

How to Start a Church

Advent Lutheran Church, Winchester, Virginia

2010

1. Assemble a group of people with common concerns over the drift of the ELCA from the authority of the Scripture.
 - After several meetings to discuss options, vote on whether to start a new church.
 - The chair of the meetings should be a concerned layman who has credibility as a leader of the assembled group.
 - Call the group a “Planning Committee.”
2. Hold regular meetings of the Planning Committee to keep the members of the proposed congregation informed and involved as well as to seek the involvement of others. The following actions should be taken:
 - Establish an ad hoc committee to deal with finding a facility for worship. Discuss the pros and cons of sharing space with another congregation, use of a public facility such as a school, or the use of a private entity.
 - Begin to identify what the congregation desires and needs in a pastor.
 - Begin planning for Christian education for all ages.
 - Appoint a constitution and bylaws committee.
3. Request a financial commitment from each family unit of the Planning Committee. If commitments raise questions about the viability of the undertaking, then the planning dialogue should be continued as efforts are made to recruit additional members to the Planning group.
4. Identify a name for the congregation. This is terribly important to establishing the identity of the church and to stating that it is more than a group of malcontents. Rather, this is a committed group with an end result that is definable.
5. Reach out to CORE/NALC and established congregations, seeking assistance as a mission congregation.
6. Adopt the bylaws and constitution by vote of the Planning Group.

7. Once the constitution and bylaws are adopted, the appropriate officers must be elected by the Planning Committee. Included are president, vice president, secretary and treasurer. Advent also chose a historian.
8. Establish an address for the Church. Initially, this could be the leader's address. Then rent a post office box for receipt of mail. Once a permanent location has been defined and after the agreements have been completed on the meeting site, then basic liability insurance coverage must be obtained. This should include workers compensation.
9. Request and establish an EIN with the IRS. This is necessary for banking and insurance requirements. Approval as a 501(c)(3) organization by the IRS is not required if you meet the IRS definition of a church. This includes holding regular services, having a constitution and bylaws, electing officers, etc. These requirements are not difficult to meet if you put in place the elements covered in this memo. Meeting the criteria means that the congregation is exempt from any taxes and that contributions are tax deductible.
10. Establish a bank account for receiving contributions and making disbursements.
11. Request initial donations and financial commitments so that the congregation may, among other things, pay for the basic liability insurance coverage and any rental expenses incurred with the rental of space. NOTE: In addition to liability insurance for the congregation, there should be a policy to cover the leaders.
12. Church/congregation may decide to incorporate, which may be done within the state where the church is located. Incorporation of churches in some states is not allowed. While not required, incorporation may be useful. Until incorporated, the congregation is essentially an association. Associations cannot hold the title to property in most jurisdictions. In addition, there may be liability exposure for individual members beyond the scope of the liability coverage and should be reviewed carefully.
13. Identify clergy to conduct worship during the period in which the congregation is being established. Retired clergy can be an excellent source of ministers.
14. Establish the location, date and time of the first worship service and the following worship services. Obtain a sign for the Church that can be displayed in a prominent location and approach the local media for publication of the event.
15. When appropriate, Church affiliation with a national body (NALC) should be approved by the congregation in accordance with the constitution and bylaws.
16. When the revenue stream warrants it, begin the process of calling a minister.

WHAT IS REQUIRED IS A SOUND COMMITMENT, GOOD LEADERSHIP, MUCH PRAYER, REQUIRED ORDER, AND A GREAT AMOUNT OF FAITH — WHICH GOD WILL PROVIDE!