



April 2018

One of our four strategic initiatives that receives funding in our General Assembly budget is Effective Biblical Leadership. In this effort, we believe our Lord has called us to create and sustain a culture of leadership development and excellence for all the leaders of the EPC.

The Ministerial Vocation Committee is a key group that has provided outstanding leadership in this area. Chaired by Michael Flake, pastor of the Davidson campus of Lake Forest Church in Charlotte, the MVC met and hosted the chairs of the Ministerial and Candidates committees of our presbyteries on March 12-13 at the EPC office in Orlando.

Twenty-five chairs representing 12 of our 14 presbyteries attended this meeting.

Why do we get such high attendance? Well, the MVC hosts this meeting at the request of these chairs. They have a vested interest. Not only that, they *want* to be together. They have found that networking, sharing best practices, and addressing issues they share in common is of high value. Obviously, the interaction between the MVC and these chairs is very beneficial given the overlap in their ministries.

It has always been a priority for me to attend these meetings. I believe the most important committee in our presbytery is the Ministerial Committee. When our Teaching and Ruling Elders on this committee do their work well, it frees the presbytery to focus on mission and outreach. When it does not go well in Ministerial, it does not go well for the presbytery, as it has to stop what it's doing to fix whatever the problem in Ministerial may be.

Among the items addressed at their March meeting included how to improve pastoral search processes and transitions for retiring pastors, as well as screening the physical and emotional health of candidates and transferring ministers. The Ministerial Committee chairs reported they are paying closer attention to the Minister's Annual Report. A trend in many of our churches—unfortunately an unhealthy one—is that too many of our pastors do not take their full allotted vacation time. I was glad to hear that some of our Ministerial Committees are notifying church sessions in their presbyteries to ensure pastors are taking their vacation and study leave.

In other business, Kent Mathews and Nate Atwood presented the Mentored Apprenticeship Program, or MAP, and answered questions about this innovative, effective, and inexpensive



way for seminary students to do fully accredited coursework. Kent heads the program. Nate, who serves as pastor of St. Giles in Charlotte, has three students taking part.

In the candidate care process, discussion centered on simplifying the care process for better understanding, as well as updating the checklist for candidates that appears on our website. The group also discussed expanding that process to accommodate the increasing number of non-traditional candidates we have.

Chairs of both Ministerial and Candidates committees expressed appreciation for the flexibility that they now have in assessing candidates for ordination. The Candidates chairs of most of our presbyteries reported that they are very pleased with the extremely strong candidates that they have presented for ordination recently. This is great news for the future of the EPC!

I offered a “State of the EPC” that included a report from the recent Board meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals, a 2018 General Assembly preview, and an update on Andrew Brunson’s plight in Turkey. The Q-and-A time was longer than my report!

There was an extended discussion about the overture that the Interim Committee on Ministerial Education has sent to this year’s General Assembly. The ICME-proposed constitutional amendment (which was reviewed by the Permanent Judicial Commission recently) calls for an expansion of the role of the Commissioned Pastor (that is, a Ruling Elder serving as a pastor but without full ordination as a Teaching Elder) in the EPC. The major change is to add the use of Commissioned Pastor in churches currently staffed with a pastor. Currently, the Commissioned Pastor is a role reserved for churches without a pastor. This change would allow a church with a pastor to call a Commissioned Pastor also. This would augment the ministry of the pastor, providing greater service for the church.

After these presbytery leaders departed, the MVC met for another half-day and conducted business specific to it. They have been working on revisions to the Procedure Manual for the Care of Candidates, and this work continues. The Committee also had revised some of our ordination exams recently, adding a greater pastoral emphasis. They were pleased at feedback indicating that this change is very much appreciated. I believe this response to the updated ordination exams, plus the positive report on so many strong candidates for ordination, is confirmation that we are moving into a great future for the EPC. Finally, the MVC discussed at length the physical, mental, and emotional health of candidates and ministers. They affirmed the tools we currently use to screen the health of candidates and



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THE JEREMIAH JOURNAL

ministers, and believe they offer an adequate level of protection for the EPC as long as those tools are used.

An awful lot was accomplished in 2½ days, and I have full confidence that the results of this meeting will continue to make us, as I like to say, “Better Together.” I am very grateful for the key presbytery leadership that came to this important meeting, for the members of the Ministerial Vocation Committee that hosted it, and I am grateful for you. For you see, meetings like this can’t happen without your financial support for the EPC. Thank you for helping make us “Much Better Together.”

God bless you, and remember: Christ is risen!