



Growing Healthy Churches

Covenant of Relationship
And
Our Responsible Portion

Introduction

American Baptists understand their relationship to God through Jesus Christ as a freely accepted covenant. It is fitting therefore that relationships of organizations created by Christians be bound together by mutually developed covenants.

Growing Healthy Churches (GHC) is a covenanting group of churches and related organizations joined together to accomplish common purposes related to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Believing that the strength of our fellowship lies in voluntary cooperation and unity, this Covenant of Relationship is presented as a reasonable expectation regarding participation by each member congregation within GHC. It represents a widespread desire that each congregation set a goal of surpassing any stated Beginning Expectations in its obedience to the mandate of sharing the gospel throughout the whole world.

The adopted mission of GHC reads as follows:

GHC is an evangelical mission agency, committed to orthodoxy in its theological stance and to the historic Baptist confessions of faith.

The mission of GHC is to grow healthy churches. The vision of GHC is for each member church to fulfill the mandate of the Great Commission, Great Commandment and the Great Criteria of Jesus Christ and become, in the words of Paul, a church "...healthy and growing and full of love." (Ephesians 4:16, as translated in the Living Bible version.)

GHC, as an expression of the church of Jesus Christ, (1) shall provide services to the local congregations (2) provide opportunities to help start new congregations and (3) shall provide a channel through which local congregations shall discharge their wider mission to GHC, and to all the world, a mission which stems from the obligation to declare and to make effective in all areas of life the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

I. Regional Network Resources and Responsibilities

Growing Healthy Churches and its covenanting congregations have responsibilities to each other. The covenanting churches agree to maintain a Network structure which will make available the following resources, support, and leadership for its member congregations:

Growing Healthy Churches will fulfill its responsibilities to its covenanting congregations by making available the following resources and leadership for its member congregations.

A. Resources provided to all covenanting churches

Network Focus. To provide a "laser focus" on the improved effectiveness of pastors and the local church for the purpose of impacting their community with the message of Jesus Christ.

Training. To bring the most effective leaders in America to our pastors and lay leaders for the purpose of expanding vision, passion and skills to grow healthy churches.

Resource Center. To help assist and provide leadership and ministry tools to a pastor or GHC congregation in the areas of administration, missions, treasurer roles, ordination and a variety of resources.

Peer Learning. To provide ongoing training opportunities.

Mission Involvement. To provide options for local churches to partner in our efforts to Growing Healthy Churches, church planting and worldwide mission.

Reproduction. To be a catalyst and provide resources for local healthy congregations to reproduce themselves through church planting.

B. Resources provided for additional fees/commitment

The following resources will be provided based on level of the financial commitment of the covenanting church. Churches giving a minimum of 2% percentage of the congregation's annual income over the minimum requirement of the *Our Responsible Portion* will receive the resources with no additional fee.

Consulting. To continually train Network staff in the most effective techniques of leadership and ministry to share with pastors and local churches.

Pastoral Search. To provide a process for the local church that includes an assessment of current ministry and a vision for future ministry that leads to the forming of a search committee and search process that matches the church's vision, working toward the end results of calling a pastor that will lead the church to the next level of ministry.

Resource Center. To provide special research and one on one training the church may need.

Financial Planning. To provide the most effective Stewardship, fund raising, budgeting and financial resources for both our Network ministries and our local churches.

C. Support

1. A channel for local church contributions toward the mission budget of the American Baptist Churches in the USA.
2. A learning, sharing and fellowship time among clusters of American Baptist churches.
3. A GHC consultant's services for pastoral leadership development, church programming and local staff relationships.
4. A channel for producing and distributing annual reports concerning the work of participating congregations and related organizations.
5. Various programs toward the development, support and well-being of GHC's pastors and other professional leadership.
6. A network among church pastors for sharing best practices.
7. A variety of Christian experiences
8. A resource for planting new churches.

D. Leadership

1. Leadership in evangelism for local church health and growth and stewardship training, in the local church.
2. Leadership and guidance in local church stewardship programs.
3. Network meetings for conducting GHC business, sharing of concerns and receiving information and inspiration.
4. Benefits of participation in GHC or interdenominational affairs.

In addition, within the limits of GHC's staff time, resources and dependent on the churches level of commitment, other tailored resources, support, and leadership may be developed to meet the needs of particular congregations.

II. Requirements for Participating Congregations

The intent of this Covenant can be met by congregations which are at different stages in their development.

These requirements are the foundation below which no congregation is expected to fall in its pursuit of a genuine family relationship, but upon which it will build to its fullest capacity to express our joint calling to God's ministry. Each congregation covenants to:

1. Publicize and accept the adopted mission, vision and values of Growing Healthy Churches.
2. Support the work of Growing Healthy Churches, by meeting the minimum requirement of the *Our Responsible Portion*¹ as well as striving towards the expectation of giving a fair share of the congregation's annual income (exclusive of building payments) to GHC or to the American Baptist Mission Budget.² A fair share is understood to be a tithe (10%), and each congregation agrees to begin working toward this goal.³
3. Provide an annual report on the form provided by Growing Healthy Churches and ABC-USA.
4. Pursue its ministry as a congregation sensitive to:
 - its own mandate for mission;
 - its partnership responsibilities to its sister congregations;
 - the expressed theological convictions of the Growing Healthy Churches;
 - and the right of the Growing Healthy Churches to take actions necessary to maintain the unity of its own life and mission.

¹Undesignated giving to Growing Healthy Churches fulfills the requirement of the *Our Responsible Portion* and is considered part of the total mission giving as well as the 10% tithe.

²The American Baptist Mission Budget is defined as giving toward approved objectives of the cooperative budget, whether such giving is undesignated or designated or specifics or targeted. GHC's Division of Mission and Stewardship will be pleased to answer any questions regarding what types of giving may be credited according to this definition.

³In both categories, Beginning and Desired, Congregations which are dually aligned are expected to meet 50% of the benevolence giving standard.

5. Strategize for the development of new church plants in communities surrounding the existing local church.

III. Monitoring the Covenant of Relationship

- A. Through clusters and GHC Staff the local church will be offered periodically the opportunity to assess the availability and quality of GHC's resources, support and leadership.
- B. A church that does not show progress toward meeting the minimum requirement under this Covenant will be offered the opportunity to counsel with GHC representatives toward the goal of determining whether Network assistance can be rendered or whether the congregation wishes to remain a member of Growing Healthy Churches.
- C. The Growing Healthy Churches will publish annually a list of all participating congregations.
- D. This Covenant is intended to increase the interdependent life and mission of the covenanting partners while respecting the appropriate autonomy of each congregation. Together we claim the unifying power of the Holy Spirit as we seek to live out our faithful obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

OUR RESPONSIBLE PORTION

An association of churches such as the Growing Healthy Churches (GHC) does not and cannot function, carrying out even the most basic administrative tasks, without adequate funding. We assume the responsibility for the maintenance of the association when we join together to form it. Beyond this, one of the primary purposes for joining forces is to accomplish together what we could not do at all or could not do as well separately. This includes both missions, starting new congregations, and humanitarian aid.

For this reason it seems proper in a world of limited resources that the burden be distributed among all of the churches so included. A fair share is the goal for all of our churches. Many of our smaller churches are doing far more proportionately than churches of greater size. However, a significant number of our churches (both large and small) are not giving to our united mission or to GHC as well as they could or should. This is distressing since we have always been a mission-minded denomination. **It is important that we all share in our mutual responsibility to support the work of the Lord beyond our immediate area.**

The minimum **mission giving guidelines** you have approved are below. To some they may seem high and in some extreme cases, they indeed may be. To others they may appear lower than they should be. Yet for all of our churches they are offered as a challenge and an encouragement to reach beyond what they currently are giving in order that the mission God has given us might continue. Of course, as our Covenant of Relationship suggests, these amounts should be but a step toward a tithe of our income.

Minimum Annual GHC and United Mission Giving Expectations

Minimum to Growing Healthy Churches regardless of size <small>(It can be given directly to GHC or by giving \$1,625 to United Mission.)</small>	
All GHC Churches	\$1,000
Minimum Giving recommendation to United Mission or GHC	
Below 100 Members	\$2,000
100 - 149 Members	\$2,500
150 - 199 Members	\$3,000

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