How to Write a History for Your Church

Description

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Here are the first steps to preserving the history of your church.
Note: When possible, write the first and last names of the people that are mentioned. Fifty years from now, no one will member who Mary, or John were.

First Step

When was your church founded?

Who was the founder(s) of your church? Optional, (but still god to know).

Why was your church started? (What were the events that lead your pastor to start your church?)

Second Step

Identify all the pastors that have pastored at your church.

What is the name (Frist and last name) of each one?

What were the dates that each of these pastors ministered at your church?

Start to collect one or two good photos of former pastors of your church.

If you cannot identify the exact dates that a pastor was at your church, do your best to at least find their first and last names and the order in which they ministered at your church. If your church is over 50 years old, it is possible that you will be unable to find the first and last names of all the pastors (if they are not in the church minutes). Sometimes you many only have the first name of a pastor and the name of his wife. (ex. Pr. Phillip and his wife Edna). Put in the information you have on them in your notes or history. It will help those doing research on your church in the future.

Third Step

Who were the founding members of your church? (Use complete names when possible, at least first and last names).

Fifth Step

Eventually you will want to have a photo of each of the pastors that have served as the Senior pastor. A second photo of he and his wife and then another of his family would be nice. Try to get photos from about the time he pastored at your church. If someone pastored your church when he was 19 years old, you may not want a photo of him when he was 88 years old. The church leaders should be the ones responsible for contacting the former pastors (or their families) to ask for photos. It should not be the responsibility of the one writing the churchâ€™s history to try to find out where all the former pastors are. When you finish writing the history of your church, put the photos that have been collected in an envelope and name it: â€œPhotos of former pastors.â€•

Sixth Step

Identify and share a little about the long-time members that have helped the church or been a blessing. Try to write a paragraph or two about each deacon of the church. Sunday school teaches, youth leaders, choir directors, bus directors, or bus captains that served faithfully for years should be written about as well. Important observation: on the back side of each photo, identify who is in the photo and when the photo was taken. For church historians, at least try to identify the decade that the photo was taken.

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Seventh Step

Once your Project is completed, have some of the church leaders and/or long-time members read your manuscript to verify the facts and give their input. Then make some copies and distribute them to some of the members and put a copy of it in the church file or safety deposit box for safe keeping. Send a copy to your local genealogical library for them to put in their historical files.

Eight Step

If you are able to collect enough information on your church, put it in print. Amazon and others have print-on- demand book services that a free to use and one only pays for the books printed. There is no minimal run for the author.

Some final observations

What were some of the best years in your churchâ€™s existence? Write more about that stage of your churchâ€™s history.

As a historian, collect the facts and do not try to interpret why certain events happened. You want the people that read your history to say: â€œYes, that is what happened.â€• You do not want to become involved in an old church fight and reopen a can of worms where people on both sides are going to attack you. You want both sides to be satisfied with what you wrote. It is better not to include certain events in the written history of your church that can cause problems (especially in a short history of just

a few pages).

Simi-Halo Effect

Write about the good they did and leave the rest out. Tell about the good that people did and leave out things that could cause you problems later. Do not exaggerate in your praise of them. If someone was arrested for something they did to the church, it is public record and can be mentioned if you deem it necessary. (I would probably leave it out).

What you write today about your churchâ€™s history will probably be used as a guide or starting point for all who write something about your churchâ€™s history if the future. Verify your facts and dates the best you can.

Do not present as fact dates, events, or names of people involved when you are not certain of the facts. If you have certain doubts about a date or an event at church, note what you are not 100% sure about everything (or better yet, that the members gave conflicting details about a date, or of an event).

Remember: Something is better than nothing. If you only write a short two or three-page history of your church, that will be a longer and more complete local church history than what most churches have (which have nothing written down on paper). A short pencil is better than a long memory.

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Should one Include membership lists in a printed History of the church?

All churches should have lists of people that were members of their church. The question is whether one can or should put it in printed form for the public. It has been my practice not to include current or recent membership lists in the church histories I have written and published.

Membership lists that are older (35 to 50+ years old), can help people doing genealogical research nail down when their ancestors were in a certain area.

Olan Millâ€™s Photo Directories for Church

Olan Mills Photography produced quality church photo directories from 1932 until 2019 when they were bought out by Lifetouch. Many others have provided similar services and some still do even today. These church photo directories are a good place to get a fairly complete list of families that attended a church at a given time. Not everyone listed in a church directory was a member. At times, the wife and a few children were members, but the husband was not.

That being said, published photo directories lists people connected to the church during a certain year. The photos in the directories are copyrighted by the company that took the photos and produced the directory. You cannot use those photos in your book even if a member gives you a photo and says you can use it (they do not own the copyright). The names listed in the book have been public for many years and can be used. Just be sure to reference where the names came from and who published the directory.

If someone does give you a studio photo of a former pastor, graciously accept it, place the pastorâ€™s name on the back of the photo in ink, and put it in the â€œPhotos of former pastors.â€• Do not use the

photo in your book. In 75 or 100 years the church will be able to use the photo once the copyright goes out and the photo becomes â€œpublic domain.â€•

Other Ideas

Once you have a list of former pastors of your church, ask one of your long-time members to write what they can remember about each one of the pastors, his family, or something he did for the church. Once that has been written, do the same for deacons and Sunday School teachers that served for years.

Deacons

Names of current deacons. When did they start serving (ordained). Tell a little something about each deacon. If possible, have each deacon write a brief testimony of Salvation (to have one on file and save).

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Category

1. Article

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