



## September 2019

This month's Jeremiah Journal is a quick recap of our 39th General Assembly. But first, I want to thank Jerry Iamurri for standing in for me recently. As you are probably aware, my wife, Cindy, suffered a stroke in April, and I have needed to stay close to home in the weeks and months afterward. Knowing that our video blog is in good hands with Jerry makes it easy for me to ask him to fill in. So Jerry: thank you very much!

Speaking of Cindy's stroke, I am very thankful to report that she is in a good place. We still have a ways to go and she has some additional therapy ahead, but we are optimistic that our Lord will give her a full recovery. Thank you to all of you who prayed for us and sent notes of encouragement. I know that the Lord Jesus has honored and answered your prayers.

And of course, prayer was the focus of the 39th General Assembly. Our theme of "Unstoppable" was based on Jesus' admonition in Matthew 7:7 to "keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking." That's what our family has been doing in response to Cindy's health situation. And it's what we all did in response to the news in late 2016 that Andrew Brunson—an EPC Teaching Elder—had been thrown into prison in Turkey.

A visible sign of God answering those prayers was having Andrew and his wife, Norine, with us at Cherry Creek in Denver for our Assembly. On Wednesday morning, he shared how the experience of spending two years in a Turkish prison for his faith had impacted his walk with Christ. In a moderated Q&A, Andrew and Norine answered questions for more than an hour from those in attendance. Norine's experience and insight during their ordeal was especially powerful. I don't think I'm overstating it to say that her testimony of walking with the Lord and beside her husband demonstrated the meaning of Unstoppable.

Andrew also preached on Thursday evening after we commissioned our newest World Outreach global workers. His message about persecution coming to the next generation of believers was especially powerful given the charge that our workers accepted: that they were willing to be martyred for the gospel.

If you were not there or did not watch the live stream, you will be blessed, moved, and challenged by watching the videos of these sessions. They are available on our website—the web address is on the screen.



Another highlight of GA is the Leadership Institute. The Tuesday event is the primary vehicle for implementing our strategic priority of Effective Biblical Leadership. The Institute has grown over the past five years from four seminars with about 150 participants in 2015, to more than 40 individual sessions with more than 600 participants this year. One measure of how much you value these equipping opportunities is that we now see almost two-thirds of our General Assembly attendees check-in in time for the Leadership Institute.

Yet we hear from many of you each year that you have a hard time deciding which seminar to attend, because there are so many quality, relevant topics. We tried to address that this year by making the seminars available in podcast form for the first time. Just search “Evangelical Presbyterian Church” on Spotify or iTunes. So even if you could not get to Denver for the event, you can get access to this training on your smartphone or other device.

Once the Assembly itself convened, we heard reports from our permanent and interim committees on their work over the past year. I’d like to share two highlights.

In church planting, Tom Ricks reported that the EPC now has 42 active church plants in 26 states, and nine church planting networks across the country. These networks are partnerships of churches in a city or region that join forces and leverage their collective resources. We also celebrated three church plants that “graduated” from church plants to full “local church” status in the past year. You can see more about EPC church planting efforts on our website, including a video of Tom’s report to the Assembly.

The Revelation 7:9 Task Force presented the results of its fall 2018 survey of EPC lead pastors, and discussed some of the background of its work. An important aspect of their presentation was to address some misconceptions about what they are trying to accomplish. The video of their presentation is available on our website, and I think you will find it encouraging and informative.

This year, church business took a bit of a back seat to a focus on prayer, celebrating Andrew Brunson’s freedom, and the equipping opportunities of the Leadership Institute. But we still had some important business to conduct.

First was installing this year’s Moderator, Case Thorp, a Teaching Elder in the Presbytery of Florida and the Caribbean. Case is the Senior Associate Pastor for Evangelism at First



Presbyterian Church in Orlando. He is a prolific blogger, and you will see articles from him on EPConnection and our social media channels over the next year.

We also elected Glenn Meyers, a Ruling Elder from the Presbytery of the Alleghenies, as Moderator-elect. Glenn serves the Ardara Presbyterian Church in western Pennsylvania, which was presented the Bart Hess Award a few years ago for their outstanding church revitalization work.

The Assembly approved the formation of two interim committees whose work will be critical to the future of the EPC. The first is the Stated Clerk Search Committee.

As you probably know, I am in my last three-year term as your Stated Clerk and will step away from this ministry in 2021. The search committee has a representative from each of our 14 presbyteries and is chaired by Bill Dudley. Their goal is to have my successor named by next year's GA. That will allow for a period of overlap and as seamless a transition as possible. Please pray that they will clearly hear God's voice as they work to discern who will lead the EPC following my departure in two years.

The other interim committee is a Giving Culture Study Committee, which will study and ultimately make recommendations on how to best address the long-term culture of support for the EPC. To be clear, funding for the national level of the EPC is not in a crisis position. This committee will help us ensure that we do not get into one.

Another item adopted was an adjustment to our Rules for Assembly. In the past, Rules could only be amended by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the total enrollment of registered Commissioners. This led to some business items in past years being delayed, because at the time they came up for vote we no longer had two-thirds of the total registered Commissioners at the Assembly. The National Leadership Team recommended that this be changed to a two-thirds affirmative vote of Commissioners present, which was approved.

Here's an example of why this amendment was important: In 2018, we could not act on several recommendations—including ones that would increase the size of both our Chaplains Work and Care Committee and Presbytery Review Committee. As the EPC has grown, the work load for these groups has increased, so we needed to increase the manpower to carry that load. However, when those items came up on the docket last year,



we did not have two-thirds of our total enrollment present. Because of the amendment to the Rules of Assembly this year, those recommendations could be approved, and they were.

Two other items were approved that now become Descending Overtures, because they are amendments to the EPC's *Book of Government*. The first of these items makes explicit that the office of co-pastor is not constitutional. The *Book of Government* states that the only constitutionally recognized roles for Teaching Elders in the EPC are Pastor, Associate Pastor, and Assistant Pastor. This recommendation seeks to add clarity to this.

The second Descending Overture concerns the ordination process for candidates coming under care of a presbytery. Specifically, it clarifies that a candidate should express his or her motive for seeking ordination by an EPC presbytery as part of the public examination.

As Descending Overtures, these two items now go to the presbyteries' upcoming fall and winter meetings for discussion and vote. If 11 of our 14 presbyteries ratify these overtures, they come back to the 2020 GA as Ascending Overtures for another round of discussion and vote.

The Westminster Confession and Catechisms, and the EPC Book of Order together form our constitution. I hope you can see that amending that constitution is not a simple or quick process. Nor should it be.

In business related to our strategic priority of Global Movement, Commissioners approved the Fraternal Relations Committee to continue its conversations with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland about the possibility of a fraternal relationship. That national church voted earlier in June to continue their discussions with us, so we look forward to the possibilities there. It's exciting to know that God is working in all corners of the globe, and that "the little band of churches" that is the EPC gets to participate in that work.

So to conclude, I hope this summary has been helpful to you. Our Communications Department is working on a comprehensive report and we hope to post that to EPCconnection soon.

In the meantime, thank you for your continued prayers as we seek God's guidance for the EPC. And remember, He is risen!