

# **The Sponsoring Church Arrangement**

Slides adapted from a presentation by Dick Blackford

# History of the "Sponsoring Church"

- Overseas evangelism following WWII
  - Evangelism in Germany sponsored by the Broadway church of Christ in Lubbock, TX
  - Evangelism in Japan sponsored by the Union Avenue church of Christ in Memphis, TN
- Domestic evangelism (and overseas)
  - Through the "Herald of Truth" on radio and TV sponsored by the Fifth and Highland church of Christ in Abilene, TX (1952) <https://www.heraldoftruth.org>
  - "One Nation Under God" mass mailings sponsored by the Sycamore church of Christ in Cookeville, TN (1991)
- Disaster relief
  - E.g., "Churches of Christ Disaster Response Team"
  - "Overseen by the elders at the Cassel Hills church of Christ, Vandalia, OH" (<https://www.churchesofchristdrt.org>)

## Definition Of **Sponsoring Church**

**Lewis G. Hale:** "There are churches known as 'sponsoring churches.' Feeling that they are **not financially able** to carry on a certain program single-handedly, they **invite sister congregations to share the expense of that work**. They receive funds from other churches and add these to whatever funds they themselves provide for the work and they become **wholly responsible for the oversight of the work.**" (*How Churches Can Cooperate, God's Work In God's Way*, p. 3)



# Sponsoring Church Arrangement



## Essential Elements Of **Sponsoring Church Arrangement**

- Sponsoring church assumes **work beyond its ability**
- Contributing churches **send money** to sponsoring church
- Sponsoring church has **exclusive control** of work
- All churches bear **equal responsibility** to work
- Work of many churches is **supervised by elders of one church** (Autonomy destroyed)
- Result: **Brotherhood elders** in a **brotherhood organization** (Collectivity of churches)



- **Mark Roberts:** “**The sponsoring church arrangement creates a church mutual fund. Churches pool their money together, and the elders of the sponsoring church manage that money.** The key is that while a church is in the ‘fund’ they have no control or oversight of their money. **The elders of the sponsoring church do all the deciding. They decide who to put on the TV program, or what to write in the mass mail-out brochure. In other words, they make all the decisions that each local church’s elders are supposed to make! All the elders of the paying churches can do is get in or get out, but while in they have given up their control and thus forfeited their autonomy.** Remember, autonomy means ‘independence and self-control’. When you have lost your control you have lost your autonomy.” (Quoted in Mark Roberts, “Mutual Fund Christianity,” *Abundant Life*, Oct., 1996, 29:10:5)

# Elders in Every Church

- Acts 14:23-- When they had **appointed elders for them in every church**, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.



# Limited Oversight

## Independent

## Equal

**Acts 20:28:** “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, **among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers**, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

**1 Pet. 5:2-3:** <sup>2</sup>Shepherd the flock of God which is **among you**, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; <sup>3</sup>nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

## Autonomous

## Sufficient



# What Part Of Their Oversight Can Elders Delegate?



Acts 14:23; 20:17-28; 1 Pet. 5:2-3

If elders can delegate **one part**, they can delegate **any part**. If they can delegate any part, they can delegate **all parts**

Jerusalem Was

## A Sponsoring Church

- Relief sent to **the brethren** in Judea (Acts 11:29)
- Relief sent to **“the elders”** (Acts 11:30)
- **Only Jerusalem had elders** at this time
- After fulfilling ministry, Barnabas and Saul **returned from Jerusalem** (Acts 12:25)
- Paul was **unknown to churches in Judea** (Gal. 1:22)
- Church in Jerusalem acted as a **sponsoring church** distributing relief to churches in Judea



Jerusalem Was

## **A Sponsoring Church**

- This entire argument rests on assumptions
  - all the relief was sent to the elders in Jerusalem
  - none of the other churches in Judea had elders
  - Paul was unknown in Judea (Ref. Gal. 1:22)
  - Paul returned after only visiting Jerusalem (Acts 26:20)

# Who Were “The Elders”?

(Acts 11:30)

- **No mention of elders** in any church before this
- **Churches** in Judea (Acts 9:31; 1 Th. 2:14; Gal. 1:22)
  - Lydda (Acts 9:32)
  - Sharon (Acts 9:35)
  - Joppa (Acts 9:36-38, 42-43)
- **Elders in every church** (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5)
- **Elders’ oversight limited to local church** (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4)
- **Context:** Does not indicate needy **brethren** or **elders** in Jerusalem, but in **Judea**



Philippi Was

## A Sponsoring Church

- Paul received **funds only from Philippi** (Phil. 4:15-17)
- But **other churches contributed** to his support (2 Cor. 11:8-9)
- **This argument hinges on whether or not the funds sent by Philippi was the same support that Paul robbed from other churches.**

**“Autonomy”:** “1. The condition or quality of being self-governing. 2. Self-government or the right of self-government; self-determination; independence. 3. A self-governing state, community, or group.”



# Church-Sponsored Evangelism



Col. 4:16; 1 Th.  
1:8



Acts 11:19, 22-26;  
13:1-3; 15:22-35



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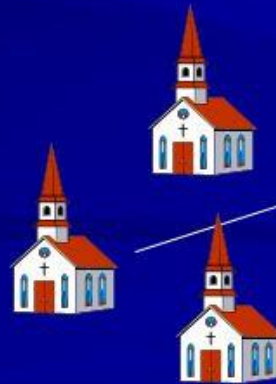
1 Cor. 9:11-14; 2  
Cor. 12:13



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Phil. 1:3-5; 2:25,  
30; 4:14-18



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2 Cor. 11:8-9

# Sponsoring Church Arrangement

- The Sponsoring Church Determines
  - **WHAT** work the congregation was to do,
  - **WHEN** the congregation would do it,
  - **HOW** the congregation would do it,
  - **WHO** the congregation would use to do it.



# Autonomy in Evangelism

- Local church **selected preacher** (Acts 11:22-24)
- Local church **defined territory** of labor (Acts 11:22-24)
- Local church **sent out preacher** (Acts 11:22-24; 13:3)
- Local church **paid preacher** (Phil. 1:3-5; 4:15-16)
- Local church **sent support directly to preacher** (*2 Cor. 11:8-9; Phil 4:15-16;*)

# Interdependence

