



November 2018

The theme of our 2018 General Assembly at Hope Church in Cordova, Tennessee, was “Forward!” based on Philippians 3:13-14, “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own (that is, complete Christ-likeness). But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward for what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ.”

Commissioners to the Assembly acted on that theme by consciously looking forward, looking to the future the Lord has for the EPC as a denomination of Presbyterian, Reformed, Evangelical, and Missional congregations.

The basis of that look to the horizon last June was Revelation 7:9—John’s vision of heaven, in which he saw “every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

How will—how can—our churches reflect that vision, given the nations, tongues, and peoples present in our communities? The message of the gospel does not suggest that our churches should look like our neighborhoods—it compels us. That’s what we mean by Missional.

Now, we are all very aware that the mission field that is the United States is changing dramatically. Very few places where our churches are located look the same today as they did just ten years ago. This goes for our Caribbean churches also.

And this is not simply about the EPC becoming more ethnically diverse. Yes, that’s part of it—an admittedly very visible part. But it is not all of it. What it is, is about being biblical. Revelation 7:9 biblical.

So at the Assembly’s direction, Moderator Tom Werner appointed the Revelation 7:9 Task Force to help us as understand as a denomination what it means to look like our increasingly diverse communities. Ultimately, they will make recommendations about how to make that happen.

This interim committee—which is scheduled to meet for the next two years—is co-chaired by Rufus Smith and Dean Weaver. Rufus is Senior Pastor of Hope Church, and Dean is chair



of the National Leadership Team this year and Pastor of Memorial Park Church in Pittsburgh.

The members of the Task Force are Tom Clymer, Marc de Jeu, David Dwight, Enid Flores, Phyllis Le Peau, Soon Pak, Beth Paz, Brandon Queen, Tim Russell, and Ted Winters. The Task Force held their first face-to-face meeting at the Office of the General Assembly in Orlando, November 13-14.

The first year of the group's two-year work can be summed up in one word: Input. Your input. They want to know what you think about where we are, and where the Lord is leading us.

They're gathering input from you in two ways:

First, a survey was sent to all our Senior and Solo Pastors in October. Nearly one-third of our 600 Lead Pastors responded. If you are one of those, thank you. Thank you for contributing your insights to this important work. If you have not yet completed this confidential, 10-minute online questionnaire, please do so at your earliest convenience. We want to hear from you! And just to be clear, we want to hear from each of our 600 churches, so we asked only the Lead, Senior, and Solo Pastors at this time. In this way, the data is not potentially skewed by multiple responses from the same church.

If you did not receive an email about this survey, please contact the Task Force and they will send you the link. And please identify yourself and what EPC church you lead.

Since we are in the early stage of gathering information, I don't want to say too much about the results to date. But I can tell you that we are encouraged by much your input, while a number of challenges have also been revealed.

Second, members of the Task Force will be listening to you in face-to-face opportunities to learn your thoughts and your experiences personally. Surveys are very helpful, but this personal interaction will be critical to the success of gathering this input.

Among these listening opportunities was time with the presbytery Stated Clerks. They were holding their annual meeting at our offices in Orlando the same week the Task Force got together. Our 16 clerks provided valuable and insightful responses to questions the Revelation 7:9 group asked.



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Members of the Task Force will attend your winter and/or spring presbytery meetings as they continue their “listening tour” in the months to come. I hope you will make every effort to attend these meetings.

Finally, an additional step the Task Force will take will be to talk to outside groups who have navigated these same waters. We want to learn what worked, what didn't, what potential landmines we should aware of, and to glean basically “what don't we know?” from those who have experienced some level of success in this area.

I am excited about the work of the Revelation 7:9 Task Force, and the work that they are doing. I hope you are also, as this Global Movement of Evangelical Presbyterian Churches continues to seek what God has for us in the years and decades to come.

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