

Considerations When Starting Up A CLC Congregation

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A. Preface

This document was created to assist those who are considering the formation of an independent congregation. The goal is to help a “Preaching Station” or any group of like-minded believers who gather on a regular basis for Divine Worship Services and/or Bible Studies, to understand the steps and considerations in the process. Often the members of the group are themselves members of other CLC congregations, and the group may be served and supported by nearby congregations. When the members of a Preaching Station are considering forming their own congregation by the grace of God, there are several steps and questions that will need to be considered for this important and wonderful goal. The following thoughts are meant to help guide a group of believers as they make plans for their future congregation.

B. Should the group formally organize as a CLC Congregation?

- a. What is the stated long range plan of the group?
 - i. Often a preaching station is started based on an expressed need or desire of a home congregation. It is good to understand what the original intent was of the group. Often people involved in the formation were not a part of the initial conversations or outreach effort. Documenting the expressed purpose is a good step to understanding where everyone is coming from and the goals for the future.
- b. Is there a desire?
 - i. Often the discussion of forming a congregation stems from a desire by members of the group for things like more regular service schedules, starting Sunday School, having close consistent pastoral care, etc. Fundamentally, when considering independence, there should be a common consensus among the members to do so. Often groups have met for years without formally organizing, so it is important to understand whether the needs or desires of the group have changed, and if so, why.
- c. Is there commitment?
 - i. If there is a desire, then step two is understanding if you have the needed level of commitment. Everyone involved in the group should realize that upon organizing as an independent congregation, there will not be a "dual membership" arrangement and that the new group will need to go forward with people willing to carry out the responsibilities of being an independent congregation. These will include both formal office positions (e.g. President, Secretary, Treasurer), as well as many other tasks associated with day to day operation of a congregation.
- d. Are the necessary resources available?
 - i. Even with desire and commitment, the group should consider whether it has the capability to sustain an independent congregation on an ongoing basis, both from the financial standpoint and the manpower standpoint. Often the group is currently

supported by a home congregation, so a good place to start is to first understand the list of tasks and costs currently associated with supporting the preaching station. Once this baseline is established, they can use this document to determine some of the additional resources they will need. With a full picture it will be much easier to answer the resource question.

- ii. Financially, the mother congregation(s) could help with initial start up costs, if possible or desired. But ultimately, an important part of the consideration in forming as a congregation means assuming responsibility as members for the full support of the Gospel work in that location before a pastor is even called.
- e. Is there faithful and patient leadership within the group?
 - i. Formally organizing as an independent congregation is no small undertaking. The group must have strong and devoted leadership to navigate each step. As part of any change process there will be varying opinions on the best course of action and timelines as well as concerns about the impact on existing congregations. The leadership group must understand these concerns and demonstrate patient and brotherly cooperation with all involved parties (existing members, pastors, and congregations) and know that they will likely need to work through challenging topics along the way.

C. Establishing Overseers & Accountability

- a. Who has authority over the group until they have become independent?
 - i. Once a decision has been made to move forward, it is helpful to establish what oversight boards or voting bodies are in place. One challenge for the group is often that their memberships with home congregations can limit their authority to do much of anything as a separate entity. This becomes compounded when there are a number of congregations with members as part of the group. Most constitutions will limit the ability of individual members making these types of decisions until the leadership team or council for the new entity is approved by the voting body of the current congregations.
 - ii. As a result, it may be beneficial, from a practical standpoint, to fall under only one constitution or one voting body to limit confusion and challenges in approval.
- b. What signoff or approval authority does the group itself have to make decisions?
 - i. With an oversight group in place it is wise to clearly document and define the level of authority the group has to make decisions. This can be both from a signoff level in financial dollars as well as to what extent the group needs approval for making decisions with worship, facilities, or called workers. Documenting this up front helps to ensure that things are done in an orderly manner and can help to avoid confusion or the hurt feelings of those involved.
- c. Who is legally responsible for the group?
 - i. Another reason to have one oversight entity is from a legal concern. If an issue does arise, it is important to know who is legally and financially responsible. Officers of the congregation may not be aware of the personal liability that might come into play if the legal arrangements are not in place. Being under an existing entity ahead of time will remove some of these risks. It is also another reason why it is better to have only one oversight voting body.
 - ii. Consequently, if the group does not take the steps to organize, the mother congregation remains responsible (at least legally) for any decision -- and therefore needs to review and approve all decisions of the group (e.g. owning, renting, service times, location, or anything in connection with the day to day operation). If the group wants that authority for themselves, they would need to organize as a congregation.

D. Building Consistency

- a. Before taking the step of independence it is often beneficial to first demonstrate that the group can be autonomous by starting to take on the regular activities of a congregation.
 - i. It is important to meet regularly for consistent attendance and offerings. Many view this as attending weekly services with a pastor, but it could also be holding weekly services with a pastor in person or by streaming a service from another congregation. The CLC Ministry by mail is also helpful to draw from as a resource. Consider and try to plan whether there are any future predictable patterns or changes.
 - ii. Have a sub-committee/board/leadership team made up of regular attendees of the preaching station. It is recommended this team serves under only one congregation or voting body. This may require getting voter approval from a secondary congregation to serve in this capacity. This team should meet regularly as well as continue to attend home congregation voters meetings to give updates and stay active.
 - iii. Focus on Inreach (elder work) and strengthening the existing membership.
 1. Regular congregational get togethers (fellowship after church, potlucks, etc.)
 - iv. Focus on Outreach (mission work) and equipping the congregation to engage others in their various communities.
 1. Improve web presence (Social Media/Publications/Local Advertising)
 2. Encourage members in their personal evangelism
 3. TVBS each summer
 4. Evangelism workshops

E. Crafting a Plan

- a. Before taking the step of independence it is best for everyone involved to build a formal recommendation or plan that can be approved by the group and the overseeing body. This plan would include the following areas of consideration:
 - i. Spiritual Care
 1. Full time, part time, exploratory, or temporary call
 2. Proximity of spiritual care to church
 3. The use of services of a retiree or active pastor
 4. Services will need to be covered (Weekly, Monthly, Special)
 5. Adult: Divine Services / Bible Classes
 6. Youth: Sunday School / VBS / Confirmation / Youth Meetings
 7. Home Visits / Instruction Classes
 8. Elder / Leadership Training / Counseling
 9. Mission work / Outreach
 10. General Administration (some congregations may specify some of these):
Bulletins, website, membership directory, etc.
 11. Detail what the responsibilities will not include (Administration functions, etc.)
 - ii. Governance
 1. Church Constitution - the CLC has an example template
 2. Membership of the Church with the CLC
 3. Create a voting body
 4. Boards and elections for new board positions
 5. Holding regular meetings for board and voting members
 6. Membership transfers - what is required by home congregation's constitutions
 - iii. Finance
 1. Banking & Government

- a. Need to establish a non-profit status and tax ID
 - b. Selecting a bank
 - c. Deciding where to deposit offerings
2. Budgeting - This is what is often included in a budget
- a. Pastor Compensation
 - i. Base Pay: Contact the CLC Board of Trustees for the current compensation recommendation for called workers.
 - ii. Type of housing: parsonage provided, housing allowance, other?
 - iii. Insurance / Health Care (Individual or Family / Group or State)
 - iv. Professional expenses (Car allowance, mileage, books, printing)
 - v. Retirement: (CLC code/average) About \$130-150 per month
 - vi. Vacation: 2-4 weeks per year.
 - 1. Experience example: (0-5 yrs (2 weeks), 5-15 yrs (3 weeks), 15+ years (4 weeks) Part/full time call
 - vii. Housing (Parsonage / Rent / Own)
 - viii. Utilities (gas, electricity, waste, water softener, phone, mobile)
 - ix. Insurance (liability, workman's comp)
 - x. Employer's match for medicare/social security
 - b. Congregational Expenses
 - i. Property
 - ii. Copier
 - iii. Guest speakers (time and mileage)
 - iv. Delegate conference expenses
 - v. Convention expenses
 - vi. Organists
 - vii. Choir music (including copyrights)
 - viii. Communion supplies
 - ix. Flowers for special occasions
 - x. Kitchen supplies (coffee, sugar, cream, food, utensils, etc.)
 - xi. Office supplies (postage, church letterhead, envelopes)
 - xii. Treasurer supplies (checks, software)
 - xiii. Financial secretary supplies
 - xiv. Computers
 - xv. Envelopes and recording software
 - xvi. Financial software record keeping
 - c. Seeking Mission Subsidy and CLC Salary Code Information
 - i. While any CLC group or congregation may request mission subsidy through the Board of Missions, the Board cannot grant every request and considers each request on an individual basis and in light of the funds available through the CLC Mission Budget.
 - ii. The CLC Board of Missions' pamphlet "Guidelines for Domestic Subsidized Congregations" should be consulted in order to understand the agreements between the newly formed congregation seeking subsidy and the CLC Board of Missions. Any deviations from this document must be addressed and agreed upon by the CLC Board of Missions and the applying congregation.

iv. Property

1. There are a number of things to consider when deciding on location. Some items will depend on the decision to build, buy, or rent. Others will be universal. It is important to get adequate feedback from members and voters etc, as well as Mission Board and whether you plan to get a CEF (Church Extension Fund) loan from the Board of Trustees. It is also wise to consider working with a realtor as part of the process.
2. Universal considerations:
 - a. Sanctuary size to member ratio - impressions of emptiness or crowded
 - b. Utilities - consider what is available or will need to be added
 - c. Sanctuary atmosphere - reverent or unappealing
 - d. Teach children why the sanctuary is special and to be respected
 - e. Location that is familiar to the community - visible to as many as possible
 - f. Close to residential - easy access
 - g. Consider neighborhood safety (crime)
 - h. Newer property (Aesthetics) - Visually appealing, updated, maintained
 - i. Number of churches in the vicinity - both CLC and other
 - j. Stability in location for consistent outreach - longevity
 - k. Stability of Pastor's living location
 - l. Understand the needs versus wants
3. Buying or building considerations
 - a. Ability to build equity
 - b. City taxes and fees for owning
 - c. Knowing building codes/requirements - landscaping, parking, drainage, lighting in parking lot, building appearance.
 - d. Land availability for future expansion
 - e. Utility costs
 - f. Acquire architectural advice
 - g. Borrow or buy blueprints from another church
 - h. Find a lawyer to look over contracts
 - i. Set up an inspection
4. Renting considerations
 - a. Affordability
 - b. Short term solution
 - c. Simple maintenance

v. Legal

1. Incorporated or Unincorporated - One of the biggest concerns with unincorporating is that the officers become personally responsible in the case of a lawsuit. Incorporation is a step in helping mitigate this liability. It is best to speak with an attorney as part of the setup process to ensure things are properly set up for the specific state and local laws. Documents that will be a part of the legal setup may include:
 - a. A constitution
 - b. Federal IRS 501c3 non-profit status
 - c. Federal IRS form 8718 user fee for exempt organization
 - d. Federal EIN request
 - e. State non-profit exempt status
 - f. State application for business registration (Secretary of State)

- g. Each state likely has a website with guidelines (Example for MN)
<http://www.minnesotanonprofits.org/nonprofit-resources/start-a-nonprofit>
- b. The goal in the plan is to layout the sequence of steps the group will walk through to become a separate entity. Laying out these steps in detail and getting approval for this plan from the oversight body will help maintain order and maintain brotherly love.

F. Execution

- a. Once a plan is in place and approval is received, a group is ready to move forward to independence. Discuss an execution plan as part of the overall strategy of the group and get approval for that along with projected goals and timelines. These should remain clear to all involved and a list of guidelines should be established. Questions might include, What financial sign off levels are in place? Who is authorized to do what? What steps need to be completed in what timeline? Each case will be unique including the actual execution and what approvals may be needed from home congregations. It would be wise to review the constitutions of the congregations that may be impacted in the process as well as talking to their council about any other concerns.
- b. The following is a general order of the process assuming that the plan has been reviewed and approval has been received:
 - i. Inform the CLC Mission Board, Conference Visitor, and CLC President
 - ii. Hire a lawyer
 - iii. Complete state forms for incorporation
 - iv. Complete EIN request and approval
 - v. Complete non-profit status (Federal and State)
 - vi. Complete banking set up
 - vii. Complete proper insurance - ensure it covers all liability needs
 - viii. Transfer funds from existing congregations
 - ix. Join CLC - Provide constitution to conference visitor and CLC constitution committee
 - x. Request membership transfers - Note: you may need to wait until CLC approval is in place. Some constitutions will not allow a direct transfer without separate voters approval unless the congregation is a member of the CLC.
 - xi. Decide to call a full/part-time pastor, details of the call may include:
 - 1. Diploma of Vocation - This is the "call form" itself, which can be obtained from the CLC president.
 - 2. History of congregation
 - 3. Current needs - plus top 3 key concerns
 - 4. Where council/committees need help
 - 5. How the congregation handles change
 - 6. Expectations of the congregation of new pastor
 - 7. Congregation's long term goals
 - 8. Call description
 - 9. Membership Directory
 - 10. Outreach summary
 - 11. Local community profile and information
 - 12. Annual report
 - 13. Christian day school report
 - 14. Liturgy and bulletin examples
 - 15. The Constitution
 - 16. A summary of the committees

Concluding Encouragement: May the Lord bless your faith family in working through this prayerful process as you consider your work together in His kingdom! As Satan will certainly be trying to hinder your goal of glorifying and furthering the Gospel of Christ, remember what Paul said to the Christians in Corinth, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). As you continue to need help or answers to questions or concerns, consult the CLC Mission Board for further assistance. The Lord IS with you!