
CONFERENCE NETWORK

The Conference Network Team is made up of the Bishop (chair), National Conference Secretary, Associates (4), and District Field Directors (13). They are:

- Bishop Hill, Chair
- Kirk Marks, Secretary
- Gary Brown
- Jeff Byerly
- Chuck Campbell
- David Carr
- Les Cool
- Brad Hatter
- Kevin Henry
- Gary Kuehner
- Marlin Lafferty
- Gordy Lewis
- Keith Miller
- Paul Miller
- Ralph Owens
- Jim Price
- Ted Rathman
- Jeff Schell
- Sterling Trimmer

The regular schedule of meetings includes:

1. A Daily Check-In, a five minute “stand-up meeting” between the Bishop and Executive Director.
2. All the members of the CNT will participate in a 45 minute teleconference twice a month.
3. The BEDAS Group (Bishop, Executive Director, Associates and NC Secretary) holds a two-hour meeting once a month.
4. The entire CNT membership meets at least twice a year in a Strategic Meeting format.

The District Field Directors (DFDs) continue to be the vital connecting link between the National Conference and our pastors and lay leaders. I have described them as having the fingers of one hand on the pulse of the National Conference and the fingers of the other hand on the pulse of the churches in their district. While our DFDs are gifted men, they are not to have all the answers; but they are to connect pastors and congregations with the appropriate Associates and resources to help them be more effective in building the Kingdom. I believe that after two and a half years of ministry, the District Field Directors and Associates are now more clearly understanding their roles within our new denominational structure.

The EC Church is made up of many smaller churches. They may be smaller churches but they are doing important ministries. Praise the Lord for the ways in which our congregations are meeting needs in the church and out in their communities. Some of our congregations though, are in need of revitalization. Our DFDs are doing what they can to help those pastors and lay leaders connect with revitalization resources as well as facilitating further conversation into how we can be the church God calls us to be. During the past National Conference year, the DFDs have been key to the effort to continue the dialogue which began during the NC2018 Kingdom & Community Experience relating to being “ALL IN.”

Our Strategic Evaluation has been a significant additional responsibility of both our District Field Directors and our Associates since October 2018. Each District Field Director completed a personal evaluation of his work as a DFD. In addition, each DFD facilitated a Strategic Evaluation conversation within his district. Similarly, each Associate completed a personal evaluation as well as facilitated an evaluation of his respective community by his community members. Their work in leading these discussions has been vital to the Strategic Evaluation process.

We are pleased that as the Conference Network Team meets, we continue to hear stories of more pastors and churches becoming involved in district gatherings. Of concern is how to more deeply involve bi-vocational pastors in the life of the districts. They already have overflowing schedules and involvement in one more thing is a challenge. The DFDs are sensitive to this and continue to look for creative ways to

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involve everyone in the life of the district. The good news is that growing number of pastors who are attending are experiencing a greater sense of team with their brothers in the district. In addition, the churches of our districts are more often coming together to reach out to those in need, particularly when there is a need with the pastoral family. Praise the Lord for local leaders who see ministry with a Kingdom point of view!

The work of leading a district as well as the participation of the DFDs in both the CNT Tactical and CNT Strategic meetings helps us to break down “silos” and fosters a greater sense of community and cooperation within their district and across district boundaries. I am thankful to report the DFDs and Associates are working well together facilitating conversations and providing opportunities for the Associates and communities to consult with local congregations. I pray these heart conversations will result in even greater Kingdom ministry all around the Evangelical Congregational Church.

It is my joy to chair the Conference Network Team. We, as a denomination are blessed to have these men lead our denomination as they follow Christ.

Bishop Bruce D, Hill

CONFERENCE SUPPORT

Calendar year 2020 will be the last year in which local churches will experience a decrease in ministry funds from the cost reductions as a result of the implementation of the covenant that began in 2016. Therefore in 2021, it is not anticipated that there will be a significant drop, if any drop, in ministry funds. Denominational leadership is determined to not enter into a trend of increasing annual ministry funds in 2021 and beyond, thereby erasing the last five years of decreases. With that in mind, the Conference Support Team (CST) is looking forward by planning and strategizing the best and most efficient manner to supply the services needed by the local EC Church. To fulfill that objective, two questions or issues arise: what services are needed by a local EC Church and at what point does efficiency and cost saving erode customer service? These are valid issues that will create tension and require thought and prayer.

Churches are unique entities that as a rule depend on volunteers that want to serve their church but have jobs, families and other interests that compete for their time. The denominational office staff routinely interacts with volunteer church staff and has discovered there are few similarities between how churches operate. Differences are not bad or wrong but it does add challenges to providing products and services. Denominational staff has routinely met the singular needs of churches without regard for efficient workflow. In the future, the denominational staff and churches will each need to endure change to improve operational efficiency.

Organizations are controlling costs with the development of self service web portals and electronic delivery of everything that can be delivered electronically. I will join in with you on the collective groan over the demise of customer service. Unfortunately, the economics of ministry are what they are and the denominational office must also become more efficient, thereby controlling costs. To that end, expect to see a shift in some long standing procedures and operating policies from the denomination.

What changes are being planned?

- Electronic delivery of communication pieces when it is practical and possible
- Web based registration for events

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- Creating and enforcing event registration and refund policies
- Increased use of web conferencing
- Assume the privilege to refuse special requests that are not related to or the result of a personal limitation or the request is a personal preference
- Decline donations for special projects that are not approved by an EC governing body

Please understand the proposed changes are designed to tighten up operations and create a more efficient working environment for the denominational office staff. It is clearly understood that these changes are going to increase tension at some churches by requiring change. Nevertheless, the only alternative is increasing ministry funds or eliminating services. The CST will work toward the optimal balance of providing customer service and self service.

REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEES AND GROUPS

Church Center Operations Team

The Church Center staff worked dutifully and courageously to implement the first new donor management and financial reporting software in 17 years. There were some stressful moments and we are continuing to fix mistakes and learn new processes. I am proud of the work the staff has done and is doing. Thanks to the local churches for your patience and understanding.

Conference Services Committee

We all owe Keith Miller, the Red Shirt Team and the staff at Messiah College a big thank-you for all the necessary small details to hold a successful conference. A thank-you in advance to the attendees for your patience and understanding as we incorporate a new technology into the National Conference. And another round of gratitude and appreciation to Todd Wolfe who serves as our Media Coordinator and Dave Julian and the musicians from Grace Community Willow Street for leading worship this year.

Property Committee

Properties Owned by the National Conference

EC Church Center, 100 W Park Ave, Myerstown, PA 17067

Community at New Direction, 226 Southeast Ave., Tallmadge, OH 44278

Community at New Direction Parsonage, 206 Southeast Ave., Tallmadge, OH 44278

Salem EC, 401 East Center St., Mahanoy City, PA 17948

Grace EC Church, 107 West Wiconisco St., Muir, PA 17957

Grace EC Church, 6067 Carpenter St, East Petersburg, PA 17520

The renovation of the basement of the Church Center to accommodate the EC archives is complete. The space was renovated to ensure the preservation of the paper records that requires controlled light and humidity. To maximize the storage space, a multi section moveable storage unit will be installed as funds become available. The next phase of the project is moving the archives from the third floor of the Church Center to the basement. If your youth group has young men and women with excess energy, I'm sure Jonathan Brown, our Conference Historian, can tire them out for you.

Two major repairs are needed Church Center. The lower half of the parking lot is deteriorating and the railing on the outside of the front stairs is causing the stair treads to crack and separate. The parking lot was patched by Myerstown Borough with some grindings from a road resurfacing project and is holding up. That repair can be delayed for a while. The railing on the front stairs is currently securely fastened and its condition is being monitored. When the railing becomes a safety hazard, a repair or replacement timetable will be accelerated.

Publishing Committee

A few copies of the 2016 edition of the Discipline of the Evangelical Congregational Church still remain. Contact Pat Wolfe at the EC Church Center to order a hard copy. The Discipline is available in

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three formats; red hard cover ring binder (7x9) - \$23.00, loose pages or inserts only to fit the 7x9 ring binder - \$13.00, 8 1/2 x 11 red spiral binder notebook - \$10.00 and 4x7 abridged version - \$3.25 ea. Disciplines may be picked up at the EC Church Center or mailed for an additional shipping charge. The discipline is also available to download from: <http://www.eccenter.com/Left/Resources/Publications/2016-Discipline.aspx>. Other denominational items are available at Church Center or download (not all publications are available for download) from www.eccenter.com: 2019 Planbook, brochures, prayer guides, membership books and various membership certificates. Please contact Pat Wolfe to order publications or with any questions.

One of two charges given to the CST is: *“providing the necessary services to accomplish the mission across the network”*. Please contact me or any of the community or committee leaders with suggestions or ideas of what services are needed to accomplish the mission of the local EC Church. The members of the communities and committees are listed in section 2 of the National Conference Journal and my contact information is in section 1 and page 1 of the National Conference Journal. We will listen to all suggestions for needs and services, evaluate the need and respond when necessary. If enough churches ask for the same service, the viability of adding the desired service will be evaluated. The leadership of the CST is also willing to attend local church meetings or district meetings as requested.

Kevin Henry