

Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church

The Committee on Home Missions
and Church Extension
of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Willow Grove, Pennsylvania
2002

This manual provides an introduction to church planting in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is about what you need to know and do as an organizing pastor, as an overseeing elder, or as a member of a presbytery home missions committee working to establish the permanent ministry of a Presbyterian and Reformed church.

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Preface

The genesis of this manual, entitled *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, was a plea from the regional home missionaries and the chairmen of presbytery home missions committees who attended the 1999 Regional Church Extension Conference, sponsored by the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The Committee also was sensitive to the need for such a document, but was concerned about three related questions: (1) Who was available to write it? (2) How would it be possible to have the requisite time for study and the composition of such a work? (3) Assuming these first two questions could be answered, where would we find someone who was sensitive to the diversity of theological opinion and practice within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), and who, at the same time, would be able to produce a document that would enhance the already existing confessional and ecclesiastical unity in the OPC?

The General Secretary and the newly called Associate General Secretary of the Committee began collecting information that they believed could be useful in the production of this manual. The Committee began to think that a manual on Orthodox Presbyterian church planting endeavors could be produced under its oversight. At its December 2000 meeting, the Committee granted the General Secretary, the Rev. Ross W. Graham, a sabbatical to produce such a document.

Throughout the writing process, Rev. Graham sought to remember the Committee's encouragements that any document produced be both principled (that is, Biblically and confessionally faithful) and practical (which is defined in the OPC as practice that flows out of Scripture itself). Rev. Graham presented the first draft to the September 2001 meeting of the Committee, where it underwent an initial critique and revision. Several individuals within the OPC were also contacted for their input. Additionally, the manual underwent a rigorous review and subsequent revision at the November 2001 Regional Church Extension Conference by OPC presbytery leaders in church planting. At its December 2001 meeting, the

Committee conducted a final review and approved the manual for publication.

The Committee is grateful to God for all who have put so much of their time into the theological and stylistic editing necessary to produce this document. Most of all, we are grateful to our Lord for giving us servants like Rev. Graham and his wife, Nikki, who labored countless hours in various aspects of the production of this document. We thank God for Rev. Graham, whose godly passion to serve the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by planting and nurturing churches faithful to Christ is an edifying testimony to us all. Although this manual is written by Rev. Graham, it should be apparent that this document is one in which a cross section of the OPC has had significant input.

It is with considerable rejoicing that the Committee presents this manual to the OPC. We believe that this document is Biblically principled, OPC-practical, theologically faithful, and sufficiently sensitive to the various points on which we disagree. Our prayer is that our sessions, presbyteries, presbytery home missions committees, and church planters will receive and make extensive use of this manual in planting new Orthodox Presbyterian churches and making more and spiritually stronger disciples of Christ, to the ever-increasing glory of God in the twenty-first century.

*The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension
December 12, 2001*

Introduction

WHY A MANUAL?

God has chosen to bless the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) with the establishment of many new congregations during each of the past several years. The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (CHMCE), which has been charged with the task of overseeing and assisting in the process of getting them started, has stood in awe of the power and blessing of our covenant God. He has surpassed all the goals we established. He has supplied the resources to fund new churches when budgets had not planned for them and when giving forecasts had not expected that it could happen. He has both humbled us and increased our faith. The OPC is growing by the addition of new people coming from various traditions of Reformed and evangelical expression to serve as the core groups of our new mission works. They often come with unrealistic or inaccurate assumptions about their new denomination. And they are frequently pastored by young church planters who have much energy, knowledge, and zeal, but lack a clear idea of what the task of establishing a new Reformed church entails.

This outpouring of God's blessing of growth on the OPC is also occurring at a time when many methodologies for starting and sustaining new churches have become suspect. During the last three decades of the twentieth century, the Church Growth movement substantially impacted the ecclesiastical scene. An overemphasis on growth and numbers, coupled with what seems to be the advocacy of sociological rather than Biblical principles, has left the Reformed community in sharp disagreement with much of contemporary church practice. In addition, because the Church Growth movement identifies church planting as the most effective means of evangelism, the whole process of establishing new churches has become suspect within the Reformed community. Is church planting merely a means to an end? Is the establishment of new churches just another Church Growth methodology? Decidedly not! But what then are the cor-

rect principles and the appropriate methodologies for Orthodox Presbyterians to follow? This manual will attempt to answer these questions.

As the number of our new churches increases, it has become clear that a general knowledge among us of the skills, practices, and competencies required to establish a new Reformed congregation has been overestimated. Our home missions committees, our regional home missionaries, and CHMCE 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 overseeing 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 OPC.

THIS MANUAL WILL BE FOR ESTABLISHING PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED CHURCHES

In producing this manual, the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension has made a choice about its focus. Rather than serving as a general study of church planting, this manual will be about starting Orthodox Presbyterian (OP) churches. While that focus may appear to limit its audience, the Committee 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 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 meth-

odologies 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 OP 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, 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 be the normal method employed by us in our church planting efforts. 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 us, they are 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 an OP 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.

OTHER RESOURCES

This manual is intended as a companion to the explanation of the policies and procedures of CHMCE detailed in its *Manual for Presbytery/CHMCE Partnership*. Additional suggested resources, examples, and materials are available and regularly updated under the Home Missions menu on the OPC Web site, www.opc.org.

1

Understanding the Work of Church Planting

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, overseeing 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.

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 OPC 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.

About the history of the Church growth movement

The Church growth movement may inadvertently be traced to a book published by a Presbyterian minister in 1886. Dr. John Nevius was a Presbyterian station missionary to China who began to call into question the methods employed by previous generations of foreign missionaries. Using Biblical principles to critique missionary methods regularly employed when he arrived in China in the late 1870s, he wrote a series of articles on the subject, which were collected into a book entitled *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*. Nevius was critical of the inappropriate payment of foreign nationals to become professional missionary representatives and of the whole process of creating foreign missionary stations, which provided living quarters for the foreign missionaries, but kept them isolated from the people they had been sent to reach. The indigenous church principles which he advocated quickly became known as the Nevius method and were adopted *in toto* by the Presbyterian Mission to Korea in 1894. The phenomenal growth of the Presbyterian Church in Korea is a notable chapter in the history of missions.

Orthodox Presbyterian missionary to Korea, Bruce Hunt, in his 1958 preface to the fourth edition of Nevius's book, paid high tribute to these indigenous principles and the Biblical exegesis which undergirded them. He recounted how successive generations of Presbyterian missionaries were required to learn the principles and had to pass an exam on the contents of the book before moving to the field. And he went on to comment on the significant impact these principles played in the development of missionary work in Korea, as well as in other countries where they had been employed, such as Ceylon, Madras, Japan, Uganda, and West Africa.

In 1970 the father of the modern Church growth movement, Donald McGavran, published his major work, *Understanding Church Growth*. It was a summary of twenty years of observation and research about how individual denominations and the national Churches of emerging Third World countries grow. Frequent citations of the pioneering work of John Nevius and of the employment of his indigenous church principles in the Presbyterian Church in Korea and elsewhere are evidence of the focus of McGavran's study and passion. He was interested in discovering how God was causing the growth of national Churches and individual denominations—hence, “understanding” Church growth.

However, the careful reader of the original edition of McGavran's work will also notice a distinct stylistic method used by the author to clarify the focus of his study. When the words “Church growth” appear together in

this original volume, “Church” always appears with the uppercase *C*, while the word “growth” always appears in the lowercase. The original intent of the Church growth movement was to make missiological observations about how God was expanding the size and strength of national Churches on the foreign mission field.

But from these missiological beginnings, the Church Growth movement took on a life of its own. By 1974 McGavran had teamed with Win Arn to write *How to Grow a Church*. Here two subtle assumptions were made. First, it was assumed that if individual, local churches in the United States could copy the methods employed by the Churches that God was blessing in other parts of the world, then they could enjoy similar growth. Second, it was assumed that sociological observation is just as valid as theological construct. The “homogeneous unit principle,” which observes that people prefer to make a profession of faith and to attend a church among others from their own social and ethnic background, and therefore urges that churches structure themselves into homogeneous social and ethnic fellowships, is an example of this. And in 1977, with the publishing of *Ten Steps for Church Growth*, by McGavran and Arn, the Church Growth movement introduced a new element into their discipline—the practice and process of church planting now became a part of the study and focus of Church Growth.

However, when the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension 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. No 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 Re-

formed mission work look like when it is ready to be organized as a new and separate congregation of the Orthodox 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 Orthodox 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 Orthodox 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 Orthodox 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 overseeing 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. Nor is it 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. Chapters 4 and 5 of this manual discuss in some detail matters of propriety, decorum, and administration.

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.

2

Beginning a Mission Work

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 Orthodox 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 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 OPC 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 Orthodox 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 Orthodox Presbyterian church.

Follow up contacts—The phone and e-mail at the CHMCE offices bring news almost daily of another family interested in seeing an Orthodox 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 OP 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 Orthodox 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 OPC, 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. The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension keeps on hand a ready supply of materials about the ministry and history of the Orthodox 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 believ-

ers to become familiar with each other and to learn together about the OPC and its approach to ministry. The study is usually held on a week-night and runs for a duration of between four weeks and three months. It generally encompasses examples of the exegetical and theological approaches of the OPC 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 OP mission work. They give core group members the opportunity to sample the kind of preaching and worship they would experience as part of the OPC, 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 Orthodox Presbyterian church, has no membership, and usually few or none are members of the OPC. 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 OPC. 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 functioning of Worldwide Outreach and the expectation of their participation in it will be important. Describing how a session, a presbytery, and the general assembly function in the OPC will also be important. On the other hand, they will need to know about the diversity of views and opinions in the OPC. 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 OPC 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 OPC before they make their decision to seek affiliation. If possible, encourage them to visit other OP churches, and bring in a diversity of Orthodox 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 OP 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 OPC 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 OPC 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 Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The work of church planting is a spiritual undertaking, and the presbyteries of the OPC 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 OPC.

FORMING A GROUP INTO A MISSION WORK

In its *Manual for Presbytery/CHMCE Partnership*, the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension explains the governmental process by which the Orthodox 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 new and separate 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 Orthodox Presbyterian church, the group must willingly commit itself to the process of being formed into a mission work. By OP 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 separate congregation of the Orthodox 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 Orthodox 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 Orthodox 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 OPC 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 OPC, 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 Orthodox 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 Church. 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 overseeing session. In that way, the emerging con-

gregation 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 the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, who are able to bring godly wisdom into difficult and rapidly changing circumstances. In addition, by participating in CHMCE'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 is one of the most important things a presbytery does to assist with its development as an emerging church. An entire chapter of

this manual (Chapter 4) 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?

The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension 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 Orthodox 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 OPC 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. Because the fielding of a church planter usually requires significant funding from outside the mission work, which comes from the presbytery and the denominational Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, representatives of those bodies need to be involved in the process of selecting the man. In this regard, it is best to keep in mind that CHMCE has a policy that it should be involved in the selection process of the evangelist when it is anticipated that denominational financial aid will be requested for his support. 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 OPC 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, it is the home missions committee of the presbytery which is usually the committee assigned to supervise the development of the mission work and the call and employment of a church planter. First, the 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, which is then presented to the presbytery for its action, along with supporting budget recommendations to cover the cost of his salary and benefits.

3

Overseeing a Mission Work

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 OPC 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 new and separate 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 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 OVERSEEING 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 appears that they provided the initial elder structure while new churches were being formed. The Orthodox 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 overseeing 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 overseeing session members

Sometimes the entire session of a local church in another community is appointed by the presbytery to be the overseeing 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 overseeing 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 OPC.

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 overseeing 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 Orthodox 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 overseeing 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 overseeing 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

At this location in the electronic version of the manual on the OPC Web site, a checklist for clerks of overseeing sessions may be found, along with suggestions for keeping minutes and for establishing and maintaining church membership rolls.

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 overseeing 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 overseeing 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 OVERSEEING 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 overseeing 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 overseeing 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. Technically, their membership may be either in an established “mother” church or on the roll of the Regional Church itself. But the overseeing 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 new congregation.

Providing spiritual care and nurture

Designated members of the overseeing 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 overseeing 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 overseeing 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 overseeing 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 overseeing 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 overseeing 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 Orthodox Presbyterian Church, also has full responsibility and authority to exercise discipline and correction.

Making congregational decisions

The overseeing 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 OPC Form of Government does not make provision for a mission work to decide these matters formally. So the overseeing 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 overseeing session would do well to make provision for these matters before problems arise.

4

Doing the Work of an Organizing Pastor

Those who take on the role of an organizing pastor are involved in a unique kind of work. As was discussed briefly in Chapter 2, 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 pas-

tor that he is willing to make the sacrifices necessary to see it accomplished? The remainder of this chapter 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.

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 Orthodox 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 OPC 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 OPC'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. In a marvelous book published in 1954, but now out of print, entitled *Biblical Evangelism Today*, Calvin Knox Cummings and John Murray put forth just this case. More will be said about this in Chapter 5. 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 earning the right to share your faith with 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 instruc-

tions 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. As the OPC Directory for the Public Worship of God explains, "A service of public worship is in its essence a meeting of God and His people." So 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.

At this location in the electronic version of the manual on the OPC Web site, samples may be found of attractive and effective printed materials from various mission works.

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 oth-

ers. 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.

At this location in the electronic version of the manual on the OPC Web site, you can find a list and descriptions of portable keyboards, sound systems, and recorded musical accompaniment CDs and tapes that mission works have found useful over the past several years.

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.

5

Developing a Mission Work into an Organized Congregation

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.

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 overseeing 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 overseeing 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 overseeing session and the organizing pastor to individual members 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 Orthodox 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 spiri-

tual 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 overseeing session will often conclude that a robust Sunday school ministry is one of the best ways to care for the whole flock.

At this location in the electronic version of the manual on the OPC Web site, information may be found concerning well-thought-out Sunday school programs developed by organized congregations and mission works, as well as links to ideas provided by the OPC's Committee on Christian Education and by Great Commission Publications.

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.

At this location in the electronic version of the manual on the OPC Web site, information from various churches and individuals may be found concerning how to set up a catechetical program in a local church.

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.

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.

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 and theological conferences, and Reformation Day celebrations are examples of additional methods of promoting the spiritual growth of the church's people.

At this location in the electronic version of the manual on the OPC Web site, a list may be found of current means and methods used in a number of OP churches and mission works around the country to promote the spiritual growth of their 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.

Biblical Evangelism Today—

Following a time-honored precedent

In 1954 the Committee on Christian Education of the OPC published a challenging study on the work of outreach and evangelism from a Reformed perspective, entitled *Biblical Evangelism Today*. This marvelous document is valuable for two reasons. First, it provides a careful and studied theological discussion of the gospel. Second, written as it was before the rise of the Church Growth movement by contributors including Calvin Knox Cummings and John Murray, the arguments move seamlessly between a discussion of the theological nature of the gospel and the practical methods and means of communicating that gospel to a lost world. Chapter headings include "The Evangelistic Meeting," "Extensive Survey Work," "Group Evangelism," and "Radio Evangelism." One of the values of this docu-

At this location in the electronic version of the manual on the OPC Web site, the text of *Biblical Evangelism Today* now out of print, may be accessed and downloaded.

ment is that it demonstrates that a zeal for evangelism rightly conceived is intimately connected to means and methods of communicating the gospel. So what follows is a brief discussion of means and methods for gospel communication for churches conducting their ministries in the twenty-first century.

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.

At this location in the electronic version of the manual on the OPC Web site, samples of print advertising and lists and descriptions of public meetings and radio and television outreach programs used by various OP churches and mission works around the country may be found.

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 congre-

gation. 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 overseeing 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.

Managing finances

The person who writes the checks for the financial obligations of the church should never be the person who handles or deposits the offerings. 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 overseeing 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 the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, 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 overseeing 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 be-

gun 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. 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 OP mission works when they begin receiving financial assistance from the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension.

At this location in the electronic version of the manual on the OPC Web site, information may be found concerning various issues of a legal nature which affect churches, as well as a financial setup checklist for a new mission work.

Establishing good member care practices

Members and regular attenders 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 attenders 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 attenders 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 overseeing 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.

6

Organizing a Mission Work as a New Congregation

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 Orthodox 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 overseeing 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 overseeing 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. (See the diagram on page 80.) 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 that can vow, "In reliance

upon God for strength ... [we] promise to walk together as a church of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God and the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church” (Form of Government XXIX, A, 3, d).

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 and its home missions committee, along with the overseeing 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 or a political interest group. Do they understand what the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is? Do they share the OPC’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 OPC.

Evaluative questions for the overseeing 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, the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension 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 Chapter 5 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 Chapter 5, 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 Orthodox Presbyterian Church, a mission work is not ready to be organized as a new congregation until the elders are trained and ready to take up their responsibilities. But the role of the organizing pastor and the overseeing 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 "rever-

ent,” 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 overseeing session of the mission work. The particular training materials and methods used are matters for overseeing 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

There are a number of standard training courses which have been developed over the past several years by OP pastors and sessions and which may be reviewed and accessed at this location in the electronic version of the manual on the OPC Web site.

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 Christian 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 overseeing 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 overseeing 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 Orthodox Presbyterian Church interface with the particular work of the local church. This work of carefully wording the church's constitution and bylaws (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 Orthodox 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 by-laws 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 Orthodox Presbyterian Church and regulates only those matters left to the congregation to decide. These are few in number and may be found in a sample document in the *Manual for Presbytery/CHMCE Partnership*, published by the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension. 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 OPC must have some kind of official document that includes a clause relating it to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and identifying the OPC's *Book of Church Order* 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. The congregation also sets the number of elders and deacons which serve at any one time and identifies which officers and members 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. Most congregations also choose to describe the process of how a pulpit committee is formed and how a pastor is chosen. More recently, some congregations have included procedures about how finances will be handled or stipulations regarding members who work with children.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE PRESBYTERY

The presbytery of the Regional Church is a wonderful friend and helper in the process of organizing a mission work as a new congregation. The organizing pastor and the overseeing 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 Orthodox 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. 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. Third, after all these details are acted upon and reported to the presbytery, it authorizes and conducts an actual service of reception, at which the church is acknowledged and organized as a congregation of the OPC, and during which its officers and pastor are installed.

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.

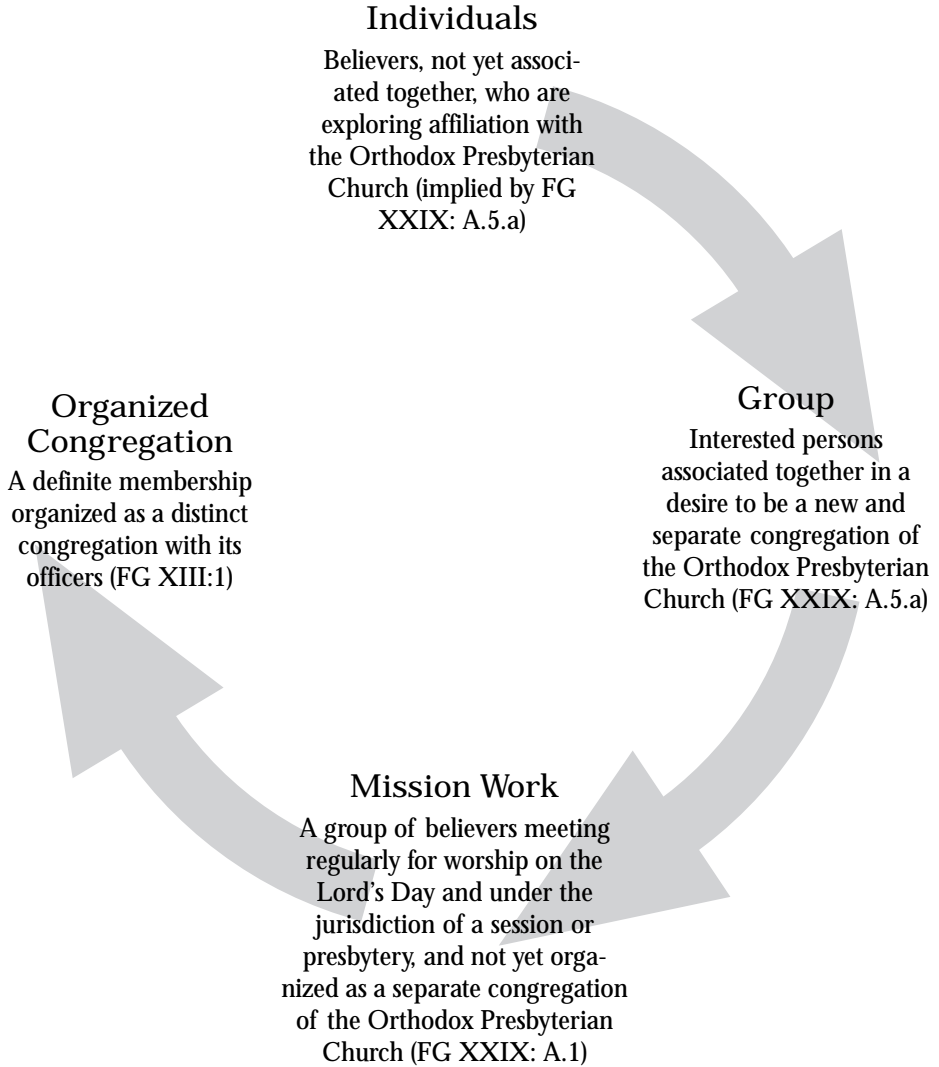
A petition to be received as a mission work is sent to the presbytery at the very beginning of their official relationship to the presbytery. This is usually a letter signed by the individuals who comprise the group and to which the presbytery responds by receiving the group as a mission work and assigning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

A petition to be organized as a new and separate 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.

Samples of these three documents are available upon request from the offices of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL DEVELOPMENT OF AN ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



7

Leading the Particular Church into Its Future

Once a mission work is organized as a new and separate congregation of the OPC, 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 Orthodox 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 Orthodox 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

Orthodox 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 Orthodox 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, Orthodox 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 Orthodox 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 Committee on Christian Education, training and discipleship materials are made available, hymnbooks and worship materials are printed and distributed, ruling elders and deacons are trained, and men are equipped and provided with internships as they take up God's call to be pastors and evangelists. Through its Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, new churches are established throughout North America and, on an ever-increasing basis, Christ's sheep are brought in proximity to shepherds. And through its Committee on Foreign Missions, 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 Orthodox Presbyterian Church is invited and urged to shoulder this ministry of Worldwide Outreach by praying for it, supporting it financially, and being open to God's call for some of its people to go. Current information about these ministries can be obtained in the pages of the OPC's denominational magazine, *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. Congregations throughout the OPC have adopted these ministries as their own.

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 Orthodox 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 OPC 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 Orthodox Presbyterian Church has a rich heritage of commitment to a Reformed expression of Christianity and to a doctrinal emphasis in its preaching and teaching ministry. It holds ruling elders in high regard, and it also values the distinct office of the minister. And it loves to sing psalms, as well as hymns and spiritual songs. 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

The concept of the Regional Church is a unique construct within the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is a logical extrapolation of Biblical church polity, which reasons that if the local church has its session and the whole church has its general assembly, then it is the Regional Church which has, and is governed by, its presbytery. This construct of the Regional Church is now in operation and being

perfected in a growing number of presbyteries of the OPC. Since students of Presbyterian polity agree that the middle court has always been the strength of the Presbyterian system of government, this concept of the Regional Church may possibly be the next step in the development of a more consistent and robust form of Presbyterianism as it has developed since reaching the shores of the New World in the early 1700s.

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 Regional Church and its 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 new and separate 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 Regional Church

Some Regional Churches are more active than others. Some hold joint worship services in a central location. Some have newsletters that tell of what is happening in each local congregation. Each Regional Church is involved in at least some intensive work of ministry to and for their young people, and most have family camp ministries and some form of cooperative outreach efforts. Get to know about the ministries of your Regional Church 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 a youth pastor, or for the establishment of a ministry to the homeless with the hiring of a full-time deacon.

Serve as a ministry center

Reformed churches, because of their commitment to Biblical authority and doctrinal preciseness, can excel as centers of ministry resources. Many Orthodox Presbyterian churches 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—Through the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Loan Fund, the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension provides counsel and advice concerning building plans and programs and provides loans to build or purchase worship and meeting structures. The Board of Directors of the OPC Loan Fund has adopted a policy that mission works and newly organized congregations are to re-

ceive the special attention of the ministry of the Loan Fund because of the importance of a permanent meeting location for the ministry of each particular church.

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.

MOVE FORWARD IN THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD

Newly organized congregations of the Orthodox 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).

Glossary of Terms

Borrowed elder: a ruling elder or minister appointed by a presbytery or a session to provide spiritual oversight for the people of a mission work.

Church planter: the organizing pastor of a mission work.

Core group: an informal collection of believers who are exploring the possibility that God may be calling them together to plant an Orthodox Presbyterian church.

Evangelist: an ordained minister who is called to serve as the organizing pastor of a mission work.

Mission work: 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 separate congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Office-bearer: a man who has been trained, elected, ordained, and installed in one of the Biblical offices of minister, ruling elder, or deacon.

Organizing a mission work: the meetings and activities during which the presbytery gains sufficient confidence that the hand of God has produced both a mature group of believers and a unified congregation which is able to walk together as a church of Jesus Christ in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Organizing a mission work as a new congregation: the process of taking a mission work, from the time of its recognition by the presbytery, through the steps necessary to receive members and form a congregation, train church officers, prepare the necessary documents which relate the mission work to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and sat-

isfy the presbytery that it has reached the ecclesiastical maturity necessary to conduct its own ministry, choose its own officers, call its own pastor, and affiliate with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Organizing pastor: the evangelist who is called by his presbytery or by an organized congregation to develop a mission work into a new and separate congregation of the presbytery. (It should be noted that the term *organizing pastor* is a construct derived from the implications of the Form of Government in the same way that the title *associate pastor* is derived.)

Overseeing session: the session of a local congregation or the elders and ministers comprising a committee of the presbytery to which is assigned the spiritual oversight of the members of a mission work.

Particular church: an organized congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.