

What We Are "For" & What Drives Us Forward

by Dana Allin,
Synod Executive

In January 2012, after ECO officially launched at the Orlando National Gathering, the clerk of session at my church came to me with tears in his eyes. We were in the midst of denominational discernment at the time, and he said to me: "Dana, I used to feel relieved at the possibility of leaving

our denomination. But now I am absolutely ecstatic about where we are going to!" I loved this moment. It was a great affirmation for the work our ECO polity committee had devoted to enacting the vision and values originally lifted up at the Minneapolis gathering six months before. And as I travel to churches around the country today, I continue to see sessions and congregations invigorated primarily by a vision for what's ahead.

Unfortunately, sometimes the story of ECO is framed the other way. Some people--and often the media--still paint ECO and our member churches as fundamentally reacting against gay ordination. This simply is not true. It is important to remember that the initial White Paper that talked about a new Reformed body and invited people to the Minneapolis gathering was written in January 2011, before there was a change in ordination standards. The authors of the White Paper cast a vision for churches devoted more to mission, ministry, and connectionalism instead of internal dynamics. From the start, ECO has been a movement grounded in what we are for, not against. And we need to keep remembering the core things we are "for" that propel us forward.

We are for ministry that promotes evangelism and justice. Too often there has been a dichotomy between people who want to share the Gospel with those who don't know Jesus and people who seek to engage in social justice. But the idea of justice in Scripture is about restoring what has been lost or damaged in the fall of Genesis 3. In the fall we see physical brokenness--brokenness within personal relationships and among structures, and of course brokenness in our relationship with God. The good news of the Kingdom of God offers restoration in all areas. I am so impressed with the number of churches involved in local ministries of compassion, not only to provide basic needs but to help rebuild lives. A number of ECO congregations are involved in International Justice Mission to stop human trafficking or provide aftercare ministries to those coming out of trafficking. As God calls us to love Him with our heart, soul, and strength, it draws us to love our neighbor as ourselves. This always includes tangible acts of mercy while also fulfilling the Great Commission to make disciples in Jesus' name.

We are for church planting and multiplication. In a recent article in The Layman about the 100th church joining ECO, I was correctly quoted as saying I am happy we have taken in 100 churches, but I will be even more elated when we have planted our 100th church. ECO's focus isn't on growing market share through transfers; our focus is on multiplying new disciples, leaders, and churches. ECO is also not recruiting or campaigning for churches; we only respond to congregations that make contact with us.

We are for creative, innovative, nimble, entrepreneurial, risk-taking ministry. As I travel to churches, I often do a presentation on ECO polity entitled, "Where Have the 'Shalls' Gone?" The "shalls" are those things congregations and leaders are required to do or not do. I remind people that some of the things that are "shalls" in other denominations are covered in ECO with words like "ordinarily," "may," or "it is appropriate to." One of the things I hear Anna Kent, our Director go Mission Affinity Groups, say is: "Our 'shalls' are now the things that are life giving!" That means "shalls" include participation in Mission Affinity Groups and Pastor Covenant Groups, because those foster life. ECO's flexibility also allows us to take greater risks and learn from people in a variety of tribes regarding ideas and practices for ministry.

We are for deeper relational connection. Sometimes people ask, "What kinds of churches does ECO not accept into membership?" The answer is ECO is not a place for churches looking to be functionally independent. We exist to enhance what it means to be Presbyterian within covenantal relationships. We manifest this in a requirement for churches to be in Mission Affinity Groups and Pastor Covenant Groups. The only way flexibility and trust works is when we know each other more deeply, and when there is agreement around core essentials of theology.

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What We Are "For" continued

Which is why we are for center-set theology. When I came into ECO, someone gave me a great analogy to illustrate this. Some ranches use fences to keep cattle from wandering where they shouldn't; other ranches keep ample fresh water and food in the middle of the property, which naturally draws cattle to the center for life-giving resources and removes the need for fences. ECO's theological essentials provide a foundational theological understanding that draws us toward a common core. Yes, these essentials provide some boundaries for belief and behavior. But I as I read and reflect on our essentials, I find them refreshing and life-giving to my soul and ministry.

For those of you in ECO, on your way into ECO, or who speak about ECO to others: let us continue to resist being identified with what we are against. Instead, let us emphasize and celebrate what God calls us to do, and to become, in our context and world.

In Christ,
Dana

FOUNDER OF AMERICAN HERITAGE GIRLS TO SPEAK

The speaker for Supper Club on Monday, March 24, is Patty Garibay, founder of "American Heritage Girls." In 1993, the course of Patty's life was interrupted when God called her to found the new organization for girls. This was in response to what she believed to be the major changes in the direction of the Girl Scouts USA.

She felt His voice was clear concerning the need for a God-honoring program that utilized some of the scout-type techniques that had made Girl Scouts an effective, transformative organization for generations of girls. For 13 years prior to her calling she served as an active volunteer in Girl Scouts USA, using her influence to share the gospel with her troop's members in West Chester, Ohio. In retrospect, God had prepared her for the journey upon which He had asked her to embark. She had had leadership opportunities, was instilled with a love of country and youth, and had been given an inquisitive and determined mind. Without the educational background, financial resources, or experience to launch a nonprofit ministry, God assured her He would provide all that she needed.

She and her siblings were raised by a disabled father who suffered with MS for the last forty years of his life. His encouraging attitude of "Why curse the darkness when you can light a candle?" inspired Patti as the founder of American Heritage Girls. She served the organization as its first president and director for nine years. Patti was educated at Ohio State University, majoring in secondary education and French.

Come and hear this remarkable woman's story. Make your reservations by calling Sally Auble at 741-3125 before Thursday, March 20. The cost of the dinner is \$10.00 payable at the door. Dinner starts at 6:15 and the speaker will begin around 7:00pm.

Children and Worship

Children ages Kindergarten through third grade are invited to a Children's Worship service each week. Start off with your families in both the 9am and 11:15am service. Then listen for the announcement dismissing the kids to their special service.

This week's helpers are:
9:00am Nathan & Jared Lowe
11:15am Michael & Marissa Fox
(Nagel Family will greet)

16. sunday

8:00am	Morning Prayer	Prayer Room
9:00am	Worship Service	Sanctuary
10:10am	Foundation Hour	
	• Children's Classes	Barnabas Ctr
	• Jr. High	BC 204
	• High School	BC 206
	• ASF	Various
11:15am	Worship Service	Sanctuary
12:15pm	Cookout/Cornhole	Fellowship Hall
1:30pm	ACA Meeting	Clubroom
6:30pm	W2W / Generations	Fellowship Hall

17. monday

6:30pm	Karate	Clubroom
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18. tuesday

9:30am	Tuesday AM Bible Study	Parlor
6:30pm	Super Choir	Fellowship Hal

19. wednesday

9:30am	Library Work Day	BC 103
	Strategy For Mothers LG Grp.	Parlor
5:30pm	Cub Scouts	Clubroom
7:00pm	Bi-Polar Support Group	Great Hall
	Worship Team Rehearsal	Sanctuary
	Session	BC 201 & 202

20. thursday

6:10am	Band of Brothers	Fireside Room
8:30am	Prayer	Prayer Room
10:00am	Knitting Group	Atrium
6:30pm	Karate	Fellowship Hall
7:00pm	Choir	Choir Room
	ACA Meeting	Clubroom
	3Cs Parenting Class	BC 203 & 204
7:30pm	Alanon	BC 201 & 202

21. friday

6:00am	Friday Morning Men	Fireside Room
9:15am	Free Fit Club	Fellowship Hall

22. saturday

8:30am	CHPC Men's Ministry and House of Joy	The Rock
2:00pm	Praise Dancers	Clubroom

The following assistive devices are available
Please ask the ushers if you need wheelchair seating or special hearing equipment. Also, handicapped accessible bathrooms are located to the right of the platform in the hallway leading to the white house parking lot.

Next week's helpers are:
9:00am Nathan Lowe & Jonny Wiers
11:15am Sarah & Jared Lowe
(Michelle Dyson will greet)

March 16 - March 22 calendar