



October 2018

As I think about the EPC's place in the greater Kingdom of God, I'm so thankful that we are different—indeed, we are distinctly counter-cultural. The EPC is a strong, vibrant denomination of more than 600 churches in a decidedly anti-denominational era in American Protestant Christianity.

In contrast to the independent, go-it-alone mentality that so much of the American church seems to prefer these days, the EPC in 2018 places a high value on connection. We have a rich, spiritual bond as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, and that bond extends to our churches as well.

We believe that we're in this "church thing" together—and 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 are 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're 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 way I believe the EPC is counter-cultural in 2018 is that trust is a value that is very important to us. We are not suspicious of one another. 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.



In round numbers, our budget this year is \$2.55 million. Connectional Support totals \$730,000—29% of that budget. Collaborative Ministry is about \$1.1 million—that's 45% of the budget. Custodial Operations is \$670,000—about 26% of the budget.

Allow me now to describe 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 most effective defenses against any legal challenges to our ministry and outreach for Jesus Christ.

This category includes those 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 are another Connectional Support item. We are making full use of 21st-century technology, especially video conferencing for more and more of our meetings. However, we still need to meet face-to-face occasionally if we're going to be most effective in pursuit of our mission and vision work.

We also need to put the executive staff of the Office of the General Assembly 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 percent of my time this year traveling.

Another aspect of Connectional Support is communications. This includes all of 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 together. So what do we do? We seek to accomplish God's mission as a global



movement through multiplication (that is, church planting), transformation (church revitalization), and effective biblical leadership. These are our strategic initiatives.

The biggest “global movement” component is the administration of EPC World Outreach. In fact, 20 percent of every Per Member Asking dollar supports the ministries of World Outreach. This EPC missions arm supports 70 global workers in 30 countries. 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, such as our fraternal relationship with the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico.

For the second year, we’re supporting multiplication—that is, church planting—in our budget, rather than through special projects or undesignated reserves. We celebrated 42 church plants at our Assembly last June, and we’re aware of others 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.

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 of the ways that we facilitate this is through church revitalization weekends, seminars, or other presentations. More than a third of our 600 churches have participated in one or more of these.

The fourth strategic initiative is effective biblical leadership.

\$230,000 supports this initiative, which augments our commitment to building a leadership development culture in the EPC. Events supported by your giving include our annual gatherings of our presbytery Stated Clerks and Moderators, our twice-a-year meetings of our Presbytery Ministerial and Candidates Committee chairs as well as our Chaplains, Next Gen and Women’s Ministries Committees. That said, the lion’s share of this funding supports the Leadership Institute of our annual General Assembly.

A key factor of the high value that you give to this Tuesday-Wednesday Leadership Institute event is this: until 2014, half of our registered commissioners signed in by Wednesday afternoon. In 2018 in Memphis, 63 percent of our commissioners signed in on



Tuesday. In other words, most of our commissioners came to Hope Church in June at least a day earlier to participate in the outstanding leadership equipping events that were offered.

The third major category in our budget is Custodial Operations. This includes those activities 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 (we hope) outstanding way. We're talking about data, voice, audio/visual tools, computer network, and oversight of our 100 percent 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 are committed to offer a work environment that is healthy, positive, and God-honoring.

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 the EPC 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 work to keep you informed of any important developments that could impact your church and ministry.

So, to summarize, our 2019 budget—which runs from July 2018 to June 2019—is roughly \$2.55 million, allocated in three broad categories: Connectional Support, Collaborative Ministry, and Custodial Operations.



When we say that 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 General Assembly Office. Not building a national bureaucracy also means reducing the full-time equivalent staff from 20 to 19 since we moved here in 2016.

We are committed to maximizing the funding of Connectional Support (that is, 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 these strategic initiatives, but we face a challenge.

Our 2019 budget is \$2.55 million. For next year's budget, giving must increase to sustain or grow our investment in our strategic initiatives.

I know that that's a challenge—a challenge for all of us. And I know that many of you are pulling your weight, and in some cases even more. But here's the thing:

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 that the Lord Jesus has for in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. 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.



EPC

A Global Movement of Evangelical Presbyterian Churches

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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 connective ministry, what Jesus has called us to be as a church. 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 connective ministry so central to who we are.

By the way, we have published this information on our website on the Ministry Report page. It's also available in PDF format that you can download, print, and share with your leaders and congregation as you see fit.

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