

# ECO SPOTLIGHT

## Sustaining a Flourishing Church (and Leadership)

*“Therefore, brothers and sisters,” since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.... Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 10:19, 22-25.*

On Thursday, November 16, representatives from NPC experienced hands-on covenant life in ECO when elders Sam DiLullo, Meg McKinley, and Dave Bellamy participated in a Mission Affinity Group (MAG) meeting with elders from the First Presbyterian Church of Mt. Holly (N.J.). Participants spent the time getting to know one another and engaged in thinking and praying together about the mission of their congregations.

“When I think about Mission Affinity Groups, I envision small groups with churches as the participants. Just as small groups typically have a focused area of study—Bible study or book—and gather to provide encouragement, accountability and prayer support, so too with church-to-church Mission Affinity Groups,” said Elder Meg McKinley. The groups are structured to encourage “collaboration and sharing of ministry practices that individual churches have found effective, and to pray for our common and individual needs.”

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On Friday, November 17, NPC’s Transition Team met with the Presbytery of Philadelphia’s Administrative Commission to discuss each team’s hopes and concerns in three key areas: church property, provision for pastors, and possibilities for ongoing relationship after the move to ECO. “We had an open and frank discussion,” Elder Dave Bellamy noted. “We think the desire to maintain some relationship is a really unique approach that could bless both Narberth and the Presbytery, and may serve as a model for others in the future.”

As a result, participants formed three sub-teams to work on each area of concern. All will reconvene in January to report back and establish the key points that will form the basis of the Terms of Gracious Dismissal. In due time—anticipated in the first quarter of 2018—these terms will be presented to the congregation for approval. If approved, these terms will then go before the Presbytery for adoption.

Please continue to pray for and with NPC’s Transition Team, leadership, and the Administrative Commission, for continued positive interaction and a process that glorifies God, preserves the unity of our congregation, and blesses the Presbytery. In the weeks ahead, pray particularly for the teams as they work together on the Terms of Gracious Dismissal.

Participation in a MAG is required for every church in ECO. Pastors join similar gatherings called Pastoral Covenant Groups, in which small groups of mutually supportive pastors encourage one another in spiritual, emotional, physical, relational and vocational health. “With a common framework of making disciples of Jesus Christ, sharing successes—as well as failures—helps knit people together across geographic distance and strengthens each church’s ministry,” said Meg. “Knowing that we will need to prepare for the meetings will help maintain our focus in the face of distractions. Intentionality is a good thing!”

Highlighting the covenantal nature of redemption is a well-established distinctive of the Reformed and Presbyterian heritage, which is professed in ECO polity: “In Christ, we are adopted into the family of God and find our new identity as brothers and sisters of one another, since we now share one Father. Our faith requires our active participation in that covenant community.” (Essential Tenets, II C, “Covenant Life in the Church”) “As Presbyterians,” says Anna Kent in a video titled, “Why Accountability?” ([eco-pres.org/covenant-relationship/](http://eco-pres.org/covenant-relationship/)), “these accountable relationships remind us that we are not independent as leaders of the church, and certainly not as churches.” Kent is ECO’s Director of Mission Affinity Groups. Intentional interdependence, she asserts, fosters healthy churches and leadership, “so that we can live into the mission that’s been set before us as churches in ECO, to build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.”

At the November 16 meeting, the NPC elders explored the question, “Where do you want to grow (personally and as a church)?” with their Mt. Holly counterparts. “We discussed resources we had found helpful, noting the importance of being ‘in Christ’ before doing ‘for Christ,’” Meg said,

observing that this basic principle bears repeating in the hectic pace of church life and ministry.

“In our MAG meetings, we get to share our church struggles and successes and help one another deal with the issues at hand,” observed Barry Gray, Transitional Pastor at FPC Mt. Holly and the Moderator of Heritage Presbytery. “We get to encourage one another and build spiritual friendships, as well as help each other stay accountable for continuing to move forward in the work Christ has called us to.” While ECO presbyteries are small by design—Heritage Presbytery, for example, includes seventeen churches in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware—it’s not possible to sustain meaningful relationships with every congregation. Mission Affinity Groups help fill that gap, Barry said, as they are “the perfect size to allow us to really get to know each other and are close enough so that if one of our churches needs help, we can be there for each other.”

**ECO’s website provides a comprehensive introduction to MAGs and covenant relationship-building, including a video series**

**([eco-pres.org/covenant-relationship](http://eco-pres.org/covenant-relationship/)) and suggested tools for reflection and assessment (same address).**

**Additionally, a recent blog post on covenantal accountability highlights Heritage Presbytery and reflections on the book of Acts**

**(<http://eco-pres.org/blog/mission-affinity-group-update/>).**

