1. HOW HAS THE HOLY SPIRIT BEEN EVIDENT IN YOUR CONGREGATION IN THE PAST YEAR -- THROUGH CONVERSIONS, GROWTH IN THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT, OR OTHER TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCES THAT MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST?

The overpowering issue that has affected virtually every aspect of life at Saxe Gotha for quite some time now had to do with deciding whether to change denominations. The Session and Ad Hoc Committees established by Session have actually been dealing with this for about three years. Once a unanimous decision was made by the Elders, an educational program for all members was conducted throughout 2013, leading to a Congregational Meeting last September. While there was dissent by some and lack of interest by others initially, the Holy Spirit enabled this process to become a largely unifying experience for Saxe Gotha, with 93% voting in favor of departing to ECO. There has been a deeper recognition by our members of why it is important to know what we believe, why we interpret Scripture as we do, and how we express our faith and convictions. New members and new visitors have been attracted into our fellowship; our children and youth have been carefully nurtured, including those who have decided to make their profession and join after attending Confirmation Classes; and a high percentage of members who were asked to be nominees for Elder or for Deacon accepted the call without hesitation. We have become intentional in our shepherding of the flock through FISH (Fellowship in Serving Him) with groups of church families assigned to each Officer. Preaching and teaching have emphasized the servant style of leadership. A decision has been made to call an Executive Pastor so that the current Pastors and staff can concentrate more fully in hands-on ministry and the personally interactive aspects of their roles.

2. HOW HAS YOUR CONGREGATION EXTENDED ITSELF BEYOND ITS BOUNDS THROUGH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW COMMUNITIES OF WORSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP, EXPANDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

Saxe Gotha serves as the lead church in Migrant Ministry outreach. Weekly visits are made to the camps during the season when migrants are in Lexington County. Recreation and food are provided, followed by worship with--and witnessing to--the migrants in our area. Mission trips are being made annually by members of Saxe Gotha to Kenya and to Honduras. In Kenya, we have a long term
partnership with the Neema Children’s Home, where we have helped to build a church and new classrooms, and where we have provided funding for evangelism training conferences to enable local Pastors and church leaders. We also support two missionaries in South Sudan. Youth mission trip initiatives within the continental United States each year allow our young people to share themselves with others as well. Our Bible School here attracts many children who otherwise are not involved in church anywhere; and our Child Development Center likewise brings in more children for an exposure to the gospel and, sometimes, entices their parents and siblings to check out Saxe Gotha. This year we hosted the Art of Marriage conference; and last year we partnered with the County by hosting a Back to School Bash and Safety Shindig, which attracted many unchurched people to our campus. Our members are encouraged to establish neighborhood Bible studies/small groups, especially during special times such as Lent, with intentional outreach to others who are not already part of the Saxe Gotha family. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Basketball League are sponsored to include many people from the community who would not likely come for other reasons. Saxe Gotha also provides the venue for the Lexington Choral Society to have concerts, which brings in large audiences to be exposed to what our church has to offer.

3. **IN WHAT WAYS IS YOUR CONGREGATION SEEKING THE WELFARE OF THE COMMUNITY TO WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED - DEVOTING ITSELF TO THE POOR, SEEKING JUSTICE, AND LIVING OUT THE WHOLE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION?**

We have long been involved in providing volunteers, food, clothing, and financial assistance to LICS (the Lexington Interfaith Community Services) which serves those in need. We host and we take the lead in sponsoring the annual Lexington Race Against Hunger, which is a major fundraiser for LICS and other similar organizations. Our Benevolence Fund is also used to help the poor. Operation Turkey provides holiday meals to many in the community. Our Nailbenders volunteers make repairs and renovations for those who are unable to do the work on their own homes and could not afford to hire someone for this purpose. We participate in providing food for backpacks to children who might go hungry on weekends without this assistance. Angel Tree is an annual outreach which enjoys strong support. The church also takes part in Operation Shoe Box, which includes a major “packing party” in addition to supplying the contents. Saxe Gotha regularly hosts Friendship Dinners for patients and volunteers from local mental health groups. Workshops and mentoring are offered to the unemployed who need help in preparing resumes and honing interview skills. Additionally, we serve as one of Lexington County’s largest voting precincts for all elections and use this opportunity to demonstrate hospitality toward everyone.
4. HOW ARE YOU ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO ALLOW GOD'S WORD TO SHAPE THEIR PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS, AND TO NURTURE CONSTANT LEARNING AND THE LIFE OF THE MIND?

Strong and consistent preaching emphasize the Word of God as the foundation for everything else in the life of our Congregation. Members and visitors are called during each worship service to take Scripture seriously and to make it the foundation for all decisions and actions. Dedicated and solid teachers lead Sunday School classes for all ages. Wednesday evening and Sunday evening classes devoted to Biblically based topics are offered. Women's Circles focus on Bible study. A well-stocked Media Resource Center contains books, videos, DVDs, and other learning materials for use by members. On-line opportunities are being offered via “RightNow” as well. Devotional guides are placed throughout the campus to be taken by our members and visitors at any time. Small groups are encouraged, with emphasis on Bible study. A large men’s group starts each week with a Monday morning Bible study at the church. We have a vibrant senior ministry for our older members which enables them to continue developing in their Christian journey and to use their gifts in meaningful ways.

5. HOW ARE YOU HELPING CHILDREN AND OTHERS NEW TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH TO DISCOVER JESUS AND GROW IN THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND LOVE OF GOD'S WORD?

All new members and prospective members are encouraged to take part in the Discovery Class, which is intended for new Christians and those who may be coming from other religious backgrounds. If anyone misses several weeks in a row from worship, the Call to Care Team makes contact to check in and to let it be known that he or she has been missed. New members are directed toward groups which seem to be appropriate for them, including Sunday School and evening classes. Confirmation classes are conducted once a year for the youth who are considering church membership. A vast array of programming in Christian education for our children is emphasized. This includes Splash, Veggie Tales, Connect, Converge, and Mellow Sunday as well as Sunday Night Live. An outstanding music program provides opportunities for all ages to become involved if they are so inclined, and for everyone to hear the Word through song and instrument as a supplement to the regular preaching and teaching. A contemporary worship service (AWE) is held on every Sunday for those who prefer a different style and those who may be reluctant to become part of what is commonly perceived to be traditional worship in the Sanctuary.

6. DESCRIBE THE MORAL EXPRESSION IN YOUR CONGREGATION—ARE YOU MORE LIKE THE WORLD OR MORE LIKE PARTICIPANTS IN THE VALUES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

This is an area of great concern to the Session. We acknowledge having many dedicated Christians who live out their faith daily and who are examples for us all. Unfortunately, we also
realize that a significant number are still shallow and in need of deeper commitment. Our church has adopted “Come Worship, Grow, and Serve with Us” as a way to articulate what we offer. Efforts are being placed on developing the growth aspect of that path. This month we began a sermon series and emphasis on the meaning of church membership. It is our desire to help all our people take more seriously the Christian life within this particular body of believers. Going forward we will be exploring more ways to encourage zealous faithfulness and less apathy by everyone in the Congregation so that the attitude becomes contagious.

7. **HOW IS YOUR CONGREGATION INTENTIONALLY UNLEASHING THE MINISTRIES OF WOMEN, MEN, AND PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS WHO ARE EXPERIENCING GOD’S CALL?**

Women’s Circles and other predominantly female ministries have long been vibrant and successful at Saxe Gotha. They are being intentionally evaluated as part of our transition into ECO with the goal of supporting them and making them even more effective in the future. Our basic Men of the Church group has been struggling over the past several years. Different styles and approaches have been tried with varying results. Special events such as Wild Game Night have produced large attendance and have been great opportunities for bringing in men who are not members of Saxe Gotha. A Monday morning Bible study for men has been popular and consistent for a long time. Smaller male group activities, such as Nailbenders and adult basketball teams, have also done well. Planning is underway to find a better approach for resurrecting the overall Men’s Ministry. Although we have very few members from other ethnic groups at this time, we do focus on our outreach ministry for migrants, who are predominantly Hispanic.

8. **HOW IS THE IDEA OF MINISTRY AS THE JOY AND CALLING OF EVERY DISCIPLE EVIDENT IN YOUR CONGREGATION? HOW ARE YOU EQUIPPING PEOPLE TO REPRESENT JESUS MORE EFFECTIVELY IN THEIR RESPECTIVE PROFESSIONS?**

This is preached and taught to our members. Admittedly, we have not had a well-defined plan to put as much emphasis on this as we should. During some of our seasonal small group Bible study series, we have been pleased to find a few members establishing and sponsoring groups in the work place. This is an area to which the Session will devote more attention in the future. We see this as being consistent with the third phase of our development continuum (Worship, Growth, and Service). As members are growing, we want to see them move toward service not just within the Congregation but in their local communities and the larger world as well. A strategic plan will be developed to help equip our people. We do remind ourselves to “Give God Joy”; and we prominently display this on much of our literature, our signage, and our website. We will add an emphasis to help our Congregation comprehend that we should all experience joy in serving Him and serving others in His Name.
9. ILLUSTRATE THE COMMITMENT OF YOUR CONGREGATION TO GLOBAL EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP, INCLUDING EXAMPLES OF WHERE YOU ARE ENGAGING AND WITH WHOM YOU ARE PARTNERING.

Saxe Gotha has been at the forefront of partnered outreach to South Sudan for many years. One of our members is the coordinator of these efforts for us and all of Trinity Presbytery (PCUSA). We negotiated that most of the funds which are disbursed annually as a condition of our dismissal be designated gifts. The Sudan Partnership is a significant beneficiary of these contributions. We also take special offerings for Sudan periodically, and even the children are encouraged to take part in the Change for Sudan by putting coins in a container at home and bringing it in for the collection. Speakers and visitors from Sudan are frequently at Saxe Gotha. Additionally, we sponsor a missionary couple who have been called to serve in South Sudan. We have annual mission trips to Honduras and Kenya. Our efforts in Kenya have included partnering with the Neema Children’s Home, building a new church and classrooms, providing a well and pump for fresh drinking water, participating in an initiative for raising chickens, and sponsoring training opportunities for Pastors and other Christian leaders.

10. HOW DOES YOUR CONGREGATION UNDERSTAND COMMITMENT TO THE LARGER CHURCH THROUGH OUR CONNECTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE BODY OF CHRIST?

This has been an area of weakness for Saxe Gotha throughout its history. The Session will need to work on, first, developing a stronger awareness and commitment by church Officers to connectionalism. If this is not modeled by the leadership, it is unlikely to be embraced by the average member. Obviously this may be an even greater challenge as we talk about a new denomination which is unknown to most people as it is still in its infancy. Having such a geographical dispersion as ECO does right now, even our Elders are unlikely to relate to a Presbytery connection for some time to come. Taking part in smaller Affinity Groups is one way for Sessions to bridge this gap, although this option does not offer much for the average member to experience. Only a very few of our Officers have been involved up to this point in attending ECO gatherings or interacting with fellow ECO Officers from other churches. In addition to the Affinity Group protocol, it may be useful for Saxe Gotha to seek connectional relationships through maintaining appropriate ties with like-minded local churches in the Fellowship of Presbyterians. All of this will require study and intentional effort before real progress can be achieved.