

The
CREED, RITUAL
and
DISCIPLINE
of the
Evangelical Congregational Church

As amended and adopted by
The National Conference
Edition of 2022

Published by the
Evangelical Congregational Church
100 West Park Avenue
Myerstown, PA 17067

First Edition 1932
Second Edition 1948
Third Edition 1960
Fourth Edition 1972
Fifth Edition 1975
Sixth Edition 1979
Seventh Edition 1983
Eighth Edition 1987
Ninth Edition 1991
Tenth Edition 1994
Eleventh Edition 2000
Twelfth Edition 2004
Thirteenth Edition 2008
Fourteenth Edition 2016
Fifteenth Edition 2022

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Printed in the United States of America

The National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church

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PREFACE

The Evangelical Congregational Church *Discipline* is meant to provide historical, creedal (or doctrinal) and operational governance for the denomination, its Commissions, and affiliates, including the local churches. Additionally, it provides guidelines for the conduct of the rituals, the organizational structure for a local congregation, and outlines the responsibility of the National Conference and her ministers.

All of the above are charged with tasking the work of the total church through a people-centered ministry having the mandate: “to know Christ and make Him known.” This vision is captured with the mission statement, which directs the denomination to raise up healthy churches by proclaiming Christ to a needy world in obedience to the Great Commission stated in Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 28.

To this end, the *Discipline* reflects denominational response to the mission and vision established with these core values:

1. Possessing a passion for Christ as demonstrated by our commitment to the authority of the scripture, the centrality of prayer and the pursuit of holiness.
2. Having compassion for the lost as demonstrated by evangelism and acts of mercy on a world-wide basis.
3. Utilizing servant leadership as demonstrated by training and developing persons for mission and ministry.
4. Sharing concern for healthy ministries through changed lives within culturally sensitive congregations and denominational affiliates.
5. Functioning as a unified body of Christ by networking with Evangelical Congregational churches with the goal of extending the kingdom of God.

Our vision is to be a dynamic movement of God, led by pastors and laity with a zeal to reach lost souls for Christ and His church in a global endeavor as together we fulfill God’s purpose on earth.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matthew 6: 9-13 KJV)

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I BELIEVE IN God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; that He descended into hades, the third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead; I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy general church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

TO THE

DISCIPLINE

HISTORICAL STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCIPLINE

HISTORICAL STATEMENT

1. Introduction

God has revealed Himself to us through His written Word, the Bible, and through His spoken Word, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1). The beliefs of the church regarding God's revelation of Himself are set forth in creedal statements, and man's response to God is seen in the lives of the saints of God in history. The *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church describes the doctrines of this body of believers in the 25 Articles of Faith and creedal statements. The polity of the Church expresses its practices and ordinances in the lives of its members.

We describe here the history of the Evangelical Congregational Church as seen in the lives of its stalwart founders. Some of these were itinerant preachers of the evangelical conviction that all men are lost and need the grace of God as it is expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They believed that the most important words of Jesus were "You must be born again" and that the proof of the authenticity of this Christian experience through faith is seen in holy living. These early preachers went about the countryside preaching the good news of Christ and beseeching everyone to repent and be born again.

One of these early itinerant preachers was Jacob Albright (May 1, 1759-May 18, 1808). As a young convert, he looked for a church with which he could unite that served his Lord Jesus Christ and upheld good discipline. It should come as no surprise to us that he found such a fellowship in the faith and practice of the church of John Wesley, the Methodists of that day. In the year 1796, yearning for the salvation of his spiritually neglected German-speaking brethren, he started out as a humble layman to preach the gospel of Christ to them. His labors extended over large portions of Pennsylvania and into parts of Maryland and Virginia, resulting in the saving of many souls.

Albright and his co-laborers had no thought of founding a new religious denomination, but in 1800, he yielded to the oft-repeated and urgent requests of those whom he had led to the Lord to begin the work of organization. Three classes were organized in as many counties in Pennsylvania. In November 1803 at a council composed of Mr. Albright, his two assistants and fourteen of the leading men of the Association, Mr. Albright was declared to be "a genuine evangelical preacher" in the name of the whole Association and solemnly ordained as such. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were declared to be their rule of faith and practice.

The influence of the creedal statements and the polity of the American Methodists of that day were never completely erased from the formal statements of faith and practice of the embryonic Evangelical Congregational Church.

As a result of the demands upon his physique traveling on horseback across the countryside in all kinds of weather, Jacob Albright fell victim to tuberculosis and died May 18, 1808, at the age of 49. He was on the way from a service in Dauphin County to his home near Ephrata. Illness prevented him from going farther than the area called Muehlbach, about 10 miles east of Lebanon, PA. He was buried in the private burial plot of John George Becker, Sr., at what is now Kleinfeltersville, PA.

2. The Evangelical Association

Following the death of Jacob Albright, his co-laborers continued to evangelize their fellow German-speaking people in the eastern states. With zeal and vision, they went from community to community wherever anyone would listen to the message of salvation. The number of local classes (congregations) increased, conferences were organized, and missionary work extended.

The election of Rev. John Seybert to the office of Bishop in 1839 gave vigorous leadership to the dozens of circuit riders. They did not limit their preaching to the settled areas in the east but followed migrating people westward into the new territories and states.

At first, the ministry was limited to German-speaking people, but as new generations were born, the English language was used more and more.

The church bore the name of The Evangelical Association, and the practice of zealous evangelism resulted in numerical growth and increased outreach. As members migrated to the Midwest and later to the far West, congregations were organized in the northern states and also Canada. Immigrants from Germany were attracted to the fellowship because many of the services in the early church were conducted in German, and

the preaching was in German. These German-speaking churches experienced phenomenal growth. Mission conferences were organized in Germany and Switzerland and later in Japan.

3. Development of Differences

As the denomination grew, differences of opinion and practice developed. One divisive issue concerned conflicting understanding and interpretation of the Wesleyan doctrine of holiness.

A more serious difference developed concerning the form of government. The increased use of the English language in the services and the accompanying application of American principles of self government clashed with the more centralized forms of government found in European churches.

The Church was faced with a critical issue at the Nineteenth General Conference in 1887, which met in Buffalo, New York, September 1-27. Rev. H. B. Hartzler, editor of the *Evangelical Messenger*, the official English publication, was brought to trial by the General Conference for "unchristian conduct, official misconduct and grievous offense as minister and as editor in our church." He had refused to print certain criticisms of the Japan mission, which were submitted by the senior Bishop, J. J. Esher. The editor did not believe the Bishop was justified in his statements. After a trial occupying eleven days of the Conference session, the editor was deposed by a vote of 57 to 47. Since there were no lay delegates at this Conference the vote was by ministers.

The large minority protested the action and rallied sufficient support to reelect Rudolph Dubs to the office of bishop. He became their official leader. Bishop J. J. Esher and Bishop Thomas Bowman were also reelected and led what was known as "The Majority," commonly called "The Esherites." The sympathizers with the deposed editor, H. B. Hartzler, were called "The Minority" or "The Dubsites." In order to provide a medium to advocate and defend their position, the Minority started an independent weekly called *The Evangelical*, which was published at Harrisburg, PA, and first appeared under the date of November 14, 1887. The official denominational publications were closed to their views on the issues in question. Although personalities entered into the controversies, the issue was primarily a centralized form of government versus a more representative form. Steps were taken according to provisions in the *Discipline* to remove each of the three bishops from active service, but only Bishop Dubs complied by refraining from the performance of the duties of the office during the period of suspension. Annual Conferences took positions with one side or the other or were divided into separate conferences according to their loyalties. By the end of the four-year period, almost every preacher and congregation was forced to take a position for or against the leadership in control.

4. The Church Divides

This resulted in two General Conferences convening in 1891. The East Pennsylvania Conference, as the oldest Annual Conference, called for the General Conference to meet in Philadelphia. The Majority group used the Board of Publication to call the Twentieth General Conference to meet in Indianapolis as the General Conference of 1887 had designated. They endorsed the position of their bishops and excluded all ministers and congregations who supported the Philadelphia Conference. The Majority sought to evict from parsonages and church buildings pastors and congregations who were not loyal to the leaders of the Evangelical Association.

The non-merging UEs did not lose their properties this time, but the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled against their use of the name "United Evangelical," so in 1928 they adopted the name "Evangelical Congregational" to emphasize their heritage in evangelical doctrine and evangelistic outreach and their concern for congregational rights in controlling church property and determining church affiliation. Denominational cohesion would be maintained through the itinerant system, in which pastors were assigned to congregations by the denominational leadership. The ECs lost their stake in Albright College, but once the Evangelical Church had moved the institution to Reading it was happy to sell the campus property to the EC Church in 1931. By the 1950s the site was home to Church Center Press (later the EC Church Center), the Burd and Rogers Memorial Home (later E.C.C. Retirement Village), and Evangelical School of Theology (later Evangelical Theological Seminary). In some communities, the civil courts were asked to rule, but in general they did not consider the moral and equitable phases of the questions at issue, and denominational ownership and control of the church property were accepted. The result was that congregations with the Minority party had to provide new places for services or buy back their own buildings.

5. The United Evangelical Church

Efforts to reconcile the differences, both within the denomination and from neutral persons, were of

no avail. The defeated Minority was compelled either to submit or to withdraw and reorganize. Most of them chose to join together in a new fellowship under a new government. On October 10, 1894, the East Pennsylvania Conference met in convention and organized as the East Pennsylvania Conference of the United Evangelical Church. They called for a General Conference to meet at Naperville, Illinois, on November 29 of the same year. Other Annual Conferences were represented by delegates who organized the first General Conference of the United Evangelical Church. This represented several hundred congregations, the larger number being in the three conferences in the state of Pennsylvania.

Articles of Faith and the *Discipline* were adopted by this Conference. The creedal statements gave added emphasis to the subjective Christian faith, with new articles on Regeneration, Repentance, Witness of the Spirit, Sanctification, and the Work of the Holy Spirit, as well as articles on the future life. The main substance of the Articles of Faith came from a doctrinal statement compiled by Dr. Milton Terry, a theologian of the Methodist Church.

The *Discipline* that was adopted limited the powers of the General Conference and restricted the authority of bishops. Each Annual Conference was provided with a measure of autonomy, and the ownership of property was placed in the control of the local congregation. The congregation also could determine all questions of ecclesiastical connection, when acting according to its deed and charter. Each pastoral charge was entitled to elect a lay delegate to represent it at the Annual Conference, and each Annual Conference was entitled to elect an equal number of lay and ministerial delegates to the General Conference, according to its membership.

From 1894 to 1922, the United Evangelical Church gained in membership, Sunday School enrollment, and property value. An evangelistic emphasis in congregations, camp meetings, and missionary projects showed spiritual results. The foreign mission outreach went to China and to Africa. Two colleges were supported liberally and developed to meet the educational needs of the times.

6. Problems of Reunion

During these years, a growing concern developed to reconcile the differences that had caused the division before the turn of the century. Following the General Conference of 1910, negotiations were started to bring the United Evangelical Church and the Evangelical Association together. Committees worked on a *Basis of Union*. Some concessions were made to the United Evangelicals, but some of the principal issues sought by them, which had caused the division in the first place, were not acceptable to the representatives of the Evangelical Association. These issues included the limited power of the bishops and the right of the Annual Conference to determine its ecclesiastical relationship.

Prior to the General Conference of 1922, the *Basis of Union* was presented to each of the Annual Conferences. The East Pennsylvania Conference meeting in February of that year took the position that this *Basis* was not properly before it but should first go to the General Conference for consideration and, therefore, refused to vote on the submitted *Basis*. All of the other Annual Conferences voted with a majority being secured to approve the *Basis of Union*. However, there were strong minorities in some of the Conferences who opposed the merger.

When the General Conference met at Barrington, Illinois, in October 1922, the East Pennsylvania delegation asked for further consideration of the issues that had previously been rejected in the *Basis of Union*. The East Pennsylvania delegates, following the instructions of their Annual Conference, did not vote. However, by this time the plans for the merger had proceeded so far that the General Conference of the Evangelical Association had convened in Special Session in Detroit, Michigan, to receive the United Evangelical delegation. The merger was consummated at Detroit, resulting in what was declared to be The Evangelical Church.

7. The Evangelical Congregational Church

When the East Pennsylvania delegates who did not vote returned home, a special session of their Conference was called to meet in Bethlehem, PA, in November. About three-fourths of the ministers and lay delegates responded and voted to continue as a United Evangelical Conference and not become a part of the merged denomination. A number of congregations in other conferences associated themselves with the East Pennsylvania Conference.

In 1924, churches in Ohio and Western Pennsylvania organized as the Ohio Conference. (A group of six congregations in the state of Illinois affiliated with the East Pennsylvania Conference united with the Ohio

Conference in 1931 to form what became the Western Conference.)

In 1926, delegates of the East Pennsylvania Conference and of the Ohio conference convened as the first General Conference under the *Discipline* of the United Evangelical Church. Bishop W. F. Heil presided. The Rev. E. S. Woodring was elected bishop for the next quadrennium.

This group, who desired to perpetuate the principles of the United Evangelical Church, found it necessary and expedient to select a new name. Consequently, in 1928, a special session of the General Conference adopted the name, "The Evangelical Congregational Church." The word "evangelical" was chosen because it emphasized the church as evangelical in doctrine and evangelistic in outreach. The word "congregational" recognized congregational rights in controlling church property and determining church membership. They continued to use the itinerant system to assign ministers, which served as a connectional means in the conferences to provide for the church's outreach.

In 1998, directed by the General Conference that recognized the need for a proactive approach to fulfill our mission, a task force began the work of strategic planning and vision casting for the denomination. A document resulted in the *Basis of Union*, expressing purpose, values, and vision for the church. This contemporary restatement of the Evangelical Congregational Church's mission led to restructuring the Annual and General Conferences. Approved in 2002, the document resulted in the uniting of the USA-based conferences and the formation of a National Conference. The *Discipline* was amended, incorporating into it the *Basis of Union*. Remaining as foundational, however, are provisions adopted by the (former) United Evangelical Church, including the rights of the local congregation, the continuation of an itinerant system for assigning ministers, and the newly constituted National Conference that serves as a connectional means for the church's outreach.

The first session of the National Conference was held in May 2003 following a transitional period of education for clergy, laity, and churches throughout the conference territories. Revisions to the *Discipline* guarantee congregations the largest freedom consistent with fidelity to the essentials of Christian belief and the orderly and efficient administration of the affairs of the church. The church is called upon to be a dynamic movement of God embodying a passion for Christ, compassion for the lost, servant leadership, healthy ministries, and unity in the body of Christ.

From the very simple beginning under Albright and his people, through the rigors of cleavage and disunity, there has come the Evangelical Congregational Church to which we give allegiance. Now it takes its place in the twenty-first century, targeting a society far different from that of its founder but intent on serving the Christ of the Ages.

PART ONE

THE CREED

- CHAPTER I – ARTICLES OF FAITH
- CHAPTER II – CHRISTIAN PERFECTION
- CHAPTER III – CHRISTIAN PRACTICE

CHAPTER I – ARTICLES OF FAITH

100.1. The following Articles contain our confession of Christian Faith:

101. OF GOD

101.1. There is but one true and living God, an eternal Being, a Spirit without body, indivisible, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Creator and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible. In this Godhead there is a Trinity, of one substance and power, and coeternal, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

102. OF JESUS CHRIST

102.1. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only begotten Son of God, was born of the Virgin Mary, grew into perfect manhood and became acquainted with all the infirmities, temptations, and sorrows of men. In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead, so that, uniting Deity and humanity in one Christ, He is sole Mediator between God and man. He gave His life a ransom for all and by His death on the cross made a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, wherein He abideth, our great High-Priest and King, and must reign until all things are put in subjection under Him.

103. OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

103.1. The Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, and of the same eternal nature, power, and glory, is everywhere present with men to convict of sin, work newness of life in them that believe, and lead them into all truth.

104. OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

104.1. By the Holy Scriptures we understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, which the church has at all times received as such. These books in order are as follows:

104.1.1. The Old Testament

104.1.1.1. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

104.1.2. The New Testament

104.1.2.1. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, The Acts, Epistle to the Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, Epistle of James, I Peter, II Peter, I John, II John, III John, Jude, Revelation.

104.2. These Scriptures, given by Divine inspiration, contain the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation; so that whatever is not contained therein nor can be proved thereby is not to be enjoined on any as an article of faith.

105. OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

105.1. All men have sinned, and they inherit a depravity of nature that is continually propagated in the entire race of Adam. This corruption of nature so far removes them from the original righteousness of man that of themselves they have no ability to recover from their fallen condition but are continually inclined to that which is evil.

106. OF SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST

106.1. The love of God has made salvation possible to all through the mediation of Jesus Christ, whereby every man is graciously provided with freedom of will to accept or reject the offer of eternal life.

107. OF REPENTANCE

107.1. Repentance is sorrow for sin, wrought in the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. The awakened sinner is thereby made to recognize the holiness of God, the righteousness of His law and the guilt and shame of his own perverse nature. Thus, deeply humbled, he turns unto God and forsakes his sins.

108. OF JUSTIFICATION

108.1. Justification is that act of God by which, when we yield ourselves in full confidence to our Savior, Jesus Christ, we are freely acquitted from the guilt of sin and accounted righteous in His sight. We are accordingly justified, not by works which we perform, but by faith in Him who died for us.

109. OF REGENERATION

109.1. Regeneration is that work of the Holy Spirit wrought in us whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature and experience newness of life in Christ Jesus. By this new birth, the believer becomes a child of God, receives the spirit of adoption, and is made an heir of the kingdom of heaven.

110. OF THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

110.1. The witness of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God, the heavenly Comforter, immediately convinces the regenerate believer that he has passed from death unto life, that his sins are all forgiven, and that he is a child of God.

111. OF SANCTIFICATION

111.1. Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, is a state of righteousness and true holiness that every regenerate believer may attain. It consists in being cleansed from all sin; loving God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength; and loving our neighbor as ourselves. This gracious state of perfect love is attainable in this life by faith, both gradually and instantaneously, and should be earnestly sought by every child of God; but it does not deliver us from the infirmities, ignorance and mistakes that are common to man.

112. OF GOOD WORKS

112.1. The Holy Spirit dwelling in man begets within him love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, temperance, and all other ennobling virtues, and these show themselves in numerous outward acts, which become so many evidences of a living faith. Although such good works cannot put away sin, they are ever well-pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God.

113. OF APOSTASY

113.1. The gracious help of God is pledged to all those who continue steadfast in faith; but, on account of man's free will, which no power may coerce, apostasy from God is possible so long as we continue in the flesh. Wherefore, constant watchfulness, prayer,

and holy living are necessary on the part of man, lest he fall away from the grace of God, grieve and quench the Holy Spirit, and lose his soul at last.

114. OF IMMORTALITY

114.1. The soul of man is immortal and, on its separation from the body at death, continues in a conscious state of existence in the world of spirits. It there either enters into bliss or undergoes torment, according to its character as formed and fixed in the present life.

115. OF THE RESURRECTION

115.1. Christ did truly rise from the dead and took again his own body and ascended into heaven. Likewise, all the dead shall be raised up by the power of God through Christ, both the just and the unjust; but those who have done good shall come forth unto an eternal life of glory, and those who have wrought wickedness shall be adjudged to everlasting punishment.

116. OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT

116.1. God has appointed a day in which He will judge all men by Jesus Christ, to whom is committed the judgment of this world. We must all, accordingly, appear before the judgment seat of Christ who will judge in righteousness in accordance with the gospel and our response thereto.

117. OF HEAVEN

117.1. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has provided for those who are redeemed by His grace a heavenly and eternal rest, into which He purposes ultimately to gather them and dwell with them in unspeakable glory. There shall be no more sorrow, pain, or death, and the glorified saints shall see God and walk in His light forever.

118. OF HELL

118.1. The incorrigible sinner, having rejected Christ and all the offers and opportunities of grace, is without God and without hope in the world and makes himself a child of Satan. When he dies, his soul awakes to the torment of hell, from which there is no promise or hope of deliverance, but the sentence of everlasting punishment prepared for the devil and his angels.

119. OF THE CHURCH

119.1. The holy general church consists of the great body of believers who confess the Lord Jesus Christ and have life in Him. The individual church is a congregation or society of Christian believers, in which the pure worship of God is maintained, His holy word is preached, and His commandments and ordinances are sacredly observed.

120. OF THE MINISTRY

120.1. The ministry of the gospel is a sacred office and calling, ordained by Christ for the proclamation of His truth in all the world and for the orderly administration of the sacraments, the worship, and the *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church. No man may assume this office without the conviction of a divine call thereto and the recognition and ratification of that call by the church.

121. OF BAPTISM

121.1. The sacrament of baptism is the formal application of water to an infant, or to an

adult believer, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, as a visible sign and seal that the person so consecrated stands in a holy covenant relation to God and His people.

122. OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

- 122.1. The Lord's Supper is not merely a token of love and union that Christians ought to have among themselves but is a sacrament instituted in memory of the sufferings and death of Christ, whereby those who rightly and worthily receive the same partake of the body and blood of Christ by faith, not in a bodily but in a spiritual manner, in eating the broken bread and in drinking the blessed cup. We thereby also continually show forth our Christian faith and hope.

123. OF CHURCH POLITY

- 123.1. The Lord Jesus Christ ordained no particular form of government for His church, so that whatever polity, rules, regulations, rites, and ceremonies are adopted and approved by common authority, and are not repugnant to the word of God, may be acknowledged as sufficient to constitute a true church of the living God. Such polity, rules, rites, and ceremonies may be lawfully changed from time to time, as the needs of men and the diversity of nations, countries, and manners may require.

124. OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT

- 124.1. Civil government is an ordinance of God, grounded in the necessities of human nature and essential to the maintenance of public order, the security of personal rights, and the punishment of evil-doers. It is the duty of all men to be subject to the supreme authority of the country in which they reside and to respect and honor the civil magistrates.

125. OF THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE WORLD

- 125.1. The gospel is designed for all nations, its field of operation is the whole world, and the church and people of God are under solemn obligation to make known its saving truth and power among the heathen. To this great work we are impelled and encouraged by the command of the Lord and the promises and prophecies of the Holy Scriptures.

126. CHAPTER II – CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

126.1. TAUGHT IN THE WORD OF GOD

126.1.1. We believe that the doctrine of Christian Perfection is clearly taught in the Word of God. For this reason, it is accepted as one of the cherished doctrines of the Evangelical Congregational Church. God said to Abram, as recorded in Genesis 17:1: "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless." Our Lord and Savior expressly said to His disciples, as recorded in Matthew 5:48: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Furthermore, to affect this great end was plainly one of the leading purposes of God in instituting the church and calling laborers into His vineyard. Hear Paul to the Ephesians, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" Ephesians 4:11-13. Paul further taught with much emphasis that the best way to attain to this high standard was to preach the sinless Christ as our pattern of perfection. See Colossians 1:28: "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ."

126.2. Summary of John Wesley's Teaching

126.2.1. As to the character of this work of grace, when attainable, and its effect upon its possessor, that most excellent summary given by John Wesley in the year 1764 fully meets our views. This statement was made after the thought and experience of Mr. Wesley had attained their full ripeness. He had given much thought to this doctrine and, finally, after a careful review of the whole subject, wrote the sum of what he had observed in a number of brief propositions, to which we as a body of Christians most heartily subscribe. These propositions are as follows as found in A PLAIN ACCOUNT OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION, Rev. John Wesley, 1764:

- 1) There is such a thing as perfection; for it is again and again mentioned in the Scriptures.
- 2) It is not so early as justification; for justified persons are to 'go on unto perfection' (Hebrews 6:1).
- 3) It is not so late as death; for St. Paul speaks of living men that were perfect (Philippians 3:15).
- 4) It is not absolute. Absolute perfection belongs not to man, nor to angels, but to God alone.
- 5) It does not make a man infallible; no one is infallible while he remains in the body.
- 6) Is it sinless? It is not worthwhile to contend for a term. It is 'salvation from sin.'
- 7) It is 'perfect love' (I John 4:18). This is the essence of it; its properties or inseparable fruits are rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks (I Thessalonians 5:16, etc.).
- 8) It is improvable. It is so far from...being incapable of increase, that one perfected in love may grow in grace far swifter than he did before.
- 9) It is losable, capable of being lost; of which we have numerous instances...
- 10) It is constantly both preceded and followed by a gradual work.
- 11) But is it in itself instantaneous or not? In examining this, let us go on step by step. An instantaneous change has been wrought in some believers; no one can deny this. Since that change, they enjoy perfect love; they feel this and this

alone; they 'rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks'...But in some this change was not instantaneous. They did not perceive the instant when it was wrought. It is often difficult to perceive the instant when a man dies; yet there is an instant when life ceases. And if even sin ceases, there must be a last moment of its existence, and a first moment of our deliverance from it.

But if they have this love now they will lose it.' They may; but they need not. And whether they do or no, they have it now; they now experience what we teach. They now are all love; they now rejoice, pray and praise without ceasing.

'However, sin is only suspended in them; it is not destroyed.' Call it which you please; they are all love today; and they take no thought for the morrow.

'But this doctrine has been much abused.' So has that of justification by faith. But that is no reason for giving up either this or any other scriptural doctrine...

'But those who think they are saved from sin say they have no need of the merits of Christ.' They say just the contrary. Their language is 'Every moment, Lord, I need the merit of thy death.' They never before had so deep, so unspeakable a conviction of the need of Christ in all His offices as they have now.

Therefore, all our preachers should make a point of preaching perfection to believers constantly, strongly and explicitly; and all believers should mind this one thing, and continually agonize for it...

This is...the doctrine of Jesus Christ...It is the doctrine of St. Paul, the doctrine of St. James, of St. Peter, and St. John...(It is) found in the oracles of God, in the Old and New Testaments...Look at it again; survey it on every side,...and that with the closest attention. In one view it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is the giving to God of all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting of, not a part, but of all our soul, body and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the cleansing of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God; the full likeness of Him that created it. In yet another view it is the loving God with all the heart and our neighbor as ourselves. Now take it in whichever of these views you please, for there is no material difference, and this is the whole and sole perfection...

Now let this perfection appear in its native form, and who can speak one word against it? Will any dare to speak against loving the Lord our God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves?...It must be disguised before it can be opposed...Does not all that is within you cry out, 'O, who that loves can love enough'?...We allow, we contend, that we are justified freely through the righteousness and the blood of Christ...we expect likewise to be sanctified wholly through His Spirit. We do expect to love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. Yea, we do believe that He will in this world so 'cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit, that we shall perfectly love Him, and worthily magnify His Holy name.'

Let it therefore be considered not only a privilege, but the duty of all true believers to strive earnestly to attain to Christian perfection and, in so far as they have ability and opportunity, to encourage all others to "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

127. CHAPTER III – CHRISTIAN PRACTICE

127.1. The purpose of this section is to provide members of the Evangelical Congregational churches with positive guidance for Christian living and to warn them against actions and attitudes that detract from Christian character and service. Every effort has been made to support these admonitions by the teachings of Scripture. Of course, they are not intended to replace the biblical ethic, nor are they intended to provide an exhaustive statement of the will of God for His people. They are set forth to call attention to important spiritual and moral issues of the day, and it must not be presumed that any and all practices not specifically addressed here are necessarily sanctioned by the denomination.

128. INTRODUCTION

128.1. The theology of the Evangelical Congregational Church, as set forth in the Articles of Faith, is oriented to the practice of Christian faith. There is always an integral connection between the church's theology and its ethics. Beliefs shape lifestyle, either to produce good fruit or to bring forth evil fruit.

128.2. A major thrust of the Scriptural principles enumerated by the Articles of Faith is Christian living, a consequence of our salvation. As Paul suggests, faith is always active in love (Galatians 5:6). The believer trusts in Christ and is saved by acceptance of God's gift. Faith not only saves (brings forgiveness and regeneration) but faith works. It nurtures love toward God and neighbor. Loving God means doing all that the relation of love requires. This includes devotion to God, prayer, study of the Scriptures, witness to our faith, and abstention from practices that reflect love for the world more than love for God. Loving our neighbors involves sharing what we have to give, feeding the hungry, providing services for the aged, and working toward the elimination of the injustices in society.

129. SPIRITUAL STANDARDS

129.1. Personal Devotional Life

129.1.1. The Bible commands every believer to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Especially helpful in this process is faithfulness in prayer, in Bible study, in the Christian walk, in observance of the Lord's Day, in the stewardship of life and substance, and in anticipation of the return of Christ.

129.2. Prayer

129.2.1. Our blessed Lord taught His disciples that they "should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1). He also gave them a brief and comprehensive model, embodying the elements of true prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). In like manner, the Apostle Paul admonishes Christians to "pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

129.2.2. Prayer is not to be regarded simply as a Christian duty, but always as the blessed privilege of every sincere believer (Matthew 7:7-11).

129.2.3. The Scriptures teach us that all matters and concerns of ours are proper subjects of prayer (Exodus 15:24; 1 Samuel 1:27; Matthew 6:13; Luke 1:13; Acts 4:29; 1 Timothy 2:2-3).

129.2.4. To be effectual, prayer must be offered in faith (Mark 11:24; Hebrews 11:6; James 1:6) and should include elements of adoration, confession, contrition, supplication, intercession, and thanksgiving.

129.2.5. Prayer should be offered in the name of Christ (John 14:13) and should be marked by complete surrender to the will of God so that with Christ we may say, "not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

129.2.6. Let every member of our church, therefore, respond faithfully to the duty

and privilege of prayer, remembering that the Holy Spirit ever stands ready to aid us in prayer (Romans 8:26).

129.3. Bible Study

- 129.3.1. We believe the Bible to be the inspired, infallible Word of God given to show us, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, our sinful condition before God. It likewise shows us the way of salvation and provides the instruction we need to develop spiritually and to walk acceptably before God in the new path of faith (2 Timothy 3:16). Therefore:
- 129.3.2. Read the Bible daily. The Bereans were wise as well as “noble” in that they “examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).
- 129.3.3. Read the Bible prayerfully. “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law” (Psalms 119:18).
- 129.3.4. Memorize Scripture. The Apostle Paul said, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). This is necessary for our own guidance (Psalms 119:11) as well as for our equipment for Christian service (2 Timothy 3:17).
- 129.3.5. Develop a systematic method of study, utilizing resources such as study guides, concordances, Bible dictionaries, and commentaries.
- 129.3.6. For mutual edification, study the Bible with other believers in Sunday school, midweek services, and home Bible study groups.

129.4. Christian Walk

- 129.4.1. Steadfastness in prayer and Bible study should lead to loving God with all the mind and heart and patterning our lives after Christ. This will manifest itself in a life of purity and well-doing, which is approved of God and beneficial to humanity. Evidences of the devoted life include:
- 129.4.2. Seeking to show compassionate concern for the unsaved, pressing upon them the claims of the gospel, inviting them to the services of God’s house, and acquainting them with His people.
- 129.4.3. Cultivating a spirit of sympathy, helpfulness, and mercy toward the neglected and suffering by feeding the hungry, clothing the destitute, giving shelter to the homeless, and visiting the sick, the lonely and the imprisoned, according to the opportunity and ability that God gives (Luke 4:18; Matthew 25:35-40; Isaiah 61:1).
- 129.4.4. Helping those who are of the household of faith, loving, forbearing, and forgiving them as brethren (Galatians 6:10; Colossians 3:13).
- 129.4.5. Seeking to promote peace, goodwill, and justice among all people (Proverbs 29:7, Matthew 5:6, Romans 12:18).
- 129.4.6. Speaking the truth in love and nothing but the truth (Ephesians 4:15).
- 129.4.7. Exercising the Christian profession with a life of faith, virtue, knowledge, patience, self-control, godliness, modesty, honesty, and love (Galatians 5:22-23) in all circumstances and conditions of life so that the gospel is not hindered.

129.5. Observing the Lord’s Day

- 129.5.1. “After God finished His work of creation, He rested on the seventh day” (Genesis 2:2). Reflecting this pattern of creation, one day of the week was divinely ordained for man’s benefit as a day of rest. (Exodus 20:8-10; 31:15; 34:21; Mark 2:27).
- 129.5.2. This day, blessed of God, was to be kept holy. In Old Testament times this Sabbath Day (the seventh day of the week) was strictly observed by the faithful.
- 129.5.3. Since the Resurrection of Christ took place on the first day of the week, we regard Sunday as the day to be observed as the Christian’s day of rest and worship, in joyful celebration of Christ’s Resurrection. In this we follow the early

disciples' observance of the first day of the week (John 20:19, 26; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10).

- 129.5.4. Sunday is therefore to be observed appropriately insofar as possible by our members, through rest from the normal pursuits of labor and cultivation of corporate worship, private devotion, fellowship with one's family and brothers and sisters in Christ, and engaging in deeds that bring praise to the name of our Lord. In those situations in which employment obligations require work on Sunday, Christians are strongly encouraged to set aside another day to observe in a similar manner inasmuch as possible.

129.6. Stewardship of Life and Substance

- 129.6.1. God, the maker and owner of all things has given to us all that we have and are in life (Genesis 1:1; 1:26; Psalms 24:1; 50:10; Haggai 2:8). Therefore, the Bible repeatedly calls us to responsible stewardship (Matthew 25:14-15; Luke 19:13; 1 Corinthians 4:2; Romans 14:12; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 1 Timothy 1:11). We are required to be good stewards of everything our bodies, our time, our talents, our money, our possessions, the gospel message, and the very earth on which we live. All things are to be held in sacred trust for God and are to be used in a manner that will bring glory to Him.

- 129.6.2. Accordingly, the sacredness of life is to be upheld; time, talents, and possessions are to be used wisely in the service of God and mankind; the gospel message is to be constantly proclaimed; and natural resources are to be utilized carefully. Money should be used to advance that which is good rather than squandered on selfish delights and activities that do not glorify God.

- 129.6.3. One helpful expression of our stewardship response to God, along with the giving of ourselves first to Him (2 Corinthians 8:5), lies in the practice of tithing: voluntarily, cheerfully, and systematically giving at least one-tenth of our income to our Lord through His church (1 Corinthians 16:2). Such funds are then to be used in support of the institutions of the church, the spread of the gospel, and the alleviation of the distressed.

- 129.6.4. The gift of human life is an embodied life; as believers, Christians are those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells (Genesis 2:7; 1 Corinthians 6:12-19). Therefore, we are required to care for our bodies in order to be used more effectively in the work of the kingdom of God (Romans 6:11-14). This means that physical exercise, restraint in eating, regular wellness checks, and due attention to injury and illness should be considered important aspects of our Christian stewardship.

129.7. Anticipating the Return of Christ

- 129.7.1. One of the greatest incentives for holy living and faithful Christian service is belief in the personal and certain return of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory (John 14:3; 1 John 3:2-3). As individual believers and as a church we affirm our faith in the promise given when Jesus ascended to the Father that He would return in the same way as the disciples had seen Him go (Acts 1:11). This truth should be proclaimed by our pastors and teachers.

129.8. Family Devotional Life

- 129.8.1. The family is a divine institution (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:31) wherein husbands and wives are to grow in their loving relationship to one another and to God (Ephesians 5:25-33), and where children are to be reared in the Word of God and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-4). Parents, especially fathers, have God-given roles as leaders in the matter of the family devotional life (Genesis 18:19; Joshua 24:15; 1 Samuel 1:2-28; Ephesians 6:4; 2 Timothy 1:5).

129.8.2. The children, a sacred trust from God, are to learn of God and Christ from their parents through their godly example and through the biblical truth that they teach and practice in the home. Such instruction will encourage personal commitment to Christ and the fashioning of Christian lifestyle for all members of the family.

129.8.3. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 is a classic biblical example of how a home should function according to God's pattern. God said, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

129.8.4. A proper devotional atmosphere in the home brought about by the daily participation of each member in private and corporate prayer, Scripture reading, and worship will produce an abiding influence upon each family member (Proverbs 22:6). The reading of Christian books and periodicals will likewise aid in the enrichment of the family devotional life. In such a spiritual climate all things will be done for the glory of God, and the awareness of His presence will beautify the home.

129.9. Corporate Devotional Life

129.9.1. Every believer in Christ should involve himself or herself in the life and service of the local church. Every believer is a member of the body of Christ and all members are needed for the proper functioning of that body. Each one of us has been given at least one gift or talent wherewith to edify another (Ephesians 4:11-16; Romans 12:4, 6; 1 Corinthians 12).

129.9.2. As a believer, you are called to invest your life in service for Christ and His church, express your love for Christ by being faithful in attendance at the services of the church (Hebrews 10:25), by receiving the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, by using God-given gifts to the fullest extent for His glory, and by combining your talents and abilities with those of other believers as you assume a responsible share in the work of spreading the gospel message both at home and abroad.

129.10. Thought Life

129.10.1. Scripture alerts us to "pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" and exhorts us to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Hence, we must not only pattern our actions after Christ; we must guard our thoughts and beliefs as well.

129.10.2. We call all our members to guard against humanism and the many varieties of "spiritual" teachings that are not "after Christ." Remembering that Satan seeks to deceive even the most faithful of believers (1 Peter 5:8-9; 1 Timothy 4:1), it is important to develop a biblically informed discernment to detect non-biblical influences wherever they appear.

129.10.3. For evangelical Christians, the Bible, God's infallible Word, is the sole authority for our faith and practice. Jesus Christ is the only Savior (Acts 4:12) and faith in Him is the only Way to Heaven. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). The Apostle exhorts us that "no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). Those who receive Christ by faith are children of God (John 1:12); they have been "rescued...from the dominion of darkness and brought...into the kingdom of the Son" (Colossians 1:13); they have been called "out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

129.10.4. Holding these biblical teachings, we caution our members against involvement with practices, organizations or movements that advocate or suggest

otherwise.

129.10.5. We encourage our members, as they have opportunity, “to do good to all people” (Galatians 6:10) and to be salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:12-16). This may involve activity in civic affairs; local, state, and national politics; and organizations concerned with drug abuse, environmental pollution, poverty, prisons, world hunger, world peace, and other humanitarian causes (see sec. 131 Social Standards). But in carrying out these biblical mandates, we must be careful to be in the world but “not of the world” (John 17:15-16). Today, perhaps more than ever, we must be alert to subtle teachings and influences not in harmony with the “truth as it is in Christ,” which appears in many places under various guises.

130. MORAL STANDARDS

130.1. Personal and Family

130.1.1. Temperance

130.1.2. Moderation

130.1.2.1. The Bible sees self-control and other Christian qualities that please God, not as human attainments but as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). As one aspect of the Spirit’s fruit, self-control needs to be supplemented by other more positive Christian qualities such as faith and love. It requires divine wisdom (2 Peter 1:6) and soundness of mind (Titus 2:2) to refuse to yield to the baser desires of the flesh and mind and to guard against excessive indulgence in things not evil themselves, such as food, clothing, recreation, and personal possessions. The Scriptures speak out against such excess, especially when practiced at the expense of the poor (Amos 4:1; 6:4-7).

130.1.2.2. It is especially fitting to emphasize self-control in an age that extols pleasure as the goal of life and urges instant gratification of desire as the guiding principle of daily living. Even Christians need to be on guard lest the greed of self-centeredness of our world subtly invade our thoughts and deter us from love for God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37), which involves self-control in all things (1 Corinthians 9:25).

130.1.3. Abstinence

130.1.3.1. At times self-control may require abstinence from or renunciation of certain activities or things even though they are not evil in themselves.

130.1.3.2. In practicing or advocating abstinence, however, we must be aware of biblical warnings against false asceticism arising from the unscriptural idea that physical things are evil in themselves and therefore need to be avoided by godly persons. We must remember that God created the physical world for mankind to enjoy and that the Bible condemns those who would forbid marrying, eating of meat, or the touching, tasting, and handling of material things (Colossians 2:20-25; 1 Timothy 4:1-3).

130.1.3.3. It may, however, be advisable for an individual Christian to abstain from an activity or thing that particularly tempts him to overindulgence – even though it may be good in itself and may be enjoyed by other Christians with no ill effect. Christians may also be called upon to refrain from legitimate activities or things if these tempt a weaker brother to do something his conscience considers wrong (1 Corinthians 8:13).

130.1.3.4. Every Christian is, of course, always commanded to abstain from practices clearly contrary to the will of God. Among these are fleshly lusts (1 Peter 2:11), immorality and covetousness (Colossians 3:5), idols (Acts 15:2, 29), drunkenness (Galatians 5:21), and every other kind of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22). As a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), the

Christian is obligated to glorify God in his body (1 Corinthians 6:20) and to present his body a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1).

130.1.4. Drug abuse

130.1.4.1. In the light of the above biblical principles, Christians ought to refrain from indulging in practices that harm the body or the use of which provides a poor example for others to follow. These include the use of mind-altering drugs, overdependence on prescription and over-the-counter drugs, smoking, and other personal use of tobacco.

130.1.5. Alcohol

130.1.5.1. The use of beverage alcohol is a serious drug problem facing our society.

130.1.5.2. In the light of this and the Bible's uniform condemnation of drunkenness (Proverbs 20:1; 23:30, 29-31; Isaiah 5:11; Habakkuk 2:15; 1 Corinthians 6:10) and the uncompromising call for the wise stewardship of life, we must seek by personal example, and appropriate legal means, to counteract the unrelenting industry, media, and peer pressures that seek to entice people to make beverage alcohol a part of daily life. Therefore, we encourage abstinence from the use of and traffic in beverage alcohol.

130.1.6. Food

130.1.6.1. Moderation is also required in the amounts and types of food one consumes. Bodily health is compromised in innumerable ways when self-control is not exercised, causing loss of time and productivity in one's labor, excessive drain of personal and family resources, and possible compromise of Christian witness (Proverbs 23:19-21).

130.1.7. Human Sexuality

130.1.7.1. God created humanity male and female (Genesis 1:27). A man and a woman, biological gender determined at birth, who seal the bond of mutual love through Christian marriage are to live for each other as set forth in Holy Scripture (Ephesians 5:21-23). Within this marriage relationship, and only within it, is human sexuality to be expressed in sexual union.

130.1.8. Marriage

130.1.8.1. The Biblical Ideal

130.1.8.1.1. The Bible conceives of marriage as a lifelong, monogamous commitment between a man and a woman. The two, man and woman, become one in the marriage bond (Genesis 2:24). The institution of marriage, ordained of God (Genesis 2:24), has been reaffirmed by Jesus (Matthew 19:5) and Paul (Ephesians 5:31). Our Lord Jesus further declared this union to be indissoluble when he said, "What God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6). This marriage covenant is morally binding so long as both shall live (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39) and may not be dissolved at will.

130.1.8.1.2. Since the strength of any society is based upon a firm family foundation, and a strong family is based upon total commitment of husband and wife, we strongly urge that:

130.1.8.1.2.1. Appropriate instruction by precept and example in the sacredness of marriage be given to our children from the earliest ages, both at home and in the church;

130.1.8.1.2.2. Our pastors seek, by every means possible, to convey to their congregations the sacredness of Christian marriage;

130.1.8.1.2.3. Our pastors insist on adequate premarital counseling prior to solemnizing any marriage;

130.1.8.1.2.4. Every effort be made to ensure that persons entering into

marriage harbor no reservations with regard to lifelong commitment;

130.1.8.1.2.5. This step be taken only when it can be done in the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:39) and thus avoid being “yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 6:14) in life’s most intimate relationship.

130.1.9. Family Planning

130.1.9.1. Procreation

130.1.9.1.1. In the beginning God breathed life into the man He created (Genesis 2:7). Since that day, all human life owes its existence to the breath of God. But God has given to humanity, His creation, the privilege of being a partner in the life-giving process. Hence, He told our progenitors to “be fruitful and increase in number” (Genesis 1:28).

130.1.9.2. Responsible Parenthood

130.1.9.2.1. Children are a blessing from the Lord (Psalms 127:3-5), and every new life has a right to be loved and wanted. Therefore, we encourage responsible parenting. Every child has a full right to life, acceptance, and love.

130.1.10. Adoption

130.1.10.1. Adoption is a means by which children can live in homes of love and share in the joys of family life. Therefore, we support all proper means for the adoption of children and recognize this, rather than abortion, as a suitable solution to difficulties arising from unwanted pregnancies.

130.1.11. Divorce

130.1.11.1. Divorce is an admission of failure in human relationships that negates the biblical ideal of marriage. Jesus indicated that Moses permitted divorce only because of hardness of heart and that it was not intended in the beginning (Matthew 19:8).

130.1.11.2. When serious difficulties occur in a marriage, the couple involved should seek the counsel and guidance of the pastor or other respected persons within the Christian fellowship. If the distressed couple fails to seek help, loving, discreet biblical counsel and exhortation should nevertheless be offered in a spirit of helpfulness and humility (Galatians 6:1) in an effort to restore harmony. Counsel that would make dissolution of the marriage bond an easy solution, even to difficult problems, should be rejected. If actual separation takes place, every possible effort should be continued to resolve difficulties and effect lasting reconciliation.

130.1.11.3. When failures do occur in this less-than-perfect world, we encourage compassion and concern for all persons involved. God’s love extends to all, even to those who have failed to live up to His standards. Therefore, every separated or divorced person has a right to be loved in Christ Jesus. Like any other penitent sinner, he or she should be granted the privilege of church membership and full participation in the life of the church.

130.1.11.4. Extreme caution must be exercised by our pastors in solemnizing a marriage in which either party has been divorced. Clear evidence of biblical grounds should be present (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:39), and adequate counseling should be given to guard against the recurrence of a broken relationship. As long as reconciliation with the previous spouse is a viable option, marriage to another person should not be considered.

130.1.12. Adultery

130.1.12.1. Marriage is a lifelong commitment to a mate of the opposite sex “so long

as...both shall live.” The two have become one flesh (Genesis 2:24), and therefore intimate sharing of the body is reserved exclusively for the marriage partner (1 Corinthians 7:3-4).

130.1.13. Premarital Sex

130.1.13.1. We oppose all forms of sexual activity outside of the biblical understanding of lifelong monogamous marriage. The premarital performance of the sex act at any time is to engage in fornication and can be looked at only as sin (Galatians 5:19).

130.1.14. Homosexuality

130.1.14.1. Homosexuality was the sin of Sodom for which that city was destroyed (Genesis 19) and is uniformly seen as a perversion of sex in the New Testament (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9, Colossians 3:5). Therefore, a homosexual relationship is not acceptable as an alternative lifestyle, and any homosexual act, even between consenting adults, is a violation of the biblical ethic.

130.1.14.2. Consistent with our understanding of human sexuality and marriage as articulated in Sections 130.1.7 ff. of the *Discipline*, persons holding ministerial credentials in the Evangelical Congregational Church are prohibited from performing any rite or ceremony, as well as from signing any documents pursuant to the sanctioning or solemnizing of same-sex unions or same-sex marriages or any union or marriage other than that between one man and one woman, nor may they recognize these unions as solemnized by other jurisdictions.

130.1.14.3. Whereas the Bible clearly teaches homosexuality to be sin, the Evangelical Congregational Church will not ordain nor accept into its ministry ranks those who identify themselves as homosexuals, whether practicing or non-practicing.

130.1.15. Temptation

130.1.15.1. Temptation is the common lot of mankind (1 Corinthians 10:13), and even our Lord was tempted (Matthew 4:1-10). Therefore, temptation to sin does not itself involve transgression of the law of God. However, realizing the power of the tempter (1 Peter 5:8) and recalling Jesus’ warnings against murder and adultery in the heart (Matthew 5:22, 28), we should seek to avoid situations that entice us to inner feelings of lust or outward acts of homosexuality, fornication, or adultery. While such attitudes and acts are sinful, we recognize our obligation to extend the love of Christ to persons caught in such circumstances and affirm our duty to minister to them as redeemable human beings.

130.1.16. Abortion

130.1.16.1. The moral issue of abortion is more than a question of the freedom of a woman to control the reproductive functions of her own body. It is a question of those circumstances under which a human being may be permitted to take the life of another.

130.1.16.2. Since life is a gift of God, neither the life of an unborn child nor the life of the mother may be lightly taken. The value of life prior to birth is seen throughout the Scriptures (Psalms 139:13-16; 51:5; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:41-44). Divine blessing is conferred upon an unborn infant (Luke 1:42, “Blessed is the child you will bear!”). The strife-filled lives of Jacob and Esau are shown already in process prior to birth (Genesis 25:22-23).

130.1.16.3. It is neither right nor proper to terminate a pregnancy solely on the basis of personal convenience or sociological considerations. Abortion on

demand for social adjustment or to solve economic problems is morally wrong. On those rare occasions when abortion may seem morally justified, the decision should be made only after there has been thorough and sensitive religious, medical, and psychological consultation and counseling.

130.1.17. The Single Life

130.1.17.1. We affirm the dignity and acceptability of the single life. While the married state is good, and family life necessary for the continuation of human life, not all persons may be led into this shared relationship. Our Lord Himself did not enter the married relationship, and Paul wrote, "Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am" (1 Corinthians 7:8). Paul also suggests that for those who are able, the unmarried state might allow one to serve God better (1 Corinthians 7:32-38).

130.1.18. Death and Dying

130.1.18.1. God, and God alone, has the right to determine the moment of death (Job 1:21). Therefore, we oppose any effort to terminate innocent life outside of the natural processes, whether it be with malice aforethought (murder, suicide) or from misdirected "kindness" (euthanasia). We also caution against the overuse of modern technological methods that unnecessarily prolong life and thereby deny the person the right to die with dignity.

131. SOCIAL STANDARDS

131.1. Introduction

131.1.1. The proper social involvement of Christians must be considered carefully. On the one hand we must not attempt to coerce, by force of law, unbelievers to confess Christ (1 Corinthians 12:3), to engage in pious activity, or to refrain from all personal sins condemned by Scripture.

131.1.2. This does not mean, however, that it is impossible or unwise to legislate or otherwise influence public or social morality. We must not be deterred from such efforts by those who accuse Christians of imposing their own moral standards upon other people. It must be remembered that all who seek to establish social codes of behavior, of necessity, do the same thing, since all laws reflect the ethical position of the person(s) seeking to enact or maintain them. In a free society, especially, Christians have the right as well as the obligation to influence the moral level of society.

131.1.3. On a personal level, this may be done through moral precept and example. On the social level, it may be done through legislation and political activity as well.

131.2. Government

131.2.1. Along with the family (Genesis 5:24-25) and the church (1 Timothy 3:15), God instituted human government. Grounded in the necessities of human nature, government is appointed to restrain evil, preserve order, and encourage just dealings among men (Romans 13:1-4). It is the duty, therefore, of all persons to be subject to the authority of the nation in which they reside (Romans 13:5) and to respect and honor the civil magistrates (1 Peter 2:17).

131.2.2. As a creation of God, however, the state's power is never absolute. It must not appropriate to itself those privileges and duties that belong to the individual, the family, or the church. When government neglects or abuses its divinely appointed responsibilities, the Christian, as a citizen of the heavenly Kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:12), must speak out against or, if necessary, refuse to follow public policies that directly threaten the people of God, the family, or the basic rights of persons (Exodus 1:17; Acts 5:29) and be

willing to suffer the legal consequences thereof.

- 131.2.3. Godly men and women may, and ought to, hold political office and participate in civil government. Further, the church must be careful not to identify, consciously or unconsciously, any earthly nation – however just its precepts – with the Kingdom of God. Under the New Covenant the nation whose God is the Lord (Psalms 33:12) is the Church of Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:43; 1 Peter 2:9) with its member-citizens scattered throughout the nations of the world.

131.3. War and Peace

- 131.3.1. It is certain that Christians oppose war and desire to promote peace on earth (Matthew 5:9). Hence the church renounces the use of destructive weapons in defending herself, in extending her influence in the world, and in waging the spiritual battle against sin and Satan. It is true that God's Old Covenant people, living under divinely appointed civil rulers, were commanded upon occasion to take up the sword in defense of their borders and as agents of divine judgment upon sinful nations. But under the New Covenant the people of God are scattered among all nations, and final divine retribution has been reserved for the Last Day. The New Testament does, however, sanction the just use of force by the state in order to restrain evildoers within and aggressors from without. It would be inconsistent, then, to bar Christians from participating in these divinely appointed police and peacekeeping actions of the state.

- 131.3.2. This in no way implies support of repressive police measures or blanket approval of all military intervention. The threat of totally destructive nuclear war, the escalating arms race, and the increasing complexities of international affairs introduce profound ambiguities into the question of justifiable warfare. In the light of such considerations, some Christians may feel conscience-bound to refuse involvement in military service, which ordinarily implies a pledge to carry out unquestioningly all orders issued by the state or its representatives. Therefore, we acknowledge the right of the individual believer to apply for conscientious objector status. Whatever decision is made in this area, it must be remembered that God's commands always supersede those of all earthly authority and that no one can ultimately escape moral responsibility for his own actions.

131.4. Human Rights

- 131.4.1. It is only as bearers of the divine image (Genesis 1:26-27; James 3:9) that men and women possess "natural" or, preferably, God-given rights that animals and things do not have in the same sense or to the same degree (Matthew 10:31; Matthew 6:25). We believe all humans are created equal and that all should have equal rights. In addition to the direct statements of Scripture regarding the dignity of mankind, duties enjoined upon people, such as worship of God (Exodus 20:3-4), concern for the poor (Deuteronomy 15:11), and the prohibition of murder, lying, and stealing (Exodus 20:13-14, 16) imply corresponding rights to freedom of worship, life, truth, and property.

- 131.4.2. Since these rights derive directly from God, no state may deny them legitimately to its upright citizens. Government is rather under obligation, as a divine institution, to protect these rights. All rights, natural and civil, must apply equally to all law-abiding citizens residing within a nation and must not apply selectively.

- 131.4.3. In the light of the Bible's uniform teaching of the equality of all humans (Genesis 1:26-27, Luke 6:31, Acts 17:26, Galatians 3:28, Philemon, 1 John 4:21) and the uncompromising call for human flourishing (John 10:10), we must seek by personal example, and appropriate legal means, to counteract all forms of racism, ethnic bias and supremacy of any people group wherever we encounter it in our

churches, communities, and government. We commit ourselves to a compelling Christian faith and Christian action until equality of opportunity and responsibility are realized by all without regard to disability, ethnicity, or national origin.

131.5. Poverty and World Hunger

131.5.1. Although our primary concern is for the poor within the household of faith (Galatians 6:10), we must display charity and concern for all mankind as well. This includes the sharing of material abundance with the neighbor – understood as anyone in need (Luke 10:30-37). In our day, when the planet has indeed become a “global village,” our concern must extend to the malnourished and starving multitudes of other parts of the world as well as to the poor in our midst.

131.5.2. Concern for the poor must go beyond relief measures intended to alleviate acute suffering (Romans 15:25-27). We must also attempt to identify and deal with the underlying causes of poverty. When it results from laziness (2 Thessalonians 3:10) or lack of prudence (Proverbs 6:6) it is our duty to try to counteract such personal and social attitudes through education and economic assistance designed to enable persons to provide their own personal and family necessities.

131.5.3. When poverty is increased or sustained as a result of political and economic oppression by affluent nations or wealthy classes within a society (Jeremiah 22:3; Micah 2:2; James 2:6), we are obliged by love for the neighbor to speak out against economic and political injustice and to strive for a more equitable distribution of the earth’s ample, but limited, resources.

131.5.4. The enduring problems of poverty and hunger must never deter us from being God’s agents of hope nor prevent us from preaching the gospel, which can meet the economic and social as well as the spiritual needs of mankind.

131.6. Pornography

131.6.1. It is often difficult to define precisely what is pornographic or obscene. It is clear, however, that certain forms of communication distort and degrade human sexuality. These impose a harmful influence upon individuals, especially the young, upon the family, and upon society as a whole.

131.6.2. The production and use of obscene materials violate the biblical injunction against carnal lust (Galatians 5:16), falsify the place of sexuality in human relations, and transform persons made in God’s image into impersonal things to be used in gratifying sinful human passions and weaknesses.

131.6.3. The legalization of pornographic materials or of prostitution is unacceptable to the Christian since these activities necessarily involve the exploitation of persons – willingly or unwillingly – for degrading and dehumanizing purposes that border upon blasphemy against God Himself through the degradation of persons made in His image (James 3:9). Out of love for God and neighbor, then, the Christian has the right and obligation to oppose pornography in all its forms through available legal means.

131.6.4. It must be remembered, however, that obscenity goes beyond the area of the sexual. It includes violence and all acts and attitudes, including prejudice, that demean the worth of a fellow human. We must also guard against the less obvious but more pervasive and potentially more subversive influence of forms of communication that glorify, or portray as normal, situations, attitudes, and living arrangements that flout the biblical teaching regarding the sanctity of marriage and the family.

131.7. Gambling

131.7.1. Our opposition to gambling, which involves the transfer of something of value from one person to another on the basis of chance, rests upon the following:

- 131.7.2. There is a high risk of loss by the bettor of the amount wagered. This may reach catastrophic proportions when compulsive gambling is involved.
- 131.7.3. The payoff to the winner(s) comes from the amounts wagered by other bettors, many of whom can ill-afford the loss.
- 131.7.4. By promising the possibility of gaining wealth with no effort, gambling appeals to the human emotions of avarice and greed.
- 131.7.5. Engaging in this activity is inconsistent with the Christian way of life. It is a distortion of the normal and unavoidable risk-taking involved in daily life and in the realization of human potential. The biblical view of work (Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12), stewardship (1 Corinthians 6:20), love of neighbor (Galatians 5:13-14), and proper use of influence (2 Thessalonians 3:9) rules out participation in all forms of gambling including lotteries and other games of chance sanctioned by the state.
- 131.7.6. These evils that accompany gambling preclude its use as entertainment or as a proper way to support worthy causes.

PART TWO

Section Reserved

Section Reserved

PART THREE

THE CONGREGATION

300. CHAPTER I – DENOMINATIONAL IDENTITY

301. EVANGELICAL

301.1. 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

302.1. 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

303.1. 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).

304. LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

304.1. Preamble

304.1.1. 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. Building a Leadership Team – A Governance Manual for Local Churches is available to assist local churches in developing functional structures.

304.2. Principle One: Purpose, Mission, Core Values and Vision

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

304.2.2. 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.

- 304.2.3. 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.
- 304.2.4. 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.
- 304.2.5. 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.
- 304.2.6. 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.
- 304.2.7. 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.

304.3. Principle Two: Prayer

- 304.3.1. 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.
- 304.3.2. A church committed to prayer is a church that:
- 304.3.2.1. Comes together regularly for corporate times of prayer.
 - 304.3.2.2. Integrates prayer into the life and ministries of the church.
 - 304.3.2.3. Encourages prayer for pastors and leaders.
 - 304.3.2.4. Cultivates the prayer life of individual believers.

304.4. Principle Three: Disciplemaking

- 304.4.1. Healthy churches are disciplemaking churches. Disciplemaking is an intentional, lifelong process:
- 304.4.1.1. Beginning when we pray for, care for and share Jesus Christ with people who are not yet His followers;
 - 304.4.1.2. Progressing as people choose to submit their lives to Jesus’ authority and receive His gift of salvation by repentance and faith.
 - 304.4.1.3. Continuing as His followers grow in love and devotion to Jesus and their commitment to making disciples.
 - 304.4.1.4. A church committed to disciplemaking 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.

304.5. Principle Four: Community

- 304.5.1. 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)
- 304.5.2. A church committed to cultivating this kind of community will include (but not be limited to) such things as:
- 304.5.3. Assimilating new people into the congregation;
- 304.5.4. Creating opportunities for fellowship and ministry both across and along common lines (such as age and interest);
- 304.5.5. Providing for the spiritual, social and material needs of all its people;
- 304.5.6. Developing and maintaining healthy relationships by fostering an environment in which sin, conflict, discipline, reconciliation and repentance are addressed in a Biblical manner.

304.6. Principle Five: Worship

- 304.6.1. 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.
- 304.6.2. A church committed to God-exalting worship will provide:
 - 304.6.2.1. Well planned, inspiring weekly worship services;
 - 304.6.2.2. The observance of the Lord’s Supper at least quarterly;
 - 304.6.2.3. Occasional special worship services such as Christmas Eve, Good Friday, etc.

304.7. Principle Six: Gift-Oriented Ministry

- 304.7.1. 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.
- 304.7.2. 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.

304.8. Principle Seven: Pastoral Relationship

- 304.8.1. 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.
- 304.8.2. A church committed to a healthy relationship with its pastor(s) is a church that:
 - 304.8.2.1. Models and demonstrates respect for those in authority, enabling the work of the pastor to be a joy and not a burden;
 - 304.8.2.2. Honors the pastor by offering him compensation that reflects his value to the fellowship and his labor on their behalf;
 - 304.8.2.3. Maintains a Pastoral Relations Committee committed to the best interests of their pastor(s) as well as the health of the congregation.

304.9. Principle Eight: Stewardship

- 304.9.1. 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.
- 304.9.2. A church committed to good stewardship is a church that:
 - 304.9.2.1. Teaches Biblical financial principles and calls its people to financial faithfulness and integrity;
 - 304.9.2.2. Provides a system of financial accountability that accurately receipts, records, and reports contributions;
 - 304.9.2.3. Fully discloses its financial state through regular reports and annual audits;
 - 304.9.2.4. Provides for and maintains buildings, grounds, and material resources necessary to accomplish the church's mission.

304.10. Principle Nine: Global Ministries

- 304.10.1. 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.
- 304.10.2. A church committed to global ministry is a church that:
 - 304.10.2.1. Prays for the peoples of the world and the global church;
 - 304.10.2.2. Cultivates relationships with missionaries and mission fields resulting in spiritual, emotional, physical and material support;
 - 304.10.2.3. Ministers to the poor, powerless and persecuted;
 - 304.10.2.4. Nurtures a global vision.

305. ESSENTIAL STRUCTURES

305.1. Preamble

- 305.1.1. 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 annual meeting of the leadership team.

305.2. MEMBERSHIP

305.2.1. Definition

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

305.2.2. Eligibility

- 305.2.2.1. 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 shall be considered for membership.

305.2.3. Procedure

- 305.2.3.1. When any person desires to affiliate with the church, the local membership committee shall investigate the request and make appropriate recommendation to the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team. Upon approval by the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team, the applicant shall be received as directed in paragraph 305.2.6., after which the

name shall be inscribed in the official Church Record Book.

305.2.4. Membership serves four purposes:

- 305.2.4.1. It gives you “ownership” and a greater “commitment” to the work of the local church.
- 305.2.4.2. It gives you the opportunity to be a part of the decision-making process as we work together to fulfill our God-given purpose, mission, and vision.
- 305.2.4.3. It gives you the opportunity to serve in the church in a position of leadership that benefits both you and the local body of believers.
- 305.2.4.4. It provides you the assurance and benefit of spiritual care through redemptive church discipline.

305.2.5. Qualifications for membership in a local congregation are:

- 305.2.5.1. Belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord;
- 305.2.5.2. Belief that the Bible is the inspired Word of God;
- 305.2.5.3. Commitment to daily Christian growth;
- 305.2.5.4. Commitment to giving Jesus Christ your time, talent and treasure;
- 305.2.5.5. Support of the local church and the ministry of the Evangelical Congregational Church denomination;
- 305.2.5.6. Faithfulness in attendance and participation;
- 305.2.5.7. Baptism.

305.2.6. RECEPTION OF MEMBERS

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

305.2.6.1.1. 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.

305.2.6.1.2. 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:

305.2.6.1.2.1. 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.”

305.2.6.1.2.2. 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.”

305.2.6.1.2.3. 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/her life on his/her 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.”

305.2.6.1.2.4. The Christian is called upon to give expression of his/her gratitude for the blessings of God by returning his/her 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.”

305.2.6.1.2.5. 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.”

305.2.6.1.2.6. 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.”

305.2.6.1.2.7. Have you been baptized? If so, answer: “YES.”

305.2.6.1.3. To members of this congregation: Do you welcome these believers into our fellowship and care? If so, answer: “WE DO.”

305.3. MEMBERS IN GOOD STANDING

305.3.1. 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, be involved in discipleship, commune during the year, and contribute to the support of the local congregation.

305.4. TRANSFER AND REMOVAL OF MEMBERS

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

305.4.1.1. Death

305.4.1.2. Moved away with certificate.

305.4.1.3. Moved away without certificate.

305.4.1.4. Withdrawal

305.4.1.5. Expulsion

305.4.2. Moved Away with Certificate

305.4.2.1. Removal because a member has “moved away with certificate” shall be defined and construed in the following manner:

305.4.2.2. Any member in good standing (305.3.) desiring to transfer his/her membership shall, upon his/her request, be given a certificate of membership and transfer by the pastor or, if there is no pastor, by the District Field Director, in accordance with the current Building a Leadership Team – A Governance Manual for Local Churches.

305.4.2.3. 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/leadership team where, if the information warrants, judicial proceedings shall be instituted in the case as prescribed by the *Discipline*.

305.4.2.4. 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/leadership team, in accordance with the current Building a Leadership Team – A Governance Manual for Local Churches.

305.4.3. Moved Away without Certificate

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

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

305.4.3.1.2. Where it is discovered that a member has united with another church, or;

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

305.4.3.2. Prior to removal, the church leadership should attempt to contact the person for the purpose of confirming that unless a contrary expression of intent be received from him within a period of sixty days, his/her consent to removal in the foregoing manner shall be presumed. If no expression of contrary intent is received, he shall be deemed to have moved away without certificate, and his/her name may be removed from the church membership records.

305.4.4. Withdrawal

305.4.4.1. Removal because of withdrawal shall be made only upon the written request of a member expressing a desire that his/her 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/her membership after an effort to reactivate him.

305.4.4.2. Prior to removal, the church leadership should attempt to hold a conversation with the person for the purpose of healing any wounds, righting any wrongs, and for mutual learning in a spirit of Christian unity and fellowship. After three unsuccessful attempts to have such a conversation, his/her desire to withdraw from membership shall be presumed, and the name of such a member may be removed. Shut-ins and those in military service are exempt from this action.

305.4.5. Attempted Withdrawal while Discipline Pending

305.4.5.1. 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/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/she has offended. This action is intended to both help the individual find freedom from his/her sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he/she may do to their members (see Matthew 18:12- 14; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).

305.4.6. Expulsion

305.4.6.1. Removal because of expulsion (exclusion from the church) shall be made only after proper hearing according to disciplinary provisions. (See 600.)

306. RESPONSIBILITY OF AFFILIATION

306.1. 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*.

306.2. Denominational Affiliation

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

306.3. Newly Established Churches

306.3.1. In the case of a newly established Evangelical Congregational Church, when the congregation meets the criteria determined by the Kingdom Extension Community, a petition signed by the members of the congregation shall be submitted through the Kingdom Extension Community 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.

306.4. Transfer of Established Churches

306.4.1. 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 306.5 of the *Discipline*.

(The numbers in the above sentence were corrected from 315.3 and 317.5 to 306.5 on 9/19/23. Please note that current printed versions of the Discipline will not contain this correction.)

306.5. Incorporation

- 306.5.1. When a 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:
- 306.5.2. The name of this corporation is _____ (name to include the words "Evangelical Congregational").
- 306.5.3. 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.
- 306.5.4. 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.
- 306.5.5. 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 308.6).

306.6. Church in Good Standing

- 306.6.1. A church which is affiliated with the Evangelical Congregational Church shall be considered to be in good standing so long as:
- 306.6.1.1. It conforms to the provisions of the *Discipline*;
- 306.6.1.2. Accepts appointment by the National Conference of a duly credentialed pastor and;
- 306.6.1.3. Pays in a timely manner all financial obligations.
- 306.6.1.4. Removal of Affiliation of a Church Not in Good Standing
- 306.6.2. 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:
- 306.6.2.1. If the Conference Network Team shall determine that a church may no longer be in good standing, the Team shall use all reasonable means to assist the church to come into compliance. If the Team shall determine that the church will not or cannot come into compliance within a reasonable time as set by the Team, the Team 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 Bishop 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.
- 306.6.3. Prior to the end of said thirty (30) days, the church may:

- 306.6.3.1. Request an extension of time to correct the default which the Bishop 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 Bishop, and the church may within fourteen (14) days of such notification appeal the decision pursuant to Section 306.6.3.2. hereof; or,
- 306.6.3.2. 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.
- 306.6.3.3. 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.
- 306.6.3.4. 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.
- 306.7.** 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.

307. CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

307.1. Purpose of the Annual Meeting

- 307.1.1. 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/leadership team, and shall transact such business as may come before it.

307.2. Call of the Annual Congregational Meeting

- 307.2.1. The annual congregational meeting shall be provided for and called by the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team. 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.

307.3. Special Meetings

- 307.3.1. Special meetings of the congregation may be called by the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team and, except as otherwise provided in this *Discipline*, shall be called by the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team 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.

307.4. Voting Members

307.4.1. 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.

307.5. Records of Meetings

307.5.1. 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/leadership team.

308. THE CONGREGATION AND ITS PROPERTY

308.1. Membership

308.1.1. 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.

308.1.2. 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 (313.1 and 316.4.1), 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.

308.2. Financial Obligation

308.2.1. 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.

308.3. Dissolving Affiliation

308.3.1. 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:

308.3.2. 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/leadership team 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.

308.3.3. At least ten (10) days' written notice of such meeting shall be given to the Bishop, Executive Director, District Field Director, and 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.

308.3.4. All persons who are of legal age (307.4), 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.

308.3.5. 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.

308.3.6. 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.

308.3.7. 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.

308.3.8. 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.

308.4. Discontinuation of a Congregation

308.4.1. 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.

308.4.2. 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.

308.5. Articles of Incorporation/Bylaws

308.5.1. 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 306.5. 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*.

308.6. Indemnification of Officers

308.6.1. (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.)

308.6.2. 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:

308.6.2.1. 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

308.6.2.2. 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.

308.6.3. 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/she may be made a party, or in which he/she becomes involved, by reason of his/her being or having been a director or officer of the Corporation, or any settlement thereof, whether or not he/she 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/her 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.

308.6.4. 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.

308.6.5. 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.

308.6.6. 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.

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

309. ANNUAL MEETING OF THE OFFICIAL BOARD/MINISTRY COUNCIL/LEADERSHIP TEAM

309.1. One of the congregation's Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team meetings shall be designated its Annual Meeting.

309.2. Purpose

- 309.2.1. The Annual Meeting of the Board/Council/leadership team shall be the highest judicial or legislative meeting of the Board/Council/team with respect to the duties set forth in the *Discipline* (404).

309.3. Membership

- 309.3.1. The membership of the Annual Meeting shall be composed of the membership of the governing Board/Council/team (in the case of a multiple-church charge, the membership of the combined boards/councils) plus all the itinerant and licensed ministers who are assigned as members of the congregation(s) of the charge. All members of the Annual Meeting shall be members in good standing (*Discipline* 305.3.) of a congregation on the charge and entitled to one vote.

309.4. Business

- 309.4.1. The members of the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team 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.
- 309.4.2. Charges duly preferred and appeals to the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team 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 the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team, such defendant shall be prohibited from communion until the charges are investigated and the case decided.
- 309.4.3. The pastor and other members of the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team who represent organizations of the local church shall make quarterly statistical reports to be recorded in the Official Church Record and sent to Church Center.
- 309.4.4. 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 consideration to the appropriate credential.
- 309.4.5. 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.

309.4.6. Elections

- 309.4.6.1. The Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team 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 its Annual Meeting of the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team. The delegate's term of office shall begin at the time of election and shall continue until a successor has been elected. The Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team 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 a member of the Pastoral Relations Committee of that church.

309.4.6.2. 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 (307.4.1.) and are to have been members in good standing of the Evangelical Congregational Church (305.3.) for at least two (2) years. Itinerant and other assigned pastors are not eligible for election to this office.

309.5. Minutes

309.5.1. The minutes of the Annual Meeting shall be kept with the congregation's Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team records.

310. THE LAY DELEGATE

310.1. 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:

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

310.1.2. 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.

310.1.3. To secure from the congregation directions as to how his/her vote is to be cast when amendments to Part Three, 305.2–308, 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.

310.1.4. 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.

310.1.5. To share with other members of the Pastoral Relations Committee (See 311) in providing the Stationing Committee with information that may have some bearing on the stationing of the minister assigned to that charge.

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

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

310.1.8. 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.

310.1.9. To serve as a member of the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team in the congregation of which he/she is a member.

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

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

311. PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

311.1. There shall be a committee on Pastoral Relations constituted annually by the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team. 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 Stationing Committee on behalf of the charge.

PART FOUR

THE CONFERENCE AND DISTRICTS

- CHAPTER I – NATIONAL CONFERENCE
- CHAPTER II – NATIONAL MINISTRY TEAM OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE
- CHAPTER III – MISSION CONFERENCE
- CHAPTER IV – DISTRICTS

400. CHAPTER I – NATIONAL CONFERENCE

400.1. There shall be a National Conference that shall meet once a year to give direction to the total program of the denomination.

401. MEMBERSHIP

401.1. Ministerial

401.1.1. The ministerial membership of the National Conference shall consist of elders who are in the itinerancy. Voting privileges shall also be granted to those holding Local Pastor, Local Elder, or Licensed Pastor credentials and who are assigned by the Stationing Committee to a charge. Only itinerant ministers shall have the right of voting on all matters pertaining to the itinerancy, which include the election of the members of the Trial Court and the Triers of Appeals and the licensing, reception, ordination, locating, suspension, and expulsion of ministers.

401.2. Lay

401.2.1. The lay membership of a National Conference shall consist of one lay delegate from each congregation in the Conference, who shall be elected at the Annual Meeting of the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team in the manner prescribed in Section 309 of the *Discipline*. The sending of a lay delegate is optional with the Board/Council/team that shall in all cases provide for the expenses of the delegate. Lay delegates shall have all the privileges and rights of ministers in the Conference excepting those matters relating to the itinerancy. A delegate instructed by his/her congregation or charge is required to carry out such instructions in voting on the question(s) to which they relate. Failure to do so disqualifies him/her to vote on the pending question, and the vote of the congregation or charge said delegate represents shall be recorded according to the instructions received.

402. MEETINGS

402.1. The National Conference shall provide for the time and place of its sessions upon recommendation by the National Ministry Team. If it becomes necessary to change the time or place fixed by the Conference, the National Ministry Team shall designate the time and place and make the announcement at least ten (10) days prior to the time of such meetings.

403. ORGANIZATION

403.1. Presiding Officer

403.1.1. At the National Conference a Bishop shall preside as chairman. If a Bishop is under charges for unchristian conduct or official misconduct, or under sentence of suspension, he shall be considered disqualified to preside. Whenever a Conference is apprised of this fact, or when no Bishop is present, or when no Presiding Officer is available under 406.1.1.4., the Conference shall elect a Presiding Officer from among the Itinerant Elders.

403.2. Vice Chairman

403.2.1. The Vice-Chairman shall be elected by the National Ministry Team from a ballot provided by the Conference Network Team. Only Itinerant Elders may be nominated.

403.3. Secretary

403.3.1. The Secretary shall be elected by the National Ministry Team from a ballot provided by the Conference Network Team. The secretary may, if necessary, choose assistants to accurately record all transactions of the Conference. Only

Itinerant members of the Conference may be nominated.

403.4. Treasurer

403.4.1. A Treasurer shall be elected by the National Ministry Team from a ballot provided by the Conference Network Team and shall function as the conference may determine to handle funds of the National Conference. Upon election, the treasurer shall become a full member of the National Conference and its subsidiary bodies.

403.5. Vacancies

403.5.1. The National Executive Committee, in consultation the National Ministry Team shall fill vacancies in the offices of vice chairman, secretary, or treasurer until the next session of the National Ministry Team, when a new officer shall be elected.

403.6. National Executive Committee

403.6.1. The National Executive Committee shall consist of the chairman, vice chairman, secretary, and treasurer. The Executive Director shall be an advisory member without vote.

403.7. Teleconferencing

403.7.1. Any conference body (i.e., the National Conference, the National Ministry Team, Communities, and affiliates, and standing and special committees) may at its discretion allow one or more persons to participate in a meeting via conference telephone or similar communications equipment so that all persons participating in the meeting can hear each other. Participation in a meeting pursuant to this paragraph shall constitute presence in person at the meeting.

404. OFFICERS OF THE CORPORATION

404.1. The National Ministry Team shall be the Board of Directors of the Corporate National Conference. The executive officers of the National Conference shall be the officers of the Corporation.

404.2. Title of Property

404.2.1. Title to all property of the National Conference shall be held by the Board of Directors in the name of the Corporation, for the use of the National Conference.

404.3. Duties

404.3.1. The duties of the Board of Directors of the National Conference shall consist of the following:

404.3.1.1. To manage, maintain, repair, and protect the properties of the National Conference through a Property Committee.

404.3.1.2. To purchase, mortgage, sell, lease, or otherwise acquire or dispose of real estate in accordance with the directions of the National Conference; to borrow money on behalf of the National Conference; and to execute for the National Conference such deeds, mortgages, leases, assignments, bills of sale, or other documents as may be necessary or appropriate to carry into effect the will of the National Conference.

404.3.1.3. To protect the properties of the National Conference with sufficient insurance coverage.

404.3.1.4. To perform such financial duties as may be delegated to it from time to time by the National Conference.

404.3.1.5. To prepare and submit to the National Conference an annual report, setting forth the transactions of the Board during the year and the condition of the properties belonging to the National Conference.

404.4. Board of Directors

- 404.4.1. Between Conference sessions, approval for unforeseen financial obligations can be given by the Board of Directors only after consultation with and approval by the National Conference Executive Committee, and the Board of Directors meeting in joint session.

404.5. Indemnification of Officers

- 404.5.1. The Corporate Directors of the National Conference 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:
- 404.5.1.1. Breach of or failure to perform his 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
- 404.5.1.2. Self-dealing, willful misconduct, or recklessness, subject to exceptions provided by said Act for his responsibility or liability under any criminal statute and his/her liability for payment of taxes.
- 404.5.2. 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/her in connection with a proceeding to which he/she may be made a party, or in which he/she becomes involved, by reason of his/her being or having been a director or officer of the Corporation, or any settlement thereof, whether or not he/she 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/her 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.
- 404.5.3. 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.
- 404.5.4. In a proceeding brought as derivative action on behalf of the Corporation, the above indemnification shall apply only to expenses and counsel fees, unless specifically authorized by the Board of Directors.
- 404.5.5. 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.
- 404.5.6. The Corporation may on an individual basis, in specific cases, apply the above indemnification to an employee of the Corporation.

405. SPECIAL SESSION

- 405.1. If it should become necessary to call a special session of the National Conference, the National Ministry Team shall name the time and place, and make due announcement thereof at least fourteen (14) days prior to the time of the meeting. The Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team in either a regular or special session may fill vacancies among the lay delegates. The purpose of the special session shall be clearly set forth in the call, and no business shall be transacted at said session except that which is set forth in the call.

406. NATIONAL CONFERENCE PERSONNEL

406.1. Elections

406.1.1. Bishop

406.1.1.1. The National Conference shall elect a Bishop from among the Itinerant Elders by a majority of the whole number of votes cast, for a term of five years, or until his successor takes office. The election of the Bishop shall proceed in a manner specified in the Rules of the National Conference. If he proves to be a faithful shepherd, lives according to the Word of God, and the Rules of the *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church, in true godliness, and if no other impediment renders it impractical, he may be reelected but shall not be continued in office for more than three (3) consecutive terms.

406.1.1.2. Items Related to the Transition

406.1.1.2.1. Items related to the transition, such as: the date the Bishop-elect shall assume office, provision for interim Episcopal leadership, if needed, and items related to the retiring Bishop, shall be cared for by the National Ministry Team at a meeting held as soon as possible after the election.

406.1.1.3. Vacancy

406.1.1.3.1. In the event of a vacancy in the office of Bishop or Bishop-elect caused by death, resignation, or suspension or by declaration of the National Ministry Team under 406.1.1.4., the vice chairman shall assume the responsibilities of the office until the next meeting of the National Conference at which time a successor shall be elected. In the event the vice chairman is unable to assume the responsibility, then the National Ministry Team shall be called into session by the remaining members of the Executive Committee to select someone to serve in this interim period and make such decisions as may be necessary for carrying on the functions of the office of Bishop.

406.1.1.4. Incapacity to Perform Office

406.1.1.4.1. In the event that a Bishop or Bishop-elect, by reason of illness or injury, shall be incapable of performing the duties of his office, the remaining members of the Executive Committee of the National Conference shall delegate the responsibilities of the office until the recovery of the Bishop or Bishop-elect, if such action is deemed advisable. If his condition should indicate the possibility of a prolonged and indefinite incapacity, or if the Bishop or Bishop-elect should be considered incapacitated, the National Ministry Team shall be called into session by the Executive Committee. This meeting shall be held at the earliest possible time to determine the means by which the duties of the office shall be handled during the incapacity. The National Ministry Team shall have the power to declare the office of Bishop vacant by reason of the Bishop or Bishop-elect's incapacity.

406.1.1.5. Responsibilities of Bishop

406.1.1.5.1. It shall be the responsibility of the Bishop to oversee the spiritual interests of the church, carefully guarding them so that everything is done according to the Word of God and the standards of our church; to serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the denomination; to oversee the Conference Network Team and Missional Alignment Community; to

represent the church in national networks and coalitions; and to assume other tasks that may be assigned by the National Conference.

406.1.2. Executive Director

406.1.2.1. Ministry Objective

406.1.2.1.1. The Executive Director shall provide administrative and financial leadership to the denomination in order to support and sustain the vision and ministry initiatives of the Evangelical Congregational Church. The Executive Director shall oversee the stewardship of the funds received by the denomination in accordance with the directives of the National Ministry Team and National Conference, the requirements of federal and state statutes and GAAP. The Executive Director shall serve as the chief operations officer of the denomination, overseeing the administrative operations and policy development, implementation, and interpretation. The Executive Director shall also be responsible for the development and monitoring of the denomination's budget.

406.1.2.2. Election / Selection/ Evaluation

406.1.2.2.1. The Executive Director position is not restricted to pastors. Applicants will apply to the Bishop who will interview and then nominate one name to the National Ministry Team for election. No term or limit.

406.1.2.2.2. Reviewed every two (2) years by the Bishop. Serves at the discretion of the Bishop in consultation with the National Ministry Team.

406.1.3. Stationing Elders

406.1.3.1. The pastors and lay delegates of the respective regions shall elect two Stationing Elders for a term of five years from among the elders of the region at a designated meeting during the sessions of the National Conference in a manner specified in the Rules of the National Conference. In addition, the Conference Network Team will elect one District Field Director from each region to serve as Stationing Elders. There shall be no limit to the number of terms the Stationing Elder can serve as long as he remains in the region. The Stationing Elder shall serve as a member of the Stationing Committee and assume those responsibilities specified in the Rules of the National Conference.

406.1.3.2. Vacancies

406.1.3.2.1. When a vacancy occurs in the office of Stationing Elder because of death, resignation, retirement, suspension, or, when he no longer resides in the region, the Executive Committee of the National Conference will appoint a person or persons to assume the responsibilities of the office until a successor shall be elected.

407. NATIONAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEES

407.1. Standing and Special Committees

407.1.1. Standing and special committees shall be appointed at the direction of the National Conference and report directly to the National Conference. Standing committees, appointed annually, have a continuing existence, and give more attention to a task than is possible in the National Conference sessions. Special committees are assigned special tasks that do not fall within the assigned function of a standing committee. A special committee ceases to exist when its task is completed.

407.1.2. Committee For Stationing Pastors

407.1.2.1. A Stationing Committee composed of the Bishop, who serves as chairman, plus three Stationing Elders selected from each region, shall assign pastors to their respective fields of labor according to the procedure set forth in the Rules of the National Conference.

408. UNSTATIONABLE PASTORS

408.1. An itinerant pastor who is considered unstationable or unacceptable for active service due to physical or other limitations shall be transferred to the superannuated classification, if qualified, or to the supernumerary classification. Such action must be recommended by the Ministerial Development Community and approved by a two-thirds vote of the itinerant elders present at the National Conference.

409. POWERS OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

409.1. The National Conference is possessed of all powers, legislative, judicial, and administrative, that it has not reserved to the congregation. On the legality of its own organization and its legal identity, the vote of the majority of its membership is final. It shall have power:

409.1.1. To plan and promote the work of the denomination through the cooperation of the National Ministry Team and its communities and affiliates. It is responsible for the establishment and guardianship of the denomination's standards and policies.

409.1.2. To delegate to the Bishop and the National Ministry Team operational responsibility of the Evangelical Congregational Church, reserving for itself its vested right of veto.

409.1.3. To amend the *Discipline* to the procedures and within the restrictions outlined in Chapter 8.

409.1.4. To vote on recommendations for amendments to *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church only every five years.

409.1.5. To, as a court of law, decide judicially all questions arising between any incorporated general society of the church and its officers, and all questions for which an appeal to this Conference is provided in the *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church.

409.1.6. To arrange the boundaries of the Districts within the National Conference in a manner specified in the Rules of the National Conference.

409.1.7. To examine the ministers and lay delegates as to their moral and official conduct.

409.1.8. To refer to the membership of the congregations the question of merger with another church body. The National Conference may approve and proceed with a merger only when two-thirds of the congregations have given approval by a two-thirds vote of the members present at each properly called congregational meeting. In the event that a merger is approved by this procedure, disapproving congregations may withdraw from the newly merged denomination without being obligated to repay outstanding appropriations. Congregations that choose to withdraw shall cease using Evangelical Congregational in their names and in their operations.

409.1.9. To provide funds for the overall ministry of the Evangelical Congregational Church, including:

409.1.9.1. The necessary expenses of operating the National Conference sessions.

409.1.9.2. The functioning of its committees.

- 409.1.9.3. The expenses of the National Ministry Team, its communities, and affiliates.
- 409.1.9.4. The salaries and approved expense items of persons elected by the National Conference and the National Ministry Team.
- 409.1.9.5. To authorize and approve methods of raising funds for the operation of Evangelical Congregational boards and communities that must secure this approval from the National Conference or, in the interim, from the National Ministry Team.
- 409.1.9.6. To permit the National Conference to have trial periods to experiment with proposed amendments to certain parts of the *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church before voting for adoption. The National Conference with the prior approval of the National Ministry Team may implement such experiments with reference to Parts Three (except 308 The Congregation And It's Property), Four, Five and Six of this *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church for periods of time set by the National Ministry Team not to exceed five years, at which time the National Ministry Team may extend the time.

410. SPIRITUAL EMPHASIS

- 410.1. In order that proper spiritual emphasis be made at the sessions of the National Conference, the following provisions should be included in arrangements for these services:
 - 410.1.1. All deliberations and transactions shall be conducted as immediately under the inspection and in the presence of God. He who has occasion to speak, let him speak the sentiments of his heart freely; the chief concern of all being to set God before our eyes.
 - 410.1.2. The intervals between the daily sessions shall be spent, as much as possible, by everyone individually in religious devotion, particularly in praying for one another and imploring God's blessing on all our transactions.
 - 410.1.3. Every session shall be opened with devotions including singing, praying, and reading from the Holy Scriptures and the *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church. The paragraphs of the *Discipline* to be read shall be selected by the presiding officer prior to the session. Each session shall be closed with prayer.
 - 410.1.4. There shall be preaching every day during the session, unless otherwise ordered.

411. CHAPTER II – NATIONAL MINISTRY TEAM OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

- 411.1. A National Ministry Team shall be constituted and empowered to act on behalf of the members of the National Conference between the sessions of the National Conference and shall be the legal Corporate Board of Directors.

412. MEMBERSHIP

- 412.1. The membership of the National Ministry Team shall consist of the executive officers of the National Conference, one active pastor and one lay representative from each district, the Associates (4), and three (3) District Field Directors selected by the Conference Network Team. The pastors and lay representatives shall be elected by their respective districts in a manner specified by the Rules of the National Conference for a term of five years and a maximum of two consecutive terms.
- 412.2. Advisory members shall include the Bishops Emeriti and the Executive Director. Additional advisory members may be added at the recommendation of the Bishop and the consent of the National Ministry Team.
- 412.3. The incumbent Bishop shall serve on the National Ministry Team until the Bishop-elect takes office. His membership then terminates and the Bishop-elect replaces him as an active member. A Bishop-elect is an advisory member until he takes office.

413. ORGANIZATION

- 413.1. The executive officers of the National Conference shall serve in the same capacity within the National Ministry Team and have the power to make administrative decisions within the framework of the policy and budget established by the National Ministry Team.

414. EMERGENCIES

- 414.1. The National Ministry Team shall have the power to take any action that may be made necessary by any emergency arising out of an international or national crisis and only in such emergencies. Subject to the foregoing, the National Ministry Team shall have power to cancel or suspend any action of the National Conference, or provision of Part Four of the *Discipline*, or the Rules of Conference, relating to the interests of the Evangelical Congregational Church as specified in the Rules of the National Conference.

415. PERSONNEL OF THE NATIONAL MINISTRY TEAM

415.1. Associates

- 415.1.1. The Bishop shall oversee the work of each Associate.
- 415.1.2. Applicants to the position of Associate will apply to the Bishop who will interview and then nominate one name to the National Ministry Team for a vote of affirmation.
- 415.1.3. An Associate must be an Itinerant Elder.
- 415.1.4. Associates serve at the discretion of the Bishop.
- 415.1.5. Applicants will apply to the Bishop who will interview and then nominate to the National Ministry Team for election. No term or limit.
- 415.1.6. Associates are evaluated every two years by the Bishop.
- 415.1.7. Associates are part-time ministry positions; the time commitment will vary greatly throughout the conference year.
- 415.1.8. Associates are members of the Conference Network Team and will provide input and receive feedback from this group.
- 415.1.9. The Associates will provide updates to the National Ministry Team.

416. COMMUNITIES AND COMMITTEES OF THE NATIONAL MINISTRY TEAM

416.1. The Bishop, Associates and the chairpersons shall appoint the members who are to serve on the respective communities and committees as called for in Part Seven (The National Conference Communities and Affiliates) of the *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church.

416.2. The **supervision** of the communities of the National Conference is to be the responsibility of the Bishop. The Bishop will serve as an Ex-officio member of all communities.

416.2.1. Church Health Community

416.2.2. Global Ministries Community

416.2.3. Kingdom Extension Community

416.2.4. Ministerial Development Community

416.2.5. Missional Alignment Community

416.3. Membership of Communities and Committees

416.3.1. The Bishop, Associates and the chairpersons shall appoint the members who are to serve on the respective communities and committees as called for in Part Seven (The National Conference Communities and Affiliates) of the *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church.

416.3.2. Committees Special and Standing Committees shall be appointed at the direction of the National Ministry Team and shall report directly to the Team as instructed by the National Conference.

416.4. Loan and Investment Fund

416.4.1. The National Conference may establish and operate a loan/investment fund through which money will be borrowed in exchange for the issuance of certificates of indebtedness, the terms of which shall be fixed by the Loan and Investment Fund Committee appointed by the National Ministry Team. The money borrowed shall be used to make loans to churches and agencies related to the National Conference for the purchase, construction, renovation, and expansion of physical facilities including parsonages on terms to be fixed by the Loan and Investment Fund Committee appointed by the National Ministry Team. Certificates of indebtedness shall be general obligations of the National Conference and shall be signed on its behalf by the Bishop and the Executive Director or the Secretary or an Assistant Secretary of the National Conference.

416.4.2. The National Ministry Team may appoint a loan/investment fund committee of at least five (5) members to operate the fund under its supervision. The Chairman of the Finance Committee and the Executive Director shall serve on the Loan and Investment Committee as ex officio members in addition to the appointed members. The finances of the fund shall be accounted for separately, which account, however, shall be included as such in the financial statement of the National Conference.

417. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE NATIONAL MINISTRY TEAM

417.1. Policy

417.1.1. It shall be the responsibility of the National Ministry Team to establish policy for those matters affecting the denomination in accordance with the faith and practice of the Evangelical Congregational Church.

417.2. Coordination and Implementation

417.2.1. The National Ministry Team shall be responsible for the coordination and implementation of the total denominational program as adopted by the

National Conference respecting actions, activities, and goals prescribed by the National Conference, and shall be expected to initiate and implement additional programs and goals.

417.3. Coordination of Interdenominational Partnerships

417.3.1. The National Ministry Team shall receive an annual report from the Bishop explaining the involvement of the Evangelical Congregational Church in various interdenominational partnerships approved by the National Ministry Team or the National Conference.

417.4. Amendments

417.4.1. The National Ministry Team shall receive from the Amendments Committee of the National Conference proposed amendments to the *Discipline* of the Evangelical *Congregational* Church. The Team shall debate the merits of each proposed amendment and decide by majority vote whether it should be recommended to the National Conference. The National Ministry Team shall submit to the National Conference amendments being recommended, along with those that were considered but are not being recommended.

417.5. Personnel

417.5.1. The Bishop will interview applicants for the various Associate positions.

417.5.2. The Bishop will nominate a candidate for Associate positions and present the name(s) to the National Ministry Team for a vote of affirmation.

418. MEETINGS OF THE NATIONAL MINISTRY TEAM

418.1. The National Ministry Team shall meet semiannually, and at such other times as the Executive Committee shall decide, or upon the written request of five members of the National Ministry Team. Three-fifths of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

419. CHAPTER III – MISSION CONFERENCE

419.1. Establishment

419.1.1. The Global Ministries Community has the authority to create a mission conference. A mission conference is a conference located in a mission territory served by the Evangelical Congregational Church, which Conference, because of its limited resources, membership, ministry, and financial strength, requires close supervision and appreciable financial aid from the Global Ministries Community and/or other sources.

419.2. Administration

419.2.1. A mission conference shall be administered by the Global Ministries Community, which shall at its discretion, name a field director or directors; oversee the formation and operation of a field council/team to administer the work locally and, in general, have oversight of the work and personnel of the Conference.

419.3. Becoming a National Conference

419.3.1. When and if the growth, development, constituency, and general conditions on the field are considered such that a self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing Conference shall be organized, it shall be the prerogative of the Global Ministries Community recommend to the National Conference USA to grant the creation of a National Conference for the field. Such National Conference shall elect a leader or leaders and adopt a culturally appropriate structure to advance the mission of the Evangelical Congregational Church in that country or culture. The National Conference USA will continue to provide project and relief funds to assist such National Conferences but will not provide funds for the governance of such a National Conference. Until that time, the Global Ministries Community may give limited right and prerogatives to a Mission Conference, with the prior approval of the National Ministry Team.

419.4. Licensing and Ordaining Ministers

419.4.1. A mission conference has the authority to license, ordain, admit to its own itinerancy, or superannuate its ministers, as well as perform such other functions in dealing with its ministers as is the prerogative of a National Conference. A mission conference must develop a procedure for licensing and ordaining ministers that examines their Christian lives, call to ministry, and doctrinal position. The procedure must further describe the steps required for a candidate to be licensed, ordained, and admitted to its itinerancy. Such procedure must have the approval of the Global Ministries Community for each Mission Conference. The ordination of ministers should be conducted by the Global Ministries Associate, the Bishop of the National Conference USA of the Evangelical Congregational Church, a Surrogate Bishop charged with the supervision of the Mission Conference, or someone designated by the Global Ministries Community. Admission to the itinerancy of a mission conference does not qualify such a person for a pension unless it is provided by the Mission/National Conference.

420. CHAPTER IV – DISTRICTS

420.1. Within the Evangelical Congregational denomination there are churches strategically located in geographic areas. These congregations are committed to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a hurting world. To advantageously fulfill the Lord's Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) effectively, efficiently, and expeditiously, the words "partnership" and "teamwork" describe their mission. These congregations, then, seeking to build God's Kingdom on earth, complement and strengthen the regional networks already in place through districting.

420.2. A district is formed with up to twenty-five (25) congregations in a variety of geographic areas which are organized to accomplish the Lord's Commission. These churches believe that God wants to change the people and the communities within these districts. It is the mandate of the Evangelical Congregational Church to effect that change. District teamwork is required so that partnering with congregations in a specific geographic area may assist the process of extending God's Kingdom. The Biblical "Districting Model" can be used to bring the denomination to complete unity "to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:23)

420.3. Following is the procedure, through regional networks of churches that cross denominational lines already established, to enhance, but not compete with nor replace these networks. Our task is one of complementing and strengthening the ongoing work of Kingdom building through Evangelical Congregational Districts.

420.4. District Boundaries

420.4.1. The National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church shall be organized into geographic districts. Assignment of a congregation to a district shall be recommended by the Conference Network Team and approved by the National Ministry Team. These assignments shall be reviewed every five (5) years by the Conference Network Team. Requests from churches for changes regarding district placement shall be submitted to the Conference Network Team during the first six (6) months of the fiscal year. Recommendations for changes shall be submitted to the congregations affected by the change as well as the National Ministry Team.

420.5. District Leadership Team

420.5.1. Districts shall be accountable to the District Field Director who will work through a District Leadership Team to serve district needs. The District Leadership Team shall consist of the District Field Director, a secretary, and the pastoral and lay representative to the National Ministry Team. The secretary shall be appointed by the District Field Director. The representatives to the National Ministry Team shall be elected by the District Ministry Team.

420.6. District Ministry Team

420.6.1. The District Ministry Team shall be composed of the credentialed active and retired pastors of the Evangelical Congregational Church and two (2) lay leaders from each of the congregations in the district. The lay leaders must possess a passion for Christ, and a compassion for the lost, and be recognized leaders in his/her congregation. One (1) of the lay leaders shall be the lay delegate to the National Conference from the congregation, selected in accord with the congregation's By-laws and the *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church. The second lay leader shall be appointed by the pastor in consultation with the governing body of the local congregation. The second lay leader shall be an advisory member of the governing body of the congregation.

420.6.2. Advisory members may be added to the District Ministry Team with the

consent of team members. The communities and institutions of the denomination may appoint district representatives who shall be advisory members of the District Ministry Team.

420.7. District/Denomination Connection

420.7.1. Each district shall have representatives on the National Ministry Team. Districts shall elect one (1) pastor and one (1) lay delegate to serve on the National Ministry Team which shall meet between the sessions of the National Conference. The terms of the National Ministry Team members from districts shall be five (5) years with a maximum of two consecutive terms. Each district shall have authority to elect one (1) alternate pastoral and one (1) alternate lay delegate to the National Ministry Team.

420.7.2. Districts may submit resolutions to the National Conference for consideration in accordance with the *Discipline*.

420.8. District Meetings

420.8.1. Districts shall decide the frequency and location of meetings. It is expected that a district shall meet at least annually. The Standing Business Rules of the National Conference shall apply to the business portion of the district meetings.

420.9. District Agenda

420.9.1. Districts shall be responsible to:

420.9.1.1. Nurture a passion for God, a compassion for the lost, and a genuine concern for health and unity of the congregations and the Evangelical Congregational Church;

420.9.1.2. Initiate a prayer strategy focused on the above mentioned areas;

420.9.1.2.1. Develop those ministries which meet needs of the respective geographic areas as revealed by the Holy Spirit;

420.9.1.2.2. Plan the Global Ministries initiatives and events for the district.

420.10. District Finances

420.10.1. Districts may receive and disburse funds to implement the initiatives of the district (e.g. evangelistic campaigns, social action work, and teacher training events). District accounts may be established and maintained by the denominational Finance Office or the District may choose to designate a local church treasury for this purpose. Monthly financial statements shall be provided to the District Leadership Team by the district secretary, who shall maintain district financial records.

420.10.2. Districts shall be apprised of genuine financial needs of a congregation within the district. Chronic financial problems shall be referred to the Executive Director, who may recommend that appropriations be paid from the denomination's treasury. The Executive Director may make such needs known to churches within adjoining districts.

420.11. District Field Director

420.11.1. The District Field Director will assist pastors and churches in reaching their potential in carrying out the Great Commission in cooperation with the Bishop's agenda/direction for the EC Church.

420.11.2. Election / Selection / Evaluation

420.11.2.1. Vacancies in a District Field Director will be filled by appointment of the Bishop in consultation with the pastors of the district and subject to National Ministry Team approval. No term or limit. Reviewed every two (2) years by the Bishop. Serves at the discretion of the Bishop.

420.12. District Secretary

- 420.12.1. Appointed by the District Field Director.
- 420.12.2. Pastors and laity who are members in good standing of the Evangelical Congregational Church are eligible to serve in this office.
- 420.12.3. Term of office is five (5) years with a limit of three (3) consecutive terms.
- 420.12.4. There is no remuneration for this office.
- 420.12.5. Responsibilities include:
 - 420.12.5.1. To record the minutes of district meetings and distribute them to district leadership/members,
 - 420.12.5.2. To maintain the financial records of the district.

PART FIVE

THE MINISTRY

- CHAPTER I – MINISTERIAL QUALIFICATIONS AND WORK
- CHAPTER II – CLASSIFICATION OF MINISTERS

500. CHAPTER I – MINISTERIAL QUALIFICATIONS AND WORK

501. Historical Introduction (adapted from the 1744 Conference Minutes of the Methodist Societies)

501.1. General Directions

- 501.1.1. Be diligent. Never be unemployed; nor triflingly employed. Follow the rules of strict economy in the use of time, even in the discharge of important duties. Let necessity, and not enjoyment determine. Redeem the time.
- 501.1.2. Be serious. Be earnest. Avoid lightness, jesting, and foolish talking. Your motto must be: "Holiness to the Lord."
- 501.1.3. Converse discreetly and conduct yourself prudently with the other sex.
- 501.1.4. Believe evil of no one without substantial evidence. Put the best construction on everything.
- 501.1.5. Speak evil of no one, because our work, especially, would eat as doth a canker. Keep your thoughts within your own breast, till you meet the person concerned.
- 501.1.6. Counsel with those under your care concerning those matters in their lives that may be weakening their spiritual development and nullifying their Christian witness.
- 501.1.7. Be yourself, avoiding all affectation. As was the Master, so must the preacher of the gospel be—the servant of all.
- 501.1.8. Be ashamed of all sin and of everything that tends to its commission.
- 501.1.9. Be punctual. Work by rule. Do not amend the rules, but keep them, not for fear, but for conscience's sake.
- 501.1.10. You are a shepherd. Your commission from the Chief Shepherd is soul-saving. This will require the consecration of all time and talent – to spend and be spent in this work. You are to look after and visit not only those who welcome you but any who are without hope or who need counsel and instruction of Christ's ambassador. It is not the end of your calling to preach only or to take care of this or that society; but to lead as many sinners to repentance and salvation as possible and to build them up in that holiness, without which they cannot see the Lord.
- 501.1.11. As a preacher of the Evangelical Congregational Church you are expected to act in all things, not according to your own will or pleasure, but as a faithful son of the gospel. As such it is your duty to employ your time in the manner in which our rules direct: in preaching, in visiting from house to house, in reading, meditation, and prayer. Above all, if you labor with us in the Lord's vineyard, it is needful that you do that chapter of the work which is assigned you and at those times and places which it is adjudged most to His glory and the furtherance of His kingdom.

502. PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

- 502.1. Our philosophy of pastoral ministry is founded upon what Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11-13, 'It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.' We affirm that God gifts, calls, and sets apart particular individuals to positions of leadership in ministry.
- 502.2. We also affirm that all persons born of God through faith in Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit have been given ministry gifts that God intends to be used

for his glory. According to New Testament teaching, the Christian faith is lived in the community of the church, where worship and witness are embodied through the spiritual gifts of its members. What allows this system to function properly is that 'the same God works all of them in all men' (1 Corinthians 12:6).

- 502.3. It is the responsibility of pastoral leaders to work with followers of Jesus Christ in the church to help believers discover and develop their gifts, and then deploy believers in building the kingdom.

503. SPIRITUAL QUALIFICATIONS

- 503.1. A pastor must first be called, set apart, and gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry. He must also possess and develop a corresponding personal character.
- 503.2. As a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he must know he is saved and possesses peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. He must know that the Holy Spirit fills his heart with love and is actively at work bringing demonstrated victories over sin. Sin must no longer rule in his heart and life. Since souls are perishing for whom Christ died, the preacher must be called by God to go and proclaim the 'good news' of the saving grace which brings salvation to any who will repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38). 'Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful' (1 Corinthians 4:2).

504. EVIDENCE OF A CALL TO PREACH

- 504.1. We affirm it is God alone who calls men to preach. We also affirm that the church of Jesus Christ plays a valuable role in affirming that an individual has been called to this sacred office. When a man believes he is called into the ministry, he must work out the confirmation of his call within the context of the church.
- 504.2. The Evangelical Congregational Church will work side-by-side with one who believes he is called into the ministry from the time he indicates his belief of his call until he is ordained or no longer seeks to be ordained in the Evangelical Congregational Church.
- 504.3. Demonstrating evidence of a call to preach begins in the home church of one who believes he possesses this call. The home church should offer such a man, opportunities to conduct and/or participate in religious services, work in the evangelistic outreach of the church, and exercise his particular spiritual gifts. While he is exercising his gifts, this person should also be thoroughly acquainting himself with all paragraphs of the *Discipline*. The full process through which the applicant will proceed is outlined in the Conference Rules.

504.4. Personal Experience

- 504.4.1. Does the applicant have peace with God? Is the love of God abiding in his heart and is it demonstrated in his relationships with other individuals? What is his relationship with the Holy Spirit? Is there evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in his life? Are his life and conversation pure? Is he concerned with the spread of the gospel and the conversion of the lost?

504.5. Thirst for Knowledge

- 504.5.1. Is the applicant studious? Is he devoted first and foremost to the study of the Bible and to understanding its meaning? Does he love to learn as much as he can about this world while at the same time understanding that his call to building the kingdom of God will always be his primary calling?

504.6. Effective Preaching and Teaching

- 504.6.1. Does his teaching consistently reach the hearts and minds of his

audience? Does the Holy Spirit bear witness in believers that God's word has been effectually communicated? Is the message culturally relevant? Has anyone been converted through his proclamation of the gospel message? Does he consistently exhibit proper exegesis and deliver high quality messages making scriptural truths relevant to the audience within various settings? Do those who regularly sit under his ministry grow more healthy and vibrant in their faith through his teaching and preaching ministry?

504.7. Gifts and Qualifications

504.7.1. Does he give indication that he will mature over the coming years in the use of his gifts and abilities under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit? Does he possess common sense and good judgment? Is he flexible and able to adapt? Does he possess the gift of spiritual discernment? Is his view of the plan of redemption and salvation scriptural? Is his preaching such that people want to listen?

504.8. **Summary:** In all cases where there is a fair degree of clarity that the applicant has demonstrated this evidence, the Evangelical Congregational Church will affirm the man's call. He will be encouraged and guided to complete the process that leads to ordination and service in our denomination.

505. INTEGRITY IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

505.1. All children of God are called to lives of holiness. It is only natural to expect that our pastors should strive to be persons of the highest moral integrity in every area of their lives. This includes: their relationships with God, their family, and their community. Our pastors should endeavor to bring every aspect of their life under the lordship of Christ, and be living examples of a life lived in step with God's Spirit. Pastors should regularly assess: their personal spiritual formation; their ministry to their own family; their work ethic and time management; their conduct with the opposite sex and children; their thought life; their financial management; and their physical well-being.

506. CHAPTER II – CLASSIFICATION OF MINISTERS

506.1. Questions to applicants

506.1.1. Candidates applying for credentials shall be examined by answering the following questions:

506.1.1.1. Do you believe yourself to be divinely called to preach the gospel?

506.1.1.2. Have you obtained the pardon of your sins and peace with God, through faith in Christ?

506.1.1.3. Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?

506.1.1.4. Do you earnestly desire and seek to have the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit, in such a measure that you may have victory over every sin?

506.1.1.5. Are you acquainted with the doctrines and standards of Christian practice as articulated in the *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church?

506.1.1.6. Will you observe and defend them?

506.1.1.7. Will you be an example of the believers by keeping your life pure, bringing every aspect of your life under the Lordship of Christ, living in step with God's Spirit, and conduct yourself in a manner consistent with the biblical standards as expressed in the Christian Practice section of the *Discipline*?

506.1.2. If the applicant satisfactorily answers all the foregoing questions, the National Conference may, by a majority of the members, grant the appropriate credentials to the candidates.

507. THE OFFICE AND FUNCTIONS OF AN INDIVIDUAL HOLDING A NATIONAL CREDENTIAL

507.1. APPROVED CANDIDATE

507.1.1. An Approved Candidate for the ministry is one who is receiving guidance in training for and clarification of the call to ministry. An Approved Candidate for ministry may function by rendering preaching service under the direction of his pastor and/or the Stationing Committee. He is also to assist the local pastor as directed by him.

507.2. LICENSED CANDIDATE

507.2.1. A Licensed Candidate is one who is fully persuaded of his call to pastoral ministry but is not assigned to a church. A Licensed Candidate carries the additional privilege of being considered as available for an appointment to an Evangelical Congregational Church.

507.3. LICENSED PASTOR

507.3.1. A Licensed Pastor is a stationed pastor who has limited or no ministerial experience. He remains a Licensed Pastor at least until he has completed his educational requirements for ordination. As a stationed pastor permission is granted to administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion and to perform weddings as long as his assignment continues. He may officially use the written title "Reverend."

507.4. ELDER

507.4.1. An Elder is a Licensed Pastor who has completed the educational requirements of National Conference and has faithfully discharged the duties of a Licensed Pastor or his previous office(s) for a period of not less than three years. Once the ordination vows have been assumed and the candidate is ordained, his full pastoral functions and title are made permanent.

507.5. ITINERANT

507.5.1. The Itinerancy is a self-disciplining body of ordained Elders who accept the priority of the cause of Christ in service to the Lord and who are committed to a lifetime of service under the authority of the EC Church.

507.5.2. Itinerants are those who have completed the educational and service requirements of the Conference, have attained full ordination as an Elder, and have been admitted to the Itinerancy by a two-thirds majority vote of the members of the Itinerancy present at a Conference session. These men unquestionably possess the calling, gifts, graces, and essential qualities for ministry in the EC Church. Members of the Itinerancy understand and accept the responsibility and sacrifice of willingly moving from church to church when assigned. Because the full pastoral functions and title of a minister are made permanent at the time of ordination, a minister is eligible for admission into the Itinerancy at the time of his ordination.

507.5.3. Service Commitment

507.5.3.1. By acceptance into the Itinerancy, a minister is making a commitment to the Evangelical Congregational Church to serve as assigned until released for good and sufficient reason by the Conference. Any minister resigning from service before the conclusion of the year of pastoral assignment may be considered to have left irregularly unless an agreement is made with the Stationing Committee concerning early release.

508. SUPERANNUATION

508.1. A Superannuated preacher is an Itinerant Elder who has reached retirement age, as determined by the Benefits Corporation, or has become physically incapacitated and/or for some other reason has been rendered unable to serve a charge, whose application for retirement has been approved by the Conference and who has been transferred by the Conference to the Superannuated list. A Superannuated preacher, to become a beneficiary of the Benefits Corporation, must be approved by that Corporation.

509. SUPERNUMERARY

509.1. Any Itinerant Elder of the National Conference who has withdrawn from pastoral ministry due to: 1. physical, emotional, or mental incapacitation such that he has been rendered unable to serve a charge; or 2. accepting a full-time position in any other sphere of service other than those listed under the classification "Active Ministers in Related Fields" shall be placed in supernumerary relationship. Non-itinerant ordained ministers who withdraw from pastoral ministry for any of the above reasons shall be classified as "Inactive" within their designated classification under Ordained Elder.

510. INACTIVE ELDER

510.1. Non-itinerant ordained ministers who withdraw from pastoral ministry for any of the above reasons shall be classified as "Inactive" within their designated classification under Ordained Elder.

511. THE OFFICE AND FUNCTIONS OF AN INDIVIDUAL HOLDING A LOCAL CREDENTIAL

511.1. A Local Candidate is one who is licensed to serve in the Word as occasion may require and opportunity offers, but who is not yet stationed.

512. LOCAL PASTOR

512.1. The Local Pastor is one who is stationed, but has limited or no ministerial experience, and has not yet completed the educational requirements for becoming a Local Elder.

513. LOCAL ELDER

513.1. The Local Elder is one who has completed the educational requirements and has three years of assigned Evangelical Congregational pastoral experience.

514. THE OFFICE AND FUNCTIONS OF AN INDIVIDUAL HOLDING AN APPROVED CREDENTIAL

515. APPROVED PASTOR

515.1. This office provides a limited ministerial credential to a man who is not a member of the Evangelical Congregational Church and has no ministerial credentials with other denominations but is deemed acceptable for pastoral ministry.

516. APPROVED ELDER

516.1. The Approved Elder status identifies those applying from outside the Evangelical Congregational Church, who are available for assignment, have a ministerial credential with another denomination, yet will retain their credential with their former denomination.

517. SPECIALIZED MINISTRY

517.1. Qualified men and women can be granted denominational credentials in areas of specialized ministry. Areas of ministry included, but not limited to, in this category are: evangelism, Bible teaching, Christian education, youth ministry, women's ministry, prison ministry, visitation ministry, counseling, nursing home chaplaincy, hospital chaplaincy, hospice chaplaincy and marketplace chaplaincy.

518. PREACHER-IN-CHARGE

518.1. An Elder shall be designated by the Stationing Committee when he is entrusted with the oversight of a church to which no regular pastoral appointment has been made.

518.2. When an interim or permanent pastor is not immediately available, laymen may be used to supply the pulpit and meet basic pastoral care needs. A preacher-in-charge shall be designated and shall oversee the administration of sacraments of the church and conduct other such services that require an assigned credentialed pastor.

518.3. A preacher-in-charge may also be designated when a church has been planted or restarted and a permanent church planter has not yet been appointed by the Kingdom Extension Community. The preacher-in-charge shall be designated by the Stationing Committee in consultation with the Kingdom Extension Community and shall give pastoral oversight to the plant/restart including the administration of the sacraments and other such services that requires an assigned credentialed pastor.

PART SIX

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND REDEEMPTIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

- CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION
- CHAPTER II – DISAGREEMENTS BETWEEN MEMBERS
- CHAPTER III – FORMAL DISCIPLINE OF LAY MEMBERS
- CHAPTER IV – DISCIPLINE OF MINISTERS
- CHAPTER V – DISCIPLINE OF A BISHOP
- CHAPTER VI – JURISDICTION AND EVIDENCE

600. CHAPTER I – CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND REDEPTIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

601. INTRODUCTION

- 601.1. Biblical peacemaking is one God's highest priorities (Matthew 5:23-24; Romans 12:18; Galatians 6:1); therefore, it must be one of our highest priorities.
- 601.2. **Formative** church discipline is the process which all Christians experience as they hear the Word of God preached and taught.
- 601.3. **Corrective** church discipline is reserved for those situations where Christians persist in unrepentant sin and need the special attention of the church in order to impress upon them the grave danger in not repenting of the offending behavior.
- 601.4. An injured or offended member shall not become the prosecutor of any offense without having first attempted the means of reconciliation and of reclaiming the offender, required by Christ, as discussed in 602. Formal church discipline that results in an ecclesiastical trial (the formal disciplinary process described in 614 and following) should be regarded by all ministers, pastors, and churches as a corrective step of last resort when dealing with matters of conflict and unrepentant sin in the church. The ministry and membership of the church in general, and of every local church, with its pastors, and officers, in particular, should make every reasonable effort to resolve any conflicts and recover any church member from a pattern of sin before any steps are taken to institute a trial.
- 601.5. Formal church disciplinary cases that come to the attention of church leaders frequently begin as personal disputes between two or more individuals. Typically, when one side feels they are not getting what they want, they bring charges of sin against the other side. In this manner, church leaders and churches are drawn into conflicts that would better be resolved at a personal level through Christian conciliation. Of course, when conflicted parties refuse to be reconciled, the accountability afforded by formal church discipline should be used to further the goals of purity in the church, the rebuke of offenses, the removal of scandal, and the spiritual good of offenders (1 Corinthians 5:5). Every effort should be made, however, to resolve the conflict through repentance, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation before a church entertains formal charges. The intent of these provisions is to encourage Christian unity before the formal provisions of church discipline are brought to bear on a situation. Of course, not every situation will lend itself to Christian conciliation. However, every effort should be made to utilize private confrontation, mediation, and arbitration in order to reserve the use of formal church discipline, and the time of church courts, for those matters related to the purity of the church and the keeping and reclaiming of disobedient sinners. Many of these ends will be realized through the processes of Christian conciliation, and, therefore, should be viewed as prerequisite procedures to the formal disciplinary process.

602. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- 602.1. The biblical components of discipline as they relate to conflict resolution are as follows:
 - 602.1.1. Instruction in the Word;
 - 602.1.2. An individual's responsibility to admonish one another (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1);
 - 602.1.3. If the admonition is rejected, then the calling of one or more witnesses (Matthew 18:16);
 - 602.1.4. If rejection persists, then the church must act as an ecclesiastical court (a hearing process), which may lead to admonition, suspension, or excommunication (Matthew 18:17).

603. INSTRUCTION IN THE WORD

- 603.1. God desires His people to live in peace and unity with one another (Ephesians 4:3). Preaching and teaching should regularly address this emphasis and the purposes for church discipline: recovery of an errant member, the purity of the church, and the protection of God's name and reputation. Attention should be drawn to the fact that the main procedural passage related to church discipline, Matthew 18:15-20, is set forth in the context of two powerful parables teaching (1) the extent and depth of God's love in reclaiming those who have strayed (Matthew 18:10-14), and (2) the vast measure of His forgiveness and the expansive forgiveness He expects from His children toward one another (Matthew 18:21-35). The extent of instruction on reconciliation provided to church members in "new member classes" and regular preaching from the pulpit will have a significant bearing on the extent to which a church member understands the benefits of church discipline and has consented to ecclesiastical jurisdiction (which is helpful for the church if it is to avoid legal liability for the proper exercise of church discipline).
- 603.2. Teaching from God's Word concerning sin and conflicts that result from it, and how Christians should respond biblically to conflict, will equip church members to become peacemakers themselves. Peacemaking has always been one of a Christian's most important ministries. As we are reminded in 2 Corinthians 5:18, God "reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." One of the most powerful ways that we can encourage reconciliation with God is to model reconciliation among people. When others see us resolve our differences in a loving and biblical manner, they are inclined to give more weight to what we say about the Lord (John 13:34-35; 17:20-23). On the other hand, when they see Christians embroiled in disputes, they tend to write God's people off as hypocrites and dismiss the claims of Christ (Romans 2:21-24; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8).
- 603.3. The Bible sets forth a process for resolving personal and substantive disputes in a constructive manner. This process is sometimes referred to as "Christian conciliation" and it may be used to resolve everything from minor personal differences to church divisions or lawsuits involving church members (Proverbs 19:11, Matthew 5:23-25 and 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, and Galatians 6:1). There are many benefits to resolving disputes through Christian conciliation. It prevents a public quarrel that would dishonor the Lord Jesus Christ and diminish the credibility and witness of His church. Conciliation also allows Christians to demonstrate their faith in Christ and their confidence in His teachings (John 13:34; 14:15; 17:20-23). In addition, conciliation encourages forgiveness and promotes reconciliation, which can help to preserve valuable relationships and strengthen the church (Ephesians 4:29-32; Colossians 3:12-17). Conciliation also helps people to identify and deal with the root causes of conflict, which may include such things as pride, selfishness, idolatry, fear, vengeance, greed, bitterness, or unforgiveness (see Matthew 7:3-5). This allows people to make changes in their lives so that they will enjoy more peaceful relationships in the future (Ephesians 4:1-3, 22-24).
- 603.4. Christian conciliation is especially beneficial for people who sincerely want to do what is right and are open to learning where they have been wrong (Proverbs 15:31-32). Conciliators (mediators and arbitrators) can help those caught up in conflict identify improper attitudes or unwise practices, to understand more fully the effects of their decision and actions, and to make improvements in their lives that will help them to honor and serve the Lord more effectively in the future (1 Peter 2:12).
- 603.5. Church leaders are encouraged to learn all they can about Christian conciliation

and develop local ministries that will equip members under their care to respond to conflicts in a manner that reflects the power of Christ working in their lives. Peacemaker Ministries® is an evangelical ministry that provides both conciliation services and training in this area of ministry (www.Peacemaker.net). The more church members understand these concepts and benefits, the more likely they will be to apply biblical principles when conflicts occur.

604. ADMONISHING ONE ANOTHER (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1).

- 604.1. Scripture warns against making a premature judgment about a matter (Matthew 7:1-5). By first going personally and in private to those who have offended, we provide the opportunity for clarification of misunderstandings and avoid premature judgment. This step includes the three responses of personal peacemaking as follows:
- 604.2. **Overlooking** an offense: An individual may overlook an offense of another. "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense" (Proverbs 19:11).
- 604.3. **Discussion** (Reconciliation) When personal wrongs are too serious to overlook, the parties are required to seek to resolve them privately through loving confrontation and confession. "If your brother has something against you...go and be reconciled" (Matthew 5:23-24). "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you" (Matthew 18:15).
- 604.4. **Negotiation** When a substantive issue related to money, property, or other material issues or rights divides Christians, a process of biblical negotiation should be followed that will meet the interests of all those involved. "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4).
- 604.5. Privately responding to conflict early, before it escalates, through the means of these three forms of personal peacemaking will often result in reconciliation and no need for further peacemaking attention. Successful personal peacemaking is usually based on at least one parties' willingness to accept responsibility for how they have contributed to the conflict and by being willing to humble themselves for the greater goal of God's glory through "making every effort" (Ephesians 4:3) to keep the unity of the spirit.

605. CALLING ONE OR MORE WITNESSES (Matthew 18:16; 1 Corinthians 6:1-98).

- 605.1. Involving others is a serious escalation of a conflict and should be considered only after the elements of step two have been fully exhausted. Step three includes the three assisted peacemaking responses as follows:
- 605.2. **Mediation** If a dispute cannot be resolved through personal peacemaking, the parties should ask one or more other Christians to meet with them to help the parties communicate more effectively and explore possible solutions. The mediators may give advice but have no power to impose solutions. They may later act as witnesses in formal church disciplinary proceedings should mediation fail due to hardness of heart or the unrepentant sin of one or both parties. "If he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." (Matthew 18:16).
- 605.3. **Arbitration** When two parties to a conflict cannot come to a voluntary agreement on a substantive issue, one or more arbitrators may be appointed to listen to the arguments and evidence of each side and render a binding decision. "If you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church" (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). See 603.5.
- 605.4. **Accountability** (Church discipline): Formal church discipline, pursuant to the

procedures of this *Discipline* as set forth in the following chapters of this Part Six, is reserved for those cases where the person who professes to be a Christian and is a member of the church refuses to be reconciled, repent of personal sin, and do what is right. Church leaders bearing ecclesiastical jurisdiction over such persons should formally intervene to promote justice, repentance, and forgiveness. "If he refuses to listen, tell it to the church" (Matthew 18:17-20).

606. FAILURE TO FOLLOW THE STEPS

- 606.1. Churches unwilling or unable to instruct their members completely in the full breadth of the steps of conciliation and discipline encourage resorting to unbiblical, worldly responses to conflict. The escape responses of denial, flight, and even suicide can be expected if church members are not positively directed to the biblical processes of Christian conciliation. Others, when not given the hope of having matters responded to within the body of Christ, will resort to verbal and physical attack, secular civil litigation, and possibly even murder to remove an opponent where there is no other avenue for a just resolution.
- 606.2. Moving a case too quickly to formal church discipline can build barriers that could otherwise be dealt with in mediation or arbitration. Every church is encouraged to equip church leaders and mature members with the skills of Christian conciliation and to exhaust conciliation processes and remedies before moving to formal church discipline.

607. USE OF CONCILIATION CLAUSES IN MEMBERSHIP DOCUMENTS

- 607.1. One significant way church members can be educated and prepared for biblical conflict resolution is through the use of a conciliation clause in the membership covenant or other agreement signed by new members when they join the church. The recommended language for this clause is set forth below. It should be noted that signing this clause should not be made a condition for membership; but may be encouraged as a voluntary biblical commitment. It should be clearly offered as an option for the resolution of any disputes that may arise.

608. CHRISTIAN CONCILIATION

- 608.1. Members are encouraged but not required to make this commitment.
- 608.1.1. If I ever have a dispute with the church that cannot be resolved through its own internal procedures, I agree to resolve the dispute according to biblical principles (such as those set forth in Matthew 5:23-25 and 18:15-20, and 1 Corinthians 6:1-8) by submitting the matter to mediation and, if necessary, arbitration, according to the Bylaws of this church and the Rules of Procedure of the Institute for Christian Conciliation, a division of Peacemaker Ministries® (www.Peacemaker.net). I understand that arbitration is a legally binding process, and that judgment upon an arbitration award may be entered in any court otherwise having jurisdiction.
- 608.1.2. Dated this ____ day of _____, 20____
- 608.1.3. Printed Name: _____
- 608.1.4. Signature: _____
- 608.1.5. Parent's / Guardian's Name (for minors): _____
- 608.1.6. Parent's or Guardian's Signature: _____
- 608.1.7. THIS AGREEMENT IS SUBJECT TO ARBITRATION PURSUANT TO THE
[STATE]
- 608.1.8. ARBITRATION ACT, TITLE ##, CHAPTER #, [STATE] CODE ANNOTATED.

609. AMEND CHURCH BYLAWS to Allow Continuing Church Jurisdiction

- 609.1. The following clause is recommended for inclusion in local church bylaws to allow the continuing ecclesiastical jurisdiction over a member who may otherwise simply flee from the church to avoid formal church discipline:
- 609.2. Members may be removed from membership at their own request following the steps of appropriate pastoral care as set forth in *Discipline* 305.9.1. If a member requests to withdraw because of specific problems or disappointments with the church, the church's leaders shall attempt to resolve those matters so that the member may remain in the church and enjoy greater fruitfulness and personal spiritual growth. If the church leaders are unable to resolve those matters, they shall offer to assist the member in locating a church of like faith and practice that can respond more effectively to his or her gifts and needs. If it appears to church leaders that a member has requested removal merely to avoid formal 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 to the Lord and to any people he or she has offended. This action is intended both to help the individual find freedom from his sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he or she might do to their members (see Matthew 18:12-14; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).
- 609.3. Use of this clause will also help the local church avoid serious legal liability for following through with all the steps of formal church discipline. Members should be informed of these provisions and carefully taught the Scriptural basis for continuing shepherding and pastoral care especially when caught in sin.

610. CONCLUSION

- 610.1. All churches are encouraged to employ the means of Christian conciliation whenever possible. That is, churches are encouraged to defer formal disciplinary action until all other remedies have been exhausted. Peace, unity, and the mission of the Church can be furthered through careful and complete attention to every step of the process as set forth above.

611. CHAPTER II – DISAGREEMENTS BETWEEN MEMBERS

612. ARBITRATION

- 612.1. In the event of disagreement between two or more members of the Evangelical Congregational Church concerning business transactions or interests, or other matters of a material nature, which the parties are unable to satisfactorily resolve, the minister, or other church leaders, or both together, shall, upon inquiry, recommend to the parties a reference of the matter to a committee of five (5) arbiters, two (2) to be chosen by each of the respective parties, and these four (4) to choose the fifth who shall be impartial; such arbiters being members of our church. If the four arbiters cannot agree on a fifth, they shall communicate this fact to the supervisory leadership of the National Conference, which may appoint a fifth arbiter, who shall be an evangelical believer who agrees to abide by the polity and procedures of the discipline pertaining to the matter at issue, but who need not be a member of our church.
- 612.2. After an appropriate hearing, the verdict of the arbiters shall be binding alike on the several parties, and if either refuses to abide by the judgment rendered, it shall be regarded as an offense against the order and *Discipline*, rendering him liable to complaint and formal church discipline, in which case, except as he can show sufficient cause for such persistence, he shall be disciplined by the church as may be appropriate to the situation, including exclusion from the church.
- 612.3. A member of the Evangelical Congregational Church who shall refuse, in case of debt or other dispute, to submit the matter to arbitration when advised to do so by the minister or church leaders, or both, and shall enter into a lawsuit with another member, without first seeking resolution by resort to peaceable measures as mediation and/or arbitration, shall likewise be regarded as having violated the order and *Discipline* and shall be liable as in the preceding paragraph. This is not to apply to executors and administrators or in cases where delay would entail financial loss.

613. RIGHT OF CHALLENGE

- 613.1. In all cases the accused shall have the right of reasonable challenge respecting those who shall sit on the arbitration committee. A person disqualified to sit as a juror in any civil suit because of interest or prejudice, should, in an intensified degree, be deemed out of place in a church hearing.

614. CHAPTER III – FORMAL DISCIPLINE OF LAY MEMBERS

614.1. The formal church discipline of lay members shall be before a select number of mature church members (those generally meeting the character qualifications as set forth in I Timothy 1 and Titus 3) of the church to which they belong or, if necessary for prudential reasons, before a committee from another congregation of the Evangelical Congregational Church, in number not less than three (3), who shall, upon an impartial hearing of the evidence, determine the questions of innocence, blameworthiness, or guilt, and the appropriate course of discipline (admonition, suspension from the Lord's Table, and/or excommunication) to be pronounced. The appropriate course of discipline shall always be considered for its most probable effect in reclaiming the errant member to fellowship with Christ and fellow church members.

614.2. Neglect of Duty

614.2.1. In all cases of reputed negligence and lack of faithfulness respecting Christian privileges and responsibilities, as clearly set forth in the Word of God and in our standards (Part I, Chapter III—Christian Practice), it shall be the duty of church leaders to visit and admonish such in the spirit of meekness and love and to do this repeatedly if the case shall require it. If no reformation is witnessed as a result, such delinquency shall be reported to the minister for additional admonition and reformatory efforts, and if all these shall prove unavailing, formal disciplinary proceedings shall be instituted or the case may be first reported to the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team for counsel and instruction.

614.2.2. If such a delinquent member is brought to formal discipline and found unrepentant and guilty of the charges, he shall be either publicly or privately admonished, barred from the Lord's table for a specified period, and/or excluded (excommunicated) from the church, unless he shall at such investigation appear to be truly contrite and desirous to amend his course, in which case he may be placed on probation for a period not to exceed six months. If, then, the minister or other church leaders shall conclude that no real improvement in conduct has taken place during the probation, the offending member shall be excluded if that step of discipline is determined to be the most effective means of demonstrating to the offender the severity of his sin. If in any case the accused refuses to be present at such formal disciplinary process, the hearing shall be held as if he were present.

614.3. Imprudent and Sinful Conduct

614.3.1. In all cases of reputed sinful conduct which includes but is not limited to conduct as set forth in the Part One, Chapter III of the *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church, proper inquiry shall first be made by the minister or other church leaders respecting the authenticity of such reports, and if these prove to be sufficiently reliable to make them appear credible, the minister or other church leaders, or both of them together, shall visit such member and inquire definitively into the matter. In case of confession, humility, and promises of repentance and reformation, the erring member shall be borne with for a reasonable time; but if such reformation does not follow, the accused shall be brought to formal disciplinary process. Should the accused, during the hearing, manifest sufficient evidence of true penitence and contrition to warrant the hope of reformation, the same leniency may be exercised as in the case of neglect of duty; if not, and in the case of demonstrated hardness of heart and lack of repentance, and on a finding of guilt, such member shall be disciplined by the church as may be appropriate to the situation, including exclusion from the church.

614.4. Gross Immorality

614.4.1. In all cases of reputed gross immorality, the member shall be visited

without delay by the minister, or other church leaders, or by both together, and the matter shall be definitely inquired into, and if the report be found sufficiently credible to demand an investigation, proceedings shall be instituted according to the directions given in the *Discipline*; and in case of finding of guilt, he shall be disciplined by the church as may be appropriate to the situation, including exclusion from the church.

614.5. Causing Dissension

614.5.1. If any member of our church shall be accused of causing dissension in any of our congregations, by inveighing against our doctrines or the *Discipline*, the member so offending shall be reproved by the minister, or other church leaders, or by both together, and, if necessary, repeatedly admonished to a better course of thought and action; but if he shall persist in such pernicious practice, he shall be brought to formal disciplinary process and, upon finding of guilt, be disciplined by the church as may be appropriate to the situation, including exclusion from the church.

615. Accuser/Presiding Officer

615.1. In all cases of lay members in which hearings are deemed necessary, but in which no member of the congregation is willing to act as accuser, the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team shall appoint a person who shall serve as the accuser on behalf of the church. At such hearing, the minister, the District Field Director, or another ordained minister of the District, appointed by the District Field Director, shall preside.

616. President of a Hearing

616.1. In all cases of hearings concerning formal discipline of lay members in which the minister must not be excused for prudential or other important reasons, it shall be his duty to institute and preside at such hearings; but if, for sufficient reasons, he must be excused, the District Field Director shall take his place or appoint an ordained minister of his District to do so. If the minister presides at a hearing, he shall also appoint the Hearing Committee in accordance with Section 614. If the minister, for prudential reasons, cannot preside, the District Field Director shall appoint the Hearing Committee and also the time and place for the hearing, even in cases in which he cannot himself preside.

616.1.1. A minister who presides at the hearing of any member shall in all cases preserve strictly an impartial attitude, such as would be expected of an honorable jurist in a civil court and shall have no part in determining the guilt or innocence verdict or in framing an appropriate discipline. He shall be accessible to the members of the Hearing Committee to impart any needed information on procedural points but shall refuse to commit himself as to the merits of the case in hand.

617. Right of Appeal of Lay Members

617.1. In all cases of formal church discipline of lay members resulting in a finding of guilt and the imposition of church discipline, any party may appeal such discipline to the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team, provided the appellant shall, within thirty (30) days after receiving a copy of the decision to impose church discipline, give notice to this effect to the secretary of said hearing, who shall thereupon send or convey the record of the hearing to the District Field Director, to be presented by him at the next meeting of the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team, which shall carefully examine the charges and specifications and the evidence presented for and against the appellant and, by a majority vote, pass upon each, which action shall be final in the case. Any member of the Official Board/Ministry

Council/leadership team having served as juror on the case shall have no vote in the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team on the same case in appeal.

- 617.2. If in passing upon a case of appeal the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team finds evidence of irregularities sufficient to have prejudiced the cause of either party, it shall annul the action of the committee and order a new hearing. If it finds the action regular in all respects, but the evidence is insufficient to warrant the decision, it shall reverse the action of the committee. If it finds the action of the committee regular and the evidence sufficient to sustain the decision, it shall ratify the same.
- 617.3. It shall be the duty of the secretary of the Official Board/Ministry Council/leadership team to transmit to the appellant a copy of the decision rendered in the case, without delay.

618. CHAPTER IV – DISCIPLINE OF MINISTERS

619. COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY

- 619.1. If in the examination of the moral and official conduct of preachers in the National Conference, it appears that there are rumors, or accusations of unchristian conduct, or of official misconduct, but that there are no legal charges, the Conference shall appoint a committee of inquiry to whom the matter shall be referred and said committee shall report its findings to the Conference. If the committee finds that there is necessity for a trial, the Conference shall appoint an accuser to prosecute the matter and order the case to proceed according to 620.2.

620. TRIAL COURT

620.1. Election of a Trial Court

- 620.1.1. The itinerant members of the National Conference shall elect from the Itinerant Elders, seven (7) or more persons, not to exceed twelve (12) in number, who shall serve a term of four years as a Trial Court in case of any and all charges duly preferred against any minister of the conference. In case of a vacancy occurring during the quadrennium, the remaining members shall fill the vacancy until the next session of the National Conference.

620.2. Convening a Trial Court

- 620.2.1. When a minister is charged with a crime expressly forbidden in the Word of God as an unchristian practice, his District Field Director shall, after having furnished the accused a copy of the charges, convene the Trial Court at as early a day as practical and at such place as shall be most convenient to those concerned. If the accused be a District Field Director, the Bishop shall furnish him a copy of the charges and convene the Trial Court. This Trial Court, when so convened, shall have full power to try the accused and, if necessity requires, censure him or suspend him from office until the next session of the National Conference.

620.3. Organization of a Trial Court

- 620.3.1. The Trial Court shall elect a chairman and a secretary from among its own members.

620.4. Records of a Trial Court

- 620.4.1. The secretary shall keep a correct record of all the trial proceedings and take charge of all papers and documents submitted in the case. The record, after having been approved by the court, shall be signed by the chairman and secretary and, together with the papers and documents presented, shall be transmitted to the secretary of the National Conference, to be used in reviewing the trial. A certified copy of the record shall be furnished to the accused minister if he demands it.

620.5. Right of Challenge

- 620.5.1. The accused minister shall have the right of peremptory challenge, yet not so as to reduce the court below two-thirds of its original number. Two-thirds of the court actually sitting in the case shall be necessary to render a decision. If the accused minister evades a trial it shall be received as presumptive evidence against him, and the court shall proceed with the case and deal with him as though he were present.

621. FORMULATION OF CHARGES

- 621.1. If there be rumors charging a minister immoral or unchristian conduct, and no one appears as accuser against him, his District Field Director shall take one or two

ministers with him and inquire thoroughly into the matter, and if they find the rumors well founded, they, or any of them, shall formulate and prefer charges to the Bishop who shall proceed in the matter as provided in 620.2.

621.2. If the circumstances be such that a trial cannot immediately be held in any of the cases above provided for, then the Bishop or the Ministerial Development Associate shall suspend such a minister from his office until his trial. If, however, the accused be a District Field Director, he shall be suspended by the Bishop. But such suspension can only be made when the charges are in writing and subscribed to by those who are willing to prosecute them; provided, however, that the defendant shall have the right to demand a trial within twenty (20) days.

621.3. In case of improper temper, words, or actions, the minister so offending shall be admonished by his District Field Director or, if the offender be a District Field Director, by the Bishop. Should the offense occur the second time, one or two ministers are to be taken along as witnesses. If he offends a third time, let the case be proceeded with according to 620.2.

621.4. When a minister fails in business or contracts debts that he is not able to pay, the District Field Director or, if the brother who thus fails be a District Field Director, the Bishop shall appoint three (3) judicious men, members of the Evangelical Congregational Church, to inspect the accounts, contracts, and circumstances of the supposed delinquent, and if, in their opinion, he has been dishonest or contracted debts without the probability of being able to pay them, let the case be disposed of according to 620.2.

621.5. If a minister disseminates doctrines contrary to the Word of God and our Articles of Faith, or inveighs against the *Discipline*, let the same process be observed as in cases of immorality. But if such minister solemnly promises to cease from disseminating such erroneous doctrines, he shall be borne with until his case shall be laid before the National Conference, which may order a trial before the Trial Court provided for in 620.2.

621.6. All charges against ministers or lay delegates in the Evangelical Congregational Church shall be in writing, the heading of which shall not exceed in evil import the thing or things charged, and such accusation shall be clearly and definitely stated, associated immediately with the specifications to be alleged in proof, so that the accused may be able to prepare his defense. An exact copy of the charges shall be given to the accused or left at his residence by the accuser in time to prepare for the trial, or not less than fourteen (14) days in advance of the time appointed. In all cases of charges whether against ministers or lay delegates, the accuser must be a member in full and regular standing of the Evangelical Congregational Church.

622. EVIDENCE ADMISSIBLE AT TRIALS

622.1. In all cases of trials of lay delegates, ministers, or bishops; persons of good report, nonmembers as well as members of the Evangelical Congregational Church, may appear as witnesses; and the testimony of absent witnesses, when taken before a committee of not less than two (2) members of the church and presented at the trial, shall be admitted, provided in every case sufficient notice had been given to the adverse party of the time and place of taking such testimony, to have enabled him to provide for cross-examination if he desired to do so. No hearsay testimony shall be admitted. It shall be the duty of members of the church to testify in matters of which they have certain knowledge when duly notified by the accuser or the accused of the time and place of a pending investigation or show just cause for refusing to do so; otherwise, it shall be regarded as a violation of the order and *Discipline* and may be

dealt with accordingly.

- 622.2. In all cases of an appeal, whether of lay delegates, ministers, or bishops, only the records of the trial, together with the credentials and documents there submitted, shall be used in evidence.

623. RIGHT OF APPEAL

- 623.1. In all cases in which a minister who stands in full connection as an Itinerant has been found guilty and sentenced to be censured, deposed from office, or expelled from the church, he shall be allowed an appeal to the Triers of Appeals, provided that he notify the Chairman of the National Conference of his intention to do so within thirty (30) days after the close of the Conference session. In the case of a licensed preacher or of a Traveling Elder the action of the National Conference shall be final.

624. CHAPTER V – DISCIPLINE OF A BISHOP

625. CHARGES AND PROCEDURE

625.1. Charges of immoral or unchristian conduct against a bishop must be preferred in writing, signed by at least three (3) itinerant elders, and plainly allege an offense clearly forbidden in the Word of God. Such charges must be presented to the National Executive Committee. After having received such written charges, the National Executive Committee shall convene the Trial Court of the National Conference. The Trial Court shall have full power to try the accused bishop, according to the directions of the *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church, and to suspend him from the functions of his office or to expel him from the church.

626. RECORDS OF THE TRIAL COURT

626.1. The Trial Court shall submit an accurate record of its proceedings to the secretary of the preceding National Conference, to be preserved among the papers of the National Conference and to be used by it in the case of an appeal. A certified copy of these records shall be furnished to the accused bishop, if he demands it.

627. RIGHT OF APPEAL

627.1. A bishop shall have the right of appeal to the National Conference, if he signifies his intention to appeal within thirty (30) days after his conviction. If the National Conference upholds the decision of the Trial Court the bishop may further appeal to the Triers of Appeals. The Triers of Appeals shall have the power to affirm or reverse the decision of the National Conference. If irregularities in the trial process are found they shall also have the authority to call for a retrial by the body in which these the irregularities occurred.

628. TRIERS OF APPEALS

628.1. The Itinerant members of the National Conference shall elect, quadrennially from the itinerant elders, five (5) men who shall be known as the Triers of Appeals. In case of a vacancy occurring during the year, the remaining Triers shall fill the vacancy until the next session of the National Conference.

628.2. Convening of Triers of Appeals

628.2.1. Whenever an appeal is taken from the decision of the National Conference, the presiding officer of the Conference shall call together the Triers of Appeals at such time and place as he may with due regard to the wishes of the appellant, designate. In the case of the Bishop making this appeal the vice-chairman of the Conference shall convene the Triers of Appeals. These persons shall have the power to affirm or reverse the decision and sentence of the National Conference. In case of irregularities sufficient to vitiate the proceedings of the Trial Court of the National Conference the Triers of Appeals shall have the power to remand the case for re-trial by the body in which the irregularities occurred. Its findings in all cases shall be final. The president of the Conference shall give due notice to all concerned of the time and place of meeting. The Triers of Appeals shall not be convened more than once a year to try appeals from the National Conference.

628.3. Officers of Triers of Appeals

628.3.1. The Triers of Appeals shall organize by electing a president and a secretary from among its own members. The president shall see that the proceedings are conducted in an orderly and judicial manner, and the secretary shall make an accurate record of all the proceedings and shall, at the close of the

appeal, transmit the same to the secretary of the National Conference from which the appeal was taken, to be preserved by him among the records and documents of said conference.

628.4. Expenses of Court of Appeals

628.4.1. The expenses of the Court of Appeals shall be paid by the National Conference.

629. CHAPTER VI – JURISDICTION AND EVIDENCE

630. QUESTION OF JURISDICTION

630.1. Whenever a Trial Court is convened to hear a case, the chairman of said court shall decide all questions of jurisdiction. Should there be a difference of opinion on any question of jurisdiction in the case, the matter shall be decided by a majority of the court. Before proceeding to the hearing of evidence in a case, the Trial Court shall carefully examine the charge or charges with the specifications, and if they are not in accordance with the requirements of the *Discipline*, they shall refuse to proceed with the trial, except the accuser shall reduce them to such conformity.

631. WITHDRAWAL UNDER CHARGES

631.1. No lay delegate, minister, or bishop of the Evangelical Congregational Church has the right to withdraw from the church while charges are pending against him or her. Should anyone assume to do so, the church has the right to properly investigate the charge and pass judgment in the case. If, however, all the parties concerned are agreed, an accused person may, for prudent reasons, be permitted to withdraw, provided that, in case of a minister or bishop, all credentials that he holds from the church be surrendered.

PART SEVEN

NATIONAL CONFERENCE COMMUNITIES AND AFFILIATES

- CHAPTER I – NATIONAL CONFERENCE
- CHAPTER II – COVENANTED AFFILIATES
- CHAPTER III – AFFILIATES
- CHAPTER IV – PARTNER CORPORATION

700. CHAPTER I – NATIONAL CONFERENCE

701. NATIONAL CONFERENCE COMMUNITIES AND AFFILIATES

702. The National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church

- 702.1. The General Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church, the Eastern Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church, the Western Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church, and the Division of Missions of the Evangelical Congregational Church, all non-profit corporations, merged by having the Eastern Conference, the Western Conference, and the Division of Missions merge into the General Conference which is the surviving corporation. The name of the General Conference was amended to be National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church and the address was changed to 100 West Park Avenue, Myerstown, Pennsylvania 17067.
- 702.2. Upon this Plan of Merger, the proper officers of the corporations were authorized to do all things necessary on behalf of the corporations to carry out and accomplish the merger, including the filing Articles of Merger and such other documents which were necessary to be filed to complete the merger.
- 702.3. After the adoption of this Plan of Merger by each corporation and the filing of the required legal documents, the merger was effective May 27, 2003.
- 702.4. The Creed, Ritual and *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church, Edition of 2000, continued to be the governing document of the National Conference, and it may be amended as deemed necessary.

703. TEAMS and COMMUNITIES

- 703.1. A team or community shall be an organizational unit charged with the implementation and oversight of one aspect of the purpose, mission, values, and vision of the church as described in the Rules of National Conference.
- 703.2. All teams and communities are under the authority of the National Ministry Team.

703.3. Conference Network Team

- 703.3.1. The Conference Network Team is an organizational unit within the denominational framework that is designed to provide counsel and encouragement to Evangelical Congregational leaders and to assure that our church's ministries are working together in unity to realize our denominational vision. It develops denominational initiatives, provides guidance in matters of accountability for EC credentialed personnel, and can make formal recommendations to denominational bodies.
- 703.3.2. The Bishop shall chair the Conference Network Team. Its members are the Bishop, Church Health Associate, Global Ministries Associate, Kingdom Extension Associate, Ministerial Development Associates, the District Field Directors, and the Secretary of National Conference. The Executive Director shall serve as an advisory member.

703.4. Conference Support Team

- 703.4.1. The Conference Support Team will support the mission and serve the church by supervising our operations – stewarding assets and providing the necessary services to accomplish the mission across the network.
- 703.4.2. The Executive Director shall chair the Conference Support Team. Members are the Executive Director, National Conference Treasurer, Church Center staff, and Assistant to the Bishop. The Bishop shall be an ex- officio member. The Bishop and the chairperson may appoint additional members who

are to serve on the Team.

703.5. Communities

703.5.1. There will be Communities as set forth by the National Conference to encourage and resource the ministries of Districts and local congregations according to the Community's area of ministry. Each community will be led by an Associate, with the exception of the Missional Alignment Community which will be led by the Bishop. The Bishop in consultation with the Associates shall appoint the members who are to serve on the communities. The National Conference may, by its rules, populate each community by assigning various groups, committees and entities to communities based on their assigned work and create new communities when practical.

703.6. Team and Community Meetings

703.6.1. Teams and communities shall determine the frequency and location of their meetings and shall share this information with the Bishop. Teams and communities shall meet at least once a year. The Standing Business Rules of the National Conference will apply to the team and community meetings.

703.7. Team and Community Agenda

703.7.1. The agenda of a team and community shall be shaped by the tasks that are assigned to it by the National Conference and/or the National Ministry Team. There shall be five general tasks that are assigned to every team and community:

703.7.1.1. To carry out the denomination's purpose, mission, values, and vision, as they relate to the team/community's area of ministry;

703.7.1.2. To appoint committees, networks, task forces, and/or teams that are needed to accomplish the work of the team/community, and to maintain contact with those committees, networks, task forces, and/or teams, and serve as a resource for them;

703.7.1.3. To establish a budget and policies related to the team/community's area of ministry;

703.7.1.4. To continually evaluate denominational progress in the team/community's area of ministry;

703.7.1.5. To be an available resource for districts and local churches which are pursuing work in the team/community's area of ministry.

703.8. Team and Community Finances

703.8.1. Each team/community shall prepare a budget, which, with the exception of the Global Ministries Community and the Kingdom Extension Community, will be submitted to the Finance Committee for inclusion in the denomination's general budget. The Global Ministries and Kingdom Extension budgets will be submitted to the National Ministry Team for approval at its fall meeting.

703.9. Church Health Community

703.9.1. Purpose

703.9.1.1. To communicate and encourage a health mindset and strategy for advocating healthier church ministries.

703.9.1.2. To assess local church health-related needs and potential within their contexts.

703.9.1.3. To deliver up-to-date resources and workshops that provide creative church health solutions.

703.9.1.4. To assist churches in adopting concepts that will ultimately produce health within their contexts.

703.10. Global Ministries Community

703.10.1. Purpose

- 703.10.1.1. To serve the local church by providing resources for fulfilling the Great Commission to the ends of the earth.
- 703.10.1.2. To assist in identifying those whom God is calling to this specialized form of ministry.
- 703.10.1.3. To help to develop a prayer support network.
- 703.10.1.4. Partner with and assist in the development of national (self-governing, self-directing, self-supporting, and self-propagating) churches.
- 703.10.1.5. To cooperate with inter-denominational mission boards, so as to develop channels, through the provision of personnel and resources, toward the effective communication of the gospel, without necessarily exporting the name of the Evangelical Congregational Church, nor its form of government.

703.11. Kingdom Extension Community

703.11.1. Purpose

- 703.11.1.1. To communicate and encourage a kingdom mindset and strategy for extending the kingdom.
- 703.11.1.2. To assess local church potential for extending the kingdom within their contexts.
- 703.11.1.3. To deliver up-to-date resources and workshops that provide creative solutions for extending the kingdom.
- 703.11.1.4. To assist local churches in adopting concepts that will ultimately extend the kingdom within their contexts.
- 703.11.1.5. To facilitate discussions among pastors and church leaders in district cohorts about kingdom extension within our cultural setting.

703.12. Ministerial Development Community

703.12.1. Purpose

- 703.12.1.1. To serve and support the denomination's mission for ministerial leadership.
- 703.12.1.2. To oversee and maintain an integrated process for credentialing.
- 703.12.1.3. To deliver up-to-date resources and workshops that provide lifelong learning opportunities for our ministerial leadership.
- 703.12.1.4. To oversee the administration of the credentialing process when needed.

703.13. Missional Alignment Community

703.13.1. Purpose

- 703.13.1.1. To assist the Bishop to cast the vision for the denomination in keeping with God's mission for his church.
- 703.13.1.2. To assess local church needs and potential for missional alignment within our current culture setting.
- 703.13.1.3. To deliver up-to-date theological approaches in order to provide missional alignment for our churches.
- 703.13.1.4. To assist churches in staying the course that will ultimately translate missional alignment to our current culture setting.
- 703.13.1.5. To facilitate discussions among pastors and church leaders in district cohorts about missional alignment within our cultural setting.

704. CHAPTER II –COVENANTED AFFILIATES

704.1. Evangelical Theological Seminary

704.1.1. Evangelical Theological Seminary was founded by the Evangelical Congregational Church (Church) in 1953 out of a vision to train clergy for service in the denomination. Over the years the Seminary has broadened the scope of its mission to include many other broadly evangelical constituencies and other forms of preparation for service to the Church and the world, all with the support and encouragement of the Church. The funding relationship between the Church and Seminary has been changed, as has the Evangelical Congregational composition of the Seminary's board of trustees. Yet the vital relationship between the Seminary and the Church continues enthusiastically today, as delineated and affirmed in an Enduring Covenant.

704.1.2. The Church and Seminary agree that the curriculum, programs, marketing, and operations of Evangelical Seminary are and shall remain designed to promote growth and development in accordance with our shared core values.

704.2. StoneRidge Retirement Living

704.2.1. The National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church (NC) and StoneRidge Retirement Living (SRL) have had a long and valuable relationship. Since 1924, when the Burd and Rogers families founded a home for seniors and subsequently gave the home to the NC, the denomination supported the needs of seniors. Since that time SRL has become a separate but affiliated ministry to seniors. Over the years the NC has provided board members, residents, employees, volunteers, and contributions to SRL. SRL has provided care for many members of the NC, many of whom had limited financial resources. SRL also provides resources on senior issues to the NC and provides facilities for various NC events.

704.2.2. SRL and the NC recognize the value of affiliations with external organizations whose missions are compatible with each other and whose activities will significantly assist each other in advancing and achieving their strategic and ministry objectives. In recognition of this important relationship between the NC and SRL and with shared respect and trust for the ministries of each organization, the Board of Trustees of SRL and the National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church both agree to a Covenant.

705. CHAPTER III – AFFILIATES

705.1. Twin Pines Camp and Conference Center

705.1.1. With a desire to expand Waldheim Park summer camp programs and begin a retreat ministry, the Christian Education Society of the Eastern Annual Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church purchased the original Twin Pines property, consisting of 140 acres, near Stroudsburg, PA, in January of 1964. In 1982, an additional 65 acres of land was added to the Twin Pines facility with the purchase of a farm located on the western edge of the original property bringing the property total to 205 acres. In 2003 Twin Pines became a self-governing ministry affiliated with the National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church. Twin Pines is dedicated to providing a place where people of all ages can get away to a quiet place and find renewed strength. Twin Pines' vision is to provide quality facilities and opportunities where people can get away from the noise and confusion of our busy society in order to be still and listen to what God has to say.

705.1.2. The Twin Pines Board of Directors can change any of their By-laws with the exception of their dissolution clause, as the National Conference of the Evangelical Congregational Church retains right of first refusal.

706. CHAPTER IV –PARTNER CORPORATION

706.1. Benefits Corporation

706.1.1. The Benefits Corporation, originally incorporated as the Preacher's Aid Society of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of the United Evangelical Church February 14, 1910, was formed to provide, and administer pensions, health, and accident and disability income plans and related funds for ministers and career missionaries of the Evangelical Congregational Church and for those other persons as classified according to its By-laws.

PART EIGHT

AMENDMENTS TO THE *DISCIPLINE*

800. AMENDMENTS TO THE *DISCIPLINE*

801. AMENDMENT PROCEDURE

801.1. The *Discipline* may only be amended every five years, with the exception of Chapter Seven (see 801.4.1.4.) and editorial changes. The five-year cycle for amendments shall run concurrent with the regular five-year term of the Bishop. In order for an amendment to be considered by the National Conference, it must be submitted to the Amendments Committee which will present the proposed amendment to the National Ministry Team. The NMT will debate the merit of the amendment and decide by majority vote

801.2. whether it should be recommended to the National Conference one year prior to the vote. The amendment may only be voted on if it is presented in the same form as it was accepted the previous year. A three-fourth vote of the Conference members present at a National Conference session that meets the “Special Quorum for Amendments” requirements is required for approval.

801.3. Editorial Changes

801.3.1. The *Discipline* may be edited by the National Conference Amendments Committee when denominational titles and/or nomenclature has changed, and it does not substantively change denominational polity.

801.4. SPECIAL QUORUM FOR AMENDMENTS

801.4.1. The National Conference may only vote on amendments properly brought before it when at least two-thirds of the members of the Conference are present, excluding all absent members in the following categories: Supernumerary, Superannuated, and Ministers in Related Fields.

801.5. EXCEPTIONS

801.5.1. The National Conference may amend any Chapter of the *Discipline* according to the above procedure subject to the following:

801.5.1.1. Articles of Faith

801.5.1.1.1. The Articles of Faith shall not be changed in form or substance unless two-thirds of all congregations give their approval by a two-thirds vote of the members present at a congregational meeting properly called to consider a change in the Articles of Faith. The approval of the congregations must be secured and reported no later than sixty days prior to the next National Conference.

801.5.1.2. Paragraph 308

801.5.1.2.1. The provisions in paragraph 308 “The Congregation and Its Property” shall not be changed unless two-thirds of all congregations shall give their approval by a two-thirds vote of the members present at a congregational meeting properly called to consider a change in this paragraph of the *Discipline*. The approval of the congregations must be secured and reported no later than sixty days prior to the next National Conference.

801.5.1.3. The Itinerant System

801.5.1.3.1. The Itinerant system shall not be abolished unless two-thirds of all congregations give their approval by a two-thirds vote of the members present at a congregational meeting properly called to consider the abolition of the system. The approval of the congregations must be secured and reported no later than sixty days prior to the next National Conference.

801.5.1.4. Chapter Seven

801.5.1.4.1. “Chapter Seven: National Conference Teams, Communities, and Affiliates” may be amended upon recommendation by the National Ministry Team at any National Conference session by simple majority vote of the members present.

801.6. PROXY VOTING

801.6.1. The voting required in paragraph 801.4 may be in person or by written proxy, received by the secretary of the meeting where the vote is to be taken at least three days prior to the vote.