



A Global Movement of Evangelical Presbyterian Churches

THE JEREMIAH JOURNAL

## November 2017

Reflecting on our place in the Kingdom of God, I'm struck by how distinctly different—how counter-cultural—the EPC is in American Protestant Christianity. We're a strong, vibrant denomination of more than 600 churches in a decidedly anti-denominational era.

Not a week goes by that I don't see an article, post, or blog declaring that denominations are dead in the 21st century. In contrast to the independent, go-it-alone mentality that is rampant in the American church, in the EPC we place a high value on our connection: the rich spiritual connection that binds us together as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, that binds our churches together as well.

We understand that we're in this "church thing" together—and also that what God is doing in our denomination collectively is greater than what He's doing in any of our churches individually.

We believe we're called to and committed to that greater work, knowing that we're better working together than working alone. And when we pool our resources, we have much greater leverage and impact for the Kingdom.

In short, we are better together—much better.

I want to talk to you this month about the impact of your financial support for the EPC, and how that makes what we do possible.

One thought before we launch into that topic: Another value that is important to us in the EPC is trust. We trust each other in Jesus Christ. When you give to the EPC, in my mind you entrust your giving to us. You trust your colleagues and friends at the national level of the church to use that money the way you would want it used.

We take that trust very seriously. We never want to abuse or misuse it. If you don't think you can trust the national level of your church, I want to hear from you so that we can talk about the obstacles standing in the way of that trust.

Now, let's talk about the funds that you trust us with.



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In round numbers, our budget this year is \$2.5 million. Connectional Support is \$930,000—that's 37% of the budget. Collaborative Ministry is \$970,000—that's 39% of the budget. Custodial Operations is \$600,000—24% of the budget.

A few comments about each of these categories.

First, Connectional Support focuses mostly on who we are—what Jesus has called us to be—carrying out the Great Commission as a denomination of Presbyterian, Reformed, Evangelical, and Missional churches.

Our investment in Connectional Support ensures that in the EPC, our churches, sessions, presbyteries, and General Assembly committees are united and aligned. Our adherence to our Constitution is one of our major and most effective defenses against any legal challenges to our ministry and outreach for Jesus Christ.

This category includes constitutional duties, those things that connect all the courts, groups, committees, and networks of our church. The annual General Assembly meeting is one of these. As we've grown to more than 600 churches, this event is increasingly important to us—but it is also increasingly complex.

Committee and staff travel is another Connectional Support item. We're making full use of 21<sup>st</sup>-century technology, especially video conferences for more of our meetings. But we still need to meet face-to-face if we're going to be most effective in pursuit of our mission and vision work.

We need to put GA Office staff on the road to promote who Jesus has called us to be and what He's called us to do. For example, I spent about 40% of my time this year outside the office.

Another aspect of Connectional Support is communications. This includes all the infrastructure, staff, and technology that supports our website, EPCConnection, this journal, and other digital communications as we promote the distinctive ethos of the EPC and work to achieve our mission and vision.

Second, Collaborative Ministries is the category that speaks to what our Lord has called us to do: that is, doing God's mission as a global movement through multiplication (that is, church planting), transformation (church revitalization), and effective biblical leadership.



The biggest “global movement” component is the administration of EPC World Outreach. In fact, 20% of every Per Member Asking dollar supports the ministries of World Outreach. The EPC missions arm supports 70 global workers in 30 countries—and most of these workers serve in the “hardest places” to do mission work, like the Middle East and North Africa.

Money is also allocated for Kingdom opportunities with the global church. Our fraternal relationship with the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico—in which we’re partnering in church planting in both countries—is just one example of this.

For the first time this year, we are supporting multiplication—that is, church planting—in our budget, rather than through special projects or undesignated reserves. We celebrated 37 church plants at our Assembly last June, and we’re aware of at least five more that are ready to launch soon. Your investment in church planting helps us recruit, develop, and care for the next generation of EPC church planters. A signature event that your giving helps fund is the annual church planters retreat in October. I hope you’ve read the EPConnection article about it!

This year’s budget also includes support for our commitment to help churches who want to reverse decline—or get off a plateau—and become a more vibrant, energized ministry for Jesus Christ. One way we facilitate this is through church revitalization weekends, seminars, or other presentations—and more than a third of our 600 churches have taken part in one or more of these.

The fourth strategic initiative is effective biblical leadership.

At first glance, \$50,000 to support this initiative doesn’t look like much. However, much of what we do supports or encourages leadership in our churches and presbyteries, and is not included in this amount. This funding augments our commitment to building a leadership development culture in the EPC. The lion’s share of this funding supports the Leadership Institute of our annual General Assembly.

A key indicator of the high value that you give to this Tuesday-Wednesday event is this: until 2014, half of our registered commissioners signed in by Wednesday afternoon. In 2017 in Sacramento, more than half of our commissioners signed in on Tuesday. In other words, most of our commissioners came to Fair Oaks at least a day earlier to participate in the outstanding leadership equipping events that were offered.



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The third major category in our budget is Custodial Operations. This includes those activities that we do to ensure wise stewardship protection and oversight of EPC assets, including our finances, our information, and our staffing. These essential functions protect the integrity—and push the effectiveness and efficiency—of our ministry within the EPC and globally.

Office operations support all EPC activities, groups, presbyteries, and churches. The expenses of our office in Orlando is included in this, and technology infrastructure is of increasing importance the further we move into the 21st century.

In general, the dollars allocated for this function ensure that all of our information is managed and protected so that we can serve our churches in a timely and even outstanding way. We're talking about data, voice, audio/visual tools, computer network, and oversight of our 100% cloud-based computer software systems.

Finance and administration is another function in this category.

We solicit, manage, and disburse your support of the EPC in a way that honors our Lord and meets the highest fiduciary standards. Our personnel policies reflect the legal requirements—and often go beyond—as we're committed to offer a work environment that is healthy and positive.

The final category in Custodial Support is risk management. One way we mitigate risk is through a thorough financial audit each year, conducted by an outside accounting firm. The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability has given us the highest grade they can give for our financial stewardship. We also stay apprised of current trends regarding insurance, as well as legal matters in the church world, and keep you informed of any important developments.

So to summarize, our 2018 budget—which runs from July 2017 to June 2018—is roughly \$2.5 million, allocated in three broad categories: Connectional Support, Collaborative Ministry, and Custodial Operations.

When we say we don't want to build a bureaucracy at national level of the EPC, it means that as best we can, we want to minimize the amount of money going to Custodial Operations. Let's be blunt: that's overhead to operate the GA Office. Not building a national bureaucracy also means reducing the full-time equivalent staff from 20 to 17.3 in our move to Orlando last year.



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We are committed to maximizing the funding of Connectional Support (what it means to be Presbyterian, Reformed, Evangelical, and Missional), and especially maximizing the funding of Collaborative Ministry (global movement, church planting, church revitalization, and effective biblical leadership).

We want to invest even more in the strategic initiatives, but we face a challenge. Our 2018 budget is \$2.5 million. This year, \$129,000 of that comes from undesignated reserves. For next year's budget, that undesignated reserve amount will not be available to us. This means that if giving does not increase by \$129,000 (about 5.5%), we will have to cut next year's budget.

We're facing a challenge here, so I want to challenge you.

I know that asking you to support the national level of the EPC with your giving is about as counter-cultural as it can get in the early part of the 21st century. I am also well aware that anti-denomination and go-it-alone independence is sweeping American evangelicalism these days.

However, when you support the General Assembly level of the EPC, you are making at least two statements:

- 1) We are a connectional church, and we're better together than if we go it alone.
- 2) When we pool our resources, we can have greater leverage, greater impact for the Kingdom of God.

Those statements are distinctly, directly opposed to the dominant attitude in American churches today. I know that. But I believe this is part of the unique role the Lord Jesus has for the EPC. He has blessed us with a spiritual connection, a real connection that gives us an astounding testimony to not just our surrounding culture, but also the American church. Under our Lord's leadership and provision, we will not "swim with the tide." We are going to do something distinctly different.

We will cover our operational costs, and then we will invest generously—sacrificially—in connectional ministry, what Jesus has called us to be. And we will invest generously—sacrificially—in collaborative ministry, what Jesus has called us to do. And I am convinced that by investing in this way, we will be better—much better—together than we could ever be without the connectionalism so central to who we are.

Thank you, God bless you, and remember: He is risen!