

## **300 CHAPTER I – DENOMINATIONAL IDENTITY**

### **301 EVANGELICAL**

Believing the Bible to be the authoritative, inspired and infallible word of God, we affirm that people are saved by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Compelled by this good news, and commissioned to make disciples of Jesus Christ, each local church prayerfully and strategically carries out this commission to its own community and beyond. (Matthew 28:18-19, Acts 1:8, 2 Corinthians 5:9, Ephesians 2:8-9, 2 Timothy 3:16).

### **302 CONGREGATIONAL**

Empowered to be unique, and owning the responsibility to be healthy, local churches intentionally, actively and collectively pursue God's mission. Each church will operate effectively by developing a principle-centered organizational structure within its local context. Each congregation will employ its gifts and callings to the glory of God. (Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, Ephesians 4:11-16).

### **303 CONNECTIONAL**

With the understanding that the local church cannot carry out the Great Commission alone, we surrender self-sufficiency and autonomy to join together in love. Embracing our common *Discipline* and our common purpose – to know Christ and make Him known – Evangelical Congregational Churches will pray together, fellowship together, develop leaders together, evangelize together, plant churches together, perform acts of mercy together, pursue justice together, and celebrate God together. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Micah 6:8, Acts 2:42-47, James 1:27).

## **310 LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH**

### **Preamble**

It is our desire as a denomination to move from rule-centered leadership to principle-centered leadership in order to be more effective in becoming a movement of God. To that end we offer the following nine principles as definitive for the Evangelical Congregational Church. It is our denominational conviction that each of our local churches may operate in harmony with these principles and move forward with God's grace. Principle-centered leadership sets people free to use their gifts and abilities as the Holy Spirit leads them. With this approach we hope to recapture some of the qualities of a movement of God that enhanced our effectiveness in the past. To that end we present these principles as the foundation upon which to build local church governing structures. While there may be a variety of local church governing structures, these principles should be found in each type of structure. A "Governance Manual" is available to assist local churches in developing functional structures.

### **311 Principle One: *Purpose, Mission, Core Values and Vision***

Healthy churches identify a purpose, mission, vision, and set of core values (PMVV) that are in harmony with the denomination's PMVV.

- Purpose answers the "why" question. Why are we here? Why do we exist? It is the common ground on which the mission, core values and vision stand. Broader and less focused than the mission statement, the purpose statement will be an identifying link between a local church and the denomination, reflecting an unwavering commitment to evangelical theology and practice.
- Mission answers the "what" question. What are we supposed to be doing? What does God want our church to accomplish? The mission statement is a broad, brief, Biblical statement of what the church is supposed to do in the community and throughout the world. It must be closely tied to the unique cultural setting of the church.
- A core value answers the question, "Why do we do what we do?" Core values speak to what is most important in the life of the church. Constant, passionate and Biblical, core values represent the "soul" of the church's ministry.
- Vision is the clear, challenging picture of what the future will look like as the purpose, mission and core values are lived out by the congregation.

In practice, all churches should identify their PMVV before creating operational structures. We find an example of this principle in the Great Commandment of John 13 and the Great Commission of Matthew 28. Jesus gave His disciples a purpose and a mission before they organized as a church. This purpose and mission

is clearly reflected in the life of the church as it is described in Acts 2 and 4. Purpose and mission must drive the ministry of the church.

Churches should align their structures to the identified PMVV and regularly assess how they are living up to the PMVV. The PMVV must be dynamic, rather than static. While the PMVV's foundational Biblical truths will not change, the specific details related to purpose, mission, core values and vision as well as the words used to convey them will change.

### **312 Principle Two: *Prayer***

A healthy church is intentionally committed to discovering the heart of God through the discipline of prayer. Effective, fervent prayer of the righteous draws upon the power of God to move in His church. We enter the presence of God on behalf of our families, churches, communities, and world. Prayer allows us to hear the voice of God and to discern His good, pleasing, and perfect will.

A church committed to prayer is a church that:

- Comes together regularly for corporate times of prayer.
- Integrates prayer into the life and ministries of the church.
- Encourages prayer for pastors and leaders.
- Cultivates the prayer life of individual believers.

### **313 Principle Three: *Disclemaking***

Healthy churches are disclemaking churches. Disclemaking is an intentional, lifelong process:

- Beginning when we pray for, care for and share Jesus Christ with people who are not yet His followers;
- Progressing as people choose to submit their lives to Jesus' authority and receive His gift of salvation by repentance and faith;
- Continuing as His followers grow in love and devotion to Jesus and their commitment to making disciples.

A church committed to disclemaking will provide opportunities for corporate prayer, evangelistic training, and community outreach. The church will also provide seekers with opportunities to investigate the claims of Christ, make a Biblically informed decision to follow Christ, and receive basic follow-up teaching on how to live the Christian life. The church will continue to provide opportunities for the study and application of God's Word resulting in disciples who are committed to making disciples.

### **314 Principle Four: *Community***

A healthy church creates and cultivates a familial community of disciples marked by loving relationships. In this community, "if one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." (1 Corinthians 12:26)

A church committed to cultivating this kind of community will include (but not be limited to) such things as:

- Assimilating new people into the congregation;
- Creating opportunities for fellowship and ministry both across and along common lines (such as age and interest);
- Providing for the spiritual, social and material needs of all its people;
- Developing and maintaining healthy relationships by fostering an environment in which sin, conflict, discipline, reconciliation and repentance are addressed in a Biblical manner.

### **315 Principle Five: *Worship***

A healthy church gathers regularly for worship that exalts God and edifies people; worship that engages both the mind and heart, inspiring people to live more fully for Christ. God-exalting worship may include fervent prayer, joyful singing, affirmations of faith, scripture lessons, Biblical preaching, the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and opportunities to respond to God's work through His Spirit.

A church committed to God-exalting worship will provide:

- Well planned, inspiring weekly worship services;
- The observance of the Lord's Supper at least quarterly;
- Occasional special worship services such as Christmas Eve, Good Friday, etc.

### **316 Principle Six: *Gift-Oriented Ministry***

Healthy churches empower disciples for ministry and mission. In order “to prepare God’s people for works of service” (Ephesians 4:12), the church helps people identify their spiritual gifts and employ them in the life of the congregation, in the community and in the world. The church also takes the initiative in identifying and developing members in the local body for leadership.

A church committed to effective placement of people for ministry will provide clear job descriptions, practical training, and personal coaching to its volunteers. The church will also provide for expressions of appreciation and recognition for its volunteers.

### **317 Principle Seven: *Pastoral Relationship***

A healthy church willingly, trustingly and respectfully submits to appropriate authority. Pastors, in turn, act as servant-leaders by employing authority for the good of the fellowship.

A church committed to a healthy relationship with its pastor(s) is a church that:

- Models and demonstrates respect for those in authority, enabling the work of the pastor to be a joy and not a burden;
- Honors the pastor by offering him compensation that reflects his value to the fellowship and his labor on their behalf;
- Maintains a Pastoral Relations Committee committed to the best interests of their pastor(s) as well as the health of the congregation.

### **318 Principle Eight: *Stewardship***

A healthy church is a good steward of its financial and material resources. Buildings and budgets are viewed as God-given tools to pursue the Great Commission. The opportunity to give money generously to the local church and to denominational activities is viewed as an act of joyful obedience on the part of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

A church committed to good stewardship is a church that:

- Teaches Biblical financial principles and calls its people to financial faithfulness and integrity;
- Provides a system of financial accountability that accurately receipts, records, and reports contributions;
- Fully discloses its financial state through regular reports and annual audits;
- Provides for and maintains buildings, grounds, and material resources necessary to accomplish the church’s mission.

### **319 Principle Nine: *Global Ministries***

A healthy church places a high priority on proclaiming the gospel and demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ to a hurting world beyond its immediate neighborhood. This outward focus compels the church to cross cultures and to cross borders in an effort to fulfill the Great Commission to the ends of the earth.

A church committed to global ministry is a church that:

- Prays for the peoples of the world and the global church;
- Cultivates relationships with missionaries and mission fields resulting in spiritual, emotional, physical and material support;
- Ministers to the poor, powerless and persecuted;
- Nurtures a global vision.

## **320 ESSENTIAL STRUCTURES**

### **Preamble**

In order to maintain a healthy and effective connection with our denominational identity (Paragraph 300) several structures will be essential in the life of a local Evangelical Congregational Church. These are membership, affiliation, congregational meetings and Local Conference.

## **321 MEMBERSHIP**

### **321.1 Definition**

The membership of a local congregation consists of those persons whose names are recorded in the official Church Record Book.



Confession of Faith

Do you believe the Bible to be the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you purpose to remain steadfast in the faith unto the end and, as a true follower of Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you promise in watchfulness and prayer to diligently use the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you promise to join in worship and service and to give regularly of your time, talent and treasure for the work of the gospel as carried on by this church and the denomination to which it belongs? \_\_\_\_\_

On the following lines, give a brief statement concerning your relationship to Jesus Christ. Tell what He means to you and how He has enriched your life.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Recognizing my need of fellowship with others of like faith and main and desiring to have a part in the ministry of the gospel, I hereby make application for membership in the \_\_\_\_\_ Church of \_\_\_\_\_.

I have read the bylaws of the church and I hereby covenant and agree to be bound by the policies and procedures set forth in them and in the *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**321.5 RECEPTION OF MEMBERS**

When at any service there are persons who, having been approved by the Official Board/ Ministry Council, shall desire to unite with the church, the officiating minister shall call the applicants forward and address them as follows:

Dear Friends in Christ: By presenting yourself (selves) before us today you are giving a public testimony that you are professing personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. We rejoice with you that by this outward act you show that you have repented of your sins and trusted in Him for forgiveness of sin, newness of life now, and hope for eternity. The moment you personally received Christ you became (a) member(s) of the Body of Christ, the church universal (Ephesians 2). Now you are presenting yourself (selves) before the Lord of the church, and us as members of this congregation, in order to take your vows as (a) fellow-member(s) of this body of believers.

We are strengthened by hearing your public declaration of this purpose. We believe you also will be strengthened as you affirmatively answer the questions that follow:

- 1) We are a congregation affiliated with the Evangelical Congregational Church. We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Do you believe this and that only in these Divine writings do we find the Christian message of salvation? If so, please answer: "YES, I DO BELIEVE THIS."
- 2) You have heard the scriptural teachings regarding your need of the saving acts of Jesus Christ: His perfect life, His sacrificial death, and His defeat of death by His resurrection. By presenting yourself (selves) today in this place you are professing personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Is this your profession? If so, please answer: "YES, I HAVE PUT MY TRUST IN JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR AND LORD."
- 3) When the Lord gave the church her commission, He said we should "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). A disciple is one who is seeking to pattern his life on his Savior's. Are you sincerely seeking to be a disciple, and live as Jesus would have you live? If so, answer: "I AM DETERMINED, BY THE GRACE OF GOD, TO BE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST."

- 4) The Christian is called upon to give expression of his/her gratitude for the blessings of God by returning his entire life to the Lord for His use. Will you therefore seek to accept faithfully the responsibility to use the gifts God has given you? If so, answer: "YES, I WILL."
- 5) The Bible itself, as interpreted by the Holy Spirit, is our standard of Christian life and practice, and the denomination's *Discipline* seeks to be a faithful interpretation of scriptural standards of the Christian life. Are you willing to seek to live by the teachings of the Bible as the Spirit guides you, and will you seek to contribute to the harmony of the local church by following the rules of the *Discipline*? Will you submit in the Lord to the government of this church and in case you are found delinquent in doctrine or life, will you submit to its discipline? If so, answer: "I WILL, THE LORD BEING MY HELPER."
- 6) Will you seek to be faithful by attendance, and participate in public worship, fellowship, study, and service opportunities of this congregation? If so, answer: "YES, I WILL, AS GOD ENABLES ME."
- 7) Have you been baptized? If so, answer: "YES."
- 8) To members of this congregation: Do you welcome these believers into our fellowship and care? If so, answer: "WE DO."

**321.6 MEMBERS IN GOOD STANDING**

In order to continue as a member in good standing of the Evangelical Congregational Church, it is necessary that a member live in harmony with the *Discipline*, attend public services, commune during the year, and contribute to the support of the local congregation.

**321.7 TRANSFER AND REMOVAL OF MEMBERS**

Members may only be removed from the church membership roll in one of the following ways:

1. Death
2. Moved away with certificate.
3. Moved away without certificate.
4. Withdrawal
5. Expulsion

**321.7.1 Moved Away with Certificate**

Removal because a member has "moved away with certificate" shall be defined and construed in the following manner:

**321.7.1.1** Any member in good standing (321.6) desiring to transfer his membership shall, upon his request, be given a certificate of membership and transfer by the pastor or, if there be no pastor, by the Conference Minister, in the form following:

<p><b>Certificate of Membership and Transfer</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">This is to certify that _____ is a member in full communion of the _____ Evangelical Congregational Church, and that at _____ own request _____ is hereby transferred and affectionately commended to the Christian care and fellowship of the _____ Evangelical Congregational Church.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">_____ Pastor</p> <p>Given at _____ this _____ day of _____ A.D. _____.</p> <p>This certificate of membership and transfer shall be valid for one year from date thereof. It may be renewed by the pastor of the church from which it was issued.</p>
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This certificate may be adapted for a transfer of membership to a church of another denomination. The pastor issuing the certificate shall, if possible, notify the preacher-in-charge of the place to which the member moves.

**321.7.1.2** The pastor receiving such a member shall inform the preacher-in-charge from which the certificate was issued in the following or similar form:

<p><b>Certificate of Reception</b></p> <p>This is to certify that _____ commended to our care and fellowship by the pastor of the _____ Evangelical Congregational Church, was on the _____ day of _____ A.D. _____ duly received into the membership of the _____ Evangelical Congregational Church.</p> <p>_____ Pastor Given at _____ this _____ day of _____ A.D. _____.</p>
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**321.7.1.3** A certificate of membership and transfer cannot be denied to a member in good standing; however, when, in the judgment of the pastor and the membership committee, there are sufficient reasons for withholding the certificate from a member, such information shall be presented to the Official Board/Ministry Council where, if the information warrants, judicial proceedings shall be instituted in the case as prescribed by the *Discipline*.

**321.7.1.4** If a church member who is not in good standing shall apply for a certificate of membership and transfer, he shall be granted a certificate of dismissal on authority of the Official Board/Ministry Council, according to the following form:

<p><b>Certificate of Membership and Dismissal</b></p> <p>This is to certify that _____ is a member of the _____ Evangelical Congregational Church, and that at _____ own request _____ is hereby dismissed as a member of the said Church.</p> <p>_____ Pastor Given at _____ this _____ day of _____ A.D. _____.</p>
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**321.7.2 Moved Away without Certificate**

Removal because a member has “moved away without certificate” shall be made only in the following instances:

**321.7.2.1** Where a member shall have moved from his last known residence and his whereabouts cannot be discovered after careful search, or;

**321.7.2.2** Where it is discovered that a member has united with another church, or;

**321.7.2.3** Where a member has removed his residence to another locality that is at such a distance from the area served by the church to prevent his attendance at church services and functions and who has given no evidence of any interest in continuing his membership.

**321.7.3** In all of the above enumerated instances, removal shall not be effected unless and until such person shall have failed to attend services or other church functions for a period in excess of six months and written notice shall have been sent to his last known address by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested, advising him that unless a contrary expression of intent be received from him within a period of sixty days, his consent to removal in the foregoing manner shall be presumed. If no expression of contrary intent is received within such period, he shall be deemed to

have moved away without certificate, and his name may be removed from the church membership records.

#### **321.7.4 Withdrawal**

Removal because of withdrawal shall be made only upon the written request of a member expressing a desire that his name be removed from the church roll; provided, however, that a member, who shall have been delinquent because of failure to attend public services, commune, and contribute to the support of the local congregation for a period of excess of two years, and who shall have indicated no desire to continue his membership after an effort to reactivate him by personal visitation, may be advised by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested, directed to his last known address, that unless a written notice is received from him within sixty days after receipt thereof expressing his desire to remain a member of the church, his desire to withdraw from membership shall be presumed. If no response is received within the time hereinbefore prescribed, the name of such a member may be removed.

##### **321.7.4.1 Attempted Withdrawal while Discipline Pending**

If it appears to church leaders that a member has requested withdrawal merely to avoid church discipline, that request shall not be given effect until the disciplinary process has been properly concluded. Furthermore, if a member leaves the church while discipline is in effect or is being considered, and church leaders learn that he or she is attending another church, they may inform that church of the situation and ask its leaders to encourage the individual to repent and be reconciled with the Lord and to any people he or she has offended. This action is intended to both help the individual find freedom from his or her sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he or she may do to their members (see Matthew 18:12-14; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).

#### **321.7.5 Expulsion**

Removal because of expulsion (exclusion from the church) shall be made only after proper hearing according to disciplinary provisions. (See 602.)

### **322 RESPONSIBILITY OF AFFILIATION**

**322.1** A congregation that is affiliated with the Evangelical Congregational Church or to which pastors are assigned by the Evangelical Congregational Church shall at all times be subject to the *Discipline*, and the articles of incorporation an/or by-laws of such congregation shall at all times be subordinate to the Constitution and laws of the state of incorporation or organization and to the *Discipline*.

#### **322.2 Denominational Affiliation**

A congregation desiring to affiliate with the Evangelical Congregational Church shall proceed in the following manner:

##### **322.2.1 Newly Established Churches**

In the case of a newly established Evangelical Congregational Church, when the congregation meets the criteria determined by the Church Planting Commission, a petition signed by the members of the congregation shall be submitted through the Church Planting Commission to the National Conference. The petition shall indicate acceptance of the doctrinal position of the Evangelical Congregational Church and a willingness to be subject to the *Discipline*. Approval by the Conference requires a majority vote of the members present.

##### **322.2.2 Transfer of Established Churches**

In the case of a church with independent status or which desires a transfer of affiliation from another denomination, the congregation shall submit to the National Conference a resolution stating such a desire. The resolution shall have been approved by a two-thirds vote of the members of the congregation present at a congregational meeting duly called for that purpose. The resolution shall indicate acceptance of the doctrinal position of the Evangelical Congregational Church and a willingness to be subject to the *Discipline*. The resolution can be submitted only after the church has had an associate relationship with the National Conference for at least one year. Approval of the Conference requires a two-thirds majority vote of the members present. Within the year following affiliation the congregation shall change the deeds, the articles of incorporation and their bylaws to conform to the provisions contained in 322.3 and 324.5 of the *Discipline*.



### **322.3 Articles of Incorporation/By-Laws**

If the congregation desires to incorporate, the decision to do so shall be by action of the congregation at a meeting duly announced for that purpose. All the members of the congregation, of legal age and in good standing are entitled to vote. The Articles of Incorporation and By-laws of each incorporated congregation and the By-laws of each unincorporated congregation affiliated with the Evangelical Congregational Church or to which pastors are assigned by the Evangelical Congregational Church shall contain the following provisions:

1. The name of this corporation is \_\_\_\_\_ (name to include the words “Evangelical Congregational”).
2. Said corporation is formed for the purpose of the public worship of God according to the faith and polity of the Evangelical Congregational Church, the promotion of the interests of the Christian faith, and the spread of Christ’s kingdom throughout the world, without contemplation of pecuniary gain or profit, in connection and association with the Evangelical Congregational Church. The corporation does accede to, recognize, and adopt *The Creed, Ritual, and DISCIPLINE of the Evangelical Congregational Church* as from time to time amended. Said corporation reserves to itself the power to dissolve this ecclesiastical affiliation and relation and form any other denominational affiliation or continue as an independent congregation in the manner set forth in *The Creed, Ritual, and DISCIPLINE of the Evangelical Congregational Church*.
3. This corporation can, by a majority vote of its qualified members present at any duly called congregational meeting, adopt any by-laws not inconsistent with the provisions of this charter, the laws of the state of incorporation and the *Discipline*.
4. Such other provisions as may be required by the laws of the state of incorporation. It is suggested that there be a statement of indemnification and alleviation of officers and directors from liability as may be provided by the laws of the state of incorporation. (see Section 324.6).

### **322.4 Church in Good Standing**

A church which is affiliated with the Evangelical Congregational Church shall be considered to be in good standing so long as (i) it conforms to the provisions of the *Discipline*, (ii) accepts appointment by the National Conference of a duly credentialed pastor and (iii) pays in a timely manner all financial obligations.

### **322.5 Removal of Affiliation of a Church Not in Good Standing**

A church may be determined not to be in good standing and thus no longer a member church of the Evangelical Congregational Church in the following manner:

**322.5.1** If the Supervisory Committee shall determine that a church may no longer be in good standing, the Committee shall use all reasonable means to assist the church to come into compliance. If the Committee shall determine that the church will not or cannot come into compliance within a reasonable time as set by the Committee, the Committee shall make a recommendation to the National Conference that the church be declared to be not in good standing. If the National Conference shall declare a church to be not in good standing, the Conference Minister shall so notify the church in writing, including the reasons therefore, and shall give a grace period of thirty (30) days for the church to correct the default.

**322.5.2** Prior to the end of said thirty (30) days, the church may:

**322.5.2.1** Request an extension of time to correct the default which the Conference Minister may grant at his sole discretion. If the default is not corrected within the thirty (30) day grace period plus any extension thereof, the church shall be so notified by the Conference Minister, and the church may within fourteen (14) days of such notification appeal the decision pursuant to Section 322.5.2.2 hereof;

OR,

**322.5.2.2** Appeal the decision by notifying the Bishop in writing of such appeal, including all grounds for the appeal. The appeal shall be heard by the National Ministry Team and its decision shall be reported to the National Conference. The decision shall be in writing and shall include Findings of Fact, a written Decision, and Conclusions. The National Conference may affirm or reverse the decision or remand the matter to the National Ministry Team for further hearings. If further hearings are held, the National Ministry Team shall notify the National Conference and the church of its further action. The final decision of the National Conference shall be given to the church within fourteen (14) days of the National Conference decision and shall be final and binding on the parties.

**322.5.3** At the hearing on the appeal, the church and the National Conference shall have the right to present oral testimony and other evidence and shall have the right to counsel and the right to cross-examine.

**322.5.4** If a church has failed to timely file an appeal or if an appeal has been taken and been denied, the church shall be notified in writing by the National Conference or the National Ministry Team or the Executive Committee of the National Conference that it is no longer a member church of the National Conference. If the church has forfeited its affiliation with the Evangelical Congregational Church, the church shall pay the National Conference all moneys owed by it to the National Conference and shall remove its name, polity, governing instruments and practice all references to the Evangelical Congregational Church.

### **323 CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS**

#### **323.1 Purpose of the Annual Meeting**

There shall be held in each church an annual congregational meeting to review the work of the year, consider local opportunities and needs, and elect leaders and officers required by the *Discipline* or by the by-laws of the congregation. It shall hear reports concerning the work, present status, and future program of the church and of its organizations and societies, shall make recommendations to the Official Board/Ministry Council, and shall transact such business as may come before it.

#### **323.2 Call of the Annual Meeting**

The annual congregational meeting shall be provided for and called by the Official Board/Ministry Council. Notice of such meeting shall be given by announcing the time and date thereof on two Sundays in the regular services of the congregation held within thirty (30) days immediately prior to said meeting.

#### **323.3 Special Meetings**

Special meetings of the congregation may be called by the Official Board/Ministry Council and, except as otherwise provided in this *Discipline*, shall be called by the Official Board/Ministry Council upon the written request of ten (10) percent of the members of the congregation in good standing. Notice of a special meeting shall be given in the same manner as notice of an annual meeting; provided, however, that notice of any special meeting shall contain a statement of the purpose or purposes thereof and only such business as is contained in the notice shall be considered at a special meeting.

#### **323.4 Voting Members**

All members in good standing, sixteen (16) years of age and over, shall be entitled to vote at any annual or special meeting of the congregation, except when legal age is specified. Legal age shall mean eighteen (18) years of age unless state law requires a higher age.

#### **323.5 Records of Meetings**

The secretary of the congregation shall be responsible for making and retaining an accurate record of the business transacted at each congregational meeting; such records to be incorporated with and retained among the records of the Official Board/Ministry Council.

### **324 THE CONGREGATION AND ITS PROPERTY**

#### **324.1 Membership**

**324.1.1** A congregation consists of the persons whose names are found on its membership records. These are the body corporate or unincorporate, in which reside the power to purchase, hold, use, control, mortgage, lease, sell, or convey both real and personal property.

**324.1.2** Each congregation is the sole custodian of its membership records, and it alone can determine all questions that may be raised concerning the accuracy thereof and the identity of persons, pursuant to the provisions of this *Discipline*. When resolving such questions every person of legal age and in good standing (321.6 and 323.4), whose name appears on the church membership records, except as otherwise provided herein or by the Constitution or laws of the state in which such congregation is located, shall be a voting member with all the rights and duties thereunto appertaining.

#### **324.2 Financial Obligation**

Each congregation, whether or not incorporated, is solely liable for its financial transactions and any debts, judgments, or legal liabilities incurred by it. No National Conference, Board, other congregation, nor other organization of the Evangelical Congregational Church shall be liable therefore unless the guarantee or assumption of such debt, judgment, or liability is duly authorized thereby and such action is conveyed in writing to the congregation or obligee.

### **324.3 Dissolving Affiliation**

A congregation has the right to dissolve its affiliation with the Evangelical Congregational Church and form any other denominational affiliation or continue as an independent congregation, in the following manner:

**324.3.1** Congregational action dissolving or changing, or intended to dissolve or change, the ecclesiastical affiliation or relation of the congregation can be taken only during the thirty (30) days immediately preceding the opening date of the regular session of the National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church within whose geographical area the congregation and its property are located. During the aforesaid thirty (30) days, a congregational meeting may be called by the Official Board/Ministry Council only if one-fifth of the members in good standing subscribe to a written call for such meeting, said call to contain an announcement of the purpose of such meeting.

**324.3.2** At least ten (10) days' written notice of such meeting shall be given to all members of the congregation entitled to vote by mailing a copy of the call, postage prepaid, to the address of such members shown on the church membership records, and the said meeting shall be announced on two Sundays in the regular services of the congregation held within thirty (30) days immediately prior to said meeting.

**324.3.3** All persons who are of legal age (323.4), whose names are enrolled at the time the meeting is convened and whose names have been enrolled at least one year prior thereto, and who have contributed regularly to the maintenance of the congregation and communed during such year, are entitled to vote.

**324.3.4** At a meeting thus convened, the congregation, by a two-thirds vote of the total membership of the congregation appearing on the church membership records and entitled to vote as hereinbefore set forth, may dissolve the ecclesiastical affiliation with the Evangelical Congregational Church.

**324.3.5** No such dissolution of a congregation's affiliation with the Evangelical Congregational Church shall become effective unless and until formal written notice of such action shall be delivered to the National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church, within whose geographical area the congregation and its property are located, on the first day of its next regular session.

**324.3.6** Members entitled to vote at the aforesaid congregational meeting who, in the event of a decision to dissolve the affiliation with the Evangelical Congregational Church, shall decide to remain with the Evangelical Congregational Church, shall be entitled to a pro rata share of the appraised value of the property of the congregation on the effective date of such dissolution, provided, however, that such dissenting members shall agree, by majority vote, to use and shall use such money in providing and maintaining a place of worship in affiliation with the Evangelical Congregational Church.

**324.3.7** If any appropriations or other grants shall have been made by the National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church, or any of the agencies of such Conferences, toward the creation or maintenance of a congregation or its property, such appropriations or grants shall constitute a noninterest-bearing obligation chargeable against the property of a congregation, such debt to become payable and collectible according to law from any congregation that shall separate from or dissolve its affiliation with the Evangelical Congregational Church.

### **324.4 Discontinuation of a Congregation**

Should a congregation become extinct or cease to exist, or should a congregation make request to the National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church, in whose area such congregation and its property are located, for the discontinuance of worship services and the closing of the work in the area served by such congregation, then and in any of such events, the property of such congregation shall revert, and if such property be sold, the proceeds thereof paid, to the aforesaid National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church, which shall thereupon acquire and become entitled to all rights of ownership thereto. A congregation shall be adjudged to be extinct or to have ceased to exist when religious services have not been held by that congregation for at least eighteen months under the pastorate of a minister appointed by a National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church and a resolution declaring such congregation to be extinct has been adopted by that National Conference. Irrespective of the foregoing provisions, a congregation may be adjudged extinct at any time by a National Conference upon the request or with the consent of that congregation.

### **324.5 Articles of Incorporation/Bylaws**

The articles of incorporation or bylaws of each incorporated congregation and the bylaws of each unincorporated congregation affiliated with the Evangelical Congregational Church or to which pastors are

assigned by the Evangelical Congregational Church shall contain provisions comparable to those contained in paragraph 322.3 of the *Discipline*. Whether a congregation has incorporated or not, and whether or not bylaws have been adopted, each congregation shall be subject to all the provisions of the *Discipline*.

#### **324.6 Indemnification of Officers**

(This indemnification statement applies only to churches located in Pennsylvania. Churches located in other states should check with their state authorities concerning a similar document.)

The Directors of all incorporated Evangelical Congregational Churches shall not be personally liable for monetary damages as a result of any action taken, or failure to act, unless such action or inaction constitutes both:

(a) a breach of or failure to perform duties in compliance with the standards of fiduciary care described in the Director's Liability Act (i.e., in good faith, in a manner he/she reasonably believes to be in the best interest of the Corporation, and with such care, including reasonable inquiry, skill, and diligence, as a person of ordinary prudence would use under similar circumstances) and

(b) self-dealing, willful misconduct, or recklessness, subject to exceptions provided by said Act for his/her responsibility or liability under any criminal statute and liability for payment of taxes.

Every director and every officer of the Corporation shall be indemnified by the Corporation against all expenses and liability, including counsel fees, reasonably incurred by or imposed upon him in connection with a proceeding to which he may be made a party, or in which he becomes involved, by reason of his being or having been a director or officer of the Corporation, or any settlement thereof, whether or not he is a director or officer at the time that such expenses are incurred, except in such cases wherein the director or officer is adjudged by a court guilty of willful misconduct or recklessness in the performance of his duties, provided however, that such indemnification shall be given in any case wherein the act or failure to act was authorized or later approved by the Board of Directors. In the event of a settlement, the indemnification herein shall apply only when the Board of Directors approves such settlement and reimbursement is deemed for the best interest of the Corporation.

In the event that a director or officer is adjudged guilty of willful misconduct or recklessness, the Board of Directors may, in specific cases, apply the foregoing indemnification.

In a proceeding brought as a derivative action on behalf of the Corporation, the above indemnification shall apply only to expenses and counsel fees unless otherwise specifically authorized by the Board of Directors.

The foregoing right of indemnification shall be in addition to and nonexclusive of all other rights to which such director or officer may be entitled.

The Corporation may on an individual basis, in specific cases, apply the above indemnification to an employee of the Corporation.

#### **330 LOCAL CONFERENCE**

There shall be a Local Conference in each congregation/charge, which shall meet at least once during the Conference year.

#### **331 PURPOSE AND MEMBERSHIP**

The Local Conference is the highest judicial or legislative body with respect to the duties set forth in 404. The membership of the Local Conference shall be composed of the membership of the Official Board/Ministry Council (in case of a multiple-church charge, the membership of the Official Boards/Ministry Councils) plus all itinerant and licensed ministers who are assigned as members of the congregation or congregations of the charge. All members of the Local Conference shall be members in good standing (See 321.6) of a congregation on the charge and entitled to one vote.

#### **332 MEETINGS**

The time and place of the regular and special meetings of the Local Conference shall be scheduled with the approval of the Conference Minister.

#### **333 ORGANIZATION**

The Conference Minister shall preside over the Local Conference. If the Conference Minister cannot be present, he may send a substitute in the person of an itinerant elder of the National Conference, who shall preside. If the Conference Minister is not present and has not sent a substitute, the preacher-in-charge shall

preside. The preacher-in-charge shall be the secretary when present and not in the chair. When he cannot act, the Conference shall elect a secretary. The secretary shall keep a correct record of all Conference transactions, to be submitted to the Conference Minister at his request for examination and approval.

### **334 BUSINESS**

The regular business of the Local Conference shall be as follows:

**334.1** The members of Conference shall be examined to ascertain whether they have been faithful, godly, and unblamable in their moral and official conduct. Inquiry shall be made whether the persons entrusted to their care are faithful and godly, especially those who may come to celebrate the Lord's Supper, so that they may commune without offense.

**334.2** Charges duly preferred and appeals to Conference shall be investigated and disposed of according to the directions of the *Discipline*. In all cases, however, where the defendant demands or where circumstances require that charges preferred against a person should be investigated by a committee, composed of people not members of Local Conference, such defendant shall be prohibited from communion until the charges are investigated and the case decided.

**334.3** The pastor and other members of the Local Conference who represent organizations of the local church shall make quarterly statistical reports to be recorded in the Local Conference Record and provided for the Conference Minister as he may designate.

**334.4** Candidates for the ministry who have fulfilled the ministry assessment requirements of the National Conference shall be examined according to the directions of the *Discipline*, and after such examination they may, by a majority of votes, be recommended to the National Conference for approved candidacy or license.

**334.5** At the session held just prior to the beginning of the ensuing fiscal year, it shall consider recommendations as to the salary and other benefits for the pastor for the ensuing year and shall fix and determine the same. The salaries of pastors serving full-time assignments shall meet or exceed the minimums established by the National Conference.

**334.6** The Local Conference may and, in order to promote the business of the National Conference, should elect a delegate to the National Conference at the session to be designated by the rules of the National Conference. In the case of a charge, each congregation may elect its own delegate at the Local Conference session. The delegate's term of office shall begin at the time of election and shall continue until a successor has been elected. The Local Conference may also elect one or more alternate delegates who shall serve, as the rule of the respective National Conference shall stipulate, in place of the regularly elected delegate when that delegate cannot serve. In the case of a charge, where a church has not elected its own delegate, an alternate delegate shall be elected from that church. This person shall be the Pastoral Relations Committee of that church.

If none of the duly elected persons serves, a delegate may be elected at an adjourned or special session. People eligible to this office are to be of legal age (323.4) and are to have been members in good standing of the Evangelical Congregational Church (321.6) for at least two (2) years. Itinerant and other assigned pastors are not eligible for election to this office.

### **335 THE LAY DELEGATE**

The lay delegate must possess a passion for Christ and a compassion for the lost, and be a recognized leader in his/her congregation. The responsibilities of the lay delegate are:

**335.1** To become acquainted with the provisions of the *Discipline* and the rules and the proceedings of the National Conference.

**335.2** To vote on all actions presented to the Conference except those matters that are related to the ministry, such as licensing, ordination, reception into the Itinerancy, superannuation, Trial Court, and Triers of Appeals.

**335.3** To secure from the congregation directions as to how his/her vote is to be cast when amendments to Part Three, Chapter III, 321-324, of the *Discipline* are to be considered. In the absence of such instructions, the delegate cannot bind his/her congregation to support any such amendment. To disregard the instruction of the congregation disqualifies the delegate to act on the question involved. Omitting to send a delegate or failing to give instructions shall in no manner abridge the rights of the congregation.

**335.4** To serve as assigned on standing committees during the conference sessions and at times to serve as appointed on special committees that function between the sessions of the National Conference.

**335.5** To share with other members of the Pastoral Relations Committee (See 336) in providing the Conference Minister with information that may have some bearing on the stationing of the minister assigned to that charge.

**335.6** To sign any application submitted by a charge to National Conference for an appropriation.

**335.7** To assist in welcoming a newly assigned pastor into the fellowship of the congregation and the Official Board/Ministry Council.

**335.8** To assist in representing the National Conference in reporting to the Official Board/Ministry Council and/or the congregation concerning actions and recommendations of the National Conference.

**335.9** To serve as a member of the Official Board/Ministry Council in the congregation of which he/she is a member and of the Local Conference of the congregation or charge he/she represents.

**335.10** To serve as liaison between the National Conference and the congregation or charge he/she represents.

**335.11** To represent the congregation on the District Ministry Team as one of the lay leaders of the church.

### **336 PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

There shall be a committee on Pastoral Relations constituted annually by the Local Conference. This committee shall function according to the rules of the respective National Conferences. The primary function of this committee shall be to aid the pastor, and any pastoral assistants, to serve effectively the needs and programs of the local congregation. It shall be a conferring and counseling committee and shall be available for consultation with the pastor concerning conditions within the local congregation(s) that pertain to various pastoral duties. Any requests concerning stationing must come through the Pastoral Relations Committee to the Supervisory Committee on behalf of the charge.