

SECTION

1

**PRINCIPLE
BASED
GOVERNANCE
STRUCTURE**

Principle Based Governance Structure

The EC Discipline “Principle Based Leadership” Section 300 to 320

300 CHAPTER 1 – 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 – EC 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 are 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: Disciplemaking

Healthy churches are disciplemaking churches. Disciplemaking 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 disciple-making 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." (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 people 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 out denominational identity (Paragraph 300) several structures will be essential in the life of a local Evangelical Congregational Church. These are membership, affiliation, congregational meetings, Local Conference and Pastoral Relations Committee.

Please refer to the **2016 EC Discipline**, which can be viewed at www.eccenter.com, for more information on this item. The following paragraphs are only partial excerpts of more complete statements.

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. (See 321.1 Membership)

321.2 Eligibility

Persons may be added to the roll upon profession of faith or by receiving a letter of transfer from another church. Only persons who have expressed a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord will be considered for membership.

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 and/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*.

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.

330 THE 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 302) of a congregation on the charge and entitled to one vote.

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 effectively serve 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.

