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This is the final edition of The Jeremiah Journal, so we brought back our original set. Shooting these has been a growth experience, and makes me appreciate those of you who shoot videos regularly. Thank you for watching these across the years and for your responses.

I've been encouraged to offer some reflections on my time as Stated Clerk.

After I was elected to this position in September of 2006, a number of colleagues sent me books I "absolutely had to read." They included Collins' *Good to Great*, Covey's *Speed of Trust*, and Gladwell's *Tipping Point*. I also received *So You Want to Be the Pope?* While full of interesting info about what a Pope does, it took a light-hearted, humorous approach to its subject. A section describing one of the Pope's many titles caught my attention: "Pastor to the congregation," with the congregation understood to be the pastors of the Church.

I really wanted to bring a pastoral approach to this ministry. I took to heart the opportunity to serve as a pastor to pastors—a safe place where pastors could come for counsel and support, to simply vent, or for someone to pray for them. One long-time friend who counseled and supported me in those early years said, "Jeff, when you're through being a pastor you're through as Stated Clerk." In my mind, taking a pastoral approach says, "The EPC (that is, we) will be there for you" when you're in crisis, when you've endured a tragedy, when you're desperately ill, or unjustly imprisoned. I'm very grateful for the opportunity and privilege to be a pastor to pastors across these last 15 years.

We've had some milestone General Assemblies:

My first GA as Stated Clerk took place in 2007. That was the Assembly where we approved transitional membership and transitional presbyteries in the EPC. The distinct picture in my mind after we approved those recommendations was tears. Tears. From the front of the room, I looked out and saw so many people weeping. Those tears were mostly from two groups: 1) longtime leaders in the EPC who never thought this day would come, and 2) a large number of people visiting from outside the EPC who desperately wanted to join us and realized the Assembly's action enabled that to happen. Tears—tears of joy.

After that historic vote, former Moderator Bill Meyers, who was the architect of transitional status, read from Hebrews 11:8. "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would



later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.” Bill said that we didn’t know where these decisions would take the EPC, but by faith we were moving forward, trusting that God would show us the way—just as He did Abraham.

In 2007, we thought our action would eventually double the size of the EPC from 180 to 360 churches. That happened—the week of our 2012 General Assembly in Baton Rouge. But it didn’t stop there.

At the 2013 Assembly, Moderator Bill Dudley ran out of breath reading the 100+ churches that we’d received into the EPC in the previous year. We were now well on our way to more than 500 churches.

About that time, I read that an organization cannot maintain its distinctive culture—its ethos—if it grows by more than 3% a year. By 2013 we had grown by more than 10% each year for four years in a row. In addition, we were creating new presbyteries to accommodate this growth.

Did we do good “gatekeeping” to ensure churches that were a good fit joined us? Yes, absolutely. Did we create new presbyteries thoughtfully and intentionally, doing all we could to ensure the ethos of those new presbyteries reflected the broader EPC? Yes. But most importantly, the Lord Jesus Christ—the Head of this church—was ensuring that the distinctive way He has moved in our little band of churches would continue.

What is that ethos? Four words sum it up well: Presbyterian, Reformed, evangelical, and missional.

Presbyterian. Immediately we think of our form of government, which is distinguished from the episcopal and congregational models. If there’s one word that sets Presbyterian polity apart in my mind it is the word “with.” We work with each other, together, collaboratively. In the local church, the pastor leads *with* the Session, the Session *with* the pastor. In the other courts of the church, the Ruling Elders lead *with* the Teaching Elders. Together, we can do much more for Christ and His kingdom than by going it alone.

Yet for me, what gives “Presbyterian” richness and impact is that it is a beautiful illustration of how we relate to one another. In the EPC, we are a relational bunch. Our focus on relationship is true to the spiritual connection that is described by the more than



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25 “one anothers” of the New Testament: welcome one another; accept one another; instruct, encourage, forgive one another; bear the burdens of, hold accountable, and of course love one another. One result of this connection of the EPC is that we enjoy being together. I’ve not thought of Presbytery and General Assembly meetings as a duty or a chore. Those meetings are enjoyable experiences, opportunities to connect with colleagues and friends. Another result of that connection that is special to us is that we trust one another. I’ve been told by those outside the EPC for years that that is a standout feature of the EPC. We trust one another. Presbyterian—we do that in a distinctive way in the EPC.

Second is Reformed. With the church through the centuries that Jesus is building, we are unapologetically biblical and orthodox. We affirm that the Bible is God’s Word, that it contains eternal, timeless truth, and we do well to order our doctrine, life, and mission according to this Word.

To be Reformed is to be confessional. We take our commitment to the Westminster Confession—our Confession—seriously. I have always described our commitment as open and honest, in that a careful reading of the Confession (written in the 17th century) would naturally lead to questions, reservations, and even exceptions to it. We expect this when we receive, or ordain, or install officers. While it is subordinate to God’s Word, it helps us maintain and defend the gospel as the Bible declares it.

As a result of being Reformed, we do not have major theological disputes and ongoing doctrinal conflicts in the EPC, because all of our officers have signed on to the same doctrine.

In the EPC, we also agree to disagree about non-essentials of the faith. People of good conscience can look at Scripture and come to differing interpretations about what is taught about such issues as gifts of the Spirit, eschatology, worship, music styles, philosophy of ministry, and the ordination of women to the offices of Ruling Elder and Teaching Elder.

In the EPC, we are distinctly Presbyterian and Reformed. We are also evangelical.

We joyfully, boldly proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ—that salvation, abundant and eternal life in this life and in the life to come, is found in the Christ, the Son of the living God. He can be known, trusted, loved, and embraced as a personal Savior and Lord. This salvation is found in no one else. As He said in John 14, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but by Me.”



The fourth defining characteristic of who we are in the EPC is that we are missional.

We are “all in” on the global mission of the Church. We also know that the United States is a vast and growing mission field. We believe our churches have been placed by God in the mission field that is their own community for the purpose of effectively reaching out to those around them with the good news of Jesus Christ.

A key element of God’s mission for us in the 21st century is to look outward and to move outward into that mission field. One way I like to phrase it is, “We’re committed to taking the gospel to the ends of the earth and to the end of our street.” One of the ways this distinctive is applied in the EPC is that we understand that the local church is where the action is.

Presbyterian, Reformed, evangelical, and missional. That’s who Jesus has called us to be. Because of who we are, He’s led, He’s provided and we can celebrate so much that has been accomplished in church planting, church revitalization, global movement, and effective biblical leadership.

I’d like to share some appreciations as I look back on 15 years as your Stated Clerk.

First and foremost, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who loved me and saved me. He called, equipped, and protected me in this role that had so many miles of travel.

Second, all of you in the EPC who I love and appreciate so much. Since 2012 when I’m asked, “What’s your home church?” I’ve always replied, “The EPC is my church.” Since that time when Cindy suffered her first stroke, you all have been so wonderful in your care, support, prayers, and love for us.

I’m very grateful as well for the 15 Moderators and the scores of members of the Committee on Administration and the National Leadership Team. A friend recently said, “You were laying tracks in front of a runaway freight train!” during that time of explosive growth. Well, I may have done that, but I did that *with* the Committee on Administration and the National Leadership Team. They did it with me. And I am so grateful for their leadership and their support.



I also want to recognize and appreciate a special group of friends who made me laugh. Gordon Miller, Steve Burton, Richard Alberta, Erik Ohman, Jim Rimmel, and Jim Dixon. Whenever I was taking myself a bit too seriously, they were able to get me to chill.

Another group I am very grateful for is the staff that has served with me across these last 15 years. I think immediately of my Executive Assistants: Della Cullins and Marti Brenner. But there are actually two sets of staff here with whom I served. One was the staff in Livonia, Michigan. The second is the staff I served with here in Orlando, Florida. And there are three who have overlapped who I have served with that I especially want to thank: Brian Smith, Pat Coelho, and Phil Linton.

Most importantly, I need to recognize, appreciate, and praise the Lord for the most important person in my life: my precious wife, Cindy. There were sacrifices to be made when I stepped into this ministry in 2006. The major one being a lot of time traveling on EPC business. Her faith, patience, and maturity has been incredible, inspiring, and life-giving to me. At those low points of discouragement and disappointment—believe me, they happened—she was there. My #1 supporter and encourager. She continually lifted me. Thank you so much Cindy! How I do love and appreciate you!

Now to conclude, the EPC was in need of a distinctive type of leadership in 2006. I am so grateful that the Lord called me to that position, that I was used by Him to accomplish His purpose. That included growing the EPC from 180 churches and eight presbyteries to over 640 churches and 14 presbyteries (soon to be 16) in the last 15 years. Also, to inspire and mobilize this larger group of churches in church planting, church revitalization, effective biblical leadership, and joining the global movement of churches committed to declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

In the fall of 2020, I began to realize that the EPC was in need of a different leader in the third decade of the 21st century. I know that Dean is that different leader whom God has called. He brings to this ministry a wonderful and dynamic mix of vision, wisdom, and energy. The longer our overlap has gone on, the more convinced I am that Dean is God's man for such a time as this and that the future is bright as he follows the leadership of the Head of our church in the years ahead. He knows he has my full support and I stand ready to do all I can to help him succeed.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to serve Jesus Christ, His church, and you in this role as Stated Clerk. I love you. God bless you, and remember: He is risen.