

Moderator

Executive Summary Report
to the 42nd General Assembly

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Brad Strait
Moderator

As Moderator in 2021-22, adaptation has been the watchword. I don't need to remind you that our world is swirling with transitions, great and small. Viruses, economic pressures, racial tensions, social and political animosity, and wars reflect on a world where much seems in windblown disarray. Honestly, some of our larger churches have struggled, as have some of our smaller churches.

These changes require, it seems to me, three primary things: steadfast faith, deep prayer, and adaptive leadership. You and I—as Christian leaders—have had to learn to be both solid and flexible. The same is true of the EPC. This year, we transitioned to a new Stated Clerk, several new key leaders, and a changing church world.

At the top level of National EPC Leadership, we met four times virtually and in person, plus in many committee meetings. We have been applying energy prayerfully for positive changes, working:

- To respond to the toll the last few years have taken on pastors and their families. We value every pastor, and so we have held two, one-week, low-cost retreats to support pastors and their wives. About 80 couples attended a recharging retreat.
- To help churches and believers deal with the rising persecution we see in our world. As leadership, we have worked on presenting practical guidance for leading churches in an anti-Christian world. We have done this through the “Prepare to Stand” Video series with TE Andrew Brunson, and in this year’s Leadership Institute seminar on Persecution.

- To help address the racial struggles in our churches and land. The National Leadership Team researched and read broadly for many months, and then met for a whole day—in a room filled with people of color—to listen, discuss, and analyze how best to address the racial strife in America. We all know it is a massive, complex, and divisive issue. Honestly, we have no easy answers, but more positive steps should unfold at GA this year.
- To bring our financial plans and systems into better alignment with our real world. We have examined in detail how best to operate financially as a denomination in the changing church world and have presented our findings and a Percentage of Income (POI) to the presbyteries. The option is now in resolution form at this General Assembly.
- To review and adjust our organization and resources to align with a renewed focus on evangelism. This is significant. Let me talk about this in more detail.

Being involved in “evangelism” is not just a part of our EPC name, but also a part of our DNA. Gospel evangelism is a priority in what we value and how we operate. We resist contemporary arenas which seek to make this word narrowly political (it is a Bible word). We are reminded that our denomination has evangelism coded into our core operating system. Some examples from our Book of Order:

- To the WHOLE CHURCH: “The primary mission of the Church is to share the gospel of salvation with all the nations of the world. This is the mission of every Christian, every local church, and the whole Church.” (Book of Worship 7-2)
- To the LOCAL CHURCH, “It is the primary mission of the local church to evangelize, making disciples by extending the gospel both at home and abroad...” (Book of Government 4-3)
- To every CHURCH SESSION, a priority: “To initiate the ministry of evangelism as the first business of the Church.” (Book of Government 18-3)
- To every PRESBYTERY, a charge: “To encourage evangelism, church planting, and renewal within its bounds as a first priority.” (Book of Government 19-4)
- To the GENERAL ASSEMBLY, “To organize itself as it deems best for the propagation of the gospel...to support the Presbyteries and churches in making evangelism and discipleship their priorities.” (Book of Government 20-4)

At the National Leadership level, we know that rekindling evangelism in many soils is not easy, and takes prayer, wisdom, and patience. Of course, life has been crazy. Certainly, church leadership has been outrageously complex. This is not a new place for the followers of Jesus. Yes, we have all been living through masking and attendance mandates, illnesses and closings, video conferencing and services, and growing external pressures from an antichristian world. But working only inside the church too often blocks the arteries of faith and trust. The heart of passion for Jesus slows and struggles. A gospel focus of faith in Jesus is the cure. We were designed to “Go and make disciples...”

My dear brothers and sisters, we must resist falling into a preservation or maintenance mode. Evangelism is not the only work of the church, but it is the priority of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

Some things bear repeating. With both Isaiah and the Apostles, we assert, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6, Acts 13:47).

With the Holy Spirit in both Habakkuk and Paul we proclaim boldly, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” (Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:16-17).

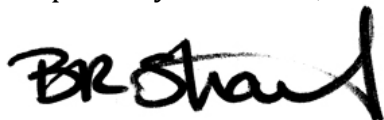
We have been working on ways to encourage a local congregation toward evangelism. We are seeking to renew Evangelism in our strategic priorities:

- Church Planting (creating new churches with new Christian believers).
- Church Revitalization (creating healthier churches with more and deeper believers).
- Global Movement (cultivating worldwide churches which reach the lost).
- Effective Biblical Leadership (cultivating church leaders who can effectively share the gospel in today’s world).

My sisters and brothers, take heart! In the EPC, we believe strongly that Jesus is still the answer for the problems of today’s world. We stand on the truth that the gospel of Christ can still be the Church’s priority. We believe the Light shines in the darkness and that the darkness—the very gates of hell—can never overcome it!

It has been a privilege to serve as your Moderator this year, and to work for the gospel at local, national, and international levels. We have a great team. May God receive all the glory for all our faith and work. And may it continue with power!

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "BR Strait". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Brad Strait, Moderator

April 2022