

National Leadership Team
Executive Summary Report
to the 41st General Assembly



Case Thorp
Chairman

Summary of Work, 2020-2021:

1. Evaluated the “all virtual” 40th General Assembly and approved a “hybrid” 41st General Assembly in response to restrictions imposed by the continuation of the COVID-19 shutdown.
2. Completed the Executive Transition Plan originally created in 2018 with the arrival of Stated Clerk-elect Dean Weaver in January 2021 and the appointment of Gabriel de Guia in May as the Executive Director of World Outreach.
3. Continued its oversight of the strategic priorities of church planting, church revitalization, effective biblical leadership, and global movement of churches.
4. Received regular reports and continued to promote the work of the Revelation 7:9 Task Force.
5. Monitored closely EPC finances and was able to restore strategic line items in the FY21 budget due strong revenue and reduced expenses.

Recommendations to the 2021 General Assembly:

1. That the 41st General Assembly **APPROVE** the amendments to “*Rules for Assembly*” governing the meetings of the General Assembly.
2. That the 41st General Assembly **APPROVE** the minutes of the 40th General Assembly.
3. That the 41st General Assembly **ELECT** Dr. Jeffrey Jeremiah as Stated Clerk Emeritus.
4. That the 41st General Assembly **APPROVE** the FY22 Administration Budget.
5. That the 41st General Assembly **APPROVE** the FY22 Special Projects.
6. That the 41st General Assembly **RECEIVE** “The Role and Purpose of the Office of the General Assembly”

Work of the Committee in 2020-2021:

1. COVID-19 shutdown and General Assembly meetings

The success of the first ever “all-virtual” 40th General Assembly in September 2020 resulted in a number of requests that the virtual component be included in future meetings. At its October meeting, the National Leadership Team discussed at length the value of our onsite annual meetings. It affirmed the high connectational value of in-person attendance at General Assembly meetings. It also affirmed the live streaming of business meetings to provide opportunities to observe business meetings for individuals who may not otherwise be physically able to attend in person. The NLT further affirmed that virtual participation does not provide sufficient opportunities to debate meaningfully issues before the Assembly. It concluded that virtual participation will not be continued at future assemblies absent exigent circumstances.

As OGA staff worked with leadership of Second-Memphis, host for 41st GA in 2021, it became clear in January 2021 that onsite commissioner participation would be restricted to no more than 400 commissioners and 550 total attendees. In order to maximize commissioner participation at the 41st GA, on February 2 the National Leadership Team voted to convene a first-ever “hybrid” General Assembly. This could only be done after the Office of the Stated Clerk issued a provisional opinion permitting a hybrid meeting. In addition, the NLT proposed amendments to *Rules for Assembly* this would allow for future General Assemblies to be hybrid or entirely virtual. These amendments are found in **Recommendation 41-03**. Finally, the National Leadership Team presents the Minutes of the 40th General Assembly for approval. This request is **Recommendation 41-08**.

2. Executive Transition

Since 2018, the NLT has been conscious of and planning for the departures of the Stated Clerk, Director of World Outreach (both scheduled to retire in June 2021), and Chief Operating Officer, who departed in 2019. With the announcement of Gabriel de Guia as the new Executive Director of World Outreach, the successors to Phil Linton and Jeff Jeremiah are in place. The COO was not replaced, but rather existing staff were tasked with specific, additional duties to much operational success. The NLT held a dinner in Phil and Janet Linton’s honor in Orlando to express our appreciation for their ministry and service to the EPC.

The 40th General Assembly received and approved the recommendation of TE Dean Weaver as the next Stated Clerk following the retirement of Jeff Jeremiah at the conclusion of his elected term in June of 2021 during the 41st General Assembly. To ensure a smooth and productive Stated Clerk transition, there has been a six month “overlap” between Jeff Jeremiah and Dean Weaver that began on January 2, 2021. The Personnel Committee, with help from former Moderator Scott Griffin, developed an executive transition plan for Jeff and Dean in November 2020. This plan set out clear responsibilities and milestones for when responsibilities would move from Jeff to Dean. During this interim period, Dean was known as the Stated Clerk-elect.

At its April 2021 meeting, the NLT approved **Recommendation 41-09**, that Jeff be elected Stated Clerk Emeritus at the 41st General Assembly.

The Personnel Committee of the NLT—Co-chair RE Chris Danusiar (Rivers and Lakes), RE Victor Jones (Gulf South), TE Patrick King (Pacific Southwest), Co-chair RE Rosemary Lukens (Pacific Northwest), RE Brian Evans (Midwest), and TE David Strunk (Southeast)—worked hard this spring with Dean on a comprehensive review of our staff in the Office of the General Assembly. I am pleased to share that we endorsed the recommendation to promote and expand the roles of the following:

- Zenaida Bermudez: from Executive Assistant to the Assistant Stated Clerk to Executive Assistant to the Stated Clerk and Director of Operations.
- Marti Ratcliff (nee Brenner): from Executive Assistant to the Stated Clerk to Executive Assistant to the Office of the Stated Clerk and Human Resources Manager.
- Patrick Coelho: from Director of Finances to Chief Financial Officer.

We have an outstanding team of faithful and servant-minded staff in the OGA. I encourage you to greet them as brothers and sisters in Christ, thank them for their service, and enjoy rich fellowship.

3. Strategic Priorities

A. Church Planting

Even in the midst of the shutdown, the commitment to church planting has continued. Today we have just over 50 active church plants, and a new, full-time church planting leadership position coming in the next year to the EPC. In fact, plants have been *launched* since March of 2020 in Port Orchard, WA; Ferguson, MO; and Jacksonville, FL! In the last 3 years we have new church planting networks in St. Louis, East Tennessee, and Charlotte NC; New Church plants in Tennessee, Colorado, Illinois, North Carolina, Kansas, and Pennsylvania. We received a \$250,000 grant that is being put to good use! Thank you, Lord!

A strength of our church planters is that they're adaptive and flexible; better suited to shift quickly in response to changes imposed upon them from without and create new pathways for ministry. Their passion to bring the gospel to their communities has not dimmed. Similar to our local church pastors, many of our church planting pastors feel disconnected and alone. The emotional stress coupled with the financial pressure during this shutdown has been a real challenge to some. As a result, the care of our church planters has been a major focus of the Church Planting Team during the shutdown. The annual church planters retreat in the fall of 2020 had to be cancelled. However, Zoom conversations featuring Thabiti Anyabwile, Zack Eswine, Greg Thompson, and Carey Nieuwhof took place from September to February. These gatherings have kept our planters connected and resourced. In addition, Church Planting Team members each committed to connect with 5-8 planters to assure them they're not alone. Finally, monies not used due to the cancellation of the annual retreat were used for counseling and coaching for our church planters and their spouses.

Because of the shutdown, a much-needed assessment for potential church planters could not be scheduled. Currently there are almost a dozen candidates for EPC church planting around the country in need of assessment. Sean Sunn and the Denver-based Aspen Grove Church Planting Network plan to offer an assessment later this summer.

As EPC church planting expands into ethnically diverse communities, there is a growing need to recruit church planters from the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico (INPM). The EPC has a fraternal agreement with the INPM that provides for this. The Church Planting Team is currently working to bring a Presbyterian Church of Brazil-ordained pastor to the Philadelphia area to work with a core group of Brazilian immigrants. The Team is also working with Richard Rieves to create and sustain a church planting residency program in Memphis, TN specifically designed to equip and train church planters for work in mono-ethnic or underserved communities.

B. Church Revitalization

Under the direction of Assistant Stated Clerk Jerry Iamurri, the EPC inaugurated the Virtual Leadership Institute on Church Revitalization in 2020. Monthly workshops led by Teaching Elders Doug Resler, Bryn McPhail, Mike Wright, and John Mabry began in October. These gatherings have focused on three areas: the revitalization of the pastor, the revitalization of the Session, and the revitalization of the congregation. Each workshop has been well-attended. After each 15-20 minute “plenary,” breakouts have taken place to discuss the topic presented, which lasts for 15-20 minutes to create dialogue and sustain engagement over the two-hour time slot. In addition to strong participation, Jerry and this leadership team has had many follow up conversations with TEs and REs. The need for revitalization is very real, especially as churches ponder life after COVID.

In addition to GO Center leaders and coaches, the EPC has benefited recently from the ministry of Vital Church Ministry. This revitalization organization is currently serving First-EPC in Moline, IL; Moraga Valley EPC in Moraga, CA; and Faith-EPC in Quincy, IL. VCM previously performed diagnostic services for First EPC-Fairbanks, AK.

Even during the shutdown, churches applied for revitalization matching funds. The NLT was very pleased to restore this line item in the FY21 budget to its original level of \$55,000. As of May 1, 2021, \$15,959.25 had been disbursed.

C. Global Movement

The updates on this strategic priority may be found in the reports from World Outreach and Fraternal Relations.

D. Effective Biblical Leadership

One of the highlights of our annual General Assembly is our Leadership Institute workshops. Because the 40th General Assembly in 2020 was an “all business, all virtual” meeting, the Leadership Institute could not be convened. Under Jerry Iamurri’s leadership, the first-ever Online Leadership Institute for Revitalization met for the first time on October 28, 2021. This is an interactive monthly workshop that provides encouragement, coaching, and peer support for those engaged in the challenging work of revitalization.

The work of Presbytery Ministerial and Candidates Committee chairs is critically important to the health and future of the EPC. The OGA hosted an all-virtual meeting of this group of leaders in October 2020 and a hybrid meeting in March 2020. New editions of the *Leadership Training Guide* and the *Procedure Manual for Ministerial and Candidates Committees* have been released in 2021. The online EPC ordination exams have been tested and approved. The great advantage of online testing is that it will save as many as two weeks in the turnaround time for each set of exams.

Another important meeting of EPC leaders is the annual Presbytery Stated Clerks' Workshop. This group held a hybrid meeting in November 2020. Ron Bengelink, former Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of the Pacific Northwest, has prepared a manual for Presbytery Stated Clerks. This tool is designed to assist Stated Clerks in organizing their business and creating minutes that will comply with the *Book of Order* and the guidelines of the Presbytery Review Committee. Stated Clerk-elect Dean Weaver and I are exploring ways for congregations to develop more ordained pastors (including church planters) with a strategic "ordination pipeline." This pipeline would be a series of coordinated efforts by existing TEs, REs, congregations, presbyteries, and seminaries to identify, nurture, resource, and train the talent of tomorrow. The work of the Revelation 7:9 Task Force also shows me that if we are to recruit future ethnic minority TEs we cannot just wait for such candidates to appear. We have to grow them with a strategic plan for identifying, nurturing, resourcing, and training such individuals.

4. Revelation 7:9

The formation of the Revelation 7:9 Task Force was approved by the 38th General Assembly in 2018. Appointed by Moderator Tom Werner, it originally had 13 members and was co-chaired by TE Rufus Smith and TE Dean Weaver. With Dean's election as the fourth Stated Clerk at the 40th GA in 2020, he stepped down as co-chair of the committee. TE Andrew Smith succeeded him. In 2020-2021, the Task Force was expanded to 16 in an effort to include representation from all EPC presbyteries. Those members are TE Rufus Smith (West-co-chair), TE Andrew Smith (East-co-chair), TE Tommy Allen (Pacific Northwest), TE Steve Burton (Central South), TE Jeff Cook (Mid-Atlantic), TE Michael Davis (Central South), TE Marc De Jeu (Alleghenies), TE Cheryl Ellis-Mendez (Florida and the Caribbean), TE Jose Figueroa (Pacific Southwest), RE Enid Flores (Florida and the Caribbean), TE Laurie Johnston (Great Plains), TE Joe Kim (East), RE Phyllis Le Peau (Rivers and Lakes), TE Soon Pak (Midwest), RE Brandon Queen (Gulf South), TE Doug Resler (West), TE Eric Shipman (Mid-America), TE Ben Tzeng (Mid-America) and RE Tom Werner (Mid-America).

In 2021-2022, the Task Force created four sub-committees: 1) The Assessment Team, which will help churches in their evaluation of their congregation, community and readiness to implement a 7:9 strategy, 2) The Presbytery Team, which will work with presbytery leadership to promote Revelation 7:9 to its member churches, 3) the Curriculum Team, which will assist in selecting appropriate curriculum and in training facilitators in the local church, and 4) the Execution Team, which will assist the local church with step-by-step implementation and vision casting for the future. More information on the work of the Revelation 7:9 Task Force is available in their report.

5. Finances

The 40th General Assembly approved two recommendations from the National Leadership Team that addressed the FY21 budget (the budget year runs from July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021). The first was the proposed FY21 budget. It was called a “Bare Bones Plus” budget that totaled \$2.36 million. Anticipating that our churches may be stressed financially as the COVID-19 shutdown continued, the NLT reduced its original budget request by 17%, to \$2.36 million. The reduction enabled us to keep the essential ministries of the EPC going.

The second recommendation the Assembly approved authorized the NLT to restore the funding of strategic items in the budget that had to be cut in the event that giving to the FY21 budget produced a surplus. The NLT has continued to be amazed as it praised the Lord and thanked our churches for the strong giving the EPC has enjoyed in FY21. During this most challenging and difficult time in the life of our church you’ve demonstrated how much you value the rich connection that is so central to who we are. Because of this strong giving, the NLT was able to restore to their original levels funding support for such strategic priorities as church planting and church revitalization in January.

This strong giving has also affected the NLT’s thinking about next year’s budget. The proposed budget for fiscal year 2022 (FY22), which runs from July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022, totals \$2,784,634. This budget includes \$200,000 to support EPC church planting, \$56,000 to support the church revitalization matching funds program, and \$116,220 for effective biblical leadership. And of course, 20%—or \$481,946—is allocated to EPC World Outreach. This [budget](#) request is found in **Recommendation 41-18**. The National Leadership Team also asks the Assembly to approve the [FY22 Special Projects](#), which are those items not included in the budget but that EPC ministry leaders are authorized to raise funds for. It is found in **Recommendation 41-19**.

I have been moved by how generous our congregations have been when responding to congregational and community needs in the face of natural disasters. The current balance of the EPC Emergency Relief Fund is \$201,449. A sample of the churches assisted by these funds include:

St. Andrews-Nassau/Kirk of the Pines-Marsh Harbour-Abaco	\$245,000
Lucaya-Freeport	\$75,000
Genesis-Mercedes, TX	\$27,250
Grace-Alexandria, LA	\$34,730
Hope-Memphis on behalf of All Soul’s Church; Nashville, TN	\$65,000
Lake Charles Relief	\$21,122
Edna (TX) EPC	\$5,525

The EPC Medical Benevolence Fund balance as of April 30th is \$423,547. The NLT approved a proposal to add dependents of ministers as eligible beneficiary for the cost of care not covered by the pastor’s medical plan. This beneficiary expansion has enabled a number of families, two of whom I know and love deeply, to find a bit of relief in challenging yet rewarding dependent care situations. We also added medical expenses related to COVID-19 as an eligible category for a benevolent distribution.

The NLT often discusses the size of these and other fund balances. Our desire is not to have designated funds sitting in coffers while there is so much need in our world. The NLT has not made an appeal for contributions to the Emergency Relief Fund since 2019 due to the fact that we have ample funds on hand. Congregations must request disaster relief funds to rebuild their ministry or reach out in the rebuilding efforts of their community following a natural disaster. I want to encourage congregations to be missionally-oriented and take advantage of these resources to expand your outreach as you love your neighbor in times of need. Likewise, TEs who have burdensome healthcare expenses for themselves or dependents are encouraged to apply so that we all may share in the joy of serving you.

Finally, the National Leadership Team is pleased to report that the EPC received a “clean” FY20 audit. Patrick Coelho continues to do an outstanding job as the EPC’s Chief Financial Officer. His role is especially important in the year ahead as three key members of the Finance Committee of the NLT conclude their service this month. They are RE Mike Gibson (Great Plains), RE Rob Liddon (Central South), and RE Phil Fanara (East).

6. Role and purpose of the Office of the General Assembly.

The 40th General Assembly approved the recommendation of the Giving Culture Study Committee that direct the Office of the General Assembly to develop a plan to educate Presbyteries and Sessions as to the purpose and role of the Office of the General Assembly. The document [Appendix A](#) that purpose and role was developed and presented to the NLT at its April 13-14, 2021 meeting. Due to the continuation of the COVID-19 shutdown and to the Stated Clerk transition, the plan to promote and educate the ministry of the OGA will be implemented in 2021-2022. The 41st General Assembly is asked to receive this document, which is **Recommendation 41-20**.

A Personal Note:

What a tremendous honor and joyful experience it has been to serve as your 39th Moderator of the General Assembly and NLT Chairman. I have been inspired by so many qualified and deeply spiritual people on the front lines for Jesus Christ. The pandemic cut short my opportunity to be present with an additional five Presbyteries, but this opportunity confirmed in me the spiritual gift of apostleship that I hope to develop further. We have an exciting future before us as a church, as well as challenges that will only bring us to our knees and in deeper communion with our Lord. Thank you for this opportunity to grow and serve.

Respectfully submitted,



Case Thorp
Chairman

www.epc.org/files/ga2021report-ntl