



# EPC

A Global Movement of Evangelical Presbyterian Churches

## **An Encyclical for the Purpose of Addressing Frequently Asked Questions in the 2024-2025 EPC Church Year**

November 6, 2024

Fellow Presbyters in the Lord,

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! We thank God for you and remember you in our prayers (1 Thess. 1:2). We the Chairman, Moderator, and Moderator-Elect of the National Leadership Team have prayed, discussed, and labored over appropriate ways to address and disseminate the information contained in this letter.

Firstly, why are we writing this letter? Since June of 2024, the General Assembly office, and the GA Stated Clerk's office in particular, has regularly received questions on the state of the EPC, requests that the GA Office clarify certain procedural and organizational matters, and even direct criticisms. In deciding to respond or not to each appeal, a part of what we have labored over are twin, and sometimes competing, desires.

On one hand, we have not wanted to appear defensive, as we have attempted to avoid starting an email exchange with every legitimate question or illegitimate claim made of the EPC online, via email, or direct letter. Were we to reply each time, it would only increase the anxiety within our denomination. Thus, we have been reticent to respond to every critique. On the other hand, in the absence of saying anything, half-truths and outright lies can flourish, shading peoples' views of what's going on in the General Assembly office or with the Stated Clerk's role in an unfair manner. This letter is an attempt to end our silence in a comprehensive fashion.

Secondly, *what* is this letter? It's meant as a 'circular letter' (or an 'informal encyclical') to share amongst Sessions and fellow presbyters in the Lord in a 'word of mouth' kind of way. It could be shared in a Session meeting, by hand, or by email. It is *not* an authoritative document or a provisional opinion. It is simply an attempt to answer questions clearly and directly.

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Thirdly, why did we choose this format? We did not want to send this as an email to the whole denomination, since reading an email is primarily an individualistic experience. Rather, we invite Sessions to discuss these things communally and prayerfully, or presbyters to share conversation about this face to face. The truth is that *many* Teaching and Ruling Elders may *not* have questions about the GA Office or the Stated Clerk's role, and it may be helpful for those who have no concerns to discuss these matters with those who do. Hence why we sent this letter to Sessions.

This letter also indicates that we do not want to adjudicate matters through the press or other online venues (online articles, social media posts, podcasts, open letters, etc.), desiring not to violate the 9th commandment by exaggerating the trivial faults of others, committing slander, prejudicing the truth, backbiting, or engaging in harsh language (WLC Q. 145). Ordinarily, we don't believe that pursuing the truth via outside online media promotes the peace and purity of the Church.

Fourthly, what is written below? Given that many of the questions and requests to the GA office have been on similar themes, we chose a frequently-asked-questions format. We'd like to reiterate that many of the questions and concerns addressed to the GA office are made in good faith, which is why we are seeking to answer them in one document.

Finally, a note about the length of this document: it's not short. The reason for this is that often the truth takes patience to wade through. In a clickbait era when foolishness would quickly take a side before gathering all the facts, we resolve to be people of wisdom, which can often mean patience, slowness, and deliberation. We invite you to read with patience and prayer as well. Now, on to the questions.

**Why has Dean used "President" or "CEO" language about his role? Isn't the Stated Clerk's role more procedural than hierarchical?**

The genesis of the answer to this question occurred in the August 2021 National Leadership Team (hereafter NLT) meeting at Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church, in Englewood, CO. This was Dean's first NLT meeting as Stated Clerk.

As part of our meeting, we invited TE Andrew Brunson to share his new video-based small group curriculum about enduring as a Christian in a cultural context often hostile to Christian beliefs and values. As TE Brunson became widely known due to his persecution at the hands of the Turkish government, he was a voice we desired to listen to. The fruit of that presentation and resulting discussion is that TE Brunson was invited to be a speaker at our 42nd General Assembly in 2022.

Given that TE Brunson sat through most of the NLT meetings over two days, he offered a comment occasionally on other matters we discussed. When it came time to adjourn the meeting, TE Brunson asked if he could bring up new business. TE Brunson shared that he would like the Stated Clerk's role to have alternate titles when the Stated Clerk addressed matters outside the EPC. His reasoning was that when former Stated Clerk Jeff Jeremiah was lobbying with US officials for TE Brunson's release, it was TE Brunson's opinion that Stated Clerk Jeremiah wasn't heeded as much as he could have been since so few outside of the EPC know what "Stated Clerk" means. TE Brunson said that if Stated Clerk Jeremiah could have communicated himself to US Senators and State Department officials as a person with executive responsibilities such as "President or CEO," he would have been treated more seriously.

Therefore, the NLT moved and unanimously approved the following motion:

*NLT 21-12*

*ON MOTION*

*The National Leadership Team recognizes that the ecclesiastical title of Stated Clerk can be opaque and inefficient in some external communications.*

*Therefore, we authorize the Stated Clerk, at his discretion, to utilize his other longstanding titles of President and Chief Executive Officer of EPC, Inc. along with his ecclesiastical title of Stated Clerk.*

From that point, Stated Clerk Dean Weaver's email byline reflected that change, since much of Stated Clerk Weaver's communications are to those outside the EPC. That email byline created a lot of confusion *within* the EPC, and as a result Stated Clerk Weaver removed it from his email byline.

Thus, when it comes to ecclesiastical matters, TE Dean Weaver is principally "Stated Clerk," not usurping powers that belong to the General Assembly (more below). When it comes to staffing leadership at the GA Office, as well as EPC Corporation matters (e.g. legal reporting), TE Weaver is "President/CEO." And when it comes to matters outside the EPC where TE Weaver represents our denomination, he has discretion to use the title Stated Clerk and the terms "President/CEO" depending on the context as to which is most helpful.

In sum, we recognize the concern behind the use of titles by our Stated Clerk under the authority of the NLT regarding a perceived top-down approach to governance. Rest assured that TE Weaver, as our Stated Clerk, is committed to servant leadership, as we and many others in the EPC have witnessed firsthand; he is not concerned with titles, status, or authority. The Stated Clerk of the EPC has no authority in the office itself, but only that which is derived by the governance of the presbyters of our General Assembly. As a committee of the General Assembly, the Stated Clerk works with and is under the oversight of the National Leadership Team.

### **Is the EPC becoming more egalitarian on women's ordination?**

The General Assembly has ruled on this issue two major times. In 1984 at the 4th General Assembly, the Assembly voted to adopt our Position Paper on The Ordination of Women, which is still the official position of the denomination. Quoting the document, *"Thus, while some churches may ordain women and some may decline to do so, neither position is essential to the existence of the church."*

The document goes on to say, *"Since people of good faith who equally love the Lord and hold to the infallibility of Scripture differ on this issue, and since uniformity of view and practice is not essential to the existence of the visible church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church has chosen to leave this decision to the Spirit-guided consciences of particular congregations concerning the ordination of women as elders and deacons, and to the presbyteries concerning the ordination of women as ministers."*

A second significant ruling of the General Assembly on this issue came in 2010 at the 30th General Assembly. The EPC at the time was experiencing the potential influx of former PC(USA) churches with ordained female teaching elders, and

some of those churches were in a geographic area of an EPC presbytery that wouldn't ordain a female TE. Thus, an Ad-Interim Committee made up equally of egalitarians and complementarians recommended to the 30th GA to allow for petitioning churches with a female TE coming into the EPC to come into a geographically adjacent presbytery. This recommendation passed overwhelmingly.

No structural change in the denomination has happened since then on that issue. One visible change, however, is that since 2015 we have had female preachers at GA. This simply reflects that we have many more female TE's than we did years ago. Preachers are chosen for GA in cooperation with the hosting church, in accordance with our constitution and approved positions to reflect the full life of the EPC family.

The EPC has historically traversed the tension on this issue, allowing ordained Ruling and Teaching elders to practice their conscience while at the same time practicing 'in all things, charity.' For instance, many complementarians in the EPC would not agree to a female teaching or ruling elder in their congregation but will charitably serve alongside them in presbytery or General Assembly committees. If a female preacher at the General Assembly is an issue for a commissioner, we'd encourage you in this: do not grumble (James 5:9), do not sow division (Galatians 5:20), just politely follow your conscience.

### **Why does it seem to some that EPC leadership is 'top-down'?**

We respect that this concern is understandable, since many in the EPC come from denominational conflicts where power-plays were used against them. We'd also respond by saying 'top-down' is often an unhelpful metaphor to describe the way that power works in the various courts of the EPC, because often power is 'side-to-side' or 'bottom-up' too. Let us respond in a few ways:

Firstly, in the context of the General Assembly floor, let us elaborate briefly on how power works. All actions of the Assembly are always the purview of the entire Assembly. Further, there is no ecclesiastical power that a moderator or stated clerk wields that is not subject to the will of the entire Assembly. For example, whenever 'the Chair' makes a ruling (about a procedural matter, or a vote, or a point of order), that ruling can always be 'appealed,' allowing the General Assembly to either 'sustain' (i.e. approve) or 'overrule' (i.e. disagree with) the Chair, who is most often the moderator. Both examples happened at

our most recent General Assembly, and since that was the will of the Assembly, we do not dispute those rulings. In other words, sometimes a commissioner's preferred option loses a vote, and it is disingenuous to blame a single person wielding power in a 'top-down' way regarding a floor decision.

Secondly, our Constitution guarantees rights and authority to various courts, and they are sacrosanct. For instance, General Assembly staff cannot ecclesiastically usurp the authority reserved to the General Assembly (20-4 of the Book of Government), the Presbytery (19-4 BoG), Sessions (18-3 BoG), or even the rights reserved to a Local Church (chapter 6 BoG). Furthermore, it is *not a mandate* that churches give their Percentage of Income (POI) request to their presbyteries and the General Assembly, and there is no disciplinary measure used against those who do not give their POI. And no church is being *mandated* to change its budget or mission priorities, since those are rights reserved to the local church.

Thirdly and finally, it is our experience that the criticism of the GA Office or GA Staff being 'top-down' has two undercurrents: the perceived growth of the GA staff, and resources that are 'top-down.' Like Stated Clerks before Dean Weaver, the Stated Clerk is empowered to make hires for staffing within the budget set by the General Assembly, and he re-organizes staffing to accomplish the mission of the EPC all subject to NLT approval. As to the budget of the GA and the resources offered, we'd encourage you to read the next question.

### **Yes, but why is Dean doing things so differently?**

The General Assembly approved adding the word "missional" to our mission statement at the 29th GA in 2009 and subsequently adopted our new Vision Statement which includes our four Gospel Priorities at the 34th General Assembly in 2014. *"To the glory of God, the EPC family aspires to embody and proclaim Jesus' love as a **global movement** of congregations engaged together in God's mission through **transformation, multiplication, and effective biblical leadership**.*

In 2019, the 39th General Assembly approved Recommendation 39-22 which amended the Rules of the Assembly adding to the NLT's functions to include (in addition to the longstanding function of Administrative Oversight) the

development, evaluation and implementation of Mission, Vision and Strategy (Rules for Assembly 10-1.A.3.a).

In that same assembly, the new Stated Clerk Search Committee was established. With the approval of the NLT, the Search Committee changed the job description of the Stated Clerk to overtly include helping the denomination accomplish its mission through the development, evaluation and implementation of the four Gospel Priorities. And so, before Dean Weaver was hired, denominational leadership desired more *explicit* 'missional leadership' in the job description in order to accomplish the very thing the General Assembly stated it wanted to do in its mission statement. We believe Dean is effectively organizing the GA staff to accomplish this Mission Statement and that we have made notable progress toward achieving our mission in the last three years.

A key part of the Stated Clerk's position description includes the responsibility: *Assist in the accomplishment of the mission of the EPC through:*

*i. The National Leadership Team, working in conjunction with the Moderator, the Chairman of the National Leadership Team and the Moderator-elect, and assist them as needed. This includes the oversight of effective biblical leadership and global movement and supervision of the church planting and church revitalization strategic initiatives...*

That said, the resources coming out of the General Assembly are just that: resources. They are meant to equip presbyteries and local churches for our mission, and each respective court may choose or not to avail themselves of those opportunities. Since presbyteries and local churches can choose *not* to avail themselves of the missional help the GA staff provides, we do not believe that this is 'top-down.' We just want you to hear our heart: we desire to serve presbyteries and local churches, which are the focal points of a missional church.

Even still, allow us to name the powers that the General Assembly *does* have. The Assembly approves each fiscal year's budget that sets the parameters for the GA budget, which includes staffing. If the General Assembly would like to see the GA office spend more or less, it has the purview to do that through standing committees and the GA floor. If the General Assembly would like to change the Gospel Priorities, it has the purview to do that too.

We recognize that the 'heavy lifting' done by our lower courts and permanent committees prior to GA may seem like 'decisions are already made' before getting to the floor of the GA. But our polity actually requires all recommendations (except those from Ad-Interim Committees) to come to the floor through the GA's Standing Committees. The Standing Committee is often where changes to original recommendations are made and consolidation recommendations are formed when there are multiple recommendations or overtures on the same subject, as happened this year. It is also our polity that the Assembly itself can and often does change, table, postpone, adopt, or not adopt the recommendations of those committees.

Now, we'd be remiss as the NLT if we did not say that we are very enthusiastic about our four Gospel Priorities and the progress we are making in church health, church planting, effective biblical leadership, and global witness through Stated Clerk Weaver's leadership. In responding to the '*top-down*' charge, we are simply trying to be clear that power is being used appropriately, and that power remains in the collective body of elders in each respective court.

**Is the EPC - or EPC leadership - getting more liberal on issues of sexuality?**

No. No one on the NLT or GA Staff wants to alter any substance in either our position paper on Human Sexuality or our pastoral letter on Human Sexuality.

In June, 44th General Assembly delegates through the Standing Committee on Ministerial Vocation voted 83-1 to form a new Ad-Interim Committee, created by a consolidated motion (44-43), and this recommendation passed with an overwhelming vote of the Assembly floor. This committee is seeking an answer to a question *unaddressed* by the position paper on Human Sexuality or the pastoral letter on Human Sexuality: does same-sex attraction in a candidate for ministry (or transfer Teaching Elder) constitute an unordainable offense, even if the candidate is celibate and desires to follow Jesus with his or her behavior? The theological issue at hand, among many potential issues, is this question: what is the difference between desire, original sin, temptation, and when desire succumbs to outright sin? The overture also stated that it was the wish of the Assembly that "no presbytery shall take action on petitions or matters before them that might touch on these areas of inquiry and exploration until the final report is received and acted upon by the 46th General Assembly." Given the



creation of the Ad-Interim Committee, the theology here is therefore not up to the NLT to adjudicate or recommend, and so we do not desire to prejudice the outcome of that committee.

Rather, at the 46th General Assembly in 2026, this Ad-Interim Committee will report its findings and make a recommendation. It will be up to the General Assembly to debate that recommendation, and approve, disapprove, or alter it as the Assembly sees fit.

We would simply repeat there is no hidden liberal agenda. No one on the NLT or our GA staff thinks that same-sex behavior is biblically permissible, nor is it permissible for an EPC pastor to perform a same-sex wedding. Our denomination has already spoken on those matters, and we are in full agreement with those views.

**Was the financial reporting this year at GA different from past years, and if so, why?**

Our reporting this year was almost the same as it has been for at least the last eight years, with one exception. We normally report actual expenditures made by the EPC that were funded from the budget as of a certain date in the current fiscal year, annualized numbers for the current fiscal year, and the current fiscal year budget (July-June), in addition to the requested budget for the coming year. We showed the FY24 budget along with the FY25 budget this year. We didn't show the actual and annualized numbers this year, though we hasten to add that we ended the fiscal year in a very strong and positive position, so there would be no need to "hide" anything. We left out "annualized" and "actualized" columns this year because the Finance Committee of the NLT has received numerous questions in years past, and they thought leaving those out would simplify things and be less confusing. It is our plan to put them back in the budget next year as some commissioners expressed concerns over their absence. We've heard you!

Every year we also provide the complete audited financial statements at the GA, which combine the financial reports, regardless of whether it's budget, designated, or restricted, for the EPC, WO and BRI in total. These audited financial statements are also submitted to the ECFA (Evangelical Council for

Financial Accountability). We continue to receive excellent reports in our annual audits, and this past year we received high marks from the ECFA as well.

The budget report and the audited financial statements are not the same. This can be confusing to some. However, the GA and the ECFA did receive the same complete audited financial statements. This occurred at the 2024 GA as it always does.

Something that could seem to be a 'deficit' but is not would be the use of designated and restricted funds (not included in the budget). Designated funds are funds set aside out of the unrestricted reserve to serve a strategic purpose. Designated funds are technically still considered unrestricted. Restricted funds are funds holding donor-restricted contributions. The contributions held in these funds **must** be used for the purpose for which they were donated.

The EPC and World Outreach combined have more than 230 restricted funds which carry balances totaling more than \$4.7 million. These balances constantly increase and decrease, but the money is **always** used specifically for the purpose for which the donations were given. In FY23 for instance, \$119,000 more was spent than what was contributed to those restricted funds. Much of this "deficit" was the higher-than-normal use of our Medical Benevolence Fund which provides supplemental care for our pastors and their families. Other notable use of designated or restricted funds from this past year include:

Benefit Resources, Inc. = \$90,000

World Outreach Family Gathering = \$262,000 \* *The WO conference fund is used to save money for global workers to be able to attend the Family Gathering. The money is saved over a period of years. In the year in which the Gathering occurs, the conference fund is depleted as costs are incurred.*

Church Health operations = \$242,000

Church Planting operations = \$90,000

### **What about the Lilly Grant? Doesn't that make us subject to liberal influences?**

No. We did get a \$888,000 grant from the Lilly Foundation for the purposes of church health and revitalization. All the money from that grant was given up front in one lump sum. That money is being used specifically to fund evangelism training, transitional pastor training and our presbytery Church Health Coordinators.

The reporting structure for these funds is as follows: all funds are requested and restricted by the terms of the grant application. The Lilly Foundation does not place any restrictions on how we utilize the funds beyond what we proposed in the application. That is, there are absolutely no strings attached. The entire amount of the grant was given to us at the onset of the program and is managed by the EPC's Church Health Team under the supervision of our CFO Pat Coelho and the National Leadership Team.

Yes, we recognize that Lilly also does fund progressive causes with which the EPC would *significantly* disagree. That said, if we can be awarded a grant that *doesn't* infringe on our rights as an evangelical denomination to pursue our mission and uphold our theology, we will gladly apply for and accept the grant. On the other hand, if such money would infringe on our evangelical theology and mission, we would not apply for such a grant. In this case, Lilly does not infringe on our theology or mission. In fact, the early success of our efforts in evangelism, transitional pastor training and church health have been a powerful witness for Christ at the Lilly Foundation reporting cohorts.

### **What happened with the Permanent Judicial Commission's findings regarding Overture 44-37 from New River Presbytery? Did the Presbytery overture get a 'fair shake'?**

We acknowledge the confusion and hurt on this issue. It is our desire to sort through the related relational matters with New River Presbytery leadership, and we have invited their Presbytery Council to our NLT meeting in January to hear their issues.

As to the brief facts of what happened, the PJC, populated by the leading experts in our constitution and polity, followed proper process. We have received

criticism that neither a rationale nor a recommendation was provided by the PJC, but pg. 119 of the Commissioner's handbook demonstrates otherwise. The PJC first recommended that 44-37 be referred to the Permanent Committees on Theology and Ministerial Vocation for study, and rationale was provided. After being asked by the Assembly to reconsider its recommendation, the PJC recommended not approving the overture (under the same rationale). It is not uncommon for an overture to not make it to the floor of the GA when there are multiple recommendations related to the same matter. Rather than deal with all five overtures or recommendations individually on the floor (that were related to the subject matter of 44-37), the Standing Committee recommended a consolidated recommendation (44-43) with the support of all five presbyteries that sent recommendations or overtures on this matter, sponsored by Mid-America Presbytery and New River Presbytery. When a substitute motion was made on the floor to attempt to replace the Consolidated Recommendation (44-43) it was ruled out of order because it was moved after the Consolidated Recommendation had already been approved, and the attempted substitute motion was not related to the subsequent matter it was attempting to replace. If the substitute motion had been made prior to the vote on the Consolidated Recommendation or had a minority report recommending the New River Overture come to the floor through the Standing Committee, the Assembly could have had a debate on Overture 44-37.

### **What were the circumstances surrounding Stated Clerk Dean Weaver's re-election?**

Every third year, senior staff in the GA Office receive a thorough 360-degree performance review and evaluation, and in the prior fiscal year (2023-2024) Stated Clerk Dean Weaver underwent this rigorous process. His evaluation was led by the NLT's Executive Team and Chair of Personnel Committee, which solicited feedback from GA staff, the NLT, and leaders from across the denomination. His review also compared his role to other similar roles in peer institutions. That review surfaced *no character issues* along with significant praise for Stated Clerk Weaver's leadership. TE Weaver was evaluated in comparison to his position description to help the EPC carry out its mission through our Gospel Priorities, among other duties. As such, he was unanimously and enthusiastically recommended for a second term by the National Leadership Team, and the NLT made that recommendation to the Assembly.

Given the tensions in our denomination on many of the issues addressed above, there was a small but vocal minority opposed to Stated Clerk Weaver's re-election. It should be noted that this was despite Stated Clerk Weaver's multiple attempts to address those matters personally with some of those opponents before the General Assembly in June of 2024.

Since that opposition persisted even after those private meetings and phone calls, the NLT- composed of members from 12 different presbyteries- wanted to show its support for Dean by being on stage during the discussion of his re-election at the Assembly. We also hoped that if there were any questions, our presence on the stage would encourage commissioners, having identified us, to seek us out directly. We recognize that if you didn't know of the criticisms against Stated Clerk Weaver by some prior to the GA, that the NLT's support could have looked heavy-handed, and we apologize for any such confusion.

Once the floor discussion started, a commissioner rose to speak negatively of Stated Clerk Weaver, which included character attacks. According to Robert's Rules, character attacks are not allowed in floor discussion, and a GA commissioner pointed out that fact with a point of order, and the Moderator ruled the point of order sustained. The only allowable form of opposition in that circumstance, according to Robert's Rules, is to speak in favor of another candidate. No other candidate was put forward, and eventually the Assembly voted. When the vote was taken, Stated Clerk Weaver was re-elected with an overwhelming majority of the 900 commissioners present.

Finally, some have questioned why the vote to elect the Stated Clerk occurred on Tuesday instead of at the end of the Assembly as we have in the past, and this has a simple answer. Our Rules for Assembly 5-1 states, "*The date and time of the election of the Stated Clerk shall be determined by the Moderator.*" In a now compressed three-day General Assembly, and with some heavy business to be conducted during the final business session, the Moderator determined that the first business session, following the election of the Moderator and Moderator-Elect had more time available for the consideration of this important matter. Similarly, in years past, we used to elect the Moderator-elect during the last business session of the Assembly. We have changed that to the first session to accommodate the flow of the GA's business.

On a final note, we'd like to acknowledge that we were not as prepared as we could have been regarding some GA matters. Some of the opposition caught us off guard, thus my (Victor's) tone could have been more respectful at times. I apologize for that. To prepare for the next General Assembly, we are re-doubling our study of Robert's Rules and are committed to preserving the neutrality and EPC ethos befitting of a Moderator.

### **Summary**

Friends and colleagues, we know there are many important matters facing the EPC, and that people with sound conviction will not always agree. The place for such disagreements is in the courts of the church, as Sessions overture Presbyteries, and Presbyteries overture the General Assembly. The place for such disagreements is not online where polarization accelerates and false innuendo reigns. Thus, should you see any online dissent that shares wildly differing accounts to the answers above, you should be skeptical of the intent of the authors. *Let us take our disagreement to our courts* and, as we disagree in such courts, let us do so in *love* as well as with *accuracy*. Disagreement is allowed - with the right spirit in the right context, we welcome it.

The reason we wrote this FAQ was to refine *what we disagree about*. As such, we may agree more than we think, and our knee-jerk reactions may be unhelpful. That said, if we still disagree, let us not disagree with straw men, lies, or even half-truths. Let us agree or disagree about the truth and subject every matter to Christ who reigns in all things.

With Love and Consideration,

Chair of the National Leadership Team, TE Joe Kim  
Moderator, RE Victor Jones  
Moderator-Elect, TE Dave Strunk