

# CHURCH LEGACY STUDY GUIDE

As your congregation begins considering or working through the legacy process, we encourage you to use these questions as a guide for gathering information/materials about your church's past and organizing an archive of your congregation's memories that will preserve its memory for future generations.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CHURCH'S FOUNDING

### Questions to Guide Your Research

1. What year was the church founded?
2. What was the original mission/purpose for its founding?
3. Who were the earliest members, and why did they found the church?
4. Who were the earliest leaders?
5. What external churches/organizations helped found/seed the church?

### Potential Sources of Information

- Earliest record books often start with covenants and confessions of faith.
- Earliest registers will often list founding members, lay leaders, and/or ministers.
- Church histories are often published or produced around anniversaries.
- Early correspondence, especially to/from a home missions office, can tell the story of a church's founding.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CHURCH'S BUILDING HISTORY

### Questions to Guide Your Research

1. Where did the church first meet?
2. Where and when was the first church building constructed? Subsequent buildings? Renovations?
3. How was the church's land acquired?
4. Was the church building ever damaged/destroyed by natural/human disasters?
5. Were there any building campaigns?

### Potential Sources of Information

- Earliest meeting minutes may list where the meeting took place.
- Deeds are likely to list from whom and for how much land was purchased.
- Church and/or parish records may include votes and meetings about church buildings.
- Annual reports and newsletters likely list building-related activities.
- Financial ledgers may include building funds or other materials related specifically to building campaigns.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT PERIODS OF CHANGE & TURBULENCE IN YOUR CHURCH'S HISTORY**

### **Questions to Guide Your Research**

1. What names has the church had?
2. For what reasons did the church change its name?
3. Did any church form out of a separation from the church? Did any church(es) merge into the church?
4. What periods of conflict or controversy exist in the church's history?
5. How were conflicts resolved? Did those conflicts linger or were they fully resolved?

### **Potential Sources of Information**

- Church histories were often published or produced around anniversaries.
- Church meeting minutes and annual reports may report on major controversies and their resolutions.
- Gaps in church records may indicate times of conflict.
- Communications with ecclesiastical conferences, regional associations, or larger denominational bodies can be useful.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CHURCH'S FINANCIAL HISTORY**

### **Questions to Guide Your Research**

1. What kinds of restricted funds are on the books?
2. Does the church have a memorial fund?
3. What bequests did the church receive from members/member families and for what purpose?
4. How were buildings/renovations/bells and belfries/organs funded?

### **Potential Sources of Information**

- Financial ledgers may list funds and their names.
- Annual reports may provide additional details on the purpose and use of funds.
- Fund/Memorial books may exist alongside larger ledgers.
- Appeal letters in newsletters or elsewhere may indicate fundraising activities.
- Parish records may document how church buildings were funded.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CHURCH'S COMMUNITY

### Questions to Guide Your Research

1. When did church membership peak?
2. What auxiliary groups met at the church?
3. Did the church have a Sunday School or other education program?
4. What have been the church's largest mission partners?
5. Did the church publish a newsletter? How long and how often was it produced? What was its name?

### Potential Sources of Information

- Membership records, often kept in registers, can be used to tabulate and track membership over time.
- Annual reports may include reports from auxiliary groups.
- Auxiliary groups may have their own record books, which may further include by-laws and/or mission statements.
- Sunday Schools will often have their own record books and reports in the annual report.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CHURCH'S GREATER COMMUNITY

### Questions to Guide Your Research

1. Who has been a part of the church? What were the church's unique cultural roots? How has that changed? What kinds of diversity have been present over the years?
2. At the apex of the church's life, what was it like?
3. When was the church mentioned in the newspaper? Why were these articles written?
4. What community events has the church participated in?

### Potential Sources of Information

- Membership booklets and church record books may help to document how the church's covenant or confession of faith has changed over the decades.
- Church histories and anniversary programs can document how people felt about the church at a specific moment in time.
- Oral histories from current members can tell the story of how a church has changed.
- US Census reports can document how changes to local populations affected church membership.
- Local newspapers and/or libraries may have past issues that can be searched through for mentions of the church.