

THE COMMUNITY BUILDER

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

Pastor to the People

The Beauty of the Westminster Confession

Polity, which refers to the church's government and constitution, is the main topic of the June Community Builder. I'm sure all of you are thinking, "Woo-hoo! A newsletter about church government; I can't wait to read this."

But to encourage you to persevere in the endeavor, consider that one of the problems plaguing us as a nation is the widespread ignorance and lack of appreciation among our people for our country's form of government and constitution. Many of you recognize that if the problem continues, the federal government will gradually accumulate additional powers at the cost of individual liberties and freedoms.

Unfortunately, a similar situation exists within churches today. Contemporary Christians often take for granted the structure of authority and safeguards that have been implemented as a protection from having their churches hijacked by unbiblical teaching or spiritual tyranny. One only has to observe the history of the mainline churches to see the consequences of taking these governing principles for granted.

Historically, Presbyterians have given significant attention to the question of governing principles and their confession. In our denomination, the constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church consists of the Book of Order and the Westminster Confession, all of which are in subjection to the Scriptures. The remainder of this article will focus on the history and value of the Westminster Confession.

On July 1, 1643, an assembly consisting of 30 members of the English Parliament, 121 of the most eminent, godly, and intellectual English divines and five Scottish clergymen, were convened at Westminster Abbey. They assembled for the purpose of "settling of the government and liturgy of the Church

of England (in a manner) most agreeable to God's Holy Word and most apt to procure the peace of the church at home and nearer abroad."



These men recognized the importance of being prepared both intellectually and spiritually for the task at hand. Over the course of their work, they set aside one day a month for prayer and fasting. In addition, each member was reminded on a weekly basis of their vow:

"I do seriously promise and vow, in the presence of Almighty God, that in this Assembly whereof I am a member, I will maintain nothing in point of doctrine but what I believe to be most agreeable to the Word of God; nor in point of discipline, but what may make most for God's glory and the peace and good of His church."

This Assembly was extremely thorough in the process of conducting its business. The delegates convened for 1,163 sessions over the course of five and a half years. The value of the Assembly's work may be seen in the longevity of the Confession as it continues to be the confessional standard of several Reformed denominations after more than three and half centuries.

The Westminster Confession provides a clear statement of what the church believes the Bible to teach about God, Scripture and other important areas of faith and life. As such, it protects the church from leaders who might steer the church into serious error.

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Not only does the Confession provide a statement of what the Bible teaches on various subjects, it also attempts to provide a cohesive and consistent understanding of the doctrine found in the Scriptures. In this sense, the Confession insists that a *system of doctrine*, cohering in all its parts, is to be found in the Scriptures and it is this system that is presented.

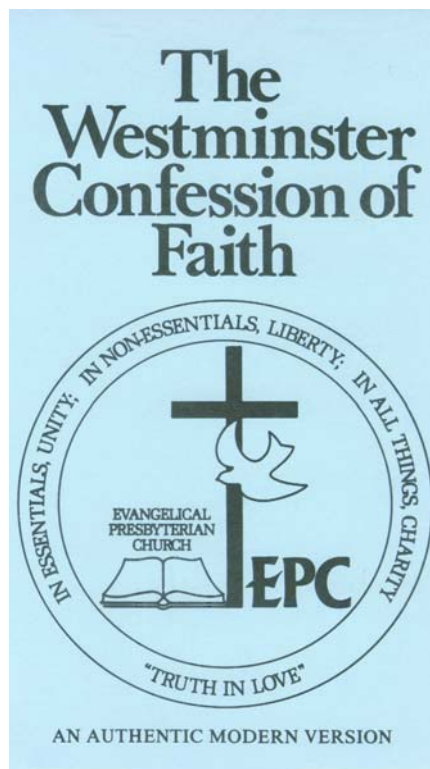
The practical value of the Confession for the continued health and vitality of the church might also be inferred from the tale of two denominations. In 1965, the mainline Presbyterian church (PCUSA), began the process of replacing the Westminster Confession with a book of Confessions which would later include a brand new rendering of faith titled the "Confession of 1967." It is noteworthy that from the time the mainline church removed the authority of the Westminster Confession as the sole standard of the church, their membership has plummeted from a high of 4.2 million to somewhere around 2.4 million at the present.

In contrast, the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) which began in 1973 with 41,000 members, and which adopted the Westminster Confession as its sole standard of faith, has been one of the fastest growing denominations with more than 315,000

members currently

If you are interested in getting a copy, you can either download it from www.EPC.org, or call the church office.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Rich



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Editor's Note

In this month's issue we begin to explore the topic of the governance and polity that directs ECC and any church in the EPC. Structure and order are important elements in the administration of a church. They also tend to be the most boring and often ignored. Our hope is that our writers can bring to life the various elements that we use to govern ECC and that everyone will begin to understand the beauty of church that is done decently and in order. As always we welcome your comments and questions.

Presbyterianism From Its Origins

By Isaac Gould

As we know it today, Presbyterianism is a form of church government as distinguished from other models, such as congregational (i.e., democratic) and



Martin Luther

Episcopal (i.e., bishop-governed). *Merriam-Webster* defines “Presbyterian” as “characterized by a graded system of representative ecclesiastical bodies (as presbyteries) exercising legislative and judicial powers.” Local bodies are governed by elders, who send delegates to local presbyteries, who, in turn, report to a General Synod. It has had these

connotations for a long time. In fact, when New England was colonized, the two major groups, Presbyterians and Congregationalists, differed not in doctrine, but in church government. These Christians who would listen to doctrinally identical sermons every Sunday broke fellowship with their neighbors over the issue of how decisions are made in the church. However, it was not always so. A brief look at history will bring out three unique aspects of the Presbyterian heritage that have importance for what it means for us at ECC to call ourselves Presbyterians.

First is what later became known as the “regulative principle.” During the Reformation, a critique that many had of Luther was that he was unwilling to cast off many of the trappings of Roman Catholicism and truly reform the Church. He essentially held that everything not explicitly prohibited by Scripture was acceptable (known as the “normative principle”). His critics held that everything not explicitly taught or commanded in Scripture should be avoided. Reformed churches, which later became known as Presbyterian, made a cleaner break with Rome on the basis of Scripture. This led to the rejection of numerous entrenched teachings and practices, such as monastic vows, clerical celibacy, prayers to the saints, the doctrine of purgatory, and the sacrificial nature of the mass. The regulative principle challenges us to justify from Scripture everything we do in worship and calls us to be always reforming.

Second, Reformed churches have historically been especially concerned with the societal outworkings of the gospel. Presbyterians have consistently been involved in civic matters, striving to transform society so that Kingdom values might permeate the secular world. The city of Geneva, as restructured by Calvin, is a famous example of this principle at work. Both

Luther and Calvin held firmly to the doctrine of total depravity, but the latter was more optimistic about the potential for real moral improvement in society as a result of Christian influence. Luther tended to view the role of Christian rulers as a merely negative one—the restraint of evil—whereas Calvin and those after him emphasized the positive role of promoting righteousness. The desire to see the earth “full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9) should motivate our interactions with the fallen world around us.



John Calvin

Third, the Reformed movement (and, consequently, Presbyterianism) has from its inception placed a higher priority on the rational apprehension of the truth than on emotional experience. Luther’s “evangelistic awakening,” while clearly rooted in the truth of Scripture, was a dramatic passage from torment to security, the desperate grapplings of a harrowed soul. For other Reformers, chiefly Zwingli and Calvin, the discovery of the gospel was more in terms of intellectual realization. It is to be emphasized that these differences are by degrees and not irreconcilable alternatives. Nevertheless, whereas Luther agonized over doctrines such as election, Calvin seems to have contented himself with the truth that Scripture reveals both God’s loving nature and his determination of eternal destinies. The willing subjection of emotions to the truth of Scripture, while challenging, shows great respect for God’s word.

Of course, we mustn’t become so enthralled with being Presbyterians that we lose sight of what it means to be Christians. Our identity in Christ trumps all other allegiances (1 Cor 1:10–14). Church history has seen plenty of examples of poor navigation between Scylla and Charybdis (two mythical maritime monsters). On the one hand, some err on the side of separation for the sake of doctrinal purity at the expense of Christian love; others err on the side of inclusion for the sake of Christian unity at the expense of doctrinal truth. We ought to hold our tradition lightly, appreciating its richness while recognizing its hazards, but finding our sense of belonging in Christ alone.

The History and Creation of Our Constitution and Bylaws

or

How Did We Get Here From There?

By Chip Wagner

Our Constitution and Bylaws are really a product of three separate entities. We are a legal entity, an organizational entity and a theological entity. Each of these entities has its own, but related, origin. They converge to form what we now know as the Evangelical Community Church (ECC). The Constitution and Bylaws reduce to writing the merging of those identities.

The easiest origin to explain is that of the legal entity. We needed to form a non-profit corporation recognized by the State of Ohio. Furthermore we wished to have a tax-exempt status recognized by the Internal Revenue Service. As many of you may be aware we had an ad hoc committee of seven of us known as the Steering Team that initially met to help form the church. We assigned one of our members with the task of creating the legal entity. A first step of which few people are aware is that there was an initial incorporator of the church that filed the Articles of Incorporation with the State of Ohio. That incorporator then voluntarily adopted Bylaws, which coincidentally were those proposed by the Steering Team. However, for the most part, ECC's legal formation was a matter of papers, lawyers, procedures and signatures that needed to be done properly and according to law. There were a couple of more complex matters that had to be decided but for the most part the legal entity was formed without any major issues.

Organizationally we patterned ourselves very much after the Presbyterian Church. As most of us had recently come out of the PCUSA our organizational structure looked very similar to theirs. We had an Elder Board with staggered three-year terms, Deacon and Trustee boards, a Nominating Committee, rules for congregational meetings, elections, etc. But we also had some differences, which were a direct response to our experiences at our former church.

Though it would be counterproductive to go into all the reasons in this short article, suffice it to say that at the time there were suspicions and a wariness toward denominations and clergy based upon our recent exodus from the PCUSA. Our original bylaws made it very clear that ECC was to be directed by Elders and that there was no affiliation with any denomination. Because some had felt that denominational authority had been misused in the immediate past, the bylaws were drafted in a way that would make it difficult for it to happen again and did not give clergy any special authority. Furthermore property ownership was of paramount con-

cern. It was made certain that the ownership of any physical property was titled in ECC's name.

Clearly the most difficult origin though was that of the theological entity. It was a significant challenge to formulate a cohesive, succinct description of our identity. Our former church was very large, had five services (two of which were concurrent), and had vast differences in theological perspectives. Sometimes it almost seemed as if we had five separate congregations. The people who came to ECC brought those various perspectives and now tried to house themselves under one roof.

Outside of a relatively simple statement of faith, there did not seem to be much of a consensus of theological understanding. There were differences on the nature, style and purpose of worship. Some felt that Sunday morning should be designed to attract the unregenerate; others thought that Sunday was a time for believers to worship. Music was always a difficult topic. Theologically we had Arminians, Dispensationalists, Baptists, Third Wavers, Reformed and others. Some held Charismatic beliefs, others were cessationists. Some felt that Scripture did not allow for the ordination of women to the role of Elder, others felt that women could legitimately hold the office. We had a simple Statement of Faith but nothing that was definitive on a lot of subjects and issues.

A backdrop to all of this was that most of us had also recently come out of a church that was heavily programmatic in its emphasis and at least in practice accommodated many of these disparate and conflicting views. At the Steering Team level there was a great deal of debate as to whether to become a church with a very specific and distinctive theology and corresponding practices or to embrace a much wider view (even if it meant that some of the views were in direct opposition) and hold the congregation together. After much debate the Steering Team as a whole thought that it was more important to attempt to hold this body known as ECC together and that perhaps a more distinctive theology would evolve as a result of solid teaching and preaching. Accordingly our original Bylaws were drafted with very wide theological boundaries, outside of a few essentials, that accommodated many of these views.

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How Did We Arrive at a Board of Elders?

By Maurie Loomans

One morning in the fall of 1995, six men came to join Nancy Stauffer, in her home, to start a church. None of us had done this before. We all came as members of College Hill Presbyterian Church (CHPC), having decided to leave the PCUSA denomination and, of necessity, CHPC. With no organization, no denominational connection, and no election, we instantly became a *de facto* board of elders. During the coming months we developed documents for this new church which outlined who we are and what we believed. The name Evangelical Community Church was established just days before our first official meeting.

To help guide this group, we formed an advisory group of approximately thirty people. This was an exceedingly wise move. With no apparent controlling factors, we needed to test everything with this group. We had decided that we would be an independent church and would adopt the Presbyterian form of government, with which we were all conversant.

Our next step was to appoint a nominating committee, headed by Keith Kintner, to offer a slate of candidates for the office of Elders, Trustees, and Deacons. It turned out that the six men of the founding members were elected by the congregants to the office of Elder for a limited period of time, thus becoming the first Board of Elders. By this time we already had four pastors on staff, who all became part of this Board. This was the organizational structure we had for the first years of our existence.

The next major step was our decision to affiliate with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in 2001. With this change, the qualifications for Elders also changed. The major change was the requirement that Elders and Deacons subscribe to the Westminster Confession as the essential doctrinal document and to the denominational Book of Order. Some of the elected ECC Elders felt that they could not in good conscience subscribe to the Westminster Confession. Some left our church, while others chose to remain.

Since joining the EPC, the Board of Elders, now

known as the Session, is also involved with the Presbytery, sending a representative to its meetings and serving on some of its committees as part of their responsibilities in addition to overseeing the work and worship of our local body. Non-serving Elders (those not currently serving on the Session) may help in this responsibility, as well as in serving communion. It should be noted that the Presbytery was very helpful to us through some difficult times. For this we are grateful.

Session is a working relationship between the Pastor (Teaching Elder) and the Ruling Elders. Pastor Rich is the Moderator of Session and has guided us well. Over the past couple of years, the Session has had a significant input into the direction of our congregation. The direction that our Sunday morning worship has taken is a clear result of an intensive study of worship by Session and its application to our congregation.

I imagine that all of us who currently are on Session consider it a great privilege to serve you in this manner.



Row 1: Rick Schatz, Nancy Stauffer, Scooter Franks
Row 2: Chip Wagner, Maurie Loomans

Our Founding Documents

By Rick Schatz

When our great nation was formed, our leaders produced the Constitution and the Bill of Rights to guide how we would live and be governed as a people. Through the years, there have been amendments to the Constitution, but these documents continue to guide us through the years.

When ECC was formed, the church leadership established some principles of how we would work together as a church and there were two white papers that were written to cover particularly challenging issues. These covered the expression of the spiritual gifts and the role of women within our church body. Our goal in producing these documents was to produce unity within our church members while not compromising on any of the essentials of the faith.

The paper on spiritual gifts was an expression of the reality that some of our members believed the gifts operate for today while others saw them as ending with the apostolic age. We called for mutual respect, love and harmony within this disagreement. There was a recognition that Bible believing theologians, including those within the reformed tradition, shared in both the charismatic and cessationist perspective relative to the gifts.

While recognizing some of our members believed the gifts operated today, there were some clear guidelines given to insure we would be doing things in the Presbyterian tradition of “decently and in order.” There was an agreement there would be no expression of the gifts during our regular Sunday morning worship services because we

believed this could bring disunity to our body. It was also agreed there would be expressions of some of the spiritual gifts in small group gatherings, bible studies, fellowship groups and times of prayer and fellowship.

The original document on the spiritual gifts was modified somewhat in 2001 and more recently some important discussions have come up concerning courses that would be taught within Christian discipleship. A joint meeting of the Elder Board and the Christian Discipleship Committee to discuss these issues took place last month. It is clear it is time for additional study, prayer and open dialog on the issue of spiritual gifts. Some additional guidance needs to be developed and clarification brought to our understanding of whether or not the gifts operate for today and if so, in what manner.

The paper on women in leadership was fundamentally an extension of the practice that had been followed at College Hill Presbyterian Church. There again was a recognition that Bible believing scholars disagree on this issue, with some believing the Bible teaches women can be pastors and elders, while others would limit their leadership to either serving as Deacons or not filling any offices of the Church.

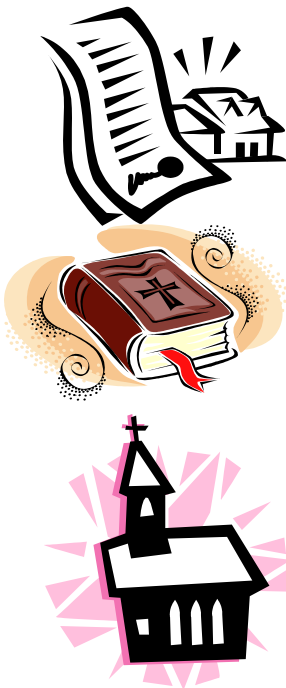
Through the years, we have followed the practice of allowing women to be nominated as elders and on a few occasions, women have been elected to that important office. One of the reasons we nominate more elders than there are positions is to allow those freedom of conscience not to vote for women who are nominated if they believe the Bible teaches this should not be the practice of the Church.

New Members Received May 13, 2007



Joan Crisp, Noreen Moscsny, Dave Moscsny, Tinan Ouian, Sandy Irwin, Lynn Fisher, Kirk Smith, Debbie Smith, John Gould, Judy Gould, Jean Bachman, Jack Backman, (Missing) Isaac Gould

The Kid's Community



AUTHORITY
 BYLAWS
 CHURCH
 CONFESSION
 DOCUMENT
 ELDERS
 ORDER
 PRESBYTERIAN
 REFORMED
 SCRIPTURE
 STRUCTURE

ADMINISTRATION OF A CHURCH

P	Y	K	R	Y	N	W	S	R	G	C	X
A	R	T	M	L	V	F	D	E	L	H	C
Z	L	E	X	W	M	Y	C	F	D	U	A
N	O	I	S	S	E	F	N	O	C	R	E
A	S	Q	V	B	A	V	C	R	N	C	M
S	P	U	B	X	Y	U	C	M	E	H	R
W	T	A	N	Y	M	T	B	E	C	E	D
A	E	L	D	E	D	S	E	D	D	T	L
L	V	W	N	U	R	M	A	R	P	O	G
Y	A	T	A	U	T	H	O	R	I	T	Y
B	E	R	U	T	P	I	R	C	S	A	B
S	T	R	U	C	T	U	R	E	Q	C	N

Constitution Continued from p. 4

Then we became part of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (the EPC). Our Constitution and Bylaws had to conform to those of the EPC. Many of our procedural and organizational issues remained relatively unaffected as they had already been patterned after the Presbyterian model. There were some minor modifications that were required but not a lot at the philosophical level. One important difference though was coming under the authority of higher judicatories such as the Presbytery. It solidified our connection and accountability to a larger body.

Our theological identity was changed significantly. The EPC's Constitution and Bylaws (under whom ours is now subordinate) contain the Westminster Confession of Faith. We are now under the umbrella of covenant theology. Accordingly, our Bylaws had to be altered to reflect the adoption of Reformed belief. No longer were Arminian, Third Wave, Dispensational, Baptist, etc. beliefs put on the same footing with Reformed understanding. Prior to this important event, Reformed theology

was just one of several competing theologies. Otherwise, the EPC did not require many of the other changes that would have been required of other denominations. Outside of what are called the Essentials of the Faith, the EPC leaves open many of the practices of our church. Therefore our Bylaws did not need to reflect further changes. That being said it is notable that Mike Glodo, the Stated Clerk of the EPC at the time, worked through a number of Bylaw drafts with an Elder representative of our church. We know of at least seven drafts that were completed before finally being accepted by our Elder Board.

The importance of our Bylaws cannot be understated. They are more than rules and regulations. In reality they are a statement of our identity. They identify us as a specific entity before the governing authorities. They codify our methods and practices of conduct and how we treat one another and now the larger church. But most importantly, they reveal our understanding of God.



An Evangelical Presbyterian Church
LIFTING the LORD . . . LIVING the WORD . . . LOVING the PEOPLE
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JUNE

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
5:30pm Sunday Night Fellowship 3	4	7pm Sr.High Movie Night 5	7pm College/Young Adult Study 6	7pm Singer/Worship Teams 5pm Prayer Mtg 7	8	Men's Second Saturday Study 9
COMMUNION 5:30Crew 7pm Connect 10	9am Vacation Bible School (VBS) 7 pm Session Meeting 11	9am VBS 7pm Sr.High Life Groups 12	9am VBS 13	9 am VBS 7pm Singer/Worship Teams 5pm Prayer Mtg 14	9am VBS 12pm VBS Cookout 15	16
5:30Crew 7pm Connect 17	7 PM Deacon Meeting 18	7pm Sr.High Life Groups 6:30pm Trustee Meeting 19	7pm College/Young Adult Study 20	7pm Singer/Worship Teams 6:15pm Mission Mtg 21	22	23
5:30pm Sunday Night Fellowship 5:30Crew 7pm Connect Resident Camp 24	Resident Camp 7 pm Session Meeting 25	Resident Camp 7pm Sr.High Life Groups 26	Resident Camp 27	Resident Camp 7pm Singer/Worship Teams 5pm Prayer Mtg 28	Resident Camp 29	30
July 1 ECC Picnic- Winton Woods - Orchard Area Shelter 3 - 9pm 1						