



EPC

A Global Movement of Evangelical Presbyterian Churches

Moderator's Report 40th General Assembly



Case Thorp
Moderator
39th General Assembly

Greetings in Christ, brothers and sisters of the EPC,

Wow. What a year it has been. Did we imagine when we last gathered that our world would be turned upside down by the COVID-19 epidemic?

As I had the opportunity to be with many of you at both presbytery meetings and elder retreats, I can with great confidence say: the EPC is alive and well. There are so many local expressions of gospel ministry that encourage me. I heard from many of you who do not feel such momentum, but the desire is strong in you to see the church be all Christ calls her to be. Church planting is expanding, and revitalization is on everyone's heart. This is a great mix for our future.

It is in this vein that I titled my blogs and podcasts for the denomination, "Church Pivot." I wanted to focus on the need and necessity to shift many of our ministry methodologies from the Christendom model of the mid-20th century, or even the attractional model of the last 40 years to a missional model. I remain even further convicted that we must continue to push in this direction at all levels of our denomination: congregations, presbyteries, and the General Assembly.

I began my term lifting before you these cultural concerns in both society and the church:

- Adult conversions have bottomed out for us, and we recognize the wanting discipleship many churches have offered people the past 50 years.



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- Post-modernism has redefined the meaning of a man, a woman, a child, even the in-utero child, such that a Christian anthropology seems like a foreign, political threat to our neighbors.
- Pentecostal and non-denominational churches give us Presbyterians a run for our money, reaching the masses while perpetuating a false prosperity gospel, starry-eyed pastors seeking fame, and “worship-tainment” dislocated from her historic moorings.
- And we are only beginning to taste and see the impact of technology and a connected world on our own politics, economics, and faith.

Acknowledging these challenges, the EPC pushes forward for the gospel.

I see success occurring for the overall church in terms of our local contextualization of ministry, shared national conversations about both problems, solutions, and opportunities, and the deep love many have for the EPC family. We truly have and need to keep nurturing our family feel, one of our greatest strengths.

Along the way, however, two concerns have become very apparent to me that we must change. Many of us share a different definition of what it means to be connectional, and how we embrace connectionalism. These divergent definitions allow us each to proclaim the idea but practice it differently. This leads to poor stewardship of our collective resources, a lack of efficiency in shared mission efforts, and the potential charge of hypocrisy in that we may talk one talk, but each takes our own walk.

A second concern of mine pertains to my own journey into the EPC, and so I feel I have permission to expose a sensitive issue. Many of my fellow former PC(USA)ers carry with them—understandably—pain, wounds, and fear from their former days of so-called connectionalism. This, in turn, leads to suspicion and a lack of trust for the EPC leaders who minister in very responsible, authentic, and passionate ways. Many have begun using the term “PC(USA) PTSD” to describe these phenomena.

As one who has taken a similar journey into the EPC family, I feel I uniquely can call my brothers and sisters with unrestored hearts and legitimate wounds to a process whereby Christ is the great balm of Gilead healing our souls. Such healing, I believe, will allow our family bonds to grow ever more deeply, and enrichen our mission into the future. What will this process look like? I’m not sure, but I hope to use my role to bring attention to this unresolved dynamic that keeps us from moving forward in a healthier manner.

We have much as a fellowship of churches on the agenda in coming years: Church Planting, Revelation 7:9 Task Force, a new Stated Clerk, World Outreach reshaping and leadership, and the Giving Culture Study Committee. I was with the Church Planters for their fall retreat.



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Wow! What a dynamic group. The work of the Revelation 7:9 Task Force is a prophetic, hard, and much needed work; I pray we give their recommendations our fullest consideration, contribution, and support.

Finally, the leadership transition coming in the next 18 months with our Stated Clerk and Director of World Outreach gives us a great opportunity to celebrate faithful work and ignite new excitement for the next chapter of leadership.

Thank you for calling me to serve; it has been one of the greatest honors of my life. The Lord has done a deep work in me during this time, and I pray through me as well.

In Him who is our Strength,

Case Thorp, Moderator, 39th General Assembly

September 2020