

CIRCULAR LETTER
for the
GENERAL ASSEMBLY, MARCH 2000
by
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Dear Brethren in Christ,

Grace and peace be unto you in the name of Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep. This letter is being sent to all ARBCA member churches in compliance with the administrative council's request for a circular letter pertaining to "Cultivating Men For Church Planting." This letter seeks to address the questions, "What should ARBCA look for in a potential church planter?" and "What kind of man is qualified for the task?"

We can be thankful to God that He provides an objective criterion that can be observed to help qualify the subjective desires of those seeking to plant a local church. It is not enough for a man to desire to plant a new work, such a desire must also be accompanied by godly character along the necessary physical and spiritual equipment. The qualifications for an elder, in 1 Timothy 3:2-7, are often summarized in two areas: Spiritual maturity and discipline, and the ability to relate well to others in shepherding them.

The work and office of the pastoral ministry includes both teaching and ruling in the local church. Such a ministry will ultimately require the consecration of a man's entire life to this spiritual work and thus separation from every secular calling. Therefore, a man should first test his call to the ministry if he earnestly desires to serve his Master in this capacity. It is important that he not enter into such a work until he has made a serious inquiry as to whether he is truly qualified and called to such a work. The following three directives must be taken into account whenever examining potential church planters.

A. ONE MUST BE CONVERTED: The candidate must be renewed through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, who has experienced conversion through faith and repentance, all of which must be evidenced by a changed life.

B. ONE MUST BE CALLED: The inward, subjective call of the Holy Spirit must be present, along with the outward, objective confirmation by his local church. This call will include meeting the criteria for an elder as set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. This call will also include being equipped with the essential gifts and graces that will be needed for such work. His grasp of the doctrines of grace should reflect that of experiential Calvinism, that will influence every area of his life and ministry.

His character profile will reflect one who tends to be outgoing, who loves to be around people, is comfortable among strangers and can easily strike up a conversation. He must be one who is hospitable and enjoys having guests at his dinner table on a regular basis. He must demonstrate a certain winsomeness that people tend to gravitate to. He must exhibit an "approachableness" that encourages people to go to him whenever there may be a problem or when there is need for counsel. He must not be the type who would rather lock himself in his study every day and never have to interact with the people on a personal basis.

A potential church planter must demonstrate an ability to evangelize. He is to be a person who is able to turn a conversation toward spiritual things and proclaim Christ. The candidate should demonstrate sufficient ability for preaching the Gospel in various types of informal settings.

A potential church planter must also demonstrate an ability to organize. He must possess a certain degree of organizational and administrative skill. He must be able to adapt to various trials, changing situations, and new challenges. He must be flexible, innovative, and, when necessary, able to establish contingency plans when original plans fall through. He must be one who learns easily and quickly from his mistakes. He must be a team player who is able to work well with others. He must be one who displays the leadership qualities that instills confidence in those under his oversight. He must be capable of leading and motivating others without manipulation or pressure. He must not be an authoritarian, who must always be in control over others.

A candidate for church planting must demonstrate an extremely high tolerance for discouragement and the emotional stamina to “go the distance.” He must be able to weather the storms of opposition or slander, and to endure going unappreciated by the very people he seeks to minister to. He must be constant, stable, patient, steadfast, tenacious, industrious, faithful, and determined. Spiritual maturity, sound judgment, discernment, gentleness, meekness, humility, tenderness and compassion must be also evident in the man’s life. (For further clarification on the call to the ministry, you are recommend to consult the excellent book, “Guidelines for RBMS Missionary Qualifications.”)

C. ONE MUST BE CONNECTED: The candidate will need to establish a relationship with the nearest ARBCA church for any necessary guidance, oversight, accountability, and encouragement, which will eventually culminate in recommendation for ARBCA membership. ARBCA highly recommends that those pursuing the planting of a future ARBCA church become a member of the nearest ARBCA member church. This will give that local church body time and opportunity to examine the man’s gifts and graces in light of the Scriptural criteria. Getting connected to an ARBCA church will enable the local church body and the overseeing elders to discern and recognize whether the man is called to a church planting ministry. ARBCA churches cannot send out someone we do not know. Ample time is needed to observe how the candidate manages his family, if he is humble under provocations, persistent under discouragement, etc.

Being connected to an ARBCA member church is vital for the dissemination of a balanced understanding of Reformed Baptist polity and practice. This enables the potential church planter to experience a church where the whole life and approach to ministry is fleshed out before his eyes. The candidate will then be able to see what ARBCA churches are really like and the type of church we want to plant. This model provides the opportunity for the candidate to observe how an existing ARBCA church functions in its public worship as well as the day to day affairs of the leadership. Being connected to an ARBCA church will help the candidate to see how the practical implications of Calvinism are applied in the life of church members. This model offers the best environment to see how the regulative principle is applied in worship, how and when church discipline is faithfully administered, and how Reformed Baptists celebrate the Lord’s Day.

Let us pour out our hearts unto the Lord of the harvest, that He may be pleased to send forth such men into His whitened fields. Let us earnestly pray for church planters who will evangelize the sinner, build up the saint, and glorify our Savior to whom be honor and glory, forever.

On behalf of ARBCA,

John Giarrizzo

“CULTIVATING MEN FOR CHURCH PLANTING”

What kind of man is qualified for the task? What to look for in a potential church planter?

ASPIRATIONS – 1 Timothy 3:1, 1 Peter 5:2

Inward Call – An intense, all-consuming desire for the ministry. There is a divine constraint laid upon the man that cries out, “Woe is me if I preach not the gospel!” This is an irresistible, overwhelming urge and passionate thirst for the work. A warm and unquenchable desire to be employed in the service of the Lord. The old saying still applies: “Do not enter the ministry if you can help it.” If you could be content doing any other type of career, then you are not called to the ministry. This desire must not be a sudden impulse, but an ongoing passion, that won’t let you go. It is a well thought-out and carefully calculated plan. It is the product of much prayer and consideration.

ABILITIES –

Outward Call – Along with the longing desire there must be the ability to teach and preach. The necessary qualities for such an office must be apparent in the candidates’ life. If a man is called to teach, he must be endowed with the gift of teaching. If he is called to preach, he must be endowed with a certain degree of speaking ability, which can be cultivated and strengthened. If the Lord calls a man into the ministry, He will surely furnish him with the necessary means. There must be evidence in the man’s life of some competent sufficiency for the pastoral office. He must be sufficiently equipped with the right gifts, knowledge, and speaking ability.

OPPORTUNITIES – There should be a corresponding providence that opens doors for the candidate as well as confirming the call. There should be a gradual train of circumstances unfolding which indicate the means, time, and place of entering into the ministry.