

## HOW TO PLANT AN ARP CHURCH

### I. Introduction – The Purpose of this Manual

The purpose of this manual is to serve as a handy reference that brings several sources of information together in one place.

**A. To Help the Mission Developer** (also known as a church planter).

**B. To Help the Elder Overseeing a Mission Congregation**

Our ARP Form of Government (hereafter referred to as FOG) distinguishes a mission from an organized congregation in that a mission is not governed by its own session, but is governed through a provisional session appointed by the presbytery. If you are asked to serve on a provisional session, this manual will help you understand some of the ways that task is different from serving on the session of your local church. The FOG states that elders on a provisional session must be careful to allow the mission to develop its distinct identity and direction.

**C. To Help the Session of a Sponsoring Church**

Having one or more sponsoring churches actively support the new work greatly increases church plant survivability. The difficult challenge for the sponsoring church is balancing their support and direction for the new work with the freedom the new church needs to develop its own identity as it is called by God to reach a different group of people than the sponsoring church is called to reach.

**D. To Help the Presbytery's Church Extension Committee**

The presbytery is the primary agent in new church development. Each ARP presbytery has a church extension (or Outreach North America) committee which oversees the development and establishment of new churches. The members of the church extension committee should be committed to the task; having the gifts, experience and insight necessary to effectively oversee the new works in their presbytery.

**E. To Help the Board Members of Outreach North America**

The purpose of Outreach North America is to introduce people in the United States and Canada to Jesus Christ, primarily by helping our presbyteries plant new churches and renew existing churches. This manual will help orient board members to their church planting task.

### II. Beginning a new ARP mission work.

**A. Ways to start a new work.**

There are a number of ways to start a new work. See *Appendix A* for 12 ways to sponsor a new church. Below are the four most common methods.

**1. A Church Sponsoring a Mission Church**

- a. Often called the mother-daughter model, an organized church sponsoring a mission church is a proven method for producing strong, viable new churches. Sponsorship can be a blessing to both the mother and the daughter church.
- b. The mother church commissions up to 10% of its membership to form the nucleus for the daughter church. Often this happens when

a significant number of members live in an area that is distant from the mother church.

- c. Planting the new church requires a commitment from the session to support the transfer of members to the new work.
- d. In the short term, the loss of members may hurt, but studies show that in the long run, the mother church usually becomes stronger in every measure of strength. Tithing members to a mission congregation spurs other members to exercise their gifts as they assume responsibilities that were vacated by the people who left for the mission. The mother church becomes stronger because of its active participation in a mission outside of itself.
- e. Sponsorship includes committing: prayer, finances, equipment and supplies, a nucleus of people and short term workers (missionaries) to the new work.

## **2. Group of Churches Sponsoring a Mission Church**

- a. Several churches share responsibility for sponsoring a new work.
- b. This offers opportunities for smaller churches to participate in sponsoring a mission church.
- c. The key is equal sacrifice among the sponsoring churches. They might not be able to provide the same level of support, but each commits to the same level of sacrifice through: financial support, prayer, providing equipment and supplies, providing members to form a nucleus for the new church, and loaning short term workers (missionaries).
- d. It is best to have sponsoring churches located within a 20 or 30 mile radius of the desired location for the mission congregation.

## **3. Potential Core Group Contacting the Presbytery**

This has been the most common method of adding new churches to the ARP denomination, but there is a danger if the groups are small and disgruntled.

- a. The group may contact the presbytery directly, or the group may first contact the office of ONA. These contacts are from either churches seeking a new denomination or groups seeking to become an organized church. Even if the group is already meeting as a church and has an installed minister, it will be treated as a mission if it does not have men ready to be examined by presbytery as ARP elders.
- b. If the first contact is with ONA, then ONA will respond and inform the appropriate presbytery. If the first contact is with a presbytery, then the presbytery will respond and will ask ONA to send an information packet about the ARP Church.
- c. The usual first step is to send the group or church a packet of materials that will give them information about the ARP Church.
- d. The presbytery will arrange an informational meeting if the group is interested in proceeding after examining the initial packet of materials about the ARP. In most cases the group will meet with

the chairman of the presbytery's church extension committee and other members of the presbytery. In some cases, the presbytery may want to invite a representative from ONA. This meeting allows the group to ask questions about the ARP and also allows the presbytery to learn more about the group.

- e. A next step may involve providing an opportunity for the group to learn more about the biblical basis for our theology and polity. This is especially recommended where the core group contains a number of people who do not come from a Presbyterian background.
- f. A class on being members in an ARP church may also be helpful for the whole congregation.
- g. If all these steps go well, the group should petition the presbytery to be received. Presbytery could choose to receive them either as an organized congregation or as a mission church. For the church to be received as an organized congregation there should be a clear understanding and acceptance of the Guidelines for New Churches Being Received into Presbyteries (*Appendix B*).
- h. Presbytery must carefully assess any group seeking to come into the presbytery to make sure they will be a good fit for the ARP Church.

#### **4. Presbytery Targeting a Strategic Area**

A presbytery may decide to target a specific area within their geographic bounds for strategic reasons even without a potential sponsoring church or a potential core group. Finding the right church planter is especially crucial in this case, because you need someone who has the right mix of gifts to be effective in planting a church without a sponsoring church or a core group. The presbytery committee should be very careful to find the right man for the work. It is far better to delay the start of the work than to send a mission developer who does not have the gifts to start a church from scratch.

#### **B. Approving a new work.**

1. New works must be approved by presbytery. Normally a recommendation to grant mission status will come through the presbytery's church extension (or Outreach North America) committee.
2. Whoever initiates the new work should prepare a Church Planting Proposal. (See *Appendix C* for an Outline for Writing a Church Planting Proposal). The proposal should be concise, usually no more than ten pages. The proposal should include an Executive Summary that is no more than three pages.
3. The proposal should be accompanied by a Three-Year Budget of Projected Sources of Income and Expense. (See *Appendix D*)
4. The presbytery committee needs to answer these questions as they consider approving a new work:
  - a. Do the demographics show that the community has sufficient population growth to support a new work?

- b. What is the combined total of average Sunday attendance for the existing churches in the community? Has someone identified existing churches and asked for their average attendance? Has someone spoken or met with pastors of any of the existing churches? What have you learned from the existing churches?
- c. How many other churches or denominations are planning to start new missions in this geographic area?
- d. How many strong Presbyterian and Reformed churches are already in the area? Where is the nearest ARP Church?
- e. What sort of potential meeting places are available for rent? What is the cost of land in the proposed area?
- f. What factors makes this area a good opportunity for new church development? Does this area look promising for developing a church of 300-500 members that will plant other churches?

**C. Funding a new work.**

- 1. A new work may be funded by many sources. Some possible sources to consider: local tithes and offerings, sponsoring churches, direct support from other churches or individuals, outside employment by the mission developer, presbytery supplement, and ONA supplement.
- 2. ONA expects that funding will be committed from other sources before asking for ONA supplements (see Fair and Flexible Policy for Funding New Mission Congregations, *Appendix E*).
- 3. The ONA supplement will decrease over time according to a prescribed formula (see *Appendix F* for ONA Supplement Calculations) so that the mission can move steadily toward becoming self-supporting. The rationale for outside funding is to make-up for the tithes and offerings of mature disciples that the mission does not yet have. The mission congregation is to evangelize the lost and to multiply mature tithing disciples.
- 4. If presbytery is requesting a supplement from ONA for the mission work, the board of ONA will evaluate the Church Planting Proposal according to the following criteria:
  - a. **Prayer:** Prayer is an evident part of the strategy. Prayer will be built into the DNA of the church.
  - b. **Worship:** Evidence that worship will be Christ-centered, God honoring, and fit the cultural context.
  - c. **Preaching:** Evidence of Christ-centered, grace-driven preaching that positively engages people in the culture.
  - d. **Leadership:** Evidence of a clear vision, planter is a good fit, with a realistic strategy to develop leaders.
  - e. **Evangelism:** Evidence of desire and strategy to connect with unchurched, to share the gospel, and plant churches.
  - f. **Discipleship:** Evident plan to assimilate new people and to make growing disciples of Christ.
  - g. **Administration:** Evidence of enough structure to assimilate and mobilize people, but not over structured.

- h. Finance:** Evidence of stewardship plan to become a self-supporting and generous church.
- i. Service:** Evidence of a realistic strategy to be involved in the community, redemptively addressing needs.
- j. Need for an ARP church:** Clearly defined location, demonstrating need and potential for a new church in this location.

**D. Launching a New Work.**

**1. Importance of a Launch Team.**

**a. Definition of a Launch Team:**

- i. “A team of committed individuals who will assist you in preparing for and executing an effective launch . . . The launch team is in existence only through the first weekly service.” (Nelson Searcy, *Launch*, p. 142).
- ii. “A group of evangelistic ‘bringers’ who have been selected and trained by the church planter to assist in the first stage of the founding of the church.” (Keller, *Church Planter Manual*, p. 129)
- iii. A launch team allows you to develop people to lead certain tasks and to take charge of certain responsibilities as specified by the mission developer and the provisional session without the expectation that these people will have future leadership positions in the new church.

**b. Distinct from the core group. Definition of a core group:**

- i. “A core group is a number of Christians who have been gathered as a Bible study group with a goal of starting a new church.” (Keller, *Church Planter Manual*, p. 129)
- ii. “Open-ended team, meets for spiritual growth, involves only the spiritually mature, is engaged to encourage and support.” (Nelson Searcy, *Launch*, p. 142).
- iii. A core group might be a pre-existing group of people that requested presbytery to develop a new mission congregation.
- iv. A core group is optional, while a launch team is essential.

**2. Recruiting a Launch Team.**

- a. Look for people who are: evangelists, new converts, people with community contacts and skills to help with the launch, people who are available and teachable, and people who will enthusiastically support the mission developer’s philosophy of ministry.
- b. Establish commitments to: pray, reach out to unbelievers, engage in discipleship, give regularly, and be open, available, and teachable.

**3. Phases of developing a mission.**

Developing a mission is about more than launching public worship services. See *Appendix G* for Phases of Church Planting. See *Appendix H* for Checklists for Each Phase.

### III. OVERSIGHT OF A MISSION CHURCH

Primary oversight is by the presbytery through its church extension (or Outreach North America) committee while immediate, but secondary, oversight is through the provisional session.

#### A. The Presbytery Church Extension (or Outreach North America) Committee

The church extension committee has primary oversight. All matters related to the mission including questions or disagreements about vision and calling of the mission developer, procedures, issues, or practices should be brought to the church extension committee. There are five specific responsibilities that must be handled by this presbytery committee:

1. **Assessing the core group** (If there is a pre-existing core group requesting to become a mission.)
2. **Setting clear expectations for the core group.**
3. **Calling the Mission Developer**
  - a. Only organized congregations can call a pastor. The church extension committee (acting something like a pulpit search committee) recommends a mission developer to presbytery. Presbytery is the agent issuing the call. If the church planter is to receive funding from ONA, he must have demonstrated church planting competencies either through successful church planting experience or through an approved assessment process.
  - b. How does the church extension committee evaluate potential candidates? At the 2000 meeting of General Synod, the synod approved Recommended Guidelines for Choosing a Church Planter (*Appendix I*). It is important for the church extension committee to examine potential candidates in light of these guidelines.
  - c. If the church planter is to work with an existing core group, that group should have some input in the selection process. No candidate should be forced on a group. If the mission is being sponsored by a mother church or by a group of churches, the church extension committee should give the sponsoring churches some input in the selection process. It is the responsibility of the church extension committee to seek the best possible candidate for the work.
4. **Recommending a provisional session**

The church extension committee recommends to presbytery elders to serve on the provisional session of the new work. Provisional sessions are usually composed of elders from sponsoring churches or from several nearby ARP congregations. The presbytery may also appoint to provisional sessions ruling elders from other denominations who are able to meet the standards of ARP ruling elders. It is important to choose elders who will be committed to the work. See below for responsibilities of a provisional session.
5. **Appointing a liaison/supervisor to meet with the church planter and session on a regular basis.**

- a. Since the church extension committee has the primary oversight of the new work, it is important that they know what is happening. They should plan to meet with the provisional session and the church planter quarterly either in person or via telephone. The chairman of presbytery's church extension committee will appoint a liaison/supervisor from the committee who will be in more frequent contact with the mission developer and provisional session in order to answer their questions and to encourage them in their work.
- b. The church planter should submit reports through his provisional session to the committee every other month or as requested, with a copy to Outreach North America. This is to help keep the committee and ONA informed about the work. The report should include attendance and giving figures as well as noting key indicators of the progress of the work. The prayer, outreach, and financial status of the group needs to be constantly monitored, along with giving attention to the spiritual, physical, and emotional health of the church planter and his family. See *Appendix J* for a Suggested Mission Report Form.

**B. The Work of a Provisional Session**

1. The FOG (III. C. 2.) requires that the presbytery appoint a provisional session for a new mission of ruling elders from neighboring congregations or ruling elders who meet the standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. The provisional session is the group of elders that provide immediate oversight to a church plant until it is organized as a particular congregation. The FOG does not specify how the presbytery chooses the provisional session. The provisional session is usually appointed by the presbytery acting upon the recommendations of the church extension committee. Most church extension committees welcome input from the mission developer.
2. It is crucial that qualified elders are chosen for the work. These elders should be men who have a real heart for the work. They should have an interest in seeing the extension of the church throughout the culture. It is also very helpful if some of them have been part of a church plant. Provisional elders should have a servant's heart and be willing to spend the time required to oversee the work of the mission.
3. The provisional session should meet monthly and the mission developer will serve as the moderator of the session. (If the mission does not have a mission developer, the presbytery will appoint an ordained minister to serve as moderator.) In addition, each elder should visit the work at least once a month. This allows him to assess the worship service and also allows him to get to know the flock. The provisional session is able to receive, transfer, and discipline members for the mission congregation; such members being held by the provisional session of the mission on behalf of the presbytery until the mission is organized with its own

members and its own session. See *Appendix K* for a Job Description for a Provisional Session.

4. The church extension committee of the presbytery should approve the vision of the church planter and his ministry plan for the new work. Once approved, the vision and ministry plan of the church planter should not be changed by the provisional session without the approval of the church extension committee. It is important that the provisional session not seek to impose a new vision or ministry plan upon the church planter, nor for a session member to try to make the mission a clone of his own church.

### **C. The work of a Mission Developer**

There can be little doubt that the most important human factor in the success or failure of a new church plant is the mission developer. It is of prime importance, therefore, to find a pastor who has the gifts to be a successful church planter. Once chosen, the mission developer needs to be diligent in his work, and in avoiding what is not his work.

#### **1. His Work**

##### **a. Working with people**

He must be a “people person” who really loves people and cares for them. A man who likes his books more than people is not a good candidate for church planting. As someone has said, “It’s all about relationships.” A mission developer must be able to develop people into teams that accomplish the ministry. More than being called to plant a church himself, the role of a mission developer is to equip a team of people to plant a church.

- b. The mission developer is more than an entrepreneur starting a new enterprise; he is a shepherd of the flock God is growing. He needs to take seriously his work as a shepherd of God’s flock. The launch team, core group, and people he meets in the community must be convinced that he really loves them and prays for them.

- c. The initial core group can become threatened when new people start to join the mission. The church planter must be able to assimilate new people into the developing congregation. This requires that he teach the existing group to love and accept new members while working with the new members to incorporate them fully into the life and ministry of the mission.

#### **2. Preaching and Teaching**

- a. A mission developer must be an effective preacher and teacher. He must hold firmly to the Reformed faith and present it in a way that builds up the flock into maturity. He will often find that his people are a very diverse group in their understanding of the Christian faith. He may find some who are well grounded in the Reformed faith, but others will know little or nothing about the Bible. Not only will there be those who have grown up in a more Arminian, Baptist, or Catholic background, there will be some with no church background whatsoever.

- b. In order to effectively preach to such a diverse group, he must



convince them that he is biblical in what he preaches and teaches. It is easier to teach the Reformed faith to a new convert if the preacher demonstrates that the Bible is the church's authority.

- c. A mission developer must avoid the danger of teaching doctrine to the exclusion of concern for the spiritual state of the hearers. The roots of our church in Scotland show how a church can fall into a dead orthodoxy. There must be a strong evangelistic thrust in the preaching and teaching of the minister. There must always be zeal for the Gospel so that people will experience the grace and love of God through Jesus Christ.
- d. The communication gifts of a church planter must be above average. He must preach in a manner that will feed the flock and yet be understandable by those visiting the group for the first time. Often there will be only one hearing from a prospective member who visits the church. People will decide whether to return based on what they heard.

### **3. Outreach to the community**

- a. The church planter must have a strong outreach mentality combined with an evangelistic thrust. The survival of the mission depends on reaching those in the community. Part of the National Vision for the ARP Church is to "transform North America's heart by reaching the unchurched".
- b. The minister who is content to spend most of his time in the study is not a candidate for church planting. There must be a well-developed outreach strategy that is implemented in a consistent manner. This means that the minister must be out among people so that he can develop contacts and prospects. ONA recommends that a mission developer set a goal of five new contacts a day or twenty-five new contacts each week. Making contact with people in the community is a strategic priority. You cannot give someone an opportunity to hear the gospel unless you first make contact.
- c. There are many different methods of outreach. One is to join a service organization such as the Rotary Club. Another is to become involved in neighborhood and school organizations. Some have found effective outreach by coaching little league or other groups. Many today are using "servant evangelism" in which they do specific acts of kindness, such as handing out bottles of cold water with church information printed on the label. The goal is always to form relationships that can lead to witnessing and evangelism. A mission developer should develop the habit of asking himself and other people "Is there someone else I should meet?"
- d. Understand that marketing and advertising are not the same as evangelism. At best, marketing is pre-evangelism, establishing name recognition and preparing people for contact. A marketing strategy is not sufficient as an outreach strategy. However, the

- mission developer must understand that a new mission is invisible to most people in the community. He must promote visibility.
- e. Outreach should not be a solo pursuit. The church planter must encourage others to reach out to their friends, co-workers, and families. The best way to encourage is to set a good example. The most effective outreach to a community is through word-of-mouth personal networking. Experience has shown that the members of the mission who are really excited about what is going on in the mission will see a good response when they invite others to attend the mission. The use of testimonies and real life stories of witnessing experiences, both the good and the bad, will help teach your people to reach out to those they naturally contact in their everyday life.
  - f. Outreach alone is not sufficient. The church planter must make a verbal witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We do not do the converting, that is the role of the Holy Spirit. Our role is to freely offer the gospel. This needs to be an ongoing activity of the church planter, and he must train the people he is gathering to do the same.

#### 4. **Worship**

- a. While worship is to the glory of God, the worship service is a key to bringing visitors back. If the service is poorly planned and comes across to visitors as disorganized, they will probably not return. People in our day also want to see authenticity in worship, not just religious ritual. Visitors should see that God is the primary audience for your worship.
- b. Every aspect of what happens at the public worship services needs to be carefully prepared. The church planter needs to assure himself that the appropriate team members have answered the following questions before the service begins.
  - i. Who is responsible for setting up the facility for worship?
  - ii. Who is responsible for signs to direct people to the meeting place and to show them where to go and where to take their children once they get into the building?
  - iii. Who will greet the visitors? Have they been trained?
  - iv. Who is keeping the nursery? How will parents be assured that their children are safe?
  - v. Who is bringing refreshments? Have people been trained to mix with the new comers rather than clustering together with each other?
  - vi. How will we get names, addresses, and phone numbers of guests for follow-up?
  - vii. Who is praying? Are we being authentic?
- c. An important principle of Reformed worship is that the congregation must understand what they are doing, and why they are doing it. The church planter needs to explain to the

congregation each part of the service in a way that will alleviate anxiety and confusion for those visitors who are unfamiliar with the order of worship.

- d. Music is a crucial element of worship and music is often a major issue of contention. The mission developer, working with the provisional session, must determine the type of music that will be used. Then he must secure capable musicians and a worship team. Finding worship leaders and musicians who are a good fit and then keeping them is a prime goal for the new work.

## 5. **What is Not His Work**

There are two areas that are not to be the work of a church planter.

- a. **Handling the Money.** From the very beginning of a new work, the church planter should have nothing to do with the handling of money. There should be a church treasurer appointed by the provisional session or the church extension committee. See below for the work of a mission treasurer.
- b. **Majoring on Secondary Issues.** Church planters are often tempted to establish a church with a strong emphasis on the pet issue of the planter. This is not the work of the church planter. The work of the church planter is to build up the body of Christ that they may become mature Christians who are reaching others with the Gospel. The mission developer needs to major on the primary means of grace: the Word, sacraments, and prayer. (Acts 6: 1-7)

## 6. **The Personal Life of the Church Planter.**

A Mission Developer's character is even more important than his work. In I Timothy 3, Paul gives us qualifications for eldership. No amount of knowledge and skill will compensate for a lack of godly character. Four aspects of the church planter's personal life are vital:

### a. **Avoiding Impropriety.**

The Scriptures warn us to "flee temptation". This command needs to be taken seriously by church planters. A prime danger in this age is misuse of the internet by viewing pornography or getting onto inappropriate chat lines. Great care must be taken in counseling women and children. Others should be present in the area during such counseling. Sexual immorality on the part of the church planter has destroyed a number of mission churches. It is critical that the church planter place effective roadblocks that keep him from going down the paths that lead to impropriety. For help, contact the office of Outreach North America.

### b. **Being a Servant-Leader.**

- i. In Matthew 20:25 -28, Jesus reminds us that our leadership style is not that of the world. We are to follow the leadership style of Christ that requires that we become servant leaders. Church planters are to demonstrate their leadership by serving the flock.

- ii. The church planter must show a servant's heart in taking the initiative in doing what needs to be done when others are unwilling or unable to help. He needs to excel in service to his people and lead by example. Servant-leadership will eliminate many obstacles to unity that can cause discord in a mission church. This servant leadership must be especially displayed by setting an example in evangelism and making disciples.

**c. Managing Time Well.**

The mission developer needs to develop a strategy for managing time that is rigid enough to keep him on track and yet flexible enough to allow for interruptions that will alter the schedule. He should list the tasks and responsibilities of church planting and incorporate time either to do each of these, or to equip others to do them. He must learn to distinguish the important from the urgent as he budgets his time and his schedule. He should submit this schedule to the session and to the church extension committee so that they know what he is doing with his time.

**d. Loving His Family.**

Church planting can be stressful, but that must not overshadow the responsibility to be a shepherd to your family. If the church planter's family life is troubled, then no outward success is what it appears to be.

- i. It is essential that the church planter have a strong marriage. One aspect of the Assessment Center is to require both husband and wife to attend in order that their marriage might be assessed. The candidate will not be approved for church planting if the marriage is not stable. It is crucial that the wife strongly supports her husband's call to church planting and that she be actively engaged in the new work.
- ii. The church planter should serve as an example to his flock of what it means to be the spiritual head of his family. His love and nurture of his wife and children should be obvious to all. In order to be and do these things, it will be necessary to schedule time off each week to devote to the wife and children. It is also important to schedule and keep vacation times.

**D. Financial Oversight and the Work of a Mission Treasurer.**

1. The provisional session or church extension committee will appoint a treasurer for the mission. This appointment must be in writing, either in an appointment letter or in the minutes, or preferably, both. See *Appendix L* for Recommended Financial Procedures for a Mission Congregation.
2. The mission needs to be officially recognized by the presbytery as a mission. This needs to be in the minutes of the presbytery. Until the work becomes a mission, it will not be able to come under the group tax

exemption of the ARP General Synod and it will not be able to issue tax deductible receipts for charitable giving. It is important for the mission to have a Tax ID number. Once they have received a Tax ID number, they may ask to come under the denomination's group tax exemption.

Procedures for Requesting to Come Under Denomination's Group Tax Exemption are given in *Appendix M*.

3. Incorporation is an optional step that the mission may find beneficial. See *Appendix N* for Information on Incorporation.

#### **IV. Goals for a new ARP congregation.**

Our FOG says that the goal of a mission congregation is to become an organized congregation with its own session. So, what is the purpose of an organized congregation? The FOG says that the purpose of a particular congregation is: [bullet format added for clarity]

- To place corporate worship within the reach of all
- To bring the lost to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ
- To build them up in the Christian faith
- To prepare them for Christian service.

Since the goal of a mission congregation is to become an organized congregation with its own session, what are some indicators that the mission is ready to be organized as a church?

##### **A. Stewardship**

An important benchmark for organization is that the mission work has reached financial independence. The rationale for outside funding is to make-up for the tithes and offerings of mature disciples that the mission does not yet have. An important part of making disciples is teaching biblical stewardship.

##### **B. Government**

1. ARP church government requires qualified elders. Therefore there must be at least two men, preferably three, that meet the biblical qualifications and who are ready to be ordained and installed as ruling elders before a mission can be organized as a church.
2. The mission developer and provisional session are responsible to presbytery to ensure proper training for potential elders.
3. There is proven wisdom in organizing with only elders at first, then electing and installing deacons a year or two after organization.
4. A major concern in shifting from provisional elders to elected elders is to ensure unity among the leadership. Unfortunately, it is common to see major divisions between the newly installed pastor and the newly elected session. The root cause in most of these cases is a differing vision for the church between the pastor and the newly elected and installed elders. Training for potential ruling elders should include training not only in doctrine and practice, but also discussions about the vision and direction of the new church as the upcoming leadership seeks to discern how God wants to express himself through this church, in this community, at this time.

##### **C. Connection**

1. The new church will be *Presbyterian* in church government. The new church will also be *Reformed* in doctrine, committed to the sovereignty of God as taught in Scripture and summarized in the Westminster Confession of Faith and catechisms. The mission developer and provisional session need to ensure that the members of the new work understand the gospel, have professed faith in Christ, and have received training on ARP doctrine, government, and history so that the membership wholeheartedly commits to becoming an ARP church.
2. This commitment will be shown by the involvement of the new church in the work of Presbytery and Synod. Both participation and financial giving should demonstrate this involvement. Mission churches receiving financial support from ONA are required to give at least 10% of their local income to the Denominational Ministry Fund from the very beginning. A church should be willing to support the work of the denomination, especially if it has received assistance from the denomination.

#### **D. Multiplication**

A new church should exhibit a Great Commission mindset in all that it does. The Great Commission as given in Acts 1:8 shows a geographic expansion outward of the early church from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth. A new church is expected to have a vision for outreach that starts at home and moves outward:

1. **Reaching their own children** who grow up within the covenant community of the church. While reaching its own children, the church should equip the children to help reach their peers outside the church.
2. **Reaching their community** with a gospel witness that will result in men and women coming to faith in Christ and being received into the church.
3. **Reaching beyond their local area to the world.** There should be an active support of home missions in the U.S. and Canada, including sponsoring other new churches, and support of foreign missions both financially and by sending active members on short term mission trips. The whole congregation should be encouraged to live as missionaries at home, seeing the community as a personal mission field.

#### **V. Organizing a Mission into a Particular Congregation**

The provisional session looks forward to the day when they are no longer needed because the mission has been organized as a particular congregation. There are three steps in going from a mission to a congregation.

##### **A. Assessing readiness to be organized**

The provisional session, the church extension committee, and the members of the mission all need to be asking honest questions concerning their readiness. Here is a suggested list:

1. Do the members love and respect each other?
2. Are there any “issues” among the body that need to be resolved before organization?
3. Is there unity in discerning God’s calling, or God’s vision for the church?

4. Are there sufficient men who are qualified to be elders and who have been appropriately disciplined and trained?
5. Is the congregation united in the way they worship God?
6. Are individuals growing in spiritual maturity as a result of the ministry of the church?
7. Are members reaching out to their families, neighbors, and friends to gather them into the church?
8. Are members and newcomers being incorporated into ministries where they can effectively use their spiritual gifts?
9. Do members understand what an ARP church is? Do they support the presbytery and the denomination?
10. Have the members been trained in stewardship and are they tithing so that the offerings are sufficient for the congregation to be organized?

In addition, the Guidelines for receiving new churches into the denomination (*Appendix B*) gives a list of expectations for organized congregations being received by a presbytery.

#### **B. Training of officers for the new congregation**

According to the Form of Government a mission cannot be organized until elders from within the body are trained and ready to assume their responsibilities. This step involves identifying potential candidates, training them, and presenting them to the congregation.

##### **1. Identifying potential candidates**

The church planter and the provisional session should continually look for qualities in men that would indicate whether they are potential elders. There may be some in the group who have been previously ordained elders. All potential candidates should be invited to training sessions. It might be advisable to invite all men in the mission who believe that the Lord may be calling them to the office of elder to attend the training sessions.

##### **2. Training potential candidates**

Training should cover three areas but not necessarily in this chronological order:

###### **a. The first is the doctrinal position of the church.**

Potential candidates must be able in good conscience to affirm the doctrinal standards of the church. Those who have problems with Reformed points of doctrine should withdraw until they have resolved areas of disagreement.

###### **b. The next area is the requirements of the office of elder.**

Candidates should know that being an elder involves far more than attending a monthly meeting. They are to be under shepherds of the flock. Those that feel the office demands more time than they are willing to give should withdraw until they can devote a sufficient amount of time.

###### **c. The final area to be covered is the church planter's goals and his discernment of God's vision for the church.**

Those that are in opposition to the goals and vision should withdraw from consideration. Those who remain are those in accord with the pastor in leading the church toward the vision.

**3. Presenting them to the congregation.**

The remaining candidates are to be examined by the provisional session and then presented to the congregation. Election of elders will be the first act of the newly organized church. The session may choose to nominate only one man for each position or else present more than one candidate for each opening if they believe they have qualified men. In most cases only one name for each opening is presented to the congregation. Nominations may be made from the floor.

**C. The Involvement of the Presbytery**

1. Presbytery is responsible for organizing new congregations. The procedure is outlined in the FOG. The procedure begins with the congregation submitting a petition to be organized. See *Appendix O* for a Sample Petition for Organization. The provisional session will concur and present the petition to the church extension committee who will then submit it to the presbytery. The Presbytery will then vote to organize the mission into a particular church. They will set a date for an organizational service.
2. In most cases, the church planter will be called as the pastor of the new church. If that does not happen at the service of organization, the Presbytery will appoint him as the stated supply of the new church. The call will require a congregational vote and then the church planter will be installed as the pastor of the church at a later date. The procedure for the call will follow the Form of Government.

**VI. Being an ARP Church**

The goal of the whole process of church planting is to organize a viable congregation that is in accord with the goals and ministries of the ARP Church. The process is a success when there is a four-fold commitment on the part of the newly organized church.

- There is commitment to the doctrines and ecclesiology of the ARP Church.
- There is a commitment to be active in Presbytery and the ministries of Presbytery.
- There is a commitment to be active in Synod and the ministries of Synod.
- There is a commitment to support expansion of the overall Kingdom of God, starting in the local community and extending to the ends of the earth.

Pray that the Lord will use the ARP Church in new areas, as we are faithful to the call to establish churches that will reach this post Christian culture for Jesus Christ.