

About the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians and The Fellowship of Presbyterians:

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About the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO)

1. **What is the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians?** The Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO) is a new denomination giving a major emphasis toward a more missional church with less institutional hierarchy, and having the desire to develop a more covenantal relationship among member congregations. ECO is a movement toward adaptive change within the church as opposed to a movement away from something. ECO believes in (a) "Kingdom Vitality" whereby congregations should vigorously reproduce new missional communities to expand the Kingdom of God; and (b) "Thoughtful Theology" whereby there is support for theological education, constant learning, and the life of the mind, celebrating this approach as one of the treasures of our Reformed heritage.

2. **What is the Fellowship of Presbyterians?** The Fellowship of Presbyterians is a movement started by seven pastors from some of the largest PC(USA) churches in the United States. In 2010, these prominent pastors began discussing the idea of a better way of reaching out and being a more missional church. In February of 2011, the pastors sent a letter to the PC(USA) stating that the "church" was deathly ill and suggested that it was time for something new. In May of 2011, the movement became more active, which led to the planning and organization of a gathering in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in August 2011. Approximately 1900 people attended the Minneapolis conference; and, after much prayer, discussion, and discernment, the Fellowship began drafting essential tenets and a refined polity for a new reformed body. A second gathering of the movement was held in Orlando, Florida, in January 2012, when the Fellowship unveiled the new denomination, known as ECO, along with the essential tenets and polity.

3. **What is the difference between the Fellowship of Presbyterians and ECO?** The values of the Fellowship and the values of ECO are identical. Congregations will be able to participate with either group or both. Those affiliating only with the Fellowship will strive to live into these values within the PC(USA). Those affiliating with ECO and the Fellowship will strive to live into these values outside of the PC(USA). The Fellowship has been designed to allow ECO congregations to join a covenanting partnership with others that are unable to disaffiliate with the PC(USA) for whatever reason. ECO is a wholly separate and distinct entity from the PC (USA), and all those congregations planning to join ECO will seek dismissal from the PC(USA). Nevertheless, they will have the opportunity to cooperate with like minded congregations which join the Fellowship but have not been dismissed from the PC(USA).

4. **Is ECO recognized as a reformed body?** ECO is in the process of seeking recognition from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches as an official reformed body. It is the hope of this new denomination that the World Alliance will recognize ECO as a reformed body sometime in Calendar Year 2013.

5. **At what stage in the process of organization is ECO?** ECO is a valid 501(c) (3) corporate entity which currently has a governing board, two full time employees, and one part time employee. ECO has developed an operating budget and has available for all church staff within ECO a medical plan. ECO has also unveiled a Board of Pensions plan and a referral service for pastors within ECO. ECO and the Fellowship of Presbyterians have shared board members during the initial organizational stages until a separate board for ECO is functional. Currently, there are eleven members serving on the Fellowship of Presbyterians Interim Board. It has recently been announced that Rev. Dana Allin was selected to be the first Synod Executive for the new Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. He began full time duties on April 15, 2013, as the recognized leader of the ECO denomination.

6. **What is ECO's vision?** ECO has described itself as a movement toward "adaptive change" and a movement toward a more "missional church." ECO is committed to growing existing churches and also to planting flourishing new churches that will make disciples of Jesus Christ. ECO invites all followers of Jesus who share a reformed and Presbyterian heritage to reclaim a sense of covenanted Biblical community. ECO has published eleven characteristics regarding its polity and vision as follow:

(a) Defined core theology and behavioral expectations - One of the main concerns for many individuals and congregations considering ECO is that the PC (USA) has not adequately defined essential theology and behavior requirements and will not allow congregations and presbyteries to define these requirements either. In the theology section of ECO's constitution, the behavioral and theological core is established and all church officers must "receive, adopt, and be bound by" these essentials.

(b) ECO is concerned with ecclesiastical matters and, therefore, property is not held in trust - There are a couple of reasons for this. First, as we have seen, whenever property is held in trust, it can be used as leverage against congregations wishing to maintain theological integrity. Secondly, when presbyteries have interests in property, an inordinate amount of time can be spent on property management.

(c) Voting is done in parity at all levels and only when people are connected with a local congregation - ECO polity does not see mission and ministry happening primarily as the result of voting. Whenever there is the need for voting at the presbytery and synod councils, within each council there is a requirement to have a 1-1 parity between elders and pastors. Only pastors who are connected to a local congregation are eligible to vote. A pastor in validated service and one honorably retired will not vote unless he/she is an "assistant pastor" connected to an ECO congregation. In this instance, the "assistant pastor" would be equivalent to what the PC(USA) calls a "parish associate."

(d) Church is redefined - ECO polity defines "church" to be wherever believers are gathered in the name of Jesus. Therefore, church can be lived out in small groups, accountability groups, ministry teams, house churches, and/or mission teams to name just a few.

(e) Elders and deacons can be deployed for greater ministry - Because the "church" is considered to be the gathering of believers in the name of Jesus within a variety of contexts, it is appropriate for the sacraments to be administered in these contexts. Elders and deacons who have already been properly trained and commissioned by the Session or Presbytery could be authorized to celebrate the sacraments within certain settings. Therefore, not only could communion be celebrated inside these various expressions of church; but, when someone comes to faith through these manifestations of church, they could be baptized by the officers who are charged with shepherding these groups if this practice has been approved, and if those officers have been properly trained and commissioned by the presbytery having jurisdiction. Similarly, some elders and deacons can also be commissioned by the presbytery to serve as the "pastors" of congregations where there is a need and/or of new church developments for the mission and the ministry of the presbytery.

(f) Emphasis on the role of members as covenant partners - ECO polity refers to members as "covenant partners." Congregations may choose to use different language if they wish, but this new designation is designed to emphasize that individuals are not joining an organization. When they say yes to membership in the ECO church family, individuals are covenanting with one another in God's redemptive mission as it is expressed in, through, and beyond the congregation.

(g) Greater local flexibility - There is much within the PC(USA) Book of Order that congregations may wish to continue to affirm, but there will also be significant flexibility in these areas. Here are a few examples:

(1) Deacons - Deacons may serve as part of a board or be commissioned on an annual basis. Since the deacons do not have oversight within a congregation, a congregation may choose to continue to elect deacons during Congregational Meetings or can choose instead to have the Session appoint deacons.

(2) Elders - Elders in the PC(USA) serve three-year terms and can serve no more than two consecutive terms. Most ECO congregations may wish to continue this practice. But a congregation could choose to re-design its elder election and rotation. As an example, a church may prefer to have elders serve only one four year term. In certain cultures, it is considered shameful for a person to be rotated off of the elders' board. Also, many small churches experience difficulty maintaining a viable Session when the leadership is limited to fixed terms. A congregation may wish to allow elders to serve an unlimited number of terms if this is best for that particular church. Each local ECO congregation will continue to be governed by elders, and the congregation must elect them, but their terms of service can have flexibility as decided by the congregation.

(3) Pastors - A few different categories of pastors are defined. As one example, ECO polity has reinstated the office of assistant

pastor, who could be hired by the Session rather than called by the congregation. This option may allow for greater flexibility in pastoral leadership. However, the congregation might prefer to retain the system of voting to call assistant pastors if that is what is best for the particular church.

(4) Presbyteries also have greater freedom - Within ECO polity, the role of the presbytery is primarily intended to support, encourage, and resource local congregations. The ECO presbyteries are only required to have three (3) committees: the Committee on Ministry, which can include the oversight of candidates; a Permanent Judicial Commission; and a governing Council which has the same roles and responsibilities of most current PC(USA) presbytery councils. Other committees and new task forces may be formed as needs are identified for the mission of each presbytery. Presbyteries also have flexibility as they guide congregations in the call process. A typical Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) may be established or a congregation may authorize the Session to serve this function. Regardless of how prospects are screened, a congregation must ultimately elect its installed pastors just as it does now.

(5) Missional Affinity Network - Missional Affinity Networks are linkages of congregations in similar ministry settings and facing similar challenges and opportunities. These networks are outside the presbytery structure. They could be comprised of congregations near universities or colleges, congregations in urban settings, multiethnic congregations, those which are actively planting atypical worshiping communities, congregations of various sizes, etc. These Missional Affinity Networks have no judicial authority but can be beneficial to one another in a variety of important ways.

(6) Accountability, support, and encouragement - ECO's polity affirms that the accountability between congregations is vitally important. Its pastors should share with one another where they have seen God most visibly at work as well as what they are discerning as their part in God's future mission. ECO pastors are expected to covenant to be accountable to one another, ensuring they are living balanced lives and being good stewards of the multiple responsibilities God has given them. Accountable relationships, called "peer reviews," may take place within the presbytery or within the Missional Affinity Networks.

(h) Flatter structure with an emphasis on God's work within every local congregation - There are three layers to ECO polity structure: session, presbytery, and synod. Synod is the widest council in ECO. Synod is essentially the national gathering and support group for all churches in ECO. Each council is designed to have a significantly smaller staff than has been the case within the PC(USA), and with significantly smaller numbers of congregations comprising each presbytery. The primary role of staff will be mission and ministry support for local congregations, thus

facilitating the multiplication of worshiping communities and expansion of the gospel.

7. **What is ECO's purpose?**

ECO exists to serve the local church and nurture its leaders so that the Kingdom of God expands.

8. **What is in the name "Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians" and the acronym ECO?**

EVANGELICAL (a) Advance the gospel of Jesus Christ (b) Plant new missional communities (c) Develop gospel centered leaders

COVENANT (a) Connect leaders in accountable relationships (b) Encourage collaboration (c) Minister out of God's unrelenting grace and covenant with His people

ORDER (a) Commit to a shared way of life together (b) Unite around a shared theological core (c) Gather regularly to encourage discipleship of Presbyterians (d) Stand on a reformed heritage (e) Affirm education and the life of the mind (f) Serve our communities and the world in Jesus' name

9. **Does the acronym ECO have another meaning?** ECO sparks the commitment to strengthen the "eco systems" of its local churches by providing the resources necessary to grow, thrive, and reproduce as church bodies. "Eco" comes from the Greek term "oikos" meaning household, which is used in the Bible to reference those network relationships that nurture an individual.

10. **What is ECO's belief on diversity?** Just as the earthly eco systems draw richness from the right kinds of diversity, ECO is committed to unleashing the ministry gifts of women, men, more young leaders, and every ethnicity.

11. **Has ECO adopted a specific structure?** Yes. Much like the PC(USA) Book of Order to which we are accustomed, ECO has adopted a pamphlet of polity and of discipline that is Presbyterian in nature, but it is less bureaucratic and structured. ECO aspires to reclaim a sense of the covenanted Biblical community, where unity is derived from a shared vision to make disciples of Jesus Christ, rather than by tiered hierarchical mandate. ECO's structure is designed to allow congregations to gather together, not primarily to debate process or policy, but to collaborate, to share best practices, to encourage a Jesus way of life, and to spur one another on to love and good deeds. The structures and policies adopted are intended to serve the ministry and mission of Christ's Church, rather than the other way around.

12. **What is the organizational makeup of ECO?** ECO has eliminated the General Assembly and will be operating more as a Presbytery based network of nurturing churches rather than a national bureaucratic structure. The Synod will in appropriate ways be the equivalent of a General Assembly for ECO.

Final proposals were presented and acted upon for official adoption at the Synod meeting on January 31, 2013, in Orlando, Florida. Later, as the new denomination grows and matures, it will likely become necessary to continue evaluating functions and to make refinements as they are justified.

13. **Will there be a General Assembly to oversee ECO?** No. ECO has eliminated the General Assembly as a governing body and a structure from its new pamphlet of order. Any authoritative roles and responsibilities that would ordinarily be expected to come from a General Assembly will be administered instead by the Synod.

14. **Will there be a Synod in ECO?** Yes. The Synod is the widest council of ECO, intended to give support and guidance to all of the Presbyteries and the congregations. The Synod will assess and proclaim the missional vision and theology of ECO. The duties and authority of the Synod provide that it will (a) provide linkage of ECO Presbyteries to one another for mutual encouragement; (b) correspond and connect with global mission partners, other denominations, and ministry partners; (c) maintain the constitution and essential tenets of ECO; and (d) where it is appropriate and necessary, provide services (i.e., pension and health insurance) for all ECO pastors, employees, and churches.

15. **What is the purpose of the Presbytery in ECO?** The purpose of the Presbytery, as a covenant community, is to exercise its apostolic authority by and for the nurture and benefit of its congregations, that the communities they serve may know the love and invitation of Christ.

16. **Who will make up the membership of the Presbytery?** The members of the Presbytery are its congregations, represented by their elders; all pastors who are installed in service to member congregations; pastors who are serving in validated ministries; and all honorably retired pastors. Presbyteries eventually will be constituted of at least ten (10) congregations, but not more than twenty (20) congregations, with a geographical connection.

17. **How will membership in ECO differ from the PC(USA)?** There would be no discernible difference from the perspective of those active members who are currently in our congregation. A unique variation could be in the terminology for member, which ECO defines as a "covenant partner." The congregation's expectations of covenantal partnership are that each covenant partner (active member) will strive to be faithful to Christ by participating in the congregation's worship, fellowship, and service on an ongoing basis. ECO churches may choose to use the new terminology when referring to their active confirmed members, although it is not mandatory to do so at the local level.

18. **What are the categories of membership?** The membership of a congregation in ECO includes baptized members (who have not yet been through confirmation and presented to the Session for examination) and all covenant partners (active confirmed members).

19. **What types of changes might we see in our structure if we join ECO?**
There would be no changes required in our existing church structure should we join ECO.

20. **Will the General Assembly and Presbyteries dismiss current PC(USA) congregations to the ECO?** The decision to release to ECO rests with the individual presbytery in which the church seeking dismissal is located. At this time, a number of PC(USA) churches have been dismissed by their respective presbyteries to ECO.

21. **Does ECO require a per capita amount to be paid by the congregations?** Yes. ECO will require one percent (1%) of each church's current budget annually.

22. **Has ECO clarified its theological identity?** Yes. A Theological Task Force was charged to assist the Fellowship of Presbyterians and ECO to clarify its theological identity. The Task Force discovered three tasks in meeting this charge. The first task required the theological work group to look to the past for heritage, guidance, and lessons learned. The second task required a new statement. The third task required a commitment for the future. These three tasks are thoroughly defined in the Fellowship theology project along with ECO's confessional standards and essential tenets.

23. **What confessional standards has ECO adopted?** The appropriate confessional standards for the Fellowship and ECO are the Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms within our current Book of Confessions, i. e., The Nicene Creed, The Apostles' Creed, The Scots Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism, The Second Helvetic Confession, The Westminster Confession, The Westminster Shorter Catechism and The Westminster Larger Catechism, The Theological Declaration of Barmen, The Confession of 1967, and A Brief Statement of Faith.

24. **Has ECO adopted essential tenets?** Essential tenets are tied to the teaching of the Confessions as reliable expositions of Scripture. The essential tenets call out for explication, not as another confession, but as the indispensable indicators of confessional convictions about what Scripture leads us to believe and do. Essential tenets do not replace the Confessions, but rather witness to the Confessions' common core. The essential tenets of ECO are thoroughly laid out in the theology project as follows:

(a) The great purpose toward which each human life is drawn is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

(b) We glorify God by recognizing and receiving His authoritative self-revelation, both in the infallible scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments and also in the incarnation of God the Son.

(c) With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - Who is both one essence and three persons.

(d) Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human.

(e) The divinity of the Son is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and His true humanity is in no way undermined by His continued divinity.

(f) The risen Jesus, Who was sent from the Father, has now ascended to the Father in His resurrected body and remains truly human.

(g) The same Jesus Christ Who is now ascended will one day return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead.

(h) We are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God only through the work of the Holy Spirit.

(i) The present disordered state of the world, in which we and all things are subject to misery and to evil, is not God's doing, but is rather a result of humanity's free, sinful rebelling against God's will.

(j) In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit, we are brought into relation with the Father, Who receives us as His adopted children. Jesus Christ is the only way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God.

(k) Through His regenerating and sanctifying work, the Holy Spirit grants us faith and enables holiness, so that we may be witnesses of God's gracious presence to those who are lost.

(l) In Christ, we are adopted into the family of God and we find our new identity as brothers and sisters of one another, since we now share one Father.

(m) Within the covenant community of the church, God's grace is extended through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the faithful practice of mutual discipline.

(n) The ministries of the church reflect the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king - reflected in the church's ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders.

(o) Jesus teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. There is no part of human life that is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God.

(p) Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained, and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

25. **What is ECO's position on property?** ECO's position on property is that it is entrusted to the stewardship of the Session, and there is no liability or claims to property by the Presbytery.

26. **What is the relationship between the Fellowship of Presbyterians and ECO?** The Fellowship is an umbrella association, in and beyond the current PC (USA), through which members can share ideas, ministry resources, and missional strategy. ECO is a new and separate denominational entity created for those seeking a clearer differentiation from the PC(USA). The Fellowship and ECO share the same mission of building flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.

27. **Who can join the Fellowship of Presbyterians?** The Fellowship of Presbyterians is open to congregations, to Presbyteries, and to individuals (including pastors, extra parish clergy, commissioned lay pastors, elders, deacons, and non-ordained members of local Presbyterian Churches), regardless of their continuing status with the PC(USA). All those who affirm the mission, the values, and the theological tenets established by the Fellowship of Presbyterians may become members of it.

28. **Is there a pension and medical benefits plan for the pastors and the church employees who seek to be dismissed from the PC(USA) to ECO?** If so, what are the differences between the two plans? Yes to the first question. ECO offers a pension and medical benefits plan. The PC(USA) has an excellent medical insurance plan and a "Defined Benefits" retirement plan in which most of the ordained staff and full-time employees working at PC(USA) churches are currently enrolled. The Task Force is carefully doing a very detailed analysis and comparison of these plans because it is ECO's desire that all transferring pastors and church employees receive a comparable package of options with no loss of benefits.

29. **Can a congregation be affiliated with the Fellowship and with the PC(USA)?** The Fellowship of Presbyterians offers three different options for affiliation so that interested congregations can pursue what best honors their own ministry context. These options are to: (1) affiliate with the Fellowship as a ministry association (involves no change in status with the PC(USA)); (2) pursue a union membership with both the PC(USA) and ECO; and (3) join ECO as a full member, which requires dismissal from the PC(USA).

30. **How can I learn more about ECO?**

To learn more about the Fellowship of Presbyterians and/or ECO, visit www.fellowship-pres.org or www.fellowship-pres.org/eco and explore the website of your choice.