

Connecting With the Bible Fellowship Church

“We, the Bible Fellowship Church, seek to become an expanding fellowship of churches united to make disciples of Jesus Christ.”



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Considerations for Connecting with the Bible Fellowship Church (BFC)

In its form of government, the Bible Fellowship Church states, “The Particular Churches seek to demonstrate their participation in the church universal by forming unions with other Particular Churches that have a similar understanding of doctrine and organization” (202-1.2).

What does it mean to be connected?

The New Testament shows that followers of Jesus and churches that endeavor to serve Him seek to be connected. Relational connection is a characteristic of God who exists as three persons who interact with each other. Human beings who are made in the image of God show the same characteristic (Genesis 2:18).

Individual believers are instructed to be connected to other believers (Hebrews 10:24-25). Being connected means:

1. Significant interaction to support fellow believers
2. Working together to carry out the mission of the church (Romans 12:5)

God’s intention is that churches are to be connected to each other. Individual or particular churches are not to exist in isolation. Jesus prayed that His followers be one (John 17:11) and expressed His will for oneness (John 10:16). Often, the call to be one body is presented for the life of the New Testament church (1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 4:4, Colossians 3:15).

The Bible Fellowship Church is committed to developing and deepening the connection between the churches which are a part of it. The connection between churches is based on shared doctrine, culture, practice and heritage. Such connections are not limited by geographical distance but are as strong as the commitment to these connecting factors.

The Biblical Merit of Connectional Churches

The Scriptures give justification for connectional fellowships of churches. The New Testament presents evidence of churches joined by mutual doctrinal compatibility and fellowship, yet being autonomous, submitted to a local rule of elders. A number of biblical reasons support a connectional fellowship of churches and demonstrate the positive merits of such fellowships versus churches being totally independent.

- **Union** – A fellowship of churches manifests to the world that God exists and is united in His purpose to redeem His people and conform them into the image of Christ by means of the proclamation of the Gospel – Jn. 17; cf. Rom. 8:28-30.
Jn. 17:21 “...that they may all be one...”

- **Accountability & Process** – A fellowship of churches provides doctrinal, pastoral and congregational accountability. It also will assist in times of pastoral change and congregational growth, as well as conflict.
Acts 15:22 “...it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church...”
- **Missions** – A fellowship of churches provides a comprehensive missions approach that includes assistance, discipleship and support. It provides a synergism to create a church planting movement.
Acts 11:22 “...they sent Barnabas off to Antioch...and he left for Tarsus to look for Saul...”
- **One-Anothering** – A fellowship of churches thrusts Christians into community, unites in efforts to extend the Kingdom, and gives churches a sense of the broader universal Church. It also affirms the truth that we need one another, i.e. gifts, prayers, support, etc.
I Thes. 1: 7 “...so that you became an example to all believers.”
- **Glorifies God** – God’s purpose for His Church is to bring glory to His name. We are created to give Him glory. When the Church hears of the broader work of the Spirit, in a fellowship of churches, it causes glory to be lifted up to God.
Acts 11:18 “...they quieted down and glorified God...”
- **Pitfalls:**
 1. A fellowship of churches could cause bureaucratic tediousness.
 2. A fellowship of churches could slip into a competitive movement.
 3. A fellowship of churches could lose its vision to grow by concentrating too much on the local level.

Advantages to Connecting with the BFC

- **Biblical Foundation:** Acts 15; Rev. 1
- **Credibility:** A corporate support system
- **Accountability:** Pastoral, ecclesiastical, financial and doctrinal
- **Counsel:** Ministerial Relations Committee, Ministerial Credentials Committee, Conference Pastor, Regional Fellowships
- **Resources:** Work teams, ministry teams, financial and material.
- **Leadership Continuity:** Pulpit supply
- **Fellowship:** Corporate, regional, ministerial

- **Doctrinal Stability**
- **Training:** Church planting, pastoral, other
- **Missional:** Church planting and foreign missions
- **Christian Education Support**
- **Retreat Services:** Pastoral and congregational

Doctrinal Compatibility

1. A commitment to the Reformation views of God's sovereignty and grace (Faith & Order [F&O] – Articles of Faith - Part I)
2. A Presbyterian (federal) polity: rule by elders, autonomy of the local church, connection to churches of like faith (F&O – sections 200, 400, 500).

Specific distinctives: believer's baptism by immersion, elder rule, election, total depravity, perseverance of the saints, inspiration of Scripture, and a pre-millennial eschatology.

Connectional Compatibility

1. BFC Conference (*Faith and Order* – Sec. 500)
2. Autonomy yet mutual submission to fellowship and adherence to the F&O
3. Support of the mission and departments of the Bible Fellowship Church – not regulated, rather a submissive support
4. Reliance upon denominational procedures and assistance, i.e. pulpit supply, conflict between pastor and elders and/or congregation, discipline, reporting
5. Agreement with the *Biblical Principles for Living* (*Faith and Order* – Section 100)

Policy for Churches and Church Plants Connecting with the Bible Fellowship Church

The connection between churches must go beyond mere concepts and be visibly observable. Four questions are important if churches are to be connected:

1. How are connections made?
2. How are connections initiated?
3. How do connections provide nurturing?
4. How does the adoptive relationship end?

1. How are connections made?

From Within the BFC

Many Bible Fellowship Churches have come into existence as offspring of the denomination. The BFC has several ways to “birth new churches.” Some come as a result of the fruit of Church Extension Ministries. Others result from regional churches combining resources to plant a new church. Others grow from the desire of an individual Bible Fellowship church to start a new work. The churches which begin this way will be connected because of their origin within the BFC.

From Outside the BFC

Other churches or church plants outside the BFC which were formed prior to any affiliation with the Bible Fellowship Church may seek to connect with the denomination. Their desire to connect must be rooted in acceptance of the doctrine, culture, practice and heritage of the Bible Fellowship Church.

2. How are connections initiated?

When initial inquiries about affiliation with the Bible Fellowship Church are made by churches or church plants outside the BFC, the following should be considered:

1. Is the pastor or church planter doctrinally compatible with the Articles of Faith?
2. Is the pastor or church planter willing to seek credentials with the Bible Fellowship Church?
3. Is the congregation in agreement with affiliation?
4. Are there any legal matters or financial obligations which might hinder connection?

Pre-existing Churches or Church Plants Outside the BFC

When a church or church plant seeks to affiliate with the BFC, it shall make application to the Board of Church Extension to become a BFC Mission Church.

An evaluation period will be established at the beginning of the relationship whereby the Board of Church Extension will consider their compatibility.

When the following criteria have been met, the Board of Church Extension will entertain a request of the congregation of a church to be recognized as a particular church by the Bible Fellowship Conference.

The following will be expected:

1. The pastor or church planter must hold credentials with the BFC.
2. The elders must certify that they are in agreement with the Articles of Faith.
3. The congregation must declare by majority vote at a congregational meeting their willingness to join the BFC.
4. Provision must be made to include the trust clause in the deed to its property if it owns property.

In the case of a pre-existing church plant, Church Extension will maintain an ongoing relationship until the church plant is prepared for graduation and will then go through the normal graduation process.

Pre-existing Churches Or Church Plants Outside the BFC And BFC Church Plants – by Adoption

Connections are not limited by geographical separation but geographical separation requires that special attention be given pre-existing churches and church plants, as well as BFC church plants which are geographically distant from other Bible Fellowship Churches. In some cases, the connection to the Bible Fellowship Church shall be made through adoption of the church or church plant by an existing Bible Fellowship church. The Board of Church Extension shall determine when an adoptive relationship is to be established.

The following actions shall be taken when a geographically pre-existing distant church or church plant connects with the Bible Fellowship Church by adoption. Such actions will also be exercised with a geographically distant BFC church plant:

1. The connecting church or church plant shall be adopted by an existing Bible Fellowship church which shall commit itself to the church or church plant seeking connection or a BFC church plant at a distance. The church or church plant seeking adoption shall agree to be adopted by the existing church.
2. The existing, adopting church shall commit itself in the following ways:
 - a. Include the adopted church or church plant in its mission statement.
 - b. Pray for the ministry of the adopted church or church plant.
 - c. Make provision to help with the financial needs of the adopted church or church plant if required or requested.
 - d. Establish a pastoral mentoring relationship with the pastor(s) or church planter(s) of the adopted church or church plant.
 - e. Provide at least three members for a Transitional Leadership Team (TLT).

- f. Schedule periodic visits to the adopted church or church plant.
 - g. When possible, invite the pastor or church planter of the adopted church or church plant to visit the adopting church.
3. The adopted church or church plant shall commit itself in the following ways:
- a. The leaders shall commit themselves to the Articles of Faith.
 - b. The pastor or church planter, if he has not done so, shall begin the credentialing process.
 - c. The congregation shall express its desire to seek connection.
 - d. The church or church plant shall follow the applicable procedures outlined in “Steps for Connecting with The Bible Fellowship Church.” (next page)
 - e. The leaders of the adopted church or church plant shall make regular reports to the adopting church that allow for periodic evaluation of the state of the adopted church and its ministry.

3. How do connections provide nurturing?

Existing Bible Fellowship Churches which are geographically near have been arranged in regions. The purpose, organization and duties of the regions have been defined in the Principles of Order, section 600. Responsibility for maintaining the relationships between churches and church plants within a region fall to the churches themselves.

Churches or church plants which are geographically distant will need to make special effort to maintain a visible, working relationship with other Bible Fellowship Churches. The leaders of the adopting church and the adopted church or church plant shall meet periodically to review the commitments outlined above to determine if they are being carried out. The adopting church shall monitor the health and progress as well as actively encourage growth and development of the adopted church or church plant.

4. How does the adoptive relationship end?

The goal for the process of adoption is for the adopted church or church plant to become recognized as a particular church of the Bible Fellowship Church. When the adopted church or church plant believes that this goal has been achieved, it shall request assessment from the Board of Church Extension following the guidelines outlined in Church Extension Ministries’ “Graduation Prep Manual” in the section entitled, “Assessment Guidelines.” The adoptive relationship will end when the adopted church or church plant is received by the Bible Fellowship Conference as a particular church.

Steps for Connecting with the Bible Fellowship Church

1. Contact the director of Church Extension Ministries of the Bible Fellowship Church – office@churchplantingbfc.org.
2. Acquire information on the Bible Fellowship Church:
 - web sites – www.mybfc.org / www.churchplantingbfc.org
 - Email – office@churchplantingbfc.org
 - The *Faith & Order* of the Bible Fellowship Church.
 - Video – *According To the Holy Spirit!*
 - Historical Book – *The Bible Fellowship Church* by Dr. Harold Shelly on our history website – www.bfchistory.org
3. Arrange a meeting with the director of Church Extension Ministries:
Contact <office@churchplantingbfc.org>
4. Send a formal request from the leaders of the connecting church to the Board of Church Extension Ministries, requesting to be accepted as a “mission church” of the Bible Fellowship Church. Acquiring this status will enable Church Extension to begin its assessments and make a recommendation to the BFC Conference for acceptance into the Bible Fellowship Church as a Particular Church.

Church Extension Ministries
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5. Proceed with the necessary assessments:
 - Financial Assessment – This assessment determines the connecting group’s ability to support a pastor and the ministry of the church.
 - Elder Assessments – This assessment determines if the connecting group has at least two men who will qualify as elders according to the Scriptural guidelines and the Faith & Order of the Bible Fellowship Church.
 - Committed Participant Assessments – This assessment determines if the connecting group has at least twenty people over the age of eighteen, who are born again, and will commit to support the church with their prayers, attendance, tithes and service. (If a membership role is established, Church Extension will assess such a role.)
6. Recommendations – The Assessment Committee will make their recommendations to the Board of Church Extension. If all is favorable, the Board of Church Extension will recommend that the connecting church be accepted into the BFC Conference of the Bible Fellowship Church as a “Particular” church. If there are areas that need more discussion and work, the Director of Church Extension will meet with the connecting church and determine what things need to be addressed in order to move ahead with acceptance into the BFC Conference.

7. Reception into the BFC Conference – The director of Church Extension will arrange the reception of the connecting church into Conference. The pastor and delegate of the connecting church, along with some of its members, will need to attend Conference for the reception. Upon approval by the Conference, the pastor and delegate will be seated with the conference and a reception ceremony will take place. This includes greetings for the pastor and testimonies from the flock.

A Brief History of the Bible Fellowship Church

If you would like to learn about the background and development of the Bible Fellowship Church, go to <http://www.bfchistory.org/briefhist.htm>.