



**VOLUME 1
ISSUE 2**

**THE PRESBYTERIAN
PLUMB LINE**

The Presbyterian Plumb Line is an online journal published four times a year and designed to biblically inform the Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church about issues that impact our ability to govern under Christ’s authority and faithfully shepherd the flock.

We strive to provide content that is accessible, firmly rooted in God’s Word, spiritually guided, and committed to the highest standards of truth. Through viewpoint and observation, news items, sermons, book reviews, and other material, we seek to lead our denomination toward a more biblical expression of our Presbyterian conviction: that biblically informed elders, seeking the mind of Christ in the courts of the Church, is the most faithful way to align with God’s plumb line. The editors welcome all inquiries to info@presbyterianplumbline.org.

**Volume 1, Issue 2
Contents**

VIEWS

Note from Plumb Line Editors.....	2
Fatal Attraction: Lot’s Wife and Side B Christianity (Peter Larson)	3
The Case Against Niceness (David Weber)	7
Preserving the Session’s Role in the EPC Church Health Process (Paul Bammel).....	11
Taking Care of Business (Jeremy McNeill).....	16
A Moderator’s Meanderings (Gordon Miller)	20

NEWS

Presbytery Shares Complaints with National Leadership Team.....	25
EPC Teaching, Ruling Elders Meet to Discuss Differences in EPC Direction.....	26
Georgia Church Joins EPC	27
Ohio Church Votes to Leave EPC.....	28
Pennsylvania Church Withdraws from the EPC	30

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

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Note from the Plumb Line Editors

Since launching our first issue in November, the Plumb Line has attracted more than 6,000 visitors and nearly 16,000 views from all over the world. We are grateful to all of you who took time to check us out. Our desire is to build up the church by better informing our elders with news and commentary about issues in the EPC. We trust the articles in this issue will be thought-provoking and encourage us all to think biblically and faithfully about current topics. Your comments and critique are welcome and appreciated. Send your thoughts and suggestions to us at info@presbyterianplumbline.org

Fatal Attraction: Lot's Wife and Side B Christianity

*By Peter Larson
TE, Midwest Presbytery*

“Remember Lot’s wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.” (Luke 17:32-33)

One of the most sobering stories in the Bible is the judgment of Lot’s wife. While fleeing from Sodom, she looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt:

“Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But Lot’s wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.” (Genesis 19:24-26)

To modern readers, this seems extremely harsh. Did Lot’s wife deserve such a terrible punishment? Was her sin really so bad? As Lot’s wife, you would think she would enjoy some kind of immunity. And yet, she looked back and perished. Just one look, that’s all it took.

Why did she look back? Probably, she had friends in Sodom. Probably, her identity was rooted in that place. Probably, she was feeling homesick. Although it seems quite innocent, that backward glance revealed a desire to return to Sodom. As a result, she suffered God’s fearful judgement. It was a fatal attraction.

Was she punished too severely? John Calvin, in his commentary on Genesis, ponders that question. Calvin writes:

“Now, if we can weigh all the circumstances, it is clear that her fault was not light. First, the desire of looking back proceeded from disbelief; and no greater injury can be done to God, than when credit is denied to his word. Secondly, we infer from the words of Christ, that she was moved by some evil desire; (Luke 17:32) and that she did not cheerfully leave Sodom, to hasten to the place where God had called her; for we know that he (Christ) commands us to remember Lot’s wife, lest, indeed, the allurements of the world should draw us aside from the meditation of the heavenly life. It is therefore probable that she, being discontented with the favor God had granted her, glided into unholy desires, of which thing also her tardiness was a sign...

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

If the severity of the punishment terrifies us; let us remember, that they sin, at this day, not less grievously, who, being delivered, not from Sodom but from hell, fix their eyes on some other object than the proposed prize of their high calling.”¹

God looks at the heart. It isn't just outward obedience the Lord desires but a pure and contrite heart. Scripture makes this abundantly clear. Jesus described the Pharisees as whitewashed tombs — clean on the outside but filthy on the inside, full of death and decay (Matthew 23:27). Where the Pharisees prided themselves on outward piety, Jesus saw only inner filth and hypocrisy:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.” (Matthew 23:25).

In other words, holiness does not consist of outward actions alone, a message Jesus hammered home in the Sermon on the Mount. Sin begins in the human heart, with our wrong and unholy desires.

The sin of Lot's wife was not trivial. It was, in fact, a stubborn refusal of God's grace. In his boundless mercy, God offered her salvation — a way out of Sodom. More than that, God sent an angel from heaven to warn and bring her to safety. And yet, she ultimately rejected God's grace. In a strange way, the punishment fit the crime. Refusing the gift of salvation, she became stuck and frozen forever between Sodom and salvation. In the words of C.S. Lewis, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’” In the end, Lot's wife got her way.

What does this story teach us? Currently, the EPC is studying whether we should allow homosexual pastors into our denomination. Although they claim to be celibate, they identify as homosexual. In addition, they claim that same-sex attraction is a biological fact — something that cannot be changed, cured, or healed. In other words, there is nothing wrong with identifying as homosexual as long as you abstain from same-sex relationships. This position is known as “Side B Christianity” (the term first came into use about 20 years ago). By contrast, so-called “Side A” Christians affirm same-sex marriages and believe that homosexuality is just one of many forms of sexuality that the church should welcome and celebrate.

Not surprisingly, this issue has caused conflict in the EPC. For some, it is an issue of grace. All of us have sinned, they argue. All of us struggle with lust and temptation, they claim. If that is true, why should we focus on one category of sin? To exclude homosexual pastors and deny them ordination would be ungracious and unloving, they argue.

And yet, this argument is utterly unbiblical. All of us are sinners, it is true. But the Bible tells us we must repent of our sin, turn to Christ, and receive the new life he offers. If we refuse to repent and renounce our sinful life, we are refusing the gracious gift of salvation. If Christian baptism

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

has any meaning at all, it means that we have died to the old life and begun a new one. Regeneration does not consist of outward actions but a changed heart. If our hearts are unchanged and we seek to justify our sin, it is doubtful that we have received the saving grace of God.

To claim that we are Christian but identify as homosexual is a contradiction. It is simply impossible to have one foot in Sodom and the other foot in the Kingdom of God. Between salvation and Sodom there is no middle ground, no safe place to dwell. The Bible tells us to flee from temptation, not flirt with it. To find my identity in Sodom is a fatal attraction and it leads not to life but to judgement. God offers us a way of salvation and we dare not linger or look back.

The problem with Side B Christianity is that it seeks to normalize homosexuality. Proponents of Side B would have us believe that homosexuality is no different from heterosexual sin. They claim that same-sex attraction in itself is not wrong or immoral. However, the Bible tells us that homosexuality is not normal or natural. In truth, it is a complete rejection of God's design in creation. God created us male and female and to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:27-28). In other words, our sexuality is not something we choose for ourselves: it is God-given and binary. As human beings, we are wired to desire the opposite sex. To be sexually attracted to the same sex is unnatural and a departure from God's design.

In the Book of Romans, the Apostle Paul singles out homosexuality as the worst and final stage of human depravity. When we deny the truth, when we exchange God's truth for a lie, when we worship the creature instead of the creator then, Paul says, the result is same-sex attraction.

Men will desire men and women will desire women (Romans 1:18-27). Homosexuality is not just another sin; it is the lowest form of human depravity. To identify as homosexual or celebrate this identity is, in fact, the supreme act of rebellion against God and His created order.

For thousands of years, Christians regarded homosexuality as something shameful. It was considered a crime and a perversion. In recent decades, there has been a movement to normalize homosexuality as being compatible with the Christian faith. Instead of revulsion, many Christians now celebrate "gay pride" and fly the rainbow flag. Instead of speaking about unnatural lust and sodomy, we have created the euphemism of "same-sex attraction." All of this is done in the name of tolerance, hospitality, and grace. However, it is a cheap grace that does not call sinners to repentance but instead affirms them in their sin.

Rosaria Butterfield was a professor at Syracuse University and an outspoken leader in the gay and lesbian community. Then, she encountered Jesus Christ and everything changed. Butterfield says she gave up everything — her job, her community, and her lesbian partner — to gain Christ. It was nothing short of death: dying to her old self and identity. Today, she is married to a Presbyterian pastor and a powerful witness to the transforming power of the gospel. By contrast, Side B Christianity requires no death. Instead, it clings to the old sinful nature and identity.

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

According to Butterfield, Side B Christianity is a corrosive influence that undermines the church. She warns:

*“Side B teaches against homosexual practice, but only for the sake of Christian tradition. While Side B seeks to uphold sexual standards, because it sees sexual orientation as an accurate category of personhood ... their theology in no way allows for an understanding of why homosexuality, even at the level of desire, is sinful and needing the grace of repentance. To the Side B Christian, homosexuality is a sexuality — one of many. Over the years, we have seen many Side B Christians defect for Side A, declaring that God sanctions gay unions. And I predict that we will see many more defectors, since the theology behind Side B is biblically untenable. How can any of us fight a sin that we don’t hate? Hating our own sin is a key component to doing battle with it.”*²

There is power in Jesus Christ to transform fallen sinners. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Of course, Satan tells us that we cannot change, that we are trapped in our sinful nature and that holiness of life is just an illusion. And yet, Jesus calls us to a new and different life, transformed from the inside out by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. When God calls us out of darkness and into his glorious light, we must not hesitate or refuse.

This truth is made abundantly clear in the Gospels. When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, at first Simon Peter refused. “*You shall never wash my feet.*” To which Jesus replied, “*If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.*” (John 13:8). In other words, sanctification isn’t optional; it is essential. If we refuse to allow Jesus to wash and cleanse us of sin, we exclude ourselves from the Kingdom of God.

To ordain self-identifying homosexuals to serve as teaching and ruling elders is not spiritually wise, biblical, or consistent with the gospel. The fact that we are even studying this issue reveals how far we have drifted from a biblical understanding of human sexuality. Yes, the church has an obligation to love and care for sinners — including homosexuals. However, in the name of caring we must not ordain those who refuse to repent and who justify their sinful desires as normal and consistent with the Christian life. As we consider this issue, we would do well to remember the words of our Savior: “*Remember Lot’s wife! Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.*”

¹ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Volume 1, pages 514-15. Calvin Translation Society, reprint (Edinburgh, Scotland: Baker Book Company, 1989), 514-15.

² Rosaria Butterfield, “What is Wrong with gay Christianity? What is Side B and Side A anyway?” From website, www.rosariabutterfield.com.

The Case Against Niceness

*By David Weber
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In the lead-up to the 44th General Assembly, we all knew that some contentious issues were on the table. The buzz around the New River Presbytery's overture, in particular, was palpable. Yet instead of embracing the opportunity for rigorous debate — with the aim of protecting and defending the faith and arriving at a more faithful manifestation of biblical orthodoxy — there were open calls to be nice. People seemed more concerned about feelings and appearances than about aligning our denomination with biblical truth.

One online comment summarized this niceness approach well: “What matters more than *what* we decide is *how* we decide.” Translation: what the EPC decides about the ordination of self-identifying homosexuals is not really important. The most important thing is that no one raises their voice, questions authority, rocks the boat, or makes others feel bad. I have even heard this weak-kneed approach to governance defended with our church motto: “In Essentials Unity, In Non-essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity.”

The assumption seems to be that if an issue is not deemed an “Essential,” then it is not worth debating. And if we do muster the courage of conviction or express any anger in our articulation, then surely, we are not showing charity in all things. Yet this aversion to conflict does not appear to be a biblical virtue. Over and over, we see in Scripture that for truth to be defended and the gospel advanced, men of God had to put aside niceness and boldly proclaim the truth. It is my conviction that if the EPC is to survive as an orthodox expression of the visible church and not fall into the ever-growing population of heretical denominations, our Teaching and Ruling Elders must be willing to rigorously debate, argue, and contend for the faith once delivered (Jude 1:3).

The Biblical Case Against Niceness

As a child of the '80s and '90s, I was no stranger to the beta-male stereotype portrayed across media. Sitcoms fed young men a steady diet of husbands who kowtowed to their wives and children, were incompetent at work and home, and were essentially good-natured buffoons. They were knuckleheads who never took anything seriously. But they were nice. Niceness seemed the way to go in this world. Nice people don't make others uncomfortable. Nice people don't rock the boat. Nice people don't get into conflict. So, be nice and avoid conflict.

However, when I began to study the Bible seriously, I saw that niceness was never extolled as a virtue, nor was conflict condemned or avoided. Actually, the opposite was true. Those unwilling to engage in conflict or execute difficult commands were seen as weak and fearful, such as the ten spies in Numbers 13 who, out of fear, discouraged the Israelites from entering the Promised

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

Land (Numbers 13:31-33). Or Saul, who failed to fully obey God's command to destroy the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:9). Meanwhile, those who fought on God's behalf were commended for their faith, such as Moses confronting Pharaoh (Exodus 5:1), Elijah challenging the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:21-40), and Stephen boldly proclaiming the gospel before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:51-60). The heroes of our faith were not feckless buffoons but serious men of competence and conviction. Let's consider three examples of men who upheld the truth of God in the face of conflict.

Nathan Confronts David

First, we have the prophet Nathan, who courageously confronted King David. As you remember, David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and orchestrated Uriah's murder (2 Samuel 11). In the ancient Near East, the king's authority was virtually unquestionable. To accuse a king of such grievous sin could have been met with severe consequences. Nevertheless, Nathan confronted David with his sin, declaring, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7).

Nathan's confrontation illustrates one of the purposes of such boldness: to bring about repentance and restoration. David's heartfelt response, captured in Psalm 51, reveals the depth of his contrition: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions" (Psalm 51:1). Nathan's willingness to risk conflict brought about God's restorative work in David's life. This example underscores that confronting sin, though uncomfortable, is often the means God uses to bring His people back into fellowship with Him.

Paul Opposes Peter

The Apostle Paul was also no stranger to conflict. He was continually willing to contend for what was right and even used biting language when necessary (2 Corinthians 11:19-20; Galatians 5:12; Philippians 3:2; Titus 1:12-13). One episode from Paul's ministry is particularly striking. In Galatians 2, Paul recounts an occasion where he confronted Peter. Out of fear, Peter had separated himself from Gentile believers when men from the circumcision party were present. Paul saw this as undermining the gospel and boldly opposed Peter:

"But when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned" (Galatians 2:11).

It would have been easier to show deference to Peter, who was Jesus' closest earthly friend and a leader in the early church. But Paul recognized that niceness and deference to authority must not obstruct the truth. Confronting error, even in those we respect, is an act of love — for it is not loving to allow falsehood to thrive and error to spread (Ephesians 4:15). Some argue that conflict will bring division to the Church. This example shows that the opposite is true. By confronting

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

Peter, Paul preserved the unity of the Church by ensuring the gospel message remained undistorted. This kind of biblical conflict not only protects the integrity of doctrine but also strengthens the bonds of fellowship among believers who are united in truth (Ephesians 4:3-6). True biblical conflict combats division.

Jesus and the Pharisees

Our third example comes from Christ Himself. In Matthew 15, after Jesus taught on what truly defiles a person, His disciples asked Him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” (Matthew 15:12). Of course, Jesus knew exactly what He was doing. He was not afraid of confrontation. He flipped tables to defend the holiness of God’s temple (Mark 11:15-17), called the Pharisees hypocrites and whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23:27), and even declared them the offspring of Satan (John 8:44).

Jesus’ love was not about avoiding conflict but about embracing it when necessary. He triumphed over the authorities of this world, putting them to open shame through His work on the cross (Colossians 2:15). But His conflict with sin, Satan, and death was not merely for the sake of victory; it was rooted in the deepest love as He gave His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). This sacrificial love is the ultimate demonstration of God’s love for us: “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). To hide from conflict in an attempt to be nice is not Christ-like; it is weakness. True love fights for the truth, not with hatred, but with sacrifice.

Conclusion: Truth in Love

What kind of church would we have if men of conviction, truth, and love were unwilling to engage in conflict? Church history provides the answer. If Athanasius had not stood against Arius, we would be Arians, not Trinitarians. If Augustine had ignored Pelagius, we would embrace works righteousness. Without Luther’s stand against the Pope, Calvin’s opposition to Francis I, or Knox’s boldness against Mary, Queen of Scots, the Reformation would never have shone the light of the gospel into the darkness. Similarly, if men like Andrew Jumper, Bart Hess, and George Carey had not engaged in debate and conflict, the EPC would not exist today.

So, what kind of church will we have if we prioritize being nice over standing for truth? In the short run, we will have a church that ordains self-identifying homosexuals, evaluates ministry success based on skin color, slides toward greater centralization of power, and administers the Lord’s Supper to those living in open rebellion against Christ’s command to repent and be baptized. In the long run, we will not have a church at all, forfeiting what our forefathers in the faith fought so hard to preserve.

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

The motto of our church cannot be used to stifle debate or conflict. Instead, it should rally us to robust, spirited debate that leads to truth. The often-forgotten conclusion of our motto is this: “In Essentials Unity, In Non-essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity; *Truth in Love*.” Without truth in love, the rest crumbles. We need truth to define the essentials, truth to discern the non-essentials, and truth to act in charity.

There is no purpose for needless conflict; to disrupt the peace of the church unnecessarily is sin (Romans 14:19). But love seeks the good of others and seeking that good often requires courage and sacrifice. So, Christian, don’t settle for niceness. For the sake of the church and the glory of God, boldly speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Preserving the Session's Role in the EPC Church Health Process

*By Paul Bammel
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Church health and vitality are essential to a congregation's witness to the gospel. Recognizing this, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) developed the Church Health Process¹ to strengthen congregations for faithful and effective ministry. This initiative reflects a sincere desire to promote leadership renewal and strategic clarity.

However, a key flaw in the process threatens to undermine biblical church governance: the delegation of spiritual discernment to Vision and Prayer Teams. While intended to foster broad participation, this model shifts spiritual authority from the Session to ad hoc committees, weakening the elders' biblical role as shepherds of the church. Scripture and the Westminster Confession of Faith make clear that Teaching and Ruling Elders are entrusted with overseeing doctrine, guarding the flock, and discerning the mind of Christ for the congregation. Delegating this task to separate teams risks diminishing both the biblical and confessional authority of the Session.

This article argues that the responsibility for discerning God's vision must remain with the ordained elders, who have been called, trained, and set apart to lead the church in faithfulness to Christ. Outside resources and congregational engagement can support this process, but they must not replace the Session's role as the church's spiritual overseers. A truly healthy church is one where elders, not separate committees, lead the process of discerning God's vision — as Scripture and the Westminster Confession prescribe.

Biblical and Confessional Foundations for Elder-Led Leadership

A. Biblical Foundations

The Session holds a biblically mandated role as the spiritual overseers of the church. Its responsibility includes shepherding the congregation, safeguarding doctrine, and discerning the mind of Christ for the church's life and ministry.

Scripture consistently affirms the role of elders as those entrusted with spiritual oversight. In Acts 20:28, Paul exhorts the elders in Ephesus, saying, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God."

Similarly, 1 Peter 5:1-3 urges elders to shepherd God's flock not as passive facilitators but as accountable leaders, guiding the church with humility and wisdom. Hebrews 13:17 reinforces

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

this responsibility, saying, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.”

These passages make it clear that spiritual discernment is not a function to be delegated; it is a sacred charge given to elders. Vision-setting is not merely an administrative exercise — it is a theological responsibility tied to sound doctrine, wisdom, and accountability before God (Titus 1:7-9, James 3:1). If the task of discerning direction is removed from the Session’s oversight, the church risks making decisions driven by pragmatism rather than by biblical fidelity. The EPC must ensure that its discernment process remains under the leadership of those called and ordained to shepherd the flock.

B. Confessional Foundations

The Westminster Confession of Faith² (WCF) further affirms that church governance has been divinely established and entrusted to elders: “The Lord Jesus has directed the establishment of church government, separate from civil authority, which is to be administered by officers of the church” (WCF 30.1). And, “To these officers are committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (WCF 30.2).

In addition, Chapter 31 of the Confession describes the authority of ecclesiastical assemblies, which includes Sessions, to determine matters of doctrine, worship, and church government:

“As far as the ministry is concerned, it is the responsibility of synods and councils to settle controversies of faith and cases relating to matters of conscience, to set down rules and directions for the better administration of the public worship of God and of church government, and to hear complaints in cases of maladministration and authoritatively to settle them. If these decisions conform to the word of God, they are to be accepted reverently and submissively, not only because they agree with the word but also because they rest on authority ordained and arranged by God in his word” (WCF 31.2).

This statement underscores that spiritual oversight belongs to elders gathered in ecclesiastical assemblies, not to committees without ordained authority. Delegating vision-setting to Vision and Prayer Teams introduces a significant risk: it detaches spiritual discernment from those who are theologically trained, ordained, and held accountable for their leadership. Elders are not merely decision-makers; they are shepherds charged with guarding the flock from doctrinal drift (Titus 1:9). If vision-setting becomes disconnected from theological oversight, the church risks prioritizing strategy over Scriptural fidelity.

Preserving Biblical Church Governance and Presbyterian Identity

The EPC must reaffirm that spiritual discernment is not a democratic process but a shepherding responsibility. Congregational engagement is useful, but final authority must remain with the elders, who are uniquely called to this task. Encouraging congregational participation in ministry is both biblical and beneficial, but participation should never be confused with spiritual authority. Rather than delegating the work of vision-setting, the Church Health Process should reinforce the biblical role of the Session. Sessions should be equipped to lead in prayer, biblical discernment, and theological reflection — not bypassed in favor of committees that may lack the same grounding in Scripture and confessional standards. By preserving the elder-led model of governance, the EPC will ensure that churches are not only organizationally effective, but more importantly, spiritually faithful to Christ’s design for His church.

When spiritual discernment is diffused across multiple committees, it creates ambiguity about ultimate authority in decision-making. Who is responsible for setting the church’s direction? If Vision Teams, Prayer Teams, and Implementation Teams all share in this process, the Session’s role as the church’s governing body is weakened. The result is often a fragmented leadership structure where no one bears clear accountability. In contrast, Scripture presents a model of unified, elder-led leadership. The New Testament shows believers exercising their gifts within the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:4-7), but final authority for doctrine, discipline, and direction remains with the elders. The church’s vision must remain under the shepherding care of those who have been called, trained, and ordained to lead in faithfulness to Christ. The EPC must be careful to preserve this biblical model rather than unintentionally undermining it.

A truly Presbyterian church is one where leadership is not delegated to ad hoc committees, but one where the Session leads through prayerful, theological reflection and biblical discernment. If the EPC adopts governance models that functionally resemble congregationalism or corporate decision-making, it risks losing the distinct biblical and confessional principles that define its polity. To maintain its theological integrity, the EPC must ensure that:

1. The Session remains the primary body for spiritual discernment, rather than delegating this task to Vision or Prayer Teams.
2. Outside consultants and resources serve as advisors, not leaders, equipping the Session rather than replacing its role.
3. Congregational participation is encouraged but does not override the elder-led model established in Scripture.

By reaffirming these principles, the EPC can strengthen its churches without compromising its biblical and confessional commitment to elder-led governance.

The Church Health Process Should Support Elder-Led Governance

For any church health initiative to be truly effective, it must begin with prayer — not just as a general practice but as a foundational discipline led by the elders of the church. The entire congregation should be encouraged to engage in seasons of fasting and intercession, but the responsibility for spiritual discernment belongs to the Session. The role of prayer in leadership is not passive; it is an essential means by which elders seek God’s direction for His church. The EPC’s Church Health Process currently assigns a Vision Team the responsibility for discerning the church’s life and ministry vision. However, this task properly belongs to the Session. The elders are the biblical and confessional Vision Team, entrusted with shepherding the church and discerning the mind of Christ for its future. While outside coaches and resources can assist in this process, they must function as advisors — not as replacements for elder-led discernment.

To align the Church Health Process with Presbyterian polity, a clear distinction must be made between discernment and implementation:

1. The Session must lead the discernment process. The elders, having been called and ordained to shepherd the church, should be the ones to pray, seek Scripture, and determine the church’s vision.
2. Outside resources should serve as tools, not leaders. A consultant or church health coach can help facilitate discussions and offer insights, but the final responsibility for discernment must remain with the Session.
3. Implementation teams may assist in executing the vision. After the Session has prayerfully determined the church’s direction, a separate Implementation Team can help carry out specific initiatives. However, care must be taken to ensure that it is the Session’s discerned vision being implemented — not an independently developed plan.

By preserving Session-led discernment while allowing for structured implementation, the EPC can strengthen church health without compromising the biblical role of elders. This approach ensures that church governance remains both theologically sound and practically effective.

A Call to Preserve Biblical Governance

Denominational leaders should carefully evaluate the unintended consequences of the current Church Health Process. Adjustments may be necessary to ensure that these initiatives support rather than supplant the biblical role of the Session. Local churches must remain vigilant in upholding the centrality of the Session in discerning the mind of Christ for the congregation. This requires ongoing prayer, theological training, and a commitment to the principles of Presbyterian polity.

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

The EPC's Church Health Process represents a sincere effort to equip churches for faithful ministry in challenging times. However, the delegation of discernment to Vision and Prayer Teams risks undermining the biblical and confessional role of the Session. The EPC must reaffirm its commitment to Presbyterian polity by ensuring that Sessions retain their biblical and confessional role.

I urge denominational leaders to reconsider the structure of the Church Health Process, placing elder-led discernment at its center. Likewise, I encourage local Sessions to embrace their calling as shepherds who seek the mind of Christ for their congregations. Church health and vitality depend on faithfulness to the model God has given us. Let us trust that He will bless our obedience, ensuring that our churches remain both spiritually renewed and strategically aligned for ministry. May the EPC continue to prioritize the faithful shepherding of its elders in all matters of church life, ensuring that every congregation is both spiritually vibrant and theologically sound, as God intended.

¹ The Program Description for the EPC church health process is available at https://presbyterianplumbline.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EPC_ChurchHealthProcessLillyGrantProgramNarrative.pdf

² See <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/WCF-Online-Version.pdf>. The stated references are on page 58 of the PDF.

Taking Care of Business

*By Jeremy McNeill
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In the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), the General Assembly serves as a pivotal gathering for worship, fellowship, and governance. However, as keynote speakers and worship segments have expanded, less time has been available for important church business. Too often, the time allowed for debate and discussion seems rushed and inadequate. Many commissioners, who attend General Assembly primarily to address the business of the church, have expressed concern about this current structure.

This article proposes dividing the General Assembly into separate speaker and business days, alongside a system for prioritizing agenda items based on commissioner feedback. These changes aim to restore balance, enhance efficiency, and honor the EPC's commitment to representative governance.

The Purposes and Duties of the General Assembly

Before my proposal is stated explicitly, it is important to note the purposes and duties of the General Assembly. The reason these need to be noted is to have in mind the weight of responsibility for Assembly business sessions, and the importance of not having a time deficit in light with what our constitutional documents dictate to be our primary purposes as a General Assembly. The Book of Government¹ (BOG) enumerates our responsibilities as follows:

1. **Legislative Authority:** To make, amend, or repeal the Constitution of the EPC, subject to ratification by the Presbyteries (BOG 16-1).
2. **Review and Control:** To exercise review and control over the Presbyteries, ensuring that they comply with the Constitution and the actions of the General Assembly (BOG 16-3).
3. **Judicial Oversight:** To serve as the final court of appeal in judicial matters, with the Permanent Judicial Commission acting on its behalf when the Assembly is not in session (BOG 17-1).
4. **Doctrine and Worship:** Defining, preserving, and promoting the doctrinal standards of the church and ensuring that worship practices align with these standards (implied throughout the Book of Order, particularly in how it deals with ordinations and matters of faith).
5. **Mission and Ministry:** Overseeing the mission and ministry of the church, including the establishment of denominational programs, setting priorities for mission work, and approving the budget for such activities (BOG 16-1 and various Acts of Assembly).
6. **Election of Officers:** Electing a Moderator, members of the Standing Committees, and other officers or members of permanent committees and commissions (BOG 16-11).

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

7. **Ecumenical Relations:** To establish or modify relationships with other ecclesiastical bodies, which involves both denominational and interdenominational cooperation (BOG 16-1).
8. **Addresses and Statements:** Issue statements or addresses on matters of faith, doctrine, or church policy that it deems important for the guidance of the church.

Division of Business and Speakers

The General Assembly serves as the highest court of the EPC, focusing on “the mission and governance of the denomination” in alignment with Scripture, the Westminster Confession, and other constitutional documents. Its tasks include:

- Promoting the unity, purity, and peace of the church.
- Overseeing the church's mission, worship, and doctrine.
- Providing a forum for shared ministry and fellowship among presbyteries and churches.

The current structure combines worship, keynote sessions, and business meetings into a single schedule, often creating tension between priorities. To better serve all attendees, the EPC General Assembly could adopt the following format:

Dedicated Business Days

- Reserved exclusively for addressing reports, motions, and discussions.
- Includes extended time for significant topics requiring thorough debate.
- Allows ruling and teaching elders to engage in governance without conflicting programming.

Speaker and Worship Days

- Keynote addresses, workshops, and extended worship sessions are concentrated here.
- Provides spiritual enrichment and educational opportunities without impeding business deliberations.

This clear division ensures both aspects receive full attention without competition for time. As BOG 20-1 states, “The General Assembly, composed of all the courts and local churches of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, expresses the unity and relatedness of all the parts. It has the responsibility of overseeing *the total work of the Church*” (emphasis mine). Since our Book of Government expressly states that the purpose of the General Assembly is to do the *total work of the Church*, business days honor the responsibilities of commissioners, particularly ruling elders, to fulfill those duties. Separate speaker and worship days enrich and inspire the broader Church

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

community but allow a more full and robust participation in the work of the church without unnecessary limitations of time.

Implementing a Business Agenda Prioritization System

A recurring challenge in General Assembly meetings is the lack of time to address all items on the agenda comprehensively. To enhance efficiency, one option is to allow commissioners to have a voice in shaping the agenda through a pre-Assembly ranking system. This system would align with the Assembly's focus on shared governance and mission, as outlined in the Acts of Assembly and the Rules for Assembly (e.g., Section 9-8). The proposed ranking process would include:

1. **Pre-Assembly Survey:** A survey distributed to commissioners ahead of time, enabling them to rank agenda items by importance or urgency. Specifically, this would allow for important overtures to be moved to the beginning of the agenda and be given an appropriate allotment of time for debate.
2. **Weighted Prioritization:** The docket would be set based on the weight of response to items based on survey feedback, ensuring that high-priority items are given sufficient time.
3. **Structure of Debates:** As pressing issues are identified, agenda blocks would be adjusted to allow for meaningful deliberation. For the sake of a more cohesive, unified, and well-informed debate, those in favor and those opposed to a particular business item would be able to convene before the General Assembly to set forth a clear and biblical presentation for their stance for or against. Perhaps, before any debate, a spokesperson could be chosen from each perspective, and they would be given an extended period of time to speak on behalf of that position. Afterward, normal rules of debate as set forth in the Rules of Assembly would commence.

This proposal respects the constitutional emphasis on order, representation, and the connectional nature of the church (BOG-3.2), aligning with the broader vision outlined in the Book of Order. It also affirms the responsibility of commissioners to participate fully in the work of the Assembly, which is to govern the church in accordance with its Constitution, ensuring unity, purity of doctrine, proper church order, and the welfare of the denomination. This involves legislative, judicial, and administrative functions that maintain the EPC's integrity and mission.

Benefits of Prioritization

- *Commissioner Engagement:* Ensures that all voices — especially Ruling Elders — shape the agenda.
- *Efficient Governance:* Focuses time and resources on the most critical issues.
- *Flexibility:* Allows for real-time decision-making and adaptability.

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

Rationale for Change

- *Biblical and Theological Foundations*
The EPC's commitment to shared governance reflects the biblical principle of mutual submission within the body of Christ (Ephesians 5:21). By creating space for both business and spiritual enrichment, the Church demonstrates its dual commitment to practical stewardship and spiritual growth.
- *Stewardship of Time and Resources*
Many Ruling Elders sacrifice time, income, and personal resources to attend the General Assembly. A focused schedule acknowledges these sacrifices and ensures their efforts are utilized efficiently.
- *Precedents from Other Denominations*
Other Reformed denominations, such as the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), prioritize business during their assemblies, reserving worship and keynote sessions for separate or regional gatherings. These models highlight the feasibility of such a division.

Conclusion

By dividing the General Assembly into distinct business and speaker days and adopting a prioritization system for agenda items, the EPC can enhance its governance, honor the commitments of its commissioners, and remain faithful to its calling. These changes would reflect a commitment to both practical stewardship and the spiritual mission of the Church, ensuring that the Assembly continues to serve as a vital expression of the Church's unity and purpose.

The purpose of our General Assembly is not *equipping*, but the *total work of the Church*. There is no need to create a conference atmosphere for us to engage in the work that we made vows before the Lord to fulfill. We don't need to be afraid of firm, full, and passionate debate. Just because something may be non-essential doesn't mean it is unimportant. Above all, we should be a people desirous to discern the mind of Christ so that we might be conformed more and more to his image. Engaging in the hard work of debate and deliberation does not detract from an ethos of unity but rather enforces it.

¹ See <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/4-Resources/5-Downloadable-EPC-Resources/A-ConstitutionDoctrine/BookOfOrder2023-2024%20update.pdf>

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

A Moderator's Meanderings

*By Gordon Miller
Moderator, 34th General Assembly*

“Meanderings” definition: Rambling or passing from one topic to another.

I hope you find the following collection of articles, quotes, quips, and Scripture to be informative, edifying, and thought-provoking. This information is not as thorough or detailed as the other articles in the Plumb Line. But I hope to stimulate honest and open debate on a variety of topics and challenges facing the church — especially the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. With cultural changes coming at ever-increasing speed, all of us on the Plumb Line Editorial Board desire that believers will stand firm, rooted in Scripture. I pray that you read this content in the spirit intended: love for Christ and for each other.

Note: The views and opinions expressed here are mine alone, and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the full Editorial Board of the Plumb Line.

Books You Might Enjoy

Toxic Empathy: How Progressives Exploit Christian Compassion by Allie Beth Stuckey. Penguin Random House, 2024.

Christians, led by Scripture, exercise compassion. Recognizing our own sins we easily empathize with those caught in sin's misery. Can our compassion be misplaced or abused? Our author suggests that in today's political climate many, especially believers, have come to believe compassion is the litmus test by which all moral issues are judged. Abortion, gender, sexuality, immigration, and social justice are examples the author highlights. Is truth being run over by emotion? The author answers in the affirmative.

For a detailed review, see https://www.realclearbooks.com/articles/2024/11/08/the_exploitation_of_compassion_1070788.html

NOTE: The lapel pin EPC Moderators receive states, “Truth in Love”

Reformed Systematic Theology by Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley. Crossway, 2024.

Santa Claus was good this past year! I can now add this four-volume set to my collection of systematic theology books. Will it be worth the cost to my wife? I've only read portions of each

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

volume and do not foresee taking weeks at the beach to claim I have read even a modest portion of the over 5,000 pages.

Some online reviews suggest it will be an excellent starting point for serious research and study. It's easy to read, and full of historical references and interesting quotes from old and new theologians alike. Even critical reviews have pointed out how readable it is, while pointing out what they perceive as a wordy or preachy writing style. If you're a fan of the Puritans and don't think Bavinck will mind, the four-volume set would be a great addition to your library.

Article of Interest

“AI and the Unhappy Society”

James Hankins

“First Things” February 2025 Issue

<https://firstthings.com/ai-and-the-unhappy-society/>

Have you ever been frustrated when contacting a major corporation or government agency that you can't reach an actual person for an answer to your inquiry? Then this article is for you! Hankins walks you through the maddening number of steps necessary to get to talk to a human being only to find out they will be transferring you to the first in a long line of additional persons, all the while praying one of them will be able to help. While Hankins has an obvious sense of humor, he makes a serious point about our culture's idea of progress. Read this article!

“With All Our Minds”

Burk Parsons

“TableTalk” November 2024 Issue

<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2024/11/with-all-our-minds/>

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind ...”

—Romans 12:2.

Dr. Parsons warns us that the world's influence will conform us to its worldly thought, words, and works. Sadly, this is often done through our confused ideas about love, freedom, and peace. We have come to believe that disagreement indicates the absence of all three. As believers we are required to exercise discernment, recognizing conflict is sometimes unavoidable. (See *Toxic Empathy* above.)

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

“Rebranding the EPC & The PCA’s Unfinished Business”

Peter Larson

“The Westminster Standard” podcast episode 217, January 2025

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNcgNF2733g>

In the first issue of the Presbyterian Plumb Line, TE Peter Larson contributed an article entitled “Rebranding the EPC.”¹ Larson was subsequently interviewed on The Westminster Standard podcast. This engaging interview is sure to expand your understanding of issues currently going on in the EPC. I highly recommend it!

“Pastoral Sexual Orientation and the EPC”

Helen Louise Herndon

“The Aquila Report” February 1, 2025

<https://theaquilareport.com/pastoral-sexual-orientation-and-the-epc/>

Helen Herndon is a member of Central Presbyterian Church (EPC) in St. Louis, Missouri. She is a freelance writer and served as a missionary to the Arab/Muslim world in France and North Africa. In this article, Herndon explains how church members in some EPC congregations are stunned about why it would take so long for the shepherds of Christ’s flock to deliberate on the subject of sexual identity for church officers.

“Presbyterians, Celibate Gay Ordination, and the Westminster Standards”

S. Donald Fortson III

“Reformed Faith & Practice” Fall 2024 Issue

<https://journal.rts.edu/article/presbyterians-celibate-gay-ordination-and-the-westminster-standards/>

In this article, TE Don Fortson explains how the discussion of celibate gay ordination has been new territory for both the PCA and the EPC. He reviews the history of this question in the old northern Presbyterian Church in the 1970s and how the Westminster Standards provide a clear answer for confessional Presbyterians.

Quotes

“You cannot reason a person out of a position he did not reason himself into in the first place.”

—Jonathan Swift

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

“Our faith may be feeble. Our courage may be small. Our grasp of the gospel and its promises may be weak and trembling. But, after all, the grand question is do we really trust Christ? Do we look to Jesus and only to Jesus for pardon and peace?”

—J.C. Ryle

“As Christians we are tempted to make unnecessary concessions to those outside the Faith. We give in too much. Now, I don’t mean that we should run the risk of making a nuisance of ourselves by witnessing at improper times, but there comes a time when we must show that we disagree. We must show our Christian colors, if we are to be true to Jesus Christ. We cannot remain silent conceding everything away.”

—C.S. Lewis

Humor

How do you milk sheep? Bring out a new iPhone and charge \$1,200 for it.

Remember, if you lose a sock in the dryer, it comes back as a Tupperware lid that doesn’t fit any of your containers.

When one door closes and another door opens, you are probably in prison.

Point of Personal Privilege

Recently I have had an opportunity to speak to and hear from friends and colleagues about issues facing the EPC. Some strongly disagree with positions I hold. What important lessons have I learned? First and foremost, honest and open communication does not guarantee agreement. What it does do is clear up misunderstandings, clarify areas of disagreement and agreement, knock down rumors, and help restore healthy fellowship. Sometimes conflict is unavoidable. What is avoidable is the many ways we wrongly handle conflict. I have found myself making unwarranted assumptions, failing to give my brother the benefit of the doubt, and forgetting that the person on the other side is a brother or sister in Christ.

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

In the Minutes of the 35th GA, Attachment ICME-A² you will find the “Ethical Affirmation for EPC Leaders.” I wish to follow its directives. I wish to communicate directly with those who I find myself in disagreement. By doing so, I wish to listen first, honor their right to disagree, and hopefully respond in love. May I demonstrate forgiveness knowing I need to be forgiven. When I engage in criticism may it be with the goal of challenging the hearts and minds of others while promoting reconciliation, peace, and the unity of God’s church.

¹ <https://presbyterianplumbline.org/rebranding-the-epc/>

² See <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/4-Resources/5-Downloadable-EPC-Resources/J-GAMinutes/GAMinutes35.pdf>. The Ethical Affirmation for EPC Leaders is on page 268 of the PDF.

Presbytery Shares Complaints with National Leadership Team

Responding to a letter of complaint, the EPC National Leadership Team met in Orlando January 14 with representatives of New River Presbytery (NRP) to hear concerns about the “distrust and division” caused by the 44th General Assembly.

The NRP was represented at the meeting by Teaching Elder Rufus Burton, Stated Clerk; Ruling Elder Gordon Miller, chair of the NRP leadership team; and Teaching Elder Ed Pettus, whose Session originated the NRP overture. During the 3-hour meeting, they claimed the NRP overture to exclude homosexuals from church office received “unfair treatment” at General Assembly, and called for repentance and reconciliation from the GA leadership.

In August, NRP sent a letter of complaint to Stated Clerk Dean Weaver that expressed anger and upset at how their overture was treated at General Assembly:

Suppression of dissent and violations of the Constitution, the abuse of Robert’s Rules, and inconsistency of rulings all pointed to a concerted effort to strong arm the assembly toward a predetermined outcome at odds with Scripture, the Confession of Faith, and the express will of the New River Presbytery. The treatment we received from the platform party has sown distrust and division that appear to have been carefully and deliberately cultivated. It is apparent from these actions that the peace, unity, and purity of the church has been deeply marred — to the point that we are seeking a way of restoration in the Spirit of Christ.

During the meeting, representatives of NRP presented a detailed timeline, documenting the prejudicial treatment of the Presbytery’s overture and how it was mishandled by the Stated Clerk, PJC, Moderator, and Parliamentarian at General Assembly. In addition, they described the widespread discontent and distrust of the Stated Clerk and national leadership that resulted from the conduct of the 44th General Assembly.

Passed unanimously by NRP, the overture was blocked from coming to a floor vote as a result of actions by the Permanent Judicial Commission and parliamentary rulings by the Moderator. In place of the NRP overture, commissioners at the 44th General Assembly voted to create an Ad Interim Committee to study the issue. The committee has begun its work and is expected to make a report to General Assembly in June 2025.

Although the meeting was described as respectful, it produced no apology or acceptance of responsibility from the Stated Clerk or National Leadership Team. As of March 4, New River Presbytery had still not received any official response to their complaints from the Office of the General Assembly.

EPC Teaching, Ruling Elders Meet to Discuss Differences in EPC Direction

On January 22, 2025, EPC Teaching Elders Mike Moses, Matt Blazer, and Mark Toon met with fellow TEs Nate Atwood, Rufus Burton, Don Fortson, and Ruling Elder Gordon Miller, at Lake Forest Church in Huntersville, N.C. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Elders agreed in principle on the following statement:

“By God’s grace our conversation had a sweet spirit, and was an open, honest, and heartfelt exchange of views. We have gained a deeper understanding of the concerns raised by all parties and are encouraged that the National Leadership Team and the Leadership Team of the New River Presbytery have been in dialogue. Further, we acknowledge that in our personal and professional capacities, we have a duty to pray for and support the work of the Same-Sex Attraction Ad Interim Committee created by the 44th General Assembly. The EPC is being strengthened by the efforts of her Elders to build Christlike relationships.”

Georgia Church Joins EPC

First Presbyterian Church of Bainbridge, Ga., was received by the Presbytery of the Southeast at its January 2025 stated meeting. Bainbridge is in southwest Georgia, 40 miles north of Tallahassee, Fla. The church was chartered in 1852 by the Presbytery of Florida in the old Southern Presbyterian Church. First Presbyterian of Bainbridge is transferring into the EPC from Flint River Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). After a long process that ended in December 2024, the congregation paid the Flint River Presbytery \$99,000 as part of a severance arrangement.

Stephen Poitevint, FPC Ruling Elder, said getting back to “the foundation of the Bible and the authority of Scripture” was a key element in the church’s decision to leave the PC(U.S.A.) and join the EPC. He described the church elders studying the Westminster Confession and moving to the EPC as “the congregation having its own Protestant Reformation.”

Poitevent said several other relatively new EPC churches in south Georgia and north Florida have been most helpful to the Bainbridge Session in navigating the transition from the PC(U.S.A.) to the EPC. He added that the church is “very thankful” to have retained its property and will not have to worry about that any longer within the EPC’s polity. The church currently has an interim pastor and will be forming a pastor search committee in the near future.

Ohio Church Votes to Leave EPC

Frustrated by the failure of the Presbytery of the Alleghenies and the General Assembly to vote on an overture forbidding the ordination of homosexuals, a church in Mansfield, Ohio, voted in November to leave the EPC.

“The main reason why we left is because of the hierarchical leadership and the disregard for polity, policy, and procedure,” said Joseph Yerger, pastor of Mansfield 1st Presbyterian Church. “When disregard is shown for the constitution, then disregard for Scripture is not far behind.”

Mansfield was one of two churches in the Presbytery of the Alleghenies that presented a motion in February 2024 to concur with an overture from New River Presbytery (NRP). That overture would have amended the Constitution to forbid men and women who identify as homosexual from holding office in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

However, instead of voting on that motion, the Presbytery approved a substitute motion that called for study and review of the EPC positions and policies regarding homosexuality. It further requested the General Assembly to develop any proposed recommended changes regarding the issue of same-sex attraction.

Yerger voiced his opposition to the substitute motion, claiming it violated Robert’s Rules of Order because it did not address the real question of the main motion. According to Yerger, the Presbytery Stated Clerk disagreed, and after his appeal the ruling of the Chair was sustained by the Presbytery.

Although the EPC forbids the ordination of practicing homosexuals, the denomination is currently studying the issue of whether pastors who self-identify as homosexual but claim to be celibate can be ordained in the EPC. The issue sparked controversy at General Assembly, where the NRP overture was blocked from coming to a vote.

The controversy began when Greg Johnson, Pastor of Memorial Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, requested permission to join the EPC. Johnson identifies as a “Side B” Christian, meaning that he is a homosexual yet practices celibacy. In his book *Still Time to Care*, Johnson defends homosexuality as his God-given identity. He further claims that is impossible for a gay person to change their same-sex attraction, and that efforts to do so result in shame and dishonesty.

According to Yerger, it is not the homosexual issue that ultimately led his church to leave the denomination, but the sense of being disenfranchised.

“If our motion had been brought to the floor and voted down, then we would probably still be in the Presbytery and the EPC,” said Yerger. “Both the Presbytery and the General Assembly have

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

worked to silence and prevent legitimate debate concerning a grave issue of sin and personal holiness. That, for us, was the breaking point. Side B homosexuality and the potential admission of Greg Johnson was simply the symptom which brought a greater concern to light.”

The Mansfield church consists of about 70 members and is located roughly halfway between Columbus and Cleveland. The congregation voted November 10 to leave the EPC, with 90 percent of the congregation’s membership voting in favor. The Presbytery of the Alleghenies did not contest its exit.

The departure was announced at the Presbytery’s September Stated Meeting without comment, explanation, or apparent expression of concern.

“The lack of comment really bothered me,” said Yerger. “There was not even a question from the floor asking why we left. That was not a very pastoral response from my fellow Elders.”

Yerger and his congregation are currently seeking to unite with the Presbyterian Church in America.

The Plumb Line attempted to contact the Stated Clerk and a former Moderator of the Presbytery of the Alleghenies but they declined to comment.

Pennsylvania Church Withdraws from the EPC

After a contentious two-year battle that ended with its pastor and Session removed from office by the Presbytery of the Alleghenies, Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church (BHPC) in Pittsburgh, Pa., voted in January to dissolve its relationship with the EPC.

In November, a judicial commission of the Presbytery conducted a trial of Pastor Nate Devlin and the Ruling Elders currently serving on the BHPC Session. On January 11, 2025, they were found guilty of contempt and violating their ordination vows. Devlin and the Session were suspended and removed from office “due to their persistent rebellion and refusal to repent,” according to the Administrative Commission’s report to the Presbytery’s January Stated Meeting.

Defying the Presbytery’s discipline, the congregation voted January 26 to leave the EPC. The vote was 106 in favor, 13 opposed, with one abstention.

The church’s battle with Presbytery began more than two years ago after some anonymous church members made allegations critical of Devlin. Although the allegations were later dismissed, it led to the formation of an Administrative Commission by the Presbytery to investigate. When the Session announced its intention to leave the EPC, it met resistance from the Presbytery.

According to the EPC’s Book of Order, a congregation is permitted to dissolve its relationship with the EPC by a two-thirds vote of the congregation. However, the Administrative Commission contested the BHPC vote by claiming that some 20 church members had been improperly removed from the church rolls. Attempts to settle the dispute over who could vote were unsuccessful, leading to the trial and suspension of Devlin and the Session.

According to Devlin, the church left the EPC because the Presbytery acted in a way that was “unbiblical, unconstitutional, and lacking due process.” In addition, the Session was concerned about the “erosion and demise of the denomination” and what they perceived as a drift in a progressive direction. In particular, the church was concerned by the Pastoral Letter of Racial Lament, the controversy over ordaining self-identifying homosexuals, and how the 2024 General Assembly was conducted.

Speaking at the congregational meeting, a member of the Administrative Commission denied that the EPC is moving in a liberal direction.

“What you have been hearing about the EPC being on some slippery slope to unbiblical progressive has been filtered and skewed,” said Roger Rumer, one of the five members of the Administrative Commission. “I believe that upon closer examination you’ll find the EPC

The Presbyterian Plumb Line

remains committed to the essential tenets of the biblical truth, just as we believe Beverly Heights is committed to them.”

Rumer attempted to dispel fears that the Presbytery was trying to seize control of the church property.

“This is not so,” said Rumer. “There is no provision in the EPC Constitution which permits a presbytery to seize property. The EPC never seized a church and never will.”

In a report to the Presbytery, the Administrative Commission recommended that the Presbytery not pursue further action against BHPC in church or civil courts.

In January 2024, the church filed civil lawsuits against the Presbytery of the Alleghenies in an effort to protect its property. In exchange for the church dropping the lawsuits, the Presbytery voted February 15 to acknowledge the departure of BHPC. The Presbytery did not vote to dismiss because it claimed the church, “had not properly followed constitutional process.” However, the Presbytery acknowledged that the church had effectively renounced jurisdiction.

In a report to Presbytery, the Administrative Commission claimed that Devlin had violated 1 Corinthians 6:1 by filing a civil lawsuit: “If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgement instead of before the Lord’s people?” The report chided Devlin for “... a pattern of disdain for clear admonitions of Scripture ... unbecoming of a Pastor of the church of Jesus Christ.”

In response, Devlin said the BHPC Session has a duty to protect the congregation by filing a civil lawsuit.

“I agree that Christians should not sue each other over trivial matters, but this is not a trivial matter,” said Devlin. “Our property is worth \$1 million and belongs to the congregation.”

During the lengthy conflict, Devlin said the Administrative Commission tried to discredit his character and competence as a pastor. In addition, Devlin was accused of slandering the Presbytery and causing division because he posted critical comments on social media and because he was interviewed by Ministry Watch, a digital publication that reports church news and commentary.

“I think the denomination does not allow room for minority voice or dissent, which is chilling and unhealthy,” said Devlin. I think the denomination needs to be aware of what is going on.”