



# Adopting churches into the family

As leaders and churches are being attracted to us and what we represent, some of them may come to a place where they want to be part of our international Salt & Light family of families.

We use the word ‘adoption’ to describe the process by which an existing church joins S&L, accepting our values and embracing apostolic and prophetic ministry. Our desire is that the church fully represents Christ, has good government, relational life, gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit and is trying to live out our S&L values.

The adoption metaphor is a powerful one, connecting ‘orphan’ churches and leaders into family. Adoption means not only being joined to a family, but also playing their own part in the family, as the family plants and adopts further churches.

*To that end, this document gives practical guidelines for regional apostolic teams, as they work together with churches seeking to connect to discern the Lord’s will in each situation.*

## 1. SOME PRINCIPLES

### (a) We serve churches relationally

We are family first and leaders second! We look for the sovereign, supernatural leading of the Lord in seeking to develop relationships. The relationship is not just an assignment or a job to be done: we don’t want simply to build a bigger organisation or add a few more churches to our list.

We must be determined to develop genuine friendships, where care, accountability, building input and Ephesians ministry can flourish. Relationships based on wrong motives (e.g. dependency, wanting approval, needing money, looking for significance) must be avoided.

Therefore, it takes a lot of time to adopt a church! We will invest time for travel, conversation, meetings, conferences and meals together. A good period of time must be allowed to see how the relationship with the church is progressing.

### (b) We work through local leaders

Remember they are still the ones responsible for the church, not you! We should not become ‘super-pastors’ who deal with all the hardest questions and issues.

Make sure you continue to get to know leaders personally and not just observe their public performance. Get into their homes and get to know their spouse and family.

Encourage and support, but also admonish and make accountable. It is good to listen a lot but we must not shy away from speaking the truth.

### (c) We must serve churches by team

One person will be recognised by the regional team as the primary contact for a particular church, responsible for ensuring that team input actually takes place. This person will be a delegate of the team, who has the confidence of that team.

However, the process of adoption cannot and should not be done by just one person. Rather we will work as team into each church. This needs to be explained early, clearly and frequently: “We will do this by means of our team, and we may send different people.”

We need to involve other team members on any trip. The primary contact will ensure the strategic needs of the group are met by the variety of ministry available.

Working as a team helps protect us from blind spots and areas of weakness. Further visits will reveal the quality of team members' work on previous visits. Reports and updates for each church will be regularly submitted to the regional team by email, Skype calls, etc.

We must insist that churches "receive Titus like me," filtering out those who just want a hotline to the senior apostolic leader.

## 2. THE PHASES OF ADOPTION

### (a) Introduction phase

- A church hears about S&L, through some means or another, and begins to show an interest.
- Some relational contact between the S&L person and a church leader will be established.
- This forming relationship will be communicated to the regional team.

### (b) Friendship phase

- We will only walk together into this phase if God seems to be leading the team to do so, and we have capacity to do so within the team.
- The regional team will recognise a primary contact who will lead and co-ordinate the work with a church until a decision has been made about this church relationship.
- This phase can last as long as necessary. We should not get impatient or presume that the relationship has developed further than it really has.
- We should be on our guard against drawing some people after us if the church leadership does not want to embrace our values. We must not attempt to take things further if there are major issues which prevent the church from changing.
- This 'friendship' phase may last for some months and should only move on to the next phase by mutual agreement.

### (c) Pre-adoption phase

- The relationship is getting serious now and both sides are aware that it could lead to a 'joining'.
- This phase will normally last several months, during which we will look for a positive response to input from the team and spiritual authority.
- Discussions will start with the lead elder ('Pastor') and a core group of local leaders, but should develop to the whole leadership team and congregation in due course.
- There are a number of aspects we will consider as part of this phase:

#### *What we look to see from the leaders of the church*

- They show an ongoing enthusiasm to lead the church to become part of the S&L family.
- They are open to receiving Ephesians 4 ministries.
- They are working on issues arising from input by the primary contact and the regional team.
- They send leaders on appropriate S&L training courses or conferences.
- They want to grow in relationship with other local S&L leaders.
- They have a clear sense that God wants the church to be part of S&L family.
- They accept key values and practices as listed in the regional version of Core Commitments, including the convictions that the regional team has on the role of women in eldership.

- They understand that to be part of S&L,
  - the church will connect to, and wholeheartedly receive, an apostolic team
  - and, normally, the lead elder ('Pastor') will receive someone from the regional team as their 'personal pastor', offering personal care and accountability ("*every Pastor needs a pastor*")

*What we look to see from the church (i.e. the people in the church)*

- They are a body of people who are committed to the Lord.
- They desire to move along the process of being relationally adopted by S&L.
- They receive the primary contact person (and others) whole-heartedly.
- They have clear, biblical foundations and agreement to S&L values and practices.
- They are truly willing to change over time so that they fit in with S&L values and practices.
- They have done all they can to put right past difficulties.
- They are open to receiving Ephesians 4 ministries.
- They are committed to financial giving to the wider family they are joining.
- They are committed to engaging with the activity of the wider family, e.g. in events, mission, training.

*The task of the primary contact*

- Get a feel for whether the church has the potential to be adopted
- Spell out the costs and challenges of being part of S&L
- Look for warning signs, such as:
  - Unwillingness to accept evangelical, charismatic doctrine as we understand it
  - Resistance to the moving of the Holy Spirit
  - Unwillingness from leaders to lead the church into new truths or practices
  - A church government structure or constitution which prohibits change
  - Irreconcilable differences at leadership level
  - No faith on our part in the existing leadership
- After an appropriate period of about six months after the process has begun, the primary contact will make a recommendation based on how much the church has moved on.
- The situation should be discussed by the regional team, if it has not already been involved.
- The regional team and others involved will prayerfully review the situation, and determine whether to continue.

(d) **Commitment phase**

If a mutual decision is made to proceed towards adoption, then the final stage involves:

- Working with the church to arrange a special meeting, with appropriate S&L people present, to recognise, celebrate and commission what is happening
- Ensuring the church/group is put on relevant mailing lists (if not already done)
- In the light of the relationships that have developed and the gifting/input the church requires, it should be clarified by the regional team whether the primary contact who handled the earlier phases is the right person to continue in the primary contact role, or whether someone else should start to take on that role.
- The primary contact will continue to consult with the local leaders and the regional team concerning the appointment of elders (if needed).
- We must be careful to honour our commitment to give genuine Ephesians 4 input (apostolic, prophetic, pastoral, teaching and evangelistic). To ensure that such input is developmental, and to avoid any tendency to be unduly focused on problem-solving, we use the '6 apostolic priorities' (arrow) as a plumb line: Extension; supernatural impartation; laying foundations; leadership development; problem solving; promoting unity.