



CONNECTING WITH THE BIBLE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

You don't need to do ministry alone

CHURCH EXTENSION MINISTRIES



“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)

Pastoring an independent church can be lonely. The burdens of ministry are hard to bear on your own. When conflict arises in the church, you have no one to support you to restore order and peace. You know that there are experienced pastors out there who have been in your shoes, but it's hard to find a place to meaningfully connect with them. You want accountability, too. Where can you find other mature Christian brothers in Christ who can catch you before you fall into sin or encourage you not to become weary in doing good?

You can get the connection and support you need by joining the Bible Fellowship Church denomination.



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. 17:21 "...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.
1 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..."

A fellowship of churches can also experience some pitfalls from connectedness. A fellowship of churches could cause bureaucratic tediousness if there are too many layers of oversight and authority. However, in the Bible Fellowship Church, this is kept to a minimum because each local church is autonomous while remaining connected through our common agreement with doctrine. A fellowship of churches could slip into a competitive movement, however our fellowship has intentionally created an atmosphere of cooperation and not competition. A fellowship of churches could lose its vision to grow by concentrating too much on the local level. In the BFC, church planting has continued to be a major focus through our commitment to be an expanding fellowship of churches. In 2023, three new churches were received into our fellowship and three more are scheduled to be received in 2024.

Advantages to Connecting with the BFC

- **Credibility:** Being associated with a fellowship of churches lets people in the community know that you are part of a larger body which provides support and stability. Unlike a denomination which has control over pastoral assignments and other areas of church decisions, the churches who make up the BFC are autonomous, but connected. Each particular church chooses their own pastor as long as they are ordained by the BFC. Each particular church also chooses their own local leadership.
- **Accountability:** The Executive Board along with other denominational boards and committees have checks and balances in place to keep you and your congregation on track doctrinally, ecclesiastically, and financially. At the same time, you maintain control over the care of your congregation since you know best how to reach your local church and its community. The Board of Church Health of the BFC exists to help when you are experiencing difficulties in your church either financially, with leadership, or with steady attendance. The committee is there for consultation and becomes involved at your invitation. The Ministerial Credentials Committee oversees pastoral ordination and makes sure those who are ordained continue to hold to the truth of God's word as expressed in the Articles of Faith.

- **Counsel:** The Ministerial Relations Committee exists to help with conflict resolution in your church but can only become involved at your invitation or the invitation of your leadership. The Conference Pastor is a pastor to the pastors and is available for you when you need prayer or wise counsel.



Harvest BFC in Boyertown, PA joined the BFC in 2019. Pastor Barry Parsons had joined the regional pastors' prayer gathering and found out just how compatible his church was with the BFC. Barry appreciates the connectedness and support that comes with being part of the BFC.

- **Resources:** The Bible Fellowship Churches support one another. Many times a church will send out a work team or ministry team to help out another church with a specific project. Our fellowship-wide email group is a place for people to offer or to ask for material needs for church ministry.

- **Leadership Continuity:** There are ample retired BFC pastors and department directors who are gifted preachers and are able to provide pulpit supply for when you are on vacation or if there is need for an interim pastor during a pastoral transition.

- **Fellowship:** Each of our BFC churches belongs to a regional fellowship. The pastors of each region meet for prayer and fellowship. Many of our regional gatherings become places where pastors can pick the brains of other pastors when they need godly advice. In addition, there is a Ministerial Convention each fall for pastors and their wives to gather to learn together and to spend time with one another.

- **Doctrinal Stability:** Any changes made to the Articles are not done lightly. They begin with a study committee and continue with presentations made at BFC Conference. Each potential change must be voted on by the Conference, then voted on by each elder board of each church, then voted by the Conference for a second time. This process gives ample time for each piece of doctrine to be prayerfully and carefully decided on. As a result, there is great continuity in our doctrinal positions since they cannot be changed on a whim.

- **Training:** There are many opportunities throughout the year for additional training. The Ministerial Convention happens each fall in addition to various other regional conventions or conferences which are optional to attend. Church

Extension Ministries also holds two Training Days a year on practical church ministry topics.

- **Missional:** The Bible Fellowship Church has a joint Board of Missions and Board of Church Extension through which you can support foreign missionaries and local church planting. The Bible Fellowship Church currently has Mission Churches in Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Florida, and Mexico. Although each church is encouraged to partner with these missions and missionaries, it is not mandatory.
- **Children's Ministry:** The Bible Fellowship Church prioritizes reaching children and teens for Christ through Victory Valley Camp, our summer camp in Zionsville, PA which also holds winter camp and other events throughout the year. Teens and young adults who serve as Summer Missionaries at the camp are disciplined for growth in Christ.



Harmony BFC in Harmony NJ joined in 2023 as a Mission Church. The Church Extension Director walked with them as they formed their first elder board with their existing leadership. The congregation has appreciated the help in filling their pulpit with men from the BFC while they are looking for a pastor, a process the Church Extension Director is also helping with.

Doctrinal Compatibility

Any church who joins the Bible Fellowship Church must hold to the Articles of Faith including these distinctives:

1. A soteriology which includes the doctrines of grace (election, total depravity, perseverance of the saints)
2. Believer's baptism by immersion
3. Premillennial eschatology (either dispensational or historic)
4. Elder-rule

To read the entire Articles of Faith, visit BFC.org/Articles-of-Faith.

Steps for Connecting with the Bible Fellowship Church

1. Contact the director of Church Extension Ministries of the Bible Fellowship Church - at CEMoffice@BFC.org. Even if you aren't sure whether or not you are ready to connect, please contact us for an exploratory conversation.
2. Acquire information on the Bible Fellowship Church:
 - Websites: BFC.org and ChurchPlantingBFC.org
 - Facebook, Instagram, Twitter: @bfcdenomination
3. 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. Mail to:

Church Extension Ministries
PO Box 3534
Allentown PA 18106
CEMoffice@BFC.org

4. 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.)
5. 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.
 6. 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.

The Big Picture: How Connections in the BFC Work

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. Inquires can be emailed to CEMoffice@BFC.org.

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." These manuals are available on ChurchPlantingBFC.org/Resources. The adoptive relationship will end when the adopted church or church plant is received by the Bible Fellowship Conference as a particular church.

Facts and Figures on the Bible Fellowship Church

- The Bible Fellowship Church began in 1858 with seven revivalists in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania. They preached the gospel through enthusiastic, evangelistic prayer meetings. If you would like to learn about the background and development of the Bible Fellowship Church, go to BFCHistory.org.
- Over 10,000 people gather for worship in our churches every week.
- There are currently about 70 Bible Fellowship Churches, mostly in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and New York.
- We also have congregations in Maryland, Florida, New Mexico, and Mexico.

