

# ECO SPOTLIGHT

## How would you describe the ecosystem of Narberth Presbyterian Church?

Some might look around and observe multiple generations worshipping together, or describe a safe haven in which to draw near to God, or comment on the sheer number of children who fill the building six days a week. Others might point to a spirit of hospitality, or excellent preaching and teaching, or the discovery of God's grace flowing sideways through another person, or the challenges inherent in sharing the fruit of spiritual nourishment with a world that, in a hundred different ways, is crying out for help without knowing where to look.

Since 1998, "We build disciples in the love of Jesus Christ" has been the stated mission of Narberth Presbyterian Church, the distillation of why we do everything we do. As our pastoral leaders and elders have thoughtfully and prayerfully considered, over many years, how we can be the best possible stewards of all the gifts and resources God has entrusted to us, ECO stands out as an excellent denominational ecosystem for churches like NPC.

ECO's own mission statement is strikingly similar to ours: "To build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ." The ECO website fleshes out their mission statement this way: "We believe that the Church is a living organism that needs life-giving resources to help it grow, thrive and multiply. ECO is committed to cultivating a healthy, diverse, resource-rich ecosystem where

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### Transition Status Update

On January 24, Session sent a letter formally requesting gracious dismissal, with property, from the Presbytery of Philadelphia to ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. In part, we said, "It is our prayer that we can part as friends, bring glory to God in the process, and present a positive witness to the community. It is our hope that we can continue to labor side-by-side for the good news of Jesus Christ until He returns." Our letter was acknowledged at the January 31 Presbytery Meeting. Subsequently, the Presbytery formed an Administrative Commission consisting of four ruling elders and three teaching elders to respond to our request.

Coming up, the NPC Transition Team (Elders Dave Bellamy, Diane Chen, Meg McKinley, and Emma Shaw) will have a series of meetings with the Administrative Commission. The first meeting is set for April 20. Please pray for this meeting, that it would commence a gracious process that glorifies God, preserves the unity of our congregation, and blesses the Presbytery along the way.

One of the expected outcomes of this process is a congregational meeting, called by the Presbytery, to confirm support for the move to ECO. This meeting could take place as early as June and, fittingly, would require a high level of participation from NPC members and a significant majority in favor of dismissal to ECO. Please prayerfully consider making every effort to attend this meeting; details will be provided as early as possible.

pastors and congregations can flourish.” This ecosystem also aims to help congregations like NPC connect within a body that intentionally and explicitly supports both our disciple-building mission and our yearning for a sharpened focus on outward-directed ministry. Along with significant resources for ministry, leadership, and theological development, ECO strongly encourages mutual accountability and support among churches. For example, ECO congregations are expected to participate in Mission Affinity Groups, which bring three to five churches with similar contexts together for reflection, collaboration, and goal-setting. Pastors similarly participate in Pastor Covenant Groups, supporting and caring for one another in life and ministry.

As our congregation at Narberth has discussed changing our affiliation, one question that arises frequently could be summarized this way: Would affiliating with ECO change who we are? We are, after all, a rather eclectic Presbyterian body, one that maintains, by God’s grace, genuine unity in Christ while embracing significant diversity in backgrounds and perspectives. The Session’s research and engagement over several years, including contact with ECO leaders, member congregations, and participation in denomination-wide events, support their confidence that our diversity would not render us outliers in the ECO sphere.

One of the ways ECO defines its own identity is through a statement of Core Values, guiding principles that ECO’s leadership has committed to honor. Among these is “Center-focused Spirituality,” the essence of which is keeping the main thing, the main thing: “We believe in calling people to the core of what it means to be followers of Jesus—what ‘mere Christianity’ is and does—and not fixate on the boundaries.” This core value resonates with our own desire to be known by

what we are for: building disciples in the love of Jesus Christ and sharing His love with all whom we encounter.

Unity of purpose among ECO congregations is further supported by a set of Essential Tenets, a biblically based, clearly articulated statement of faith drawn from the essentials of the Christian faith and Reformed tradition. It is important to note that these tenets do not require strict conformity in the interpretation of Scripture; rather, they serve as a common theological core that church officers are expected to respect and abide by, along with church polity.

In the early 2010s, the leadership and Session of Narberth Presbyterian Church began hearing about a movement stirring among Presbyterians with hopes similar to our own. Curiosity became excitement as this movement, The Fellowship of Presbyterians, gained momentum and, in early 2012, coalesced into the founding of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. In fact, pastors and elders from NPC were present at this founding meeting in Orlando. Five years on and 340 churches strong, we believe that God is calling us to officially join the movement, if the way be clear.

**ECO’s main website, [www.eco-pres.org](http://www.eco-pres.org), provides a helpful introduction to the denomination, as well as information about how ECO is organized, foundational documents and resources, and member congregations. Additionally, videos from ECO’s annual national gatherings, including the most recent gathering this past January (at which several people from NPC were in attendance), can be explored at [www.econationalgathering.org](http://www.econationalgathering.org).**

