

PBBA Equip Ministry | The <45 Project

Part 1 - The Crisis of Ecclesiology Toolbox

Project Summary | A group of PBBA pastors, age 45 and under, gathered in the Spring of 2022 to identify challenges and trends they see facing the church and to then discuss how best to implement a response that can shape the next 25 years. To develop a response, their minds were set to biblical faithfulness, and their heart to Kingdom collaboration. After identifying these challenges, seven in all, this series of ministry tools emerged to aid pastors and churches.

Introduction | The unhealth of the American church is growing more apparent. Various metrics (e.g., decrease in attendance/engagement and a lack of practice of spiritual disciplines, plus many more) affirm this unsettling trend. As these trends have now continued for multiple decades, and seemingly accelerated, a crisis has emerged. While there is great confidence that the Kingdom promise Christ Jesus made to the church will endure, a rapidly growing number of severely challenged churches may not be continuing their efforts in the next decade, and other churches who do continue risk biblical compromise to cultural pressures and internal apathy. Addressing the health of the church is essential for the church moving forward together on Kingdom mission. Uncertainty on the framework of church health (e.g., assessment and ministry essentials), unwise practices by both the pastor and laity, as well as the decrease in lay leaders and biblically qualified deacons and elders, are core components of this crisis that churches must face. This toolbox is geared to address these four components of this crisis of ecclesiology.

Defining and Evaluating Ministries | Pastors and churches frequently talk about being a healthy church. Their subsequent hope is that their church would grow, in both depth and breadth, as the church pursues health. To see the desired health realized, some existing ministries will need to be adjusted or ceased, while new ministries will need to be formed. Despite the ecclesiastical uniqueness that exists in autonomous churches, even among those who embrace Baptist distinctives, biblically faithful churches can still embrace a common framework of what is a healthy church. This framework of church health can serve as a reference point both to pursue for the future and to evaluate the present.

Tools | PBBA has established [12 Characteristics of a Healthy Church](#)¹ as a common framework for our partnering churches. These characteristics address key components every church can consider within their mission, vision, and strategy. Each characteristic contains a description and accompanying metrics that can be applied to each church, regardless of size or context.

To aid the church in assessing their current health, PBBA has developed [Pop the Hood](#)² training and the [Church Health Assessment](#)³ to accompany the 12 Characteristics of a Healthy Church. It is recommended that these tools be completed in conjunction with LifeWay's [Discipleship Pathway Assessment](#).⁴ Together, these three tools, along with the help of a PBBA coach, will aid them in identifying the current health of their church, and prioritize a prayerful and strategic response to toward a healthy future.

Expectations on Elders | Pastors/Elders must commit to take up a cooperative approach to address the present crisis of ecclesiology. While faithfully teaching the biblical text (e.g., preaching), the pastor must also seek to *apply* the scriptures within his church (e.g., leadership), and then partner with other pastors and churches in the same (e.g., Kingdom cooperation). While there are numerous expectations that are biblically

¹ Available online at <http://pbbassociation.org/healthychurch/>

² Available online at <http://pbbassociation.org/popthehood/>

³ Available online at <https://pbbassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Church-Health-Assessment-Guide.pdf>

⁴ Available online at <https://discipleshippathwayassessment.lifeway.com>

entrusted to the pastor/elder, addressing matters of church membership must be prioritized to address the crisis of ecclesiology (e.g., regenerate membership, discipline, inter-church communication).

A contributor of the present crisis in the church is members who conduct themselves in a manner worthy of rebuke and discipline, yet the pastor and/or church fail to address the behavior; or if they do, the individual transfers to another church, leaving the manner unresolved (e.g., abuse, sexual sin, divisiveness). Further, the pastor of the church that the individual begins to attend fails to contact the previous pastor and/or church, or vice-versa, thus the behavior is left unresolved and is potentially repeated. Consequently, sinful behavior is left unaddressed in the church and potentially transfers and infects another.

Tools | PBBA pastors seek to reduce this concern by taking seriously the biblical responsibility of church discipline and partnering together to see more meaningful restoration and reconciliation occur. In addition to faithfully addressing sinful behavior within their church, PBBA pastors have embraced [“How Pastors Relate”](#)⁵ as a covenant by which they work together for an inter-church response. This covenant prioritizes overall Kingdom health over individual church growth, serving both for the good of the individual and health of all involved churches. Further, we recommend “Obligations of Church Leaders to Members” (appendix 1) as a statement of commitment between a church’s leadership and their members

In addition to providing conflict resolution services, PBBA recommends the following resources to equip pastors/churches in handling conflict:

- The Peacemaker (Sande)
- The Path of a Peacemaker (Noble)
- Managing Conflict in the Church (Kale)
- Total Forgiveness (Kendall)
- Antagonist in the Church (Haugk)
- [Peacemaker Ministries](#)⁶
- Obligations of Church Leaders to Members (Appendix 1)

Expectations on Members | Members of a local congregation are tasked to fulfill biblical mandates, both *within* the local body and *through* the local body. Fulfilling these mandates can only occur by members seeing their personal journey of faith is engineered to build up within the overall body of faith (e.g., exercising gifts, fulfilling missional tasks, correction/rebuke/restoration). The present culture of individualism that dominates the American church (e.g., “I should only be concerned about my faith journey”) contradicts scripture. It is incumbent upon the church to articulate biblical expectations upon its member and hold each other accountable.

Tools |

- PBBA recommends the following books and documents contained therein.
 - “I Am A Church member” (Rainer)
 - “I Will” (Rainer)
 - [Expectations of Members](#)⁷

Raising Up Leaders | God assembles the body of Christ for our good and for His glory. He gifts His people to carry out various roles within the church with varying degrees of responsibility. In addition to lay leaders who can equip and oversee groups, God also calls out biblically qualified individuals to fulfill the ecclesiastical offices of deacon and elder (pastor). Those who fulfill these offices are responding to God’s

⁵ Available online at <http://pbbassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/How-we-relate-as-PBBA-Pastors.pdf>

⁶ Available at <https://www.peacemakerministries.org>

⁷ Available online at <https://pbbassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Expectations-of-Members.pdf>

specific ministry call upon their life and not merely taking a next step in the maturing of faith and leadership. The church that is well positioned to expand the Kingdom of God in the next generation will have pathways and tools to raise up lay leaders in their church, a faithfulness to “call out” those God is calling to church offices, and an equipping pathway for them to fulfill that calling, wherever God may determine.

Tools | PBBA recommends the following tools to serve churches in Raising Up Leaders.⁸

Growing Lay Leaders

- [Multiplication Pipeline of the North American Mission Board](#)⁹ (L1 & L2)
- High Impact Teams (Witt)

Calling Out the Called

- Is God Calling Me? (Iorg)
- [Called – Pursuing the High Calling of Ministry](#)¹⁰

Equipping the Called

Deacon

- A Deacon on Purpose (Dr. Tony Wolfe)
- Deacons (Matt Smethurst)
- [Sample Deacon Handbook](#)¹¹

Planter

- [Multiplication Pipeline of the North American Mission Board](#)¹²(L3)

Elder

- [A Guide to Ordination](#)¹³ [document & guide]

⁸ Numerous recommended resources at the end of "The Gospel Driven Church" (Jared Wilson)

⁹ Available at <https://www.namb.net/send-network/pipeline/>

¹⁰ Available at <https://ftc.co/called/>

¹¹ Available online at <https://pbbassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Sample-Deacon-Handbook.pdf>

¹² Available at <https://www.namb.net/send-network/pipeline/>

¹³ Available online at <https://pbbassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/A-Guide-for-Ordination.pdf>

Appendix 1

Under45 Project | **Obligations of Church Leaders to Members**¹⁴

We covenant:

- That your elders/pastors and deacons will meet the criteria assigned to them in the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1-13, 5:17-22; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
- To seek God's will for our faith family to the best of our ability as we study the Scriptures, pray, and follow the Spirit (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-5).
- To care for you and seek your growth as a disciple of Christ, in part by equipping you for service (Eph. 4:11-13) and praying for you regularly, particularly when you are sick (James 5:14).
- To provide teaching and counsel from the whole of Scripture (Acts 20:27-28; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).
- To be on guard against false teachers (Acts 20:28-31).
- To exercise church discipline when necessary (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1).
- To set an example and join you in fulfilling the duties of faith family members (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Tim. 4:12).

¹⁴ Adapted from a ministry tool of Pine Summit Baptist Church, Pensacola, FL