



EPC

A Global Movement of Evangelical Presbyterian Churches

THE JEREMIAH JOURNAL

September 2017

We have four objectives when we meet at our annual General Assembly:

1. We gather together as a church to worship God.
2. We equip and encourage one another in our ministry for Jesus Christ.
3. We enjoy being together; the rich fellowship that is ours in Jesus Christ.
4. We conduct the business that needs to take place at the national level of the EPC.

We do all this committed to becoming what our Lord Jesus Christ has called us to be: a mission- and vision-driven denomination of churches.

Brian Smith, our Director of Communications, has posted a thorough written report of our 2017 General Assembly. It can be found on EPCConnection, the official news and information channel of the EPC.

The purpose of my journal this month is to highlight the major business items we took action on at Fair Oaks in June.

Dean Weaver, lead pastor of Memorial Park Church in Pittsburgh and a member of the Presbytery of the Alleghenies, did a great job as Moderator of our Assembly.

In the National Leadership Team report, NLT chair Mike Moses emphasized that the goal of the NLT is to serve, resource, and champion what the Holy Spirit of God is doing in our churches and presbyteries. He added, "In everything we do, we are resisting a top-down approach to doing church."

An example of the NLT commitment to be as lean as possible at the national level:

In our last year in Michigan, the Office of the General Assembly was staffed with 20 full-time-equivalent (or FTE) employees. Following our move to Orlando last year, staffing in the office has been reduced to 17.3 FTEs.

This smaller allocation of funds to staffing frees us up to make a more significant investment in our strategic initiatives. Church planting, church revitalization, effective biblical leadership, and global movement have been an important part of the statement of vision we adopted in 2014:



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“To the glory of God, the EPC family aspires to embody and proclaim Jesus’ love as a global movement of congregations engaged together in God’s mission through transformation, multiplication, and effective biblical leadership.”

Those initiatives have been funded through undesignated cash reserves until this year, when the Assembly decided that these are of such high value and impact for vitality and growth that they should be included in the EPC operating budget.

I reported that we’ve been working hard to encourage giving to the EPC budget. We have a lot of room for improvement, but our giving increased from 61% in 2015 to 68% in 2016. I praise the Lord and thank you for the work that you did in that increase.

Next, the Assembly gave final approval to the Position Paper on Human Sexuality. This approval concluded a process that began in 2015, when the 35th Assembly approved the formation of an interim committee to revise and update our position papers on Homosexuality and Marriage. The Human Sexuality position paper can be found on the position papers page of our website.

The Assembly approved the splitting of the Presbytery of the Pacific, which currently stretches from Fairbanks, Alaska, to San Diego, California. The new presbyteries of the Pacific Northwest and Pacific Southwest become effective on January 1, 2018.

The Presbytery of the Pacific Northwest will have 39 churches and approximately 7,000 members, while the Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest will include 30 churches and approximately 11,000 members.

One other presbytery matter: Due to its dramatic growth beyond the state of Florida, the Presbytery of Florida was renamed the Presbytery of Florida and the Caribbean.

In an effort to better address health and vitality issues of churches that are between permanent pastors (and to prepare those churches for their next pastor), commissioners approved Transitional Pastor as an ordained call. This recommendation came from the Ministerial Vocation Committee, which believed the term “interim” needed to be replaced. “Transitional” not only better defines the task, but also further establishes the importance of this role as a call—as opposed to an appointment—from the Session of a church.

Sandy Willson, chair of the Interim Committee on the Pastoral Letter on Human Sexuality Issues, reported that the committee has divided the task into ten preliminary chapters,



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with each having a three-part format: Biblical and Theological Framework, Cultural Issues and Objections, and Pastoral Application.

The Committee hosted Network Lunches on Thursday and Friday at Fair Oaks that received input and comments from commissioners on the topics the interim committee is addressing. The draft of this will be sent to our presbyteries and churches in January 2018 for review and comment in preparation for being presented to the 2018 General Assembly.

Church planting is one of our key strategic initiatives. Tom Ricks, chair of the Church Planting Team, reported we currently have 37 active church plants in the EPC, which is 6.2% of our churches. To provide a context, church plants were just 4.3% of our churches last year.

Tom told us that not only does the Church Planting Team train, nurture, and equip EPC church planters, it also helps congregations, networks, and presbyteries get the right church planters in the right places. This is best accomplished when each of our congregations becomes a “Parent, Partner, or Patron” of at least one EPC church plant.

Ken Priddy, who leads our Church Revitalization Team, reported that since the 2016 General Assembly, 40 on-site revitalization training events had been held. Forty pastors and leaders have completed additional online revitalization training, with 19 more in the pipeline. In addition, 21 pastors have expressed interest in a new online training vehicle that focuses on developing Great Commission skills among pastors.

The Revitalization Team is recruiting Vision Team coaches in each of our presbyteries, as well as Presbytery Coordinators. Priddy explained that a congregation’s Vision Team leads the revitalization efforts for the local church, and Vision Team Coaches from the presbytery work with them. A Presbytery Coordinator is then the link between the presbytery and the GO Center; that is, revitalization at the national level.

The Interim Committee on Ministerial Education introduced the Mentored Apprenticeship Program at this Assembly. The program was designed to help meet the EPC’s new educational requirements for ordination to the office of Teaching Elder, which were approved by the 36th General Assembly in 2016. These requirements include eight three-hour courses in the ministry- and skill-based areas of discipleship, ethics, leadership, pastoral care/counseling, ministry as mission, apologetics, preaching, and evangelism.



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In partnership with Gordon Conwell Seminary, these eight courses have been developed to address these topics and are available online at half the normal Gordon Conwell tuition cost.

The annual Bart Hess Award for church growth and revitalization was presented to Closer to God Church in Kearny, New Jersey, for their work in community outreach. Valdir Reis is the pastor of this multi-ethnic, Portuguese-speaking church.

Phil Linton, Director of World Outreach, reported that while we commissioned three new missionaries at this Assembly, the growth of World Outreach global workers plateaued in 2016. He asked the Assembly to commit to pray for 11 missionaries to be appointed and commissioned at the 2018 General Assembly.

Phil said, "We need 11 new appointees for next year just to meet the recruitment needs for our current teams. Those teams have established tenuous toeholds in some crucial areas. These folks who have made heroic efforts, but we need these reinforcements to help them."

We are now in a fraternal relationship with the Evangelical and Reformed Presbyterian Church of Peru. The purpose of this relationship is to help our friends in Peru develop equipping and church revitalization materials. We're looking for those who can translate our written materials into Spanish.

Finally, at Fair Oaks we recognized Ed McCallum for his 20 years of service as Assistant Stated Clerk, which came to an end on June 30. Ed took the summer off to catch his breath, and in September he began his new role as an associate with ITEN, the International Theological Education Network of EPC World Outreach.

I trust this report has been helpful to you, your leadership, your presbytery, and your church. God bless you and remember, He is risen!