



**EPC**

*A Global Movement of Evangelical Presbyterian Churches*

**COMMITTEE REPORT**

**Fraternal Relations Committee**  
Report to the 40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly



Carol Culbertson  
*Chairman*

**Summary of Work, 2019-2020:**

1. The Committee “continued its conversation with the leadership of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland about the possibility of a fraternal relationship” as directed by the 39<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.
2. The Committee continued to work on implementing the fraternal relationship with the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico (INPM).
3. The Committee received a report from TE Case Thorp and TE Jerry Iamurri, who represented the EPC at the Fifth General Assembly of the World Reformed Fellowship.
4. The Committee responded to various requests related to fraternal relations with other churches.

**Recommendations to the 2020 General Assembly:**

**Recommendation 40-33:**

The Fraternal Relations Committee recommends that the 40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly approve a fraternal agreement between the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church of Brazil.

## **Work of the Committee in 2019-2020:**

### **1. Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI)**

The 39<sup>th</sup> General Assembly approved “the continuation of its [the Fraternal Relations Committee] conversation with the leadership of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland about the possibility of a fraternal relationship.”

In pursuit of this instruction, at its September 19 meeting the Committee received offers from 39<sup>th</sup> GA Moderator Case Thorp, TE Andrew Smith, and TE Walter Taylor to represent the EPC on their planned visits to Northern Ireland in the coming year. It also directed Jeff Jeremiah to correspond with Rev. Trevor Gribben, his counterpart at the PCI. The October 10 letter to Rev. Gribben included an invitation to a video conference call to begin a conversation, as well as the EPC definition of fraternal relations.

At its February 27, 2020 meeting, the committee discussed Rev. Gribben’s February 2 reply, in which he enthusiastically endorsed a video conference call of PCI and EPC leadership. This was arranged on March 11, 2020. Representing the PCI at this meeting was Rev. Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Very Rev. Dr. Noble McNeely, Convener of the General Council of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and Rev. David Bruce, Moderator-Designate of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Moderator Case Thorp, Fraternal Relations Committee chair Carol Culbertson, and Stated Clerk Jeff Jeremiah represented the EPC.

In terms of titles and leadership bodies, it was confirmed that the General Council of the PCI is equivalent to the National Leadership Team of the EPC. The Convener of the General Council is equivalent to the Chairman of the National Leadership Team. The PCI Ecclesiastical Relations Committee (Nigel Graves, incoming chairman) is equivalent to the EPC Fraternal Relations Committee, chaired by Carol Culbertson. The PCI Council for Mission is generally equivalent with the EPC Church Planting.

Topics discussed in this two-hour meeting included theological education of pastors, caring for small churches, the impact of Boomer pastor retirements, and ecumenical relationships. PCI leadership also spent time updating the EPC on its continuing relationship with the Church of Scotland.

It was agreed that each side’s notes from this meeting would be exchanged before being disclosed beyond this group. After these notes were filed with the leadership of both denominations Jeff Jeremiah would draft a general agreement of fraternal relations to serve as a springboard to further discussion.

The outbreak of COVID-19 brought any progress beyond the March 11 meeting to a halt.

### **2. National Presbyterian Church of Mexico (INPM)**

The EPC entered into a fraternal relationship with the INPM in 2016. As a part of that agreement, three INPM-ordained ministers are planting EPC churches in the United States. Progress in establishing church-to-church partnerships for ministry has been slow. An EPC church that had explored this possibility in 2019 notified the committee it was not able to

pursue this. At its September 19 meeting, the FRC directed the Stated Clerk to notify EPC presbyteries of this church-to-church partnership opportunity. This was done on September 23. The Presbytery of the Gulf South is exploring this opportunity. Meanwhile, the committee was pleasantly surprised to learn the Redeemer EPC in Erie, Pennsylvania, (Doug Kortyna, Pastor) had decided to partner with an INPM church in Monterrey, Mexico.

### **3. Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO)**

At the General Assembly of the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF, see below), ECO leadership had asked Moderator Case Thorp and Assistant Stated Clerk Jerry Iamurri for fraternal relations with the EPC. Because the 27th General Assembly (2017) had instructed the committee to explore a fraternal relationship with ECO, the committee agreed to pursue this matter. It agreed that Jerry Iamurri would take the lead on the EPC side. Iamurri is in regular contact with ECO Executive Director of Ecclesiastical Support Nate Dreesmann about potential partnership opportunities.

At its February 27 meeting, the committee received the December 6 written request from ECO requesting fraternal relations. The committee responded by inviting ECO to send a representative to our 40th General Assembly in June. At the Assembly their representative would be asked to make a 10-minute presentation to the Fraternal Relations Standing Committee on Thursday afternoon, June 25, and speak 3-5 minutes to a plenary session on Thursday or Friday. The invitation would also include the EPC's "Definition of Fraternal Relations" and ask for ECO's expectations for a fraternal/ecumenical relationship. To date, there has been no reply from ECO to this March 2 invitation. Due to the change of dates to September and the fact that there will be no standing committee meetings at the rescheduled 40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, further action with ECO has been delayed.

### **4. Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB)**

In late 2019, Covington EPC in Covington, Louisiana, (Jason Wood, Pastor) called IPB-ordained Glauber Becker to plant an EPC church in the Brazilian community in Covington. The major obstacle to getting Becker and his wife to the U.S. was getting approval of R-1 and R-2 visas at the U.S. Consulate in Brasilia. In an effort to help Covington, the Stated Clerk contacted Dr. Davi Charles Gomes of the IPB.

The EPC and IPB have enjoyed fraternal relations for more than 30 years. The conclusion reached on this matter was that the Stated Clerk would draft an agreement that the EPC and IPB could approve, which then could assist Rev. Becker. The COVID-19 pandemic produced a delay in this.

### **5. Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)**

The PCA invited the EPC to send a fraternal guest to its General Assembly in June in Birmingham, Alabama. Tom Werner, Moderator of the 38<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, consented to represent the EPC at this meeting, which was cancelled in April due to COVID-19.

### **6. World Reformed Fellowship (WRF)**

Case Thorp, Moderator of the 39<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, and Assistant Stated Clerk Jerry Iamurri attended the fifth General Assembly of the WRF, which met August 8-12 in Jakarta, Indonesia. Leaders from 68 denominations and more than 162 affiliate organizations from

25 counties were in attendance. Messiah Church (founded by evangelist Stephen Tong) served as the host church.

The purpose of these quadrennial gatherings is to: 1) Conduct the necessary business of the Assembly (such as considering any changes to doctrinal standards or purpose statements and electing the Board of Directors). EPC TEs Todd Smedley and Rob Norris serve on the WRF Board of Directors. 2) Address major issues facing the global Reformed and evangelical church.

Issues addressed at this meeting included the global refugee crisis, the decline of Western civilization, the challenges of technology, and political instability in various places worldwide.

### **7. Other fraternal relationships**

At its February 27 meeting, the Stated Clerk reported that some fraternal relationships have become dormant. While the EPC enjoys cordial relationships with groups such as St. Andrews Presbytery–Argentina and the Presbyterian and Reformed Church of Peru, the committee directed the Stated Clerk to contact St. Andrews leadership, asking for confirmation of the state of our connection. In addition, he will notify St. Andrews of the work of a group of EPC leaders in translating all EPC documents, as well as a Spanish language catechism written by TE Hector Reynoso, into Spanish. When this project is completed, they would be made available to St. Andrews and to the Presbyterian and Reformed Church of Peru.

## **Recommendations to the 2020 General Assembly**

### **Recommendation 40-33:**

The Fraternal Relations Committee recommends that the 40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly approve a fraternal agreement between the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church of Brazil:

### **Fraternal Agreement between the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in Brazil**

#### Preamble

Since 1984, the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) have enjoyed a rich relationship based on the historical connections of the Brazilians with American Presbyterianism. Ashbel Green Simonton (1833-1867) a graduate of Princeton Seminary was the first missionary to Brazil. He established the first Portuguese-speaking church in Rio de Janeiro in 1860 and led the struggle for Protestant toleration in the predominantly Roman Catholic country. From this beginning, the IPB has grown to more than 1.5 million members. Given its commitment to biblical orthodoxy, the IPB was interested in a new American Presbyterian partner shortly after the formation of the EPC.

From this beginning, strengthening the Presbyterian seminaries in Brazil was a major priority. In addition to supporting the training of IPB teachers in the US, this partnership led to the 1991 establishment of the Andrew Jumper Center of Post Graduate Theological Education in Sao Paulo.

### Agreement

The purpose of this agreement is to continue the relationship of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church which will allow us to consider new forms of missionary or ministerial involvement, mutual learning and to unify our search for new and relevant routes to the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28.18-20). We will pursue these routes guided by the following commitments:

1. Our relationship will be characterized by a spirit of love and reciprocity, open dialogue and commitment to mutual learning. We will then strengthen our partnership in a variety of ministerial expressions, so that the relationship between our churches may be further strengthened.
2. We will seek to identify opportunities through which the members of both churches can serve and strengthen both the IPB and the EPC through regular visits and exchanging ministerial personnel to both countries.
3. Our shared mission activities will be integrative. This means that we will seek to incorporate the whole Gospel, in words and actions, to the ministries of physical needs, intellect, emotions and relationships with those whom we will serve through the ministry.
4. Church planting and those activities that support church planting will be a focus for fulfilling the Great Commission in both countries. Those activities may include General Assembly, synod and presbytery collaboration, cooperation between the church planting ministries of the IPB and EPC, theological education, missiology and the development of social outreach ministries.
5. To meet the above objectives, the IPB and EPC agrees to mutual recognition of the confessions, ordination, ministry and ecclesiastical government of one another.

On issues of mission and philosophy of ministry, the signatories of this agreement will be the same. If we find that changes need to be made to this agreement, we commit to mutual agreement as we address them.

The General Assembly of the EPC will be responsible for nourishing this relationship with the IPB.

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Leaders of the EPC and IPB will gather as needed with the objective of strengthening our bond, deepening the agreed commitments and discussing how to improve the partnership between our churches and presbyteries. Through this agreement, each church will provide their knowledge and their resources for the benefit of the other.

This agreement is signed the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_. This agreement will be reviewed every five years and will be modified by mutual consent.

**Committee Members:**

RE Carol Culbertson (Chairman), Presbytery of the West  
RE Gwynn Blair, Presbytery of Florida and the Caribbean  
TE Don Fortson, Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic  
RE Jerry Harmon, Presbytery of the Central South  
TE Joe Pallikkathayil, Presbytery of Mid-America  
TE Alan Trafford, Presbytery of the Gulf South  
TE Case Thorp, Moderator, 39<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (ex officio)  
TE Jeff Jeremiah, Stated Clerk (ex officio)

**Committee Meeting Dates:**

September 19, 2019—Telephone conference call  
February 27, 2020—Telephone conference call

Respectfully submitted,



RE Carol Culbertson, Chairman

September 2020