



Digest

of the
National Ministry Team
March 17, 2022

The National Ministry Team met for its spring 2022 session on the campus of Evangelical Seminary. There was only one NMT members absent, as he was on a short-term mission trip.

Rev. Les Cool, Kingdom Extension Associate, presented a message on Jesus' call to follow him, be in relationship with him, and his commission to make disciples. This needs to be the way every follower of Jesus lives.

Bishop Hill presented his final report to any official body of the National Conference. He noted that the world and our culture continue to provide us with overwhelming evidence of the reality of sin and the lostness of the human soul without Jesus. As Ed Stetzer, Dean of the School of Mission, Ministry, and Leadership at Wheaton College, recently described it, the world and western culture in particular is experiencing a "cultural convulsion." Bruce expressed his deep concern for our pastors, lay leaders and churches. As David Brooks, a conservative political and cultural commentator for the New York Times has put it, for the past two years, and counting, we have felt "disoriented, disturbed, unmoored... in a yawning chasm of mutual incomprehension. The atmosphere within many Christian organizations has grown more tense and bitter. Pastors are exhausted – partly because of Covid but partly because every word they use is scrutinized to see if it passes this or that theological litmus test." And it all happened with startling speed. In response, the Bishop is working on a series of videos dealing with the issue of lamenting. He also reminded us how the Lord prepared the Evangelical Congregational Church for such a time as this, even without us knowing it. Our flatter denominational structure has enabled us to be more efficient. Giving assigned pastors the authority to "oversee" the administration of the Lord's Supper has allowed for the creative provision of this important aspect of congregational worship. Our ecclesiology statement, the clear understanding that the church is a people and our strong history and commitment to the involvement of lay people in the ministry of the local church have been key to making the adjustments required to minister during cultural upheaval. While we are concerned about the number of small congregations that make up our denomination, we must also recognize the unique opportunity we have to minister to the neighborhoods surrounding our churches. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us leverage the positives of smaller churches in ways that will bring people closer to Jesus. We can never lose sight of the reality that each of us live "to know Christ and to make him known." While our culture and even some within the evangelical movement struggle with that word, we must remember that we are Evangelical – people of the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus. Paul wrote very simply in Acts 20:24, "My life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus – the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God." So too, our programs and ministries, are worth nothing if they don't provide the opportunity to lead people to faith in Jesus. We are "congregational" because that's where the action is. The sharing of the Gospel in our culture does not depend on how attractively we package it, but on whether congregations and individual Christians are living it out and talking about it in their daily lives. The Bishop expressed his deep appreciation for the pastors, lay leaders, and members of the Evangelical Congregational Church; people who truly love Jesus. He also spoke of his gratitude for all those he was had the privilege to serve with in denominational leadership and at Church Center.

The NMT received Bishop Hill's final report with a standing ovation. A written copy of this report was distributed and will be posted to the denomination's website (www.eccenter.com).

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Mrs. Debra Patterson, National Conference Treasurer, presented the treasurer's report and highlighted some items from the report including the note that the Ministry Funds rate included in the proposed budget for 2023 is unchanged from the 2022 rate.

Bishop Hill presented the CNT report noting a number of personnel changes in the members of District Field Directors. Bishop Hill has worked with Bishop-elect Sizemore to fill those arising vacancies. Bishop Hill also noted that when DFDs were first appointed their primary focus was connecting with the pastors on their district, then they began to connect with lay delegates, and now he has asked them to get to know the lay leadership teams (board/council) in their districts. This is all a part of our connectional structure as a denomination.

Mr. Kevin Henry, Executive Director, presented the Conference Support Team report and gave updates on registration for National Conference which are now "live" on the website (www.eccenter.com). Kevin also stressed the importance of every person attending National Conference 2022 to register via the website.

Bishop Hill presented the Amendments Committee report with appreciation for Rev. Joel Kime, Amendments Committee chairman. The Bishop also reminded the members that this is the second year of the amendment process, the voting at Conference for these amendments will be only "up-or-down" – there can be no changes or amendments to these items.

Rev. Dr. Gary Kuehner, Church Health Associate, presented the Church Health Community's (CHC) report highlighting the many resources the Community makes available to churches. The partnership between the EC Church and Christian Endeavor for youth ministry resourcing, and approximately 12 churches are working with this partnership. Drew Parry is the new CHC's point-person for this partnership and Josh Good will be representing CE at National Conference this year. The CHC has begun to address bi-vocational ministry needs in the EC Church and has added people into the community to help in this area. Gary invited anyone who would like to speak into any area of the CHC's work and to contact him.

Rev. Ted Rathman, Global Ministries Associate, presented this report and highlighted three items from the report: 1) the current efforts to raise funds for a new vehicle for India. 2) the Global Ministry Community (GMC) is working to increase funding for our international churches. Local US churches are being asked to designate funds in their budgets for our international EC churches. 3) Ted makes himself available to any EC church who would like his help to ignite or reignite its missions efforts. Ted also reported that Dan and Kim Blank are coming onto the GMC to serve as liaisons between the GMC and Operation Christmas Child to enhance our denominational partnership with that ministry.

Rev. Les Cool, Kingdom Extension Associate (KEA), presented the Kingdom Extension Community's (KEC) report noting that this is his last report as he is leaving the KEA responsibility. He spoke about a number of new KEC initiatives that are in the works at the present time.

Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Byerly, Ministerial Development Associate (MDA), presented his community's report. Jeff described the various ways the Ministerial Development Community (MDC) helps develop leaders to

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build healthy communities. Jeff noted that when moral failure issues among our credentialed personnel arise, the MDA must be notified quickly – not to respond punitively, but to be a resource to people in difficult situations. Gary Brown shared about some efforts being made to do “member care” for our pastors through the MDC.

Bishop Hill presented the Missional Alignment Community’s report which outlines the constituent groups of this community and each group’s work. Bishop Hill gave some highlights of the work of the Faith and Doctrine Committee. The Heritage Committee oversees the archives, and submissions to the archives must be approved through Jonathan Brown. Bruce also highlighted some of the work of the Prayer Mobilization Team.

Mr. Kevin Henry, Executive Director of the EC Church, gave a report from the Benefits Corporation. Our retirement program is still in transition as Prudential has sold its retirement business to Empower Retirement. The Benefits Corporation is working with our retirement advisor to explore other options for our retirement fund.

As noted earlier, Bishop Hill reported that he and Bishop-elect Randall Sizemore are appointing two new District Field Directors and seeking the NMT’s affirmation of these appointments: Rev. Michael Knapp as District Field Director for the Capital/Lebanon District (effective January 1, 2022) and Rev. Wayne Houck as District Field Director for the Penn/Jersey District (effective July 1, 2022). Both of these appointments were to replace retiring DFDs. The appointments were affirmed by the NMT members.

Rev. Randall Sizemore, Bishop-elect of the EC Church, presented the following appointments for affirmation of the NMT for Conference Officers: Rev. Jeffrey Schell as Vice Chairman of Conference; Rev. Adam Roberts as National Conference Secretary; and Mr. Carl Butler as National Conference Treasurer. These appointments were affirmed and will be effective at National Conference, May 25, 2022.

Rev. Randall Sizemore, Bishop-elect of the EC Church, presented the name of Rev. Michael Snedeker as his appointee for the position of Kingdom Extension Associate. The appointment was affirmed and will be effective at National Conference, May 25, 2022.

Bishop-elect Sizemore gave a brief description of his plans for the theme “Overflowing Hope,” program, and equipping experience for National Conference.

Rev. Dr. Gary Brown closed the National Ministry Team meeting with a word of prayer.