

# STARTING WELL

WISE ADVICE FROM VETERAN PRESBYTERS ON HOW TO START WELL

ANOTHER AG SECTIONAL  
PRESBYTER EXCHANGE  
RESOURCE

BY GENE RONCONE



## ENDORCEMENTS



"The art of leadership requires three skills: communicating a compelling vision, assembling and aligning a team to accomplish the vision and managing conflict. "Starting Well" gives new presbyters the foundation they need to do that."  
Rich Guerra, SoCal Network Superintendent



"This resource is long overdue. Thank you for your vision to mentor first-time men and women into this realm of leadership."  
Allen Tyson, Presbyter, East Central Section, Arizona District



"Gene Roncone has put together a great tool that takes into account the various networks in our fellowship that will give a new presbyter the tools they need to serve well."  
Paul Scheperie, Executive Presbyter, Southern Missouri District



"This resource is encouraging, educational, and empowering. I have sent it to all of my presbyters and encouraged them to read it. I would have LOVED to have had a resource like this when I served as a presbyter."  
Dennis Marquardt, District Superintendent, Northern New England District



"I believe this resource will set up both new and veteran presbyters for greater success."  
Neil Lindwall, Presbyter, Northwest Section, Illinois District



"I attended my first presbytery meeting back in the 1980's after my election as a presbyter from a small rural section at the ripe old age of 29. I had no idea what I was getting into and would have devoured Gene Roncone's excellent resource on the topic—if it had been available. This document provides clear, concise, and strategic information designed to equip and empower."  
Don Detrick, Secretary/Treasurer, Northwest Ministry Network



"I wish I had something like this when I first became a presbyter."  
Dane Wead, Executive Presbyter, Rocky Mountain Ministry Network



"Every new presbyter needs a starting point! STARTING WELL paves the way for new presbyters to receive great advice and see their work through the lens successful peers."  
Randy Popineau, Secretary/Treasurer, Rocky Mountain Ministry Network



"The role of presbyter is a new world of influence and responsibility. This document answers many questions a new presbyter has and provides excellent wisdom and clear direction to help a presbyter be effective."  
Don Steiger, District Superintendent / Network Pastor, Rocky Mountain Ministry Network



"What a good resource this is! I wish I had this three years ago when I first started."

Felix Gonzalez, Executive Presbyter at Large, Potomac District



"When elected, presbyters are ministers willing to serve. They must then be developed into presbyters. This resource is a practical, well thought and applicable starting point in the task of presbytery development."

Bret Allen, District Superintendent, Northern California & Nevada District Council



"I would highly recommend this resource to any new, veteran presbyter or committee person to help guide them on their journey to success. It is filled with fresh insight, tools and veteran advice that is sure to help presbyters and committee people succeed in building stronger communities."

Chris Peterson, Executive Presbyter, Rocky Mountain Ministry Network



"God calls some to be overseers, but where is the training to carry out that calling? This manual goes a long way to help the presbyter be the best shepherd he or she can be."

Greg Wendschlag, Executive Presbyter, Northern California & Nevada District



"Starting Well provides insights, practical wisdom, and resources enabling new presbyters to share their sovereign contribution more effectively from the start."

Chad Spinler, Presbyter, North Twin Cities Section, Minnesota District



"Starting Well is a great resource for any leader who desires to connect and lead his/her section with excellence."

Andrew Templeton, Presbyter, Chattanooga Section, Tennessee District

**STARTING WELL**  
**Wise Advice from Veteran Presbyters**

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Lou Zinnanti (Presbyter, Southeast Section, Southern New England District)

## CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations! You have just been elected as a presbyter. Most likely you have a pretty good handle on the structure, governance, and policy in your network; but you are wondering what the difference is between good and great presbyters. You may even wish you could talk to those who have gone before you and ask them how to start well. We have good news!

Up until now, there has been no structured way new sectional presbyters could learn from seasoned veterans about how to start well and navigate the learning curve; but this e-book contains the advice of over **35** presbyters from **17** different sections across the nation. They look back and give you **10** practical things to consider when starting your new ministry as a presbyter. Then 54 network superintendents were invited to review the report and fill in the gaps. **For the first time, the combined wisdom of hundreds of years is at your fingertips.**

However, it is important you understand that this e-book is NOT a policy manual! Nor does it supersede anything your own Network has created. It is the combined coaching from seasoned veterans about what they would do if they were starting over. I have combined their wisdom into 10 steps that can give you immediate traction and a running start.

Over the years, several names have emerged to describe a district. Today the words “district,” “network,” and “resource center” are all used around the nation. For the sake of simplification, this e-book will use the term “network” to refer to all of them. I will also be writing in the plural sense of “we” because most of this work is the consolidated effort of many contributors. As you read this, it is my hope that you will feel the support of a larger crowd seated in the stands and cheering you on to success!

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## CREATE MARGIN

By accepting the role of presbyter, you have also made a commitment to fulfill the duties of that role to the best of your abilities. The role will require you to give of your time, talents, and energy as well as spiritual resources. Veteran Presbyter Ken Jasko (New Jersey) advises new presbyters to count the cost to ensure that “you’re prepared for the extra work you will have to do serving the section and network.” Following are some suggestions as to how you can create the needed margin in each one of these areas:

### **1. Time.**

Serving as a presbyter is going to require time. You will do well if you can decide early on that your time serving as a presbyter is an expression of faith. You already give your tithes, offerings, and missions pledge as a matter of faith and know the spiritual dynamics involved. Decide to have the same approach to your time. Be as generous as you are able without neglecting your own ministry. However, make no mistake about it; you will need to take some things off your plate, designate blocks of time each week for service, and delegate things to your own staff to free you up. You will also need to engage other ministers and members of your sectional committee to help. It is safe to say that the time it takes to be a good presbyter averages about two and three hours a week over the course of a year. That would include sectional meetings, network presbytery meetings, commute times, phone calls, and administrative matters. Plan now what days or times you can help accommodate that load into your schedule.

### **2. Talents.**

You have not been given this opportunity by chance. God knows what your section needs; and part of meeting those needs involves your employing your passions, giftings, and natural talents in your service as a presbyter. Make a list of your spiritual gifts, talents, passions, natural abilities, and experiences to see how they might be engaged in your service as a presbyter. There is something your section needs that only you can provide.

### **3. Energy.**

As a presbyter, be careful not to give your ministry leftovers. While your church

cannot suffer, it is important to delegate some of your best time and creative energy towards your ministry as a presbyter.

#### **4. Network.**

By network, we are referring to the connections and relationships you have that can be leveraged to make you more effective in this ministry. Make a list of them and keep them in mind.

#### **5. Spiritual resources.**

As a presbyter, it is important for you to be spiritually vibrant. If you are to care for the spiritual “water carriers” of your section, you must be one who lives in the Word and is directed by God’s Spirit. You must possess more than book knowledge, longevity, or pithy leadership quotes. The Word must have matured you enough to meet the demands of hurting; discouraged; depressed; and, at times, suicidal colleagues. You must be a well of authentic spirituality to serve your weary colleagues.

Following is a list of questions to help you identify and create margin as you settle into this new role:

- What block of time each week will I dedicate exclusively to my role as presbyter?
- What spiritual gifts have I seen effectively used in my life over the years?
- What natural talents have been developed to the point where they are significantly above average?
- What one area, objective, or theme can I maintain a high level of passion in my role as presbyter?
- What friends, associations, communities, or ministries can I mobilize to serve my section?
- On a scale of 1-10, how would I rate the consistency of my daily bible reading and prayer life? What would need to happen to make that number a 9 or 10?

Our Best Practices report revealed an interesting finding on this matter. Presbyters with standout commitment levels and active sections seemed to view the time they give as a ministry offering to the Lord instead of a distraction from their local church. What is the takeaway? A section’s sense of community will be a direct reflection of the commitment level of its presbyter.



## READ RESOURCES

The first thing you must do is educate yourself about this new role. This will require you to read existing resources and prepare a list of questions. Following are three invaluable resources for you in the early days:

### 1. **Network Constitution/Bylaws.**

Read your network bylaws and take note of every reference to the office of presbyter or presbytery. It is important that you understand what your network needs from you and how to stay in your lane. Most references can be broken down into the following three categories:

- **Qualifications of a presbyter.** Make a list of these and keep them at the forefront of your mind. What you do as a presbyter will never exceed what you are.
- **Responsibilities of an individual presbyter.** Make a list of the specific tasks and responsibilities you are expected to fulfill as a member of the presbytery.
- **Powers of the presbytery (group as a whole).** This will not only include meetings but also powers, responsibilities, and expectations of the entire presbytery as a group. Make a list of these so you can be sure you are part of making them happen.

### 2. **Existing orientation materials.**

Each network has its own way of orientating new presbyters. Some are in the form of an orientation manual or training meeting. Others have a “learn-as-you-go” type of program. Network Superintendent Rich Guerra (Southern California) not only has the responsibilities listed in their network bylaws but also has taken the time to cast vision through a short document he wrote entitled, “Qualities of an Executive Presbyter.” Although it is short, Rich was wise enough to keep expectations simple and focused by using colorful words such as “visionary,” “inspire,” “committed,” and “pastoral.” This kind of imagery communicates so much more clearly than long policy statements or bylaws. Whatever the case may be in your situation, be sure to ask your network’s Superintendent to send you any and all forms of presbyter ordination material. If they do not have any, do not worry. The next chapter entitled, “Get Coaching,” can help you make up the difference.

### **3. 2018 Best Practices report.**

In late 2018, the AGSPE conducted a national survey to identify best practices of community building on a sectional level. The results were compiled in a report identifying the best practices of 176 presbyters in 30 networks and how they are using sectional meetings to build community in an age of isolation. The report has hundreds of great ideas and insights and is available to you for free at [www.agspe.org/bp.pdf](http://www.agspe.org/bp.pdf).

As we wrap up this important phase, you may be wondering why this step is mentioned before suggesting a discussion with your network leadership. The reason is that by familiarizing yourself with these resources first, you can write down questions that can be asked later as described in the “Get Coaching” section. Creating this list of questions now will help you make the best use of your time and that of others.

## GET COACHING

Taking time to seek the advice of other leaders in your network is a wise move that many new presbyters overlook. Veteran Presbyter Brad Puckett (Appalachian District) echoed this suggestion saying, “Ask your network leadership and the prior presbyter for an overview of existing concerns or needs within the section. It is important that you understand the situational and spiritual environment in which you’ll be ministering.”

This process may take a bit of time but is well worth the effort. The last thing you should be doing at this stage of the process is trying to implement significant change or introducing big initiatives. This is a learning season that will take approximately one to three months and involves your calling key players in your network and asking them for coaching on a few topics. Remember to send them an email BEFORE asking for their time and list in your email the questions you intend to ask. This will give them time to think about their responses and maximize everyone’s time. The email should be short, simple, and similar to the following:

*As you may know, I was recently elected/appointed to serve as a sectional presbyter for the (insert the name) section. I was wondering if I could spend some time on the phone with you to get your advice and feedback. As I begin serving as the sectional presbyter, I would value your feedback on how to start well. Is there a day or time that you would be able to accommodate 30 minutes over the phone?*

*The thought also occurred to me that sending you a short list of questions might help me be a better steward of your valuable time. I have attached a document with these questions that might help. I’m eager to learn from you, friend.*

*In appreciation,  
New Presbyter*

Following is a list of the most important leaders who can give valuable advice and perspective. We have also included a list of possible questions for each leader.

### **1. District Superintendent/Network Pastor.**

Following are a few suggested questions to ask your superintendent when beginning your service as a sectional presbyter:

- Is there some form of orientation (manual or training) that is available to new presbyters?
- Are there any outstanding problems or issues in my section to which I need to be sensitive?
- What makes my section unique within our region and network?
- What challenges do you feel need to be addressed in my section?
- What are four things I can do to better support you as our leader?
- How often do you think we should touch base over the phone or in person?
- What would you recommend I do or focus upon during my first year as sectional presbyter?

I would suggest emailing these questions to your network superintendent and then scheduling a phone call after he or she has had time to think about them. It is paramount that you see your role as a support to your leadership. You were elected because people thought you capable of cooperating with them and not competing with them. The only way that can happen is if you take the initiative to stay connected to your leader's vision and needs.

## **2. Previous Presbyter.**

If your predecessor has served with distinction, you will want to organize a way the section can express appreciation for their leadership. This may be a luncheon celebrating their leadership, a card everyone signs, or a gift on behalf of the section.

Newly elected presbyter Rob Rocca (Rocky Mountain) organized a love offering and a sectional dinner at a local restaurant to honor retiring presbyter Michael Popineau. Popineau served for 12 years, and it was important to Rob that the section honor him for his service. Rob met with the sectional committee to come up with a plan. He confirmed with the existing presbyter and asked permission to organize his last monthly gathering and made all of the arrangements personally. When asked why he would recommend this to other new presbyters Rocca said, "I believe we need to honor those that serve before us. It builds a bridge of trust between two leadership roles in the transition."

In addition to this, you will also want to set up a meeting or a phone call for at least 30 minutes where you can get their feedback. Presbyter Karen Rydwansky (Southern

New England) said, “Don’t be afraid to consult with the former presbyter. They have experience with various situations that will help you navigate difficult water.”

Following is a list of questions that may help you get started. Again, email them the list of questions a few days beforehand so they can be prepared to answer with wise reflection.

- What makes our section unique?
- What tasks associated with being a presbyter in this section have taken the most time?
- How have you encouraged relationships and interaction among the ministers in our section?
- What methods have you used to communicate with the section?
- What ministers have you found to be reliable in getting things done?
- What is your assessment of the sectional committee?
- How has the section included staff pastors and spouses in sectional life?
- Are there any issues, tensions, or needed healing among ministers or churches that I would need to know about?
- Are there any situations you were personally working on that would require me to be brought up to speed?
- Are there any initiatives you started as presbyter that are already in motion and you would like for me to consider continuing?
- Are there any annual events or traditions of which I need to be aware?
- What would be your advice to me in the first year?

### **3. Sectional committee members.**

As soon as you are able, set up at least 90 minutes to meet with the sectional committee in person. Send the following questions beforehand so the committee members can be prepared to answer them thoughtfully.

- What tasks have you each performed on the team in the last year?
- What are your suggestions for me in the first year?
- How often do you think we should meet?
- How many hours are you able to give to sectional work a month?
- What opportunities do you feel we are missing?

- What do you think we can do to create a deeper sense of community in our section?
- What would you recommend I do or focus upon during my first year as sectional presbyter?

After you get their answers, you will have a lot of relevant topics to discuss in your first committee meeting.

#### **4. Executive Presbyter over your section.**

If your section has an executive presbyter, email the following questions and ask if they are able meet in person or for a phone meeting.

- Is there any sectional history on which I need to be brought up to speed?
- What would you recommend I do or focus on during my first year as sectional presbyter?
- Are there any people who need to be appreciated, fences that need mending, or relationships that are strained?
- How can I best support our network pastor/superintendent?
- Would you be available to give me advice and coaching along the way?

The information and coaching you will glean through this step will shave months and even years off your learning curve. It will also help you gain instant traction as the new sectional presbyter. Few things will be a better use of your time than this step.

## CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS

Within two days of being elected, email your network and request the latest email list and contact information for all the ministers in your section. Upon receipt of this information, email all the ministers and spouses in your section to thank them for giving you the opportunity to serve them, clarify expectations, and affirm your commitment to them personally. Following is a list submitted by veteran presbyters of recommended topics to be addressed in your first communication:

**1. Gratitude.**

Communicate your gratitude for their trust and confidence.

**2. Availability.**

Set expectations regarding your availability to them. Give them several different ways they can reach you when they have questions or need assistance. This would include your name, mailing address, email, cell phone, and work number.

**3. Meetings.**

Many presbyters want to assure those in their section that they will honor their time and keep meetings brief, purposeful, and relevant.

**4. Communication.**

State your primary forms of communication and how they will be used to help everyone stay connected in the section (email, text, Facebook group, snail mail, website, blog, or other).

**5. Dates.**

Give them the date, time, and place of the next meeting.

**6. Confidentiality.**

State your commitment to confidentiality if and when they need assistance, providing, of course, that nothing is illegal, puts others in danger, or requires moral compromise on your part.

**7. Relationship.**

Explain how eager you are to meet with them and to learn more about them, their family, and their ministry.



Following is an example of a first communication used by Presbyter Sam Scalf (Rocky Mountain):

*Thank you for allowing me to serve! For those who don't know me, my name is Sam. I am married to an amazing woman. Melodie and I have been married for 16 years. We have four daughters. I am the lead pastor at Rêver in Longmont. I am a Colorado native. I was born in Colorado Springs and grew up on the Western Slope. Almost all of my faith journey has happened in the Rocky Mountain Ministry Network. I received the baptism in the Holy Spirit and was called to ministry at our very own Camp Cedaredge. I love this Network. I am honored and thrilled to have been given the opportunity to serve as the Denver Metro North Sectional Presbyter. I am thankful for the faithful service and leadership Doyle Robinson has provided as our sectional presbyter over the last 9 years. His personal investment in me is a huge part of my journey. I am excited about the future!*

*I wanted to take a few minutes to let you know what you can expect from me. First of all, I want to be accessible. If you are going through a difficult time, I want to know how I can help and pray. Don't hesitate to reach out to me. If you have a win you'd like to share, I want to celebrate with you. I will work hard to respond promptly.*

*Second, I want to work toward developing a sense of community within our section. The truth is that ministry life is difficult and lonely at times. To help create this sense of community, we are planning monthly gatherings. We will be taking the busy months off. (No meetings in July, August, November, December). Each gathering will be "hosted" in one of YOUR neighborhoods. We will rotate each month. These gatherings could be either at your church if you want to provide the coffee or at your favorite coffee shop. We will take a few minutes out our time together to hear from the host about their life, ministry, and community. I hope these gatherings will be a meaningful time to hear from the ministers in our section. Our first gathering will be May 17th at 9:30. I will be sending out an invite with location and hosting details next week.*

*Finally, I want to help connect you to the resources that you need to make you effective in ministry. I don't have access to everything you need personally, but someone does. One of the ways we are going to facilitate that is through our brand-new Facebook Group. This page will allow us not only to connect relationally but also to better connect concerning your needs. In our various ministries, I believe we have valuable resources that from which others could benefit. Maybe, it is expertise. (For example, we have a pretty gifted IT guy who could help you solve a nagging networking issue). Perhaps you have extra equipment. Maybe it is a listening ear and a different perspective. I believe we are better when we work together for God's Kingdom.*

*I'd love to connect with you.*

Samuel Scalf

*Cell: 720.839.7444 (Feel Free to Text)*  
*Email: sam@rever.ag*

This was Sam's first time serving as a presbyter, and his first communication hit it out of the park. His passion for community building and being a relational leader ended up reviving his section and inviting the participation of several millennial pastors. You can too!

## INVITE FEEDBACK

In 2018, we conducted a national survey of sectional presbyters about how they were using sectional meetings to build a deeper sense of community in their section, and 176 presbyters from 30 networks participated. The presbyters who enjoyed higher rates of participation were not only collaborative in planning their meetings but also used open-ended surveys to help them know what “itch to scratch.” These surveys were then made available through online applications, handouts, or questions emailed to local ministers in the section.

In AGSPE’s February 2019 podcast, Presbyterian Phil Price (New Mexico) shared how surveys helped him triple attendance at his sectional meetings. Following is a template of a survey you can use or customize for your section:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Church \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

1. Role in church (select one): Lead pastor, youth pastor, children’s pastor, associate pastor, minister’s spouse, or retired minister.
2. How effective are our sectional meetings on a scale of 1-10? \_\_\_\_\_  
What would need to happen to make this number an 8 or 9? Please give specific examples.
3. How many times in the past 12 months have you attended our sectional meetings?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What do you like most about our sectional meetings?
5. What do you like least about our sectional meetings?
6. What opportunities do you feel we are missing as a section?

7. If you were to pick your first, second, and third preference for the day of the week sectional meetings occur, what would they be?

1<sup>st</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

3<sup>rd</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

**HINT:** Sorting the responses to this question three separate ways according to each individual's preferences promises to be enlightening. For example, determine which day was the most popular first choice. Then determine which day was the most popular second choice and then which day was the third most popular choice. This is called preferential voting and helps to take into consideration people's second most desired outcome.

8. What time of day works best for you: morning, lunch, or evenings. Please number them in prioritized order.

1<sup>st</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

3<sup>rd</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

**HINT:** Sorting the responses to this question three separate ways according to each individual's preferences promises to be enlightening. For example, determine which time was the most popular first choice. Then determine which time was the most popular second choice and then which time was the third most popular choice. This is called preferential voting and helps to take into consideration people's second most desired outcome.

9. Would you be willing to host a sectional meeting?

10. What suggestions or ideas would you have to make our meetings more relational in nature?

11. What three areas of ministry require the most of your time?

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

12. What topics for the previous areas would you most enjoy discussing, presenting, or hearing about in future meetings?
13. What fun and nonministry-related social activities would you recommend we do as a section?
14. What giftings, knowledge, or availability do you have that might contribute to the success of our meetings in the next year?

There are many inexpensive online methods to take surveys. Survey Monkey, Typeform, Google Forms, Client Heartbeat, Zoho Survey, Survey Gizmo, Facebook Groups and Survey Planet are just a few. Use them to connect with your section in ways that are important to them.

## MOBILIZE A TEAM

Presbyter Carey Waldie (Michigan) said it best when he remarked in our survey, “Team building not only helps you as a presbyter, but it also helps include others and allows them to buy in.” Following are a few questions to think about when mobilizing and building your own team:

### 1. What kind of team members do you need?

Your section will most likely have elected one or two other individuals to serve with you on a sectional committee. You will also need to pull in other individuals to assist when special needs arise. Do not limit your team to the sectional committee. As stated in the concluding “take away” of our Best Practices report, “Leaders, not programs, create community!” If you believe that to be true, then the next logical question is, “What kind of leaders do we need in this age of isolation?” The data seems to show that in addition to our existing organizational qualifications, every section should strive to elect and every presbyter should strive to be:

- **Spiritually passionate.** If they are to care for the “water carriers” of your section, your team must be people who live in the Word. They must possess more than book knowledge, longevity, or pithy leadership quotes. The Word must have matured them enough to meet the demands of hurting; discouraged; depressed; and, at times, suicidal colleagues. They must be a well of authentic spirituality to serve weary colleagues.
- **Genuinely relational.** Being laid-back or an introvert does not make one relational nor does being fun-loving or extroverted. Relational leaders overlap every temperament and personality. They are intentional brokers of relationship because, at their core, they love people, bringing people together, and creating a culture of community.
- **Intentionally inclusive.** It kills them to see people left out, isolated, or marginalized. They have large umbrellas and are bridge builders for all generations. They can lead outside of their preferences and see good in the egotist, potential in the novice, and value in both young and old. They are slow to take offense, quick to include, and champions of community.

- **Kingdom generous.** They are willing to give of their time, talents, and resources. They are givers who pastor giving churches and create a culture of sharing.
- **Curious listeners.** They have more questions than opinions. They are masters of inquiry; facilitators of dialogue; and sincerely curious about the lives, families, stories, passions, and disappointments of others.
- **Ambidextrous leaders.** Their ego allows them to be supportive followers and decisive leaders all at the same time. They are skilled at following the vision of their district superintendent/network pastor but also able to lead leaders and facilitate collaborators.
- **Broken collaborators.** Pain has purged them of selfish ambition and given them a need to serve something greater than themselves. They are humble lovers of people who inspire others to dream, work, finance, sacrifice, and cooperate for no other reason than the fact that we are better together.
- **Seekers of excellence.** They despise mediocrity, desire greatness, and value competence and ingenuity. They call people farther, longer, wider, and higher because they see beyond what “we” are now and focus on what “we” can become. In this day of isolation, narcissism, and disengagement, we need leaders—not curators of tradition, guardians of the status quo, or title collectors but servant leaders who are willing to be inconvenienced for the “betterment of us.” As a presbyter, no one will influence the depth of your bench more than you.

## 2. What should our team focus on during my first six months?

During your first six months, you should lead your sectional team to accomplish the following six things:

- **Initial team huddle.** Meet with your sectional committee within the first month of being elected. Introduce yourself and get to know them better. Discuss what methods you will use as a team to communicate (email, cell, text, other).
- **Surveys and feedback.** Design a list of survey questions (see chapter entitled “Invite Feedback” and take a section-wide survey.
- **Team brainstorming.** Schedule a brainstorming meeting to evaluate the survey responses and to determine a game plan.



- **Annual calendar.** Set an annual calendar, send it out, and keep to it. Presbyterian Louis Zinnanti (Southern New England) underscored the importance of this saying, “Schedule the entire year’s meetings and give it to the sectional ministers so they can plan way ahead.” Last-minute planning for busy pastors never works! Make a plan and work the plan. Presbyterian Michael Popineau (Rocky Mountain) further warned on this point saying, “Don’t book a sectional event and later cancel it to accommodate your personal calendar.”
- **Determine a funding plan.** Determine a way your section will fund sectional initiatives. In early February 2019, members of the AGSPE Facebook group posted ways they fund sectional initiatives. Following are the most popular ways sections secured funding to achieve their goals:
  - **Church finances.** Each church contributes \$20-25 a month.
  - **Network funding.** Some networks give each section a small budget.
  - **Sectional fundraiser.** Churches in the section team up to do a section-wide fundraiser (fireworks stand, Christmas trees, etc.).
  - **Church offerings.** Each church takes a sectional offering once a year.
  - **Host church.** Host church absorbs the cost of the meeting.
  - **Bartering.** A section in Northern California & Nevada shares their facilities and partners with organizations in the community to secure funding for sectional events.
  - **Combined approach.** Key churches budget \$300 a year to help and sectional dues of \$25 per minister and \$100 per church for the year (Chattanooga Section, Tennessee).
  - **Presbyter’s church.** At the end of services, Presbyterian Phil Price (New Mexico) asks his congregation to drop a \$20 bill on their way out so they can host sectional meetings, cater in food, and provide babysitting. His passion for his section is contagious, and his church loves supporting his efforts.
- **Connect with ministers.** Executive Presbyterian Greg Wendschlag (Northern California & Nevada) divides his list of ministers among his team and has them call members of the region.

### **3. How can we involve others?**

Superintendent Rich Guerra (Southern California) encourages his presbyters to pull people into the creative process because “people support what they help create.” Other presbyters echoed this several times in our survey saying things like, “Don’t do it all alone,” “Use your team!” “Delegate to others,” and “Communicate deadlines.” It became clear that community in the section is a by-product of collaboration on the sectional team.

When evaluating surveys, there is usually one person who seems to drop a wealth of “forgotten wisdom” about a topic most overlooked. Presbyter Ric Lewellen (Potomac) was that person for this project. In this case, however, Ric’s forgotten wisdom was about the often forgotten saying, “Don’t forget about retired ministers within the section. They can be a wealth of knowledge and have great stories. Don’t neglect those ministers who may not be pastors or pastoring at this time. They sometimes are overlooked or forgotten, like evangelists or even missionaries on itineration who may reside there. My wife and I make attempts to meet with ministers AND their spouses when possible, especially female pastors whose husbands sometimes feel like an unknown quantity.” Thanks Ric! We are grateful for the needed reminder.

## BUILD COMMUNITY

The ground is moving beneath us! Like shifting tectonic plates, something is changing in the church and it is not good. Pastors are leaving the ministry, burning out, suffering from depression and taking their own lives in record numbers. Author Richard Clinton in his book, *Starting Well*, claims that 70 percent of those who enter the ministry will not finish well. We are experiencing a national crisis among our ministers that cannot be ignored. It is not until you dig down beneath the symptoms of burnout, loneliness, and moral failure that you begin to see the real problem—isolation.

As a presbyter, it is important to know that you are part of God's prescription for this dark and devastating epidemic. When it comes to building meaningful relationships and creating a deeper sense of community in your section, you are ground zero. You can do that better than the national office, district/network departments, or even massive mega-church events. Following is some wise advice from veteran presbyters about how to build community.

### **1. Plan, schedule, and lead regular meetings.**

Your most significant tool in creating a meaningful sense of community will be sectional meetings. Presbyter Greg Wendschlag (Northern California & Nevada) offers valuable advice when it comes to effective meetings. "We call our gathering the 'Sectional Leadership Forum' and focus on developing our ministers. We avoid doing sectional commercials and get high quality people to present at the meetings. It's worth the money. Treat the speakers well so they will come back! Have good food and keep to the time limit. I have purposely got up and stood next to a speaker when they have gone over their time allotment. The people appreciate that they can plan their day and they feel respected. It's also a good idea to invite those outside the AG to speak. It's great to expand our fellowship and partner with others doing great things in our area", says Wendschlag.

The most exhaustive and relevant resource concerning sectional meetings is the 2019 Best Practices report. The report is the product of five months of research, over 700 pages of data, and surveys from 176 presbyters in 30 networks around the nation. The report identifies how relational leaders are using sectional meetings to

build a deeper sense of community in an age of isolation. The report is free, and can be accessed at [www.agspe.org/bp.pdf](http://www.agspe.org/bp.pdf).

## **2. Introduce yourself and broker introductions.**

Most veteran presbyters stressed the importance of reaching out to every minister in the section to introduce yourself personally and let them know you are there to serve. This can be through a phone call, text, or email. Presbyter Paul Scheperle (Southern Missouri) warns new presbyters about the need to take the time to learn BOTH the pastors' and their spouses' first names. "Make sure you know every minister's name and their spouse's name. It is totally unprofessional when a presbyter cannot remember a minister's name and refers to them by their town or church name." However, do not stop there. Every time a new minister enters your section, introduce them to others via email, coffee appointments, and texting. Be a powerful broker of relationships and networking.

## **3. Regularly connect outside of meetings.**

Presbyter Angelo Fleece (Michigan) recommends that new presbyters "connect relationally with all the lead pastors in your section and value each generation represented in the ministers." Veteran Presbyter Lonnie Campbell (Rocky Mountain) knows that each minister has their own "preferred method" of communication. That is why he wisely recommends that new presbyters "communicate in more than one format (text, email, phone, Facebook, etc.) regarding all events in the section." Presbyter Karen Rydwansky (Southern New England) said, "Don't just focus on lead pastors; call as many credential holders as you can. This helps you connect with everyone." Never end a phone call without asking the question, "What are three things I can pray for you about?" That one question is always a springboard to deeper levels of relationship.

## **4. Reach out to those on the fringes.**

No one affects the level of inclusiveness in a network more than presbyters. Do not constantly use and communicate with the same people. Reach out to those who seem distant, uninterested, or marginalized. In the words of veteran Presbyter Elwyn Johnston (North Texas), "Don't assume you know why someone does not participate. Ask. The answers may surprise you."

## **5. Involve your ministers in meetings.**

Whether it is training, sharing a book review, or sectional tasks, try to identify the giftings of your sectional ministers and allow them to use those gifts in sectional meetings.

## **6. Be a relational leader.**

Veteran presbyter Michael Popineau (Rocky Mountain) listed three things he does to be a relational leader:

- Makes it a point to get to know each minister in his section.
- Spends time with the sectional committee.
- Visits the physical church address of lead pastors in his section when meeting with them.

A common mistake new presbyters make is trying to fly without the wings of relationship. According to veteran Presbyter Elwyn Johnston (North Texas), “big asks” like requesting participation, time, money, facilities, and skill must not precede the establishment of authentic relationship.

Presbyter Felix Gonzalez (Potomac) makes it a point to talk to each person in his section face-to-face at least once a year. “No texts!” says Gonzalez. Nearly every veteran presbyter who participated in the survey echoed the importance of being relational in one form or another.

Presbyter Ric Lewellen (Potomac) simplified this important priority by saying, “I connect in whatever way is convenient for them: face-to-face, dinner, lunch, coffee, or whatever.”

## **7. Keep your contacts updated.**

Presbyter Louis Zinnanti (Southern New England) understands that relationships will never exceed the accuracy of your data: “Establish a database system that works for you. It needs to be simple but powerful. You should be able to contact sectional ministers via email or phone and access information no matter where you are. I have all my sectional contacts in my iCloud account and use an email service like Mailchimp or Constant Contact.”

Presbyter Chad Spinler (Minnesota) has created a “care card” to record each contact he has with the ministers in his section. The card contains all the important information about each minister like the names of their spouse, children, and grandchildren; birthday; contact information; and prayer requests. He then uses those

cards as a prayer card when praying for those in his section. One word or warning should be stated on this point. Do not assume your ministers have given the network their latest contact information. In many cases, the presbyter will find out about church name changes and address, email, or phone updates long before people think to notify the network office. This is and will be an ongoing and frustrating part of district work.

#### **8. Give spiritual support.**

One veteran presbyter rightly advises, “Don’t stop praying for and being available to your ministers. They need you or they WILL need you at some point!” When ministers in your section face trials, crises, a death in the family, or hard times, be there for them and use your influence to mobilize others in prayer.

#### **9. Create community building events.**

Presbyter Nate Elarton (Michigan) is wise enough to know that common projects are an effective and fast way to pull people together. That is why he and his team identify sectional projects that the entire section can adopt and buy into.

#### **10. Return phone calls.**

Few things minimize the importance of others and undermine a sense of community more than unreturned phone calls, texts, or emails. Presbyter Allen Tyson (Arizona) warns, “Never ignore emails, texts, or voicemails.” If you really claim to be a network or community, then it is important to act like it. Enough said.

There are some who claim networks to be irrelevant. However, when it comes to creating community, no one is more qualified or strategically positioned to do it better than you so do what only you can do and do it well.

For a list of community building practices from 176 presbyters around the nation, be sure also to read the Best Practices report at [www.agspe.org/bp.pdf](http://www.agspe.org/bp.pdf).

## GRASP NUMBERS

*A special thanks to Secretary Treasurer Jay Herndon from the Northern California & Nevada District Resource Center; Executive Presbyter and Finance Committee member Chris Peterson from the Rocky Mountain Ministry Network; and Phil Parker, the Finance Administrator from the Rocky Mountain Ministry Network for collaborating with us to make this chapter possible. Their combined perspectives in consolidating the suggestions of veteran presbyters have been invaluable.*

Congratulations on being selected to serve as a presbyter for your section. As you approach upcoming presbytery meetings, you may be overwhelmed by the volume of data in the financial reports. Unless your local church is over 700 or 800 attendees, chances are the network financial structure will be more complex than you are used to. That is why we want to answer some of the most common questions new presbyters have about network finances.

### **1. Who is responsible?**

The first question a new presbyter has to ask is, “Who is the Fiduciary Board?” Every nonprofit organization must identify the fiduciary, the people who are responsible for overseeing the finances and the legal well-being of the organization. In some networks, that is the Executive Presbytery; and in others, it is the network’s Presbytery at-large. The first thing a new presbyter needs to know is, “Am I a fiduciary?” If the answer is, “No,” then you can relax a little. You may receive a copy of the quarterly financial report, but you probably will not be asked to make many financial decisions as it is not within your jurisdiction. However, if you are on the fiduciary board, then you had best pay attention! It is your job to make sure you understand your role and organizational responsibilities.

### **2. How are budgets created, approved, maintained, and reported?**

In most cases, the budget formation is similar to the local church and involves the following phases:

- **Formation.** The general fund budget usually begins with the network’s accounting department creating an initial budget report and draft showing anticipated income and expenses based on past history. Those drafts are usually done under the supervision of the network treasurer to ensure that they reflect organizational



objectives and projected income and expenses as well as the vision of the superintendent. Departmental budgets begin in a similar way but usually involve the departmental directors working directly with the treasurer to make a draft.

- **Committee review.** The second phase usually involves draft budgets being presented to some kind of a finance committee for comment and feedback. This group is usually a team of people with administrative giftings, a representation of the network presbytery or a hybrid option of the two.
- **Superintendent's briefing.** The third phase usually involves the superintendent being briefed by the treasurer on all budgets to ensure they reflect the superintendent's values, vision, and preferences regarding the allocation of organizational resources.
- **Approval.** The fourth phase usually involves the budget being reviewed and recommended either by a network's executive or general presbytery.
- **Evaluation.** The fifth phase involves the budget being reviewed alongside monthly financial statements by the network's Fiduciary Board.
- **Reporting.** The sixth phase is reporting back to the network council through an audit report or financial presentation at network council.

### 3. How are network finances similar to the local church?

Although the financial structure of the local church and the network are different, they do have some similarities that will help you find your way.

- Both are religious ministries and exist as nonprofit organizations.
- Both are required to utilize "fund accounting."
- Both have assigned fiscal responsibility to officers and an official fiduciary.
- Both have a "general fund" that facilitates expenses for salaries, facilities, and general operating expenses.
- Both have specific departments that are responsible for submitting and managing budgets (Kids, Youth, Missions, Men/Women and others).
- Both have budgets that are created, approved, reported, and maintained.

The most important thing to remember is that financial structures should reflect purpose and mission. The purpose of the local church is to evangelize and disciple. The purpose of the network is to network, resource, and train. Therefore, it is logical

that they will have some similarities but also have distinct differences—which brings us to the next question.

#### 4. How are network finances different from the local church?

Network finances can be very different from church finances.

- **The number of “funds.”** As a pastor, it is likely that your church probably has about a dozen funds: General, Missions, Building, Youth, Men, Women, Children, etc. However, the nature of network ministry requires more funds. It is not uncommon for networks to have funds for each network affiliated church, each network affiliated pastor, and each section. Each department may have several funds themselves. There may be funds for missionaries and special projects. You may think, “That’s too many”; however, you need to remember that one of the core purposes of a network is to resource its churches and ministries and that sometimes requires that they process funds for them.
- **The complexity of the annual audit.** Audits can be hard to understand because they answer questions the average person does not ask. Most people simply want to know, “Was our income more than our expenses? Do we have anything left?” Those are important questions, but they do not give a full picture of a network’s financial standing. The difference can be compared to having your family doctor listen to your heart through a stethoscope or having the cardiologist run a full EKG on your heart. Most people would not know how to read the EKG, but that does not mean they should skip it!

Most modern audits are trying to answer the question: “Do the financial statements of this organization fairly represent what truly happened fiscally over the course of the last year?” As such, they are often concerned as much with the methods used to record and report transactions as they are with what the final financial statements look like. In this day and age, auditors are also looking for opportunities for fraud and whether the organization is doing all it reasonably can to minimize those opportunities.

- **The primary sources of revenue.** Unlike the local church, a network has very limited sources of and opportunities for income. Most networks have four primary sources which include ministers’ tithes/dues; church offerings; departmental events; and at times, interest earning investments. Of these sources, the

ministers' tithes/dues are the most predictable because it is a requirement for a minister to keep their credential. As a result, it will not fluctuate greatly from year to year and is fairly reliable. Some networks require a 100 percent tithe, and others have a flat rate or set amount that is virtually the same for everyone in a particular category (ordained, licensed, or certified). However, the annual consistency in tithes does not translate into monthly consistency. Some pastors may send in their tithe/dues sporadically (or even annually!). Fortunately, the ministers are aware of their obligation; and if they skip a month or two, they will probably make it up since their credentials require them to do so. This is not true in the church where members rarely make up missed tithes and their membership is not contingent upon giving a specified dollar amount. The point is that (unlike the church) a low month or two is not necessarily cause for concern.

There is an additional difference regarding the opportunities to gain income. Unlike the local church, a network does not have weekly opportunities to appeal to donors. That is why most networks rarely receive large unrestricted or undesignated gifts. If there is a large gift, it is usually designated for some kind of missions or building project. This means that the network has to plan their budget very carefully and strictly stay on budget. There is little room for overages.

- **The size of financial reserves.** It is not uncommon for a network to have a large reserve in the form of a savings or interest-bearing account. Pastors are often uncomfortable seeing the amount of money the network has in reserve. They want to see those funds being activated in ministry instead of sitting in an account. However, it is important that pastors realize networks usually cannot collect special offerings for operational needs or emergencies. Unlike the local church, they are unable to make appeals to their constituency on a weekly basis. As a result, they have to plan for emergencies, unexpected expenses, and economic downturns by creating reserves.
- **Departmental spending.** Some churches may choose to fund their departments from a General Fund surplus or may allow them to run in the "red" with any deficit being carried by the General Fund at the end of the year. Most likely, your network does not operate this way. The network will typically allow each department to carry any surplus forward at the end of the year. They may also allow them to

“spend down” some of this surplus while holding the department leader accountable to be diligent about operating their budget in the black.

- **Reports with numbered accounts.** Most churches utilize named accounts on their financial statements. Examples of this would be items labeled as “youth camp income,” “children’s church supplies,” or even “electric bill” while in most cases network budgets assign numbers to these accounts and expense categories. Most often funds are given a numerical prefix with individual categories in that fund being assigned a suffix (numbers after the prefix at the end). For example, the Youth Department may be a fund with a prefix of “005”; and Women’s Ministries may be a fund with a prefix of “008.” A convention event may be assigned a suffix account number 3445 resulting in a general ledger number reading “005-3445” for Youth and “008-3445” for Women. Why all the numbers? It is the only way to organize that volume of information. Libraries use the Dewey Decimal System to organize books for the same reason. It will take some time to learn your network’s numbers; and if you need assistance, just ask.
- **Detail of management reports.** Unlike the local church, the monthly finance report you receive will be more than a simple income and expense report. It probably will not include restricted accounts and reserve accounts. If it did, the report would be so large that it would be useless as an expense management tool. The management report usually only reflects administration and ministry operations and may count transfers as expenses. That alone may be 25 pages long; but each network will be different and reflect the particular accounting software used, preferences of leaders, and past precedent.

## **5. How do I deal with the tension between preference and principle?**

As a presbyter, it will be important to manage the tension between preference and principle. Preference is the way you like things to be done and how you do them in your own church. Principle is a clearly identifiable moral, biblical, or accounting standard that should supersede preference. Some presbyters who are used to getting their own way in their own local church make the mistake of elevating their personal preferences in finance management to the level of principle. That dynamic is multiplied by the fact that the presbytery consists of men and women who are all leaders in their own right. In their local setting, they have become accustomed to

getting what they want and bringing their own organization into conformity with their personal preferences. However, you must remember that your role is to support your network superintendent as the person God chose and the individual your constituency has elected into office. That means you cannot make the mistake of promoting your personal preferences over principle. When an issue is not moral or principled in nature, it comes down to preference; and your superintendent should be given the “right of way.”

**6. What if the presbytery becomes divided about budgetary items?**

Money debates can become heated. Some may even adopt a moralistic disposition of “I am right, I am godly; you are wrong, you are carnal.” Few things can cause godly people to lose their godliness as easily as money. Perhaps that is why Jesus forewarned us that how we handle money is a qualifier/disqualifier for greater riches! If you find your own presbytery occasionally divided about money, it is important to treat your officers and fellow presbyters with respect. Remember, God measures holiness by how we treat one another. Conflict is also an opportunity God gives us to reveal character and leadership in the community of faith. That is why Paul said, “There must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized” (1 Corinthians 11:19 ESV).

**7. Will I be reimbursed for expenses related to my service as a presbyter?**

Each network has its own policy and budget for reimbursable expenses. You should contact your network treasurer to be sure you understand what that policy is and what will be required of you to be approved and reimbursed for an expense. It is also important to remember that just like the volunteers in your church, there are times our services cannot always be measured or rewarded monetarily. Sometimes excellence will require us to give of our time and resources as an offering unto the Lord.

**8. What is the best way for me to understand the network financial structure?**

As has already been noted, each network is different and reflects the particular accounting software used, preferences of leaders, past precedent, and the size and scope of their ministries. It will most likely take a year to totally understand how all the pieces fit together. The best way to get on the other side of the learning curve is

to attend a few meetings, keep a list of questions, and then schedule a phone appointment with your network treasurer to get a line-by-line briefing on reports.

## 9. What are the most common mistakes new presbyters make regarding network finances?

There are many mistakes that can be made by new presbyters in their approach to dealing with network finances. Following is some advice to help you avoid those that are most common:

- **Do your homework.** Make sure you review financial reports. If possible, ask for the reports in advance of the meeting so you can review them and develop a list of questions. Be prepared for the meeting.
- **Ask questions.** Make sure you ask questions during the meetings in order to have a clear picture of the financial landscape of the network including the General Fund and those of the various departments. Remember that at this level, change is not as fluid and fast as it may be in the local church.
- **Be supportive.** It is important to remember that financial resources are among the most important earthly facilitators of vision. Vision is cast by leadership and supported by the presbytery board. Any hijacking of finances affects vision. That is when the work can become frustrating, strained, and even divisive. Check in with your superintendent through email or over the phone 2-3 times a year to ensure that they feel your support and that you are helping them achieve the vision God gave them for the network.

Sooner or later you will have strong opinions about how the network prioritizes its income and expenses. Please remember that those who came before you were godly and sincere people and had good reasons for setting things up the way they are. Those reasons may have become outdated but understanding them is still crucial. It is important to educate yourself, ask good questions, and take the time to learn the reason why things are done a certain way before suggesting something different. Context, thoroughness, and comprehensive understanding are important. The proverb says it best declaring, “The first ones to tell their side of a story seem right until cross-examined by their peers” (Proverbs 18:17, The Voice).

## HEED WISDOM

Most of the advice from veteran presbyters seemed to fit into the nine chapters of this e-book. However, there was also a plethora of really great advice that did not fit neatly into a common category or chapter but was just too good to pass up. Those jewels of wisdom are listed as follows:

### **1. Show respect for your peers.**

Do not criticize or compare yourself to the previous presbyter or network leadership. In an attempt to build rapport, some new presbyters may even criticize presbytery decisions to ministers in their section. Inexperienced presbyters create division by saying, “I will fight for you at the network office and presbyter meetings.” Presbyter Ken Jasko (New Jersey) warns against trying to present yourself as a moral minority, organizational activist, or lone advocate. This will only backfire and result in division on the presbytery and ultimately with those in your section questioning your motives. Remember, you are part of a team; and as Presbyter Brenton Frank (New Mexico) said, “You are here to serve others and that should be seen by you as a privilege, not a right.”

### **2. Be present.**

It is a sad commentary in and of itself that several veteran presbyters felt the need to remind new members about the importance of faithful attendance. Presbyter Landon Holder (Kentucky) summarized it best saying, “Don’t miss presbytery meetings, sectional activities, or significant network functions.” If you had time to take the title, make time to fulfill the commitment.

### **3. Respect diversity.**

Your presbytery will consist of leaders from small, medium, and large-sized churches. There will be ministers from various genders and ethnicities. Their ages will range from young to old, and giftings and temperaments will vary. It is important to remember that the size of your church or the strength of your personality does not make your ideas any better or worse than anyone else’s. Your opinion is only your opinion. Your fellow presbyters may not always be sure that you are right, but they will certainly know if your spirit is right.



#### **4. Be a humble listener.**

You were not elected as a boss, supervisor, or authority figure. Treat your peers with respect and lead from humility and relationship instead of pseudo authority. Perhaps network Superintendent Rich Guerra (Southern California) said it best in our survey: “Don’t meet with pastors to tell them what you are doing. Take time to ask questions and find out what they are doing.”

#### **5. Do not represent anonymous opinions.**

Some leaders unwisely surrender their credibility by trying to anonymously represent the opinions of others in presbytery deliberations. They might say something like, “As a younger minister, I think...” or “Many female ministers have told me...” or “Our older ministers have told me they want us to do...” or even “Several people, who I am not at liberty to say, have told me they don’t like....” Unless you are willing and able to share their names with others, do not try to cloak a concern, opinion, or criticism under the guise of “several have come to me....” It only weakens the trust others have in you as a member of the team. If you cannot mention names, then do not mention them at all unless you share the concern. In that case, then share it as your own and not as the opinion of an anonymous group or person.

#### **6. Stay in your lane.**

Be sure you are not overstepping your bounds, creating more problems than you are solving, or contradicting your network leadership. The questions for the superintendent mentioned in the chapter entitled “Keep Learning” will help you stay in sync with your leader and fellow presbyters.

#### **7. Do not take things personally.**

There are some people who just will not return phone calls, show up for meetings, or show enthusiasm towards your initiatives for reasons that have nothing to do with you. One presbyter humorously wrote, “I’ve had to accept the fact that there are some ministers who would not come to network events if Jesus Christ was the keynote speaker!”

#### **8. Keep boundaries and use channels.**

As the presbyter, there may be times when disgruntled staff pastors or board members from other churches in your section may try to pull you into church politics. Although you serve all the ministers in your section, be careful to work with and

through official channels. Veteran Presbyterian Joe Berry (Rocky Mountain) wisely warns, “Don’t ignore the needs of staff people in your section but be careful to work through their lead pastor when possible. It will help insulate you from church politics.”

#### **9. Keep the network informed.**

As a presbyter, there will be times when you hear of developments, church name changes, new contact information, a tragedy, or life situations among your ministers long before the network office does. Do not assume they know but try to keep them in the loop. They cannot respond to what they do not know.

#### **10. Take time to build trust.**

Presbyter Dane Wead (Rocky Mountain) said it best on our survey: “Don’t expect to be trusted immediately. It takes time to build relationships and trust.” Presbyter Phillip Wood (Northern New England) said, “Don’t try to fix all the sectional problems right away. Look, learn, and listen for the first few months.” Understanding the needs and unique culture of your section will take intentionality and time.

Most of our mistakes on the front side of any learning curve are not intentional. No one chooses to be foolish! At the beginning of every new opportunity we all lack experience, wisdom and longevity. However, the wise advice of these veteran presbyters will help you avoid the follies of inexperience. That is what Proverbs means when it says, “The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice” (Proverbs 12:15).

## KEEP LEARNING

The Assemblies of God Sectional Presbyter Exchange (AGSPE) is another powerful resource that can help you continue to grow and increase your effectiveness as a presbyter. Here are five ways the exchange can help you:

### 1. Synchronizing Questions.

Every network superintendent is different. Some articulate vision clearly and may even have it written out. Others are more relational and less articulate. A few know their vision but do not always articulate it in ways that are clear. In these cases, you may need to take the initiative to learn your leader's vision and then stay in sync with it during your service as a presbyter. That is when nonthreatening questions become important. Few things are as helpful as asking good questions. Questions open up options, foster collaboration, and build bridges to miraculous solutions. Some of the most unforgettable moments in scripture were the result of leaders asking questions.

- God asked Isaiah, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8), resulting in Isaiah's acceptance of his prophetic calling and divine intervention in the nation's future.
- Jesus asked, "What do you want Me to do for you?" (Luke 18:41), resulting in the miracle of a blind person's receiving his sight and a testimony to an entire community.
- Abraham asked God, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25), resulting in the righteous being spared in Sodom.
- Jesus' teaching on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit was the result of Thomas's questioning him about the future (John 14:5).

One of the most powerful examples of this is in 2 Kings 4:1-7. A widow fell into financial need and told Elisha her two sons were going to be taken as debt slaves. Although the need was beyond Elisha's natural resources, miraculous provision resulted by his asking the simple question, "How can I help you?"

Following are a few questions the AGSPE has assembled to help you stay in sync with your network superintendent as a person and leader. Try asking one question each month in the form of an email, and opportunities will appear.

- I have an idea. Does it fit into our vision for the future; and is it worthy of the resources, time, and attention it may require?
- How can I better support the mission of the network or your vision in the next six months?
- Do you have any organizational concerns I can pray with you about?
- What are three things I can pray about for you personally or your family?
- Do you have any feedback or tasks for my involvement on the presbytery?
- Are I/we unknowingly wasting time, talent, resources, or margin?
- What problem is short on helpers?

Without asking good questions, we are just part-time thinkers who are taking up space. Every miracle requires us to find an opportunity to educate ourselves, make a contribution, and become part of the solution. Whether it is in person over coffee, over the phone, or through email, become part of the solution by asking questions.

## **2. Facebook Group.**

AGSPE Facebook Group is a place where sectional presbyters can share ideas; post questions, comments, and wisdom; and collaborate. Presbyter Allen Tyson (Arizona) posted to the group shortly after its inception saying, “Thank you for the new group that focuses on a position most people in church don’t understand. This group has been needed for a long time.” There are only 700 sectional presbyters in the nation, and 35 percent of them are part of this group that shares ideas. However, membership is contingent upon being a part of your network’s presbytery or being an AGSPE mentor. You can find out more from the Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AGSPE/>.

## **3. Podcast.**

AGSPE produces a short monthly podcast that interviews guests who give advice and share ideas on how you can be more effective as a sectional presbyter. Examples of podcasts topics are “How to Include Mavericks in Sectional Life,” “8 Benefits of Evening Sectional Meetings,” “Isolation in Ministry,” and “Warning Signs to Moral Meltdown.” The podcasts links are posted on the AGSPE Facebook Group.

## **4. Research.**

AGSPE periodically surveys presbyters all over the nation on how they approach topics or challenges. That wisdom is then compiled into a free report. Examples of

recent reports include the “Best Practices” report on sectional meetings, the “Isolation in Ministry” sectional meeting discussion guide, and the “Starting Well” steps for new presbyters.

## **5. Resources.**

AGSPE maintains an online document with descriptions and links to all its resources. To access the most recent update of this document, click this link or copy the url:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ig4pseuukq8qqxw/AGSPE%20Table%20of%20Contents.docx?dl=0>

The best way to stay informed about AGSPE resources is through the group’s Facebook page.

## CONCLUSION

Proverbs 15:22 says, “*Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.*” Before this resource was created, new presbyters had to learn the hard way or rely on the availability of oral history. But now you have the availability of wisdom and proven resources to help you serve the Lord with effectiveness, efficiency and excellence. We hope this mentoring resource has been helpful to you. If it has been or if you have other ideas for future projects, please let me know. I would love to hear from you.

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