



Churches Planting Churches: An Example from Columbia, SC

Alan J. Avera, D.Min.
Executive Director

How can the ARP grow? We need to organize more than 7.5 churches each year to offset attrition. This means more church planting than we are currently doing. It will require a church planting culture in the ARP demonstrated by an “all-hands-on-deck” mentality with most of our churches involved in the effort. What part can your church play? As one example, I interviewed Rev. Sean Henderson, Associate Minister of Missions at First Presbyterian Church about what is happening in Columbia, SC.

What was the impetus for FPC to plant another church?

When Dr. Sinclair Ferguson arrived in 2006, it had been over 40 years since FPC had planted a church. He and the session, and then subsequently Dr. Derek Thomas, envisioned becoming a church-planting church. In 2010, we planted Grace Presbyterian Church. Since day one, Grace has wanted to be a church-planting church as well. At the 10th year anniversary celebration of their first worship service, the idea surfaced of planting a church together.

What was the process through which you decided to plant two churches?

In 2022, the FPC session approved forming a committee consisting of elders and members of both FPC and Grace to study and develop a plan for a church plant modeled after the Grace plant. Through much prayer, deliberation, and research, the committee concluded that we should seek to plant

not only one, but two churches in the area. The first plant is planned for Lexington and will be formed primarily from interested people from FPC. The second plant will be formed primarily out of Grace but will not start immediately. Grace plans within the next year to hire a Church Planting Apprentice, who will work at Grace and eventually take the lead with the church plant.

Why Lexington and where in Lexington?

We prayerfully considered where there was a need for a strong Bible-believing, gospel-centered church. Then we conducted a demographic study through the MissionInsite program, which helped us plot the current growth areas in our community. We also identified the locations of church members driving far distances to church, who would benefit from having a church nearby.

What steps are you taking at this stage?

Catawba Presbytery approved the church plant and appointed a provisional session. We have begun meeting and decided to begin the search for the church planter. We are also gathering the core group through a Sunday school class, led by Dr. Thomas, that meets at FPC on Sunday mornings. Once we identify the church planter, he will begin to teach the class and continue developing the core group for the purpose of establishing the new church in Lexington. We need much prayer, as none of this will happen unless the Lord is the one who builds it. We make our plans, but God directs our steps (Proverbs 16:9).

Photo credit: Calvin Kramps, FPC Audio-Visual Specialist

Covenant Church Burbank



Covenant Church Burbank is a new church plant of the Mississippi Valley Presbytery. After beginning as a Bible study on Acts, they launched morning and evening worship a year later in April 2023. Covenant is a church of prayer, worship, and love for our neighbors, all to God's glory. Rev. Brooks Pipher and his wife Amanda have lived in Burbank, California since 2018. He was ordained as an ARP minister in 2016, after graduating from Erskine Theological Seminary.

Burbank, California (surrounded by Los Angeles) is known as "The Media Capital of the World" and is home to major studios. While never anticipating a bi-vocational call, Brooks says that he is now "very grateful for this opportunity to work as an executive in the family business at a film and television studio in Burbank while church planting."

He has found some advantages to bi-vocational work. First, the studio work provides a "fishing pond." Brooks explains, "I pray for opportunities to speak about Jesus on productions." Brooks lists other benefits, "the studio also provides a salary, reducing Covenant's financial burden. My studio position provides "clout" for me in a media-focused town, and I understand better the idols and spiritual needs of entertainment professionals. The studio also provides space where Covenant gathers for worship each Sunday." But there are challenges to being bi-vocational. "There is desired ministry that I'm simply unable to accomplish." He credits Tom Hawkes with giving him insight, "my limits can lead to others stepping up in the church, making a healthier ministry in the long run."

Personal Evangelism



Fears inhibit evangelism. Insufficient training and poor confidence in speaking about Jesus also minimize Jesus as a topic of conversation. Even the word evangelism scares people. But when sharing Jesus with others becomes part of a church's natural conversations, exciting things happen.

Ebenezer ARP Church in Rock Hill, SC is exploring new ways of doing evangelism. They started an Evangelism Committee designed to resource members with face-to-face forms of talking about Jesus that is personal and natural. They are grappling with how to train and motivate their people to participate in the Spirit's work of building the Kingdom of God.

How does a church grow in evangelism? How can members find the motivation to talk about and relate Jesus to every aspect of their lives? What content do members need to communicate what it means to be a Christian? And, how can people get past their fears and discomfort in sharing Jesus with others?

First, start with a team of people concerned about the lost. Second, encourage every member to tell others about what Jesus has and is doing for them. Third, survey the members to identify roadblocks that hinder them from sharing their faith. Fourth, develop a strategy for equipping them with resources and opportunities.

ONA supplies churches with effective tools for making outreach and evangelism part of the church's lifestyle.

Contact: Jim Klukow, D.Min.
klukow@arpsynod.org
(864) 467-1800 Ext. 229

Strengthening Churches



For a couple of decades, about 80% of American churches have been in decline. Covid added to this so that about 90% of churches are now in decline. The ARP Church is no different. In fact, as we hold to the inerrancy of scripture and the unchanging standards of God's Word, we find ourselves increasingly in a hostile Post-Christian culture.

Therefore, it is essential that all churches figure out how to take the gospel forward in this climate. ONA comes alongside our presbyteries in helping sessions, pastors, and churches discern how to do this while remaining faithful to scripture and our confessional standards. People are no longer looking for a church when they move into a community. Rather, as it was asked in relation to Jesus, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?", so now people often ask, "Can anything good come from the Church?" How will we adjust to this new mindset?

We have the means of grace. We have a community that will accept you and forgive you. (Eph. 4:32) We have Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life. (John 14:6) In a pluralistic and relativistic culture, this exclusive claim of Jesus is considered narrow and hateful. How can we be a church with boundaries and yet minister in our community?

The Secret Guest Worshipper survey has been helpful for several ARP churches. It begins with how guests first engage the church, looking at the website, at the signage of the church, and the condition of the parking lot, and then continues with how the congregation receives and welcomes the "secret guest worshipper." People often decide whether to come back within the first 11 minutes. This is long before the sermon. There have been times when sessions are convinced that their church is very friendly, but no one spoke to the guest. The result has been a growing awareness by the session, leading to training about how the congregation can welcome guests.

Also, how is your pastor doing? This is not to

suggest that the pastor is the "silver bullet" to fix any congregation in decline. But often our minister is discouraged. He may not take time for physical exercise. He may not take a day off. All of these are intended to help your pastor be at his best spiritually, physically, and emotionally. ONA has a Pastor's Questionnaire and pastor zoom gatherings to pray for one another and bear one another's burdens.

The most comprehensive church strengthening process is FFCM (Framing the Future of Your Church and Ministry). 24 churches have been involved in this process in the last 5 years. It includes a vision team of elders, deacons, and people from the congregation seeking to discern the biblical mission and core values of the church. They gain clarity about priorities and how to focus their use of resources. This discernment process usually takes about 9 months and then 3 years to implement after the session has approved. FFCM also uses MissionInsite demographic information.

Finally, ONA provides a list of books that are good church strengthening resources. Please come by the ONA booth at World Focus or contact our office to learn more. We look forward to talking with you!

Contact: Rev. Wayne Frazier
wayne@arpsynod.org
704-641-1317



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Become a Church Planting Advocate



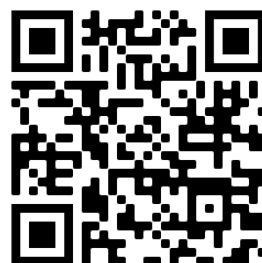
4 ways your church can get involved:

- **Plant** - a daughter church
- **Partner** - with other churches
- **Adopt** - an existing mission church
- **Support** - with resources and ministry

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(864) 467-1800 ona@arpsynod.org www.ona-arp.org

Outreach North America
General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
918 S Pleasantburg Dr. Ste. 108
Greenville SC 29607



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