

[Church Health](#)  
[Global Ministries](#)  
[Kingdom Extension](#)  
[Ministerial Development](#)  
[Missional Alignment](#)

# COMMUNITIES

## CHURCH HEALTH

Greetings in the precious name of Jesus! And greetings from the Church Health Community (CHC)! What a joy it is to be on a team of servant leaders who are committed to raising up healthy churches. The CHC team members are: Gary Kuehner, Ralph Owens, Jim Price, Ken Ogden, Wayne Houck, Rob Valentine, Scott Carr, and Ken Kalisz. We are in the process of adding two or three additional members to the team. At least one of these new members will be a “part-time” (partially compensated) pastor. Because of the increasing number of “part-time” pastors in our local churches, we believe this “voice” is important and needed on our CHC team.

The CHC continues to offer help to EC churches/pastors in five specific areas: evangelism, discipleship, refocus, revitalization, and church health assessment. These resources are offered free of charge to our EC churches. The following are brief descriptions/explanations of the five resources we offer:

- **EVANGELISM** (A Story Worth Telling: How God Uses Your Story to Tell His Story). This training event, focusing on the importance of your story (how you came to know Jesus and how he has impacted your life), equips people to share their faith in a natural, non-threatening way.
- **DISCIPLESHIP** (4TD – Four Tier Discipleship). This template or model, based on the teaching approach of Jesus, encourages people to engage in four tiers or levels of discipleship: the crowd (congregational); the twelve (small groups); the inner circle (discipleship triads/quads); and the beloved disciple (one-on-one mentoring/coaching).
- **REFOCUS** (How to Be a 1<sup>st</sup> Century Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century). This training event, based on Acts 2:42-47, is designed to help people focus/refocus on the Great Command (Matthew 22:36-39) and the Great Mission (Matthew 28:19, 20). Six topics are considered: discipleship, fellowship, prayer, ministry, worship, and evangelism. I have used and continue to use a condensed version of this material to help local churches transition from an official board structure to a ministry council structure.
- **REVITALIZATION** (The 7 Re’s of Church Revitalization). Using biblical principles and real life experiences, this training event considers seven topics: restoring hope; refocusing on the mission; re-educating your people; restructuring to accomplish the mission; rejoicing in your success; reflecting on what you’ve done; and resolving to stay the course.

Revitalization groups continue to meet in many of our Districts. These groups use various resources (books, videos, etc.) to stimulate discussion. If you are interested in starting a revitalization group in your District and would like some guidance, please contact me at your convenience.

# COMMUNITIES

---

- **CHURCH HEALTH ASSESSMENT** (Natural Church Development). Natural Church Development (NCD) is a process that measures (using a survey) eight quality characteristics that are essential to local church health: empowering leadership; gift-based ministry; passionate spirituality; effective structures; inspiring worship services; holistic small groups; need-oriented evangelism; and loving relationships. Follow-up coaching with a credentialed NCD coach is provided to assist in analyzing survey results.

Five CHC members (Gary Kuehner, Ralph Owens, Scott Carr, Jim Price, and Ken Ogden) are certified NCD coaches. As I write this report, four EC churches are at various stages of the NCD process, working with four of our coaches. A coach's meeting is scheduled for June 7, 2019.

The CHC oversees the work of the Christian Education and Youth Network Leadership Team, led by Rob Valentine. Rob has created a Facebook page for EC youth leaders (paid and unpaid) called EC YouthNet. Please encourage the youth leaders at your churches to join this group and take part in the discussions. A Friday after Thanksgiving (FAT) lock-in for youth is planned for Ozzy's in Leesport, PA on November 29-30. Rob is also working with Twin Pines to schedule a Youth Leadership Retreat.

The CHC also oversees the EC Men's ministry led by Wayne Houck. A men's gathering is planned for Saturday, September 21, 2019. This one day event will be held at Trinity Lighthouse Church in Royersford, PA.

CHC members met on January 8, 2019 to evaluate the work and structure of the CHC. The consensus was/is that we need to keep doing what we are doing. Things are going well. CHC members are making real connections with pastors and local church leaders. Team members also expressed how thankful they are for the "think tank" that exists in the CHC. Members freely share their ideas and concerns. Teamwork makes the dream work!

I had the privilege of attending Exponential 2019 from March 4 to 7. During this conference I was able to take part in 11 interactive workshops on church health/growth/and assessment and church revitalization.

Future meetings of the CHC are scheduled for September 25, 2019, February 26, 2020, and September 23, 2020.

More and more churches are utilizing CHC resources. Praise the Lord! Our prayer is that God will continue to bless the work of the CHC as we continue our pursuit "to raise up healthy churches proclaiming Christ to a hurting world.

***Dr. Gary Kuehner***

---

# GLOBAL MINISTRIES

## FACILITATING MISSION WORKERS

In my October report I shared: *"Through the six month reports our missionaries send in to us we have sought to assess the level of care each missionary receives from their parent mission organization,*

# COMMUNITIES

---

*which we will utilize to determine the level of care they require from the GMC". I have shared in multiple places since I assumed this role in July that one of the major focuses of the Global Ministries Community will be in the area of missionary care. We continue to assess how the GMC can enhance the care we already provide and continue to pursue ways to equip churches to provide care as well. The way in which the GMC hopes to achieve this goal is through MCT's (Missionary Care Teams) made up of people from the local body of EC Churches. In March, at the GMC meeting, we will have a missionary couple come to share their experience and expertise in the area of missionary care with hopes that the GMC can utilize this information to begin to strategize how we can make Missionary Care Teams a reality. Our desire is that the 25 missionary units and one (1) missionary candidate partnering with the EC Church and part of the EC family never feel "alone" out there on the field; whether that field is here in PA or on the other side of the globe we want them to be cared for.*

## EMPOWERING INTERNATIONAL CHURCHES

### Japan:

According to John WM. Mehn, in his book *Multiplying Churches in Japanese Soil*, "the country of Japan has the tenth largest population in the world with 127 million people; however, the percentage of Christians in Japan is miniscule: under 1 percent." It is this context in which the EC Church of Japan seeks to share the gospel and build the kingdom.

### 1. Grace Garden Church

Rev. Yoriyoshi Abe is the pastor of Grace Garden Church and ministers alongside his wife Emiko and his daughter Kanae. In his latest newsletter Yoriyoshi shares some of the challenges the church faces in reaching out into their community. He also shared this story from one of the Grace Garden Church members who, in the midst of living in a challenging culture, stood firm on her convictions as a follower of Jesus:

*According to a statistic, 98 million people all over Japan go to a shrine on New Year's Day to pray for their fortune for the year. One of the members of Grace Garden Church, who became a believer almost a year ago, also went to a shrine with her family because that was her family's tradition. But when she was offered the purification ritual at the shrine she declined it and said, "I don't need it. That's not my god." Everyone who heard the story was encouraged by her faith. Like her, people who become Christian first in their family usually confront that kind of cultural/spiritual battle.*

### 2. Fuchinobe Community Church

If you receive the newsletter from Tomoyuki and Jessica Abe you may have heard about some of the exciting and challenging things God is doing in their lives. Tomo and Jessica have sensed God leading them to transition their family to continue their service and ministry in France. On March 10<sup>th</sup> FCC will hold their last Sunday service and will rejoin their mother church Sagamihara Grace Chapel which is about 20 minutes away from their current location. The EC Church of Japan will be sending Tomo to France as a missionary partner with an organization called OMF International (Overseas Missionary Fellowship...used to be China Inland Mission) which seeks to reach the Japanese Diaspora in Europe. In October, Tomo was approved by OMF to partner with them in France and will be pursuing this relationship as they make their move in April. As part of this transition back to Jessica's native home, she will also begin a pastoral internship at an Evangelical Free Church in September.

# COMMUNITIES

---

As part of this transition, Tomo, Jessica and I have been in conversation on how the GMC can support them during this exciting and stretching time in their life as they step out in obedience to what God has called them to do in this new season. The GMC has requested churches to continue their full support of Tomo and Jessica through September until she would officially begin her job with the Evangelical Free Church. As I said, Tomo will be serving as a missionary through EC Church Japan with OMF International and will be in need of continued support just like any other missionary. However, since they are technically not under the GMC, and since Tomoyuki would be considered a missionary under the National Conference of EC Church Japan, I shared with them that churches in the USA may decide to discontinue their support and give it toward another missionary or to the EC Church Japan in general. The financial support Tomo and Jessica received was for them to serve as church planters for the EC Church of Japan. However, as of April 16<sup>th</sup> of this year that will no longer be the case, so churches would be justified in redirecting their support when they leave Japan for France. That is why I have specifically asked churches to continue their support through September even when they leave Japan, so that their family can get adjusted to their new life in France, and so we (EC Church USA) can help shoulder some of the burden of our brother and sister as they seek to obey God.

### 3. Sagamihara Grace Chapel

Grace Chapel is the mother church of Fuchinobe Community Church and will prepare to receive FCC members following the last celebration service on March 10<sup>th</sup>. Grace Chapel continues to be pastored by the Bishop of the EC Church of Japan Nobuo Abe. Grace Chapel continues to hold its services, prayer meeting, and church school on a weekly basis.

#### Statistical report from Japan (avg. for the year)

Sagamihara Grace Chapel – 29 in Worship Service/ 3 in Prayer Meeting/ 10 in Church School

Fuchinobe Community Church – 21 in worship/ 11 in prayer meeting/ 4 in Church School

Grace Garden Church – 19 in Worship Service/ 2 in Church School

Kyodo Grace Church – 35 in Worship Service/ 12 in Afternoon Service/ 8 in Prayer Meeting/ 14 in Church School

**Totals: Worship: 104   Prayer Meeting: 22   Church School: 30**

#### India:

In April 2019, ECCI will hold its Annual Leaders' Conference. Originally Bishop Bruce Hill and I had planned to attend this conference. However, through correspondence with Kap Vaiphei, he also requested that we come in 2020 for the General Leaders Conference in which more leaders from the six presbyteries will attend and at which point a new General Director (Bishop) of ECCI will be elected. I decided not to attend the 2019 Conference for a number of reasons. One, as a shared ministry position my travel is limited and therefore could not justify traveling to India in 2019 and 2020 without having visited all the International Conferences at least once. Second, it seems more beneficial to attend the conference where the majority of the leaders from ECCI will gather. Third, I believe it will be important for the GMC to attend the conference in which the new Bishop will be elected and (fourth) where I will have the opportunity to begin building a relationship with the newest leader of ECCI. Therefore, we will plan to travel with a delegation to India in 2020 for their General Leaders Conference.

During Randy's tenure as GMA you may remember that we focused on "cross-pollinating" (taking leaders from other conferences on trips to build relationships with all of our international leaders) the EC

# COMMUNITIES

---

Church worldwide. This April the GMC will be helping Kap Vaiphei (General Director of ECCI) attend and speak at the National Conference of ECC Japan.

## **Evangelical College of Theology**

Here is an update regarding the work of ECT and Dr. Lalrosiem Songate:

*Here at ECT, we take the practical ministries of our students very seriously and we also monitor their involvements in their local churches during the weekends. Students staying in the campus are also assigned to participate in the Sunday School ministries of nearby local churches. We believe that theological education should not be just a raking of knowledge in the brain, but should lead to the practice of what is learned through ministry and evangelism.*

*We are thankful to have Rev. Dr. Ginneithang Ngaihte, a veteran missionary to Thailand and other Asian countries to teach Urban Mission to our M.Th. students during this current module. Rev. Dr. Ngaihte completed his doctoral study at Fuller School of World Missions, California. His intellectual knowledge, rich experience in missionary work, plus his commitment to world mission is indeed a tremendous resource to our students of missiology.*

- ECT is expecting Rev. Tony Jackson from the UK to visit during the latter part of February till early March. He will be a main speaker during the Spiritual Retreat and he will also minister to some of our local churches.
- ECT has been able to set up an E-Library in addition to the normal physical library. However, this has highlighted the need to incorporate a basic course on computer operation as many of our students have never touched a computer before. The students need to have a basic knowledge in order to make use of the E-Library.

## **Nepal:**

This past January 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> was my first trip as the GMA. Rev. John Friedlund and I went to Nepal in order to accomplish these objectives:

- Attend 1<sup>st</sup> graduation of ministry leaders from the Evangelical Leadership Training Course
- Ordain a graduating pastor, elders and deacons
- Dedicate the establishment of the official ECCN Youth Department
- Baptisms

This trip came about rather quickly during the fall. I had not planned on traveling anywhere in January, but Janga made it clear that he really desired my presence for the very first graduation of the Evangelical Leadership Training Course. I felt it important to go to provide some legitimacy to the ELTC, honor the graduates, and put Janga's fears at ease with a new GMA transitioning into leadership.

While in Nepal I had the privilege of ordaining one pastor, as well as, a number of elders and deacons (all three of these leadership positions receive ordination). The conference was being led by some of the local pastors and the youth groups from the various ECCN churches. I was very impressed with the amount of young people involved and the amount of leadership they had in running the Conference. It is a positive sign for the next generation of ECCN to lead the church. Janga shared with me his desire to have GMC help sponsor the building of new churches for many of these congregations being represented. Unfortunately, many of them do not actually have any kind of building to worship in due to their inability to afford construction costs. Janga's vision is to provide, not only spiritual leadership, pastoral care, and prayer support, but also something tangible and physical in order to bless these new fellowships. The GMC will be discussing this request, among others, presented to me while in Nepal at the Community meeting in March.

# COMMUNITIES

---

I led a special dedication service for the establishment of the ECCN Youth Department and for that I got my name on a nice little stone that now stands outside Bethel Church in Nepal, and designates EC Center Nepal as a place where the youth can grow in their faith. After that service we went to the baptismal and I did 10 baptisms of mostly young people. I was also privileged to baptize three (3) of Janga's orphan boys.

While the trip came about rather quickly, for the reasons I stated above, I was glad to make Nepal my first official visit as the new GMA. I had met Janga in 2013 and so I appreciated the opportunity to strengthen the relationship between us now as the GMA. Janga was also very thrilled that the very first trip of the new GMA internationally was to Nepal, he mentioned that a couple times...and he also mentioned he is glad the new GMA is his size. Janga is an excellent leader and has grand visions for ECCN. Unfortunately, those grand visions take a lot of resources that I fear the GMC will just not be able to give much support to. I know this was one of Randy's concerns as he was leaving. As ECCN expands, and will need more support, the GMC will struggle to keep up with the demand due to its shrinking support base. However, EC Center Nepal was a God sized vision that was shared with me when I was there in 2013 and in 2019 I performed ordinations and baptisms, dedicated a youth department, and held the first ever graduation of ELTC at EC Center Nepal, so I told him we will need to pray together on how God will fulfill His purposes.

## **ECCN 2018 statistics**

No.1 New Converts 109

No.2 New Baptisms 87

2 new churches were established in 2018

12 total Churches

10 total Fellowships

## **Nepal prayer and goal for 2019**

1. To have 5 more local church established
2. To have couple seminar in March or April fund we have already
3. New ELTC to begin in April
4. In April ECCN annual council

## **Mexico:**

Juan Zuñiga, the leader of the EC Church of Latin America, has shared that there are currently 11 churches and three (3) missions operating in Mexico. The mission churches are being supervised or managed by Pastor Justino Bautista, Flaivo Ramirez, and Elias Martinez. Two of the missions' works are operating just north and south of the city of Monterrey in the central part of Mexico and Elias Martinez, the previous Director, manages the mission outreach in Veracruz which is in southern Mexico. Elias is also seeking to train another couple to eventually begin a mission work in the state of Oaxaca in the southern region of Mexico as well.

Recently an institute was opened to give training in pastoral ministry and eight couples already serving in ministry went through this training. I am currently in correspondence with Juan for a potential trip to Mexico sometime during the fall of 2019.

# COMMUNITIES

---

## **Liberia:**

The 50th Annual Conference of the E. C. Church of Liberia was held from January 26<sup>th</sup> through February 3<sup>rd</sup>. The Annual Conference convened at the Duane M. Ray E. C. Church in Tiah's Town, Gbee District, Nimba County. The theme for the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference was *Wear your Dream* taken from Judges 7:7-9. During the conference a new building, constructed by the National Council of the EC Church, was dedicated to the Lord for worship. Also additional 50 bags of cement and five (5) bundles of zinc, nails, paints etc. were purchased for the reconstruction of Philip D.V. McClain E. C. Church and the UCA E. C. Church. The Conference ended with the baptism of 21 new converts and more than 200 conferees who recommitted themselves to the Lord and to the dream/vision of the E. C. Church of Liberia.

Rev. Abraham Powell, Bishop of the ECCOL, shared that he is launching a Bible purchase campaign for 2019. Rev. Powell is challenging people to purchase 20 Bibles (Old and New Testament of any size) this year and to distribute them to 10 people who cannot afford to purchase a Bible.

## **ENAGAGING THE CHURCH IN THE GREAT COMMISSION**

I shared previously that one of the goals for the GMC was to begin using social media as an avenue to nurture a global vision in our churches. In the domestic airport in Nepal, while waiting for our flight, I began a Facebook page for the GMC. I was able to use this page to update everyone on the trip while John and I were there. The goal is to use the page as a way to keep people updated on things that are taking place on the International Fields, as well as, with EC missionaries on a more regular basis. The challenge will be to keep fresh content on the page so people will utilize it. The same can be said for most media and technology endeavors, while we will look to utilize these platforms more regularly and to a greater extent the challenge will be investing the amount of time needed to do these things well and keep them fresh.

In addition to utilizing multi-media to engage local churches, we will seek to begin pursuing partnerships with other like-minded missions' organizations to develop ways we can better serve our missionaries, deepen our relationships with our international churches, and also help those sensing some kind of call to missions to be able to clarify and pursue their calling. These partnerships, I believe, will help the GMC provide assistance to our local churches to enable them to nurture this global vision. This will be an important element of the GMC going forward because we want to be able to offer support to those who believe God is calling them to serve as missionaries somewhere, but need help in discerning that call and need equipping and training. We ultimately want to get them to where God desires to use them in this world. God has not ceased in calling people into this type of work and we (EC Church USA) need to be sensitive to the Spirit calling these people in our churches, and the GMC wants to be able to help them step out in obedience to God and serve Him.

***Rev. Ted Rathman***

# COMMUNITIES

---

## KINGDOM EXTENSION

The Kingdom Extension Community continues to create and entertain conversations designed to nudge pastors, leadership teams, and churches toward intentional missional ministry. It is rather difficult “To [Fully] Know Christ and [Begin To] Make Him Known” if we don’t engage him in daily life outside the church building and encounter people not-yet-in-the-Kingdom in spiritual conversation. And so, we nudge!

We have continued to promote, encourage attendance at, and sponsor scholarships for Exponential, Fresh Expressions, and other Kingdom-focused teaching-learning events across the denomination. Our goal is to expose pastors and churches to resources that are available for our churches as we think outside of the building.

We have also begun to make better use of available technology to provide teaching-learning experiences and to hold missional conversations. We have produced a video version of the 2018 National Conference educational experience (Vimeo) that can be used wherever you have an internet connection. We have run a series of Zoom conversations sponsored by members of the KEC team. These were well received by those who participated.

We continue to enjoy watching Community EC (Sinking Spring, PA) support their several fresh expressions. Tim King and his leadership team are settling into a new church building and community (Ephrata Grace EC) with hopes of reaching the yet-to-be-reached. Grace Community (Willow Street, PA) is surfing new waters as Addison Roberts leads their foray into the world of Virtual Church. We will learn much from this exciting adventure. Dinner church continues to be a valuable ministry for several of our churches (Mohnton – Bob Shuey, Slatington – Brian Kern, Community EC – Mike Snedeker) as they reach the unreached in a new way in their neighborhoods.

Along the way, we have been privileged to hear stories of creative, sometimes unusual and exciting, ministries. Each story reflects the goodness of God and the creativity of his people. We continue to pass along these stories to the greater EC world by way of the Partners Newsletter. Our hope is that the stories will inspire others to launch new ministry initiatives.

We covet your prayers as we continue to support these vital ministries for our EC family. We realize that prayer is the fuel behind these many ministries, both old and new. We thank you for your faithful financial support. Each generous donation helps makes possible some of the above mentioned ministries, as well as allows us to provide “as needed” training and resources. We also look to you for stories we have yet to pass along. Thank you in advance for helping us help others.

### KINGDOM EXTENSION COMMUNITY MEMBERS

We are all listed in the National Conference Journal. Drop us an email or text, give us a call. As time allows – we all have day jobs – we will chat with you, brainstorm with you. Together, we can learn from each other, and then go and make disciples. Members are: Rev. Leslie Cool, Associate & Chair; Bishop Rev. Bruce Hill, Rev. Ron Anderson, Rev. Andrew Brubaker, Rev. Matt Hill, Rev. Carlos Kelly, Mrs. Lynda Miller, Rev. Adam Roberts, Mrs. Michelle Roberts, Rev. Tim Seiger, Rev. Mike Snedeker, Rev. BJ Whitaker, Rev. Todd Wolfe.

# COMMUNITIES

---

## CURRENT PROJECTS

- **Churches and Church Plants**
  - Ephrata, PA . . . Christ House Church (Tim King)
  - Ephrata, PA . . . House of Blessings (Abe Montanez)
  - Lehigh Valley, PA . . . Horizon (Bud Daneker)
  - Pottstown area, PA . . . Journey53 (Rick Christman)
  - Slatington, PA . . . Trinity (Brian Kern)
  - Willow Street, PA . . . Virtual Church (Addison Roberts)
  - York, PA . . . Iglesia Cristiana (Carlos Kelly)
  - York, PA . . . The Next Step (Carlos Kelly)
- **Partnerships**
  - Lancaster, PA . . . Iglesia De Dios Ven A El (Luis Ramirez)
  - Mohnton, PA . . . Dinner Church (Robert Shuey)
  - Palmerton, PA . . . Gaming Grotto (Chris Bronico)
  - Reedsville, PA . . . LifeTree Café (Jeff Byerly)
  - Sinking Spring, PA . . . Fresh Expression Launches
  - Slatington, PA . . . Dinner Church (Brian Kern)

## DISCIPLESHIP AND KINGDOM EXTENSION

KEC conversations about missional ministry often circle back to the need for disciples and healthy (or healthier than we sometimes experience) churches. In the same way you cannot build with bricks that haven't been baked, you cannot build churches with members who have not been discipled. Well, you could, and in both cases with less-than-desired results – collapsed buildings and ineffective churches.

We recently partnered with 3DM for a now completed onramp huddle (preparing pastors) leading up to an extended Learning Community (LC) that recently launched its first immersion event at Community EC in Sinking Spring, PA. This LC will cover two years, include four immersion events (multi-day leader gatherings for debrief, training and encouragement) and leader coaching. The total experience alternates teaching-learning with months of hands-on experience for our congregations.

The KEC has provided initial scholarships for four churches (Christ House in Ephrata, Emmanuel in Hatfield, First in Palmyra, and Plymouth Meeting) as they seek professional discipleship training. Each church has a team involved in this new Learning Community. Their goals include creating or enhancing a discipleship culture, making a shift from doing church toward being missional, and identifying players to draw into the process.

## MISSIONAL MINISTRY ZOOM CHATS

The KEC has completed a series of Zoom chats with missional themes. Each Zoom session included a KEC member sharing seed ideas as they led a conversation around the topic. Themes included discipleship, food as a missional tool, being missional at work, scheduling time to be missional, and starting conversations. The goal, to expose pastors and others to basic concepts that feed missional activity, was met – based on the response of participants. We began during the sketchy weather months. We plan to offer more sessions in the future.

# COMMUNITIES

---

## **PLANT VERSUS CHURCH**

Occasionally, KEC team conversations include topics, issues, and concerns that are above our pay grade. Well, we think they are! Since we gathered at National Conference in May 2018, we have played with and passed along to the BEDAS team (most likely to be passed on to other teams) a couple of questions we thought needed to be addressed. These interesting questions addressed some of the new realities we have been experiencing that seem to fall outside of existing EC policies.

We had realized that most of the existing (and longer standing) EC church plants and missional ministries are now outside the hands-on ministry of the KEC. Aside from casual KEA conversations, most just press on, doing what they have been doing. They seem to be churches. Just not chartered, and not large. All seem to be serving the Kingdom. Most seem to be stable (or stable-ish), though small or smaller.

In the end, we developed a proposal, with supporting documents, that was handed off to the Bishop and BEDAS team. Our desire was to see appropriate E.C. leaders take our conversation places we could not. Future conversations will discuss the definition of church (closer to the ground than a recent philosophical document took us) and the value of chartering (beyond Ministry Funds which even some churches ignore), as well as ponder the care of church plants and missional ministries that pass beyond the fingers of the KEC.

It was our intention that these conversations should ultimately lead to updating sections of the Discipline and Rules of Conference, specifically regarding the definitions of church, church plant, and chartering. We also understand that these conversations and changes will probably impact our role in the E.C. church planting world.

## **CHARTERING, CHURCH PLANTS, AND REHABILITATION**

Somewhere in the conversation about church plants and missional ministries we are responsible for (see above item), we stumbled into a “chat” about the chartering process that leads to “becoming a church.” But this chat was other than the one noted above. Here we toyed with the question: Why do we expect certain structures and behaviors to be in place (e.g., solid core of active members, financial stability, proven leadership, history of doing church, history of maintaining and turning in reports, effective discipleship, etc.) before we allow a plant to charter, while we allow churches to continue to plod along or even dwindle without the said structures and behaviors in place that we expect of church plants?

We decided that the seeming inconsistency was answered as we fleshed out the difference between “structures and behaviors we want in place” so that new churches start out on a healthy path, while the ministry we offer to older, maybe declining churches, is more like rehab work. We are hoping to restore these latter churches to a more healthy status. Not asking them to start fresh (though that might be an option), but to guide and assist them to redevelop atrophied muscles. We had no solid resolution to this concern. And so, along with the above questions, we passed this along to the Bishop and BEDAS team for further consideration.

## **FRAGILE LIVES, AS-NEEDED-TRAINING, AND SOUL CARE**

Not necessarily a planned element of my role as Kingdom Extension Associate, the heaviest weight I have carried so far has been the many contacts I have had with men and women struggling in and with ministry. The struggles are very real. As is their pain. I had not realized how good I have it in the little world that consumes my time and energy.

# COMMUNITIES

---

We often joke that a church usually wants a pastor in his early 30s with a grad degree, wife, two (2) or three (3) young children and 15 years of experience. Why? So he might attract young families to the church. That he might live long enough to make a difference. That he might have experiences enough to be all that is needed at his new church. Sadly, this is not how it works.

Young men (or not young men) take on a charge, trained or being trained, but often with fewer ministry experiences than he might need to handle the situations (crises or otherwise) that he will encounter. Funerals. Weddings. Crisis counseling. Waking up every Monday pregnant with yet another sermon (this can be overwhelming to some). Why do we assume these matters are “in the bag” as we launch men into church ministry? It might be beneficial for us, as a tribe, to ponder what more we might do to make sure our pastors (and church leaders) are better prepared in these areas.

And then there is the matter of soul care. Everything I have mentioned above is a potential drain on the human soul, even upon the Spirit-enlivened human soul. The Grip-Birkman identifies three energy components of the person – social, physical, and emotional – and they all run off the same battery. No wonder we run out of steam, lose perspective, and make poor choices. We have watched sin take men out of ministry. We have watched poor health minimize a ministry. We have watched exhaustion sideline valuable leaders. Why do we naively press on, seemingly assuming they will sort this out and do what is best? Or that they even recognize that the ship (life or ministry) is taking on water?

The KEC recognizes the need for soul care events for pastors and other church leaders (including office/clerical/support staff). We admit that these soul care events are outside our calling as a Community; but it is in our field of concern as fellow soul travelers. Who will take up this vital aspect of support for our men and women in the trenches of ministry?

If I had a magic wand (for which I might be run out of ministry), I would wave it and fix the many things I have mentioned above. But I don't. So I cannot. But I firmly believe that we can address these many concerns as a tribe. The E.C. Church, empowered by God, is enough and has enough, to take on everything God has called us to do. The issue here is that we only take on what we have been called to do.

My friends, allow me to remind us all what we are to be about. We are to be about the redemptive mission of God, launched by Jesus, fleshed out in the Church that bears his name. We are to be message bearers of God's invitation to join his Kingdom (The Great Commission). We are to be about loving one another and loving our neighbors (The Great Commandment). We are to be missionaries, learning (or exegeting for understanding) our communities and ministering in ways that make sense to those to whom we minister. We are to avoid getting sucked into the busyness (even the good busyness) that distracts us from our mission, “go and make disciples.”

Your Kingdom Extension Community depends on your prayers and support as we seek to be what our pastors, church leaders, and churches need as they seek to honor God's call upon their lives. We are grateful for your support – hands and feet, skills and abilities, and financial gifts. Together, we will realize greater Kingdom impact.

For the privilege and opportunity we have to serve Christ's Kingdom, our churches, and our planters, we thank you.

***Rev. Leslie Cool***

# COMMUNITIES

---

## MINISTERIAL DEVELOPMENT

When I was a child growing up in eastern Lancaster County, I was contracted as free labor to help cultivate a sizable garden on my parents' eleven-acre farm. My duties included removing stones after the first plowing, planting seeds, weeding the garden, and nurturing the growth of the various patches of vegetables. During the summer, I would pick, husk, and shell vegetables with my family. I quickly learned that the enjoyment of the good fruits of that garden began only after the arduous, lengthy tasks that involved the sweat of my brow. I think that many of us can easily relate to the connection between these toilsome tasks and the flourishing benefits of gardening.

In many ways, the Ministerial Development Community (MDC) is a garden. There are seeds planted, weeds are removed, shoots burst forth, seedlings grow, and fruit is produced. In the Gospels, Jesus provides us with a multitude of lessons (and parables) that describe this idea of cultivation in an agricultural setting. We are generally aware of the many things necessary to bring flourishing to our gardens. And through this metaphor, we become aware of things necessary to bring flourishing to our lives. I would maintain that the MDC nurtures and develops the many things necessary to bring flourishing to our churches as well.

Today we look out over a garden that is healthier, and more vibrant, and I will say, revealing her beauty and health toward flourishing.

### CULTIVATING THE SOIL

Last Fall, when the core team leaders (Bishop-Executive Director-Associates-Secretary, aka BEDAS) of the denomination met, we reviewed the intended outcomes of the Covenant Implementation Plan. We were encouraged to see that most of the objectives from the proposed plan were being accomplished within the MDC. One of the most significant challenges that we had to confront was the concept of organizational silos.

Problems emerge when groups within a process operate in isolation from other groups within the process. In other words, groups can often operate independently from one another, and often assume that critical information gets communicated along and throughout the process. This was the case in the former structure. Many times, objectives from the Pastoral Assessment Center, the Conference Relations Committee, Coaching, and Conference Ministers were not in sync with one another. This issue occurred not as a result of any group's or individual's weaknesses, but rather as a result of the structural isolation between these processes. However, now we can state that this chief agenda item has been corrected within the new integrated structure and is working very effectively.

### PLANTING THE SEED

With each new Pastoral Assessment Center (PAC) season, we continue to modify and improve our team's objectives. As we prepare couples for assessment, we are equipping them to realize the tension between traditional and missional paradigms for ministry. Rev. Al Giles and his team apply a disciple-making model that guides these applicants to gauge their personal and congregational experiences in ministry in order to understand and follow God's work in their development and ministry settings.

As each applicant enters PAC, he has been nurtured to better understand his own gifts and how God uses him. By the conclusion of PAC, applicants and their spouses have not only been assessed, but

# COMMUNITIES

---

have learned what it means to be part of the Evangelical Congregational Church and the direction that we are journeying on together. They are equipped with some helpful resources for understanding themselves and their ministry contexts.

## **WEEDING THE GARDEN**

The standard for pastoral ministry continues to be raised. Over these past three years, the MDC has been helping men and women realize the importance of holding a credential within the EC Church. In the past, people were able to hold a credential without significant accountability after their initial interview. It was no one's fault really; it was simply that the former process was broken in some places, siloed in others, and sometimes circumvented by a tyranny of the urgent.

Many individuals were provided with little guidance about their next steps. Others were given guidance, but it may not have conformed to the overall expectations beyond their region. Other individuals struck out on their own and developed their own plan for their education, which lacked conformity to our requirements. Additionally, people transferring into our denomination often did not possess similar educational experiences. Quite frankly, this confusion had frustrated us for the past two years, as we sought to provide clear paths which honored the expectations that were communicated to them, as well as reaching the principles that are representative of our educational standards.

We have made a significant breakthrough in two areas. First, the Examiners have adopted a rubric that guides them in providing clear and fair objectives for new applicants that come to us from within or from outside our system. As a result, we are now able to tell an applicant up front clearly what will be required of them.

Secondly, we now provide every new applicant with a General Education Plan (GEP), and if necessary, an Individual Education Plan (IEP). These IEPs are designed to review an applicant's educational degrees and courses and formulate the supplemental education that equates to a Master of Divinity degree. We have addressed this need for supplemental certificates with Evangelical Seminary, and they are working with us to create these IEPs for each new EC student. In this way, we will be able to provide an actual course-by-course IEP according to the rubric. This standardization is now being applied to all new applicants going forward. As a result, we have already been making headway by applying this rubric with some individuals, who had remained stuck in their progress and needed to understand their next steps to reach their terminal credential. Our expectation is that these changes will allow individuals to move forward with clear direction.

Another significant change this past year arising from the Examiners focused on those who hold credentials that require annual renewal. Some changes were adopted to help those holding credentials with annual renewals to strongly consider what they are doing with them. Last Fall, the National Ministry Team revised the Rules of Conference to reflect the need for these individuals to provide ministry updates through interviews every five years to the Board of Examiners. Additionally, the questions on these applications were revised to consider the gap between one's intended use of his or her credential and its actual use.

On their own, some individuals have been realizing that they do not have a need for using their credentials. Therefore, they are not renewing them and letting them expire. Likewise, we have recently been meeting with some individuals and holding serious conversations about their need for credentials. Sometimes these conversations are arising from them. We have nothing against someone holding a

# COMMUNITIES

---

credential, but if they are holding a credential without using it, then let's talk about this. A lot of these situations squander administrative time of Church Center staff and the MDC personnel.

## **NURTURING THE GARDEN**

The Ministerial Development Community works to nurture its garden in several ways. We provide coaches for each new pastoral candidate. At the conclusion of PAC, as I meet with each couple to explain the next steps in their credentialing journey, Rev. Matt Hill meets with them to discuss the prospect of their coach assignments. As Matt develops this coaching community, he will be offering training and resources that will guide the coaching process for these new pastors.

Rev. Gary Brown continues to develop the culture for understanding pastoral health in the Evangelical Congregational Church. Most recently, he has worked in partnership with Rev. Gene Stevenson and his wife Beth to offer a course for Ministry Self-Care taught through the Center for EC Studies. Rev. Joel Kime and I continue to dialogue about the educational and financial needs for our students at Evangelical Seminary and are thinking of ways to provide opportunities for future training and resources.

## **ATTAINING A FLOURISHING GARDEN**

As we consider these many components of the MDC, the essential guiding document for everything we do is the Profile of an EC Pastor:

*Pastors in the EC Church must understand their own identity in Christ, as well as their calling and gifts in relation to the body of believers so that the church is engaged for the work of ministry in the 21st century. They must learn how to interpret their cultural setting and properly communicate kingdom values and instructions from God's Word in order to form and lead a healthy community of believers.*

*They must be shaped by a character that reflects God's love in their lives through authenticity, patience, compassion, integrity, and spiritual fervor. They must participate in a disciplined lifelong pursuit that reveals teachability, hospitality, forgiveness, and most of all how to disciple others into these same Christ-like character traits. They must be able to effectively communicate the faith—what it looks like and how it works—within and beyond their community of believers, while also recognizing and discerning false claims to the Gospel.*

*They must demonstrate a disciple's life through their own ways of living the faith—serving, directing, giving, listening, and laughing with others in order to cultivate and empower flourishing among the community of believers and make an impact on the greater community.*

*They must see God at work around them, enabling others to grasp hold of God's intentional love for them, and each person's own individual potential for ministry. They must not neglect the opportunities and threats in their midst, but rather reveal how God's kingdom intersects with the life of the church and their surrounding community.*

This guiding document has helped us to clarify what it means for our pastors to be leaders within the Evangelical Congregational Church. It points our applicants in a direction toward healthy ministry. Additionally, it guides the Board of Examiners in our interviews. When we read this document before each block of interviews, we are reminded about our objectives for pastoral ministry and can easily observe if the person sitting before us is able to pursue this direction. If not, we don't move them forward. Recently,

# COMMUNITIES

---

we had such an interview. It was difficult, but the applicant clearly articulated that he was not on the same page with us. This approach helps us consider features of ministry beyond an applicant's articulation of the right theology; it goes to their identity and character and how that gets expressed within our local church settings. As a result, we are learning better ways to discern how individuals will fit and flourish among us.

## ENJOYING THE HARVEST

Today, we look out over a much healthier garden. New seeds are still sprouting, but sometimes it's only after we cultivate the soil, pick some stones, and do some weeding that the garden comes to full bloom. It's arduous work that involves the sweat of our brows. Yet we labor in this field, because we look forward to the fruit that God's Spirit is bearing in our midst. So let's rejoice in a healthier, more vibrant garden, which means healthier, more vibrant local churches, which means a healthier, more vibrant expression of God's kingdom to the world!

*Rev. Jeffrey Byerly*

---

## MISSIONAL ALIGNMENT

The Missional Alignment Community is to:

- Discuss the latest missional alignment concepts—stirring the team's thinking through reading books and exploring web-related resources together.
- Discuss opportunities and solutions for missional alignment in our cultural setting.
- Discuss issues derived from district cohorts concerning missional alignment.
- Explore together missional alignment for congregations in our cultural setting.
- Focus a segment of the National Conference gathering to missional alignment—providing a district or national level speaker as requested.

The Community is made up of four active committees:

### FAITH & DOCTRINE COMMITTEE

The Faith and Doctrine Committee was reconstituted this past conference year with Kirk Marks appointed as chair. The Committee began meeting according to a regular annual schedule which will include two "plenary" meetings of the Committee each Conference year (a winter and a summer meeting) and additional and/or sub-committee meetings as needed. The Committee held its first regular plenary meeting on this schedule in December of 2018.

The Faith and Doctrine Committee is working in partnership with the Board of Examiners and ETS Center for EC Studies to offer a class entitled "The Theological Ethos of the EC Church" for those seeking credentials and ordination in the EC Church. The first offering of this class came in the fall of 2018 and a second offering was given in the spring of 2019. The Committee is also offering a seminar at National Conference 2019 "What Is Evangelical?" in keeping with the conference theme of "Who We Are."

# COMMUNITIES

---

The Committee is seeking other and new venues to hold gatherings and give presentations to deepen and broaden the contextual theological conversation throughout the denomination.

The Faith and Doctrine Committee is tracking several projects that are underway, being worked on by sub-committees or individuals to address specific needs. These include:

- A statement on civility in discourse, both public and private.
- A position paper on what is meant when we say “the Gospel” to be used by the Board of Examiners when talking with candidates seeking credentials.
- A table of definitions of basic “missional church terms” to be shared across Communities to insure uniformity of term use and clarify communication.

## HERITAGE COMMITTEE

The renovations of the lower level of the Church Center building have been completed to house our EC archives. The funding for the physical renovation of the space in Church Center has been provided by the denomination. The next step is for the Heritage Committee to raise funds to purchase movable shelving units to hold the many documents which are a large part of the archives. It is hoped that the units will be purchased this year in order to allow us to move the archives from their temporary location on the third floor of Church Center to their permanent home in the lower level. A task force is now working to draft scripts for a series of videos to replace the old *Streams of Influence* video. These new videos will be able to be used in membership classes and other contexts. In addition, the Committee continues to work on the publication of an English translation of Karl Heinz Vogt's book *Jakob Albrecht: Ein Ziegelbrenner Wird Bischoff*.

## NEXUS

From its inception, NEXUS has been committed to pursuing the E.C. Church's fifth core value of being united in the Body of Christ. At first, our emphasis was to reach out to brothers and sisters in Christ from other Christian traditions to engage in fellowship, support each other in prayer, and explore cooperative endeavors as appropriate. We've continued to do this, with this past October playing host to our fifth annual Clergy Fellowship Gathering, an event that continues to be a well received time of refreshment, prayer, and conversation with non-E.C. clergy.

The past year or so, however, has also seen NEXUS begin to devote more attention and energy to intentionally fostering unity among our E.C. brothers and sisters. The result of that attention and energy is partly seen in some of the breakout session topics for this year's National Conference. With the current polarization of our society aggravating the fractious aspect of our Protestant heritage, we also call upon all E.C. pastors, lay leaders, and members to resist the spirit of contentiousness that works against Christ's prayer for His disciples to be one as the Father and Son are one so that the world will know who Christ is and who sent Him (John 17:20-23). Rather, may we *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on [us], live at peace with everyone"* (Romans 12:18). And may we repent of being quarrelsome and divisive, thus hindering our witness in the world.

Finally, we note that after seven (7) years of co-creating and leading NEXUS, Gene Stevenson will be stepping down as chairman of this committee. Anyone who feels led to coordinate the efforts of this group should contact him or Bishop Bruce Hill. Anyone with a heart for peacemaking in Christ's church and who would like to join this, the Evangelical Congregational Church Committee for the Promotion of Christian Unity (our formal name), please also contact Gene or Bruce.

# COMMUNITIES

---

## **PRAYER MOBILIZATION TEAM**

The Prayer Mobilization Team (PMT) is a team of pastors and lay leaders that have become increasingly aware that our churches can enhance the process of transforming our ministries to greater relevance by mobilizing God's people to pray together in God's Word. While preaching, teaching, worship, and outreach makes use of our individual gifts to develop disciples, prayer is common to every believer and is essential to increasing intimacy with God and with one another. It is this divine vertical and horizontal intimacy that is foundational to effective disciple making and healthy churches as the Lord heals, directs, and gives increase to the church that prays together.

God can change a person, a family, or a church through prayer, but this could require a paradigm change for some individuals and churches. We desire to assist pastors and prayer leaders in all of our churches who have a God-given vision and desire to birth a prayer movement which brings the whole congregation together in corporate prayer.

A new resource available this year is a method of congregational prayer called "SaintsPray" which will be presented during one of our Conference workshops on Thursday afternoon. If you miss the workshop, please let us know and we can arrange to schedule one at your church or at a district meeting. Also, Our Spiritual Warfare Advance Team (SWAT) members are available to come to your church to pray with you to provide additional prayer support relating to spiritual warfare issues. We are able to provide Prayer Workshops for individual churches, pastors, and prayer leaders tailored to your specific needs and to help motivate a renewed enthusiasm for dynamic corporate prayer using the various resources that we have available.

Finally, if you would like to learn more about the PMT and possibly become a member please visit our display table at Conference for more information or contact Mike Campbell at [faithc-mike@comcast.net](mailto:faithc-mike@comcast.net). We have monthly meetings at the E. C. Center in which we explore various ideas for mobilizing prayer, and we pray for specific individuals, churches, and our denominational leaders. Meetings can be attended in person or by teleconference.

The Prayer Mobilization Team looks forward to receiving inquiries from many of our churches during Conference and in the coming year.

***Bishop Bruce D. Hill***