
\$5000. I cannot call the fund manager and tell him how to invest that money, or to buy a certain stock, or stay away from a company's stock. The fund manager does the managing (overseeing) of the money, not me. All I can do is send the fund money, or get out of the fund. I have zero authority over my money while it is in the fund. I cannot control it, or direct it. Do you see how this *exactly parallels* the sponsoring church arrangement? Look carefully at the diagram on the inside of this tract. Churches A, B, and C could be replaced with Investor A, B, and C. The sponsoring church is the "fund manager." The sponsoring church arrangement creates a church mutual fund. Churches pool their money together, and the elders of the sponsoring church manage that money. The key is that while a church is in the "fund" they have no control or oversight of their money. The elders of the sponsoring church do all the deciding. They decide who to put on the TV program, or what to write in the mass mail-out brochure. In other words, they make all the decisions that each local church's elders are supposed to make! All the elders of the paying churches can do is get in or get out, but while in they have given up their control and thus forfeited their autonomy. Remember, autonomy means "independence and self-control." When you have lost your control you have lost your autonomy. There is no denying that this is exactly what happens in the sponsoring church arrangement, and that this violates the New Testament pattern for the church.

Some have responded to this line of thinking by stating that without the sponsoring church arrangement the Lord's people will never be able to accomplish any big work. We concede that this is more than likely so.

Westside lacks the funds and resources to buy time for a commercial during the Super Bowl! Realizing this, we are distressed that some seem to think that technology has caught the Lord by surprise. If God had wanted His church to do big things He surely would have specified in His word how to do them so that we could please Him. Do we really imagine that God looked upon this earth in 1950 and said "Wow, look at radio and television. Sure do wish I'd put the sponsoring church arrangement in the New Testament so that the church could take advantage of that!" We know better than that, don't we? The truth is there were "big works" that the first century church could have done if God had been so minded. Large amounts of money have always been able to exercise power and influence. The churches in the New Testament could have pooled their resources under Rome's oversight and rented the Coliseum for a gospel meeting, or they could have started a preacher school in Jerusalem under that church's elders, or mailed out a copy of Paul's writings to people (yes, they had a mail system then) under the direction of the elders at Ephesus. If God wanted the church doing big things in a mutual fund arrangement we should expect to find it in the New Testament. The utter lack of any such record speaks volumes about the scripturalness of such arrangements today.

Interestingly, these twin errors (wrong concept of the church, and violating church autonomy) have led directly to additional apostasy and error. We see advertisements in brotherhood publications for a church to be "the overseer church" for a "missionary congregation." Pray tell what is an "overseer church" and where do we read about that in the Bible? Is this not a direct extension of the

sponsoring church concept? Isn't this just the mutual fund managers taking on more funds to manage? If a church can manage *part* of another congregation's affairs what would be wrong with managing a lot, *if not all*, of that church's affairs?

In closing, if you do not agree that the sponsoring church arrangement is unscriptural please write us and clearly set forth the "book, chapter and verse" for it. Demonstrate from scripture that such is right in the sight of the Lord. You will be our friend for doing so. If, however, further study of the New Testament pattern reveals that the sponsoring church arrangement is not scriptural or authorized then we urge all to plainly admit such and withdraw from such an arrangement. Our appeals to others to respect Bible authority ring very hollow when we ourselves refuse to do so. "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).

This tract presented by the:

Westside church of Christ
2300 West Pioneer Drive
Irving, Texas 75061
972-986-9131
www.justChristians.com

SPONSORING CHURCHES

Help or Hindrance to the Lord's Cause?

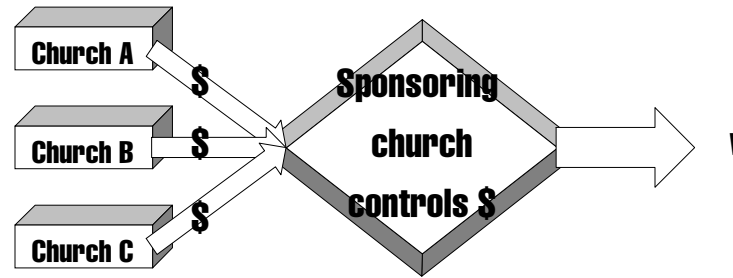
Mark Roberts

In the late 1950's and the early 1960's a battle raged across this country. churches were divided, preachers fired, and feelings hurt. The cause? The sponsoring church arrangement and the controversy that its nation-wide implementation caused. Today some may feel that this is a "dead issue," equivalent to the controversy over whether a church could have a baptistery or must baptize in running water. Yet we see churches today that support the sponsoring church arrangement with little thought as to its scripturalness (it is just accepted and done) and likewise know too many brethren who realize they are supposed to be against it but could not tell anyone why. Let us take a moment to probe the matter further.

The sponsoring church arrangement was first proposed on a national basis in the early 1950's so that the Highland Avenue church in Abilene could finance a nation-wide radio program, The Herald of Truth. The idea was simple: congregations would send money to the Highland congregation where the work would be overseen and directed by the Highland elders. It didn't take long for many congregations to sign on, for it surely seemed like a good work. However, it also didn't take long for some to begin to oppose this plan as unscriptural and unauthorized. It is this writer's contention that they were correct in doing so, because the sponsoring church represents a breakdown in a crucial area: understanding what the church is.

One brother wrote, "For more than thirty years I have held to and vigorously taught that as members work together to build a congregation, congregations should work together to build the church." Notice that this writer conceives of the church, the Body of Christ, as being made up of individual

congregations, not individual Christians. Christians make up a congregation, he says, and those congregations make up the "church." This describes the basic error of the sponsoring church arrangement precisely. Brethren came to think of the church as a group of congregations, rather than seeing the church for what it is: people in a saved



relationship with the Lord (see Acts 2:47). When our thinking is faulty about such a fundamental matter error is sure to follow, and so it did in the 1950's. Brethren decided to "activate" this web or network of congregations, pulling them all together in one harness to do a big, expensive work like coast-to-coast radio and television programs. The sponsoring church arrangement was born. It harnesses congregations together (mistakenly conceived of as "the church") to do large projects.

The most basic objection to this sponsoring church arrangement was, and remains, that there is simply nothing said in scripture of churches ever being pulled together into such an arrangement. There is no pattern for this "harness," no provision for how it is to be managed, or who is to oversee it. There is no "book, chapter, and verse" for the sponsoring church arrangement.

Faced with this objection the most common answer was to simply say "the Bible doesn't specify the 'how' of evangelism, and the sponsoring church arrangement is just a method of teaching the Gospel." While noting this response is fraught with difficulties (for example, the sponsoring church arrangement is a lot more than a method, it networks churches together) we also note that no method of evangelism is acceptable to God that violates other clear principles of scripture. For example, if someone should suggest that the church put on a "girly show" to attract a crowd and then have preaching we would quickly protest that such would not be right. No amount of characterizing us as "anti's" or "against evangelism" or saying "this is just a method" would change our opposition. It may be a method, but it is an unscriptural method because it violates other passages of scripture.

So the continuing objection to the sponsoring church arrangement has been "It may be a method, but it violates congregational autonomy and so is unscriptural." There can be no doubt that the New Testament teaches that every congregation of the Lord's people is to be independent and autonomous. 1 Peter 5:2 clearly teaches that elders must "shepherd the flock of God among you." Paul appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23) and urged the elders of the Ephesian church to care for their own flock, not every congregation in the city or territory (Acts 20:28). We have been correct in observing to denominational friends that the New Testa-

ment knows nothing of one church ruling others, area-wide bishops, dioceses, conventions, or councils. Can we not see the application to the sponsoring church arrangement? The sponsoring church is overseeing the work of the contributing churches, and thus violating their independence and self-rule (autonomy). There can be no denying this, for even the advertisements soliciting funds for various projects state clearly "This work is overseen by the elders of the ----- St. church" or "After much prayer and research, the elders of the ----- church announced the launch and oversight of the new ----- television program." The sponsoring church becomes, in effect, a super church. It does its work, and supervises (at least part of) the work of contributing churches. We ask where is the authority for one church to manage the work of another? How can the sponsoring church take the oversight of other church's work without violating their autonomy?

The standard answer to these objections has been "We have not forfeited our autonomy because we could stop sending checks to the sponsoring church at any time." We understand that not being contractually bound does provide a feeling of some independence and autonomy. However, close inspection reveals there is much more to the oversight of a local work than just deciding whether or not to send a check. Autonomy in overseeing this congregation's funds demands that not only do we have the right to determine if the funds will be spent, but that we can decide how, where, when, and why. An illustration may help. If I take \$5000 and invest it in a mutual fund I still have the right to pull my money out at any time. However, I have forfeited my right to manage my money. The fund manager now makes all decisions about what to do with my