

## **Proposal to General Assembly**

### **Structure for Receiving Churches Transitionally**

*1/16/07*

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this transitional structure and process is to provide a means by which congregations or associations and groups of congregations from other denominations within the Reformed family of churches may become members of the EPC on a transitional basis toward the goal of full membership.

The purpose of this proposal is not to undermine, circumvent or de-value the primary and fundamental responsibility of each presbytery to exercise its rights and responsibilities in receiving churches and ministers. In fact, it reflects deep gratitude for the work of the Spirit over the EPC's short history in bringing us to the place of a generous yet clear self-understanding as a Reformed confessional church practicing a healthy unity and diversity. Further, it reflects the desire of the General Assembly, its officers and resources to assist presbyteries in meeting the increasing number of non-EPC congregations inquiring into membership in the EPC.

#### **Background**

The EPC believes that there is a fresh move of God across the U.S. and the world calling individuals, churches, associations and denominations to new and greater collective obedience to the Great Commission.

Out of such a sense the Long Range Planning Committee formed by the 24<sup>th</sup> General Assembly has called our congregations to begin to think and act "missionally." As a denomination we are trusting God to show us the implications of that call, the new priorities that such Great Commission thinking will require for us as individuals, congregations, presbyteries and General Assembly.

We seek to be a missional, Evangelical, Reformed and Presbyterian body that brings glory to God as He extends his kingdom in the U.S. and the world through us. The following process is committed to that end.

#### **Period of Transitional Structure**

Transitional membership shall be possible as of the adjournment of the 27<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and shall end on June 30, 2012.

### Principles of Transitional Membership

1. Transitional membership will allow existing presbyteries and transitional member churches the time and opportunity to fully assess the mutual expectations doctrinally, missionally, legislatively and financially before committing to full membership. It will do so by providing an expeditious and optimal situation by which that process of discernment can begin.
2. Associations or groups of congregations desiring to do so may function as non-geographic transitional presbyteries during the period described above. All churches and pastors entering the EPC on a transitional basis must affirm “Essentials of our Faith” without any reservations.
3. The General Assembly shall establish a commission to create transitional presbyteries, to receive churches and ministers into transitional membership and to oversee their work as it deems wise and appropriate.
4. All churches and pastors entering the EPC on a transitional basis must acknowledge the Westminster Confession and Catechisms to be the sole subordinate confessional standards of the EPC, and, with regard to disciplinary matter, will follow the EPC *Book of Discipline*.
5. When received from transitional to full membership, teaching and ruling elders must meet existing requirements for subscription to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. Examinations in such cases will be based on views and beliefs as provided for in *Book of Government* 13-5.<sup>1</sup> Ministers and elders of transitional member churches will have existing presbytery members and resources made available to them to assist in preparation for meeting these subscription standards.
6. The approach to and understanding of confessional subscription to be applied is that adopted by the 21<sup>st</sup> General Assembly where subscription to “Essentials of our Faith” is required without exception and where each presbytery is responsible for allowing or disallowing exceptions to the confessional standards of the church.<sup>2</sup>
7. Authority to create, dissolve, establish and alter presbyteries shall remain with the General Assembly. Those boundaries may be reassessed and changed during, at the conclusion of or following the period of this transitional structure in order to enhance and advance the mission of the church.

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<sup>1</sup> It may be helpful to note that ministers with current Reformed credentials are examined similarly to transfers – on views and beliefs – and reordination is not required.

<sup>2</sup> A summary of this approach can be found at <http://www.epc.org/general-assembly/news-pdf/NR7-6-01Appendix.pdf>.

8. Member churches of transitional presbyteries shall be encouraged to establish relationships with existing EPC congregations in their geographic area, to engage in cooperative ministry and participate in ministry networks.
9. Transitional member churches may call and dissolve relationships with ministers under the provisions of the *Book of Government*.
10. At the conclusion of the transitional period, all congregations and ministers not received into full membership shall be dismissed.
11. Transitional congregations and ministers may request dismissal from transitional membership at any time according to and following the provisions of the *Book of Government* including 5-6.
12. All transitional church ministers and staff members shall be regarded as eligible for EPC benefits programs subject to the limitations and exclusions of the retirement and medical plan documents.
13. All transitional member congregations will be asked to participate in the Per Member Asking to the best of their ability. Transitional presbyteries may establish additional askings for their own operations.
14. The process and provisions for transitional membership may be applied by existing EPC presbyteries to receive churches directly into transitional membership.
15. Because the particular church has ownership of its own property, no judicatory of the EPC assumes any liability or responsibility for resolution of local property disputes arising from efforts to be dismissed from other bodies.
16. The EPC maintains a range of formal relationships with other Reformed denominations and will employ, to the extent possible, the means those relationships provide for facilitating their reception into either full or transitional membership. Independent churches may also be received into full or transitional membership.
17. This transitional structure and process is in no way intended to discourage or preclude congregations from direct transfer and reception into full membership of the EPC.