

NWBF
Church Legacy Planning Report
Northwest Baptist Convention
November 2007

Over the past several years it has become increasingly evident of the need for NWBC churches to plan for the future, just as individuals need to plan for the future. **Jeremiah 29:11** ‘**For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.’**

We recognize and are especially sensitive to the fact that the Northwest Baptist Convention is a convention of fully autonomous churches. In keeping with that spirit we have prepared the following recommendations in response to our recent experiences and understanding of scripture and Baptist polity.

We acknowledge that the word “legacy” means different things to different people. However, we define legacy as “*something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past, and may include a gift of money or other property.*”

We would be remiss if we did not recognize that a church’s legacy consists of much more than the passing on of its property and assets, just as a personal legacy does. A church’s legacy is measured in lives saved or changed, congregations started or enriched, and mission causes supported. These must be a part of any legacy discussion. We have received a rich legacy from our Baptist forefathers. We owe the same to future generations.

Therefore, we submit the following names and statements for this cooperative effort.

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| 1. Project name: | Church Legacy Planning |
| 2. Project tag line: | Preserving Your Heritage |
| 3. Project purpose: | To develop a cooperative strategy to insure, protect and enrich the longevity and legacy of NWBC churches. |

Associations are on the front lines as they work side by side with churches on a day to day basis. The **NWBC staff** is available to assist in a number of ways including conflict resolution, or healthy church consultations which can provide a thoughtful, yet pragmatic method for a church to evaluate its ministry and future options. The **NWBF staff** is available to answer questions and provide guidance when legal options are being considered and legal documents must be drafted or amended.

The ultimate goal is to work together to assist churches with immediate needs and to promote legacy planning as a worthy endeavor for every church. By working together we hope to provide our churches with the tools they need to do effective legacy planning.

We define **Legacy Planning** as the process of developing and documenting a church's strategy for protecting and passing on its assets.

Legacy Planning Guidelines – The Foundation plans to develop a brief set of guidelines for directors of mission, convention, and foundation staff to use as they help churches work through the process. The process will include six steps.

- 1. Invitation** – An invitation from the church to allow someone from the association, convention, or foundation to explain the process to the church or a group of its leaders.
- 2. Presentation** – A presentation by a representative of the association, convention, or foundation to the church or a leadership group of the church, describing the legacy planning process.
- 3. Evaluation** – An analysis of the legacy planning options for the church, prepared by the representative.
- 4. Recommendations** – A presentation by the representative of the suggestions developed during the evaluation process.
- 5. Approval** – A vote by the church, its leaders and/or authorized committee to implement any or all of the recommendations.
- 6. Implementation** – Preparation and adoption of needed resolutions and documentation.

As churches work through this process, the foundation will be available to assist the churches and, if necessary, refer churches to private attorneys who can answer questions, prepare documents, or provide other legal assistance.

In the final analysis, it is the local church that will decide whether to act on any of these recommendations, and that is only proper. We offer the above as advisory guidelines. It is our prayer that God will use our efforts to advance His Kingdom through His churches.

Scriptural Background – A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers. Associations and conventions are organized by New Testament churches to secure the cooperation of the churches for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. These associations and conventions have no authority over one another or over the churches. These organizations are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of Baptist people in the most effective manner. (See the Baptist Faith and Message, Articles VI and XIV.)

Such is our purpose here.

New challenges appear in every age. In the Northwest, property values have escalated to a point where many churches cannot afford to buy property and buildings. At the same time many of our older congregations are experiencing declining attendance and some are dissolving. Deciding what to do with their property and assets involves a difficult, yet necessary, decision making process.

Just as a faithful Christian steward should have an estate plan in place, it seems logical that a local church should have a legacy plan. The normal, yet painful, transitions through the birth, life, and even death of a local body of believers require thoughtful and prayerful consideration and planning by every local body of believers to ensure that the legacy of that church brings glory to our Lord and advances His Kingdom (See Luke 19:12-27, Romans 14:12, and 1 Corinthians 4:2).

Added to these economic realities are legal complexities. Every church needs articles of incorporation, by-laws, minutes, financial statements, and other legal documents as required by state (Oregon, Washington, or Idaho) and federal laws and regulations. Yet many, if not most, of our churches are ill equipped to understand and implement what is legally required of them in the area of legacy planning. By working together we can direct each of our churches to the advisors they need to implement a legacy plan (See Proverbs 11:14).

Another factor which we must not fail to recognize is the growing number of predators in our society. Weak congregations can become easy prey for clever imposters who may “come to their rescue” disguised as shepherds when their real intention is personal economic gain (See Luke 20:46-47 and 3 John 9-12).

No two churches will face exactly the same set of circumstances as they consider a legacy plan. And every local church will have to make their own decisions about what plan to put in place, because it is that local body of believers which bears the stewardship burden for their properties and assets (See Baptist Faith and Message, Article VI).

However, as a part of "a regional network of churches working together to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ," we owe to each other mutual obligations of accountability and support just like a family. And while we must always respect the autonomy of each local church, we cannot use autonomy as an excuse not to offer aid or assistance to our brethren in their time of need (See Baptist Faith and Message, Article XIV).

These mutual obligations compel us to assume the duty to run to the aid of one of our cooperating churches when it is in need. As we do so, we must give deference to the wishes of the local church and not be compelled by a desire to control their free-will, but rather a desire to protect that free-will even if that means losing that church (and its properties) from fellowship with association or convention.

Our ultimate goal is to promote church legacy planning as a worthy endeavor for every one of our cooperating churches, and provide them with the tools they need to do it effectively.

Luke 19:12-27

12 So He said, "A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. 13 "And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, 'Do business with this until I come back.' 14 "But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' 15 "When he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done. 16 "The first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.' 17 "And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.' 18 "The second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' 19 "And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.' 20 "Another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; 21 for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.' 22 "He said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow? 23 "Then why did you not put my money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?' 24 "Then he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' 25 "And they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas already.' 26 "I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. 27 "But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence."

Romans 14:12

12 So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

1 Corinthians 4:2

2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

Proverbs 11:14

14 Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.

Luke 20:46-47

46 "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, 47 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

3 John 1:9-12

9 I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. 10 For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church. 11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.