

Dear Brother Newgloucester 1795

Whereas you are authorized by your Ordination to plant Churches when you may think it expedient: & are further under a particular Charge from our yearly Meeting to Labour Faithfully with this Branch: I have that it expedient to communicate some of my Ideas of a Church of Christ; & also something that appears necessary to be done in this Branch in order for their becoming what may be called a Church of Christ & whereby you may answer to God & your Bretheren, who under Him I trust have put you in trust & Charge with that Business which I conceive is of the first Importance.

I shall in the first place give you my Idea of a Church & the cause & necessity of its institution in as concise a manner as may be.

A Church then I conceive to be a Voluntary Society of Bretheren joining themselves together of their own accord in order to the public worshipping of God in such Manner as they judge acceptable to Him.

Now as no Society or Body of Men can be kept together unless they have some Rules to govern themselves by: the continual Transgression of which Rules or Regulations will certainly exclude them from being Members of such Body they thus Reject themselves: the Society has no more to do to than to publish it in such Manner as they may judge most Expedient. And they ought always to have some Rules for the Reception or something of their members.

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Contributed to Maine Memory Network by the Maine Historical Society (Coll. 4, Box 1/1) Date: 1795 Description: Letter from Ephraim Stinchfield, New Gloucester.

When a Church of Christ thus voluntarily  
embodies themselves they engage that the  
Scriptures of Truth shall be the Rule of their  
Conduct: by the commandos of Christ & his Apo-  
stles, <sup>they</sup> engage to be governed whenever they cease  
to come up to Such engagements & live in &  
persist in so doing after repeated admonitions  
they voluntarily dismember themselves from being  
what they did profess to be; A Chh of Christ  
again when we consider of the cong & necessity  
of such institutions, being knit together <sup>in love</sup> and  
Bound to the Same Haven Children of one Father  
Disciples of one Lord, Heirs of one Kingdom all  
speaking the Same Things They are drawn to-  
gether by the Cords of uniting Love by their  
embodying in Churches they Manifest to one  
another & to those about them that this is the  
case, in order for this to continue it is necessary  
for them to meet often together that they may  
be acquainted with each others travel to visit  
each other often in order that they may get  
Such an acquaintance, <sup>that</sup> they may <sup>pastorally</sup> ~~stand~~  
care for each other, — To be particular in  
enquiring into <sup>each others</sup> Travels & Tryals that they may  
<sup>assist</sup> sympathise with each other & enquire into  
their particular circumstances that they may be  
able to bear each others Burdens & so fulfil  
the Law of Christ none of this Body ought not  
to be neglected the Same, Halt Weak & Feble  
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in Short every office of Love ought to be  
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Letter of Advice To Committee From

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[written on right side]  
Letter of Advice to Committee From

Yearly Meeting Finis &c.

to take for the Rule of their Conduct, but in a Body of professing <sup>people</sup> are destitute of such Qualifications & remain so after being duly admonished & Laboured with they can no longer be considered as a Church of Christ.

According to the aforementioned definition of a Church, was this & the Several Branches formed in our Community. According to the same Rule was our yearly Meeting formed of the Various Branches This Branch as a Body (I would except a large number of its Member) have been considered as Transgressors & as a Transgressing Body they have been repeatedly admonished and after all no sign appears of a Reformation. A Man that is departed from the Faith after the First & Second admonition Reject. But the Scripture is silent as to the particular form of such rejection.

By a critical examination of the foregoing observations you may see the propriety of the advice I shall now give you respecting this Branch

First examine critically & faithfully who are in Fellowship & union, not (as has been to often the case before) to neglect to be particular in this great & important point Many because they are not Mad with each other will declare themselves in union & Fellowship & perhaps within a short time will be biting & devouring each other and declaring they never had a Fellowship.

Then Secondly be as particular in your enquiry & examination whether they are in Fellowship & travel with the yearly Meeting by setting before them their order & Mode of Discipline

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[written on left side]  
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& Wherein they differ from the Standing order  
of Baptists by such means you may gain an  
Idea of their Standing & union so that you  
may make a constant report to the next  
yearly Meeting. You may then in the last  
place give them Fellowship in behalf of the  
yearly Meeting. This according to the small  
measure of Wisdom I have received is the  
most likely <sup>method of procedure</sup> to take a salutary effect & be  
the means of our upbuilding. I trust I have  
been importunate at the Throne of Grace for  
directions in an affair of such great consequence.  
& would desire you to spread the case before  
the Lord & I conclude you will concur with  
me herein. — Perhaps a Query may be  
started what will become of the remainder of  
the Church? Let those who have Fellowship with  
each other Labour to reclaim them by all gentle  
Means & if they will not go <sup>with them</sup> ~~with~~ all due Labor  
& persuasions it will be in vain ~~to use~~ to use  
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Ephraim Stinchfield