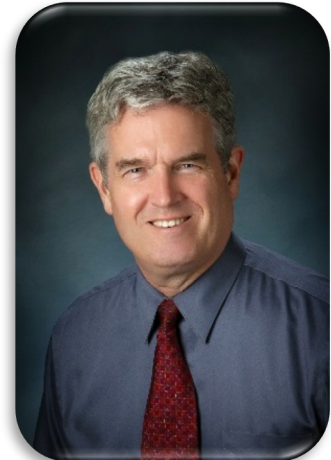


Stated Clerk

Report to the 39th General Assembly



*Jeff Jeremiah
Stated Clerk*

“The EPC is my church.”

Since 2012, when I’m asked, “What is your church?” or “Where do you worship?” I reply, “The EPC is my church.” That’s because your outpouring of prayer, emails, cards, and flowers in the aftermath of Cindy’s stroke in July of that year was overwhelming and connected me to you in a new and richer way. In the aftermath of Cindy’s second stroke on April 14, you once again showered us with expressions of love, encouragement, intercession, and hope. There is still progress to be accomplished, but we are hopeful. Thank you for your continued prayers for her complete recovery. The following are highlights from the last year.

Andrew Brunson

In my thirteen years as Stated Clerk, no date is more significant than October 12, 2018. That was the day that Andrew Brunson was released and allowed to depart Turkey for the United States. As we celebrate with Andrew, Norine, and their family at our General Assembly, I want to express my praise to the Lord and appreciation for the prayer and advocacy support that was mobilized on behalf of Andrew in our denomination. And you weren’t done after Andrew was released. Thanks to your financial generosity, a one-year term as “Missionary in Residence” at Christ Community Church in Montreat, North Carolina (the Brunsons’ home church) was funded. This has allowed Andrew and Norine to rest, recover, reconnect, and focus on what the Lord would have next for them.



Oversight of Strategic Priorities

The four strategic priorities embedded in our vision statement are:

- 1) Church Planting (“multiplication”),
- 2) Church Revitalization (“transformation”),
- 3) World Outreach and Fraternal Relations (“global movement”), and
- 4) Effective Biblical Leadership.

In the Office of the General Assembly, Jerry Iamurri and I split oversight responsibilities of these priorities. I have enjoyed a great working relationship with Tom Ricks, Church Planting Team leader, and Ken Priddy, Church Revitalization (GO Center) Team Leader, for more than five years. Director of World Outreach Phil Linton reports to Jerry Iamurri. The Fraternal Relations Committee is resourced by me. Jerry oversees Effective Biblical Leadership, which includes the annual Leadership Institute during GA week, and the Ministerial Vocation Committee. Another element of this priority is networking groups. These groups include Presbytery Stated Clerks, Presbytery Ministerial and Candidates Committee chairs, as well as local church leadership groups.

Protection of the EPC

Three roles (Protect, Promote, and Provide) are one way I think about my ministry as Stated Clerk. Other reports in this Handbook address Promote and Provide. There are two Protection items to call to your attention.

1. Clergy housing allowance

On March 15, 2019, a three-judge panel of the U.S. Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals overturned a 2017 lower court ruling and affirmed that the ministerial housing allowance is constitutional. If appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, it is unlikely to be taken up due to unanimous decision in the Seventh. A previous challenge to the housing allowance was rejected in 2014 on jurisdictional grounds. This time, the Circuit panel found that the housing allowance does not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. It noted that the housing allowance has been in place for decades, and is parallel to housing allowances for some non-religious vocations.

The Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF), an atheist group that brought the original suit, said it is considering a rehearing to the full Seventh Circuit or an appeal to the Supreme Court.

According to the congressional Joint Committee on Taxation, the housing allowance saves ministers an estimated \$700 million per year in taxes.



2. Impact of the U.S. Supreme Court legalizing same-sex marriage

In his dissent to *Obergefell v. Hodges* which legalized homosexual marriage, Associate Justice Samuel Alito warned against the way this decision threatens religious liberty: “It will be used to vilify Americans who are unwilling to assent to the new orthodoxy. In the course of its opinion, the majority compares traditional marriage laws to laws that denied equal treatment for African-Americans and women...The implications of this analogy will be exploited by those who are determined to stamp out every vestige of dissent.”

For one EPC pastor, Alito’s warning recently became a reality.

Tom Ricks, Lead Pastor of Greentree Community Church in Kirkwood, Missouri, ran for a seat on the local school board this spring. A few days before the election, Tom sent me this note:

I expected some blow back from being a pastor and being evangelical, but the last few days have been a bit of a jolt, much more than I anticipated.

A former CNN reporter and local social media person got ahold of a pastoral letter I wrote to GTCC folks back in 2016 on human sexuality. The goal of my letter was two-fold. First, to lay out what Scripture says about God’s design for how we express our sexuality in the context of marriage between a man and a woman. Second, I was calling all of us out on how we can be judgmental, self-righteous, or even hypocritical when it comes to this topic. I admonished our congregation to love all equally and treat everyone with respect and care.

I don’t have to tell you which of the two aspects of my letter the person highlighted in his attack on me. This has been picked up on social media, and while many folks in Kirkwood don’t spend their day on Twitter or Facebook it has taken on a life of its own. I’m a “queer hater” and “bigot,” and “children in our schools won’t be safe if Tom Ricks is elected to the school board.”

In the April 2 election, Tom placed third among three candidates.

Churches in Transition

As Baby Boomers move into retirement, more and more of our churches are engaging in searches for pastors. In my experience since 2006, search committees that “go it alone”—resisting any outside help or counsel—are much more likely to regret the results of their work. Unlike other denominations, in the EPC the Ministerial Committee does not direct the work of a search committee. Representatives from the Ministerial Committee are there to offer guidance and support. My office always is available to offer counsel founded on our collective wisdom and experience in working with many churches across the years. Our

goal is always to help any EPC church find the individual who will lead their church into the best possible future the Lord Jesus has for it.

Change in Reporting Relationships

Phil Van Valkenburg will retire as Chief Operating Officer (COO) on June 30, 2019 (please see below for my Appreciation). At its April meeting, The National Leadership Team decided to leave the COO position vacant. One factor in their decision is the fact that Phil hired outstanding reports. In the absence of a COO, Pat Coelho (Director of Finance and Administration), Bart Francescone (Executive Director of BRI), and Brian Smith (Director of Communications) will now report to me. This arrangement will be evaluated by the NLT at its January 2020 meeting. I am very confident that this arrangement will be successful because of the excellence that Pat, Bart, and Brian bring to their work, as well as their desire for this to succeed.

Appreciation for Phil Van Valkenburg



I often reflect on the changes that have happened in the EPC since I became Stated Clerk in 2006. However, as Phil Van Valkenburg departs as Chief Operating Officer, I'm impressed by how much the Office of the General Assembly has changed since he took this position in 2014.

Phil had come on staff in 2013 as Director of Benefits. As the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was being implemented, we assumed that the ACA would force us to shut down the EPC medical plan. The plan was for Phil to close down the medical plan and then become the Chief Operating Officer. The COO position was one the Committee on Administration (the predecessor to the National Leadership Team) concluded was needed in 2011. When it was clear the medical plan would not be forced to close (and has even prospered), Phil became COO in 2014 and a new Director of Benefits was hired.

When Phil became COO, the immediate benefit I enjoyed was that I was no longer responsible for the day-to-day operations of the OGA. However, that was just the beginning of the blessing it has been for me to work closely (if mostly at a distance) with a colleague and good friend at the national level of the EPC.

A distinguishing feature of Phil's impact and legacy is the projects he led that transformed the processes and systems of the OGA. The key result of these projects: the OGA effectively serves 14 presbyteries, more than 600 churches, and more than 145,000 members with approximately the same number of staff the Office had when I became Stated Clerk in 2006. In that year, the EPC had 8 presbyteries, 180 churches, and 75,000 members.



EPC

A Global Movement of Evangelical Presbyterian Churches

COMMITTEE REPORT

Yet the key project Phil led was the re-location of the OGA from Livonia, Michigan, to Orlando, Florida. He handled the relocation of staff who moved to Florida, a relatively easy task. He handled the separation of those staff who turned down the invitation to relocate, which was not easy. He also directed all aspects of the physical move. Many whose vocational backgrounds include relocations told me they didn't think this relocation could have gone any better.

Another marker of Phil's impact is the upgrade he brought to the hiring process. While in Michigan, he hired Brian Smith, Director of Communications, and Pat Coelho, Director of Finance and Administration. In the space of four weeks in the late summer of 2016, he hired no less than ten staff for the OGA while overseeing the final phases of the physical relocation to Orlando. Those staff include who date their time with us include Marti Brenner, my Executive Assistant and Office Manager, and Zenaida Bermudez, Jerry Iamurri's Executive Assistant.

As Phil departs and returns to St. Louis with Becky after six years of outstanding service, he will certainly be missed. However, he will not be forgotten because those of us who serve in the Office of the General Assembly will continue to feel his impact each working day.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Jeremiah
Stated Clerk

June 2019

www.epc.org/files/2018acr
www.epc.org/files/2019ministryreport



Churches Received, Dissolved, or Dismissed*May 2018 – May 2019*

CHURCHES RECEIVED:**Presbytery of the Alleghenies**

Church	City	State	Received	From
New Albany EPC	New Albany	OH	9/21/18	PCUSA
Stow Presbyterian Church	Stow	OH	9/22/18	Independence

Presbytery of the Central South

Church	City	State	Received	From
Woodlands Presbyterian Church	Hot Springs Village	AR	4/7/19	PCUSA

Presbytery of the East

Church	City	State	Received	From
Langhorne Presbyterian Church	Langhorne	PA	9/29/18	PCUSA
Deerfield EPC	Bridgeton	NJ	5/7/19	PCUSA

Presbytery of Florida and the Caribbean

Church	City	State	Received	From
Nación Santa	Haines City	FL	1/20/19	Mission Status

Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic

Church	City	State	Received	From
First Presbyterian Church	Martinsburg	WV	1/31/19	PCUSA
Grove Presbyterian Church EPC	Dunn	NC	2/24/19	PCUSA
Grace Brevard EPC	Brevard	NC	3/17/19	Mission Status
Antioch Presbyterian Church	Jacksonville	NC	4/14/19	PCUSA

Presbytery of Pacific Southwest

Church	City	State	Received	From
The Table	San Francisco	CA	10/13/18	Mission Status

Presbytery of the Southeast

Church	City	State	Received	From
First Presbyterian of Stanton	Stanton	KY	5/5/18	PCUSA
Church of the Redeemer	Knoxville	TN	2/1/19	Mission Status



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CHURCHES DISSOLVED OR DISMISSED:

Presbytery of the Alleghenies

Church	City	State	Received	Dismissed/Dissolved
Berlin Presbyterian Church	Lewis Center	OH	6/30/14	3/17/19

Presbytery of the Central South

Church	City	State	Received	Dismissed/Dissolved
Heartsong Church	Ripley	MS	10/25/14	1/1/19
Mt. Sharon Presbyterian Church	Adamsville	TN	8/1/11	9/28/18

Presbytery of the East

Church	City	State	Received	Dismissed/Dissolved
First Korean Presbyterian Church	Annandale	VA	9/3/17	5/15/19

Presbytery of the Great Plains

Church	City	State	Received	Dismissed/Dissolved
First Presbyterian Church of Cushing	Cushing	OK	10/29/16	9/29/18

Presbytery of the Gulf South

Church	City	State	Received	Dismissed/Dissolved
First Presbyterian Church of Laredo	Laredo	TX	4/30/05	4/12/19
Christ EPC	Houston	TX	4/26/91	4/12/19
Ascension Presbyterian Church	Gonzales	LA	11/18/08	5/5/19

Presbytery of Mid-America

Church	City	State	Received	Dismissed/Dissolved
Mercy Road Fellowship	St. Peters	MO	4/7/08	10/27/18

Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic

Church	City	State	Received	Dismissed/Dissolved
Castanea Presbyterian Church	Stanley	NC	11/9/03	1/1/19
Northampton Presbyterian Church	Hampton	VA	4/1/91	4/12/19

Presbytery of the Midwest

Church	City	State	Received	Dismissed/Dissolved
Church of the Good Shepherd	Winona Lake	IN	12/16/11	2/15/19
Covenant Community Church	Ann Arbor	MI	10/19/82	5/19/18

Presbytery of the Pacific Northwest

Church	City	State	Received	Dismissed/Dissolved
Reflections Church	Meridian	ID	3/3/12	5/31/19

Presbytery of the Rivers and Lakes

Church	City	State	Received	Dismissed/Dissolved
First Presbyterian Church	Morrisonville	IL	4/1/14	4/7/18
Baldwin Community Church	Baldwin	IL	11/8/87	4/26/19