision shall be made therefor; (2) assets held by the church upon condition requiring return, transfer, or conveyance, which condition occurs by reason of the dissolution, shall be returned, transferred, or conveyed in accordance with such requirements; (3) assets received and not held upon a condition requiring return, transfer, or conveyance by reason of the dissolution, shall be transferred or conveyed to one or more domestic or foreign corporations, societies, or organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or the responding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law), and are engaged in activities substantially similar to those of the corporation; this distribution shall be done pursuant to a plan adopted by the Session, or as otherwise required by the laws of the State of _____; and (4) any assets not otherwise disposed of shall be disposed of by a court of competent jurisdiction of the county in which the principal office of the corporation is then located, for such purposes and to such organizations as said court shall

determine, provided such organizations are part of the Bible Presbyterian Church or are one of its approved agencies.

Article XVIII: Indemnification of Officers [*Necessary for non-profits*]

1. The Session may choose to indemnify and advance church-related expenses of any officer, employee, or agent of the church.
2. Subject to the provisions of paragraph c. of this section, the church shall indemnify any pastor, elder or deacon or former pastor, elder or deacon of the church against claims, liabilities, expenses, and costs necessarily incurred by him in connection with the defense, compromise, or settlement of any action, suit or proceeding, civil or criminal, in which such person is made a party by reason of being or having been an elder or deacon, to the extent not otherwise compensated, indemnified or reimbursed by insurance, if:
 - a. The conduct of the pastor, elder or deacon was in good faith;
 - b. The pastor, elder or deacon reasonably believed that his conduct was in the best interests of the church, or at least not opposed to its best interests; and
 - c. In the case of any criminal proceeding, the pastor, elder or deacon had no reasonable cause to believe that his conduct was unlawful.
3. The church may not indemnify a pastor elder or deacon in connection with a proceeding brought against him by or in the right of the church, in which he was adjudged liable to the church, or where the pastor, elder or deacon is charged with receiving an improper personal benefit and he is adjudged liable on that basis.
4. The Session is authorized to obtain insurance coverage to implement the provisions of this bylaw.

Article XIX: Stewardship

As this church believes in the biblical principle of every man giving as he purposes in his heart; not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:6-8) there shall be no money raising “projects” engaged in by the church or any of its organizations. The church recommends the giving of tithes and love offerings, believing God will bless those who honor Him.

Article XX: Pulpit Supply

In selecting speakers it shall be the purpose of this church that no one may fill the pulpit who is not known to be sound in the faith as taught by this church. Because this church believes in the doctrine of separation from apostasy and unbelief, no member of any ecclesiastical body or council judged to be apostate from the orthodox Christian faith by the pastor and Session shall occupy the pulpit. Nor, will this church join in fellowship with other churches connected with these or other apostate councils.

Article XXI: Rules of Order

All meetings of the church, the Session, and its various boards and committees shall be conducted pursuant to the latest edition of *Roberts Rules of Order*.

Article XXII: Amendment of Bylaws

These Bylaws may be amended or repealed only by the affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the voting members present at a duly-called meeting of the church called for such purposes.

SAMPLE MEMBERSHIP CLASS OUTLINE

THE VISIBLE CHURCH

By Rev. Leonard Pine

I. The Purpose of the Local Church

A. To Glorify God I Cor. 10:31

The church is not a place to "get a blessing," nor is it a place to have your needs met primarily: it is a place for God-centered activity; where the members of the congregation are active in worship, and not mere spectators.

B. To Edify Saints Eph. 4:11-15

C. To Guard the Truth 2 Tim. 2:1,2; Jude 3,4

D. To Reconcile Sinners Matt. 28:18-20; II Cor. 5

II. The Activity of the Local Church (Compare with purposes above)

A. Characterized by Spirituality

Like the Spirit, pointing to Christ by our activities. Led by the Spirit, demonstrating discernment in the choices we make. Filled with the Spirit, exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23).

B. Worship Services on the Lord's Day

1. Quantity (How often do we meet, and at what times)

2. Order

3. Atmosphere

4. Music

5. Sacraments

a. Frequency of Observation

b. Participants

6. Giving

7. Role of the congregation

C. Education

1. Sunday School

2. Home School Support

3. Additional training for members

D. Young People

1. "Children's Church"

2. Youth Group

E. Fellowship

In keeping with our understanding of the covenantal relationship between us, we must "not forsake the fellowship of the saints." The church families should fellowship together at every convenient opportunity, both as a whole and as smaller groups, both at planned activities and spontaneous activities. Fellowship is essential to the well-being of the body.

F. Outreach

1. Family Ministries
2. Community Involvement
3. Evangelism/Missions
4. Radio
5. Other

G. The role of women in the church

H. A biblical view of spiritual gifting

III. The People of the Local Church

- A. Cherishing the Savior, they are good disciples. Lk. 9:23; Jn. 14:15
- B. Humble in the Spirit, they are faithful and united in purpose. Phil. 2
- C. Unmovable in their stand, they image the Father consistently. Eph. 6
- D. Rejoicing in fellowship, they lovingly bear each other's burdens. 1Jn. 3
- F. Conscientious in their lives, they show their faith by their works. James 2
- G. Honorable in their actions, they give no cause for the world to blaspheme. Is. 52:5; Rom. 2:17-29

IV. The Doctrine of the Local Church

- A. *Sola Scriptura* and a plain-sense hermeneutic
- B. Creeds and Confessions
- C. The Reformed Faith
 1. Doctrines of Grace
 2. Covenant Theology
 3. The exaltation of Christ and Him crucified

V. The Government of the Local Church

- A. The Chief Shepherd

- B. The Under-shepherds (Officers)
 - 1. Minister
 - a. Qualifications
 - b. Duties
 - 2. Elder
 - a. Qualifications
 - b. Duties
 - 3. Deacon
 - a. Qualifications
 - b. Duties
 - 4. Remuneration
- C. Administration – *As governed by the Church's By-Laws*
 - 1. The Session
 - 2. The Deacons
 - 3. The Trustees
 - 4. Other
- D. Discipline – *As laid out in the BPC Book of Discipline*
 - 1. Preventive
 - a. Purpose
 - b. Attitude
 - c. Method
 - (1) Initial screening of members
 - (2) Visitation by the eldership
 - 2. Remedial
 - a. Purpose
 - b. Attitude
 - c. Method
- E. Relationship to the presbytery and synod

VI. The Situation of the Local Church

- A. Location
- B. Size of Congregation
- C. Building

THE CHARTER ROLL

The Charter Roll is an important part of the historical record of a local church. It is a record of testimony to what God established in a particular region of the world. In generations to come, new members may look back at the testimony of the Charter members.

The Charter Roll is simply an initial roll of members in a congregation of a local church. It is to be opened when interested people commit to becoming members and supporters of the new church.

Prior to establishing the Charter Roll, it is vital to hold initial membership classes so that interested parties can know what they are committing to. The developing church should take steps to explore whether initial people are willing to be supportive members in all ways. Once the initial group is ready to commit to the establishment of the church, the Charter Roll will be opened for a set amount (usually a week or two) so participants can be recorded as official charter members.

After the roll is closed people will be deemed members. It is recommended that the date, name, and address be used to record the Charter Members. Other information like phone numbers and emails are not necessary due to their high turnover rate.

(Example form)

Charter Roll of the Bible Presbyterian Church of _____

We, the undersigned, believing in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ and publicly affirming that we have individually and personally experienced the new birth by receiving Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord, do hereby unite in forming the *Charter Roll* of the **Bible Presbyterian Church of**

We recognize that in thus forming this Church we are lifting the standard “for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” The doctrinal standard of this Church shall be the whole Word of God with our subordinate standard being the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as received by the First General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church, meeting in Collingswood, New Jersey, September 6-8, 1938.

We hereby apply for membership in the _____ **Presbytery of the Bible Presbyterian Church, General Synod.**

Furthermore, we count it a privilege to become part of the historic witness of this church, a branch of the church of which Jesus Christ is Head and the chief Shepherd. By thus entering into this fellowship of Christians, we desire to fulfill the command of our Lord as recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 to preach the Gospel of Salvation to the lost; to build up Christians in the most holy faith; and to be faithful to Christ and His Word until He comes again.

We believe that every Christian has a responsibility before God to lift a voice against every form of unbelief and worldliness. Furthermore, we treasure the heritage of freedom handed down to us by our forefathers who established this nation, and we believe it to be our solemn duty to pray for our country and be responsible citizens.

Date Roll opened: _____

Date Roll closed: _____

[Two columns should follow with space for printed or typed names and signatures of charter members.]

SUGGESTED BAPTISM FORMS

(Example form – adult)

Bible Presbyterian Church Certificate of Baptism

This is to certify that _____
has been baptized, publicly confessing faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior,
on this _____ day of _____ in the year of our Lord 20____.

Witnesses: _____
_____ Pastor

Bible Presbyterian Church of _____
City _____ State: _____

(Baptism record for Church files):

Name of person baptized _____
Date of baptism _____
Administered by _____
Witnesses _____

(Example form – child)

Bible Presbyterian Church Certificate of Baptism

This is to certify that _____ child of _____
Born on the _____ day of _____ in the year of our Lord 20____ has been baptized as a child of the
covenant, and _____ (parents or guardian) have taken solemn vows to bring _____ up
in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Administered at _____ Bible Presbyterian Church _____,
On this _____ day of _____ in the year of our Lord 20____.

Witnesses:

_____ Pastor

(Baptism record for Church files):

Name of child _____
Name of Parents _____
Birth Date _____
Date of baptism _____
Administered by _____
Witnesses _____

MANAGING CHURCH MINUTES

(Sample designed for a 200 page book

Pages

Title Page

Bible Presbyterian Church of (name of city, state) of (name of presbytery)	1
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Table of Contents	2
Church History	3-8
(Registers)	
Register of Members (plan for 100-300 names)	9-16
Register of Elders	17
Register of Deacons	18
Register of Trustees	19
Register of Ministers	20
Church Minutes (This may be divided into separate sections for minutes of congregational meetings, session meetings, deacons or joint officers meetings)	21-191
(Records)	
Record of Baptisms	192-193
Record of Marriages	194
Record of Deaths	195
Other Records of Interest (General information not included in History section, a listing of Mortgages or bond issues, insurance information, etc.)	196-200

SESSION MINUTES

Essentials of sessional records include:

- Kind of meeting – regular (stated) or called (special) or adjourned (regular) or adjourned (special).
- Name of church.
- Date, time and place of meeting.
- The opening prayer and scripture passage read.
- Note who is presiding and names of all in attendance.
- Note if minutes of previous meeting were approved, or their reading dispensed with by motion.
- Record all the main motions, except such as were withdrawn, and points of order and appeals, whether sustained or lost, and all other motions that were not lost or withdrawn. Generally, the name of the person who introduced a motion is recorded and, when possible, the name of the one seconding the motion.
- Record a note about other business discussed, so there is preserved a record of the general content of the meeting.
- Show the hours of the meeting, the motion to adjourn, and the closing prayer.
- When approved, it is customary for the minutes to be signed by the moderator (Pastor) as well as the Clerk of Session. Example: Date of approval ____; Signature of Clerk ____; Signature of moderator _____.
- When a previous action of the Session is referred to, the page or pages on which it is recorded should be designated.
- Minutes should be kept in a permanent record book with numbered pages. (*Purchase information on page 00*).
- The record should include mention of the full names of any changes in the roll through death, dismissal, discipline or new membership.
- Every person named in minutes should be properly addressed.
- Keep the good name of fellow believers, report the meeting objectively, keep personalities out of the minutes except for recording those who make and second motions.
- Erasures, interlineations, and footnotes should be avoided as much as possible.

PRESERVING YOUR CHURCH HISTORY

The Bible contains much material of historical significance as it traces the story of the people of God. Names, places and events are recorded. We would do well to be conscious of our heritage.

In Moses' song, recorded in Deuteronomy 32, we find this admonition: "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations."

Telling the Story of Your Church

3. Appoint a Historian:

- Select someone with qualifications; someone familiar with your church and one who will give attention to details and has the time to begin such a task. They should be trustworthy in keeping track of and returning materials from other people. The appointment should be a three year term.

4. Begin to plan and gather materials:

- Begin with church files, with former officers and with members. Look for record books, picture albums, scrapbooks, and ministerial record books. Also, some church members will have photo collections, back issues of your church newsletter, bulletins and flyers.
- Make lists of church events, pastors who have served, and church leaders through the years. Also list records of baptisms, marriages and funerals. Include groundbreaking and dedications of new buildings, recordings of sermons and special events from as many of the church's pastors as possible.

5. Learn how to preserve historical materials:

- Put photos and documents into albums designed for preservation made with acid-free materials. Most inexpensive albums do not meet this requirement and may seriously damage photos and documents.
- Transfer written records onto paper that resists deterioration (acid-free) or scan into a computer and save on a CD.
- Organize and catalog your materials, using binders, folders and boxes to keep things in good order. Also maintain an inventory.
- Duplicate as much material as possible and keep the duplicates in a separate location.

6. Suggestions of types of materials to preserve:

- Orders of service – general and special service folders such as installations, funerals, ground-breaking, laying of a corner stone, dedications and other special events.
- Photographs – of personnel, ministers, officers, buildings, properties, special events, Sunday schools, youth groups, etc. If possible, identify the people in the photos.
- Films, videos, and audio recordings of special events.
- Equipment – items such as special worship materials and paraphernalia used in services, mission activities and any materials that may be helpful in the future in depicting the mode of life or worship in your church. Discretion needs to be used in preserving these items.
- Diaries, scrapbooks, congregational organizational histories – these may be kept by individuals and would be welcome gifts to the church archives.
- Miscellaneous – any documents, manuscripts, leaflets, pamphlets, etc., relating to the work of the church.

ORDER OF WORSHIP

The following order of worship reflects what is typically present in a Bible Presbyterian service, with some variation in order at the discretion of the local Session and pastor(s). All of these elements should be present, though: prayers of invocation, petition, confession, and blessing; songs, hymns, and spiritual songs; Scripture reading and response; the Word; giving.

Prelude/Silent prayer

Call to Worship

*Doxology

*Invocation/The Lord's Prayer

*Gloria Patri

*Hymn of Praise

Responsive Reading

Hymn of Petition

Pastoral Prayer

Prayer Response

Tithes and Offerings [can eliminate if a box or plate is available by the door as people arrive and leave

*Scripture Reading

Sermon

[Hymn

Communion celebration at the Lord's Table]

*Hymn of Praise

*Benediction

*3-fold Amen

Postlude/Silent Prayer

**Congregation standing, please*

A PLAN FOR TEACHING THE SHORTER CATECHISM IN SUNDAY SCHOOL

WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Nursery

Beginners

Quarters	2 yrs old	3 yrs old	4 yrs. old	5 yrs. old
First Quarter	Q. 1-5	Q. 21-29	Q. 57-67	Q. 101-112
Second Quarter	Q. 6-10	Q. 30-38	Q. 68-78	Q. 113-124
Third Quarter	Q. 11-15	Q. 39-47	Q. 79-89	Q. 125-136
Forth Quarter	Q. 16-20	Q. 48-56	Q. 90-100	Q. 137-145

WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM FOR PRIMARY TO NINTH GRADE

Intermediate Grades

Primary Grades

Junior Grades

Quarters	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth	Seventh	Eighth	Ninth
1st Qtr.	Q. 1-10	Q. 41-50	Q. 81-90	Q. 1-10	Q. 41-50	Q. 81-90	Q. 1-10	Q. 41-50	Q. 81-90
2 nd Qtr.	Q. 11-20	Q. 51-60	Q 91-100	Q. 11-20	Q. 51-60	Q.91-100	Q. 11-20	Q. 51-60	Q 91-100
3 rd Qtr.	Q. 21-30	Q. 61-70	100-107	Q. 21-30	Q. 61-70	101-107	Q. 21-30	Q. 61-70	100-107
4th Qtr.	Q. 31-40	Q. 71-80	Review	Q. 31-40	Q. 71-80	Review	Q. 31-40	Q. 71-80	Review

WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM FOR TENTH GRADE TO ADULT

Seniors

Adults

Quarters	Tenth	Eleventh	Twelfth	First Year	Second Year	Third Year
1st Qtr.	Q. 1-10	Q. 41-50	Q. 81-90	Q. 1-10	Q. 41-50	Q. 81-90
2 nd Qtr.	Q. 11-20	Q. 51-60	Q 91-100	Q. 11-20	Q. 51-60	Q 91-100
3 rd Qtr.	Q. 21-30	Q. 61-70	100-107	Q. 21-30	Q. 61-70	100-107
4th Qtr.	Q. 31-40	Q. 71-80	Review	Q. 31-40	Q. 71-80	Review

The 3 R's **READ, RECITE, REVIEW**

READ aloud, in unison. Repeat 5 times

RECITE, looking away, in unison, 5 times

REVIEW individually and together



AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO CATECHISM STUDIES FOR SUNDAY SCHOOLS

In small or newly-formed assemblies, having a full-fledged graded Sunday School can be impossible due to lack of personnel and/or resources. By using the following method as an alternative, good education in basic theology is not only possible, but has these added benefits:

- ✓Train Fathers to Teach - Deut. 4:9
- ✓Communicate Oneness of the Body - Neh. 8:1-8
- ✓"Nourishment" Principle - Deut. 6:4-9; Eph. 6:4; Ps. 78:4-7

This model has three goals for the catechism study time in Sunday School. First, we want everyone to be grounded in the basics of the Christian faith. Second, we desire to encourage parents to exercise their role as teachers in their homes, particularly fathers. Third, we want to maintain pastoral oversight in our Bible study efforts, of which the catechism is a part.

The Program - Family Catechism Study: A Four-Pronged Strategy

1. Pastor's Introduction

After congregational singing at the beginning of the hour (usually 2 or 3 songs and sometimes a special number), the pastor delivers a 15-minute practical introduction to the week's catechism question. Though he should address the children present as well, the primary focus is to adults.

2. Family Application

After the introduction, the group splits up into families. Each father will lead his own family in a 15-minute follow-up time relating my overview to questions and issues important to his family. Young people without parents present, families without fathers present, adults without children at home, or new families who just want to see what all this is about are led by one or more of the elders.

The follow-up time is not to be a prepared lesson, but rather a time to apply and discuss what was covered in the introduction. Fathers use the time also for memory work and preparing the way for studying the doctrine further during the week.

3. Monthly Study Guides

The people are also given proof texts weekly in the bulletin, and study guides are published monthly to help parents anticipate which direction the pastor is going with a question. Of course, parents are free to develop the doctrine as the Lord leads during the week.

4. Elder Follow-up

Frequent contact by session w/ parents to minimize confusion and provide a measure of accountability.

Advantages

Can be used with any curriculum.

= Keeps curriculum development under pastoral oversight while encouraging individual initiative and study.

=Provides a mechanism for training parents in a nurturing, "hands-on" manner; while, at the same time, it encourages kids to participate more freely since peer pressure is eliminated.

= Allows parents and session to work together as a team, following the biblical principle of church leadership equipping saints for the ministry instead of doing it all themselves.

=Restores (indeed, demands) to parents their rightful appointment as the primary teachers in the home.

Once the church reaches sufficient size that space limitations and sheer numbers make this program unwieldy, a more traditional program can be enacted. Sunday Schools are not a biblical mandate, but they can be a very useful tool in assisting parents in the task of raising their children in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The benefits of this program outlined above will continue to bear fruit even when the methodology changes, too.

[If you are under PMU as a home missionary, this form must be submitted monthly]

PMU HOME MISSIONS MONTHLY REPORT

Month/Year _____

Pastor's Name _____

Attendance Record (Record number in each service in blanks below)

Date	Sunday School	A.M. Worship	P.M. Worship	Midweek Worship	Other

Statistics

- Number of officers:
- Number of Sunday School classes/teachers:
- Number of members:
- Number of covenant children:
- Number of adherents:

Church Financial Report (Please attach a copy of your budget to your **first** report.)

- Income from offerings:
- Income from other sources:
- Total Income:
- Expenses (please broadly itemize by category on reverse side of this page)

Pastoral activities engaged in this month (visitation, hospital calls, counseling, evangelistic work, door-to-door work, etc.) Continue on back, if necessary

News, prayer requests, and items for praise: Continue on back, if necessary.

New contacts made [Name(s), Contact information, anticipated relationship]

Future goals for your ministry. Continue on back, if necessary.

Submit to the home office as soon after the end of the month as practical:

PO Box 879; 1283 Homestead Loop, Bonners Ferry, ID 83805 • For details, contact the office: pmu@bpc.org

CONSIDER YOUR CHURCH

An objective look at your church's strengths and weaknesses on a regular basis will help to isolate areas that need improvement and, at the same time, identify areas that strengthen your congregation and so should be continued or expanded.

1. What is the most helpful thing going on in your congregation, now?
2. What are your church officers doing that is pro-active in achieving your ministry goals?
3. What do our church finances look like?
4. Identify your church's greatest need.
5. If your church were a business, how would you evaluate it?
6. What are the percentages of the makeup of your congregation?
Under 21 _____% 22-50 _____% 51-plus _____%
Youth & unmarried _____ Married with children _____% Retired _____%
7. Do you have an age gap? (Such as, children & retirees)
8. Do you have consistent Sunday school attendance? Prayer meeting attendance?
9. List your church's strengths.
10. What is an achievable goal for the next 12 months?
11. If you had an assistant, what would they do?
12. Do your officers work together? Are they supportive of you?
13. What do you do that might be unnecessary?
14. What do you do that others could do?
15. What are you doing to train future leaders?
16. Do you have things in place that are specific for children? Youth? Singles? Young families? Retirees?
17. Describe your church outreach into your community.
18. Do you have a visitor follow-up system?
19. Describe your worship: its strong points and its weak points.
20. How do you promote your church and its ministry?
21. Have you done a "drive by survey" of your church property to see what passersby see?
22. What would you like to be doing differently?

OUTREACH IDEAS

- Vacation Bible School
 - Traditional, on site
 - Mobile team effort (take it to the community rather than expect them to come to you)
- Canvassing campaigns
 - Mailings
 - Door hangers
 - Surveys
 - Pointed evangelism
- Street preaching
- Community event participation
 - Fairs
 - Celebrations
 - Sporting events (running concessions, handing out tracts, etc.)
- Radio broadcasts
- Regular newspaper columns
- Signage on church property
- Personal evangelism training and implementation through the laity
 - Hospitality
 - Neighbors
 - Co-workers
 - Strangers and casual acquaintances
- Neighborhood Bible clubs
- College ministry
- Shelter and Nursing Home ministry
- “Salt and Light” citizenship activism on moral and religious issues in society
- Special public meetings, well announced and advertised
- Christian film events
- Coffee shop/reading rooms in high traffic areas of a city/town
- Camps and retreats for unchurched youth and families – in addition to usual Presbytery camps
- Service ministries to immigrant populations
 - ESL classes
 - Moving and adjustment helps
 - Providing furnishings and other needful items

CHURCH PLANTING LINKS & RESOURCES

Presbyterianism

What is Presbyterianism? by Charles Hodge, D.D.

<http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/wip.html>

What is Meant by Adopting the Westminster Confession? by Charles Hodge, D.D.

<http://www.puritansermons.com/reformed/hodge01.htm>

What is a Bible Presbyterian Church?

<http://presbyterianmissions.org/what-is-bpc/>

The Apostolic Church - Which is it?

<http://www.apuritansmind.com/WCF/WitherowThomasApostolicChurchWhich.htm>

Church Polity

Session Minutes Books

Fine black and maroon simulated leather binder with pull rod and posts which can be permanently sealed.

Minutes of Session Binder with Pull Rod and 200 Sheets

<http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/ProductDetail.aspx?pid=319243>

Minutes Sessions Book Pages 1-400

<http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/ProductDetail.aspx?pid=317491>

Resources for effectively recording minutes

Websites:

How to take Minutes Resources

<http://www.wikihow.com/Take-Minutes>

Books:

Taking Minutes of Meetings (Creating Success)

by Joanna Gutmann

The Corporate Minutes Book: A Legal Guide to Taking Care of Corporate Business

by Anthony Mancuso

Resources for effective procedure

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Robert's Rules

by MA, PRP, CPP-T, Nancy Sylvester

Robert's Rules of Order (Full and summary versions)

<http://www.robertsrules.com/>

Church Planting

Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours? By Roland Allen

http://www.gospeltruth.net/miss_methods.htm

Catechism Resources

Westminster Shorter Catechism Project

http://bpc.org/resources/shortcat_iframe.html

Shorter Catechism for Young Children

http://www.reformed.org/documents/cat_for_young_children.html