

A New Creation

What is the Evangelical Presbyterian Church?



The Evangelical Presbyterian Church traces its roots from the Reformation under John Calvin in Switzerland during the 1500's and its advancement under John Knox in Scotland during the same era. Even so, this branch of the Reformation draws on the ancient teachings of such figures from church history as Bernard of Clairvaux of the 12th Century and Augustine of the 4th century. After the Reformation, its seed continued to grow during the mid-1600s with the shaping of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Our spiritual ancestors came to North America during the middle 17th century with such leaders as Francis Makemie, Jonathan Dickinson and William Tennent. A century later, Jonathan Edwards triggered a spiritual awakening in New England and became a link in our historical chain. In short, the story of Presbyterianism is the story of the EPC.

In the Beginning

Presbyterians come in many varieties with new branches being formed in every generation. The EPC began in the fall of 1980 and spring of 1981 when a group of pastors and elders held meetings in St. Louis, Missouri for planning and prayer. They came from mainline Presbyterian denominations like the United Presbyterian (northern churches) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States (southern churches). These leaders had become increasingly distressed by liberalism within their denominations. They wanted to form a church that took seriously the words of Scripture, the theology of the historic confessions of the faith, and the evangelical fervor of Presbyterian founders. They envisioned a denomination that was truly evangelical and truly Presbyterian; hence the name.

In Essentials, Unity

Six months later, the first General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church met at Ward Presbyterian Church near Detroit, Michigan. To ensure that the ideals of faith would remain foundational to the new denomination, the Assembly drafted an intentionally brief list of essential beliefs. The Essentials listed in this brochure define a church that is Presbyterian in theology and church government, as well as evangelical in sharing the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

In Non-Essentials, Liberty

Even though the founders of the EPC valued purity of faith, they wisely saw the danger of division over non-essential issues. To protect the new denomination from needless strife, the founders promoted an understanding of freedom in which less essential matters were left to the conscience of individual churches and believers. This understanding included such matters as the freedom of a local church to elect its own officers, to exercise spiritual gifts, and to own and keep property. So EPC churches study the Scripture and make their own decisions about issues like worship style and the ordination of women. At regional and national meetings, church leaders take for granted that they will work and worship with other leaders who differ with them on these and other non-essential matters.

In All Things, Charity: Truth in Love

The final statement of our motto speaks of love. We are fellow pilgrims, walking together with our Lord. We have, individually, received his charity toward us, so we extend that charity to each other. We speak the truth to define our faith and to extend it to others. But we speak it out of love—for our brothers and sisters, and for our Savior.

A Present and Future Hope

In 1981, the 1st General Assembly convened with 75 delegates representing 12 churches. When the Second General Assembly met nine months later, more than 120 elders and ministers registered as commissioners. Before the decade of the 80's ended, an impressive growth in member congregations took place. Churches in Argentina formed a presbytery and joined us in 1987, to grow and be dismissed as a national church in 2004. Nearing the end of the first decade of the 21st century the EPC has exceeded 80,000 active members in over 225 congregations in the U.S.

With world evangelism as a top priority, the EPC commissioned its first missionary couple in 1983. By the mid 90's, 56 missionaries represented the EPC throughout the world. Today, more than 90 missionaries represent the EPC in about 20 countries. Because we believe that God uses a variety of ways to draw people to himself, many of these missionaries serve with EPC support through mission agencies other than our own. Our global mission plan focuses on planting, developing, and nurturing the Church.

We believe that God created the Evangelical Presbyterian Church to be a significant part of his plan for the renewal of believers and for witness to those outside the faith. It is our conviction that, like the ancient Queen Esther, God has brought us together for such a time as this.



IN ESSENTIALS UNITY

All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks.

On this sure foundation we affirm these additional essentials of our faith.

1. We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever!
2. Jesus Christ, the living Word, became flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He now is our High Priest and Mediator.
3. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ and to apply the saving work of Christ to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior, indwelling our hearts. He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth, and seals us for the day of redemption.
4. Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God's free grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, and thereby justifies them in His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life.
5. The true Church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are united together in the body of Christ. The Church finds her visible yet imperfect, expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity, where scriptural discipline is practiced, and where loving fellowship is maintained. For her perfecting she awaits the return of her Lord.
6. Jesus Christ will come again to the earth-personally, visibly, and bodily-to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate history and the eternal plan of God. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22:20)
7. The Lord Jesus Christ commands all believers to proclaim the gospel throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations. Obedience to the Great Commission requires total commitment to "Him who loved us and gave Himself for us." He calls us to a life of self-denying love and service. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10)

The Essentials provide an explicit and concise expression of the Christian faith. These essentials are set forth in greater detail in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

IN NON-ESSENTIALS LIBERTY

What is a non-essential? Non-essentials denote those doctrinal issues and convictions which are secondary to the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We believe room should be given for freedom on lesser issues. Some issues may be important to the individual Christian but such should not be promoted at the expense of unity.

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church is a denomination that affirms the congregational freedom to elect officers without restriction or quota. Instead, congregations are encouraged to search the scriptures and prayerfully, but freely, elect those persons best qualified to lead.

Although Reformed, not Pentecostal, in theology the Evangelical Presbyterian Church affirms the gifts of God's Spirit exercised under the guidance of God's word and the authority of the local session.

Believing unity to be a spiritual not temporal relationship, we therefore guarantee in perpetuity the congregation's right to own and manage its property.

IN ALL THINGS CHARITY

"Love...bears all things"

Christ did not come just to teach forgiveness. He lived it! Being forgiven we are now free to forgive and understand each other. As a fellowship of believers we strive to love one another that the presence of the Spirit may transcend individuality.

"...Believes all things"

We believe not only in what we have attained in Christ, but also that we are moving forward. We are God's pilgrim people. We are in a journey together, sharing each other's burdens and joys along the way. Though we have already been redeemed, our sanctification is the process we share together.

"...Hopes all things"

Hope encourages and builds life while despair destroys. Resisting the sins and sickness of this world, we as a fellowship are more than haters of evil. As lovers of God and His people, we live for His glory. Much more than mere wishing, our confident hopes are anchored in Christ.

"...Endures all things"

To find a denomination that can weather today's storms without compromising on love is rare. We share a calling to perseverance of the saints and a commitment to a life of love.

TRUTH IN LOVE

We believe that if Christ is exalted He will build His church. It is therefore our mission to lift up Him who is THE truth in loving proclamation of the Christian gospel.

To accomplish this, we commit ourselves to the following goals:

- A global vision of missions outreach;
- An enthusiastic promotion of evangelism as the first priority of the Church;
- An aggressive program of church planting and church development
- The development and implementation of solid programs in Christian nurture rooted in the teaching of the Bible to all ages
- A positive concern for Christ-centered youth ministry
- A loving spirit of cooperation with all who truly are one with us in Jesus Christ.

In the words of John Wesley, 'If your heart is as my heart, let us join hands and walk together.'" Let us walk in TRUTH! Let us walk in LOVE.