

Theology Committee
Report to the 41st General Assembly



Zach Hopkins
Chairman

Summary of Work, 2020-2021:

1. Reviewed the charter for the Theology Committee from *Rules for Assembly* 10-1G.
2. Reviewed the updated EPC Endorsement Policy recently approved by the 40th General Assembly.
3. Reviewed Recommendation 39-26 with regard to the relationship between Bethany Christian Services and the EPC.
4. Reviewed Recommendation 39-35 and studied how the EPC can be more sensitive to the needs of the disabled.
5. Reviewed Recommendation 40-16 and studied the terms “connectional” and “connectionalism” as understood by the EPC.

Recommendations to the 2021 General Assembly:

- 1. Recommendation 41-10:**
That the 41st General Assembly withdraw approval from Bethany Christian Services as an approved agency of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.
- 2. Recommendation 41-11:**
That the 41st General Assembly approve proposed changes to *Book of Government* 19-4.C.1.
- 3. Recommendation 41-12:**
That the 41st General Assembly approve proposed changes to *Book of Government* 20-4A.3.
- 4. Recommendation 41-13:**
That the 41st General Assembly approve proposed changes to *Book of Worship* 7-5.
- 5. Recommendation 41-14:**
That the 41st General Assembly receive the report of the committee concerning the terms “connectional” and “connectonalism” as understood by the EPC.

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Work of the Committee in 2020-2021:

There were two items that were deferred from the 40th General Assembly that the Theology Committee was prepared to present. The committee began its work in the fall of 2020 by reviewing these items. That included:

- **Recommendation 39-26:** The National Leadership Team recommends that the 39th General Assembly send the matter of Bethany Christian Services (BCS) to the Permanent Committee on Theology to review in light of the EPC Position Papers on Abortion and Human Sexuality.
- **Recommendation 39-35:** That the 39th General Assembly refer to the Permanent Committee on Theology for study how the EPC can be more sensitive to the needs of the disabled.

The following is a summary of the committee's work related to these two recommendations from the 39th General Assembly.

Bethany Christian Services (BCS)

The committee received reports explaining: 1) why the National Leadership Team (NLT) made the original recommendation to the Assembly, and 2) the discussion of the Theology Standing Committee of the 39th General Assembly related to this topic. Post-Assembly research was disclosed and discussed, as well as the EPC Position Papers on Abortion and Human Sexuality.

Additionally, the committee spent considerable time studying the history of the EPC's practice of entering into relationships with external agencies. The previous Endorsement Policy of the EPC (2002) was reviewed, and an updated version was recommended to the 40th General Assembly. The updated Endorsement Policy was approved by the 40th General Assembly. It is now accessible on EPC website at www.epc.org/downloads/#other.

EPC and the Disabled

The committee received reports explaining: 1) why the National Leadership Team (NLT) made the original recommendation to the Assembly and 2) the discussion of the theology standing committee of the 39th General Assembly related to this topic. The committee also reviewed the documents "Constitution and the Disabled" and "Sacraments and the Disabled" that were provided to EPC through the NLT. Three items of constitutional consideration were identified and are presented for the sake of institutional clarity on this matter.

The responses to these recommendations from 2019 were deferred to the 41st General Assembly and are presented in this report.

Additionally, the 40th General Assembly, upon recommendation from the Giving Culture Study Committee, assigned the following work to the Theology Committee:

- **Recommendation 40-16:** That the 40th General Assembly direct the Theology Committee, with assistance from the Ministerial Vocation Committee, the task of

defining the terms “connectional” and “connectionalism” as understood by the EPC, and report to the 41st General Assembly (2021).

The response of the Theology Committee is available to the 41st General Assembly.

Recommendations to the 2021 General Assembly:

- 1. Recommendation 41-10:** That the 41st General Assembly withdraw approval from Bethany Christian Services as an approved agency of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

Background:

1. The 39th General Assembly requested that the Permanent Committee on Theology to review Bethany Christian Services (BCS) as an approved agency of the EPC in light of the EPC Position Papers on Abortion and Human Sexuality.
2. Acts of Assembly 89-19 records that the 9th General Assembly took the following action: “[BCS] is approved as an agency for ministry to unmarried mothers and the unborn, providing alternatives to abortion including adoption services. Bethany is commended as deserving of the prayers of our people as well as worthy of financial support from those of our people who feel so led.” (Minutes, 9-39).
3. Standing with historic Christian belief and practice, the EPC has long supported ministry to women and the unborn, through recommending resources and agencies as alternatives to abortion including adoption services.
4. In April 2019, the Michigan chapter of BCS acceded to the State government’s requirement and agreed to place children for adoption in homes which include relationships that are forbidden according to the historic, orthodox, and biblical definition of marriage as between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; WCF 24.1).
5. At its meeting on September 11-12, 2019, the Permanent Committee on Theology, after careful review of this matter in light of Scripture, the Constitution of the EPC, and the EPC Position Papers on Abortion and Human Sexuality, was prepared to offer this recommendation to the 40th General Assembly. The circumstances of the 40th General Assembly did not offer the opportunity for the interaction on this matter that it deserves. Therefore, the matter was deferred to the 41st Assembly.
6. On March 1, 2021, the President and Chief Executive Officer of Bethany Christian Services, Chris Palusky, announced that BCS would begin providing services to LGBTQ parents nationwide, effective immediately.
7. The committee now offers **Recommendation 41-10** for consideration by the 41st General Assembly.

2. Recommendation 41-11: to approve proposed changes to *Book of Government* 19-4.C.1.

Current <i>Book of Government</i> 19-4.C.1	Proposed <i>Book of Government</i> 19-4.C.1 <i>Amendments in bold italics</i>
1. To work with other Presbyteries and the General Assembly to create agencies for education, the orphaned, the aged, and other suitable activities.	1. To work with other Presbyteries and the General Assembly to create agencies for education, <i>identify resources for ministry to and inclusion of</i> the orphaned, the aged, and <i>the disabled.</i> other suitable activities.

3. Recommendation 41-12: to approve proposed changes to *Book of Government* 20-4A.3.

Current <i>Book of Government</i> 20-4.A.3	Current <i>Book of Government</i> 20-4.A.3 <i>Amendment in bold italics</i>
3. To create separately or in conjunction with the Presbyteries those agencies or institutions needed for education or other purposes that would enhance the life and ministry of the whole church.	3. To create <i>identify</i> separately or in conjunction with the Presbyteries those agencies or institutions needed for education or other purposes that would enhance the life and ministry of the whole church.

4. Recommendation 41-13: to approve proposed changes to *Book of Worship* 7-5.

Current <i>Book of Worship</i> 7-5	Current <i>Book of Worship</i> 7-5 <i>Amendments in bold italics</i>
The New Testament describes the concern and compassion of Christ for the conditions of people. The Church shall emulate its Head by showing special concern for the sick, the sorrowing, the hungry, and the poor. The Session shall be responsible for establishing these ministries within the congregation, and into the community. The service of compassion to those in adversity shall include such places as hospitals, retirement homes, convalescent homes, children’s homes, prisons and other public institutions. The higher courts of the Church shall seek to show compassion in these areas, including the establishment of institutions, both at home and abroad, for the care of various needs.	The New Testament describes the concern and compassion of Christ for the conditions of people. The Church shall emulate its Head by showing special concern for the sick, the sorrowing, the hungry, and the poor. The Session shall be responsible for establishing these ministries within the congregation, and into the community. The service of compassion to those in adversity shall include such places as hospitals, retirement homes, convalescent homes, children’s homes, prisons and other public institutions. The higher courts of the Church shall seek to show compassion in these areas, including the establishment of institutions, both at home and abroad, for the care of various needs.

5. Recommendation 41-14: to receive the report of the committee concerning the terms “connectional” and “connectonalism” as understood by the EPC. ([Click here for Report](#))

Committee Members:

TE Zach Hopkins (Chairman), Presbytery of the Rivers and Lakes
RE Fred Flinn, Presbytery of the Central South
RE Gordon Miller, Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic
RE John Moody, Presbytery of the Great Plains
TE Cameron Shaffer, Presbytery of the East

Committee Meeting Dates:

November 3, 2020: Video Conference
December 10, 2020: Video Conference
January 14, 2021: Video Conference

Respectfully submitted,



Zach Hopkins, Chairman

June 2021