

Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension
Church Plant Support Program
Approved in December 2018

Church Plant Support Philosophy:

When discussing the support provided to church plants by the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (“CHMCE”), we might be tempted to reduce that discussion to finances. Financial support is a significant component of the support provided by the CHMCE. But the resources of the denomination provide a more extensive program of support that includes the following categories: finances; prayer; and continuing education and training.

The CHMCE has carefully reviewed the recent history of church planting support with an eye toward strengthening our approach in each of the three areas mentioned above. We are committing significant additional resources of time and money to increase our support of church plants and church planters. Below is a summary of our commitment to support each of our church plants in the areas of finance, prayer, and continuing education and training.

When a new mission work receives a commitment of support from the CHMCE, we are also asking presbytery home missions committees and church planters to make a commitment to fully participate in the support listed below. Each church planter, along with a representative of the presbytery committee, will sign an agreement to fully participate in each of the support components described in this document.

1. Financial support

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is committed to a particular approach to funding the work of the Great Commission through the Worldwide Outreach (“WWO”) program committees: Home Missions, Foreign Missions, and Christian Education.¹ The CHMCE utilizes a significant portion of those annual gifts to provide financial support typically through a four-year declining scale financial package. We significantly increased those support packages in 2017.

When a new church plant receives approval for support, we are committed to financial support for the whole length of the approved package. As long as certain commitments are maintained – ongoing training, monthly reports, and annual refreshment of stewardship plans – support will continue as long as the presbytery renews the request for support each fall.

2. Prayer support

¹ There are many reasons for this approach and benefits of this approach. A significant practical benefit for church planters is that, unlike other denominations, OPC church planters do not have the task of fundraising.

While the financial support is significant, we should recognize that even more significant is the prayer support of the whole church. Since all church planting is ultimately the work of God through human instruments, we depend on his work and blessing. In speaking about WWO, we often describe it as the whole work of the whole church. In other words, every mission work, every church planter, and every missionary belong to the whole church. We participate in their work. And that is clearly evident in the prayers of the whole church for every mission work, both home and foreign.

We continue to look for new ways to share the work of our mission works with the whole church, so that people can respond in a timely fashion with prayers of thanksgiving and supplication.

Here is a brief list of the various tools we use to encourage prayer for mission works and RHMs:

- a. *Home Missions Today* – approximately once a quarter, Katie Stumpff interviews church planters and writes a paragraph update including prayer items; this is distributed to the churches every other week
- b. *New Horizons* prayer list – these sentence updates for the purpose of prayer are gathered from the monthly church planter reports
- c. Prayer with church planters – during visits and quarterly phone calls
- d. Social media updates – Katie Stumpff regularly solicits updates for Facebook and OutwardOPC.com; but if you have items to share, don't wait for the staff to ask
- e. Regular staff prayer meetings to pray through the list of supported works
- f. Regular visits to congregations and presbyteries to share the ongoing work of home missions, including stories about various mission works to encourage prayer

3. Education and training support

The CHMCE and its staff have committed significant time in the past couple years to consider the work of continuing education and training for church planters. We reviewed the work of other church planting entities and quickly realized that we have provided, relatively speaking, much less in the area of training. We are committed to doing more.

Here is a brief summary of new commitments on the part of the CHMCE to train and support our church planters. All of these involve new or increased expectations for support receiving church planters, and we realize they demand time. But we chose areas where ongoing training and growth seems not only advisable, but necessary. These new expectations are intended to support and direct the continuing education that should necessarily be part of the church planting experience.

- a. Church planter training conference

This past year, we made several changes to the annual church planter training conference. First, we increased the length of the conference from three to four days.

Second, we expanded the conference to include not only first year church planters, but also third year church planters. This means every support receiving church planter attends the training two times, and it has the added benefit of church planters with a couple years of experience mingling with our newest church planters.

Third, we added wives of church planters to the invite list and provide strong incentives to make their attendance possible. This comes at a significant cost increase, but we believe it is more than worth the expense – and the wives seem to agree.

Fourth, we expanded the training to include: intensive training in evangelism and pastoral leadership; some separate training for the wives (with guest trainers – to include at least one pastor's wife); more time for prayer and recreation (to provide some rest, but also opportunities for church planter families to make new ministry friends); and additional time for discussion of issues that planters bring with them.

The response in the first year was overwhelmingly positive, and we also received some helpful feedback to add topics to the training schedule.

- b. Quarterly conference calls with Associate General Secretary Al Tricarico and other church planters

Every month, Al schedules a conference call that includes 7-8 church planters. Before the phone call, they are encouraged to read a chapter from a book. Al provides a short, written summary of the chapter with a few thoughtful response questions. Each church planter is encouraged to interact on the call with one of the questions. They also spend approximately 30 minutes praying for each other.

- c. Periodic field visits from one of the general secretaries

The general secretaries are committed to making, if possible, two visits to a church planting field during the four years of support. That has been manageable for the past couple years (with about 25 works receiving support at a time). It seems as if those numbers will increase over the next couple years, but we will do our best to maintain that pace. On these visits, we spend time with the church planter, with his family, and especially with the couple – in addition to participating in some of the regular activities of the mission work. And we devote time to prayer with the church planter and his spouse. These visits are invaluable. They inform our prayers and our ongoing contact with the church planter. Al and I love building relationships with these families, who are wonderful gifts from the Lord of the harvest to his church.

- d. MTIOPC courses jointly offered with the Committee on Christian Education (“CCE”)

This year, the CHMCE and the CCE have entered into a partnership to provide three MTIOPC classes specifically for church planters. These are currently existing classes, but we are providing them more often so that every church planter will be able to attend during their years of support. The three classes are: Preaching (Doug Clawson, Dale Van Dyke); Evangelism (Eric

Watkins, John Shaw); and Practical Ecclesiology (Craig Troxel). We chose these classes because of their obvious relationship to the work of church planters.

We realize this might sound like a big commitment, to require these classes for already busy church planters. We believe the benefit is well worth the labor, and we also chose classes in areas where church planters should already be reading in order to grow. The assignments in each class are also quite practical and the kinds of assignments that church planters should already be completing. In these classes, they will carry out those assignments with the support of experienced pastors with proven gifts in these particular areas of ministry.

e. Continuing education reading in particular target areas

At last year's Orlando conference, one of the regular participants asked me if we require ongoing reading of church planters in areas like evangelism or leadership. He served as a church planter 25 years ago, and directed reading was part of the expectation for church planters then. We have built a reading list [attached] and intend to require church planters to pick a book from that list each year to read – hopefully in groups with other church planters. The idea would be to read a book from the list and then gather virtually in groups of 3-4 for discussion with an eye toward implementation. Participants would pray for one another and follow up to discuss progress on implementation.

f. Ongoing mentoring or accountability relationship(s) with experienced minister(s)

We all recognize the importance of mentoring in ministry, and we as a denomination commit to mentoring through the internship program, which has essentially become a requirement for prospective ministers. But the biblical pattern points to ongoing mentoring even once a man begins vocational ministry (think Paul with Timothy and Titus, for example).

While we all recognize the importance of this ongoing mentoring, most of our church planters rarely benefit from such a relationship. The CHMCE believes that we (meaning at the denomination and presbytery level of home missions support) should help church planters formalize mentoring relationships with experienced ministers who give evidence of particular gifts. In fact, most other like-minded church planting bodies require ongoing mentoring relationships with regular accountability as part of their church planting program.

So what does this look like? Every church planter should have a relationship with an experienced minister that involves, at minimum, prayer and encouragement – but hopefully also involves serving alongside in areas like evangelism, discipleship, preaching, or officer training. They should be in communication weekly, and if possible, meet face-to-face monthly or at least quarterly. The weekly contact doesn't need to be long (30 minutes), but it should be regular and substantial. The church planter should know that he has someone in his corner who will pray with and for him, and someone he may contact when he needs wise counsel.

The presbytery and the denomination committees should encourage such relationships, and even be ready to help new church planters identify a potential mentor and establish the plan for mentoring and accountability.

4. Other Support

The General Assembly Committee on Ministerial Care provides what is called an “Intake Interview for New Pastors and Their Wives.” It involves interactions meant to create awareness of CMC resources and for the Committee to gather information from ministers and their wives. The focus is on financial matters and the Committee’s interest that men receive adequate compensation, including retirement resources. Other subjects are also covered in the interview, all with the view toward assessing needs and suggesting ways in which needs can be met. Church Planters will agree to participate in this interview.