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Preface

Why have we compiled this book, entitled “The EFC faith, bylaws and practices”? Christians are the people of God, who are marked with grace, and shoulder the responsibility of carrying out the Great Commission of evangelism, while living out a life of love for one another. This love is an enviable thing to the world, and enables the world to see what type of people make up the disciples of Jesus Christ. However, throughout the past two thousand years, God’s people, and the churches they have gathered in, have had many disputes due to differences in the realization and perception of their beliefs. Consequently, the power of the Christian witness has been greatly diminished, which is very unfortunate.

“EFC faith, bylaws and practices,” as a book, is the result of contemplation and reaffirmation of beliefs by the EFC pastors in response to the times we are living in. Our hope is to clearly express “who are we?” in this day of globalization, pluralism and secularization, and to answer the following important questions: a. What do we believe in? b. What do we do? c. How do we do it? d. Why do it this way and not a different way?

We hope that this book will not only reflect the diversity and the inclusiveness of Christian backgrounds within EFC, but will also function to regulate and define our church and believers, while bringing foresight, openness, and guidance. In other words, this book is clear enough to explain who we are, but also vague enough for us to reflect on and accommodate the differences and diversity within the current EFC denomination. We believe that an organization and its structure must have stability, but at the same time must allow room for flexible application. The tension between these two is both real and undeniable. Thus, upon implementation, we must be humble and unbiased, and we need to move forward with prayer, wisdom, patience, and love.

Thanks to Rev. Peter Chen, Elder Jay Kuo, Rev. Shine Chen, Elder Paul Huang, Rev Daniel Wu, Pastor Huang-Ju Ho, Rev. Felix Liu, Rev. Wilfred Su, Rev. Kuo Liang Lin, Dr. Ekron Chen, Rev. Susan Chou, Rev. David Hsu, Dr. Daniel Sher, and Dr. Evan Hsu for their provision of these articles. Thanks to many EFC pastors, for drafting or writing up articles that explore the different issues and stances from our the past. Thanks to the editing and advisory committees, and the many pastors involved, for their numerous suggestions for these articles; thanks to Elder Ching-Lin Chen, the EFC Generally Assembly coworker, for his editorial revision, and to Lay Minister En-Jen Cheng for his assistance; and thanks to the LOGOS Evangelical Seminary and Global Enrichment Theological Seminary for devoting a great deal of human resources, so that this book can be successfully completed. And special thanks to Dr. Daniel Sher and Dr. Ekron Chen for putting so much time and energy into this book. Although this book sets out the ideas of EFC ministers and elders, and gathers their wisdom, there are still many omissions and shortcomings that require us to constantly work on and improve.

We hope that readers will benefit from this book and have a deeper understanding of what kind of church EFC is, what kind of a Christian an EFC member is, and what kind of faith group an “EFC’er” belongs to. We also hope that, after knowing and accepting what it means to be a “EFC’er”, we can then obey, practice, commit, and remain united, so that EFC will be a church pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ and prepared for His second coming.

Isaac Chen
Chief Editor

Foreword

It has been a full forty years since Evangelical Formosan Church (EFC) was established in 1970. From a single church in the beginning (EFC of Los Angeles), sEFC has now developed into 100 gospel fellowships (including independent churches, gospel stations and prayer stations), which makes the institution of church governance and denominational spirit all the more important. In order to effectively manage EFC, the formulation of bylaws and timely revision and adjustments thereof has become an indispensable task.

The regulation and formulation principles of the EFC bylaws have been elaborated on in “The Evangelical Formosan Church Faith, Bylaws, and Practices – Book II Bylaws”. Nevertheless, much of the denomination’s spirit and characteristics, as well as its vision and consensus, cannot be demonstrated through its bylaws, but appear through its practices. As the denomination continues its rapid development, concrete means to effectively pass on “the EFC practices” is a top priority. The compilation of Book III of “The Evangelical Formosan Church Faith, Bylaws, and Practices,” therefore, is done to achieve this goal.

Book III contains twenty-one articles, covering six major areas: 1. Prospects 2. Life, livelihood and work of the worker. 3. Concepts and practices of church governance. 4. Church ministry. 5. Ethical issues. 6. Participation in world missions. Many articles are a collective work. Some articles may have one major writer but were finalized after discussion with many people. Therefore, the views in each article do not represent the opinions of a few people, but the consensus of most of the EFC leaders. Here, I would like to thank every minister and elder involved in the writing and editing process, as well as those who participated in discussions and gave responses.

May the Lord use this book to unite all members of EFC to have the same goal and same mindset. Everyone’s function and gifting may be different, but we are like the many parts of a body that are well connected to one another under Christ the Head, to preach the gospel, establish churches, and proclaim the name of the Lord.

Elder Jay Kuo

EFCGA Former Moderator

EFCGA Former Moderator

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Part I Prospects

Vision for the EFC Jubilee 2020 2

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The “EFC 2020 Jubilee” is a vision derived from the results of the 2015 Survey conducted by the General Assembly (hereafter referred to as EFCGA) after a long period of prayer. The expectation is that this will be an attainable goal for the entire Evangelical Formosan Church (hereafter referred to as EFC) by 2020.

We need to have visions and goals

EFC is currently implementing the 2015-100-10000 mission plan in Taiwan. This goal has given Taiwan Missions (TM) both their direction and motivation, and has allowed these endeavors to achieve excellent progress over the past five years. However, Rev. Felix Liu has solemnly reminded us not to target only TM, but to continue missions and church planting in North America, New Zealand and Australia.

In Southern California, a couple of local EFC churches recently celebrated their 20th anniversaries- they are the fruits of the “90-25” church planting movement. However, since the 90s, the church planting ministry in Southern California has almost stopped; other parts of North America have also not been as proactive. In the face of this phenomenon, the EFCGA is contemplating setting up two new churches every year, beginning this year, but with better strategies and implementation based on experiences from the past. The EFCGA will also seek to engage in more effective communication with pastoral and lay leaders from the local churches, so as to come up with better strategies and methods.

The EFCGA conducted a survey on the 2015 goal, and found that while some churches were actively praying and engaging in discussion to provide positive feedback, while others had their doubts and wanted to “wait and see.” We are all aware that the majority of people are reluctant to be stretched or forced to withstand pressure; people prefer to take it easy and do only what they can. However, in the face of kingdom expansion, it is very difficult to save millions of souls for God with this attitude. Without goals and visions, followers will not know what to do, which may lead to the disintegration and even destruction of the group (see Prov 29:18); without effective leaders, followers will do as they see fit (see Judg 21:25). A group of people without visions, goals, and leadership will end up not

knowing where to go, and consequently, each person will go their own way, making it extremely difficult to produce the effect that may otherwise result from everybody working together.

How do we break such a deadlock for the development of EFC? The key lies in the overall leadership of the denomination. That is, the vision needs to be consolidated from the perspective of the entire group with effective leadership arising from it, which is the role and responsibility of the EFCGA. At present, our problem is to find committed and effective leaders. A quality organization needs such leaders, but they are hard to find. The primary function of a leader is decision-making, yet the complexities and uncertainties of today’s environment have made it difficult to make many decisions, especially decisions dictating organizational direction and development. These are difficult issues to face up to. However, regardless of the difficulty, we must recognize that not making any decisions is also a decision in itself, and allowing no-decision to be a decision is the worst situation! Making a decision on direction so that people may know where to go, rather than trotting on the same spot, is better than not making any decision at all. However, leaders then face the challenge of knowing how they can wisely determine the correct direction according to God’s heart, while taking up responsibilities for the Lord, and encourage followers to move forward together. Yet only in doing so can we attempt great things for God.

EFC is in great need of many leaders like this, who are able to come together and consolidate their visions and utilize their leadership ability to lead EFC forward according to God’s will. If we can’t do so, then in twenty to thirty years the people of EFC will wonder “What were the EFC leaders doing in 2010?!” Inaction is not an option in this generation.

Examining the growth targets by numbers

Generally, it is difficult for a small local church to have a ten-year plan. From a denominational viewpoint, however, it is appropriate and necessary to set a goal every ten years, as this enables all to prepare, plan, and work towards the target. EFC has met both the 9025 and 2050 goals for church planting. Although no specific target was previously set for 2010, yet we were still able to grow to 100 churches. If we follow this growth pattern of doubling the number

of churches every ten years, then the goal for the year 2020 should be to have 200 churches.

In terms of membership numbers, many churches have an annual growth rate of 10%. So for EFC churches outside of Taiwan, including North America, New Zealand and Australia, the goal of 2015 will be 10,000 people, which matches the TM target of 2015-100-10000. Therefore, in hopes of giving each church more space for healthy growth, the EFCGA has set the membership target at 20,000 for the year 2020. At the same time, the EFCGA would not only like to see an increase in numbers in the local churches, but also a rise in the quality of the members' spiritual lives.

Currently, Taiwan (including the gospel stations) and overseas EFC each has approximately 50 churches. The 2020 target is to have 25 and 75 more EFC churches overseas and in Taiwan respectively. In terms of members, currently there are approximately 2,000 people in Taiwan EFC churches, and 5,600 in overseas EFC churches. The 2020 target is to reach 10,000 in both Taiwan and around the globe.

Many worry that the slogan may be overstated. What is to become of EFC if she cannot deliver? Also, it is not easy to set up 200 churches and 20,000 church members simultaneously. So perhaps we should consider not saying "and" but "or" - 200 churches or 20,000 people. But if both goals are not set, we would tend to choose the easier target to work with, and our execution would then begin to show bias. Opting for "and" as the target is definitely a challenge, but, if there were no challenge, our potential would not be developed. And in order to meet the target, we need an innovative growth strategy. Take EFC of Los Angeles for example. They recently had an opportunity to add a Saturday night service. Under such strategy, it should be possible for Los Angeles EFC to reach 2,000 people from the current 1,000 by 2020.

For Taiwan EFC churches to increase from the current 2,000 to 10,000 people is indeed a challenge. However, looking from another angle, Taiwan has twenty million people, and ten thousand people only accounts for 0.05% of the population, not even making up one thousandth of it. This is really too little and how can we settle for this!? We must admit that Taiwan is still a land desolate of the gospel! As for establishing an EFC church overseas, it is limited by the need to find

Chinese communities, and is therefore relatively difficult. However, although we have not set the number to be as big of a leap as for the TM. We must still strive to spread the gospel in places where many Chinese gather.

Focus on the target and examine our minds

Is it too ambitious to have 2020-200-20000 as our number targets? This is a question of perspective. This is just like the 12 spies surveying the land of Canaan and bringing back two kinds of reports – Caleb and Joshua saw opportunities, but the other ten saw difficulties. Of course, today we cannot just look at the optimistic opportunities. Rather, we are to examine both sides carefully. And while we seize the opportunities, we also plan on how to overcome the difficulties. "Two" has the significance of "double" in the Bible. 2020-200-20000 should not merely be a target to be met haphazardly, but should be the most fundamental bottom line. If it delights the Lord, He will have us exceed!

The crux of the problem is not the number but a test of leadership. And this test is not a test for just the one leader but for all to take part. For church leaders, it is a test of leadership capabilities where, by way of creating a simple goal, they can summon the congregation together and lead them forward. When determining whether the goal is right or not, the leader must first face the question of "who is God?". That is, in their faith, the leaders do truly know that God is who He is and His name is indeed "I am!" (Exod 3:14). He will accomplish for those who are after His own heart. Secondly, leaders need to answer before God the question "who am I?". This includes questions in many aspects – how serious and eager are you to see the goals realized? Are you just shouting the slogans or are you serious in asking the Lord? Are you an effective leader? Do you have the commitment and skills of leadership? Can you win the congregation's hearts and inspire them to work together? Can you take people to see the fruits of Canaan instead of the tough enemies, and in turn defeat the enemies? All of these are God's challenges to the leaders. May God raise a people in EFC who can complete this mission.

We set goals and numbers mainly to consolidate our hearts and minds. However, a more important focus is to fight for the Lord and save lost souls. Morale is most important in a battle, since it has the ability to bring all the

people together to fight. Between the 1980s and 1990s, when people used to look at EFC, they saw a church blessed by God and fully motivated. EFC was full of passion in spreading the gospel! When promoting 90-25, how united and one-minded we were! Now we long for the same morale to reappear. When the drive of denominational expansion thrives, all the churches will benefit and attract many talents to serve in the gospel.

A feature of EFC is the serving together of pastoral and lay leaders. The first generation pastoral and lay leaders may have had many differences in style, but they complemented each other well. There was no secrecy or division, and it was just like a big family. There are many wonderful testimonies from these years, and we are greatly encouraged. The second-generation leaders ought to imitate their example. When faced with the overall ministries, they should not stand on the sideline, but participate together. Whenever there are some willing to serve, all should encourage them to become the new leaders. But the second-generation leaders must also make efforts and work harder to utilize their gifts and talents, and to develop their own ministries. As far as EFC is concerned, we must continue to cultivate the third-generation leaders, and encourage them to become our successors, so that the torch of the gospel can be passed on from generation to generation. May God's words to Joshua be our encouragement:

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (Josh 1:9)

Whether 2020-200-20000 is the giant in Canaan or the fruit in Canaan, we need not tremble nor fear, for the Lord is with us. This is the Lord's promise. His heart is for all to be saved, and what we are doing is pleasing to the Lord.

EFC Jubilee 2020

The mission statement of Jesus when he was on earth was to preach the gospel to the poor, set the captive free, make the blind see and let those oppressed be free and proclaim the Jubilee of God's favor (Luke 4:18-19, Isa 61:1).

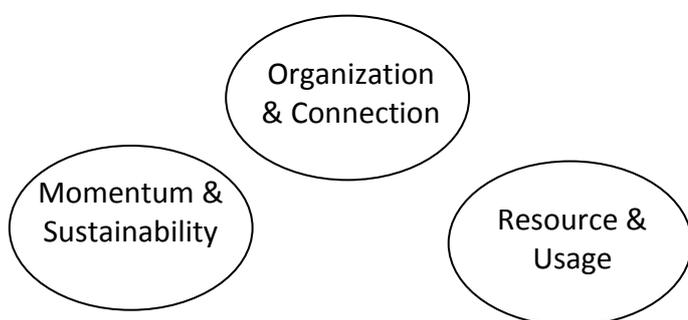
"Jubilee" means fifty years in the Bible. The Bible stipulates that when celebrating the Jubilee, all lands are to be returned to the owner without any compensation. Every fifty years, the land will be evened out as they belong to the

LORD (Lev 25:10-17). In terms of biblical theology, the celebration of Jubilee emphasizes all the more the reconciliation between men and God, for the Jubilee begins on the day of the atonement at the great sound of the horn (Lev 25:9).

As EFC prepares to celebrate the 2020 Jubilee, we expect to see many people turn to God and reconcile with Him. Let us prepare ourselves in the next 10 years and pray for our relatives, friends and those we come in contact with. Let us seize the opportunity to tell them of Jesus Christ's salvation and hope, that they will be like us to receive the goodness of the gospel, make peace with God, have their names listed in the book of life, and live a true Jubilee.

Three keys for Opening up the Future

Another important key for determining whether the future development can be effective and sustainable is to have a clear understanding and introspection on key development issues, and then to integrate them with EFC's existing conditions and strength while eliminating her weaknesses, so that by forming a common vision, future developmental goals and objectives can be generated. With respect to constructing future development, it can be initiated with three keys as follows – organization, momentum and resource (see diagram below). These are three intertwined elements that affect one another. We need to think and look forward from these three areas to find direction for future efforts that can be translated into practical ministry programs.



Organization

The first key is organization. When a group of people gather together to carry out certain activities or work, there will naturally be some form of organization, since an organization functions to connect everyone for a common goal, designating each person with a different post, function and task, so that they can collaborate and support each other to accomplish their desired goal.

From the point of view of EFC as an organization, it is a carrier of ministry works. In the face of church missions and tasks, an organization that can effectively carry the ministries must be developed; otherwise, missions and visions will always be abstract concepts, and fail to be realized. Regardless of which type of organization (e.g. decentralized or hierarchical) is chosen, sound organizational structure, division of labor, and a good organizational working culture not only promote positive development for the organization, but also avoids the so-called bureaucracy that makes

people serve the organization rather than the other way round. Therefore, as we face development, we must prevent the organization from becoming a constraint to ministry development, as it may be in the case of an unhealthy organizational structure, bad functioning, and the inability to adjust and change with time.

When examining EFC's organizational development, we see that we have always been good at designing organizational structure. We know how to draw up structure charts, as well as set up departments and committees. These efforts have already paid off considerably and we have also made necessary adjustments and changes as our development diversifies. However, there will be a considerable amount of uncertainties, complexities and ambiguities in the future; thus, many variables in future ministry contexts may undermine organizational functions. Therefore, effective organizational development must be flexible in order to allow for timely responses, and also must allow room for developing direction and accommodating future insights.

As for the future of the EFC organization, efforts must continue in at least two aspects: (1) The EFCGA and local churches/institutions are to respond to changes (internally and externally). When necessary, existing organizational structure shall be amended or changed, or new organizational structure shall be designed. And they shall be implemented to accomplish the goal of carrying ministry development. (2) Through ongoing connection, integration and consolidation of all members in the organizational structure, the EFC organization is to become a group of people with vitality. And through elaborating and renewing the EFC spirits, a quality EFC culture shall be created to regulate EFC church operation.

EFC has always worked on the first aspect, even though she may not have achieved it all of the time. The change or design in organizational structure is not just a change on the organization chart but, most importantly, a determinant that can be developed to bring about results. Persons undertaking this task must have a comprehensive understanding and control of the relevant factors such as the current situation, the EFC vision and core values, strategies and resources, as well as organizational operation. We desperately need

this type of organizational engineering talent during our development stage. Another key is the implementation of changes. Most people are not inclined to change, which will effect the completion of the necessary changes. If organizational structural changes are to be implemented effectively, contribution from change agents will be needed. Leaders need to know how to consolidate the consensus based on the EFC vision and core values, and lead her members through to completing the changes.

As for the connection, integration and consolidation in the second aspect, the key lies in how to be connected to the common vision, and how to build a network of relationships and communications. The EFCGA is actively promoting and conducting many projects, such as the construction of a communication network, by adjusting the organizational structure. The establishment of the regional assemblies in recent years is one obvious example. By connecting and consolidating fewer members, we have further and more effectively achieved connection and consolidation as a whole. Additionally, through modern information and communication technologies, attempts have been made to effectively pass on the EFCGA's works, ideas and news to every member. The EFCGA's news, special events and monthly DVD, quarterly conference calls, and weekly e-news are all current efforts. Among pastors, connection with one another is enhanced through promoting the Ministerial Association. The carrying out of this "EFC faith and practice project" (the compilation of this book) has been done with the connection, integration and consolidation on EFC's identity and positioning in mind. We need to know who we are, so that our diverse development has the basis of unity, and so that our flexibility and space have boundaries for distinction and protection. These many approaches are just one method of facilitating connection, integration and consolidation. We still have room for creativity to facilitate more connection, integration and consolidation in many other aspects.

Momentum

For EFC to develop, she must have momentum. When a group is large and momentous, its impact on the world has the potential to be great, and to make Satan afraid. The size of this momentum is not determined by

the number of people, but by the vigor to "fight" for God's kingdom. This vigor depends on the overall commitment, insistence, and dedication of the church as that exhibited by Gideon's three hundred warriors (see Judg 7). Of course, this spirit is derived from understanding God's heart, being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading and work, and having the desire and dedication to take on what is entrusted, after having accurately felt the pulse of the times. The development experienced by EFC in the 1980s and 1990s is a witness to the generation of such momentum. However, momentum must be maintained and continued, and even reengineered, in order to effect effective, sustainable development of ministries. Otherwise, no matter how glorious a ministry has once been, it will gradually disappear in the course of history.

As for the maintenance and reengineering of momentum in future development, at least two things require our attention: (1) A clear and common understanding of the vision. That is, when looking forward into the future, we can foresee the works God expects EFC to accomplish whether it is in geography, group targets, and other aspects. This is so that goals that may cause us to commit and move forward will be produced. (2) Capabilities that grasp the pulse of the times and make respond in an appropriate manner shall continue to be cultivated, as we seek the Holy Spirit's guidance with all sensitivity. We must know where the Holy Spirit works, how He works and how we should collaborate with Him. If we can continue to experience the excitement generated by working with the Holy Spirit, maintenance and reengineering of momentum will result naturally.

Whether in North America, New Zealand and Australia, or Taiwan, the momentum for growth is everybody's concern. It requires much seeking and waiting, but also faith and courage that, in hopes of God doing great things, will bring about the momentum to accomplish great things by the Holy Spirit.

Resources

Obviously, resources serve to support the two aforementioned aspects. Construction of the organization and maintenance of momentum, and whether a ministry is successful and effective or not, are all related to resources. As EFC enters

into another leadership phase, she faces the rapid changes of external conditions and internal development; her required resources are very diverse and volatile. Therefore, from the EFCGA to various local churches, all must reconsider what their required resources are. Basically, spirituality, manpower, and financial resources are still the three main levels.

The focus of the spirituality level will continue to be the condition of the spiritual lives of the pastoral co-workers, as well as the entire congregation. Whether the individual or church is healthy or not has a decisive impact on the effective development of EFC. Spirituality, despite being emphasized constantly by the church, can often be overlooked when the focus is on ministry activities. Therefore, how to cause each person to have a vibrant spiritual life would still be something the church works on.

Development of manpower resources involves internal cultivation and external recruitment. The former is nurturing within the family, and requires pastoral and lay leaders to recognize potential in sisters and brothers, and offer them training in ministry skills and concepts of development. With regards to this, especially comprehensively and systematically cultivating a worker, it is yet to be strengthened. As for external recruitment, it will depend on how big EFC's attraction is. We also need to consider who, and with what level of caliber, we would like to invite to join us. These two factors affect each other. Within the context of human resources, the ministry skills, experience and ideas of those who serve are closely related. In the face of the needs and the necessity for professionalism in today's ministry, we will need workers who not only have the spiritual life and character, but who are also leaders capable of working independently and leading expeditions.

As for financial resources, what God has given us is ample, even if we have not ignited and developed these funds perfectly. How we make every believer see the Kingdom's rise and fall as his/her own responsibility and offer his/her best to the Lord will be our ongoing challenge.

Looking back, we know we possess many spiritual legacies left by our predecessors, which includes the EFC spirits. These are all resources for marching on. As we are grateful for their

contribution, we should carry on the legacy, so as to pave the way for future generations.

Conclusion

God raised EFC and placed us in an era of great change. He desires to use us to bring the light of Jesus Christ's life into this dark era. We can choose to continue taking on such a mission, or we can choose to remain complacent, which is not the spirit of EFC. Yet, if we choose to continue taking on such a mission, we must all have the same aspiration; that is, let the Lord use us. What we desire is that all of the EFC people will commit in one accord, continue to receive God's visions, cultivate spiritual leaders, establish a vibrant organization, accumulate the wisdom of our predecessors, integrate abundant resources, work hard for evangelism, deepen local church planting, devote in the cultivation of works, emphasize spiritual growth, pay attention to team ministry, and have all clergy and lay persons working hand in hand, so that EFC will continue to work towards becoming an attractive church, sent out to the whole world.

Part II Life, Livelihood and Work of the Worker

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When God created man, He gave him missions, one of which was to rule the whole earth. This is the mission and calling that God gave to Adam, as well as to every person he has created. Such is the beginning and foundation of man's service to God, and is God's will for every person he has created. To be called as God's worker is such an honorable, glorious, and noble ministry, and it is the identity given to us by God.

But the fall of mankind changed all of this. God had to call the people to repent and turn to Him through the salvation He has prepared, so that they may once again become His people (1 Pet 2:9, Exod 19:5-6). He has even entrusted this ministry of reconciliation with Him to every follower of Jesus Christ. From that point on, there is one more area to which we are all called to serve God, and it is the most important mission mandated to the church.

Therefore, believers are all called to be workers, serving God with no exceptions. However, when we talk about workers in the church today, we usually refer to that group of church leaders that includes full-time pastors and clergy, as well as lay leaders. This error in understanding and attitude has made the church fail to serve her purpose. Such phenomenon highlights a necessary cognition – God instituted leaders in the Church because God's Church needs leaders to lead, and therefore God chooses and calls upon workers to be leaders in order to accomplish the leadership tasks and missions He has entrusted to them.

As the Church fulfills the missions mandate, this group of workers with leadership responsibilities must possess certain qualities and capacities in their lives and services. The pastors and clergy, elders, deacons and co-workers, and leaders of every level in EFC, are no exception. For this group of leaders, the text below will provide some basic but important leadership values, code of conduct, and guidance that is important for all leaders, and provides the basic concept for preparing for ministry and leadership.

Molding of the worker: the servant leader

Those who serve God must know one thing: being a "servant" is their identity before God. For the Apostle Paul, he even used the word "slave" to express this identity, which means that

he claimed no sovereignty over himself, and that God and His will was the center and ultimate end of his life and ministry. Paul's ministry values are the basic values that everyone who serves God must have.

In order to complete His plan, God calls, chooses, and raises up leaders in every generation, through whose efforts He affects and leads His people to complete His plan. This group of leaders must also be servants - an important command from Jesus Christ (Mark 10:44; see Matt 20:27 and Luke 22:26).

Being called to be a leader of the Church, and yet made to be a servant, is a Biblical paradox that is difficult to understand. Yet, it was Jesus' clear command. This paradox means that God chooses people to be leaders, and he wants them to serve those they lead in the form and identity of a servant. The concept of "serving to lead and leading to serve" can further interpret the meaning of the "servant leader".

Servanthood is a leader's inner attitude, value and motivation as he/she faces God and the people. Service is the hallmark of a leader's spiritual life. The values and mentality of being a servant will enable those who serve the Lord to be grounded as they enter into the world to those who need to be served.

Leaders lead as it is their mandated mission and authority. They are called and chosen to work with God in order to complete their entrusted mission and accomplish God's plans. Leadership that is acceptable to God will be an important function these leaders must produce. The main focus of this leadership function is to serve the followers with solid leadership capabilities, and to lead them to walk in God's will. In the leading process, the leaders confirm that God is the initiator of leadership, the keeper of the process, and the perfecter of the ultimate end; that is, God is the real leader.

"Serving to lead" refers to a leader's love, protection, guidance and help for his/her followers. Through these functions comes the momentum for leadership. And as these leaders lead, the focus of their hearts will be the best interests of their followers, or those they serve. They will serve the followers with the minds and sight of God. When the followers are fulfilled as

they walk in God's will, the leadership function has served its purpose.

"Leading to serve" means the ultimate end of a leader's service is to lead a group of God's people to accomplish what God has entrusted them with. This is God's anticipation for spiritual leadership, which also shows that spiritual leadership has a purpose and cannot be separated from God's creation and salvation plans. Leading His people to accomplish that which was entrusted to him is the leader's most important service as they work with God.

In such a tension, stewardship becomes an office fusing the servant and the leader. Church leaders are entrusted by God to lead as servants, serving to bring out leadership. These kind of servant leaders truly know that when they face God one day, what God sees will no longer be the role, status, and position of the individuals but their relationship with Him.

In Chinese churches, due to the influence of some theological views and traditions, it is not easy to address this important issue of leadership, and it is even harder to call others or self leaders. However, as we understand the nature and functions of a servant leader, Paul's words to the church, "Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task." (1 Tim 3:1) will be an encouragement to the churches.

The following lists the ten qualities of a servant leader that may serve as signposts for learning:

1. Listening – Through listening, servant leaders identify the will of God and of the group they serve, clarify it, and communicate it as they make decisions.

2. Empathy – Servant leaders understand and empathize with the hearts and minds of those being led, and they think and feel in their shoes.

3. Healing – Servant leaders understand that learning to heal is a powerful force for transformation and integration, and they learn to be a person who brings healing.

4. Awareness – Servant leaders have the ability of introspection and reflection, which enables them to face reality of who they are, and to look at their current situation from an overall perspective.

5. Persuasion – Through communication and persuasion, servant leaders establish a consensus and agreement among the group. When making a decision in the organization, they rely on persuasion rather than on power in exerting authority. More communication and convincing, rather than coercing compliance, is the key distinction between the traditional authoritarian model and servant leadership model.

6. Conceptualization – Servant leaders nurture their abilities to dream and develop ideas, which they then turn into concrete actions. As they deal with daily affairs, they also become the ones who conceptualize future visions.

7. Foresight – Servant leaders learn from lessons of the past and realities of the present. When making decisions relevant to the future, they clearly foresee the likely consequences and successive development from those decisions.

8. Stewardship – As they are trusted and entrusted, servant leaders hold fast and care for God's resources.

9. Commitment to the growth of people – Servant leaders clearly recognize that the ultimate end of service is God and those they serve. Fulfilling others is the key to their serving.

10. Building community – Servant leaders seek to build an organic and spiritual entity rather than a large-scale institutionalized organization.

God has a high standard for those who lead His people. He desires them to have the gentleness, humility, selflessness, and dedication of a servant, as well as the ability to understand His will and plans, so that he or she may look ahead, pay the price, complete the leadership mission, and become someone that others are willing to follow.

Character of the worker

Character – the inner qualities of a man affects every aspect of his life.

God cares about the character of His workers, for there is no darkness or shadow in Him; He does not do anything out of His character, nor does he permit His created beings to do so. When He delivered men from their enslaved condition, bound by sin and death, He wanted them to turn to Him and to be holy, for He is holy (Lev 11:45; 1 Pet 1:15-16). When it comes to

serving, this view and principle of holiness and consecration is God's basic requirement for the character of the worker. When serving, we must remember that God is not to be mocked (Gal 6:7)

Ministry flows out of being. What a person serving the Lord is like on the inside is what his/her ministry will be. While the ministry on the outside may for a moment look "spiritual," time will reveal its true condition, since the external presentation of any ministry depends on the internal motivation and value, which is determined by the inner life qualities. This is why saints of past generations placed great emphasis on character formation.

When a person believes in the Lord, if he/she obeys the Holy Spirit's guidance and work, his/her character will experience constant renewal and adjustment. From the character of a new believer, to the maturity of a spiritual life that has undergone in-depth practice, God's molding process lasts a lifetime, and is not complete until Christ is fully formed in the person by the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:19), who does a lot of shaping and trimming. This process not only lasts a lifetime, but is also an everyday constant in the life of the believer, whereby he/she must continue to crucify the old self with Christ on the cross to obtain the glorious life of Christ's resurrection (see Rom 6:4-11). This process of renewal and transformation requires meticulous practice of the spiritual disciplines. As Paul said, "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." (1 Cor 9:27)

Spiritual character and quality must also be shown in our lives. As far as the Lord's worker is concerned, this is a must if he/she is to have an effective ministry. This is why Paul wanted the young worker, Timothy, to understand that he must set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (1 Tim 4:12; The Message translates "purity" literally as "integrity"). Qualities of the inner life, and outward presentations of words and actions, are just as important.

Some spiritual characteristics and qualities are very crucial, and require our attention as the foundation of the character is being set. These spiritual characteristics and qualities are primary considerations for God's selection of leaders,

because gifts and talents cannot replace spiritual characteristics. Service without the spiritual characteristics is like a building constructed on sand, and will eventually be destroyed. These spiritual characteristics and qualities include godliness, integrity, loyalty, obedience, honesty, humility, love, faith, kindness and patience (1 Tim 6:11; Gal 5:22-23).

Amongst the many characteristics and qualities, integrity can be regarded as the most important cornerstone. Integrity includes the meaning of fullness, without flaws and corruption, and refers to the consistency of a person inside out and the wholeness and unity of his/her innermost motives and external actions. This is exactly the gist of Paul's commands to Timothy. And God uses many ways to test this particular characteristic. By way of value assessments, trials, conflicts in serving, and persecution, God tests one's inner conviction, faith, calling, loyalty, perseverance, and accountability. When people pass God's tests, their character will be more mature, their abilities and commitment to serve will increase, and their scope of service will also expand. We can see this from the lives of Joseph and Daniel.

When we understand the meaning of this quality of integrity, we see that this is the character that is easily overlooked and generally lacking in the workers serving the Lord today. In this era of celebrity culture, the aura of emphasizing external appearance more than intrinsic values is also found in the church. But if a ministry is to be rooted and established to last, integrity is a crucial foundation. If it is combined with learning other characteristics and traits, then the worker's life and ministry will bear many fruits.

Teaching a person the skills of leadership is much easier than changing a person's character, since character building as a process is both long and latent. Yet the worker cannot do without the spiritual character if he/she is to finish the race and accomplish what God has entrusted to him/her. Therefore, we cannot ignore or neglect the necessity of this molding, but must respond actively to God's molding work. And we must remember that character molding is a life-long lesson. If this fact is ignored, and the Holy Spirit is not allowed to continue in His work and fulfillment, the end result will be the destruction of both the worker and the ministry.

Worker's preparation for work

The primary work of servants is the vertically upward service to God, which is then followed closely by the horizontal service to men. From individual homes, small groups, fellowship groups, and affiliated churches to the communities, societies, and God's work in the entire world, every worker has his or her role and responsibilities to undertake. Although everyone's responsibilities and roles are different, serving God and ministering to people to engage in missions takes certain capabilities beyond just determination and passion. Given that spiritual character is the foundation of effective ministry, one must continue to utilize and practice the talents and gifts of the Holy Spirit, coupled with the continued development of more skills, to bring about optimal performance. In other words, effective ministry not only requires purity of heart, but also the cleverness of hands.

Purity of heart and cleverness of hands are God's ongoing desires for His workers. For church leaders, these character traits are all the more necessary, because God will accomplish His purpose through their leadership. God's shaping and fulfillment of leaders can be divided into three parts – spiritual molding, ministry skills molding, and strategy molding. In the life of a leader, these three parts will take place concurrently, but their emphases and contents will change in different stages of life and ministry.

Spiritual molding is the molding and development of the inner life of God's people. It is relevant to who the leader "is". Molding of the ministry skills focuses on the skills and relevant knowledge required in the ministry. It is relevant to what leadership "does". The results of molding in this respect are appropriate and effective ministry. In terms of the molding of ministry skills, the main method is through on-the-job training and learning in ministry, where one can develop the best methods of serving, and achieve proficiency.

Strategy molding is the shaping of a leader's overall developmental orientation, values, and concepts in ministry. It is the process of God's molding of the leader's ministry philosophy, the systematic ministry concepts built upon knowledge of God's will and plans, and the understanding of God's work principles and

leadership values. When leaders know why they lead, and the roles and responsibilities they are to undertake in their entrusted missions, they are able to do the "right" things in ministry.

Strategy molding is even more important for core church leaders. When God gives the mission and vision of the era to church leaders, they must use the existing value system and concepts to accomplish what is entrusted to them. Therefore, in order to undertake ministries in today's drastic changes, molding dynamics and effective ministry philosophy will be an essential lesson for church leaders.

The above three aspects of molding complement one another, and lead to maturity in a leader's life and ministry. What these three aspects produce can be classified as the learning, insight, and courage a person needs to serve God. That is, life, knowledge, experience, astuteness, and resourcefulness are all indispensable.

Worker's leadership learning

As far as leadership is concerned, a worker becoming a servant leader must learn to lead oneself, others and the organization as he/she prepares to serve in leadership.

The ability to lead oneself helps leaders to develop positive and trustworthy relationships, and evokes them to take initiatives and the lead role, so as to help followers accomplish the works together, efficiently and with a purpose. Leading oneself, in fact, is the act of accepting God's guidance, with focus on cultivating the inner spiritual life, which is a God-centered discipline and practice, so that one may have a Christ-like character, experiencing and revealing His presence in life and ministry. Upon this basis, and coupled with proper self-management, the individual will gradually be molded into a leader who can be trusted by others.

Leadership requires the establishment of a meaningful connection between the leader and others (especially followers). In order to complete the leadership task and achieve the goal, the ability to lead, and knowledge of how to lead others, must be cultivated. These include abilities to establish and maintain relationships, to set up effective work teams, communication skills, conflict management skills, and to develop and fulfill others. God chooses and calls the leaders to utilize His resources and carry out His entrusted

missions to affect His people and complete His plan.

How we are to lead a group of people to accomplish what is entrusted not only requires leading the self and others, but also the organization. Leaders need to cultivate capabilities that help the group complete their tasks. These include management skills, the ability to think and act out strategic directions (vision formation and realization), innovative thinking, and the ability to introduce, initiate and implement change.

Leading an organization is different than organizational management. Simply put, management relies on the organizational structure and system to handle people and affairs, but leadership is more than organizational structure and system because men have thoughts and cannot be managed like objects. Men must be led, and there is a difference between being led by good leadership and bad leadership. Structure and system may fail to work effectively, mainly because the followers' willing aspiration or motivation to follow is not a natural corollary of the organizational structure and system. As far as Christians are concerned, this willingness must come from the followers' understanding of the rights and authorities of God and man, acceptance of the organization vision and mission, and trust in the leadership capabilities of the church leaders.

This is not to deny that the church needs an organizational structure and system, but the presence and utilization of good or bad leadership are after all critical in determining whether the church tasks and missions can be accomplished. The significance of leading an organization is to cultivate and utilize sound and effective leadership, and to lead and inspire the members within to accomplish the missions.

God has even higher requirements for key workers in the church – pastors, elders and deacons, who are to be accountable to and responsible for God in terms of their influence and their followers' growth and actions. To be able to submit the final account before God, they must face up to the various capabilities and substances required for ministry, as well as rely on the Lord for a lifetime of molding to complete what is entrusted to them.

Conclusion

As EFC responds to God's call for every lay person to become a worker and to participate in building up the church and enacting the Great Commission to go to the ends of the earth, we are deeply concerned about what kind of workers we are to nurture, so that they can respond to God's calling and take up the mission of the times. With quality workers come all sorts of effective ministries. Only competent servant leaders can lead and integrate congregations to build healthy churches that can be God's glorious witnesses in the local communities and places around the world.

For such workers and servant leaders, the practice of spiritual characteristics, the learning of ministry skills, and the cultivation of a ministry philosophy are all indispensable. However, all of this begins with the building up of the inner life. God values what a worker is more than what he/she does. Without a life after God's own heart, there won't be enviable living testimonies, and it will be even more difficult to hold on to the fruits of the works. Such abovementioned values are the principles and objectives by which we nurture our workers.

As for how we can nurture such workers is another challenge EFC must address. She needs to face up to the importance of this task with other church leaders, so as to develop practical training ministry through comprehensive reflection and foresight.

Every person needs a family, but broken and disintegrated families have become today's social phenomenon. As a result, mankind longs for those things that God intended for healthy families to provide, and yet we are never fully satisfied. Obviously, mankind's family values have been distorted and moved further away from the biblical values. Because of this, individuals, families, and societies are paying a heavy price, and this trend is also impacting the church severely.

There are many reasons that have contributed to this phenomenon. For example, some of these reasons include: changes in marital and familial values, and moral degeneration (especially with the promotion of sexual liberation and same sex marriage), changes in life and work patterns (where both parents work long hours and even have to work away from home on some occasions), disharmonious relationships between the husband and wife (extramarital affairs, and divorce have caused family separation and result in single-parent families), and neglect and indifference in the parental role (causing the next generation to grow up lacking parental love and guidance, which results in wanton behaviors, rebellion, and even quarrels between parents and children). All of these factors are interconnected and impact one another, resulting in the disintegration of relationships among family members, and the collapse of families. This is not all; the destructive power this brings about has directly endangered the stability and harmony of society. In the face of this situation, the church must encourage and help believers build Christian families, so as to influence and change today's society.

As far as EFC is concerned, family problems and problematic families also exist in her church. We do not boast better conditions than those outside the church, even though church families ought to be more spiritual and holy. Many believers mistakenly think that as long as a couple believes in the Lord, they will automatically build a Christian family. They think that the simple act of bringing their children to church will fulfill their spiritual responsibilities as parents, and that their children will automatically become the Lord's disciples. These parents don't understand that building a Christian family takes life-long learning and efforts. Their family must be founded upon

God's heart, as well as His design for marriage and families, with the concerted effort of all family members. Each family must be Christ-centered, and exalt the Lord as the head of their family, under the guidance, power and protection of the Holy Spirit. This is the biggest difference between the Christian and the world's family values. The following text will discuss how to build a blessed and happy Christian family, namely in regard to Biblical teaching, establishing guidelines, and offering feasible suggestions.

Basis for Christian Family in Biblical Theology

God has noble and edifying designs for mankind's marriage and family units. Today, if man is to build a Christian family, he must understand God's thoughts. Since families are derived from the marriage relationship, a Christian family must be founded on a marriage that is honoring to God. Understanding a godly marriage is crucial to knowing God's will for families. Therefore, the following Bible-based exposition includes insight on God's design for both marriage and the family unit.

Sanctity of marriage and honor of family

Marriage and family were established when God created Adam and Eve. God saw that it was good and blessed it with sanctity, setting it apart for Him as holy. Today, godly marriages and families have kept this characteristic of consecration, where the man and woman make their vows before God to enter into marriage, thus establishing a family, and then go on to multiply, all of which must be God-centered in order to reveal God's glory.

God values marriage and family; Therefore, He uses intimacy in marriage to express the relationship between Him and His people. In the Old Testament, when the Israelites turned away from Him again and again, God was like a wounded lover who persevered, waiting patiently as He desperately wanted them back again and again. And in the New Testament, God used the marriage relationship to express the groom and bride relationship between Christ and His Church, and the wedding banquet He was busy preparing. God also used the father-son relationship to express the Father and Son having the same attributes and an intimate relationship, in which the Son was the Father's representative on earth. God even used the parent-child relationship to

point out that He saw all the people He created as His children (Luke 3:38). They had an intimate relationship with their heavenly Father, but lost it because they sinned. Yet through the firstborn son, Christ, (Rom 8:29; Heb 1:6; Col 1:15), all those who believe in Him can become the children of God (John 1:12).

When Jesus was on earth, He reaffirmed the sanctity of marriage. In the Sermon on the Mount, He emphasized such purity in marriage that even adulterous thoughts were forbidden (Matt 5:27-32). His statement against divorce further shows His value for the sanctity of the marriage covenant (Matt 19:3-6). The coming of Jesus had fulfilled the promise of the last verse in the Old Testament (Mal 4:6) - He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers. Broken family relationships are to be saved and renewed by of Jesus Christ, which is an important part of His salvation plan.

Now that marriage and family are God's intentions, their sanctity is something that we must face solemnly, and it cannot be mocked. The marriage relationship, which God so values, requires our ongoing attention and effort to maintain.

Purpose of marriage and family

From the teachings of the Bible, we can see that the purpose of marriage is three-fold: (1) The husband and wife are partners (Gen 2:18), living as family members who enjoy intimacy; (2) the couple is to be fruitful and increase in number, and fill the earth (Gen 1:28a); and (3) the couple is to serve God (Josh 24:15) and participate in ruling over the earth with Him (Gen 1:28b).

After God created Adam, He saw that it was not good for him to be alone; so He created Eve to help him. This is a display of God's considerate love for mankind. It is not good for the man to be alone; he needs company, and marriage is one of the most important ways to provide that company he needs for support, and to satisfy one another as they share their lives, joys and sorrows together. This family unit, then, which is derived from marriage, enables man to live his life in an intimate relationship. This is God's arrangement and mandate for man. After God created the institution of marriage, He blessed man and woman, and commanded them to be fruitful and

increase in number, and fill the earth, so as to serve Him through family generations, and to rule over the earth. Being fruitful and multiplying is achieved through reproducing offspring in marriage, the purpose of which is different than the traditional Chinese view of "the worst of the three transgressions of filial piety is severing the family line". For the Chinese, offspring is for honoring one's own name; but God wanted man to have godly offspring (Mal 2:15), so the responsibility of serving God and ruling over the earth can be passed on through the generations to glorify God in all the earth. God has His purpose in establishing marriage and family, that is, mankind is not only shouldered with family responsibilities, but also with social responsibilities. This is the cultural mandate God gave man.

Standards of marriage

Three standards for marriage can be summarized from the Bible, and they still apply in the 21st century: (1) A man and a woman; (2) a husband and a wife; and (3) a lifetime.

Having a man and a woman means that marriage is the union between a man and a woman, and not the union between the same sexes. This was God's clear stipulation for marriage when He created Adam and Eve. The physiological design required for being fruitful and multiplying makes marriage proper only if it is between a man and a woman. Monogamy shows that God demands loyalty between the couple – that they trust each other completely, there is no third party, and neither of them dishonors the other (Heb 13:4). Monogamy also means that the couple is equal. Although they are created differently, in physiological and psychological aspects, and their functions, responsibilities, and scope of works are also different, they can only grow and mature in marriage when they complement one another. In God's heart, marriage is the covenant of a lifetime. After making the marital vow, only by strong commitment and holding fast to the covenant can the couple love each other and stay together for life.

Although God's standards for marriage are very high, only when mankind strives to achieve them will they produce a blissful and happy marriage and family. The key to this lies in that both the husband and wife exalt Christ as the head of the family, and become one in all aspects

in body, soul and spirit (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4-6; Eph 5:31). And as they face family and social responsibilities, they act in harmony and one accord to share the burden, thereby establishing a marriage and family that is pleasing to God.

The key to the Christian family after man's fall

After the first man sinned, mankind's marriage and family relationships have repeatedly reaped pain, brokenness and damage as a result of man's fall and sin. Yet God never abandoned His salvation plan for marriage and the family. In fact, He even achieved His purpose of salvation through a chosen family. God's choosing Abraham and making a covenant with Him was an important key in His plan for salvation. God promised Abraham countless descendents and blessing to all nations through him (Gen 12:1-3; 17:1-8). This selection by God had a condition and purpose; that is, Abraham would direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD would bring about for Abraham what He had promised (Gen 18:17-19).

Through Abraham, God raised a family and a people, and even a nation, so that they could be the LORD's witness among the nations. The nations are blessed because of Abraham's faith in God. Therefore, God wanted him to maintain this faith as the head of the household to lead, direct, and teach his children to understand and practice all that God had commanded, and to do what is just, so that God's glory may be revealed among the nations through his offspring. When the world knows that the LORD is the master of the universe and the One who makes the covenant of grace with mankind, they will be drawn to return and reconcile with Him. This important spiritual implication reveals the importance of the Christian family unit in today's church, for the purpose of fulfilling the great commission. Similar to God's commands to Abraham, so also today, that when families keep the way of the Lord, all nations will be blessed because of these families' testimonies.

The key to building a marital relationship and family – God's love

For marriage and family to be established in harmony, there must be love; harmony can never be achieved with reason and law. Yet this most vital factor of love cannot depend solely on

the efforts of the family members, because man's love is not perfect, and it requires God's salvation for renewal. Therefore, in building a Christian family, the most important thing is that the family members must all be connected to the source of love – God (1 John 4:19). It is having experienced and understood God's selfless, unreserved, and unconditional love that they are able to truly love with the love that is from God (see 1 Cor 13:4-8a). Only in doing so can the establishment of the family be stable and lasting.

Directions for Building a Christian Family

Building a Christian family requires a blueprint, and the directions for building correctly require at least eleven different aspects and functions in order to demonstrate the core values that a Christian family should possess. Below is a brief summary that would provide brothers and sisters with the substance and direction required for building a healthy Christian family.

1. Family is a dynamic work of art. The composition of family members and their lives are full of complexities and changes over time. Such a combination of dynamic lives makes it an artistic creation that needs energy to complete. The building process of a Christian family may not be perfect, but it will renew and change under the continuous guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is united yet diverse, regulated yet liberating, together yet individualistic; such is family.

2. Family is pure and fertile. In a fallen world tarnished by sin, family is a pure and fertile soil for growth, as well as an ecological environment for sound balance. Keeping and protecting this pure and sound balance requires continual effort from every family member, so that God's good and perfect will may nurture the growth of every member.

3. Family is a nurturing place that fosters creativity. God gave man creativity, and family is the base and key place for nurturing such creativity. This creativity must come from a healthy and balanced environment; otherwise, it will evoke destructive creativity. Beginning from a child's birth, family must become the best nursery for cultivating creativity, and for nurturing God's geniuses in acceptance and wholesomeness.

4. Family is the caring cradle. Interpersonal relationships in this world are intertwined and complicated. Family is the center for forming and

cultivating sound interpersonal relationships. Through the interactions of the world's most intimate relationships, man has the opportunity to face the weaknesses, shortcomings and darkness of human nature, and to learn in grace, so that man can learn to love, respect and complete each other.

5. Family is the safe house in the midst of storms. Man cannot be exempt from the storms of life, such as accidents, sickness and death. Family is the hiding place from these storms, within which are members who are loving, empathetic, caring, and wholeheartedly willing to provide a safe environment for optimal restoration for those hurt in body, spirit, and soul.

6. Family is the continuance of truth. The never ending relay of biblical truth is a function of family succession. Knowing the Almighty, and the knowledge of the fear of the LORD, must fill the entire family and be passed onto generations through continued teaching, frequent discussions, real life application, and ongoing observance.

7. Family is a living entity of shared experience. Financial stability and sufficiency is the foundation for family survival. Regardless of good or bad times, the members stay together to share financial responsibilities. There is, however, another trait vital to the health of Christian families, with regards to financial stewardship, and that is that they must understand that wealth is not the main basis for building a family.

8. Family is the control center for members' learning and education. Family is the control hub of learning for members (especially children), and should enable them to receive well-rounded and balanced education in various aspects, including: intellectual ability, spirituality, emotions, and physique. Every opportunity should be utilized, wherever and whenever possible, to teach and promote family member's development, with ongoing follow-up and supervision over an extended period of months and years.

9. Family is the museum of memories. Life is full many memories worth cherishing. Every memory points to traces of God's work, and family can be the best museum for collecting these memories. When family members understand the importance of storing up these memories, they will intentionally create many life

events worthy of remembrance, which will enrich the lives of every member.

10. Family is a door opened and closed at the right times. Family is the place for enjoying domestic bliss, as well as a place for sharing life with friends. Sometimes, it can even be a place for strangers to take refuge. However, family must have a door that can be opened and closed; there is a time for opening, and a time for closing.

11. Family is a wonderful balance. There are many relationships in the family that need to balance out. For example, roles and positions between the couple, and between parents and kids, must strike a balance. On the other hand, as time changes, the situation between dependence and independence also needs to be adjusted in order to strike the proper balance. Family, as it is a dynamic work of art, needs the balance of various relationships in the midst of dynamic changes in order to be stable.

These eleven aspects fairly and comprehensively demonstrate the substances necessary for building a healthy Christian family, and provide important signposts for this task. No matter what has happened in the past, every family that wishes to become a Christian family must begin building, using these guidelines, today. When looking at all of these aspects, we can see that God established family for man to experience His grace, and to enjoy its abundance and bliss. Moreover, this is what God had in store for everyone, and it is for man to keep. All we have to do is to turn to Him, and then we can regain Eden's richness and prosperity.

Issues of the day that affect the building of Christian families

In today's era, the prospect of building a Christian family faces many challenges. It is difficult to know how the church should best help believers build these healthy families. Recognizing the times, trends, and self-examination will help believers, and the church, explore together how to best go about making the necessary changes, adjustments, and preventative measures and boundaries. The following aspects need our urgent reflection:

1. Post-modern thoughts of rationalization and relativism have become mainstream, causing marriage and family views to be distorted. Cohabitation, premarital sex, trial marriage,

extramarital affairs, divorce, homosexuality/same sex marriage, and other phenomena have, under the influence of this trend, become acceptable in society as behaviors to be accepted, and even encouraged. The issue of same-sex marriage in California is one such example. While not dealing with these phenomena with an approach of condemnation or escape, the church and Christian families must let the world see that marriage and families built on biblical truth can produce real benefits and value. The world needs to see the goodness and abundance thereof, discern the vanity hidden behind contemporary pursuits, and thereby envy Christians and turn to God. This challenge is enormous, and some churches today have already been influenced by the world, and lack the ability to teach and discern what is morally right. This is especially prevalent among youth today. The teaching and practice of the truth have become urgent matters in today's church.

2. Parental absence results in an abnormal family life for the next generation, who lacks the education and example of parents and cannot properly pass on the substances and functions that a family should have. Under the impact of modern life and work patterns, as well as the brokenness and disintegration of families, parental roles have progressed from absence and single-parent to parentless situations (where children are nurtured and brought up by grandparents). Besides undermining the integrity of family life, parental absence more critically disables children from learning to be a man/woman, wife/husband, and father/mother from their parents, and even causes the same situation to repeat from one generation to the next, which continues to produce unhealthy families. Such a situation is also seen in the families of brothers and sisters in the church. How we face up to this problem is quite a challenge, as it involves how one achieves an effective balance in family life, parental roles, church ministry, and work. This is an area that the church is lacking in discussion and resolution, and it's undertaking must be sped up. Moreover, the church also needs to help brothers and sisters value parental roles, and further train them to be parents, so as not to cause a lost link in the family's generational succession.

3. Internet technology brings damage to marriages, especially the hurt brought about by

distorted cyber matrimones. The World Wide Web brings interpersonal relationships closer. Not limited by time and space, it changes the way people interact. Cyber love, cyber marriage, solicitation and other phenomena have emerged as a result, and are developing rapidly in all sectors, including the youth. Due to the virtual nature of the cyber world, man cannot judge who he is interacting with. While the relationships developed seem to have no substance, it is enough to endanger a person's friendships, marriage or family in the real world. It also produces a compounding destructive effect on existing marriage and family values that were already incorrect, so that interpersonal relationships cannot be maintained and developed with consolidation, making the breaking-up or staying-together of a relationship, and even a marriage, a flash-of-a-second decision. Such development naturally makes man feel disappointed with his marriage and family. How we face this challenge is not a question that can be easily answered, but it needs the church's commitment. Particularly for the youth (including those in the church), how we counsel and prevent these dangers must be a primary focus, as they are the biggest victims of these phenomena. If there is no correct truth and teaching in the near future, their future marriages and family will be a grave concern.

4. The church's mentality of ignoring or neglecting her ministry to Christian families makes building these families a slogan rather than action. In recent years, the church has been passionate in missionary and evangelism works, and has devoted effort and resources to setting up churches in various places. However, the church lacks attention and influence on the deterioration of morality in society, particularly in regards to the breakdown of marriage and family. Christian marriage and family standards continue to be questioned, challenged, and destroyed by the general public. Apart from feeling concerned for this situation, and reminding believers from the pulpit, the church has not adopted any concrete action to respond, and has even fallen short of teaching believers to apply God's immutable truth in drastic life situations. There are several reasons for this. One is that we are not aware of the severity of the situation. Another is our inability to respond to challenges (both in theology and practice). Also, the church lacks

examples of Christian families. If the church is to truly affect the world through brothers and sisters' building Christian families, we must address these three aspects. Beginning with awareness, and then through reflection, learning, and change, construction will take place step by step until the tide has finally been turned.

5. The lack of instilling the need for the husband father to be the spiritual head of the house. The "head" of the house does not mean a representative who controls, has the right to rule, or is superior. Rather, it is the acting out of such leadership functions as presiding, leading, guiding, protecting, providing, holding fast to the truth, maintaining order, and defending against the evil's one's attacks. This is the leadership that God desires from the husband/father as the head of the house, so that he can lead the whole family to understand His will, and can put His commands into practice. Also, the husband/father is to let every member enjoy the warmth, comfort and protection of family, and to utilize all that has been given to them by God. Such leadership is the role and responsibility entrusted to husbands/fathers by God. Unfortunately, this leadership style, which is supposed to come from the husband/father, is no longer easy to see in society, or even in churches, today. However, this style is the key factor for building a Christian family, and is the necessary mechanism for reversing the trend of family breakdown. Therefore, brothers must be awakened to undertake this mission and challenge, and must strive to build families pleasing to God. The church must also become a group entity that encourages the brothers into taking up this responsibility as head of the family.

Factors that cannot be ignored in building a Christian family

The building of Christian families cannot be accelerated. It needs the concerted efforts of the family members over many years in order to have any effect. However, just as towering buildings are constructed from the ground up, so also the building of a Christian family begins with small actions. Regardless of a family's current status, in addition to the guidelines provided in the aforementioned text, three concepts and methods must be noted for those who desire to build a Christian family:

1. Cultivate correct perception, and understand that pastoring is the necessary responsibility of parents for building a Christian family. A Christian family does not naturally come into being because the husband and wife believe in the Lord, or because there are Christian portraits or Bibles placed in their home. It comes into being because the husband and wife build, maintain, and look after their family with the mindset of a pastor. When there are children, the pastoral role of parents will be even more obvious, as the molding of disciples begins in the family, to which priority and emphasis should be given. Parents today often outsource their parental roles, and unfortunately, churchgoers are no exception. In particular, they outsource the responsibility of nurturing spiritual lives to the church, without realizing that parents are most important in shaping their children into disciples. Therefore, if we are to build Christian families, we must know that family is the center of Christian education. Parents should exercise the commands in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Not only should they instruct their children to study, trust and obey God's words, they also should lead by example, and live out their lives as testimonies, so that their children may believe the authenticity of the faith, and become the Lord's disciples themselves.

2. Realize the critical influence the family of origin has on the current family, and learn from both positive and negative influences. Families shape a person's personality, and affect his/her growth of character, interpersonal development, and emotional control. Subconsciously, family also affects the approach a person adopts when facing the deepest emotions, interactions, and understanding in intimate relationships. Familial influences from childhood, either positive or negative, will be brought into the new family as a result of the couple's union, which will become the environment for shaping the next generation. How one does not continue the negative effects from his/her growth process in the new family is an important lesson in one's life journey. Therefore, the couple or parents must discern the influences they were subjected to in their family of origin. Through self-examination, they should analyze the negative impacts during their formative years, discover their various "emotional buttons," and seek ways to change and control these influences. At the same time, they should use the same approach to understand and accept

the healthy influences, so that they can take a step forward to create a healthy and cozy home together. When children have a safe, healthy, and loving environment for growth, it is a positive influence on their own prospects of building families and careers in the future. The Christian family life we have practiced and built will become a model that will be imitated by our children.

3. Establish family worship: The starting point for spreading the gospel is family, and establishing family worship is the key. As all family members come together in worship, their homes will be filled with the fragrance of Christ, so that when unbelieving friends, relatives, and neighbors visit, it will be as if they are entering a room of irises and orchids (in good and pleasant company). Family worship is a weekly gathering of family devotion, planned and led by the parents, and has an appropriate duration of approximately thirty minutes. By coming together in worship, thanksgiving, praise, reading God's word, sharing life's moments, praying for one another, and edify one another in love, the whole family is able to fulfill the responsibility of being each other's priest, and can taste the true meaning of Christ as the head of the family.

Conclusion

In the face of worrying about various family situations both within and outside of the church, building Christian families is an urgent need today! As EFC continues to move forward in development, this calling is important. The degree to which Christian families are built up and established in the church reflects her spiritual life condition. If we are to develop healthy families, the church must have a solid inner life as her foundation for stable development. Therefore, we would like to call upon all believers to examine their current family situation, and to renew, adjust, and change by the grace of God, and strive to build a Christian family with Joshua's proclamation "**As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.**" (Josh 24:15) as our declaration. Ultimately, may the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob become the God served and worshipped by every family of EFC, from generation to generation.

Note: See Schaeffer, Edith, *What is a family?* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1975).

Chinese translation, *Sweet family*, trans. by Tsai Hsiu Yan, Taipei: Campus Books, 1979.

Gifts and talents are one of the most important resources necessary for Christians to serve the Lord and complete their entrusted missions. In order for every Christian to have an effective ministry, the use and development of their talents and gifts is one of the critical factors. Correctly using and developing one's talents and gifts comes down to being a faithful and insightful steward. Therefore, the Lord's workers must have a correct understanding on two things; namely, "gifts and talents" and "stewardship," and must apply them in service.

On gifts and talents

Regarding the skills and abilities required for service by Christians, "gifts and talents" is a simplified statement that is familiar to all in the Chinese churches, and is often generally called the "gifts". When explored in greater detail, gifts and talents can be classified into three levels: natural abilities, acquired skills, and spiritual gifts.

Natural abilities refer to a person's innate and acquired skills, abilities, knowledge, or qualifications to complete certain tasks. Spiritual gifts, on the other hand, are the unique abilities given by God to every believer to use, either once or repeatedly, to engage in a ministry that is "empowered by the Holy Spirit".

Abilities in these three aspects ultimately come from God; they are His presents (gifts) to the individuals. Whether one believes in Christ or not, God has given to all unique natural abilities, as well as the intelligence and opportunities, to learn skills that are required for livelihood and work. However, unbelievers they do not possess spiritual gifts. This is because spiritual gifts are given by God to every believer, according to His will, in order for God to bring about ministries filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, and for brothers and sisters to edify one another, build the church, and expand God's kingdom in the world.

As more research is being conducted, category classification and identification means of natural abilities are becoming more mature and practical. There are even professional identification institutions that are designed to help people better understand their innate abilities. When man utilizes his natural abilities, he feels like fish in the water, which is the most

apparent distinction from using skills acquired from learning alone. The latter makes people feel consumed.

After man believes in Christ, the Holy Spirit will give to him the spiritual gifts as He pleases, in order to bring out Holy Spirit-empowered ministries. Therefore, if a person uses his/her spiritual gifts to serve, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit can be clearly felt during and after the ministry, and is not limited to using those so-called supernatural gifts for it to appear.

To serve the Lord, abilities in these three aspects are all needed; we cannot just use the spiritual gifts. When engaging in a certain ministry, we may use the abilities, endowment, skills or qualifications of one, or a combination of each of these three aspects. We must seek more rigorously all the goodness and abilities given by the Holy Spirit, and seek His presence and work in ministry.

For every worker serving the Lord, exploring, identifying, and developing these items, and the overall combination of these three aspects, are very important, and is the work of a lifetime. Due to limited space, we cannot here explain in detail how to explore, identify, and develop the gifts and talents. Interested readers are encouraged to read related books, attend relevant training, and obtain assistance from qualified institutions.

Understanding the spiritual gifts

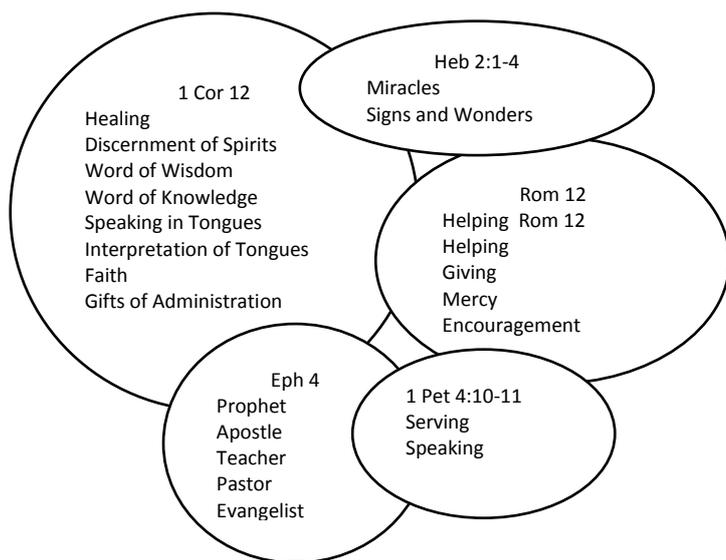
Spiritual gifts are the key to participation in service. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to each believer as He determines (1 Cor 12:11), for the sake of building up the church. The Holy Spirit does this after a person believes in the Lord and becomes a member of the church. Often, however, the lack of knowledge on spiritual gifts causes believers to fail to identify and use them. Therefore, understanding spiritual gifts is important to the service of both the church as a whole, and to individual believers.

The use of spiritual gifts are affected by the following factors: Scripture that identifies the spiritual gifts; acceptance or disagreement regarding theological positions on today's use of some spiritual gifts; the individual's experience in using the spiritual gifts; theological concepts on how the Holy Spirit works; views on how the spiritual gifts work among the body;

considerations of different denominations; and others.

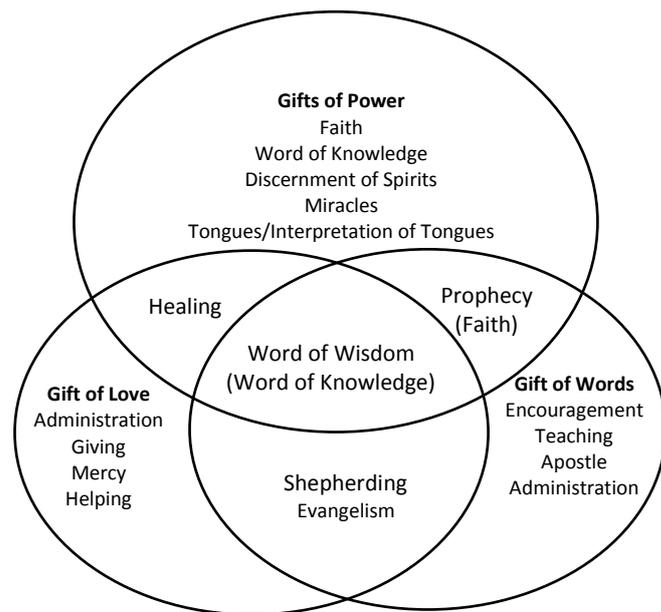
The Bible has several direct references to spiritual gifts. The Apostle Paul’s discussion is the main one (Rom 12, 1 Cor 12 and Eph 4), while secondary accounts include Hebrews 2:1-4 and 1 Peter 4:10-11. Spiritual gifts are the abilities uniquely given by God to every believer so that, through these believers, works that are induced and powered by the Holy Spirit can be produced.

The diagram below demonstrates the spiritual gifts mentioned in these scripture verses.



In order to be more effective in considering the relationship between the spiritual gifts, we can divide the spiritual gifts mentioned above in three major categories: gifts of words, gifts of power, and gifts of love (as shown in the diagram below). (Note)

The gifts of words refers to the abilities/natural endowments that are related to knowing and applying God’s word. The gifts of power has to do with manifestation of the extraordinary powers of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of love reveal God’s great love. If a church is to have spiritual vitality, and grows and matures regularly, then she must develop a healthy balance between these three aspects, so as not to result in biased, chaotic and even strayed situations.



Composition of the gifts of power, gifts of words and gifts of love

For pastoral and lay leaders to lead the church effectively, they must have the gifts of words. This is because the church’s spiritual leaders must lead with God’s will as the goal, the regulatory means, and the ultimate end. And this necessity is rooted in the leader’s knowledge and understanding of God’s words, and in their knowing how to implement God’s words to lead the church. Therefore, church leaders must plead with God to bestow the gift of words upon them, so that the church can be led according to God’s will.

God is the source and power behind the gifts. These gifts, given by the Holy Spirit, and the manifestation of the Spirit’s power, are not for personal glory, but for the common good of the church (1 Cor 12:7). From Paul’s analogy of the body (1 Cor 12:12-30; Rom 12: 4-8), we confirm and honor the different functions of different parts of the body, and believe that we must live in God’s love, and live by relying on, complementing, and serving one another. As we edify one another, believers will be equipped, the church will be built up (Eph 4:11), and God will be glorified!

The “steward” values in the Bible

“Steward,” as the name suggests, is not the owner or host of the inheritance, but rather one who is entrusted to manage the inheritance on another’s behalf. Ever since Adam was created and mandated with the responsibility to subdue

the earth and rule over all living creature in the sea, in the sky, and on the ground, man became a steward before God. This has been a consistent theme throughout the Bible. God wants man to assume management responsibilities as he enjoys His abundant giving.

In the Old Testament, Abraham's elder servant, Eliezer of Damascus (Gen 15:2; 24), depicts the characteristics of a steward. Not only did he manage Abraham's family wealth, but at one time he also acted on behalf of the senior master to choose a wife for the junior master. This responsibility meant that the steward was given full authority to stand in the master's place, and to make decisions on his behalf. This kind of responsibility is significantly different than that of an employee. Given that he was not the owner of the property, the steward's greatest challenge was to look after and manage the wealth to the best of his ability. Man usually does not give his all to things not his own; yet, the Bible expects a steward to be like Eliezer.

When Jesus was preaching in the world, he mentioned several parables related to stewardship. For example, the dishonest manager (Luke 16:1-13), and the faithful and wise manager (Luke 12) are important stories found in the Gospels. Toward the end of His ministry, Jesus even used the parables of servants entrusted with wealth (Mat 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27) to remind the disciples of their unique identities. The core message of these parables is that, between Jesus' leaving this world and coming again, the disciples are to be alert, use time wisely, perform good works entrusted to them by the Lord with diligence, and to become faithful and insightful stewards, who can manage and use every opportunity and resource given by God, especially the gifts and talents, to expand His kingdom and accomplish His mission. When Jesus returns, they will be expected to hand over their accounts to Him who will judge them according to each one's faithfulness and fruits.

Jesus' commands and reminders are very important ministry values, and are applicable to all Christians. Every Christian has been given unique, gifts, talents, and personality traits, and has been given equal opportunities to grow and develop for the work of the kingdom. God expects us to build up our natural abilities, skills and gifts, to maximize our potential (Eph 2:8-10), and to

accomplish His will and glorify Him. We must also be responsible for how we use those opportunities and resources in our lives, so that we can hand over our accounts to God.

There is another important principle behind these parables; that is, we must recognize that all opportunities and resources in a man's life are given to him by God. What man holds in his hands are God's resources, not "my resources"; and his responsibility is to use his opportunities and resources are for the purpose of God Himself, not his own purposes. Man's thoughts are to transform from "how much can I give to God?" to the steward's perspective of thought, "How much must I keep for myself?".

For church leaders, the responsibility of a steward not only entails accountability to God in his/her personal life, but also the handing over of accounts to God, based on the impact that has resulted from his or her leadership, as well as their followers' actions and performance. God has higher standards and requirements for His leaders.

Steward values applied to gifts and talents

As we apply stewardship values to our gifts and talents, every believer must discover what gifts and talents he/she has, and must understand how they relate to and complement each other when integrated together. For example, the gift of evangelism is often combined with the gift of love, for mutual reinforcement, to achieve better ministry results. Further learning to understand and discern which gifts and talents are primary and secondary should be engaged in, so as to work at making the primary gifts and talents the core ministry application. In addition, becoming a steward with gifts and talents also means that the individual must be accountable for the continued development of these talents and gifts. From possessing to mature application, it is a continuing process of learning and practice, which is an important concept that is often overlooked.

For pastoral and lay leaders, there is one more layer of responsibility from the steward's point of view. In addition to being responsible for discovering and developing gifts and talents throughout their lives, so that the leaders' works of service may be effective and fruitful, they must also help the congregation, and those around them, by understanding and applying their own gifts and talents. Through their teaching,

encouragement, example and guidance, members of the congregation will also discover and develop their gifts and talents for service, which further promotes the operation and overall leadership of the church, and the working and development of ministries. For EFC leaders, this is another undertaking and challenge of leadership work. Below are some stewardship tips for leaders.

Leaders' personal development

- The development of a leader's gifts and talents is the core of leadership development. Service ultimately comes from who the leader is, and gifts and talents make up the key part of this "is".
- As a leader leading the church/institution, he/she must affirm and develop all the individual endowment and abilities (gifts and talents are part of it), so that he/she can become an effective leader. This must be a lifelong process of learning and effort.
- More seriousness is needed in facing up to the "stewardship" responsibilities of a leader, because God's standards for leaders' application of gifts and talents are higher.
- The leader should know that, at important moments in life, a combination of personal gifts and talents should be the basis for a wise career choice. This is because God's giving man gifts and talents has everything to do with the life mission which God wishes to complete through him.
- Due to understanding the combination of one's gifts and talents, the leader will be purposeful and proactive in accomplishing something for God. In other words, a focused and attentive life of service will result.

Facilitating leadership and ministry undertaking and development

- Leaders are to know that they must be ultimately responsible for from the impact of their leadership, and for the actions and performance of their followers.
- Through understanding and applying these concepts of gifts and talents, leaders are to help young leaders explore their gifts and talents, and propose advice for their development in the next stage, thereby fulfilling the young leaders' personal

development, and facilitating the continuation and further development of ministries.

- When designating ministry roles and posts to co-workers, leaders need to make pertinent and good decisions, through understanding the combinations of their personal gifts and talents that enable them to serve, and develop their ministry according to their gifts and talents.
- Where there are co-workers with different gifts and talents, the leaders can co-ordinate divisions of labor according to their knowledge of the co-workers (differences and similarities in gifts and talents, personalities and other aspects) to facilitate integration of ministries and building together.
- Leaders should correct the imbalance or unhealthy situations that may result from the underuse or excessive emphasis placed on some gifts.

Conclusion

As EFC looks forward to future development, we believe that God has entrusted something to every layperson and leader, as well as to the church as a whole. This requires an all-out mobilization, where we take up the identity and spirit as the steward of God's kingdom, and make good use of our individual gifts and talents to participate in various works of service. During this process, we also need pastoral and lay leaders to use their leadership gifts and talents to lead the people of God. Through everyone's participation, we can build a church that is pleasing to God, and that is able to accomplish the great mission entrusted to us by our Lord Jesus.

Note: See Clinton, J. Robert, and Richard W. Clinton, *Unlocking Your Giftedness* (Altadena, CA: Barnabas Publishers, 1993), 126.

Part III Church Governance Concepts and Practices

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Every church has some form of leadership structure. All throughout church history, there have been different types of church leadership. Regardless of which type, however, the essential criterion for healthy church growth is effective leadership. This importance is also demonstrated in the development process of EFC.

After 40 years of development, EFC has derived its own leadership and governance model. This article is an explanation of the concepts and development of our leadership structure, and focuses the discussion mainly on the church's core leadership. Following the addition of churches and diversity of ministries, and in the face of today's increasingly complicated situations, EFC's church leadership and governance model will need to be constantly reconsidered and strengthened. As such, this article will also provide some bases and suggestions for re-thinking.

Development of EFC's core leadership structure

Development of EFC's core leadership structure is closely related to the EFC spirits. Although the founders highly respected the role and function of clergy in church leadership, the EFC spirits were consolidated from several important values, and resulted in the formation of EFC's leadership structure.

These important values include: learning to be a church that glorifies the Lord, and waits upon God's guidance; having church members who are pure in heart towards the Lord, and who love one another with humility and mutual respect; and, being a large group of people devoted to service, by way of teamwork and collaboration. In such an atmosphere, this group of co-working teams, which includes pastors and lay people, labors as one. Together, they offer their time, money, individual gifts, and talents. From pastoral care to governance, we see that the fruit of these works comes from effective division of labor and teamwork. Under this fear of God, as well as the concerted team work of pastoral workers and lay persons, EFC has been led by the Holy Spirit to form a core leadership structure that is today characterized by the dual leadership and governance of full-time clergy and lay leaders.

Development of EFC's leadership structure has its precedence from the leadership model of

the Jerusalem Church in the early days of the church. After the Holy Spirit came on the day of the Pentecost, about three thousand believers were added to the Jerusalem Church. From that day on, these believers feared God, worshipped in one accord, and shared all things together. The apostles' teaching and authority became the key in consolidating the believers, as well as in leading and governing the church (see Acts 2:41-47). However, as the church continued to develop an increased number of disciples, the Hellenistic Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews, saying that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

In the face of this problem, which was caused by growth, the apostles found that effective administrative management was necessary to reinforce the ministry of the word of God. They believed that they needed to continue in the work of the gospel. Therefore, the apostles prayed for discernment in their purpose and calling, which was to focus on prayer and the ministry of the word. As for administrative affairs and resource allocation, there needed to be support from others, so that the ministry of the word of God could go unhindered. The apostles asked the Church to choose seven qualified men to undertake these administrative and governing responsibilities. As for the criteria for choosing these administrative co-workers, the apostles clearly stated that they should have good reputation, be filled by the Spirit, and be full of wisdom (see Acts 6:2-4).

The leadership principles and methods, which were developed by the apostles for the Jerusalem Church, serve as the basis for EFC to follow in terms of leadership. The primary example set by in this example is the aspect of the division of labor. When dealing with church work, it is not appropriate for clergy to take all responsibility themselves, but to share it with lay people. Therefore, in the EFC system, pastors preside over pastoral care, prayer, and ministry of the word, and lay leaders preside over administrative and governance responsibilities. According to the apostolic teachings, clergy are to pay attention to "prayer and ministry of the word." Therefore, the senior pastors must lead the pastoral team (if the church has a pastoral team of co-workers), in order to devote themselves to prayer and the word of God, and to pay attention to receiving the word of God, so

that they can teach, shepherd, and equip believers to mature in Christ (Eph 4:11-16). On the other hand, lay leaders lead and undertake matters of church administration, governance, conduct planning, implementation, liaison of various church departments, and church property repair and maintenance. Basically, these lay leaders are to carry out nitty-gritty church matters, all of which serve as a strong foundation for church operation.

In terms of leadership responsibility, pastors are to lead and be responsible for truth and spiritual guidance, while elders and deacons must respect the spiritual authority that the pastoral team assumes, by understanding the word of God. They ought to take the position of advising, collaborating, and supporting the pastors. When elders and deacons sense different directions, or burdens in spiritual guidance, they may make suggestions to the pastoral team, but should let the team or senior pastor make the final decision. Likewise, with regards to administrative affairs, pastors need to trust and respect the elders and deacons for their administrative guidance. When pastors have different opinions, they may make recommendations, but elders and deacons should have the final say as the predominant leaders. Nevertheless, for this leadership structure to work effectively, both the pastoral and lay leaders must all have good reputations, be filled by the Holy Spirit, be full of wisdom, and be men of humility and maturity.

With this type of support, division of labor, cooperation, mutual supervision, and restraint, the word of God will be promoted outwardly through the church. In the history of EFC's development, we see that when pastoral teams and lay leaders seek God's will in one accord, the church will grow and spring up, one after another. This is the working spirit, not only in local churches, but also in the EFCGA. The EFCGA received the 90/25 vision in 1986, and the 20/50 missionary and church planting goal in 1996. These goals were birthed and completed due to the prayer and unity of all co-workers. We must press on with this same spirit of leadership if we hope to accomplish the EFC Jubilee's 2020-200-20000 missionary and church planting goals.

Probing different leadership structures

Although EFC's core leadership structure adopts the model of dual leadership and governance by pastoral and lay leaders, by examining the church leadership structures from different eras, backgrounds, and geographical regions, we will be able to reflect, collate, and comprehend the good and bad points and limits of EFC's leadership structure, and further understand how we can strengthen the existing leadership. Currently, commonly seen church leadership structures are the Congregationalist polity, Presbyterian polity, Episcopal polity, and enterprise leadership model, which is influenced by contemporary enterprise management.

The Congregationalist polity is where every member is directly involved in decision making, and sets the direction for ministry. That is, all will gather and convene in meetings for church affairs; it is very democratically oriented. However, unless it is a very small church, very few churches are Congregationalist or able to exercise the spirit of all-out participation of a Congregationalist polity. As far as EFC is concerned, with so many members, it will be difficult for her leadership to function and form a consensus under the Congregationalist polity.

The Presbyterian polity is a system of representatives, where the church members choose or appoint representatives, such as deacons and elders, to represent the congregation and participate in the governance and execution of church meeting motions. In churches with this denominational heritage, local churches will choose or appoint representatives to participate in the decision-making and execution of regional assemblies and general assemblies. This form of governance is more common in modern day churches. The governance structure in EFC is based on the Presbyterian polity, where active members choose elders and deacons to govern the church, and then add the hired reverends and pastors into positions of core leadership, in the hope that they will exercise the function of leading the church in the aspects of truth and spirituality.

Representative form of governance sometimes will appear in the form of a general business model, where the Board of Elders or Church Council is akin to the Board of Directors, the Chairperson akin to the President, the Senior Pastor is the CEO, and other pastoral co-workers

are employees of the church. In this situation, although the CEO is entrusted with the day-to-day responsibility and authority, the person with the real power is the president. The abilities and service performance of the pastors are subject to appraisals. Should they underperform, there is the possibility of being replaced. For clergy who are called to serve and have visions, they will not work in this type of church, as they feel like they are employees, rather than workers who have answered God's call. They feel that the boss is the Board of Elders and its Chairperson. This imbalance in power often renders the pastoral workers powerless. Pastors who serve in this kind of church can only observe, please, and follow man's orders, and act as per command, always getting ready to be retired. This kind of church will not grow. And of course, this type of leadership model is not what we expect to see in EFC.

The Episcopal polity has its present-day corresponding extension from the single leadership structure, where the pastoral worker (in particular, the senior pastor) is the main leader. The senior pastor has great powers, liberty, and autonomy to determine the church's direction. The main basis for adopting this type of leadership structure is that clergy have the calling from God to lead the church. And they have had theological training, so they have spent more time than laypersons in routine church leadership. The advantage of this kind of church is that a ministry can be ongoing and consistent, so long as the pastor is in charge. This is because lay leaders have fixed terms, which are quite short, so it is not easy to engage in long-term thinking and planning. If a pastoral co-worker has the vision from the Lord, the right direction, and good implementation, then he/she will be very efficient, resulting in a very effective ministry. However, there is also an immensely inherent danger, as there will be the tendency that the minister is not accountable to anyone but God. Yet man is weak. If he falls, damages to the church will be greater than anything. Ministers have blind spots, too; their perspectives have limitations, and many angles often cannot be seen from the minister's perspective. If they are in the wrong in receiving visions and strategies, the church will be at loss. Today, there are many churches led in this structure that are blessed by God. The main reason for their success is that their ministers are open in their thoughts and approaches to ministry,

and they are willing to hear different voices, so that they are able to lead the church in the right direction.

Rethinking the EFC leadership structure

As we examine these different leadership structures, we must face the fact that no single leadership structure will function perfectly and without flaw, because, while the structure regulates, it is also a limitation and cannot entail every detail. Moreover, it doesn't necessarily suit every member. Therefore, instead of pursuing a "single" perfect leadership structure, we should consider how we can effectively, suitably, flexibly, and dynamically continue to develop the leadership structure required by and ideal for EFC. Despite the fact that EFC adopts the dual leadership and governance of pastoral and lay leaders as her core leadership structure, like all other leadership structures, she must also face several issues as she considers the prospects of what is required of leadership.

1. Position, role, and function of the pastoral co-workers and lay leaders. The wrong division of sacred and secular (division of clergy and lay persons) more or less impacts the formation of the church's leadership structure. The Bible clearly states the teaching of the "priesthood of all believers" (1 Pet 2:9). That is, whether full-time pastors or part-time lay persons, they all have the same identity and position as the priest between God and man. Their roles and contents of service, however, come from God's appointment and calling to serve different functions in the church. Yet even in their differences, they are to serve the same Lord together, and every member is called by God to serve. During the process of service, God will raise leaders to lead His people; some will specialize in spiritual leadership, while others will be responsible for the administration of general affairs. These are principles that EFC has always adhered to and shown in our leadership structure. As EFC continues to develop, how full-time pastoral and lay leaders continue to uphold the truth of the priesthood of all believers, while displaying unity and harmony from different callings and leadership functions, will be a goal that needs to be worked on continuously.

2. How we cultivate core leaders, and formulate actions to facilitate. The church expects quality leadership, but quality leadership

comes from quality leaders, and quality leaders need to be nurtured. For dual leadership of pastoral and lay leaders to work effectively, both must be quality leaders. For current leaders (whether pastoral or lay leaders), how we can continue to facilitate their progress in holistic maturity and leadership will be the key to EFC's continuing production of effective leadership. In fact, in the life of the church, administration and pastoral care often overlap where the responsibilities, obligations, and powers of both areas overlap. This is a time of testing the maturity (especially spirituality and personality) of pastoral and lay leaders. As they face the ministry, if they can respect each other, and think and pray together, then they can lead the entire congregation more effectively towards the same direction.

Due to tenure and leadership changeover, leadership succession is another serious issue, and must be considered separately from the other two aspects. One is how we recruit externally, or train internally, full-time pastors, and facilitate their integration into the leadership team. The other is how we can prepare (select and cultivate) and choose among the lay persons, and help them fulfill their gifts and talents to become the church's elders and deacons, and to take part in church leadership. Concerning these two aspects, we currently take more of an institutional approach, but we need to develop the aforementioned concepts into actual practice. Such efforts will lay a more solid foundation for the functioning of EFC's core leadership.

3. How pastoral and lay leaders could work with each other in actual leadership operation to generate group leadership capabilities. In the life of the church, actual situations of collaboration between pastoral and lay leaders offer some important and relevant thoughts.

Many ministry resources often come from lay leaders, since they come from all walks of life, and their experiences and resources (such as finances, interpersonal network) can become a blessing for the church. Lay leaders have a wide array of experiences and expertise that can be an example for other lay persons, who generally find it easier to relate to them than to ministers and pastors. Therefore, a lay leaders' good example will bring subtle change among the laypersons. Lay leaders also tend to hold a similar point of

view to their brothers and sisters, are better equipped consider how they could attain balance between family, work and service. This is the angle sometimes neglected by pastoral co-workers who have offered themselves for the Lord, which has often resulted in the lay leaders not being able to keep up with the minister's pace in developing a ministry full on. Nevertheless, lay leaders also have their limitations. If not careful, they may bring in secular practices that negatively affect the church; they dislike too much change, and tend instead to seek stability; and they have tenure, and sometimes simply want to complete their term of service. These situations all have adverse effects for a church seeking development.

Pastoral co-workers are more likely to focus on spiritual principles, thus helping the church to preserve the truth, and act according to God's will. However, sometimes their over spiritualization may be out of touch with reality; this is to be avoided. Another fact that we must face is that the driving force of ministry development often comes from the pastoral co-workers (in particular, the senior pastor). A church without a senior pastor will find it difficult to consolidate vision, ministry direction, and strategy. In the absence of a driving force for development, churches usually won't grow. Even if there are strong church councils, they usually seek to keep the status quo. If the senior pastor and other pastors are not serving with the mentality of the property keeper, they will definitely want the church to grow. And because of their training, experience, and opportunities, they tend to be more capable of long-term thinking and planning of the ministries. When the senior pastor leads with passion and thrives, it will inspire church members to follow suit. However, should the senior pastor go too fast in the development, or should his vision not match reality, tension will result between the pastor and lay leaders, which can cause the minister to fall into a situation of disappointment, powerless and with no one to talk to.

The above circumstances show that the prerequisite for a successful co-governance system of pastoral and lay leaders is effective group leadership capabilities. This requires excellent communication and collaboration between the pastoral co-workers (minister's office) and lay leaders (board of elders/church council); otherwise, they will offset each other, which will result in a morbid relationship. Only

under the condition of selflessness, and very little church politics, can there be healthy leadership teams. Although the bylaws have laid out the operation of core leadership structure in local churches, what is most important is the tacit understanding of one another, in obedience to the Holy Spirit's guidance. Through communication, the senior pastor and all the core co-workers should consolidate the church's vision, mission, and core values, and develop and implement ministries, so as to facilitate church growth. Therefore, an important lesson we need to learn is to be able to produce and cultivate the leadership capabilities of the core leaders.

4. How we can achieve accountability and balance in the rights, responsibilities, duties, and power of the co-governance between pastoral and lay leaders. This is closely related to the previous issue, but requires more attention, because leadership in this world is subject to selfishness and the desire for power, which will bring damage, or even destruction. Whether it is pastoral co-workers or lay leaders, they all need checks of accountability and balance, so that they may be cautious about the use of power. This is very important.

However, thoughts on avoiding the negative effects of power may cause us to take a more passive approach towards power, and to overlook the fact that we can take a constructive angle to look at the positive effects that may result from accountability and checks and balances. When leaders selflessly agree and protect each other, for the sake of one another and of God, accountability, and checks and balances, not only restrain one another and offset each other's power, but also can become the driving force for balanced development, and a complementary, interdependent, respectful, and encouraging outcome. Obviously, this cannot be achieved by regulations and bylaws alone, because it is the result of a power operation that is highly artistic. For a more mature leadership structure within EFC that will function effectively, constructive and positive development of accountability and checks and balances will be necessary. Nevertheless, for effective accountability and check and balances to truly take place, leaders must face the fact that the difficulty of the problem ultimately lies with "man". It is not other people who stop a man from doing the work; it is himself. Therefore, getting to the bottom of the

matter, personal spiritual molding is a task that leaders must deal with seriously and in humility.

As EFC continues to develop the co-governance leadership structure of pastoral and lay leaders, we hope to see in this model the partnership between pastors and laypersons. With mutual respect and mindfulness, they will be able to put their gifts together and finish what God has entrusted. EFC's leadership structure is not established for playing the balance of power game, but the analogy of "double palm" can be used to demonstrate the essence of this leadership structure. This analogy shows that only the Lord Jesus is the head of the church. And of the double palm core leadership, one hand is the pastoral co-workers and the other is the elders (and deacons). It is only under the command of the head of church Jesus Christ, and through the cooperation of the two hands, that optimal work effects can be achieved. Although the two palms are different, even in the midst of these differences each specializes in his or her own, and seeks similarity in the differences, to make the whole leadership system more stable.

Conclusion

Any leadership structure, when put in practice, has its good and bad points and limitations. EFC's "double palm" system is no exception. However, from our understanding of biblical truth, the EFC spirit and leadership operation and development, and integration by analysis and induction of current situations in several aspects, we can see the value of keeping EFC's core leadership structure. If this leadership structure is to operate more effectively in the future, several aspects will require our attention.

1. The EFC spirits must continue to flourish: Exhorting the Lord and seeking God's heart need to be the ultimate end of church development; all are one in pursuing harmony, so as to stabilize and carry out leadership with harmonious relationships; emphasis must be placed on the spiritual growth of leaders, who must continue to practice their spiritual lives and face the darkness and shadows of their spirituality without compromise.

2. Whether it is pastoral or lay leaders, all leaders need to learn about holistic development and leadership enhancement (at both personal and group levels). This is not only about

spirituality, but is also related to the cultivation of ministry abilities and concepts. This is so that the leadership team may have the spiritual and ministry insight, action force, and implementation capabilities necessary for effective leadership.

3. All members of EFC must have a unified understanding, acceptance, and identification of the “double palm” co-governance leadership structure of pastoral and lay leaders. They should contend to learn obedience. Under the church leadership, which exhorts Jesus Christ as Lord, all should make concerted efforts to complete the mission entrusted to us by our Lord.

4. Today’s leaders face complex, diverse, changeable, and ambiguous circumstances, rather than static ones. The EFC’s “double palm” core leadership structure also needs to deliver the same leadership capabilities. We must distinguish the core truth, values, and principles from the methods and actions that may change as circumstances change. The key lies in understanding God’s will, that is, seeking God’s mandate and guidance for EFC through understanding the biblical truth and God’s plan of salvation. This is done so that, in this era of dramatic change, accurate and effective leadership may result.

Whether it is pastoral or lay leaders, let us work together, hand in hand, with a humble and open attitude in our own posts, to establish Christ’s glorious Church, and to spread God’s eternal gospel truth to the nations.

In the two thousand years of church history, church disunity and even schisms have often occurred due to different theological positions and faith practices, as well as various political factors. Church members have been wounded, and the Church has lost her testimony before the world. Today's Church, unfortunately, is no exception.

Ever since establishment, EFC has always upheld a spirit that we are a family of love in Christ. This spirit has stimulated EFC's continuous development, and pastors and congregations of various EFC churches have also put effort into seeking and maintaining church unity based on this spirit. Although it is often challenged, putting unity into practice, within and outside of the church, and in turn applying it in life and ministry, is still EFC's ideal.

True meaning of church unity

Church unity is God's will. The Church is a group, called by God, who not only calls men to repent, but also to unite in Christ, through faith in Him, and to reconcile with God as the body of Christ. This is the key difference between church and other secular groups.

Church unity is God's accomplishment, already fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Regardless of race, class, or sex, Christ's salvation on the cross has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility, so that believers are all one in Christ (Gal, 3:28; Eph 2:14) and heirs of God (Eph 3:6). Church unity is the display of Jesus' command to "love one another" before He left the earth (John 15:12, 17); it is also the focus of His prayer for the believers (John 17:11, 20-26). Through brothers and sisters' loving one another, the world may see, believe, and return to God, and become His children (1 John 4:12).

Church unity has its example based on the unity between the Father and Son. This unity means that there is no barrier, no distortion, and no darkness in God's relationship with Lord Jesus. Such unity has become the foundation for believers' unity.

Church unity is not a superficial uniformity or unification; it is, rather, a connection and coordination of contrasts and differences. Unity displays a body that has diverse functions, yet is perfectly connected and coordinated. This is

Paul's main discussion in 1 Corinthians 12. We need not compare the different parts of the body, nor can we compare, as each has its function and needs one another in grace.

In reality, church unity is not easy. The hardest aspect of unity is that brothers and sisters are unexpected strangers who are called to become a family. For a group of sinners who have received grace to love one another, share their lives, and live in unity, it takes a miracle, and is the corollary of God's work.

Church unity relies on relationship building, which includes our relationships both with God and other believers. This is the basis and substance of church life. The unity we expect to achieve in our horizontal relationship with other believers must be based on our vertical relationship with God. When believers are intimate with God in Christ, their lives will be renewed and changed. They can become one because their lives are of the same nature (John 6:57), and they can put their faith into practice in their daily lives, so that they may share with other parts of the body. Loving God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength will be transformed into a practice of loving others like yourself. And this experience, by grace, will enable believers to make peace with themselves and others, as well as to learn how to love one another.

Loving one another is not easy, which is why John clearly points out in his epistle that the motivation for loving one another comes from realizing God's love for us (1 John 4:10). When believers are willing to imitate Jesus Christ's self-sacrifice, and love one another according to how the Father loved the Son, and vice versa, such a group of sinners blessed by grace can then truly become one.

Factors affecting unity

Beginning from the Garden of Eden, Satan has never stopped attempting to destroy mankind's relationship with both God and fellow believers. In order to achieve this end, he has resorted to every conceivable means. From using lies to seduce the first couple to sin, until today, he has never stopped making man an enemy against God and one another. He will continue to work on it to the very end of the age. Today, this dark power is still the main force for destroying

church unity. In order for the church to be united, we must recognize the nature of this spiritual warfare.

On the other hand, sin has distanced mankind from one another. Even when man believes in Jesus Christ, and becomes a member of the church, the situation of church unity being broken due to man's imperfection will always exist, because his life has not yet been transformed and renewed to perfection.

In actual church life, two key factors affect unity. The first is the problem that comes from interpersonal relationships. This involves our attitudes and feelings towards other people, including how we see ourselves and others, and the correspondence in between. These factors determine how we treat others. Interpersonal conflict is often an important factor that undermines church unity. The second is the problem that comes from differences in cognition, perception, ideals, and values. This involves our concepts and approaches to ways of doing things and dealing with both people and affairs. From the big-scale church mission and vision, theological position, and church growth, to trivial matters such as whether the church office should add another computer, differences in cognition, perception, ideals, and values, often bring about conflicts.

These two key factors are often intertwined. When they occur together in a conflict, the degree of disruption to unity is compounded. Interpersonal conflicts require truly loving each other, as well as mutual tolerance, to establish unity in Christ. Differences in cognition, perception, ideals, and values, on the other hand, require negotiation and the willingness to seek the best ministry concepts and methods in order to create new scenes.

The above four points are the key fundamental directions that must be considered when dealing with church disunity. By relying on the Holy Spirit and, through review and analysis, we can address the problem and find the correct remedy to restore church unity.

EFC's special circumstances

When EFC was first developed, there was one major deciding factor, which was the desire to build a church in the North American immigrant society that exists so we can worship in

our own language and culture. At the time, members of the congregation mostly came from Taiwan, but some members came from different regions and different church traditions. Although all are Chinese, different regions have different cultural backgrounds. And when they gather in one place, there are different church traditions, rites, and forms of governance, coupled with different subcultures, all of which has different effects and impacts on the church. After developing the Mandarin and English ministries, differences in the values and ideologies of the subcultures have become more apparent, and there are also the impacts brought about by the clash between Chinese and Western cultures.

This complex situation, which stemmed from the crisscross of these factors, has placed the local churches and the EFCGA in a tension, that resulted from the integration of culture and tradition, as well as theology and practice. In recent years, the EFCGA has begun to emphasize the Taiwan Mission, and has established many churches in Taiwan. This new round of development has added a new type of member to our big family, so that the culture and ministry concepts of the new developmental stage must come together in unity. Under this condition, the "big family" unity faced by EFC is by far a greater challenge than that faced by general denominations, as it entails many aspects, including: interpersonal, generational, Chinese and Western, language and culture, theological thoughts and church traditions. As far as unity is concerned, the challenge is great and the price is high, but its witness is glorious.

Conservatively heading towards unity

Church unity is the Lord's command. And EFC faces many challenges in accomplishing this unity. In order to move toward unity, several directions for work are listed below:

1. Refuse the superficial fake unity in church, and pursue real unity in Christ. Chinese people underscore harmony as precious, but often what is kept is a superficial harmony. Church unity is not superficial harmony, but the relationship among body parts, which are interconnected by peace. Therefore, we are to learn forgiveness and appreciate one another's differences, so that when conflicts occur, we know how to make them into a constructive force.

2. Ensure that the focus for pursuing unity is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God (Eph 4:4-5). Believers have received the heavenly grace and the same calling to walk the same heavenly path. As such, we should be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love; and make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph 4:2-3).

3. Hold fast to the sound doctrine in the faith, which is the foundation for unity; seek common mission vision and value from God, as He is the ultimate end in the development of ministries; and be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guidance during the development process of ministries, handle situational needs, and correct accordingly by being pro-active, creative and flexible. In addition, seek unity in the most foundational truths; give liberty in non-fundamental truths; and give love in all things.

4. Believe that God Himself has endowed leaders with various spiritual gifts in order to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith (Eph 4:11-13a). Every member has different gifts and personalities, and should be respected regardless. Efforts should be made to work with one another to show church unity.

5. The local churches should strive to connect with one another by the common mission and visions of EFC, in accordance with all her spirits, bylaws, and traditions, to complete together what God has entrusted to us.

Conclusion

We believe that if we follow the Lord's command to love one another, and strive to maintain unity, then God will reveal His glory among us. His presence and His love will be the church's testimony before the world.

Regarding church work, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12, uses the human body as an analogy, and clearly points out that church work requires the participation of all members, whether big or small, to get involved and collaborate according to their gifts and talents. This means that serving in the church is for all of God’s people, not only for ministers or deacons and elders. In today’s words, ministry is a team matter.

In today’s complex and diverse era, we can no longer perform a one-man show if we wish to finish God’s mission, because the gifts, talents and professional skills required in ministry can no longer be provided by one individual. It has become a prerequisite for the church to be able to form gather quality teams at all levels in order to address the constantly changing and developing challenges of ministry today.

After 40 years of development, EFC, by God’s grace, is witnessing the fruit of our concerted efforts. Every local church, from the pastoral office, board of elders, and church council to the core leaders’ group of fellowships and small groups, has developed different combinations of ministry teams to undertake different functions, duties, and roles. The same situation is also evident in the various EFC institutions. Team ministry has always been the fundamental spirit for serving in EFC.

With the development of ministries in multiple languages, the increase of newly established churches, the joining together of existing churches, and the expansion of institutions, every leadership team, including the EFCGA, will need a new force for team ministry to face the various new challenges. Therefore, a basic understanding of team ministry will help various churches and institutions reach yet another new height in service.

Comparison between synergistic and consolidated teams and work groups

The working together of members in teams will take different forms, due to factors such as the number of members, their relationships, and the nature of the ministry involved. Regardless of the different forms, the key to assess whether it is a quality team or not

lies in the relationship between members, and their attitudes towards their team.

Members of quality team ministry will work to demonstrate their synergy as a group. This is just like the various parts, from head to toe, of a healthy body, that are well connected and closely coordinated to function as they should. When all work together, they produce a 1+1>2 effect. Members recognize that their relationship to their team identity is (the team belongs to) “us” and not “you-me-it”.

Quality teams don’t naturally form simply by putting a group of people together. Under certain goals, duties, and regulations, a group of people can indeed work together, but they won’t necessarily produce a quality team performance. This kind of team, strictly speaking, can only be defined as a working group.

A truly quality team will demonstrate the characteristic of synergy and cohesion. The bonding of brothers and sisters” will be naturally visible in the team where an individual would become the collaborator, facilitator, and protector (especially in the face of spiritual warfare) of other co-workers. The diagram below is a comparison of characteristics between a quality team and a working group.

Synergistic Team	Working Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonly significant and shared goals to achieve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals’ goals are coordinated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals are accountable and report to the team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals are accountable and report to the immediate superiors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdependence and cooperation, and bearing of each other’s weaknesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independently working to bear one’s own responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on renewal, transformation and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on information sharing and productivity

- Network connective leadership
- Linear subordinate leadership

A well-functioned working group can also produce the same effect of achieving goals, but there is a significant difference when comparing it with a team characterized by synergy and cohesion. The former is work-oriented, where the growth of the members and the entire team during the process is not important, but the latter does not ignore such growth while completing the tasks.

The picture Paul had for church work is that, as body parts, we will fellowship in the life of Christ and grow and mature in ministry. The ultimate end of church work is that those who serve and those being served will all be perfected; “people” is the key for serving and being served. Therefore, establishing synergistically cohesive teams is the goal of those who serve in EFC churches all around the world.

Consolidating and constructing the force behind quality teams

Since establishment, EFC has been developing in a multi-cultural context, making the construction of multi-cultural teams extremely critical. As EFC begins another wave of mission movement in Taiwan, it also requires the same construction foundation for Taiwan’s increasingly multi-cultural contexts.

Paul’s ministry teams provide an example of quality multi-cultural teams. Co-workers who work closely with him changed over time, but his teams always had the characteristic of a multi-cultural background. Different ethnicities, skin colors, and cultural backgrounds did not affect their ability to work together, but rather they formed teams that increased their cross-cultural capabilities and advantages in service. More importantly, it was those teams that witnessed the saving grace which was prepared for all nations and peoples.

By exploring Paul’s thoughts, along with the modern concepts of teamwork, we hereby provide EFC co-workers with some concepts from two aspects that must be addressed when constructing multi-cultural ministry teams.

Building life-sharing, diverse teams in Christ

Paul formed his ministry teams regardless of ethnicity, skin color, gender and cultural background, which can be understood from Paul’s theology of salvation. He clearly claimed that believers are the children of God in Christ, as one family (Eph 3:6), because Jesus Christ has destroyed the dividing wall among them, so that they can all be one in Christ (Gal 3:28). This is the theology and value, based on which the church builds her team ministry. Recognizing and holding firm to the truth, that “all are one family and one body,” will effectively help teams build, develop, and produce the following attributes necessary for effective team reinforcement:

1. Accepting and loving one another in humility and selflessness. There are many dividing walls that hinder men to accept and love one another. Removing these barriers to acceptance of one another is the beginning of church co-workers’ serving in one accord, as well as the basis for keeping everyone working together. In acceptance, we can truly love one another.

2. Mutual respect, and trusting one another. Mutual respect and trust are the glue for consolidating teams. A lack of respect will hinder the flow of love between team members, causing them to become more fragmented, and to compete with one another. Without trust, there won’t be honest and open communication; members will not be willing to commit in teams, and much cover-up will result; in particular, cover-ups of mistakes and shortcomings.

3. Mutual understanding and appreciating one another to help one another achieve goals. God has given each member different gifts and talents, and has endowed every person with different personalities and work styles. He does not give a single person all the capabilities, because He wants to reveal the glory of all parts being connected as one in their diversity and differences. When members understand, appreciate, and help one another as various parts of the same body, the whole body will then connect and perform effectively.

4. Laboring and toiling together to share one another’s burdens. This is the manifestation of serving as one, with all committed to the same goals. During this process, everyone needs each other, and each member must help other members, and be willing to accept others’ help

and service; individuals do not and need not play superman.

5. Confronting and handling conflicts in a healthy and constructive manner. As a group of people serve together, it is inevitable that conflicts will result due to various factors, such as different backgrounds and personalities. When faced with conflicts, the key is not to avoid these differences, but to seek to resolve and manage them in a healthy and constructive manner. This is the result of applying the aforementioned attributes. In addition, there should also be the willingness to listen and understand one another's needs, and to confess sins to each other and forgive each other whenever necessary.

6. Clear and consistent communication. This is the criteria for building quality teams. As all are willing to build a united team, they must strive to overcome every kind of hurdle, and place every member on the same communication platform.

7. Common spiritual principles and norms guiding team members' interaction. Principles and regulations that are formulated in love will help members to define boundaries with one another and establish sensible decorum and observance of spiritual authority.

Not one of the attributes listed above is easy. Bearing the multi-cultural context in mind, if we are to consolidate and build quality teams, we will truly require Paul's understanding of "all one in Christ," in order to face up to the challenge of turning "you and me" into "us".

Consolidating teams with Kingdom missions and vision

For teams to effectively operate and function, there must be clear reasons and objectives for their formation, so that they will not deviate from their mission.

The same could be said for Paul, when he called upon co-workers to form ministry teams. He understood and received Jesus Christ's Great Commission, responded to God's collective calling of His people, and, according to God's personal call to him, became an apostle to the Gentiles by forming a cross-cultural ministry team. He understood the importance of Kingdom missions and vision to a ministry. He had striven all his life to obey the vision from heaven (Acts 26:19),

which had also been insisted on by teams led by him.

Similarly, churches must clearly understand that the ultimate end of team ministry is to respond to God's Great Commission. When responding, various local churches or institutions, due to the different contexts faced, must understand God's mandate for them in their contexts, so that they may have clear vision and objectives for future ministries. Below are some necessary elements for team ministry, which have been developed based on this concept of consolidating teams.

1. Understanding the truth of the Great Commission and receiving such a mission.

Various ministry levels of a church and institution require ministry teams of various combinations. Whether they seem to be directly related to the Lord's Great Commission or not, accomplishing the Great Commission is the ultimate end for forming these ministry teams. Therefore, members need to understand the Great Commission, which has been entrusted to us by the Lord, and see it as the basis for the team's formation and the motivation for the team's hard work.

2. Understanding God's mission based on the Great Commission, which has been entrusted to each team in its unique circumstances.

In different eras, God has completed His own plans through the churches and ministries He has raised in various localities. Teams must seek and understand their unique missions, entrusted to them by God. This requires a deep reliance on the Holy Spirit, as well as mastering external contexts and cultural changes, to figure it out.

3. Linking with the mission to develop a clear vision, and plans that can be implemented.

A vision is the situation and picture of a ministry when it is finished in the future; visions dictate a team's direction. The pragmatic plans developed according to the visions will provide teams with concrete guidelines for their everyday ministry. Visions and plans must be sought, formulated and revised, with caution, in prayer.

4. Providing the capacities and resources required by team members. In order to achieve the mission, vision, and plan, team members must possess relevant capacities and resources. Continued equipping and training of members,

providing necessary resources of various kinds, and constructing a team operating system are all elements for empowering the members, so that they not only have the capabilities to be competent, but that they can also achieve excellence.

5. Clarifying member's roles, functions, and duties to avoid a mistaken arrangement of positions. Every person in the team has his/her role, function, and duty. As everyone is part of the bigger picture, when all are placed in the right positions, works by the team shall make great leaps.

6. Facilitating commitment and bearing of responsibilities. Members of teams that are formed out of mission and vision, under correct guidance, will focus on the big picture, and will show their commitment and undertaking of responsibilities in service. This will be a source of team morale, and an important factor in the effective completion of the mission.

The above elements are the motivation for consolidating and keeping a multi-cultural ministry team. In particular, the common mission and vision from God is the key for uniting and unifying the differences. These are directions for co-workers to work at.

Leadership capabilities and team ministry

Leadership capabilities determine whether a team is able to successfully consolidate and operate. Under the Holy Spirit's guidance, it is the spiritual leaders that lead the teams to excellence and mission completion. They are the soul for consolidating and constructing quality ministry teams. When leading teams in service, these spiritual leaders should also have the following characteristics and objectives:

1. They are totally committed to Christ. They come to the Lord everyday, and serve Him with their lives. By committing to the team, they become a model for other members.
2. They train themselves and others to be fit for team ministry, emphasizing honesty, transparency, openness, and mutual trust.
3. They are sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guidance, and they know how to feel the pulses of the times, so as to lead the teams forward in the areas of research and development.

4. They constantly enhance their abilities in cross-cultural ministry and leadership.

5. They are broad-minded in accepting different opinions. Open to brainstorming, they enable members to consolidate vision and participate in decision making together, so that the ministry becomes "our" ministry.

6. They find appropriate positions for themselves in team operation, and arrange the members properly, so that all can complete the mission with appropriate division of labor.

7. When advising or instructing improvement to members, they first examine their own motivation to ensure that helping the members is their primary consideration.

8. They mold the team to be one that learns from successes and failures, and constantly strives for excellence.

9. They cultivate the members' creativity. This is the key for breaking through bottlenecks in ministry. By providing a liberating atmosphere, there is room for developing new ideas.

10. They are cheerleaders who encourage everyone to truly implement the plans from the vision, focus on the targets, and persist until the end.

Conclusion

Based on what the Lord has entrusted, and in the face of future ministry development, EFC, from the EFCGA, institutions, and local churches, to the fellowships and small groups in various churches, should be able to set up more quality ministry teams under the Holy Spirit's guidance, with help from principles in this text to climb to yet another height in ministry.

Teacher Hsia called the Sunday School principal and asked, “We prohibit children to bring all sorts of cards to the church, for examples, Pokemon cards, Star Wars cards, and poker game cards. Teachers have said it, the principal has also stated it, and parents have repeatedly warned them, but the children still bring them in secret. This not only affects the classes, but also nurtures a culture of card trading in church. What do you say about how we should help them?”

Brother Wei rushed to speak to the chairman of his fellowship, “What do you say we do? Brother Lai recently has lived with a girl, and they go places together. Brother Lai is the co-worker leading the evangelism group, but he is not married. Is this appropriate? Won’t allowing him to serve effect the testimony of the fellowship? What actions should we take?”

Rev. Baker received a surprise phone call saying, “My wife has an unusual relationship with the assistant pastor of your church.” As a senior pastor, how should Rev. Baker deal with this surprising and burdensome affair?

In church, it is inevitable that members will have unbiblical speech and conduct that bring trouble and damages to church. However, if the church does not show or act toward them with appropriate discipline, to correct those improper or wrong situations, it will be her negligence in responsibility. Nevertheless, the issue of church discipline often involves a multitude of things. Churches need a great deal of wisdom, spiritual sensitivity, courage through learning from the Bible, prayer, and careful preparation in order to be effective in dealing with the issue of church discipline. As far as EFC is concerned, we are certain that effective church discipline is a prerequisite for building healthy churches. However, in this area, we must admit that there is still considerable room for improvement. This article will provide some basic principles on church discipline from teachings in the Bible.

About church discipline

Church discipline refers to how the church controls members when they have improper or wrong speech and/or conduct. On what improper or wrong things should church exercise church discipline? The Bible has provided basic concepts. Some verses clearly tell us things that should not

be done. For example, Galatians 5:19-21 mentions “sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, and orgies.” 1Timothy 3:1-5 mentions, “Now the overseer is to be faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.” Mark 7:21-22 mentions, “For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, greed..... arrogance and folly.” 1 Corinthians 5:11 also mentions “slander,” and so on. Although this is not a comprehensive list, it is a good starting point of concern for church discipline.

Church discipline is a matter that concerns the entire church. For church discipline to be implemented effectively, church members must fully understand the biblical teachings concerning believers’ decorum and church system, and be willing to observe them. As the church implements church discipline, every member must assume some basic convictions and attitudes: brothers and sisters are to observe the biblical teachings of the Lord by respecting the authority of church leaders, pastors, deacons, and elders, by submitting to their leadership, and by accepting their recommendations when faced with church discipline matters, so that their work will not be a burden when they give their accounts before God (Heb 13:17). Pastors, deacons, and elders as leaders must also think on behalf of their brothers and sisters’, constantly paying attention to every soul, with a prayerful heart, and never procrastinating in the practice of Biblical church discipline whenever necessary, so as to restore the body parts, renew spiritual lives, and prevent the flock from going astray.

Enforcement of church discipline

Matthew 18:15-20 is the Lord Jesus’ teaching for the Church when dealing with some member’s improper or wrong speech and conduct. From this short passage of verses, we find seven tenets that can be the principles and spirits used for enforcing church discipline when there are members speaking and acting out of line with Biblical teaching.

1. Family affairs (v. 15)

Church discipline is to take place within the family of God. When the Lord Jesus said “if your brother sins”, He clearly defined the scope for exercising the discipline to be those within the Church, and not extending it to those outside in the secular world. Brothers and sisters must recognize that, from the moment we believed in the Lord, we are God’s children and the body of Christ. In Christ, we call other believers brothers and sisters, which is a very deep level of spiritual relationship that circles us for church discipline.

2. Face to face confrontation (v. 15)

If a brother sins against you, Jesus commanded, “go and point out their fault.” “Go” is not an easy action; it is also a very difficult thing to enforce. Many times, church discipline will be stranded in the “go” because it entails facing up to the willingness, motivation and courage to “go,” as well as the approaches needed for concrete actions.

“Go” is not simply going to accuse and rebuke people, presuming that all they did was good for nothing. Face to face confrontation, rather, is to go to that particular brother and describe his mistake, or the sin committed in his life. Usually, a man’s most instinctive response to things like this is denial, so one must pray a lot before he/she goes to confront them. After comprehensive thinking, and discreet planning, one can engage in the meeting without being led to anger or negative emotions, as impulsive actions will not produce the desired effects of these meetings.

Many times we dare not confront a brother because we have no idea how the entire process will proceed, and we fear that the situation may get worse. Man prefers, and is used to, avoiding facing problems and confrontations. We don’t like troubles and, on top of it, we assume that to “go” won’t have any effect, so we end up not acting when we should. However, if we don’t go, problems will always remain. If not dealt with in time, they will spread to other members and impact the church. If not addressed, they will bring shadows and hindrance to church development, and will often become a force for creating a bad culture in the church. Unless we raise up to face these problems, they will always be there to stir up and disturb the church.

3. Correction in private (v. 15)

When we “go”, Jesus points out an important principle – you are only to point out your brother’s fault when you are alone with him. The party being wronged has the responsibility of arranging an occasion to confront the party at fault in private, to talk it out face to face and offer correct advice. Going in private aims to not escalate or heat up the problems, so that the situation won’t expand further. It also offers an opportunity for those being offended to restore the party at fault with tenderness (Gal 6:1). Pointing out a person’s fault is very risky, because one never knows how the other person will respond. Therefore, we need to adopt a very tender attitude. Such an attitude encourages others to understand their faults, and to not become more bitter and stubborn. When correcting and exhorting in private, we need to remind ourselves that we, too, are not perfect, and have had failures before. We must think about how we have come out from past failures, and empathetically stand in the other person’s perspective to think for his/her sake. This type of attitude will help us face the other party with a tender heart, so that we can avoid being angered during the meeting process, and can restore the other party.

Private correction and exhortation aim not to diminish the other person’s confidence, belittle his/her esteem, or tear open the scars of his/her wound. Rather, it hopes to bring healing and promote spiritual growth. Therefore, individuals should pray thoroughly before the Lord first, and deal with personal bitterness and resentment before going to the meeting. Only in doing so can we have a healthy attitude toward this matter.

As we begin the act of correction and exhortation, we can first talk about the good qualities of the other person and express our true appreciation for these qualities, which would serve as the basis for honest discussion, as well as affirm our love and concern for issues related to the other person’s spiritual well-being. During the conversation, an effective approach would be to admit and allow the possibility that we ourselves also may have mistaken judgment or assessment. We should never say, “How could you do such a thing? How could you do this?” but rather say, “Is this true? Is my observation correct? Do I need to clarify some misunderstanding?” Very often, misunderstandings would be resolved after they have been explained and clarified. Such talks in

love usually strengthen the relationship between the two.

In dealing with problems related to discipline, it is important to begin with this principle of “in private.” Pointing out one’s fault should take place first in a place where there is only the two of you. Before talking to the other person in private, we should not make the matter public and discuss and complain to others in public gatherings or meetings. Even after talking to the other person, we should respect him/her and keep all contents of the talk absolutely confidential. When there is still a chance for making up, the matter should never be brought to a third party without the consent of those involved. For if there is still a chance for restoring the other person, making the problem public will usually close that opportunity for restoration, with successive developments escalating to the point of no return, which is something we must pay close attention to.

4. Insisting on restoration and renewal (v. 15)

If face-to-face correction and exhortation in private can enable the party at fault to admit his/her mistake and repent, then the situation will be as Jesus spoke – you have won your brother (or sister). The main point of Jesus’ statement is to make a person admit their mistake, and to correct it, or confess the sin and repent. Nevertheless, this is only part of the purpose for correction and exhortation. Admitting mistakes, correction, confessing sins, and repentance are paramount and necessary, but even more critical is that the restoration of a part of the body of Christ will enable reconciliation of relationships within the body, renew the life of the church as a whole, and benefit all. The Lord Jesus focused not only on the needs of the sinners but also the needs of all brothers and sisters as one body, which is a full display of the spirit of Christ’s saving grace.

What Jesus said, “If they listen to you, you have won them over,” at the same time also indicates an immense inherent risk. That is, when you go and point out their fault, if they will not listen, you would have lost them. Unfortunately, this is exactly the reality that keeps occurring in the church today. If those being corrected and exhorted are not willing to face their mistakes or sins, they often choose the easiest yet most inappropriate shortcut, which is to walk away

altogether. They presume that there will always be other roads to turn to, and there are still many other churches waiting with open arms for them to come.

Very often, behind this attitude hide two incorrect mentalities and perceptions. One is that some believers today join church with a “consumer’s mentality.” They think that they can just change churches when the product and services being offered no longer satisfy them. Yet they don’t realize that joining church and joining social clubs are completely different things. When we join a church and become a member, we are a member of the spiritual family as a part of Christ’s body, with responsibilities and commitments to the church and her life and ministries, and also mutual commitments to other parts of the body. Another reason is the lack of understanding of spiritual authority, not knowing the real meaning of submission to authority, and being unwillingness to submit under the influence of free and democratic ideology. Although it is inevitable that church authority may be misused or abused, we must understand that all authority comes from God. When people know how to submit to the authority (whether good or bad), they know how to submit to God. For a person subject to correction and exhortation, in order that he/she may admit faults and repent, he/she must also know and accept such truth. When a man does not accept correction and exhortation, and leaves church easily, he has not resolved the problem in actual fact, but has instead run away from it. If he joins another church, the problem will be extended to that church. Therefore, for those being corrected, the right attitude is to solemnly face church discipline within the church. However, we must also point out here that teachings in these two aforementioned aspects by today’s churches are often inadequate and not all accurate; more efforts are needed.

Additionally, for both the church and the party sinned against, we must remember that the purpose of church discipline is not to try and judge members, but to restore and renew as the Lord wills. Although going in private to point out the other party’s fault is risky and requires great courage, it is only by going with great love and concern that restoration can be truly achieved. We must make these efforts, as we do not want to lose a brother (or sister), and we expect to see our friendships deepened, our spiritual lives grow,

and the church develop harmoniously and healthily. In this process, while there may be tensions brought about by correction and exhortation, and struggles from confession and repentance, the results of restoration and reconciliation are joy, peace, and the renewal of lives.

5. Addition of witnesses (v. 16)

When personal correction in private does not work, the Lord Jesus said, “But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”

In church, most of the cases do not require finding one or two witnesses, because resolution is often achieved at the private correction stage. However, if the person insists on not correcting their behavior, and requires further efforts of correction and exhortation, two or three people (rather than one) are more likely to be successful in resolving the matter. Bringing a matter before two or three people looks as if it is intimidation to make the person feel threatened, but this is absolutely not the case. Rather, it is for those at fault to be aware of the severity of the situation, and to increase the amount of attention that is paid to the results of their misconduct, and the responsibility they should bear accordingly, so that they may face it and correct it. Nevertheless, when we look for one or two witnesses, we will also increase the tension in the whole matter. Therefore, we must undergo careful consideration before we take this action. We must not jump past the one-on-one meeting stage and go directly to this stage in the beginning.

However, if the person, whose misconduct or sin is being corrected, still denies the truth or refuses to accept corrective advice and means, two or three people as witnesses will be more powerful than one person, in order to ascertain the truthfulness of the matter or situation. And this will directly effect and impact the handling mentioned in the next point.

6. Open disposal and declaration (v. 17)

When the brother in sin still refuses to confess and repent after a private meeting of two and three, then the situation must be dealt with as Jesus said, to “tell it to the church.” Why to the church? This is because this text is talking about handling a situation between church members, or

between members and the church. Church is a formation of brothers and sisters who are one body, and who need to “have equal concern for each other” (1 Cor 12:25). In order to truly care for each other in love, it is necessary to exercise discipline when members’ improper words and deed do damage to the whole body.

The Lord Jesus did not mention what method should be used to tell the whole church about the situation. But no matter what method is used, the point is to exhort and help brothers and sisters needing correction with biblical truth, and ultimately to restore them. We are to pray unceasingly during the entire process. Other members of the church should, by all means, avoid any inappropriate judgment. They must not be arrogant in presuming that such a situation will never happen to them.

When church leaders or co-workers have tried all possible methods of confrontation, and still cannot successfully restore those being corrected, they should then consider following what Jesus said to, and “treat them as a pagan or a tax collector.” In Jesus’ times, relative to the Israelites, pagans represent people who have no part in grace and blessings. A tax collector, on the other hand, was often seen as a traitor, due to their work for outsiders. They collected their fellow countrymen’s money for the Roman government, and many times they used this opportunity to fill their own pockets. In today’s words, “treat them as a pagan and a tax collector” means to treat them as an unbeliever, who must be excluded from membership and communion. Participation in church worship, fellowship and activities, however, are not excluded because they, like other believers, still have the right to participate in these activities, so that they may have the opportunity to hear the word in the meetings and repent.

At this stage, we still have to treat each other in love, and hope for an opportunity to restore them. When a person is removed from membership, it is a painful last resort, but we do it in hopes of plainly communicating this truth to them: “We have found your current behavior unacceptable to God and the church. Because of our love for you, we need to take action. Even though it is painful, we hope that by God’s grace we can see repentance and renewal.”

When a person, whether in private or public, takes up the opportunity to confess and repent, the church and her members must learn the lesson of never again mentioning past doings, and replace it with the church's love, forgiveness, and acceptance as a big family, into which he/she can once again mingle. These actions will bring healing, and pave the path of revival for the individual and the church.

7. Authentication of church authority

Matthew 16:18-20 records Jesus' giving Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. These keys are the symbol of authority. By this authority, whatever Peter binds on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever he looses on earth will be loosed in heaven. But this authority is not the type of authority that the Catholic Church has interpreted, given solely to Peter, and later the popes, because the keys are in plural and given to the church as a whole. This echoes the Matthew verses 18:18-20, which were discussed in this article. Jesus reveals to His disciples, "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." The authority given by Jesus obviously is not exclusive to one person, but to all believers in the church.

Given its context, the authority to bind and loose is related to the church's exercise of discipline: when the church forgives and restores repentant believers, who go back to fellowship as one, the church is exercising the authority to loose; when the church treats the sinning and unrepentant believer as pagans, the church is exercising the authority to bind.

The Lord Jesus went on to say, "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven." (v. 19) This verse is often misused. This is not a promise for general prayers, as if to say that God will give us whatever we ask for; rather, it refers to church discipline. "Agree" means that, pertaining a certain matter, both parties have discussed and prayed to reach a unified result at the end, and exercised the authority given by God to bind that which should be bound, and to loose that which should be loosed. Since it involves the use of God-given authority, it is an extremely powerful promise! Man should not be flippant when faced with church discipline.

In summary of the above seven principles and spirits, enforcement of church discipline should be carried out satisfactorily, with both parties resolving the matter in private. If the person being corrected is unwilling to repent, witnesses can then be brought in; if it still cannot be resolved, then it is to be brought to the church to be dealt with. Regardless of which stage, the point is that all are in one accord, and not just the majority agrees. In this way, what we ask for on earth, our Father in heaven will do. This is the process of exercising church discipline, and is also what God is pleased to see.

Conclusion

We know that the giving of the Old Testament laws seems like a constraint to men, but it is in fact the manifestation of God's grace to the Israelites. God gave them the Law because He loved them, as He disciplines those he loves (Heb 12:5-12). In the same way, today in God's house, God has certain regulations for His children, making it necessary to enforce church discipline. However, it is grace, and it is protection, so when we actually enforce discipline, we must reveal such a spirit of love. This is the conclusion we have obtained from analyzing Matthew 18:15-20.

As EFC goes through four decades, from the first church to the extensive development today, we have experienced an abundance grace from God. However, there have also been occasions where church discipline should be enforced, but weren't, and this caused damage to the church. Therefore, we hope this article can be a reminder of the principles and spirits for the churches, as well as for all of our brothers and sisters. As EFC becomes more and more multi-cultural, the appropriate enforcement of church discipline will be a blessing to the churches and their members.

Church unity is God’s will, and is also the

1. Traditional view: This view sees conflict as a negative behavior that brings only violence, destruction, and challenge to an organization. Therefore, conflict is seen as harmful to an organization, and its’ occurrence must be prevented. This view presumes that conflict is related to man’s sinful nature, and is therefore initiated by man’s disobedience and fall, which causes men to plot against and compete with each other. Those who hold to the traditional view of conflict tend to address conflict with a basic attitude of prevention.

2. Human relations view: This view sees that, so long as men are working together, conflict is an inevitable phenomenon that will definitely take place within an organization. Therefore, the basic attitude held by those with this view is to accept the fact that conflict exists, and even that God’s servants cannot avoid rendezvous with conflicts. In addition, they believe that Satan may attack believers through conflict. As for the results that can be produced by conflict, this view holds that these results can be both positive and negative.

3. Interactionist view: This view sees conflict as a behavior that can produce positive results. This positive view consists of three levels: (1) When opinions, views and convictions are different, conflict is inevitable; however, the integration after conflict will produce a synergistic and compounded effect, to the benefit of all. (2) Conflict will occur when there are incorrect behaviors or ideas, and this is necessary in order to cause change. For instance, Jesus’ cleansed the temple, rebuked the Pharisees, and corrected His disciples during His ministry. All of this was done to correct wrong behaviors or ideas. (3) God tests a man’s character and inner conviction with conflict. Those who hold this view see conflict itself as non-destructive, and the result of conflict resolution is determined by whether the individual or organization has appropriately managed the conflict or not. Has it made the scope of the conflict bigger, or has the conflict disappeared without a trace? Those who hold this third view see conflict as an opportunity for growth and development, and are therefore willing to manage their conflict.

The traditional view has behind it the assumption that results in several myths about

conflict: (1) That conflict leads to a win-lose situation. They view conflict as akin to competition, where a winner and loser must be declared. Yet interpersonal relationship can only last under win-win situations, so conflict is avoided. (2) The other party’s gain is my loss. People often become fixated at the “size of the pie,” and they overlook the fact that more can be gained if all work together to enlarge the pie. (3) Conflict is definitely bad. This myth overlooks the inevitability and positive effects of conflict, and insists on conflict avoidance, thus losing the creative tension that can be brought about by conflict. In order to avoid the negative effects brought about by these myths, we must admit the impacts of sin in conflict, and transform our thinking pattern on conflict based on this first view. Otherwise, conflict will only be covered up passively, and will never be truly dealt with.

The Human Relations view of conflict recognizes the legitimacy of opinions produced during conflict, but is unable produce a positive force when dealing with conflict resolution. And finally, the Interactionist view sees conflicts as the source, and force, for stimulating positive development, which will in turn generate a positive attitude among participants. This is the most appropriate basis, and the method that should be taken for church conflict management.

Views	Years	Presupposition	Views on Conflict
Traditional view	1930 - 1940	Conflict prevention	Negative effect, and must be avoided
Human relations view	1940 - 1975	Conflict acceptance	Natural and inevitable; may have positive and negative effects
Interactionist view	1976 - to date	Conflict stimulation	Absolutely necessary; a positive force, so

			should be maintained to a certain degree
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Responses to conflicts (note 1)

When facing conflict, the ways in which man may choose to respond can be divided into three major categories:

1. Peace-faking – This is an avoidance response. The average person tends to use this approach, which is to avoid the situation, and not deal with the conflict. This is especially true in Chinese churches, where the tendency is to ignore conflict, in order to maintain unity on the surface. Rather than dealing with the conflict, the response by those who engage in “peace faking” ranges from suicide (most extreme), to escape or denial.

2. Peace-making – This is a response that seeks reconciliation. The purpose of addressing and dealing with conflict, according to “peace makers,” is to achieve win-win. This can be accomplished several different ways, including ignoring or forgiving the other party, When peace cannot be attained, mediation, arbitration, or church punishment/disciplinary measures are three ways to help alleviate the negative effects of conflict, and can be used, depending on the circumstances, with the necessary intervention from a third party. Matthew 18:16-17 is the biblical basis for this response.

3. Peace-breaking – This is an aggressive response. When in conflict, people with this approach see the outcome as more important than peace, and they harbor a “must win” mentality. When their desires cannot be met, prosecution, violent attack, or murder (another extreme) are three possible responses.

Obviously, “peace making” is the desired response for our churches.

Stages of conflicts

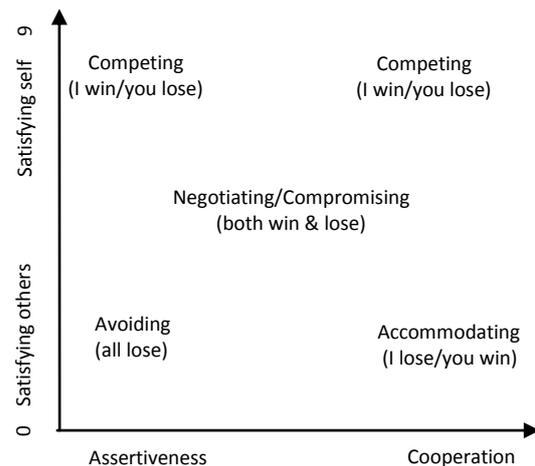
The occurrence of conflict doesn’t usually escalate to violence immediately. Its developmental process can be divided in several stages, listed below: (1) In general, conflict begins with a misunderstanding; one party, or both parties, fail to understand each other’s thoughts;

(2) differences in opinions and viewpoints cause discrepancies; (3) disagreements with one another make the tension caused by these different viewpoints the focus; (4) a “party spirit,” where those who are like-minded gather to work together; (5) the battleground determines whose standpoint wins; (7) one will not balk at fighting for an ideal, even if it means self-sacrifice; (8) reconstruction of damage, or even destruction, takes place after the conflict.

These different stages depict the escalating degrees of severity that develop in conflict. This escalation of severity is common in the world, and even churches, today. However, God’s will develops in reverse, and God’s people have the responsibility of making peace, so that conflict may be resolved.

Five styles of conflict resolution (note 2)

Different people have different styles in dealing with conflict. The graph below uses “assertiveness - cooperativeness” and “satisfying others – satisfying self” as the axes to label the five modes of conflict resolution: avoiding, competing, negotiating and compromising, accommodating, and collaborating.



When facing conflict, these five styles are all possible and necessary, and must be adjusted depending on the specific situation. For example, in the event of a knife robbery, avoidance or accommodation are better options. These five styles can be compared to five different animals: competing – an attacking shark; compromising – a fox in a vineyard; avoiding – a hiding turtle; accommodating - a cute teddy bear; and collaborating – a wise owl. However, in the face of church conflict, we hope to progress from

avoidance to compromise, leading to collaboration, so that, under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, the church can grow even more after the conflict. Avoidance and competition both undermine the church.

About church conflict

Church conflict is a unique type of conflict. From an interpersonal perspective, there are many possible reasons for, and types of, conflict in the church, including divisions in or between: the entire church, congregations, co-workers, pastors and congregations, pastors, pastoral and lay leaders, or pastors and the entire church. In the event of a conflict in church, its scope must first be clarified, because different situations require different approaches.

Reasons for conflicts in church include at least the following categories: (1) Ambiguous communication, which results in misunderstanding; (2) varying degrees of accepting change; (3) problems related to indecision, which cause successive ripples; (4) members’ not acting like Christ; (5) different personalities and working styles among members; (6) turnover of co-workers in a ministry; (7) important changes in church direction; (8) financial management; (9) differences in faith positions or worldviews; (10) differences in opinion on public and social issues; (11) inequalities. Similarly, when conflict occurs in the church, the reasons must be made clear, so as to effectively address and deal with the issue.

Summary

In summary of all of the above views on conflict, we hold that, when the church faces conflict, the best approach is to adopt positive conflict management by encouraging church members not to be satisfied with pretentious unity by refusing conflict in order to protect unity on the surface, but rather to address different opinions. Unity is not void of conflict; rather, the key is to have a spirit of reconciliation and harmony. Therefore, our thinking and application need to be transformed from “conflict resolution” to “conflict management.” Conflict resolution focuses on reducing or eliminating conflicts; however, conflict does not disappear just because the problems on the surface have been resolved. Rather, more problems follow. Besides resolving conflict, conflict management also focuses on how

to transform conflict into a facilitating strength that directs church organizational development. The table below is a comparison between conflict resolution and conflict management.

Items for comparison	Conflict resolution	Conflict management
Philosophical basis	Conflict means there is something wrong with church organization	Conflict is a normal part of church organization
Basic mentality	Both parties in conflict must determine who wins/loses	Conflict is for achieving church organizational goals
Method of handling	Use various means to eliminate conflict	Seek the best way to handle conflict, with a rational attitude
Attitude of handling	Defend oneself and oppress others	Open oneself and be willing to change one’s stance
Degree of tolerance	Cannot tolerate the existence of conflict	Conflict is beneficial to church; organization can continue to exist

Having had a full understanding of church conflict, we know that the church should establish healthy concepts of church conflict, as well as nurture capable persons, who possess conflict management capabilities, to address and manage conflict, so as to decrease negative conflict and increase positive effects.

Biblical values for handling conflicts – 4 principles of making peace

The Bible teaches that God very much values making peace. In the face of conflict, there are four basic values that must be strictly adhered to by church leaders, and laypersons in general.

1. Glorify God. First and foremost, we must think of how to glorify and please Him in the midst of our conflict, because no matter what we do, we are to glorify God (1 Cor 10:13).

2. Remove the plank in the eye. In the face of conflict, we must examine ourselves first, and remove the plank in our eye, and then we can see clearly (Matt 7:3-5). In actual practice, we must think of how to take up our own responsibilities in conflict, in order to reveal God's work.

3. Gentle Restoration. When brothers and sisters are overcome by transgressions, the spiritual leaders in the church should restore him/her with a tender heart (Gal 6:1). The point of application for this principle is practice of withstanding contamination by sin, while minister with love to those in transgression, and help them take up their responsibilities from conflict. Gentle restoration includes accompanying them to walk that extra mile.

4. Proactive Reconciliation. Conflicts can produce grudges, and can even cause us to sin against one another. Therefore, we should strive to tolerate each other and forgive each other, just as the Lord has forgiven us (Gal 3:13). The godly approach is to point out the other person's wrongdoing in private, so as to bring him/her back (Matt 18:5). Such proactive action leads to the revealing of God's forgiveness in conflict, and helps to develop reasonable conflict resolutions.

Conflict Management Concepts and Skills

When applying actual conflict management, some conceptual framework and skills are required. Below are several points worth learning:

Strategies for resolving conflicts

When conflicts occur in church, we must remember that the aforementioned concepts of the different developmental stages of conflict will require contingent strategies and processes of conflict management, depending on the degree of specific conflict situations. Below are the corresponding actions for conflict, from light to severe: (1) Talk. Resolution is achieved through openly expressing each other's feelings and thoughts. (2) Communication. Resolution is achieved through full discussion, and the mutual exchange of each other's perceptions, cognitions, and stances. (3) Relevant members working together. Resolution is achieved through relevant

personnel coming together in communication and collaboration. (4) Relevant members resolving problems together. Resolution is achieved through seeking common and agreeable means of resolution. (5) Negotiation and compromise. Resolution is achieved through negotiation and mutual compromise on issues difficult to agree on. (6) Third party involvement. When the issue of conflict is beyond agreement by the two parties, a third party may step in to mediate and intervene.

The process above shows a spectrum of private to public conflict resolution strategies, with a very important spirit and reminder; that is, we must not jump over any of the stages. This is because, by doing so, the conflict will only escalate. Therefore, when dealing with conflict, one must have the wisdom to evaluate the situation. For example, for a simple misunderstanding, that only takes a talk to resolve, we should not let it become chaotic, with many people involved. The principle of resolving conflict is to reduce the anxiety and tension of the conflict, and to increase the motivation for driving constructive development. Therefore, choosing the correct strategy is crucial.

Seeking a way out that is good for all

When resolving conflict, what people usually do is negate the other person's perceptions and ideas, and hope to convince others to accept theirs. However, the best outcome from this situation is that only one party wins, and it is not a solution of synergy, which is superior to the unilateral way. What we need is to discuss and seek better ways to overcome the limits of unilateral thinking, and satisfy the actual needs of both parties, rather than focusing on one's own standpoint first. Through sound communication and mutual trust, we can create new paths for win-win situations, and improve conflict in relationships.

This discussion and seeking process includes five steps: (1) Do not argue standpoints. (2) Separate people and problems. (3) Focus on "interest seeking," rather than on the standpoints of both parties. (4) Use horizontal thinking to come up with proposals beneficial to both parties. (5) Assess with objective standards. This method requires every party in the conflict to let go of self-interest, so that they can create a common, shared, and better future. Should they

accomplish this successfully, the outcome will exceed their imagination.

Broadening the horizon: See truth from God's eyes

Although man has the ability to know God's vast truth, we must admit that not everyone's understanding of that truth is complete. What we know is part of the truth, which is sometimes the same and sometimes quite different. Added to this is the fact that everyone has a blind spot, which means that the part of the truth that we know may happen to be deviated and inaccurate. Therefore, we must come before the truth humbly. As we admit the comprehensiveness and consistency of truth, we can also respect and tolerate the diversity of individual interpretation and expression of the truth, so that all can have a better understanding of the truth.

When facing and resolving church conflict, having such a horizon is necessary, because the key reason for conflict is our differences, especially when it comes to our ideals and cognition. If everyone was able to humble themselves before God, engage in good communication, and objectively share what they know, and, in turn, come together to better understand the truth, then conflicts would be transformed from a negative to a positive, and would evoke constructive development.

Four important principles can help us expand our horizons, and obtain effective consensus through our interactions: (1) Use empathy. (2) Admit that we, too, may have wrong perceptions, so we won't negate others' perceptions because we are afraid to show our perceived errors. (3) Discuss our understanding together, from different angles. (4) Allow others a way out of their predicament when they have the wrong understanding, and try to find convergence between our own perceptions and other people's understanding. Broadening our horizon does not cause us to lose our standpoint, but gives better understanding of our unresolved conflict, so that we can be on the same page with everyone else.

Use of the parallel thinking model: the six thinking hats (Note 3)

Conflict is the expression of unwillingness to cross over and stand in the other person's shoes, the cause of which is usually related to differences in horizons. For a conflicting issue that involves

many people, parallel thinking is a model that offers the participants an opportunity to think from another point of view. What is actually done is that participants all wear a hat, out of the six hats, at the same time, and adopt the same action. Through brainstorming from six different aspects (changing six hats), they are able to integrate to obtain a consensus.

Actions represented by the six hats are as follows: (1) White hat – participants come together to comprehensively collect and obtain relevant information on core issues. (2) Red hat – participants look at the decision using emotion, gut reaction, and intuition for confirmation. (3) Yellow hat – everyone uses the optimistic viewpoint to undergo a logical exploration in assessing the issues. (4) Black hat – everyone uses the pessimistic viewpoint to undergo a logical exploration in assessing the issues. (5) Green hat – One person thinks about and designs creative proposals to solve the problems from a positive light. (6) Blue hat – This is the hat specially intended for people chairing meetings. Its function is to maintain focus, direct thinking, promote participants' changes in perceptions, and achieve a conclusion. This action requires everyone's collaboration.

As to how one should use the six hats, there are a number of hints: (1) During the entire process of changing hats, participants are not to just wear the hats they like. (2) The use of these six thinking rules is not limited by its order. (3) The six hats are not a division for the thinkers. (4) Every thinker should know how to utilize the characteristics of each hat. (5) When using any of the hats, their functions are not to be mentioned. (6) Every hat has a limited time frame, meaning it cannot be worn indefinitely. (7) Any hat can be used by itself, as well as used systematically and repeatedly. (8) When using the red hat, participants' emotions are to be reckoned with empathy, and not reacted against.

Some skills on communication and verbal expression

Effective communication and correct verbal expression are necessary. There are many skills involved in these two aspects, and some key principles are as follows. In the communication aspect: (1) Communicate with God first, before communicating with men. We must first correct our inner motives. (2) Learn to listen, and actively

listen and confirm what we hear. That is, we need to understand what the others are trying to express, whether it is obvious or hidden. (3) Speak clearly, and choose appropriate words, in order to give a complete statement of the ideas. (4) Deliver the “I Message,” and not judge the “You Message.” (5) Give the talk for an objective and common purpose.

For the verbal expression aspect: (1) Do not exaggerate the facts (e.g. using statements such as “you always” or “you never”), nor ignore the facts. (2) Control the tongue, and discipline verbal expression. Stop whenever words get out of control in a meeting. (3) Converse and argue openly and honestly, facing the other party directly, and seeking resolution. (4) Immediately prohibit a party in conflict from talking to you about the other party. Advise him/her to go directly to the other party for resolution.

Conclusion

Church conflict management is a tool that is urgently needed for church ministry development today, because many churches are being devoured by conflict, and how sad it is for God and men to see this situation. Through some explanation of conflict management concepts and skills, we hope to provide learning channels for the church. However, we know this is not enough because, in the event of conflict, the key to resolution lies in the maturity of church members' inner spiritual lives. Paul's exhortation in Philippians 2:1-5 are still applicable to today's church. Whether it is the individual's plank in the eye, bias, misunderstanding, anger, standoffs, confrontation, or division in conflict, all can be turned around as we learn to “have the mind of Christ Jesus.” When we obey God's will, church conflict will be transformed into a strength for church development, and, during the process of conflict resolution, we will experience the hope, renewal and healing that springs from God's grace.

Note 1: See Sande, Ken, *The Peacemaker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004); Wally Yew and Cecilia Yau, *Managing Church Conflicts* (Petaluma, CA: CCM Pub (US), 2002).

Note 2: See *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument - also known as the TKI* (Mountain View, CA: CPP, Inc., 1974-2009).

Note 3: De Bono, Edward, *Six Thinking Hats*, 2nd edition, (New York: Back Bay Books, 1999).

“If I didn’t have to attend church council meetings, then I would enjoy my ministry even more.” We believe that this is often the thought of many pastors, deacons, elders, and co-workers. When church leaders see meetings as a pain, or even as a dreadful activity, it implies a potential crisis in the church. Inefficient meetings not only waste time, they also point to the possibility of an unhealthy constitution, and ineffective ministry performance.

EFC holds many meetings every year. The EFCGA conducts the General Assembly meetings, Board of Director meetings, Executive Board meetings, and meetings of different departments. In addition, local churches conduct congregational meetings, Board of Elders meetings, Church Council meetings (Council of Co-workers meetings), and various kinds of other meetings. Most of our ministries are determined through meetings. Therefore, if workers are afraid of meetings, or if we conduct inefficient ones, then our ministries will not be effectively promoted or completed?

Some people joke that there are two kinds of church meetings: hellish meetings and heavenly meetings. Characteristics of hellish meetings are: leaders are afraid to attend, start times are not punctual, there is no agenda (or it is incomplete), an inability to reach an agreement, ceaseless arguing over trivial matters, and even blaming or accusing one another, resulting in fruitless meetings and the church’s inability to perform. Characteristics of heavenly meetings are: leaders enjoy their meetings, as meetings are a display of team ministry, participants feel that their time is being respected, and they believe their individual gifts are being approved. Through effective fellowship and cooperation, communicating viewpoints, consolidating consensus, and sharing vision, leaders will have faith and hope for the church’s future, thereby building the church together to finish important tasks.

Although how meetings are to be convened is not a central item in church operation, it still needs our attention. Regardless of the size of the meeting, the following is, for the readers’ reference, an explanation of the concepts, spirits, principles, and skills required for holding an effective meeting.

Bad conditions hindering effective meetings

Whether a meeting, from the time of preparation to its’ convening, is effective or not depends on many dynamics and practices that affect one another, some of which must be avoided, and are outlined below according to the progress of a meeting.

Firstly, we address some of the negative conditions that often exist before the meeting convenes: (1) Negative attitude – another meeting! I wonder what time it would go until! Why are there so many meetings? (2) Prior to the meeting, no one prepares for and follows-up on the convening of the meeting, and no notice of the meeting has been received. (3) There was no agenda, or the agenda has no contents, because the leader just assumed that everyone is on the same page. (4) Last minute notification (or change) of the place and time of the meeting. (5) Participants are not prepared – information is incomplete, no one knows what to discuss, and the meeting was not prayed for.

Some common mishaps that present themselves at the onset of the meeting: (1) Location clash, where no meeting room was booked. (2) Poor preparation of the information required in the meeting, inadequate number of copies prepared, or unclear photocopying of the data to be distributed. (3) Incomplete preparation of required equipment and supplies, such as: projector, microphone, pen and paper, etc. (4) Phones and equipment are only installed shortly before the meeting begins. (5) There are not enough seats prepared, and people are not able to find seats. (6) Meetings cannot start on time – a customary practice, since many people have the habit of being late; some people even self-aggrandize. (7) No food is provided during the meeting, which is held at lunch or dinner times.

Bad situations that arise during the meeting: (1) No opening and closing prayer. (2) The purpose of meeting has not been agreed upon. (3) Presenters are poorly prepared, failing to achieve effective communication. (4) Repeating briefing and explanation of the agenda, and its contents, to latecomers. This is disrespectful to other participants, as well as a waste of time. (5) There are no rules in the meeting. When cell phones ring, getting the phone call seems more important than the meeting. (6) There are meaningless agenda topics. (7) Too many motions, with no preparation made prior to the meeting; participants are

permitted to speak whatever comes to mind. (8) Participants argue about the minutes of the last meeting, disrespect the resolutions, or are unwilling to implement them. (9) Participants try to remember prior minutes, and do not address and discuss what is in the agenda. (10) Those invited to the meeting do not come and, those who weren't invited do attend; the attendance rate is low. (11) The proxy does not know his role, the purpose of meeting, and his responsibilities. (12) The meeting is too long.

Situations related to the chairperson's leading of the meeting: (1) The chairperson is inadequately prepared, or forgets to bring his information, which causes unnecessary and frustrating delays in the meeting. (2) The chairperson is biased, and cannot play the role of facilitating the meeting progress. (3) The chairperson allows a few individuals to monopolize or take over the meeting. (4) There is a lack of privacy in procedure, naming names. (5) The chairperson allows "side meetings" during the meeting, which causes the main meeting to become chaotic. (6) The chairperson is quick to put up a vote, without complete communication and before reaching a consensus. (7) There are frequent off-track discussions, and, even with all participants gone off-track, these discussions cause him to lose the focus of meeting. (8) Only a few are engaged in the meeting – most are silent and not participating, having nothing to do with the meeting. (9) The meeting becomes a conference between two people, who go against each other, with the rest becoming spectators who are even divided into two camps. (10) The chairperson allows the terminator to interrupt others' speaking and conclude for others, disrupting others' chance to speak.

Bad situations during participants' speaking: (1) Participants like to say words that put on a show, rather than words of expression. (2) Participants like to say boasting words before saying words of expression. (3) Participants like to tell long stories or history. (4) Participants like to lengthen their point – their speaking is akin to delivering a sermon, with detailed explanation, as they are afraid people may not understand. (5) Getting hold of the microphone – participants interrupt others' speaking. (6) Emotional outburst – participants like to use meetings as venues to complain or accuse others. (7) Participants like to use terminologies that are

unfamiliar to other participants. (8) Presenters read their reports, word for word.

Some negative situations that often take place at the end of a meeting: (1) There is no scheduled duration of the meeting, and no end time has been announced. (2) The agenda has finished, but the set end time has not yet been reached, so the meeting continues. (3) No conclusion is reached by the end of the meeting. (4) Meeting minutes are not seen until the next meeting, and are not read, confirmed, or revised on the spot. (5) After the meeting, no one keeps track and follows up on the resolutions and implementations.

In addition, there are two other bad situations in church: (1) Two unrelated meetings are held together. (2) Two meetings are held concurrently, resulting in participants having to sit through two meetings.

Key to effective meetings – the competent chairman

The chairman is the central figure of the entire meeting. The key to whether a meeting is successful or not lies in the chairperson of the meeting. A good chairman can serve using meetings. A good chairman should have relevant knowledge and skills in several aspects, which are described in the following key points:

The function and role of the chairman

The main function of a meeting's chairperson is to facilitate the convening of the meeting, and to achieve its objective. Therefore, recognizing the duties and authorities of the chairperson is critical. The most important responsibility the chairperson has is to prepare the agenda, facilitate resolutions, and follow up on the implementation and results of those resolutions. That is, a meeting should have an agenda, every agenda a resolution, and every resolution an action. And for a chairperson to exercise these functions, he/she must understand several concepts:

1. The chairperson is the leader of the meeting. Meetings play a very important role in directing church ministries, since meetings decide all major ministries. The chairperson must be a good leader, so that the meetings can become like worship, and serve to bring the church into God's will. During the process, people can feel God's

leading, and their heart for service will be inspired to fulfill their functions as one body.

2. Recognizing, and adhering to, the purpose of the meeting. Although the purposes of various church meetings are different (for example, setting visions and mission, planning strategies, deciding on ministries, or resolving problems), these purposes must be clearly understood, so as not to waste time, or even end up with futile efforts. And every meeting should evaluate whether the objectives set out in the agenda were achieved. For example, if the church has a Church Council meeting every two months, but a motion has had no results over several meetings for whatever reason, it is only natural that works will be stagnant and delayed.

3. Understanding church bylaws and policies (required also of participants). Church bylaws and policies regulate the functions of various meetings, as well as the qualifications and roles of participants. The chairperson should assist participants in understanding their responsibilities, so meetings can be effective and compliant to the bylaws, as well as to minimize unnecessary conflicts. For newcomers, the chairperson should provide relevant information and training on church bylaws and policies.

4. Understanding the characteristics of participants (e.g. gifts, mentality, ability, personality and experience), and letting meetings be a type of team ministry. Sound use of personnel and encouragement can enable participants to realize their potential. Through liaison and communication in meetings and daily encounters, the chairperson can facilitate unity to produce compounded effects. The church should increase her team ministry quotient through the effective operation of meetings.

5. Facilitating the progress of meetings. From meeting preparation to the post-meeting implementations, the primary duties of the chairperson include: (1) Deciding on the agenda, meeting time, and meeting place. The quality of agenda dictates the success and failure of a meeting. (2) Preparation prior to the meeting, e.g. preparing soft and hardware, ensuring attendance, and reporting and distributing the agenda. (3) Chairing the meetings. (4) Ensuring that the minutes are being recorded during the meeting. (5) Tracking and following up on the resolutions after the meetings. (6) Conducting meeting

evaluations. Of course, the chairperson is the supervisor responsible for all items. He/she needs to delegate the details of implementation to relevant co-workers.

6. Controlling and maintaining meetings. The chairperson is the key to a meeting's success. A meeting's progress needs the chairperson's leading and control (not manipulation). His/her job is to preside over the meeting, and to play the role of a moderator. Should the chairperson desire to express a personal position or opinion, he/she should state that they are speaking "not as the chairperson." However, this should be avoided if possible.

Skills required for chairing a meeting

Every meeting deals with different circumstances and issues, which may include things that make people tense, or are difficult to handle. But whatever it may be, if the chairperson has good meeting facilitation skills, it is a positive impetus for the meeting. The following are some suggestions of the skills required during a meeting, related in four aspects.

1. Skills for opening a meeting. A good start to a meeting is the half-way point to success. The chairperson needs to create a positive and expectant, but also relaxed, atmosphere, and must relieve any unnecessary and opposing tensions that exist. This is the ice breaking procedure. When the meeting begins, the chairperson or pastor should try taking three minutes to share a scripture, testimony, or happy incident in church (any one of the three), so as to help participants focus on God's work. Then a prayer should be said for the meeting on behalf of all, by one or two people, but should be kept brief. Afterwards, a couple of jokes can be shared to lighten the atmosphere and warm up the meeting.

2. Skills promoting and maintaining the effectiveness and vitality of meetings in progress. This type of skill involves many areas, including: (1) Making oneself and the participants actively engaged. (2) Facilitating every participant to engage evenly, without favoritism. (3) Decisiveness to make clear the focus of the meeting. (4) Truly resolving problems and making decisions. (5) Adhering to the agenda, and not deviating from the issues. (6) Dealing with motions using the so-called parking skills – deciding whether the motion is to be discussed in

this meeting, or parked in the lot for the next meeting. (7) Summarizing the discussions to produce an objective and feasible conclusion. (8) Overall mastery and control of the meeting in progress (time and contents).

3. Skills for ending the meeting. A good meeting will resolve differences, achieve consensus, bring out directions for church ministries, and consolidate cohesion to promote commitment. And a meeting with a good conclusion will gather all these important developments and produce the morale required for implementation. When closing, the chairperson or pastor should lead all to give thanks for the meeting's proceedings and its results, and pray for the implementation to follow. In addition, reading the minutes for this meeting, to affirm the final copy and amendments, will ensure that everyone's efforts won't go wrong. Finally, the chairperson can thank all of the participants.

4. Skills for dealing with problematic situations during meetings. Bad situations happen during the course of meetings. The chairperson must have the wisdom to deal with these situations, otherwise meetings will be undermined and unable to have the proper impact. The three main situations that must be dealt with are (1) Long and irrelevant remarks. The chairperson should remind participants of this, and even interrupt intentionally, if necessary. (2) No involvement, no expression, and no talking from participants. The chairperson should try to discern the reasons, and invite participation. (3) Controversies. The chairperson should discern whether the controversy is constructive or destructive, prevent destructive expressions, and, whenever suitable, use time-out skills to pause meetings.

Every item above actually entails many relevant skills. Therefore, to convene a good meeting, apart from knowledge, we also need to constantly learn and accumulate experience.

About the rules of meeting procedure

Like sports or games, meetings need to have rules of procedure. Clear rules will regulate meetings in progress. Therefore, before the meeting, participants need to know the meeting's rules of procedure, such as: who can participate;

participants' rights and obligations; how to discuss a motion; how to reach a conclusion; and how to put up a vote, etc.

Formulation of the rules of procedure is based on the fundamental spirit of democratic meetings. They include: (1) The spirit of free discussion. (2) The spirit of equality and fairness. (3) The spirit of equal rights. (4) The spirit of respecting the minority. (5) The spirit of submission to the majority. (6) The spirit of order and harmony. These spirits are fundamental to the rules of meeting procedure, and have all been written in EFC's Bylaws and Constitution. Therefore, when EFC (EFCGA and local churches) convenes a meeting, all participants should observe the relevant rules of the Bylaws, and the chairperson should follow the meeting rules to preside over the meeting. When necessary, they should act like an umpire, with strict enforcement, to prevent violators from creating chaos and disturbance.

Reminders for other important details

For a meeting to go well, every detail from before and after the meeting must be given attention. Reminders for some details are as follows:

Before the meeting

The first key step to conducting a successful meeting is to decide on the purpose of the meeting. A precise and clear objective will focus the meeting, so the meeting is not conducted just for the sake of having a meeting. Based on the purpose, an agenda can be developed and arranged according to the regulations. In the case of no regulations, the agenda should be set as discussed by the key members. It is then followed by preparation prior to the meeting, which includes distribution of the agenda, determining the participants, preparation of relevant materials, and arrangement of the meeting venue. Of course, the most important element is the prayer for the meeting, the chairperson, and the participants.

During the meeting

From the welcome to providing beverages and snacks, a relaxed atmosphere should be created. A variety of auxiliary equipment and material, e.g. using PPT to do a presentation, should be used to achieve communication effectiveness. During the meeting, the chairperson should strive to ensure that the

meeting does not deviate from the agenda, minutes are being recorded, and that all are participating. He/she should also set an example of the right attitudes in a meeting (listening, feedback, appreciation, and admitting faults). Finally, conclusions should be made – all issues have resolutions, things pending to be done are listed, and details of the next meeting are finalized. The resolutions need to set out clearly the ministry contents and delegation, who people are responsible and accountable to, duties, and the estimated time of ministry commencement and completion. In addition, it is very important to finish the meeting on time. This is not an easy thing to do in church meetings.

After the meeting

After the meeting ends, the most important job is to keep track and follow up on the resolutions made during the meeting. Keeping track and following up is a display of a church's execution ability. If successfully implemented, the decision will be carried out, and the implementation will bear fruits; the success or failure of the entire meeting is totally dependent on the execution of this stage. On the other hand, the evaluation of meetings is where we need to discern whether the purpose of the meeting was met, and obtain feedback from the participants as the basis for improvement. Lastly, we need to deal with the motions that have been placed in the "parking lot," and consider whether they should be listed in the next agenda.

About the agenda

A meeting without an agenda is like a restaurant without a menu, where the participants do not know why they have to attend a meeting. Agenda formulation should consider the following items: participants, what type of meeting, the meeting's purpose, place, time (including start and end times), reporting items, and discussion items.

Conclusion

Conducting a meeting well not only requires correct ideas and skills, but also the art of wisdom. This text offers some ideas and skills, but even more important is that every chairperson and participant is diligent to play his or her part in having an effective meeting. As far as the chairpersons, senior pastors, and co-workers are concerned, conducting a meeting well is a

ministry skill that they must have, and must therefore continue learning. Let us work hard and learn together.

Part IV Church Ministry

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Pastoral counseling refers to the counseling ministry of the pastoral personnel. Broadly speaking, pastoral personnel include pastors who have gone through relevant theological, biblical, and pastoral training, and who serve in churches and institutions. However, this text explains the contents and practice of pastoral counseling, with specific reference to the pastoral co-workers ministering in the church.

In today's stressful and constantly changing world, believers face many needs in life, and their body, mind and spirit are often overloaded. With a life full of tests and temptations, the believer's spiritual growth is also challenged. In this complex situation, they often need others to offer a helping hand, and this is where pastoral counseling plays a very crucial role, as spiritual guidance can actually be used to help believers. For pastoral co-workers in various local EFC churches, pastoral counseling is indispensable in their pastoral ministry. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the theory, concept, and practice of pastoral counseling, and to accumulate experience in actual counseling practice, so that believers may receive help, and church pastoral ministry will be more effective.

Definition of pastoral counseling

In church pastoral ministry, all relevant works (from nurturing to healing) that enable the church and her members to grow healthily can be included in the broad scope of pastoral care, which also includes care for average patients, terminally ill patients, and their families. Pastoral counseling is a part of overall pastoral care. It mainly uses different short-term counseling and treatment methods, through a series of planned conversations, to help believers constructively change their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors in life, so as to overcome difficulties and face up to crises, and ultimately receive healing and growth. Although pastoral coworkers proactively care for believers, the need for pastoral counseling is often raised by believers.

The basis and coverage principle of pastoral counseling

Those who work in this area of pastoral counseling often also serve as the pastor of their local congregation, which is where those who desire counseling attend. This makes the task of

pastoral counseling closely related to church ministry. Therefore, the basis and coverage principle of pastoral counseling will be founded on faith, as well as other issues related to faith. Below are some key points:

Pastoral counseling deals with "relationship" as the core

This entails relationships between man and God, man and man, man and self, and man and the world. The Bible has clear teachings on these aspects, and the discussions below are several basic beliefs, which lay the foundation for pastoral counseling.

1. God is the creator: Mankind was created in God's own image (Gen 1:27), so all have value and dignity. Pastoral counseling must see mankind as God sees them.

2. Man is a sinner: Every man has sinned and falls short of God's glory (Rom 3:23). In this world, man does not do the good he wants to do; but keeps on doing the evil he does not want to do (Rom 7:19, James 4:17, 1 John 3:4). Understanding the truth of man's fallen nature is the beginning of effective pastoral counseling.

3. Jesus Christ is the mediator: Christ became incarnate man, died, and was resurrected to reveal God's love for mankind. Because He is rich in mercy, love, and grace, all those who believe in Him will receive saving grace freely (Eph 2:4-8, 13-18), so man can be reconciled with God, reconciled with other men, and reconciled with oneself. This complete saving grace is the foundation of effective pastoral counseling.

4. Holy Spirit is the counselor: He is with those who believe in Him, and He lives in them. He came to satisfy the basic spiritual needs of those who believe in Him – life renewal in the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-6), that they may become the children of God (Gal 3:26, 4:6; Rom 8:14-16), and be set apart to be holy (Col 3:12). He is the advocate (John 14:16-17), and argues for those who believe in Him. He also comforts, helps, and encourages them. He is also the Spirit of truth (John 14:17, 15:26) who teaches, exhorts, warns, rebukes, and deals with those He loves, so that they will call themselves to account about sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). He guides them with truth during the process of care and counseling, and intercedes for them (Rom 15:18-19, 1 Cor 2:4, Rom 8:26-27). He even gives

them power (Acts 1:8) to encourage them and make them strong and capable, completing in them the changes and renewal needed.

Pastoral training

Although the average pastor does not take that many courses on pastoral counseling, they are, in comparison to other professional counselors, trained in systematic theology, biblical studies, ethics, and church history. This training, and the framework derived from it, provides pastors with a unique and valuable horizon to look at the situation of those seeking help.

Role of pastors

Pastors are the church's spiritual leaders, as well as important representatives of Christian values and beliefs. Therefore, when laypersons seek help from pastoral co-workers, they expect pastors to be equipped with Christian values and beliefs, as well as a commitment to the faith, thereby bringing out the true meaning and practice of the Christian faith, by counseling people in their hardships.

The context of pastoral counseling is church, and this includes several aspects:

Churches with the Lord's truth offer clear ethical values and stances, so that pastoral counseling has truth as its basis; the church's worship hall can be quiet and safe, and a place to meet God; churches have abundant spiritual resources, which provide important reinforcement for pastoral counseling; the close relationship church members have with pastors and other members provide a platform for pastoral counseling. Although laypersons mostly seek pastoral counseling when they are in crises, the relationship that has already been built, and their intimate relationships with other members, often become their support when faced with big and small life changes and challenges.

Objectives of pastoral counseling

There are several objectives of pastoral counseling. The counseling relationship between pastors and laypersons aims to overcome the inevitable crises in life; confront and properly deal with the effects on the body, soul and spirit caused by the experience of loss and death; facilitate the growth of the person's spiritual life; and build harmonious interpersonal relationships.

Resources for pastoral counseling

The Bible, prayer, preaching, communion, anointing with oil, laying of hands and spiritual reading are all resources that can be used. Out of these resources, the Bible, prayer, sermons, and spiritual reading are most often used.

1. The Bible: The word of God is the basis for solving any of life's problems. It is a sharp sword that can penetrate, even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow (Heb 4:12). Therefore, it is also an important basis and source for pastors to provide guidance, comfort, and solutions during counseling. However, pastors should not look to the Scriptures immediately as the wonder drug and rush to quote the Bible, but they should first have a good understanding of the problems, and then apply the Bible with thoughtfulness and discernment, according to the Holy Spirit's guidance. Nor should they use the Bible with bias, as a tool for condemnation. Rather, they should be inclined to point a new direction to help those who seek guidance, enabling them to truly understand the Scriptures, so that the word of God can become a force for change. In actual practice, pastors can specify the reading of relevant Scripture as homework.

2. Prayer: Prayer means that, when pastors counsel believers, they do not rely on their own knowledge, skills, or methods, but rather on the Spirit of God. In this way, God's power may be revealed, for He is the true counselor. Prayer is not a routine or formula; neither is it a spell that can make problems disappear quickly, or a ritual that closes the counseling session. Rather, through prayer, God gives man grace, so that those being counseled will be brought before Him to allow for His intervention and transforming work. Some scars, which have cut deeply into a person's personality or life, need pastoral care through prayer for a long period of time. We should not end a difficult case by saying simply, "let's pray and give it to God."

3. Preaching: Preaching and counseling in pastoral ministry affect one another. Through pastoral counseling, pastors can come to a deeper understanding of believers' lives, and discover their various problems, so that their sermons are able to better meet the needs of believers. In addition, through this kind of message, believers who had not considered getting counseling might

be encouraged to actively seek help and apply the principles learned during counseling on themselves.

4. Spiritual reading: Specifying reading material is a part of the pastoral counseling process. It should be noted that reading should not stop at the individual level, but should be taken a step further and be briefly discussed together, so as to achieve the purpose of the reading. Contents of the specified reading should be as consistent with the progress and objective of the counseling development as possible.

Limitations on pastoral counseling

1. Pastoral counseling training and time allocation: In comparison to the counselors of general profession, pastors not only have limited training in counseling, they also have limited time to spend in counseling. As the churches' pastors, they must counsel, but only as a small part of their involved and complex ministry. Therefore, pastors should adopt short-term, effective, and targeted counseling strategies to help laypersons in crises by teaching them the truth, connecting them with support in the church, and referring them to outside help whenever necessary, as a means of supplementary assistance. Whether or not a church takes the small group approach, these relationships among brothers and sisters must be actively developed, so they may teach, exhort, fellowship, and watch out for one another, thereby filling in for the pastors' lack of time and training.

2. The issue of charges: Generally, pastors ought not charge for their services in pastoral counseling. The underlying philosophy is that all believers who have needs should be able to receive counseling without worrying about their finances. However, the reality is that those being counseled may not be serious about receiving counseling, and often do not effectively use the pastor's time. For this reason, pastors should state clearly, in advance of the meeting time, limits or boundaries for counseling, so as to avoid the ineffective use of time.

Pastoral counseling skills

Pastoral counseling has many skills that overlap with general Christian and non-Christian counseling. The following introduces some of these important skills.

1. Counseling time and place: The principle here is to schedule a pre-arranged appointment. Counseling consumes considerable efforts in terms of both spiritual and physical strength. Therefore, the time the counseling takes place should be carefully chosen. When a party is in poor condition, changing the appointment time may become necessary. With regard to the place for the counseling meeting, it is best to find a place that is without interference, with comfortable seats, and at an appropriate distance from both parties. Enclosed spaces should not be considered (in order to avoid temptations and slander), but the privacy of those in counseling should be protected. The counseling time can be flexible and, in principle, should not exceed 90 minutes.

2. Initial level of empathy: Counseling stresses listening and acceptance. Pastors must be focused in their body, mind, and spirit in order to effectively dictate the direction of the counseling session. Through asking key questions, as well as repeating the facts and feelings described by those being counseled, the pastors are able to establish trust with those being counseled, while at the same time collect relevant information that allows those being counseled to present a more comprehensive description of their problems. Pastors, who are accustomed to one-way teaching and preaching, must be "quick to listen and slow to speak" (James 1:19), and willing to "speak less and listen more." The point of the counseling meeting is to get to know the other party more, and to adjust oneself to respond to the needs of those being counseled, rather than simply preaching a long sermon. Pastors should maintain an open heart, in order to create a safe environment for talking. When it is necessary to correct, they should avoid being too severe, focusing instead on being cautious and gentle. They should not say more than what needs to be said, and their words should be completely upright, so that those being counseled will have no fear, and will believe that their trust will not be betrayed. As a counselor, one should become all things to all people, and correct oneself first, so that God can correct those being counseled through you, thereby saving everyone for the Lord (1 Cor 9:22).

3. High level of empathy: When counseling, those being counseled sometimes are unwilling to

express their deep feelings and hidden thoughts or ideas. If pastors are able to identify them, they should try to make them clear to those being counseled, but they should not make absolute expressions. Pastors should give those being counseled the opportunity to clarify and confirm, which in turn will help them change their frame of reference, and re-evaluate the whole incident.

4. Confrontation and challenge: This action can only be taken after the pastor has gained the trust of the person receiving counseling, and has built up a considerable degree of understanding with that person. Remember, this is not a time to attack with hostility or anger, but rather, through feedback, it is an opportunity to extend an invitation to the counselee, to examine some self-destructive or harmful behaviors and thoughts. Moreover, the purpose of challenging the counselee is to provide clarification of values and facts, stimulating them to think about the crux of their problems. After this real understanding is achieved, they can then ascertain their objectives, and design effective action plans.

5. Establishing action-orientation: Counseling requires practical action in order to produce any lasting change. Therefore, pastors need to help those being counseled to: (1) identify problems; (2) determine the priority of the problems; (3) choose a few concrete, feasible, and non-complex objectives; (4) set clear timetables for implementation; and (5) enforce and evaluate. Pastors can allow those being counseled practice their roles during the term of counseling, and then reinforce and enhance its effects through homework.

6. Continued follow-up: The relationship and interaction between pastors and those being counseled does not end simply because the counseling relationship is terminated. Rather, this relationship needs to be continually supported by the follow-up and support of brothers and sisters in the church, which is done within the context of pastoral counseling. Therefore, pastors should allow the parties involved to assimilate into the life of the church by joining small groups or fellowship groups, making full use of our relationships as one body, and building each other up in love, through mutual support and close watch.

Recent development of pastoral counseling

The work of the average pastor is very complicated. Even under the circumstances of immense demand for pastoral counseling, pastors still need to focus much of their time and energy on prayer and preaching, which creates a dilemma. Recently, the development of the theory and practice of strategic short-term treatment in psychotherapy has become increasingly mature, which naturally have been noticed and adopted in pastoral counseling. The features of strategic short-term pastoral counseling are mainly as follows:

1. Pastors utilize basic counseling skills, as well as the unique context and resources of pastoral counseling, to actively lead the counseling process.

2. Pastors, and those being counseled, are partners; therefore, the latter also needs to actively participate in the process (especially by completing the specified homework).

3. A time limit is set for the counseling process (in general, not exceeding five sessions, and not exceeding one and half hours per session), and should not be easily changed once it has been determined; however, the completion time for the entire counseling process can be lengthened, as needed.

4. Counseling targets are clear: Pastors only deal with one specific problem at a time, which is dually determined by both parties, so as to help the person being counseled derive spiritual insight and connect with God, thereby helping them to grow spiritually.

5. The goal of pastoral counseling is for the counselee to have hope in facing the future, fulfill his or her responsibilities, and live in the now. Pastors should help those being counseled to adjust their focus, and set their eyes on the God of hope, who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not (Rom 15:13, 4:17). This is so that they will hold firmly to His unchanging promise that will be fulfilled, believing that in all things God works for good (Rom 8:28), and living everyday bravely and positively, finding sufficiency in God's grace (2 Cor 12:9) and in the eternal hope of being with the Lord, which is better by far (Rev 21:4).

Ethics and referrals of pastoral counseling

The ethics of pastoral counseling first emphasizes the privacy and rights of those being

counseled. The enforcement of this principle may have various discrepancies, which are subject to various local laws and public sentiments, but the spirit and overall direction of these ethics is universal.

1. Keep the secrets of those being counseled:

Pastors should absolutely not leak out counseling content without the agreement of the party involved. The only exceptions to this principle come from the need to adhere to various local laws. In some countries, the government requires pastors to notify relevant competent authorities should he/she find that the party being counseled is having suicidal or murderous intentions. Therefore, knowledge of relevant laws is an important aspect of pastoral counseling.

2. Avoid the complexity of dual relationships:

In order to avoid relationships becoming too complicated, and thus unable to fully exercise the functions of pastoral counseling, pastors should choose to play a caring and supportive role, rather than establishing a counseling relationship when church coworkers, deacons and elders, or relatives and friends, require professional counseling. They should refer these people to other suitable pastoral personnel, or to qualified and relevant counseling institutions.

3. Use psychological tests or questionnaires with caution:

Pastors should use tests and questionnaires according to the needs of those being counseled. Questionnaires that have not been authorized, or which are irrelevant to the person's problems, however, should not be used.

4. Become familiar with local resources:

This includes professional Christian counseling centers, support groups, various doctors, Christian or non-Christian psychologists and psychiatrists, and various legal or social service centers.

5. Focus on the needs of those being counseled:

Pastors should be careful not to undertake pastoral counseling in order to meet their own needs for control, approval, significance, or desires for being followed.

6. Avoid temptation:

Pastors must not overlook the possibility that something may go wrong when they counsel the opposite sex alone. Whether this means that pastors should, therefore, never counsel the opposite sex is a matter of debate. Whether or not to counsel the opposite sex is a matter of principle for the

individual pastor, who must come to a consensus with his/her spouse. They should also reach a consensus with the coworkers' council first. If they do choose to counsel the opposite sex alone, they must pay attention to "transference" and "counter-transference." The former is where the one being counseled transforms reception of counseling into amorous feelings, falls into temptation, and even becomes sexually attracted to the pastor; the latter is where the pastor projects his unmet needs for love and desire, from elsewhere in his life, onto this counseling relationship, expecting to be satisfied from the one receiving the counseling. If these two transferences are not dealt with appropriately, it can result in great damage to the individuals, as well as their families and churches, so all must be careful.

7. Make referrals in time: It is impossible for a ministering pastor to not engage in pastoral counseling at all. However, in the following circumstances, pastors should change from pastoral counseling to pastoral care, and refer the parties involved to suitable units to avoid delaying the right opportunity, and even harming themselves and others.

The pastor does not have enough professional training in a specific case.'

The pastor does not have enough time to help the person, due to other ministries.'

The person, after receiving two to three sessions of pastoral counseling, has not changed in their cognition and behavior.'

The pastor, and the person being counseled, run the risk of overstepping appropriate boundaries, which is characterized by several phenomena: too much time being spent with the person, over-empathy of his/her problems, and signs of transference or counter-transference have appeared in the relationship.'

Conclusion

When pastors sit in the counseling room to counsel people, they represent the Church and Jesus Christ. It is a ministry that comes with an immense cost. Counseling a person with confused thoughts, a bruised soul, anger, or fear requires the pastor to share his/her burden. In a way, this is a little like the Lord Jesus Christ taking up our pain and bearing our suffering (Isa 53:4). In order

to effectively take up this burden, pastors must keep renewing their spirituality through various spiritual practices, enter behind the curtain, and connect closely with the Lord, so that their inner being is filled with the words of truth, spiritual insights, and love for others. In this way, they are able to come out in their daily lives to carry others' burdens, and to minister to brothers and sisters in need. When people are liberated and freed from spiritual and emotional bondage, and, in turn, live out abundant lives, the risks and burdens born during the pastoral counseling process all become worthwhile.

Faith is something that must be practiced in life. We can express our faith through personal or public liturgical rites, or spiritual traditions, which represent the outpouring of our thought, emotions, and actions. Some examples of expression include daily devotions and Sunday worship, making these things very important for the church to emphasize. These rites and traditions have become opportunities for God to meet with His people in His immanence and Word, enabling man to receive, by faith, all of the favors given by God through His immanence and Word.

In addition to various routine liturgical rites and spiritual traditions, the church has, throughout her history, established several different sacraments. Although most traditions have different definitions, depending on the denomination, these sacraments all share one feature; that is, they stem from an important spiritual meaning, such that the substance of God's word is tangibly passed on to the recipients, so that God's promise and declaration can be demonstrated through the sacrament. In actual experience, these sacraments are concrete symbols that, through the experience of the physical senses, recipients are able to truly feel and perceive.

EFC observes two closely related sacraments – baptism and communion. Jesus Christ personally established both of these sacraments when he was on this earth. They are observed for the purpose of revealing that God, who loves us, not only sent the Son Jesus to this earth to complete salvation, but also that He continues to proclaim the promise of His salvation, demonstrating that He keeps His covenant, is immutable, and uses action and real objects as marks for mankind to remember. From this, we see their importance. Therefore, this text will elucidate on EFC's theological perspective, and practical application of, these two sacraments.

Baptism

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave His disciples the Great Commission, in which He commanded them to go into the world and preach the gospel, making disciples of all nations, and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, so that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (Mat 28:19; Mark 16:15-16). When a man believes in the

gospel, he should then be baptized. This is Jesus' command, and it is therefore God's will. A deep understanding of the meaning, purpose, and mode of baptism will help us to value the practice and observance of baptism in our faith.

Meaning of baptism

We need to know why, after a man believes in the gospel, he needs to be baptized. This will help us express the true meaning of the sacrament every time we hold a baptism ceremony, and enables all those who are present to experience grace together.

1. Baptism provides an opportunity to show that those who believe, and are baptized, have entered into a united relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul clearly used the actions symbolized by baptism (entering the water, being immersed, and rising up out of water) to explain the spiritual meaning of baptism – to be baptized into the name of Jesus Christ is to be united with Him in His life, death, and resurrection, and to experience being dead, buried, and resurrected with Him (Rom 6:3-11). The death being spoken of is to die to the fallen and decayed old self, and to sin and transgressions. In the process of being dead and buried with Jesus, the old man is crucified with Him. For those who believe in Jesus, in God's eyes, the history of them being sinners is already finished. Because of Jesus' salvation, there is no condemnation, and no bondage by death. The symbolism of being resurrected with Christ Jesus means that those who believe in Him are new creations; the old has gone, and the new is here (2 Cor 5:17). They no longer live under the Law, but rather under grace (Rom 6:14). The resurrection power of Christ Jesus is to the power that enables believers to face everyday life.

2. Baptism is, for those who believe in Jesus, a public characteristic and mark of their sins being forgiven, and of their receiving the Holy Spirit and beginning the lifelong process of sanctification. When men repent and believe in the gospel, and receive Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord, their baptism is a testimony, publicly declaring that God's promises have been accomplished and fulfilled in them; that is, that their sins are already forgiven, they have received the Holy Spirit given by God (see Acts 2:38), and they have obtained salvation (1 Pet 3:21). Although baptism is not the criteria for judging whether a person has been born again and saved, it is by God's grace and

arrangement that baptism makes real the significance of dying, being buried, and raising again with Christ Jesus, so that those receiving baptism can more clearly understand the true meaning and significance of their rebirth and salvation. In addition, the act of believers proclaiming their faith before men is a personal reaffirmation of their beliefs, which will increase their faith in God (see Titus 3:5). When they are weak and doubtful, baptism becomes an actual mark and reminder of their assurance of salvation.

When a pastor baptizes those in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, he/she also makes another important declaration; that is, that these people have already been set apart as holy for the LORD. From that day on, they are people who belong to another kingdom. They enjoy all the rights of the kingdom of God, and they follow the likeness of the people in His kingdom, even though they live and serve on this earth. They are dead to sin, to the old self, and to the world's degeneration, so that they no longer offer any part of themselves to sin, as an instrument of wickedness, but instead to God, as an instrument of righteousness (Rom 6:12-13).

3. Those who are baptized are affirmed and accepted into the church as parts of the body of Christ. The church is God's home and, for those who believe in Jesus, and are therefore given the right to be God's children, baptism has become the church's way of confirming and accepting new members into their family. Through baptism, new believers not only express their relationship with God, but they also become a part of a new family, which is composed of people from various backgrounds. They are now one in body with their brothers and sisters, which is very significant to those being baptized, and to the other church members, as they have to learn to accept and support one another in love, and to bear one another's needs.

Baptism in EFC

EFC upholds the truth of "righteousness by faith" (see John 1:12, 3:16; Rom 10:9), and obeys Jesus' commands to baptize those who receive Him and believe in His name. The belief here refers to believing that Jesus is the Son of God, and that Christ who died for man's sins, and was raised for them, so that all who believe in Him may restore their relationship with God, be justified, and enjoy all of God's promises in Christ.

If people believe these things, we will baptize them, and we must encourage them to obey the Lord's command and receive baptism.

Today, in various EFC churches, baptism classes have been set up for brothers and sisters who are preparing to be baptized. The purpose of these classes is to help those who want to be baptized to fully understand the true meaning of baptism. It also helps new believers understand the life that is required of Christians, including their faith pursuit, spiritual devotions, serving in ministry, church life, and so on. Such arrangement helps both the churches and those being baptized to ensure their rebirth and salvation, and is not meant to add extra conditions for salvation on top of grace and faith.

Regarding the form of baptism, EFC mainly uses aspersion, and also accepts immersion. Although immersion is a more obvious expression of the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection, we believe that the most important aspect of baptism is that, through baptism, as commanded by God and performed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, those being baptized, along with the baptizers and spectators, all witness the significance of those being baptized – that they have died with Christ, been buried with Him, and have been resurrected with the Lord and sanctified for God. Therefore, we emphasize the revealed meaning of baptism, and not the form. As for brothers and sisters from other churches, regardless of the form in which they are baptized, so long as they have been baptized in the name of the Lord, EFC will accept them in communion. If they want to join EFC, the church will also accept them as members, according to the corresponding procedures.

According to records in the New Testament, baptism doesn't necessarily have to be performed by a full-time pastor or minister. However, in order to protect the assurance of salvation and truth, and order in the church, EFC will have baptism performed by ordained ministers, or lay clergy who have been authorized by the EFCGA. Either way, we all must remember that what saves a man is the Lord, who established baptism, and not the person performing the baptism.

EFC encourages parents with infants and babies to take up christening for their children, and to dedicate them to the Lord. For those who have undergone infant baptism, the church may

perform a confirmation ceremony when they are willing to profess their faith publicly.

Communion

Before the passion, the Lord Jesus established communion in His last supper with His disciples, and He told them to do so in remembrance of Him (Mat 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25). He used bread and wine as symbols for His body and blood, so that man, after receiving the Lord Jesus' salvation, and by way of communion, would not forget God's saving grace. Since it is the Lord's command, we should have a clear understanding of the meaning and rite of communion, so that we can observe it correctly when we receive it.

Meaning of communion

EFC follows the Lords' command in carrying out communion. While the rite of communion is not complicated, it is full of meaning, and must be considered and remembered by believers every time they receive it.

1. Remember that Jesus became the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29) and, because of his death, mankind can be reconciled with God. All have sinned and fall short of God's glory (Rom 3:23). The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23), but God made him who had no sin to be sin for us (2 Cor 5:21), to die for us on the cross (Rom 5:8), and to shed his blood, so that the sins of those who believe in him will be forgiven (Heb 9:22; 1 John 1:9), and removed from God's wrath, judgment, and eternal death.

With regard to the bread and the cup, we must understand that the breaking of the bread represents Christ's body being broken for mankind, after He experienced great suffering. Hebrews 10:20 even asserts out that the curtain, which divides the sanctuary and the Most Holy Place, signifies the body of Christ. When Jesus died, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Mat 27:51), representing the fact that, when his body was broken, he opened a new and living way for mankind, so that they can freely come before God's mercy seat. The wine, on the other hand, symbolizes the precious blood of Christ, which he shed for mankind. He entered the Most Holy Place, once and for all, by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption (Heb 9:12). Because of Jesus' blood, mankind's sins are forgiven and cleansed, and we can enter the Most

Holy Place without fear. Therefore, when receiving the bread and cup, believers remember Jesus' sufferings during his vicarious death, and are once again reminded that eternal salvation was accomplished, their sins have been forgiven, they can come boldly before God, and they are reconciled with Him. What grace this is! Men should not forget.

2. Remember the new covenant Jesus made, in his blood, with those who believe in him (Mark 14:24; 1 Cor 11:25). This new covenant redeems us from under the Law, and frees us from its dominion (Gal 4:4-7). And we also receive the Holy Spirit, enabling us to become the children of God, and enter into grace, having the hope of eternal life (John 5:24, 17:3). This new covenant is very different to the old covenant God, which made with the Israelites. In the time of the old covenant, the Law was carved on stone tablets, and the people had hearts of stone that neither understood nor perceived the heart of God, which resulted in their inability to obey God's commandments, and, consequently, the Law became their bondage, and the basis for their judgment. Jesus used his blood to make a new covenant, in fulfillment of the prophecy in Jeremiah 31:31-34, by writing his Law on the hearts of those who believe in him through the Holy Spirit. He was the mediator for this better covenant. By knowing him, and experiencing the Holy Spirit's renewal, men are able to live out God's will and experience the reality of God being their God, and them being God's people (Heb 8:6-13). Therefore, when we receive communion, we confirm once again that God will always be our God through the covenant Jesus made with us in his blood, and we will live out the likeness of God's people by the Holy Spirit.

3. Realize that believers are one body in Jesus Christ. Through communion, we demonstrate the unity of God's children as one in Christ; while we are many, and different, there is still one loaf, and we are one body, for we all share the one loaf (1 Cor 10:16-17). During communion, believers are reminded to obey the commandment revealed to the disciples by Jesus when he set up communion – to love one another with the self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ (John 15:12). The church is a gathering and composition of sinners saved by grace. To such a group of people, the Lord Jesus' command is very challenging, for unless all can come together

before the Lord's gracious table to experience the sacrificial love of the Lord Jesus, then it is extremely difficult to move past our personal to learn, practice, and experience genuine love and acceptance of one another. The Lord Jesus set up the sacrament of communion not only to let recipients experience unity with the Lord, but also to enable believers to experience the real unity that comes from selflessly loving one another in Him.

4. Be grateful for the Lord's grace, and think about and obey the Lord's commandments to his people – the great commandment (see Luke 10:27-28) and the Great Commission (Mat 28:19-20). When we consider the Lord's death, we are able to give thanks and return the favor. If people love him, they will obey his teachings, (John 14:23) follow his steps (1 Pet 2:21), and even become like him in his death (Phil 3:10), practicing his word in life, according to his commandments and orders, before he comes again. Therefore, the meaning and purpose of receiving communion does not end with the closure of the communion ceremony, but believers are once again reminded that they are to act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God (Mic 6:8), so as to live out the life of Christ Jesus before the world until he comes again.

5. Hope that the promise of celebrating with the Lord in the kingdom of God will be fulfilled shortly. When receiving communion, we are assured of God's promises, and believe that Jesus will return. When Jesus established communion, he not only proclaimed that he would die, but he also proclaimed an eternal hope. On that day, those who believe in the Lord will be with him in the Father's kingdom, and will share the joy of the wedding supper of the Lamb with him (Mat 26:29; Rev 29:1-10). The night when the Lord Jesus was betrayed had a grave and somber atmosphere, in which the disciples could not understand the Lord's proclamation; however, the promise of this celebration became their hope after the resurrection of the Lord. When we receive communion, and give thanks to the Lord Jesus for suffering and dying for us, we also receive a foretaste of the joy and happiness of eating with the Lord in the Father's house on that coming day. This enables us to wait in faith for his glorious return (1 Cor 11:26), and to truly believe that we will forever celebrate with him together, at the table he has prepared for us, and enjoy eternal life.

Communion in EFC

The communion ceremony signifies the gospel of Christ's forgiveness of sins, and symbolically delivers the grace of God's eternal life, while the communion table is a mark of salvation of Christ our Lord. Therefore, during communion, believers gather together to remember the Lord Jesus' saving grace. For friends who have not yet believed, the church welcomes them to simply observe the ceremony, until they one day know God's grace, through the marks of bread and cup on the communion table.

As for the reception of bread and cup, the church, according to Paul's teachings, emphasizes that believers must eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord in a worthy manner; otherwise, they will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine himself or herself before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ, eat and drink judgment on themselves (1 Cor 11:27-30). Therefore, in order to prevent the abuse of communion, the church, when distributing the bread and cup, must only invite Christians who clearly know the meaning of communion, and who have been baptized, to receive the elements, after having examined themselves.

Although we do not take on the Catholic Church's view that the bread and wine of the communion become Jesus' actual body and blood after being blessed by the clergy, we are certain that the bread and cup symbolically represent the Lord's body and blood. When receiving communion, the breaking of the bread symbolizes Jesus' body, which was broken for us, and the wine represents his blood, which was shed for us. And we follow his command to eat of the bread and drink from the cup in remembrance of him.

Communion in EFC are held by ministers or lay pastors. When conducting the communion, they are to follow the Lord's command, and remind believers to prepare themselves in the following ways: (1) Self-examination and confession before receiving; (2) when receiving in discernment and worship, we are together with all other believers in the Lord's new covenant, to remember that we are partaking of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, and to truly believe that, through Jesus Christ's once and for all atonement, our sins are already forgiven, and that we are one with Him in the Holy Spirit; (3) after receiving, in

thanksgiving and prayer, we should have the joyous hope for the Lord's second coming, and be renewed daily in the Holy Spirit, determined to live for the Lord.

After the communion ceremony is finished, the church usually has a special love offering. This is a tradition, and is done in gratitude of the Lord's grace, and in response to the Lord's command to love one another and care for the needs of those in the body. This tradition concretely reveals the purpose of communion, and gives it a perfect ending.

Conclusion

For those following the Lord Jesus, every time they partake of the sacraments of baptism and communion, which were personally established by the Lord, they have the opportunity to experience the reality of God's continuous expression of His saving love and salvation to mankind. What a blessing this is! Therefore, every time we partake in these sacraments, we should not only experience God's immense grace, but also take it a step further, to receive and affirm what He has entrusted to us. Then, with a thankful heart, we should accomplish His entrustment, and be grateful. This is the most crucial meaning of these two sacraments to us.

As far as churches in the twentieth century are concerned, the most influential and debated issue, as it concerns both theology and missions, is the so-called “Charismatic Movement”. During the past one hundred years, three waves of charismatic movements, which have clearly been related to the work of the Holy Spirit, have appeared. The first wave is called the “Pentecostal Movement,” and took place early in the twentieth century; the second wave is called the “Neo-Pentecostal Movement,” or the “Charismatic Renewal Movement,” and took place in the middle of the twentieth century; and the third wave arose in the 1980s, and emphasized power prayer, power preaching, and the ministry of spiritual power.

The second and third waves of the Charismatic Movement have had the greatest impact on today’s churches. The characteristic of the Movement is not the emergence of new denominations, but rather the pursuit of renewal in various churches through experiencing the Holy Spirit, thereby making churches the vessels of the kingdom of God. The Movement has crossed hierarchies, denominations, theological views, and ethnic boundaries, having great impacts on the churches worldwide from, major Christian denominations, to independent churches, and even on the Catholic church. Of course, EFC is no exception.

Many Western churches in North America, including churches that emphasize charismaticism, have, after years of exploration and adjustment, progressed to a more mature and stable state. However, Chinese churches had a later start in this movement, and therefore are still troubled by many shortcomings of the Charismatic Movement. Not only that, but this movement has been mixed with some Taiwanese folk religions, which has greatly increased the complexity and degree of difficulty in dealing with this situation.

Since 1984, EFC pastoral coworkers have formed a team for the purpose of observing, researching, adjusting, and advancing into the charismatic issue. We have continued this study over the years, and below are our views related to charismatic issues.

Respecting Gifts Given by the Holy Spirit

Whatever one’s stance on the Charismatic Movement may be, the issue has certainly encouraged, and even required, today’s churches to pay attention to “pneumatology” (doctrine of the Holy Spirit), and to rethink the person of the Holy Spirit and His works. Generally, there are two controversial triggers that stem from this issue: 1) phenomena that springs from the work of the Holy Spirit, such as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or being filled with the Holy Spirit; and 2) the use of some supernatural gifts given to the churches by the Holy Spirit, such as prophecy, word of knowledge, tongues, miracles, healing, and so on. Churches that specifically emphasize certain manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit, and focus on the use of these supernatural gifts, will be called “Charismatics”.

However, we believe that “charismata” refer to the grace given by the Holy Spirit. They are gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to every believer in order to build up the church and expand the kingdom of God; “charismata” are the Holy Spirit’s channel and means of revealing God’s grace. Therefore, “charismata” represent the grace given by the Holy Spirit, and include the gifts given to believers by the Holy Spirit. Believers should desire the renewal and grace brought about by “charismata,” but should not be biased or go to the extreme in the practice of supernatural gifts.

The word “Evangelical” in the name of the “Evangelical Formosan Church” means that the “EFC” is a church that exalts evangelical beliefs, and we have been established for the purpose of spreading the gospel. This indicates that the foundation of EFC is the comprehensive truth of the Bible, and assumes an open mind to accepting all abundant grace given by the triune God, for the purpose of preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth. Of course, this abundant grace of the triune God also includes the “charismata.”

Therefore, we believe being charismatic is not exclusive to the Charismatics Movement, but that it is the grace given by the triune God to all churches and all believers, which is not something we can choose to have or not, but rather is something we must have. We exalt the Holy Spirit and His works, and pray that the grace of the Holy Spirit will move freely in our churches through His people, and allow the grace of God to move through the world He loves. In other words, EFC accepts the teaching and use of the gifts of the

Holy Spirit that are in line with the comprehensive truth of the Bible.

On ways of worship in church meetings

Influenced by the Charismatic Movement, many churches' worship style (especially in the singing of songs) has, in recent years, become lively and passionate, with an all-out participation. Praise and worship has become the name for this kind of worship style. However, not every church or believer accepts this style, thus a certain degree of tension exists in the churches, which is also a phenomenon that has appeared in EFC. Before addressing the issue as to whether the church should adopt this style, we must emphasize that praise and worship is only a part of the whole and full worship, so we cannot neglect the individual believer, or the entire church's knowledge and practice of the true meaning of holistic worship.

Worship is to honor God as God, and to place no other gods before Him (Exod 20:2-3). Worship is the encounter between us, the created beings, and God. In God's immanent glory, the created beings fall face down to praise the almighty creator and Lord (Rev 7:12). Worship is an opportunity for man to know God and to see His glory, and, by acknowledging his sins and filth, to surrender to Him, confess his sins, and repent, responding to God in spirit and truth, and to be determined to live for the Lord (e.g. the experiences of Isaiah and Peter). Worship is also rejoicing in the day of the LORD's victory (Ps 118:24).

Worship is living out God's glory in every aspect of our lives (Rom 12:1-2). It is an action, not just at specific moments, but in every day and all the time. And through fellowship with other saints, we worship together to share the joy of worship (see Acts 2:46-47). Therefore, worship is not just a ritual, but it is a way of life, respectfully offering everything we have in life as a living sacrifice to God, and rejoicing and sharing with those around us.

As long as we uphold the ideas mentioned above, we don't need to confine our meetings to a specific liturgical form, but like the psalmist states in Psalm 150, we are free to express our boundless joy and reverence with all kinds of instruments, songs, and movements. As the Holy Spirit leads us to realize God's holiness,

omniscience, and omnipotence, we will be willing to praise, weep, fall facedown, or mediate quietly as we listen to the Lord.

Therefore, different worship styles have arisen from different understandings held by individuals or churches, and all should all be accepted, appreciated, and experienced personally; not criticized and judged. We should avoid falling into formalization and superficiality, where there is reverence but no worship; or falling into emotional outburst, where there is worship but no reverence. The entire worship process must be carefully planned and orderly; it must not be chaotic, defiant with nonsense and pretense (1 Cor 14:40), for "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

On prophecy, word of knowledge, and word of wisdom

Among the gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the church, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, and prophecy are the gifts that often cause the most confusion, and all of them deal with God giving instant words to churches or individuals in certain and specific circumstances. The ways by which God talks to people are not, and cannot be, restricted; therefore, we believe that the Holy Spirit still endows these gifts. When these gifts are used, however, we have the responsibility to discern what is true or false, how we affirm them, and how we ensure that these gifts will not be misused or abused. These are the keys to deal with confusion.

First, we must admit that our understanding of the meaning of the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge, and their practical application in the life of the early churches, is limited. Today, some churches or groups have interpreted these gifts as the foresight into a person's flesh and mind, or future fate, which are not the absolute truth, and can easily result in misuse and misguidance.

According to the Ananias and Sapphira incident in Acts 5, and James' decision at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, these two gifts centrally point to God's words instantly being revealed and applied through people in different circumstances. The Chinese Union Version translates "prophecy" as "be a prophet" or "be a prophet to speak" (1 Cor 14:1), to mainly refer to

speaking the whole truth of God's words. This is just like the prophets in past history, who proclaimed God's judgment as well as the hope of His salvation as future events. And the gift of prophecy can also be like what Agabus (Acts 21:10) and others did, by showing future circumstances and things that are about to happen, which, must be in line with God heart and works and is not a matter of forecasting the future by way of divination.

Regarding the use of these three gifts, there are a few principles: (1) We are to understand that all gifts are intended to edify the church in love, and to build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:12); (2) based on the principle of the New Testament, their use must comply with the whole truth of the Bible, and their use must not be the prophet's own interpretation of things (2 Pet 1:20); (3) there must be confirmation from coworkers in team ministry (Acts 16:10; 1 Cor 12:10), and evidence supported by objective facts; (4) there needs to be responsibility and accountability in the use of the gifts, such as remembering the words spoken by those using the gifts, and carefully verification of those words; (5) if these activities and exercises are performed in the church, those using the gifts must go through rigorous tests (1 John 4:1; 1 Cor 14:29), in order to test their understanding of Jesus Christ (1 John 4:1-6) and their admission of Him as the Lord (1 Cor 12:3).

Therefore, if the church has activities or exercises that use words of wisdom, words of knowledge, or prophecy, they should be very cautious. If brothers and sisters are endowed with these gifts by the Holy Spirit, they should talk to the pastors and church coworkers before using them publically, and their must be tested before they can apply them according to principles in the Bible. They should not think they have received from the Lord that they are free to publicize without accountability, lest they act rashly and cause confusion in the church.

On healing ministry

Praying for healing is, for the Charismatic Movement, another phenomenon that has both attracted much attention and caused much controversy. We will discuss four aspects of this gift of healing.

Healing ministry is God's command

Healing was an important part of Jesus' ministry on earth. He went about for three years, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness (Mat 9:35). Similarly, he gave the authority to heal every sickness, and to drive out demons, to the disciples (Mat 10:1), and commanded them to do so. EFC obeys the Lord's Great Commission to make disciples of all nations; therefore, we follow His heart and command to participate in His ministries. From preaching the good news, to teaching and praying for the sick, to driving out impure spirits, we obey the Great Commission in its entirety.

The healing ministry of the apostles testified to the word they preached

After the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, and in the process of spreading the gospel and building the church, miracles, wonders, and healing ministries followed the apostles' in order to confirm the good news they preached. EFC is also willing to pray the prayer of the apostles in the early church: Lord, enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus (Acts 4:29), so as to make EFC a church that experiences the Holy Spirit's power and testifies to the name of the Lord.

Respecting the sovereignty of God

Healing can only be done according to the sovereignty of God. What we focus on is the holistic healing ministry that glorifies the Lord, and not partial healing. Through the ministry of praying for healing, we seek to help people adjust their relationship with God, so that God can manifest His absolute sovereignty on both the server and the one being served. We must humbly and patiently allow the Holy Spirit to move freely; whether it is through immediate healing, gradual healing, or no healing at all, it is all God's sovereignty.

Minister in love and in teams

In the healing ministry, ministering to the individual is more important than the healing itself. Besides physical, emotional, spiritual, and relationship healing, or driving out evil spirits, it is more important to spend time loving and helping the person to remove the junk in their lives, so that Christ can rule in their hearts, and they are

free to build a right relationship with God. Additionally, team ministry should be emphasized when it comes to healing, in order to avoid the tendency towards showing off by any one individual. The healing ministry is the outpouring of love. Brothers and sisters who have the gifts of healing sickness should exercise in teams, so as to outpour God's love through the team-healing ministry, and build up a thriving church fellowship in love.

On tongues

The gift of tongues is the gift of praying in a language that people do not understand (some people will include praying sounds made by the tongue). Most charismatics believe that speaking in tongues is a criterion for admission into being filled with the Holy Spirit. When people link the baptism in the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues, and emphasize its necessity and relevance, they make the use of the gift of tongues all the more confusing. The following key points are worth noting:

Different types and functions of tongues

Tongues, as recorded in the Bible, can be classified into three types: (1) Other languages (Acts 2:4), which can be understood by others. (2) Tongues of angels (1 Cor 13:1), which Paul, unfortunately, did not elaborate on in detail, so we cannot fully understand. (3) Words spoken to God, which are spiritual utterances that no one understands (1 Cor 14:2), and are a kind of prayer in the spirit (14). Out of these, the third type is most likely to be misused, since people speaking in this type of tongues "utter mysteries by the Spirit," and imperceptibly feel superior, mysterious, and spiritual. Thus, Paul has set out the principles for using this gift very clearly (see 1 Cor 14).

The functions of tongues can also be broadly divided into three aspects: (1) Transcending language barriers and accelerating the spreading of the gospel. The coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, when the gift of tongues was used to make people understand and receive the gospel, was one such example. (2) As a sign to confirm the Word (Mark 16:14-20), and also a sign for unbelievers (1 Cor 14:23). If people could speak in new tongues that they have never learned, and perform miracles, then they can confirm the reliability and authority of the gospel, as well as

reveal the works of the Holy Spirit (see Luke 4:18-19). (3) For the purpose of devotions or personal edification (1 Cor 14:2, 4, 14-16, 28). This is the type of tongues that is spoken to oneself and to God; so basically, it is not to be used in public meetings.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit does not necessarily mean speaking in tongues

Some people indeed speak in tongues when they are filled with the Holy Spirit, but this does not mean that they will definitely speak in tongues every time they are filled with the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that not every believer will speak in tongues (Acts 4:8, 31; 7:55; 8:17; 9:1, 17; 11:24; Eph 5:18). Speaking in tongues is not the only sign of being filled with the Holy Spirit. The manifestations of being filled with the Holy Spirit are the works and power of the Spirit, such as witnessing boldly. Those who have the gift of tongues can also use it when not being filled with the Holy Spirit.

God gave Jesus the Spirit without limitation (John 3:34). When the Holy Spirit alighted on Jesus, the Bible does not record that he spoke in tongues (Mat 3:16); when the Spirit anointed him, it was for him to "proclaim the good news" to those in need (see Luke 4:18).

Principle for using tongues in meetings

If we use the gift of tongues in public gatherings, we must follow several principles listed in 1 Corinthians 14: to pursue love, to use all spiritual gifts with love, and to build on another up in love; tongues must be interpreted, otherwise they are to be silenced in meetings; tongues should be spoken by any more than two or, at most, three people; those speaking must do so in turn and in order, so as to not cause confusion; and those who speak must be obedient to the leader of the meeting.

Using gifts in love

Speaking in tongues is one of the many gifts given to people by the Spirit, just as He determines, so believers must not deliberately flaunt, pursue, or strive to learn this gift. In order to not allow man's weaknesses and incomplete understanding to limit the use of the gift of tongues, believers should follow Paul's teaching and pursue the greater gift – love (1 Cor 12:31; 13; 14:1). We should use and come in contact with

the gift with love. Without love, the tongues of men and angels would only be a resounding gong or clanging cymbal, with no meaning and value, and may even become a loud noise that brings confusion and faults.

When church members go to charismatic meetings

Many pastors or coworkers are deeply troubled by the impact of charismatic gatherings. This is because some church members, who are passionate about going to these charismatic meetings, often claim that they have experienced the manifestations of the Spirit's power and spiritual renewal. Moreover, they see the rapid growth of fervent believers in charismatic churches, so they are inclined to propose requests for reform in their own churches, and even expect imitation of charismatic churches in terms of the worship style, direction of pursuit, contents of the gathering, and so on.

These kinds of requests often stir up doubts and repulsion in the church, causing controversy and discord among members, and putting church leadership in a position of confusion and dilemma. If not handled properly, it is possible to end up with dissatisfied believers leaving the church, which may even cause the church to split as a result. Therefore, under the premise of tolerating with love, communicating with patience, and handling with wisdom, the following are some ways the church should respond:

Do not prohibit deliberately

In the spirit of exchanging gifts and fellowship between churches, we should never adopt a closed-door policy by prohibiting church members from enjoying the grace God gives to other churches. Prohibiting laypersons from attending other gatherings will only show a lack of confidence in our own churches and teachings. The consequence of prohibition is often fractured communication, causing laypersons to leave or even church split. Acceptance, on the other hand, often brings about positive responses, even though acceptance does not mean agreement. On the other hand, the church should be committed to comprehensive holistic teachings, in order to reveal the presence of God and treasure the good points God has given us, holding fast to what God has entrusted.

In-depth understanding and appropriate response

Pastors or coworkers should avoid judgment only on information heard from hearsay, and should seek to understand the actual contents and happenings (it is best if they can participate) of those meetings, trying to understand the participants' experience in order to discover whether there are biases. More importantly, the participants' needs should be understood. For example, perhaps they are at the crossroad of a life crisis, longing to meet God, or suffering from spiritual depletion and expecting a revival. Understanding real needs, and helping to resolve them, is the only solution.

Open communication

We should seek to have timely and open discussion with those who have participated in charismatic meetings and are eager to share their testimony with their church family. When they desire to share their new experience with people, it must be backed by Scripture; they are to understand that God gives everyone different qualities and needs, and they should not force their experience onto others. Knowledge of the Spirit's work, and the charismatic experience, such as being filled with the Holy Spirit, healing, and speaking in tongues, are definitely not exclusive to Pentecostal churches; they are to understand that the true meaning of "revival" is to live a life obedient to the Spirit, not remaining in an emotional hype fueled by charismatic experiences.

Seeking Biblical truth through prayer

The church should conduct a series of topical bible studies or workshops related to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's works, and gifts and their usage. Under the leadership of pastoral coworkers, the entire church should come back to the word of God and objectively discuss some of the disagreements or controversial problems. Our understanding of the Spirit's gifts and works will come amid light shed on the topic from the Bible and prayer support, and believers will be signposted to the correct goals and path for pursuit. At the same time, we should humbly review our teachings and worship style, so that we are in line with the Bible's whole truth. We should be flexible in worship style to fulfill the congregation's needs. In this way, it is easy to

obtain consensus. And because we have knowledge of the truth, and respect the Spirit's sovereignty and works, we will enable the Charismatic Movement to produce positive, proactive, and healthy renewal and breakthroughs in the church.

Lessons learnt from the Charismatic Movement

For the Charismatic Movement to have a surging influence, there must be something we can learn and reflect upon. The churches of EFC should look inward, and practice in the following areas in order to focus on church renewal and breakthrough.

1. Respect the Holy Spirit's sovereignty and work, and believe that the Spirit is willing to bestow grace upon the churches. Learn to rely on the Spirit and not quench the Spirit, expect the Spirit to work in the church, and make disciples of all people through the power of the Spirit, so as to build the church and expand the kingdom of God.

2. Continue constant renewal in the Spirit. Do not be complacent about the current situation, admit our imperfections, avoid habituation and rendering things absolute, and keep pursuing the Spirit's renewal of both churches and individuals.

3. Systematically and comprehensively research and teach the truth related to the Holy Spirit, and train believers to make sound judgments pertaining to the truth. Much confusion has resulted from the Charismatic Movement, and is often due to a lack of understanding of the comprehensive teachings in the Bible, and by making subjective personal experience absolute. Teachings that believers must understand include the outpouring of the Spirit, baptism of the Spirit, being filled with the Spirit, gifts of the Spirit, fruit of the Spirit, work of the Spirit, and so on.

4. Value a personal relationship with God. Pursue spiritual renewal, and live a life with devotions, prayer, and bible reading every day. Teach believers to meditate on and receive the word of God, and to make it their source of strength.

5. Pay attention to the worship and praise style (especially in the aspect of music worship) during meetings, and earnestly long for the presence of God. This is the awakening brought to the churches by the Charismatic Movement. Since

God sets His throne in the midst of His people's praises, believers should learn to live their lives in praise and worship, and to let the presence of God become both a reality and a mark in the lives of churches and believers.

6. Mobilize believers to serve and witness boldly for God. This is a positive influence produced by the Charismatic Movement, and is also an indispensable element for church growth; through exploring and using the gifts with collaboration, we are able to fulfill our duties to build up the church.

7. Pursue the integration, as well as balance between the whole truth and actual experience. The negative influence of the Charismatic Movement is its emphasis on the partial truth related to gifts in the Bible, or on the one-sided experience of individuals. On the other hand, many churches that lack the experience of the Holy Spirit have lethargic believers and atmosphere. There must be a balance between the two.

8. Understand the gifts and their use, and encourage brothers and sisters to respect other people's gifts and experiences. The Holy Spirit bestows gifts in order for us to build up and help one another. Therefore, we should learn to accept, support, and respect one another, avoid absolutizing personal knowledge and experience, and learn to collaborate in ministry under the church framework, transforming resistance to facilitation.

9. Pursue the greater gift, that is, being filled with love. The love from God is the foundation for using the spiritual gifts, and only with love can we embrace, respect, and collaborate with one another in our differences; love is the starting point, as well as the substance, for any ministry.

Relying on the Holy Spirit to accomplish great things

Regardless of how the Charismatic Renewal Movement impacts the church, one thing that is certain is that every church of the Lord needs the power of the Spirit, which is also the promise the Lord Jesus gave to the apostles and the Church (Acts 1:8). If believers wait upon the Holy Spirit and let Him be the master, then they shall receive power and be the Lord's witnesses in all the earth. It was so in the apostolic times, and it will be so today as well. In the face of the calling to

accomplish the Great Commission, let all EFC brothers and sisters submit to God's sovereignty, rely on the Holy Spirit and, through the gifts He bestows, accomplish what is entrusted.

The status and role of women in the church, and in the family, has been widely discussed within the church over the last few decades. This discussion has produced a lot of controversy, with the issue of ordaining women being the most controversial. The church's views and practices concerning women in ministry is influenced by theological stances, denominational traditions, and real-life situations.

Regardless of one's position, or how we deal with the aforementioned issues, the fact is that women usually make up the majority of the congregation in Chinese churches. In addition, those who are most often actively serving are usually sisters. Their talents, gifts, skills, and capabilities in ministry are no lesser than that of brothers. Yet, when it comes to the more important ministries, decision-making, and leadership roles, sisters do not share this same privilege. This atmosphere has created constraints that have become apparent female teachers and pastors. Therefore we must examine, from all aspects, the status and role of sisters, so that they may work with and complement the brothers for the works of service, to build up the body of Christ. This text will explore the issue of woman leadership from the current situation, as well as from biblical, theological, and practical angles, in order to convey EFC's views.

Different views on women in church leadership

Throughout history, and even today, the church's standpoints on women's status and role within the church can be divided into six categories, which are outlined below.

Traditional view

This view holds that the gender relationship between a man and woman is a hierarchical one, where men are at a higher level, and women are at a lower level. The man is the head and leader, and the woman is the follower. The woman is created for man's needs, in order to be his helper, making hers a supporting role. Concerning the family, the roles of man and woman are clearly distinguished, with the men responsible for earning the income and feeding the family, and the women staying home to focus on their responsibilities as a wife and mother. In the church, the roles are also clearly distinguished. Women are confined to serving in childcare,

children's Sunday School, caring ministries, meals, and reception; they are not be ordained as elders and ministers. This view is mainly based on Genesis 3:16, 1 Corinthians 11, and 1 Timothy 2.

Supplementary/complementary view

Similar to the traditional view, this view holds that there are still differences in the hierarchy of gender roles, but the distinction is smaller, and gives women greater room for leadership. In the church, women are in charge of the women and childrens ministries, and, in terms of teaching roles, this view is not as strict as the traditional view, which forbids sisters from teaching adult men. In terms of church leadership, sisters are permitted to serve as deacons, and can even become pastors or assistant ministers, but they can never be an elder or senior pastor; there is always a line of distinction or restriction.

Egalitarian view

This position holds that man and woman are equal in status, which is not only recognized in biblical theology but also in actual ministry practice where, regardless of being a brother or sister, all are encouraged to serve according to the person's gifts, talents, and calling; in other words, no ministry role is determined by gender. Regarding leadership roles, sisters can be ordained as elders, and women ministers can be ordained as senior pastors. This view is mainly based on Genesis 1:26-28 and Galatians 3:28.

Radical feminism

Believing that women can accomplish anything, radical feminism vigorously promotes women in positions of leadership. Sometimes, this is done with aggression, just for the sake of surpassing the males. In the process of fighting for women's rights, men may be treated with hostility. When these advocates of radical feminism engage in theological thinking, they may choose to omit or support certain verses, and add on information outside of the Bible. As far as the evangelical church is concerned, this stance is not acceptable.

Equal....but

While some churches or denominations may claim their stance as equal, in actual practice they would adopt the complementarian stance, and they fall short of giving sisters equal opportunities and support when it comes to leadership roles and responsibilities. They still have some

limitations, just as it in the supplementary/complementary position. This stance usually results when the core leaders identify with the egalitarian position theologically but, because the church and circumstances are not ready, they cannot display their theological position in actual practice.

Supplementary....but

Some churches hold to the supplementary position theologically; however, under emergent and special situations, women's roles in leadership are only temporary.

Amongst these positions, EFC adopts the egalitarian stance and holds that men and women should all serve according to their gifts, talents, and calling, and they should all be encouraged to do so. Therefore, the church encourages sisters to actively participate in ministry, and endows them with leadership roles and responsibilities, including ordaining sisters as elders and ministers in the local churches, appointing them to be coworkers in charge of the institutions, and accepting female ministers to serve as the senior pastors of local churches.

Reflections on the biblical theology of women in leadership

Due to the various interpretations of key Bible passages that are related to the relationship between men and women, there are different standpoints on female participation in church leadership, particularly when it comes to their positions and role. Therefore, a comprehensive review and reflection on relevant passages is key for us, as we seek to explore this issue of women in leadership.

How does the Bible see man and woman?

In order to understand the role of women in leadership, we must first understand how God views the positions and roles of men and women. From the creation of mankind, their fall to their salvation, and their eventual renewal, the Bible reveals the following concepts regarding their relationship:

1. God created mankind in His own image and likeness. Man and woman are created in God's image, can build a direct relationship with God, and together they receive God's command to subdue the earth (Gen 1:26-28). Although man and woman are created differently, they are in an

equal partnership in terms of status. They need each other and complement each other, and they are not in a hierarchical relationship. When the Bible talks about God creating the woman to "help" the man (Gen 2:18), it does not mean women are inferior to men, and neither does it mean that the woman is subordinate to man, for the same word "help" in Hebrew is used to describe God's help to people (see 1 Sam 7:12; Pss 121:1-2). God's forming woman out of man also does not mean that women belongs to men, but rather refers to the unity between them.

2. Man's ruling over woman was not God's will when He created mankind. Man's ruling over woman happened after the fall (Gen 3:16), which is not the relationship God had intended during creation. In other words, this ruling type of relationship is not normal. The original male-female relationship was one of harmony and unity, and was destroyed and replaced with one of power, control, and domination. In addition, man does not sin less than women; both men and women are slaves to sin (see Gen 3:6; Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22)

3. Men and women are united, and their relationship is renewed, because of Jesus Christ's salvation. Because of God's grace, man and woman have received saving grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Under this grace, the man-woman relationship has been renewed and restored to harmony and unity (Gal 3:26-28; John 1:12-13; Rom 8:14-17; 2 Cor 5:17). Paul's discourse in Galatians 3:28 says that, because of love, there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for we are all one in Christ. This is a revolutionary concept raised by Paul against the social system and cultural context of the time. Salvation breaks through the hurdles of hierarchies and distinctions. In Christ, both man and woman stand on the same level, and there is no longer any distinguishing between them as superior or inferior.

4. In the house of God, men and women receive the same gifts and mandate. Both are saved by faith in Christ, and both are called to receive the Holy Spirit, and all the gifts endowed by the Spirit (Acts 2:1-21; 1 Cor 12:7-11; 14:31). They are also both exhorted to "use whatever gift received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pet 4:10-11; see Acts 21:9; Rom 16:1; Judg 4:4; 2 Chr 34:22;

Mic 6:4). And for them, there is no distinction between the offices of the prophet, the priest, and the king (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18; 1 Cor 11:5; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6; 5:10).

From the reflections of Scripture in the aspects covered above, we see a consistent teaching that, in the eyes of God, man and woman have no distinction in identity or position. God wants them to be in a harmonious and united relationship, to receive the inheritance together, and to serve together. When Adam and Eve fell, the relationship between man and woman became abnormal, but God has renewed and restored their relationship through His plan for salvation through Christ's salvation, so that they can once again enjoy the richness and glory of when they were first created.

Several passages that restrict the roles and functions of women in the church

In the Pauline epistles, there are several discussions limiting the roles and functions of women in the church, which Paul wrote in response to the situations of the churches in Corinth and Ephesus (1 Cor 11:2-6; 14:33-36; 1 Cor 2:9-15). The emergence of different positions is closely related to these passages. Interpretation and understanding of these passages must be explained from the broader biblical thinking (the abovementioned argument), using general Scriptures to explain these local and contextual passages. In other words, these passages have unique historical and regional backgrounds.

In the book of First Corinthians, Paul's teaching related to the role of women was in response to the shortfalls of the church at the time. His first point is that some women have misperceptions about the male-female relationship, which jeopardizes the stability of the church, and causes those outside the church to have the wrong impression of Christian meetings. In 11:3 of the same book, Paul used the order "God – Christ – man – woman" to teach about the importance of order. Paul did not intend to establish an order of authority, just as Christ and God the Father have different works and missions, but are equal in honor and glory. By the same token, the order of man and woman corresponds to that of the Father and the Son. Paul did not specifically use "head" to express sovereignty or authority. The Greek word of "head" (κεφαλή) is hardly used as "authority over," but is generally

used to mean "source" or "origin." Paul herein emphasizes a relationship of origin, and not one of hierarchy.

Regarding Paul's forbidding women to speak and preach in meetings, there was a circumstantial factor. At that time women, had very few opportunities for education. If they were not educated and had not learned the Bible, and inquired in meetings as they pleased, it would disturb the order of those meetings. This was the situation in the church at the time, which had to be prohibited. And Paul wanted the sisters to ask their own husbands at home, because this was the most practical way (1 Cor 14:34-35). If these women, who did not understand the truth, taught in the meetings, there would be problems that had to be prohibited. Therefore, Paul wanted the women to remain silent and learn. He emphasized the order of meetings and accurate teachings of the truth. Once these two aspects were accounted for, he did not oppose to women praying and prophesying (11:5).

The situation of the church in Ephesus was similar to that of Corinth, but more complicated. At the time, the church was dealing with the impact of false teachers. Their impact on the women was especially serious. If women who were affected by false teachers taught, it would cause biases and distortion of the truth. Paul advised the church to take necessary actions, and prohibit these kinds of women to speak.

Paul wrote letters to churches at Corinth and Ephesus that touched on issues regarding their faith and life. Today's churches can still use some of the general principles governing these two churches, but Paul also gave instructions relating to special circumstances. Therefore, we cannot generalize the treatment of special settings in the first century, or make them into permanent principles, thereby resulting in improper ministry concepts.

In fact, Paul affirmed the equal positions of men and women before God. We can see this from his coworkers. Junias was one such example. Paul called her and her husband Andronicus apostles, and said that she was "esteemed by the apostles" (Rom 16:7). Priscilla was another example. As a pioneer of family churches, she often had her name appear before her husband Aquila's, and worked with Paul numerous times. From Paul's actions, we see that he respected

women's gifts and service before God, and did not reject their ministry and leadership on grounds of gender.

Spiritual leadership in the Bible

Biblical spiritual is servant leadership, which is to serve mankind and benefit them, not to "exercise authority over" and give commands to others (Mat 20:25-28; 20:3; Mark 10:42-45; John 13:13-17). Leaders are to serve one another in love (Gal 5:13), and are to set an example by feeding the flock entrusted under their care (1 Pet 5:2-3). This kind of service is not limited by gender. There are many examples of women in positions of leadership in the Bible. Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Esther, Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla, Junias, and others all became leaders at different times, and led the people of God to accomplish what was entrusted to them.

Summary

After reflecting on various Scriptures, we have determined that gender difference should not be a factor in determining leadership roles in the church. All gifts are from God and should be encouraged, recognized, and given an opportunity to prosper, so that the church can be built up. Gifts should not be kept from being utilized due to gender. The ministries, functions, and offices in the church should not be limited due to gender. Domination, oppression, and inequality are all products of the fallen world, and are situations to be overcome. Because of salvation in Christ, mankind can have freedom, can serve God with liberty, and is free to live for God with liberty.

Other factors affecting women in ministry and leadership

There are other factors besides theological positions that also affect this issue of women in ministry, including cultural and practical factors. As far as the Chinese churches are concerned, two of these aspects stand out as the most obvious.

Chinese culture, as well as the traditional leadership model, is based on patriarchy, where core leadership authority tends to fall mainly on the oldest male. This situation also exists in the Chinese churches. Therefore, ministry leadership opportunities for sisters are generally fewer than they are for brothers. In churches that assume the traditional and complementary positions, opportunities for sisters to lead ministries are few.

In churches that take the egalitarian or complementary theological positions, however, a proviso for women in leadership is common, which undermines the sisters' pursuit of leadership responsibilities. Therefore, it is not common for sisters to get involved in broader, deeper, and more flexible leadership ministries; there are still many obstacles to overcome.

The second important factor that influences this issue is motherhood. Regardless of the length of time spent in baby rearing, the mothers undertake most of the responsibility. If women choose to stay home to rear their children, their service in church will, after a while, be limited, suspended, or delayed. If they choose to continue working in the workplace, given that they have to care for both the family and work, their ministry will also be affected. Under these circumstances, if they were to continue seeking ministry development, they must have support in rearing their children and dealing with housework, such as having their husbands share in the household chores, or find other means of family support. In addition, the development of capabilities in leadership ministry requires both learning and training. The sisters' leadership learning and development will, due to the impact of motherhood, be delayed, which will in turn affect their commitment to leadership responsibility.

Although some churches have already adopted the egalitarian position, these two factors have subjected this desire for the renewal and practice of women's leadership concepts to some significant tests. Therefore, in order for women to participate more in ministry and leadership, we need to not only renew our theological thinking, but also conduct in-depth research on these two factors, and take necessary actions to produce the desired results.

Some recommendations to sisters

The ministry and leadership positions and roles of sisters in today's churches has not yet reached an ideal situation, but sisters need not be discouraged. Below are some concrete suggestions for our sisters.

Strive to become the person God has created you to be, and know that God has a wonderful plan for you. Understand the limits brought upon you by the circumstances you find yourself in, and seek to use creative ways to overcome those

limits. Be aware that you may need to spend more time and effort in order to reach the same position as a brother with similar gifts and talents as you.

Learn to live your life rooted deeper and deeper in the word of God, build an intimate relationship with Him, and learn to hear His voice. No matter what else you do, this is the most critical foundation for your life and ministry.

Understand clearly the force and principles that facilitate change under the circumstances you are in, so that you can timely and appropriately use them to bring about change. Learn that you do not need to depend on a position or title in order to have an impact, since effective leadership does not necessarily come from authority. Pray for God to open a way for you to ascertain your gifts and talents, make use of every opportunity to utilize and develop these gifts and talents, and create opportunities for your gifts and talents to open doors for you.

Learn to use all your qualities, and do not seek to become someone else. Pay attention to examples of women leaders around you, and let them become a source for your imitation and inspiration. Look for teachers who can help you develop in all aspects, and who enable you to have a forward-looking horizon on your life and ministry. In addition, it is wise to seek sponsors in your ministry, who are able to initiate ministry opportunities for you.

Lastly, set your mind to work with your brothers, and do not to object for the sake of objection. Take a step further to face God and deal with your anger and bitterness. Learn to forgive and, if necessary, seek help, and never allow anger to destroy you and your service. In the face of different situations, use words of wisdom to communicate properly with your brothers, and avoid disputes in the flesh. Have faith in God, while remaining patient, but always be ready, so that when the opportunity arises, you can dedicate yourself to God with all your heart.

Encouragement to the brothers

Recognize that, in the church, sisters make up more than half of the congregation, and are coworkers bearing your same yoke, and are laboring faithfully with you. Believe that they, too, have the potential to undertake important

leadership ministries. As for those female leaders whom God has called and endowed with gifts and talents, brothers are to accept them and identify with their leadership ministry. When you see ministry and leadership opportunities, and find that there are sisters who have the relevant gifts and burdens, you can become a sponsor and refer them to the leadership ministry. And you should do so with care, becoming their mentors in their service, helping them accomplish the ministry God has entrusted to them.

If you are in a position of leadership, learn to become an unbiased leader who provides equal opportunities, so that sisters can also develop their ministries according to their gifts and talents. If there are still obstacles in the church regarding women participating in ministry and leadership, you are to become a facilitator of change, transforming this issue from a concept of renewal to a practice.

Lastly, affirm and learn about the mutual dependence and assistance that exists between you and the sisters.

Conclusion

EFC has always worked hard to deal with issues related to women's roles in church ministry, and we expect to see them cultivated and fulfilled, so that they may become workers in the kingdom of God. With this conviction, we shall continue to promote women participation in ministry and leadership, and hope to break through the limits brought about by theological perceptions, culture, traditions, and institutionalization, in hopes of achieving the goal of God's calling for mankind to ministry: so that all the women shouldered with God's mission would become a mighty throng (Ps 68:11). Brothers and sisters are to unite as one to fulfill His glorious mandate together.

Part V Ethical Issues

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When it comes to engaging in charitable services, social care, political affairs, environmental and ecological protection, and so on, some believers and churches believe this is unspiritual and lifeless work. They hold that Christians should be busy spreading the gospel, rather than expending effort and resources to care for society and participate in politics. As a result, they do not care about, and are unwilling to participate in, community, national, and world affairs. They see individuals who are devoted in these affairs as engaging in unspiritual and secular work, and refuse to give their support. The church has taught very few relevant biblical values and principles from the pulpit regarding how believers should live in today's pluralistic society, which has resulted in a general lack awareness from believers and they have, inevitably, been left confused about the roles and responsibilities they should have in society. These circumstances are not what EFC desires, for we believe that God has His will and purpose for placing the church and believers in the world, and that the church and her members have responsibilities as social citizens. This text will outline our views on social issues from biblical, theological, and practical aspects.

Understanding the responsibilities of a social citizen from the Bible, theology, and worldview

The responsibilities of a social citizen refers to the obligations a person who lives in this world as a citizen, or a member of a social group, should bear in order for his or her social group to function and develop in harmony. When living in society, the relationship between man and society is akin to that of the lip and teeth. Everything that happens in society somehow, whether directly or indirectly, affects its members, who are an indispensable part of it.

Many Christians are been influenced by the dualistic thinking of "spiritual – secular," and focus on pursuing the advancement of their inner spiritual lives and despise the so-called mundane daily life of the flesh. Such a worldview has deeply impacted their understanding of the responsibilities of the social citizen, and has caused them to overlook the importance of social participation. This dualistic thinking is not in line with the truth of the Bible. For this to be reversed,

several concepts, which are discussed below, must be understood and reflected on:

1. Knowledge of the world. The Apostle John's advice – "do not love the world or anything in the world" (1 John 2:15) – has deeply impacted many Christians' views on the world. This passage places everything related to this world into the "cannot love" category. However, according to the Bible's description, there are at least two concepts related to the world. One is the natural world that God created in Genesis, which is the universe and all the things within; and the other is the world as it relates to its geographical boundaries, which divide up the nation into various nations today. With this understanding, we find that when John advised against loving the world, he was referring to the humanistic world that was ruled by Satan and plagued by sin. This world is full of, as he points out, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (2:16). These things, which are of the world, are not pleasing to God and, of course, are things that we should not love.

Moreover, in John 3:16, John proclaims that God loves the "world" (the Chinese Bible translates it as the "people of the world," while the original transcript means the universal world, or the natural world), and Jesus Christ died in order to save the world, which showed God's love to the world. And through this love of His, He reconciled all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through Christ's blood, shed on the cross (Col 1:20). Therefore, when we have a clear understanding of the word "world", we have a deeper knowledge of those categories about the world that we should not love. We also are able to understand that, as we address our responsibilities as a social citizens in today's world, we ought to be grounded in the truth, and not compromise in the areas John warned against, and to participate in the other areas with God's love.

2. God wants mankind to rule over the earth. When God created mankind, He endowed them with the mandate of subduing the earth (this mandate is called the creation or cultural mandate today), and of ruling over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and the livestock, and over every living creature that moves on the ground (Gen 1:26-28). God wanted mankind to

work with Him in His creation as a steward; wholeheartedly ruling over all the good things He created. This command eventually became an important part of mankind's purpose in life. When we think from this perspective, subduing the earth is both our mandate and our responsibility, endowed to mankind by God. Therefore, we know that God wanted mankind to value the material world, and that He also wanted them to find satisfaction in all their rule and toil (see Eccl 3:12-14). Although the world today does not follow after God's own heart in many aspects, due to the power of Satan and influence of sin, Christians should not reduce our involvement in various levels of the society, and we should all the more strive to complete the creation/cultural mandate endowed by God, with due diligence.

3. In the fallen world plagued by sin, mankind cannot accomplish the creation/cultural mandate of subduing the earth. Therefore, God has entrusted His people with another mandate – the gospel/mission mandate, that is, the mandate in which God wants His people, whom He has raised up, to go to all nations and witness for God. When His people respond and take up this gospel/mission mandate, reconciliation will take place between mankind and God, between mankind, and between mankind and nature through salvation in Jesus Christ (see Col 1:15-22), so as to once again realize God's will in creating mankind and the world, and to fulfill the creation/cultural mandate God endowed on mankind.

Since Abraham's time, God has made His will even more obvious; God made a pact with Abraham, promising to make him into a great nation, bless him, and bless all peoples on earth through him (Gen 12:1-2). The covenant with Abraham demonstrated that God wants to raise a kingdom through him to become the tool for showing God's grace to the nations. This not only showed that salvation would come from his offspring, Jesus Christ, but it also shows that God wants the Israelites to be set apart to be a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation for Him (Exod 19:4-6). By obeying the commandments, laws, and decrees given to them by God through Moses, the people of Israel were called to display to the nations God's holiness, righteousness, love, and other attributes. And what God wanted them to demonstrate was to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him (Micah 6:8).

The fifth through tenth commandments of the Ten Commandments talk about the relationship between man and others, with the general theme being to love others as you would love yourself. This is a constant theme in the Old Testament Law, and is also the prophets' exhortation. This is because after the fall, and under the influence of sinful nature such as greed, pride, and stinginess, exploitation appeared among the people in the natural world, and injustice was everywhere. God wanted the people of Israel to be priests, so that they could serve as mediators, facilitating the reconciliation between God and mankind. God also wanted them to live out the requirements of love and justice by the Law, so that they could become representatives of mankind before God. These requirements were to be revealed mainly in these aspects: to free the poor, orphans, widows, and foreigners from injustice; to free those being governed from the oppression of their rulers; to cease violence and build peace; to enable those marginalized by society to be accepted, and to assimilate them into society (see Lev 19, 25; Deut 19, 25, 26). The Law also shows that God wanted His people to care and love for the natural world, so He demanded the Israelites to love and rule over nature. An example of this is to let the land rest (Lev 25:2-5).

When God chose the Israelites, their being set apart meant that they belonged to God, as His special people. This was not just a mandate to be separate from the world, but was also a mandate that made them enter into the world to lead people back to God. The requests made by God to the Israelites through the Law show that God desired to bring about reconciliation and renewal through the salvation He had prepared, and demonstrates the meaning He has endowed on creation. However, the people of Israel were not able to complete the entrusted gospel/mission mandate, so God raised up the church, as a group of His people, to continue to complete this mission of testifying to the nations. They are to enter into the society, and, through proclaiming the salvation of Jesus Christ, demonstrate God's justice and mercy, in order to attract all peoples to return to Him.

4. God's reign has come upon the world – all peoples and nations, as well as individuals – through Jesus' coming into the world. Proclaiming God's reign is the center of Jesus' ministry. God's reign, accomplished through Jesus

Christ's salvation, has overcome sin and death, and brought a new order to this world. The work mentioned in the third point, which God wanted the Israelites to complete through the Law, ended up being manifested in Jesus Christ. When Jesus began preaching publicly, He stated His mission: to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19; see Isa 61:1-2). What He did and accomplished on earth was the exact essence of the Old Testament Law. And in the Sermon of the Mount (Mat 5-8), Jesus even interpreted the essence of the Law to the disciples by pointing out the true meaning of the Law in God's kingdom. He wanted the disciples to serve as light and salt (Mat 5:13-16), and to live out the love and justice of God in their lives, in order to impact society in a positive way, so as to demonstrate the reality of the kingdom of God on earth. From Jesus' work on earth, we can understand that His coming not only brought a holistic and comprehensive gospel to the world, and enabled God's reign to come upon individuals, but also evoked the sinners He has saved to bring God's reign into their societies, nations, and the natural world, through the power of His resurrection.

When we combine the above the concepts discussed above, we can clearly understand that God wants His church and children to live in this world, but not belong to the world of sinful influence. We are different than those in the world, but we are to become their blessing because of our salvation. Therefore, we do not just stay out of the world's affairs and live completely devoted and separated lives; on the contrary, through our Christ-like words and deeds, we will bring the truth of salvation, God's mercy, love, and justice into the crowds. This, on the one hand, will allow people to understand the truth of salvation and be saved; and, on the other hand, it will impact and transform society, the nation, and the world we live in.

On fulfilling the responsibilities of a social citizen

When Christians face the issue of how to fulfill their responsibilities as social citizens, they find that many areas are involved. Social responsibilities include any item in life that is related to public affairs, from small-scale, local community issues, to large scale international

affairs. The discussion of how the church and believers are to fulfill their responsibilities in these aspects would require many books in which to elaborate. However, as Chinese churches have not studied these issues as thoroughly, there have not been many works, even though there is a great need for them. Therefore, we want to call upon scholars and pastors to work together to provide the Chinese churches with principles and methods that are in line with biblical values, in order to help our churches fulfill our social responsibilities. This is also a ministry that EFC should participate in. We hope that more EFC-goers will work on how to fulfill our social responsibilities, and propose methods of implementation. While there are many items for discussion, this text is limited in length, and can only provide EFC congregations with some initial reference and reminders, discussed briefly in the three sections below.

Church and state government

The state government is a mechanism and organization formed in order to protect all the citizens under their jurisdiction, and to govern their relationships with one another. God establishes the authority of rulers, so that there is no authority except that which God has established. Rulers, then, are God's servants. Therefore, the church's main recognition of government is that she is to submit to the rule of those in authority over her as a matter of conscience, not because of possible punishment (Rom 13:1-5). "Submission" means that fulfilling social responsibilities is more important than considering one's needs. For the sake of the Lord, Christians are to submit to the ordinances of man and the rule of governing authorities, for it is God's will that, by doing good, you may silence the ignorant talk of foolish people (1 Pet 2:13-14). Good governments will maintain order and reveal justice, encourage good citizens and punish the bad; these things are beneficial to us (Rom 13:3-4). EFC local churches have all been planted in democratic countries that enable their citizens to enjoy all sorts of freedom. Our religious freedom has made it easier for the church to deal with submission to state laws and government operation, as compared to the church in New Testament times. As a citizen in today's democratic countries, and in consideration of biblical teachings and actual circumstances, we

will provide some principles for practice, both for individuals and the church as a whole.

There are many responsibilities that Christians, as citizens, are to fulfill for their governments, including: (1) Seek the peace of the country and city (society), and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace, we will have peace (see Jer 29:7). (2) Pay taxes as the law decrees, exercise the citizen's rights, and fulfill all obligations. (3) Seek political office with God's guidance, as a servant of God, in order to urge the government to implement policies that are in God's eyes. (4) Join various volunteer groups or political parties that may improve society, where required. (5) Raise and care for political problems, by means of influencing public opinions, in a political atmosphere of justice and moral standards, using biblical values and appropriate moral principles. (6) Be a person of peace when the society is in conflict, and in the face of disharmonious conditions that exist due to certain social issues. (7) Respect the public power exercised by the government to maintain social order, and support measures taken by the government in order to maintain public authority.

The church also has certain responsibilities toward the government, including: (1) Participate in state public prayer, making petitions, intercession, and thanksgiving for all people, and for kings and all those in authority (1 Tim 2:1-2). (2) Promote respect for the social rights and interests of individual citizens. (3) Teach fellow citizens ethics according to biblical principles, and remind them to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk with God. (4) Encourage respect for the rulers (Exod 22:28; Acts 23:5). (5) Exercise the function of the moral conscience, using biblical truth, in the event of an improper use of political power. (6) Exercise the function of prophetic warning and correction against the injustice and crime that exists in society, according to biblical truth. (7) Remind those in authority that they are accountable to God, and that they are servants of God, who should exercise their power and fulfill their obligations according to the law, to promote justice and maintain social freedom.

Social charity and humanitarian concerns

Because God demands love and justice from His people, social charity and humanitarian concern are ministries that many churches ought to be involved in. This is especially true when it

comes to natural disasters, human lives are endangered, and churches should be the first to provide relief and aid. Some churches, as well as some individual believers, have made every effort to care for minority groups in society. In these aspects, EFC's involvement has had quite a history. With God's love for those in need, we have provided as much help as we can, especially in emergency situations. This is the spirit that all local churches, and the EFCGA, should continue to hold. However, the commitment and involvement of other faiths in these aspects have made it necessary for us to think and reflect further on our existing values, ideals, principles, and practices. We are very clear that the basis for the church's being responsible in these aspects originates from our experience of God's love in our lives. Because of God's love, we care in Christ Jesus for the welfare of others, which is different than the worldview of accumulating merits, or caring for the sake of ourselves. And if we are to give more of this kind of love today, we will need many reminders, so that our caring is not accidental, but continuous: (1) We must truly realize the importance of people, each of whom is valued by God regardless of their positions or identities. (2) We need to harness the strength of groups through loving and united relationships among brothers and sisters, and utilize that group strength to make our charitable ministries more effective. (3) Effective and long-term social charity and humanitarian concerns require professional commitment and collaboration, which require the EFCGA and local churches to come together in seeking out and cultivating talents, as well as in consolidating direction and practices.

However, we must understand that, other than in the case of natural disasters, matters that require the solicitation of charitable relief and humanitarian concerns usually stem from corruption, which is the result of human greed, pride, the desire for power, and factors such as government corruption, failure of public power, political confrontations, and wars, all of which have caused the improper distribution of wealth, exploitation, the marginalization of minority groups, and innocent citizens suffering as victims, even to the point of having their lives and properties subjected to threats. These situations continue to exist in many parts of the world. For churches and believers, who are the people of God's kingdom and a part of the global citizenship,

our duties are two-fold. We are to spread the gospel and have mankind receive salvation, and then undergo renewal and transformation; but also, we have the responsibility to call upon the world, by speaking and acting out God's commands of love, holiness, and justice, so that, with biblical truth as the basis, the nations may implement strategies that improve social systems and revive the public power to exercise justice, thereby enabling social charity and humanitarian concerns, and having a substantial and ongoing impact on the world. For EFC, this type of involvement in social charity and humanitarian concerns is relatively rare, and there is still great room for learning and participation that require our ongoing care and commitment.

Environment and ecology

As a global citizen, we have the responsibility to protect and manage the environment and ecology. Today, environmental and ecological protection have become global issues. People have perceived that nature and mankind are no longer in an "it and I" relationship. Mankind lives in nature and is closely related to it. As part of nature, destroying it is equal to doing harm to ourselves. If man continues to destroy the environment, and to abuse natural resources to a point where we lose the earth's capacity to maintain survival of various organisms, mankind themselves will also be threatened. Today, human damage (pollution, excessive acquisition of resources, etc.) to the environment has caused ecological imbalance, global warming, climate changes, and threats to biological diversity, with many species on the brinks of extinction. In fact, the current situation has reached the point that we must take action; otherwise, we will not be able to leave our future generations with a land in which they can live peacefully.

In the past, EFC has not paid much attention to environmental and ecological issues, for a number of reasons. As an evangelical church, we see the gospel/mission mandate as the core of our ministry and, when it comes to the future, what we care about is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In addition to this, we have neglected the creation/cultural mandate, so we have not paid attention to the truth that we should respect God's design and be responsible to God (Gen 1:28; 9:1-3). The consequence of this has been that we have not assumed our identity as stewards, nor

have we fulfilled our responsibility of ruling over and protecting the earth. The natural world is God's design and creation, and He liked what He had created, so He rested on the seventh day to enjoy His creation (Gen 1:1-2:3). When we understand these truths, we love what He loves and, by principle of loving others as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31), we actively protect the environment and ecology. This is a responsibility that we cannot be excused from.

However, the global trends today of focusing on economics, commerce, and technological development, as well as the encouragement of consumption, have brought much tension to the issue of environmental and ecological protection. As the church gets ready to be the earth's good steward, with the horizons and spirit of a global citizen, she must examine, point out, and face up to the characteristic of greed in human nature. Development of this technological civilization has contributed much to human lives; but, while pursuing progress and convenience, it is undeniable that hiding behind it all are often the greedy desires for wealth and material gain. If mankind cannot accurately measure how much is enough to satisfy them, then they will never cease their exploitation of nature, and will never truly implement environmental and ecological protection. As such, mankind needs to return to our faith and service in the Creator, be mindful of the accumulation of earthly wealth, and seek His kingdom and righteousness as the goal in life (Mat 6:19-34). This is our appeal to everyone from, a macro point of view, and God's children should lead by example.

As for practicing environmental and ecological protection in life, below are some sustainable development projects that should be considered by both individuals and society (including various industries): (1) Reinforce recycling and reuse of resources. (2) Ensure the efficient use of energy, with current efforts on carbon reduction. Encourage the use and application of non-fossil fuel. (3) Develop public transport as a viable option for transportation. (4) Maintain natural open spaces, and protect forests and lakes. (7) Develop intensive living models to facilitate resource sharing. (8) Promote simple lifestyles to reduce the burden of resource development and usage.

These items are not exhaustive. However, in the face of environmental and ecological protection, relevant education is still the most important step for today. Only when every person faces up to the importance of this issue can real protection be implemented. On the other hand, we must be proactive in creating and developing diverse and suitable environmental protection technology and practices, in order to achieve environmental and ecological protection, and even to raise living standards. Some ways of doing this include: building green houses, which include the use of recycled building materials, environmental friendly paint, and shutters; the rooftop can be sealed with soil and gardened, and rainwater can be recycled; and permeable pavement can be used for walkways or parking lots. When mankind is willing to give a little more thought and consideration to this issue, we can make contributions to environmental and ecological protection.

Conclusion

Mankind lives in society, and the natural world and benefits from them. They should give something back and fulfill their due responsibilities. For Christians, as this article has described, we have many necessary responsibilities to fulfill in order to accomplish God's will for mankind, for society, and for the natural world. It is not, however, a simple and easy thing for us to exercise our responsibility effectively as social citizens, according to God's purposes. The main difficulty is that, under the impact of globalization and information technology, human societies are increasingly diverse, and no longer have a single makeup of members. Their cultural characteristics, beliefs, worldviews, and values are rather different and complex. This has made it difficult for different individuals and groups to come together in harmony to share their rights and obligations. And the prevalence of democratic trends and the relative values of our postmodern culture have compounded this difficulty even more.

In a pluralistic society, Christians must simultaneously demonstrate distinct characteristics of being God's people, and be proactively involved in secular affairs, in order to be good citizens. The key challenge is to shrewdly discern between things that should be agreed upon and supported, and things that shouldn't be

agreed upon and must be opposed to; then, a decision must be made that reflects our stance by laying out a plan of action. This not only requires mastery of biblical truth, but also the wisdom to communicate and build bridges over multiple cultures. For the brothers and sisters of EFC, these two aspects are what we must strive to learn and practice. May God give us power and strength to function as light and salt – by shining the light of life onto the people in darkness, attracting them to come back to God, and producing a seasoning and preserving effect that will renew and transform our societies, so that they will not deviate from God's will, and may be filled with justice and mercy.

In developed twenty-first century countries, those who are married only once will become a minority, as the increasing trend of divorce and remarriage is difficult to reverse. Those who are forgoing marriage, and instead are gravitating towards co-habitation, are setting another trend in society. The recent rise in the divorce rate has slowed, not because the situation has improved, but because the co-habitation population has greatly increased, and quite simply, the unmarried cannot divorce.

These trends have an impact on the church, whose members increasingly mirror those of the society at large. As co-habitation is not in line with biblical principles, and is regarded by God as a sin of promiscuity, and thus unacceptable, it will not be discussed here. However, the church will ask those involved in co-habitation to confess and repent, and to terminate such relationships. They will also be encouraged to marry, and enter into matrimony.

Regarding divorce, some Christians have already been divorced before they come to know the Lord, while others are divorced after becoming Christians. Therefore, what the church has to consider when dealing with the divorce issue is very complicated. Churches that believe in the Bible, and are willing to exalt the Lord, often have to face some fundamental issues. For example, some of the social questions the church faces include: can Christians divorce? Under what conditions can they divorce? Can they remarry after divorce? If they were to remarry, how should the ceremony be held? Can divorced and remarried people participate in church ministry? What ministry can they be involved in? This text will propose views and principles for dealing with these issues related to divorce and remarriage.

Before talking about divorce

Before discussing under what conditions divorce is permissible, two aspects must first be affirmed: to insist on the marriage principles God has established, and to rely on the Holy Spirit and God's love for mankind's imperfection.

God established marriage when He created Adam and Eve. Marriage is a covenant relationship, made between a man and a woman before God. Both the man and woman not only

have to love and live with each other under this covenant, but they also have to have a close relationship with the witness and protector of this covenant – God. The sanctity of this covenant also sets the couple apart for God, when the two become one. When this covenant is broken, it not only hurt both the man and the woman, but it also damages their relationships with God. Jesus Christ's statement fully expressed the importance and seriousness of this covenant – the husband and wife are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate. (Mat 19:6; Mark 10:9).

As we insist on God's noble heart for marriage, we also understand that mankind lives in a world that has been fully affected by sin. Satan has used all means possible to destroy the marriage and familial relationships. Therefore, social corruption and human weakness cannot be overlooked when facing and dealing with divorce issues, as they cannot be properly handled simply by insisting on no divorce.

Factors causing divorce are complicated. Looking at it from the big picture, these factors include the secularization of the society, which results in changes in marriage values, financial pressures, liberal divorce laws, independence of women in work and financial status, high expectations for marriage, and the vicious cycle of the divorce phenomenon. However, looking at it from the individual couple's relationship, the reasons for divorce are apparently more complex than ever before. For example, some factors include: extreme personality mismatches, long and severe conflict in daily lives, uneven distribution of household chores and child rearing responsibilities, problems with in-laws, extramarital affairs and adultery, physical and psychological abuse and assault, mental disorders, psychological illnesses, addiction to alcohol, gambling, drugs, or pornography, and so on.

When faced with bad or failed marriages, couples eventually face the decision of whether or not to get divorced. When the couple's relationship cannot be improved, either choice will bring pain and harm. From the perspective of the covenant, damage is already present in these two circumstances; it is only that a divorce officially (and legally) terminates the covenant relationship of marriage.

When a couple is making a decision about divorce based on the degree of pain or harm it will cause, they will often come to the conclusion that divorce will cause less suffering. In this instance, divorce is licensed, not because we agree, but because there are no alternatives. We still hope, however, that those involved will experience the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Looking at divorce and remarriage from Christian values

The main scriptures in the Bible that deal with divorce and marriage include Genesis 2:24; Exodus 21:10-11; Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Malachi 2:11-16; Matthew 5:31-32, 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:1-6; and 1 Corinthians 7:10-15, 27-28.

Scholars' interpretations of these passages are divided into four main positions: (1) one cannot divorce, or remarry; (2) one can divorce, but not remarry; (3) one can divorce and remarry, on grounds of adultery and abandonment; (4) one can divorce and remarry, under specific circumstances.

Traditional and conservative Chinese churches, based on the principle in Matthew 19:6, hold that what God has joined together, let no one separate, so they adopt the first stance. However, from the Bible's values on marriage, and having seriously considered the sins and difficulties actually faced in marriages, we believe the third and fourth stances must be considered.

According to Deuteronomy 24:1-4, divorce and remarriage were already common practices in Moses' time. The purpose of the Law was threefold: (1) to avoid "something indecent" (the New Chinese Version renders it as "something disgraceful") that would spoil the sanctity of marriage; (2) to protect women from being abandoned by their husbands for no reason; (3) to provide divorced women with certificates, lest they are seen as prostitutes or women who ran away from home and acted inappropriately.

From these purposes, we understand that, through Moses, God set principles for the purpose of protection, to guide people in the midst of a chaotic and bad marriage system. Jesus' teachings on passages related to divorce and remarriage (Mat 5:31-32; Mat 19:3-12; Mark 10:1-12) show that He refuses to look at divorce from the rigidity of the Law; but rather, he points to God's

intention for marriage, and to the spirit of the Law, to highlight the sanctity of marriage. In doing so, He emphasizes that, in kingdom ethics, marriage is long lasting, and that no one should separate what God has joined together. Therefore, these teachings are akin to the legal principles of the Ten Commandments, and are not detailed enforcement rules; they are to be further defined upon application. Moreover, hyperbole is used here, which indicates that, when we deal with actual cases, God's intended meanings must not be applied literally, or rigidly, but are to be determined according to the respective circumstances, while maintaining the important function of evoking a change in the thinking and behaviors of man.

Today, believers live in an era in which the kingdom of heaven has already come, but has not yet been fully realized. Human hearts are still as hard, as they were in the times of Moses and Jesus, and divorce and remarriage are still inevitable. This is why Jesus permits divorce on the grounds of adultery in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:3-12.

Paul does not think that the Lord Jesus' teachings on divorce and remarriage include all situations; otherwise, he would not have added the extra factor of "abandonment." Therefore, Paul continues the Lord's teachings on divorce by affirming the permanent nature of marriage, and encouraging believers to strive to keep their marriage with their unbelieving spouse, and to not take the initiative of seeking divorce. However, Paul also accepts the fact of hardened hearts. If the unbelieving spouse insists on a divorce, then here the principle of harmony is more important than the principle of no divorce, and he concedes to "let it be so" (1 Cor 7:10-14).

As for the possibility of remarriage, Paul's saying that people "not bound," in 1 Corinthians 7:15, means that one is free to remarry, as was used in the Jewish divorce papers. Similarly, "are you free from such a commitment?," in 1 Corinthians 7:27-28, means that the man was once married, but is now in a possible situation of being "divorce" or "widowed." For these believers, Paul says, "Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned." Obviously, in each case, if the reason for divorce were accepted, then the possibility of remarriage would be permitted.

Besides the third stance, where divorce and remarriage are permitted due to the spouse committing adultery or leaving, we have also, based on the principle of choosing the better out of two imperfect and undesirable situations, considered the circumstances entailed in the fourth stance: when the spouse insists on not making changes to his/her behavior, has no intention to build up the marriage relationship, and continues to abuse the other person materially, physically, or mentally, or is addicted to alcohol, gambling, drugs, or pornography, and refuses to repent and accept treatment. The innocent spouse, after doing all he or she can, but no avail, may consider divorce and remarriage, for the wellbeing of themselves and their children. The purpose of this view is not to open the door for divorce. However, if we refuse to consider exceptions, we may end up causing greater trauma to the body, mind, and spirit of those involved.

In conclusion, we hold that the New Testament has four reasons for permitting divorce, two of which are the traditional view of “adultery” and “abandonment by the unbelieving spouse,” while the other two are “emotional negligence” and “material negligence,” which are accepted by the Old Testament Law and prophets based on Exodus 21:10-11, and indirectly used by Paul and the church traditions. Paul used these two aspects equally for husbands and wives, and they become the foundation of the Christian marriage vows in Ephesians 5:28-29.

In order to reverse the raging waves of divorce, the church cannot simply respond with criticism and rebuke, but must instead seek proactive prevention. The decision to divorce is usually the result of something that has accumulated for a long period of time, with early signs along the way. If intervention occurs early in the process, there is always an opportunity to save the marriage. The church should, therefore, work on providing pre-marital counseling, marriage and family counseling, and divorce and post-divorce counseling.

When dealing with divorce, we should do so in “grace” and “truth,” by encouraging the parties involved to translate share their willingness to communicate, change, resolve problems, save, and restore their marriage, which God had originally intended, into practical actions. Humans

inevitably have weaknesses. One should not think that he/she must divorce because their spouse committed adultery or abandoned them; but rather, they must be willing to do all they can to restore the marriage to its healthy state. This is not an easy thing to do for victims who have been hurt and lost trust. However, this is the life of the people of the kingdom of God, and the renewing strength of the Holy Spirit is able to bring healing and restoration to broken relationships.

If one party is subjected to long periods of material and emotional mistreatment, and their spouse has absolutely no intention to reconcile, or wants to continue the marriage relationship without making any changes, causing the brother or sister to be determined to divorce, then the church should be accepting, and not judging, and accompany them through this difficult phase, so that they will not be hurt again.

Whether or not to remarry, and “when to remarry

Generally speaking, although divorcees have been hurt in a marriage relationship, the possibility of their remarrying is very high. According to the abovementioned scriptures related to divorce and remarriage, and considerations such as that “it is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen 2:18), and “but if they cannot control themselves, they should marry” (1 Cor 7:9); as well as “not bound” (1 Cor 7:15); and, “but if you do marry, you have not sinned” (1 Cor 7:28),” the church ought to hold the following positions:

1. Divorce is the last resort for Christians, reserved only for those instances where it is inevitable. All divorcees should self-examine, confess, repent, and forgive in order to seek the possibility of restoring the marriage. As for believers who are without good reasons, but still insist on a divorce, the church should deal with them using appropriate discipline, including suspending their service or participation in communion.

2. Those who have just divorced should first seek healing and personal growth in the Lord, wait quietly, and avoid any immediate new development in relationships.

3. Believers planning to remarry should seek pre-marital counseling, examine whether they have already sorted out past baggage, understand

whether each other's expectations (with respect to children, work, assets, in-laws and so on) are realistic, and whether their perceptions on the Christian view of marriage are correct.

4. To believers who are divorced but have decided to remarry, if they are prudent and have fulfilled all righteousness mentioned above, the church should accept them, emphasize the salvation of the gospel, and allow them to hold the wedding in the church. Before performing the wedding, the minister needs to make sure that this remarriage is allowed within the scope defined in the Bible and that those remarrying sincerely accept marriage as the union of a lifetime. During the wedding ceremony, it is necessary to include a section commenting on the fact that they have been subject to discipline, and have subsequently repented, and to declare that divorce (even if it is under the circumstances permitted in the Bible) undermines God's ideal for marriage.

Conclusion

For Chinese churches in the twenty first century, divorce and remarriage is a common and difficult problem. Factors causing believers to have difficulties in their marriage relationships are many, including extramarital affairs, physical and psychological abuse, extremely incompatible personalities, baggage from the family of origin, immense differences in parenting, or conflicts with in-laws. Certainly, there are also brothers and sisters in EFC who already have experienced, or are currently experiencing, the hardships of marriages that have hit rock-bottom.

We sincerely hope that these brothers and sisters, who are struggling in their marriages, will be able to love again, forgive their spouse, and have no resentment or bitterness through the work of the Holy Spirit, teachings from the Bible, and support from brothers and sisters. Prayerfully, the result will be resolved problems and restored relationships. However, if after much effort over a long period of time, one party is still unwilling to change, and his/her heart is hardened so that they must separate, we hope that they will have a clear and good conscience towards God and men.

While we may have different reception and convictions, and thus adopt a certain stance, let us face this problem of divorce and remarriage with Christ's saving love, listen and learn from one

another in humility, and constantly absorb God's word, until we are convinced of the proper course of action. At the same time, let us engage together in works of prevention, teaching, and edification, in order to minimize divorce and remarriage. May God transform us into sons of peace, so that the hearts of the husbands will turn to their wives, and the hearts of the wives to their husbands.

In the past, homosexual behavior could not be tolerated by social ethics, and was subject to much criticism. Homosexuals are marginalized people in society, who hide in the shadows to engage in disparate acts and indecent activities. Now, groups in support of homosexuality have stood out to speak for homosexuals, and to fight for their rights. Homosexuals have also become more daring in arguing for their sexual orientation and behavior in public. Their activities have become more and more public, in order to invoke laws for their human rights and welfare, in an attempt to win societal sympathy and legitimate status.

Today, homosexuality has become a global hot topic, arousing attention from all walks of life in all nations. This article will propose EFC's views and positions held on this issue, from the perspectives of Christian faith and science. Nevertheless, we must first state that EFC does not discriminate against homosexuals. In view of the principle that God loves sinners and hates sin, EFC opposes homosexual behavior, but loves the souls of homosexuals. We are willing to help them to come to know Christ and return to God's perfect will for mankind.

God's creation and biblical ethics

The ethical foundation of Christianity is not based on philosophical thought or culture, but on the attributes of the triune God, including holiness, justice, omnipotence, truthfulness, goodness, love, mercy, kindness, and faithfulness. These godly attributes are complete and immutable, and will never change. Therefore, the ethical principles of Christianity will not change according to people or place, but will stand the test of time.

When exploring the ethics of the Bible on homosexuality, we must return to God's will for creating mankind and establishing marriage and family. The Bible records at its outset that the entire universe is the meticulous creation of the Almighty God, and that mankind is His masterpiece, to whom He gave honor and glory. When He created mankind, He made them in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26), so that they have true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). Although man and woman are different in gender, they have both been created in the image of God, have equal status before God, and possess the

same right to subdue all things on the earth. God also established for them the sacred institution of marriage, which promotes unity between a man and a woman (Gen 2:24). Although man and woman are different in physiological and psychological makeup, they complement and support each other, and reproduce offspring with the physiological functions God created, in order to establish a family together, experience the true meaning of love, and live out the virtues of God. This is what God intended when He created mankind, and it is God who established the natural order of marriage. If mankind deliberately destroys or violates this order, they have committed a detestable sin (Lev 20:13), and the sin of unnatural relations (Rom 1:26-27).

The Bible condemns the sexual intimacy of homosexuals, and not their sexual orientation. Homosexual orientation is an abnormal sexual orientation, but it can be corrected. As for homosexual behavior, it is one of the sins that Paul sternly condemns as unrighteous (Rom 1:26-27). He points out in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 the result of its wrongdoing. The male cult prostitutes, and men having sex with other men, are the same as the sexually immoral and idolaters in that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God. "Do not be deceived" was the warning Paul gave to homosexuals and other unrighteous people. As far as Christians are concerned, they should not have any homosexual behavior, just like they should not do anything unfitting.

Regarding the difference between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior, we must distinguish between temptation, or the thought of sin, and the act of sin. When an unclean thought enters the human mind, this is temptation. So long as the person can wake up immediately and clear these thoughts, he/she does not sin. But if they allow these unclean thoughts to accumulate in the mind, do not clear them immediately, and let them work in their mind, the sensual desires will overpower them when the opportunities arise, which will result in sin of the mind (Mat 5:28), and even the act of sin. It is the same for someone with a homosexual orientation. Orientation itself is a physiological or psychological condition, which one should try to correct as much as possible. When temptations of homosexuality appear in life, he must refuse. This tendency itself does not alone constitute the sin of homosexuality, but if he falls into temptation,

which results in homosexual behavior, then it is condemned by the Bible.

Biblical teachings on homosexuality

The Bible opposes and rebukes homosexual behavior. In the Old Testament, two incidents of homosexuality are recorded, in the cities of Sodom and Gibeah (Gen 19; Judg 19). With respect to the homosexual sin that the people of Sodom committed, regardless of their reason, the Scripture clearly says that what they did was a wicked thing (Gen 19:7). Because of this sin, and other sins they committed, God's wrath came upon them, destroying them. In other words, God's judgment and destruction came upon Sodom because of the evidence of their sinful acts. The book of Judah also clearly points out that the sins of Sodom are sexual immorality and perversion (Jude 7).

The Bible also has explicit passages forbidding homosexuality. In Leviticus, two texts rebuke the act of homosexuality – “do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable” (18:22), and, “if a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads” (20:13). These two passages clearly indicate that homosexual acts are detestable sins and, in order to remove this sin, homosexuals should be put to death. Those who approve of homosexuality believe that these two passages, which clearly appear in Scripture, relate to ritual cleansing, and that these liturgical laws were repealed as a result of Christ's salvation. But we must recognize that the words of Leviticus are not all religious and ceremonial cleansing regulations that can be abolished. If they could all be abolished, then the sinful acts of rape, incest, and bestiality, recorded in Leviticus chapter eighteen, would be abolished together with the sinful act of homosexuality. God has decreed that the Israelites were not to imitate the Egyptians and the Canaanites and perform those detestable sins of sexual immorality. They were to keep themselves holy, and not to defile themselves, lest they be cut off. The Gentiles had sinned and defiled their place, so God drove them out of the land. If the Israelites committed the same sins, which were in violation of what God had intended for creation, they would also be driven out of that land, for the sins they had

committed were moral sins (Lev 18:1-5), and not sins violating liturgical laws. Unfortunately, besides idol worship, the Israelites did embark on the same path as the Canaanites. They engaged in the perverted acts of the sexual relations of male cult prostitutes within the nation (1 Kings 14:24; 2 Kings 23:7), which made God detest Israel. When she had committed too many sins, God's judgment came, and the northern and southern kingdoms were destroyed. This is a warning from history.

In addition, Paul also discusses the issue of homosexuality in his epistles. Like many other sins, homosexual behavior is a sin that Paul sternly rebukes. In the letter to the church of Corinth, he lists the homosexual behaviors of male cult prostitutes, and men having sex with men, together with the sins expressly prohibited by the Ten Commandments of “the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, and the greedy”. He points out directly that people who commit these sins cannot inherit the kingdom of God. We see herein the seriousness of this sin of homosexual behavior. And from 6:12 on, Paul talks about the problem of freedom. He points out that man does not have the freedom to make the body into an instrument of sin. Homosexuals cannot enter the kingdom of God, because homosexual behavior is a sinful act and is not within the range of freedom permitted by God. In 1 Timothy 1:9-10, Paul lists the sin of homosexuality with other things that rebel against God in the last days, to reveal its seriousness. In Romans 1:26-27, Paul rebukes the act of homosexuality as “unnatural” relations against God and man. This unnatural relation is what happens when mankind sins against God. When man deliberately does not worship God, God abandons them, and gives them over to sin, to live a life that is contrary to the creation principles and against nature. As far as Paul is concerned, homosexuality is a lifestyle that is against natural relations; it is a sin that does not please God, which is also EFC's perception and stance today.

On the factors causing homosexuality

For both gay men and lesbians, their bodies have an uncontrollable desire to have intimacy with same-sex companions. This includes the desire to kiss, caress each other, and even engage in mutual masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, and so on. These are unnatural behaviors. Emotionally,

they desire letters, words of love, and comfort from their companions, and even eagerly hope to share in steadfast love with their same-sex partner. However, homosexuals often have psychological struggles and pressures. Many of them appear withdrawn and are emotionally depressed, while certain homosexuals have a grave sense of guilt and shame impressed upon their hearts.

No matter what the situation is, more and more homosexual supporters think that the cause of homosexuality is innate. They believe that if homosexuality is innate and constituted by the unique makeup of genes, which is a force majeure, then homosexuals and homosexual acts cannot be seen as a sin, as it is not the result of mankind's intentional choice. However, it is not hard to find that the formation of homosexuality is quite complicated, and includes some acquired factors. For example, there may have been dysfunctional family relationships and problems with identification of roles during the childhood or adolescent stage, or people may have been subject to sexual abuse and sexual experimentation before becoming homosexuals. These factors counter the argument and positions of homosexual supporters.

As to whether homosexuality is derived from innate factors, there has yet to be a conclusion, and it requires scientists' ongoing research. In the past, causes that have been explored in medical research include: study of homosexuals' physiological features from their hormone secretion; comparison of the hypothalamus of gay men and heterosexual men; comparison of the structural makeup of the x chromosomes of homosexuals; forecast of homosexual population from history; and research on the genetic factors of hermaphroditic children. However, the research findings, perhaps due to the inability to distinguish between consequences and causes, or due to limited data, are not satisfactory to scientists, and they have yet to prove that homosexuality is innate.

Under these circumstances, even if innate factors exist, we must still think on the basis of salvation history from the Christian angle. That is, we are to distinguish between our nature at creation, and our nature after the fall. Today's natural world has retained some of the nature God first created, but also has many elements of

post-fall nature. In our nature after the fall, we do not rule out that there may be a genetic factor of homosexual orientation. But does that mean that, if there is a natural tendency, that homosexual behavior is not a sin? The answer is no. If the answer is yes, then commit the naturalistic fallacy of concluding that what ought to be is derived from what is – an erroneous attempt to draw ethical conclusions from natural facts. This is exactly what Paul argued in Romans 1:26, when he said that sexual behaviors are distinguished between natural and unnatural ones. The innate homosexual orientation in our post-fall nature does not warrant that there ought to be homosexual behaviors, for Paul classifies them as unnatural relations, which are not in line with God's creation purposes. But if we derive what ought to be from our nature at creation, then we are not wrong. God first established marriage to be a heterosexual union of man and woman (Gen 2:24), This is what God intended for creation. As we live in the nature after the fall, we need to wait eagerly for the new heaven and new earth to come in the future, which will usher in our redeemed nature, which will be saved and renewed, and no longer has any element of our post-fall nature (see, Isa 11:6-9; Rev 21:1-5).

In all, although the causes of homosexuality are not simple, and may include both innate factors and environmental and human factors, we need to be aware that homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior are different. Homosexual orientation can be controlled, and one can stop incubating the thought that results in the actions. Same-sex orientation needs to be corrected, while same-sex intercourse is a sin of unnatural relations. It is a shameful act, and must be reprimanded and prohibited.

EFC's response to homosexuality related issues

In the current time, when positions for and against homosexuality are increasingly tit-for-tat, EFC pastoral coworkers and believers must understand that, when we take up our stance from the biblical point of view, we must deal with some issues carefully as we begin to take action. Our approach is discussed below, in several aspects:

First of all, according to the Christian faith, we do not reject the homosexual himself; what we reject is the homosexual behavior that the Bible regards as a sin. Society inevitably discriminates

against homosexuals, but the church should not discriminate against them. God loves sinners, but hates their acts of sin; this has always been EFC's position. Unfortunately, this is a position that many homosexuals today cannot accept. They think that, since they are not in the wrong, others should approve of their behaviors. As such, asking them to refrain from homosexual desires is unacceptable to them. Therefore, a challenge for EFC pastoral coworkers and believers is to point out the homosexual sin with moral courage, while loving the homosexual people with Christ's unconditional love, thereby eliminating his/her hostility, and producing effective conversation with him/her to enable them to understand God's will and receive what God has promised.

2. Society and the church should both respect and care for the human rights of homosexuals, because they were also made in the image of God, and share equal rights of survival, work, esteem, and accommodation. Therefore, we need to learn how to address and care for their interests and rights, from the perspective of respecting every man created by God. However, as for the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) rights advocated by homosexuals, that is, recognition that it is their right to choose homosexuality, we must consider otherwise. From the Bible's position, if we ascertain that homosexual behavior is a sin, then agreeing to LGBT rights is equal to agreeing that man has the right to sin, such as the right to commit adultery, the right to lie, and the right to be corrupt. This is not to be accepted by Christians.

3. Homosexuals are not considered a minority group. When groups in support of homosexuality come together to amend laws, and seek to alter the traditional family system, the church and believers should actively participate in debates of public opinion to reveal the truth and protect it. We must understand and ensure that homosexuality is not another alternative lifestyle, but an abnormal lifestyle. Same-sex marriages are also abnormal, and will bring about abnormal impacts on society. After all, God's purpose and design for marriage and families are best for mankind.

However, at present, homosexuality and same-sex marriage as a moral issue has gradually become a political issue of legislation. This is the case in many countries today, and is not what we

would like to see; but when necessary, the church and believers must defend the faith and church with the truth. For example, if the government plans to enact anti-discrimination legislation to protect homosexual behaviors, it would be a direct challenge to the definitions of marriage and family. All dictionaries and encyclopedias and textbooks would have to be rewritten, and schools would not be allowed teach the Bible's stance against homosexual behavior. Neither can the church declare and teach her members these biblical positions, nor can she reject applications from homosexuals for minister and pastor posts on grounds of homosexual behavior. This will have severe repercussions and adverse consequences to social norms and church governance.

4. The Bible is indeed very clear in condemning homosexual behavior as a sin, but the Bible also condemns sins of adultery, greed, unbelief, hypocrisy, criticism, and self-righteousness. Christians must know that they are totally corrupt sinners saved by grace, and that only by the salvation of Christ can they be justified before God. Therefore, the church and believers must not hold animosity against homosexuals, but rather should seek to break self-limitations and build a bridge of effective communication. They should not begin invariably with criticism, but instead focus on restoring the sinners and developing an evangelistic ministry for homosexuals, learning to guide them with love, so they can return to God and leave the snare of homosexuality.

Most homosexuals are not willing to be exposed, because they cannot stand the way people look at them. They are sensitive and emotionally vulnerable. They hide in the dark corners of society, and they do not like to accept counseling from heterosexuals. Helping them to change is a very difficult task. But we believe that, by the Spirit of God, they can be cleansed and healed (1 Cor 6:11). Therefore, in addressing the problem of homosexuality, churches can set up a homosexual groups or fellowships that agree with the biblical position and is led by experienced pastors and professional counselors. Together, they can seek healing based on biblical principles, and testify to the great power of God in transforming lives.

5. The causes of homosexuality are closely related to the impacts brought on by societal moral corruption, family breakup and disintegration, and sexual abuse by parents or relatives. While professional ministers and counselors work to lead and win over homosexuals for God, the church has all the more responsibility to promote Christian marriage and family ministries, so that marriage and family values, and lifestyles pleasing to God, will not only be taught and practiced in the church, but also demonstrated, advocated, and spread in society. The church's renewal, and her impacting and transforming of society, is indeed the key to effectively address and resolve the problem of homosexual behavior. And this effort will reduce the impact and harm that homosexuals have on the next generation.

How does the church see Christian homosexuals?

Today, there are more and more social service groups in society that exist to help homosexuals, but not many can help them with physical and spiritual growth. Church is one group that can provide such a ministry, and we have the responsibility to preach the gospel to homosexual friends. When the church is willing to commit to such a gospel ministry, we will see homosexual friends becoming Christians (of course, there may already be members with homosexual orientation, or who are practicing homosexuality). However, after receiving the Lord and accepting the Spirit's renewal, their lives won't necessarily become holy and spotless instantly, and a homosexual may not necessarily be successful in becoming a heterosexual. Therefore, if a homosexual person has come to the Lord, instead of forcing him to become a heterosexual, we can encourage him to live a holy, single life, to learn to depend on the Lord and the Spirit's grace for overcoming the improper desires of the heart, and not to commit again the sin of homosexual behavior. If the Lord continues to work in him, and turns him into a heterosexual, then that is the will and grace of God, which man cannot force upon him.

When the church is dealing with homosexual believers who are relatively weak, pastoral coworkers not only need to care more about their movement and needs, they they also need to teach believers, on a positive note, the biblical position on homosexuality, and the right attitude towards them. Brothers and sisters are to be

reminded to love the part of the body that is weak or sinning in this respect. All church members must learn the attitude of unconditional acceptance and respect for them, especially when it comes to their personal privacy. This is not about a cover-up, but a matter of wisdom. When we learn of certain people with this condition, we cannot make it public, but must encourage those involved to approach pastors or teachers, who can then provide professional help, and talk to them about themselves and trust their assistance.

While the church avoids vilifying the weak parts of the body caught in the homosexual struggle, she should not be afraid to exhort them in the truth, even out of a fear of being rejected. If possible, let the pastors and professional teachers they trust maintain communication with them as much as possible, by praying with them regularly. And through Bible study, they can point out, step by step, the errors of homosexual theology, establish a correct understanding of the truth, and help them to be released from the unrealistic and self-beautifying illusion of loyal homosexual relationships. If they are able to, in this way, accept the biblical position, are willing to repent and confess in truth, and accept proper counseling to regain new birth, then that would be the sweetest testimony.

If there are Christian homosexuals who continue to live with their homosexual partners, or continue their homosexual behaviors, or insist on another set of beliefs that the Bible permits homosexuality, then they are sinning against God in these situations. However, if the church is anxious to subject them to church discipline, then it would only speed their leaving the church. If the church feels that it has not yet reached the point of eliminating their membership, then she should try to restore them as much as possible, correct their faults, pray that the Holy Spirit will shine light on the erroneous deed, and help them seek the Lord's guidance step by step.

If in the believers' homes there is a youth saying that he/she is a homosexual, what are we to do then? By similar principles, the church should teach and help parents accept that child and love him/her with unconditional love. The church should also teach the child to obey God and honor his parents and state, and God, according to the Bible, forbids that homosexual behavior. Another thing to do is to invite pastoral

coworkers and professional instructors to pray with the parents and child, asking God for mercy to change his/her sexual orientation. If their sexual orientation cannot be changed, then they are to learn to live a holy and celibate life by grace.

Cases of corrected homosexuals show that counselors must persist and be patient, because the \ process of change usually takes as long as three to four years. If the person who was once engaged in homosexual behavior or had homosexual orientation is determined to depend on God, deal with him/herself, and is supported by the church's ongoing acceptance and support, he/she can be liberated and changed. However, in dealing with such a process, the entire church must be prepared to pay a price in this regard.

Conclusion

The homosexual issue, faced by the church today, is no longer a small-scale situation, but has affected all of society. As far as EFC is concerned, we have a responsibility to put forward the right views and positions according to the teachings of biblical truth, but we are also responsible to proclaim the good news of the saving and transforming gospel to those caught in homosexual bondage. This will be a commitment; we must be willing to struggle with them, to go through the pain of change with them, and to overcome sin with them by the power of the Holy Spirit, gaining freedom together in the grace of the Lord.

Since the twentieth century, rapid technological development, in particular the highly developed life sciences and technology, has made many contributions to mankind, but has also evoked issues related to human life. Its complexity has impacted social ethics and standards of morality.

EFC deeply believes that the revelation of the Bible is the highest standard for human life and behaviors. It transcends race, culture, science, and philosophy, and it does not fade or change with the times or the evolution of civilization. EFC upholds biblical truth in order to provide spiritual principles as the basis for bioethics. This article will offer EFC's views and principles for dealing with seven issues related to bioethics, namely, artificial insemination, abortion, euthanasia, suicide, capital punishment, organ transplants, and human cloning. Our hope is that pastoral coworkers will be able to respond appropriately to these issues, teach the believers to make good use of them, to serve as witnesses and spokespersons for this era, and to function as pillars in this materialistic generation.

Basic ethical values of life

Human life is honorable and noble. The Bible clearly reveals that mankind is made in the image of God (Gen 1:26). The life of mankind is more honorable than anything on earth, and God cares for them (Ps 8:4-8). When the triune God created mankind, He made them to represent Him and manifest His glory. Human life has a special dignity, as it was created for the creator himself, and not for other purposes; therefore, it is sacred, and it cannot be trampled or killed as one pleases. Therefore, mankind has no right to dispose of their own (or other people's) lives as they please; they are to live life fully and meaningfully, according to God's will.

Unfortunately, when our ancestors rebelled against God and sinned in public, the image of God in man had become incomplete. From then on, the honor and value of mankind at creation was distorted, and men have failed again and again in their spiritual warfare. Sin has made mankind fall short of God's glory, and mankind's fall and corruption are unable to reveal God's perfection and glory. However, even in their fallen condition, God still sees mankind as precious. He loves them and is determined to restore their

honor and value at creation. Therefore, God sent His only Son Jesus Christ to the earth, so that, through His salvation, the sins of mankind can be forgiven, and their relationship with God restored. Mankind can now regain their value and dignity and, in turn, be able to manifest God's glory. This theology, related to man's creation and salvation, fully demonstrates that God values each person's worth and dignity, and that the purpose and value of human life originates from and depends on God, the creator of life. It is on this basis that EFC deals with issues related to bioethics. The sovereignty of life is in God, and life should be respected by all.

Artificial insemination

Artificial insemination is where an infertile couple seeks non-conventional and non-natural ways to nurture human life. Advanced medical and biomedical development has enabled three categories of artificial insemination techniques:

1. In vivo fertilization: The sperm is injected into the uterus of the wife by artificial means.
2. In vitro fertilization (IVF): The embryo is synthesized by artificial means, outside of the body, and then implanted into the uterus of the wife.
3. Surrogacy: The artificially synthesized embryo is implanted into the uterus of another woman.

Surrogacy has stirred much controversy, mainly because it is related to the ownership of the sovereignty of life, which Christians believe to have come from God, and honor it. In God's creation, God gave mankind the ability to reproduce, and desired for them to be fruitful and increase in number to fill the earth (Gen 1:28). He did not want them to reproduce without rules, but wanted them to be fruitful and increase in number in the sacred institution of marriage, which He had established (Gen 2:24), lest they cause societal chaos. This also enables children to be born into wholesome families, to receive parent's loving nurture, and to grow strong with brothers and sisters, thereby developing healthily in body, mind, and spirit.

Another key ethical life issue, related to artificial insemination, has to do with the human embryo. In order to increase the implantation rate, the doctor usually incubates several embryos, and

then chooses three to four embryos to plant in the uterine cavity. However, in order to avoid problems that may arise from multiple gestation (such as miscarriage, malnutrition, and so on), doctors may undertake fetal reduction, which is an abortion. As for the remaining and unwanted frozen embryos, what do the parents do with them? Do they freeze them indefinitely? Do they destroy them? Or do they donate them as research material? Whatever is done, it all has to do with how we look at life. And this is an issue that must be thought through thoroughly before people undergo artificial insemination.

Besides this, several other aspects must also be considered, from the perspectives of both society and family. If we are to undergo artificial insemination, the source of sperm and ovum must be strictly regulated, lest it destroys marriage loyalty and family ethics. We also need to avoid causing controversies of estrangement and incest. As for surrogate mothers, there must be legal regulations, lest there be disputes of blood relationships, unclear ownership of children, regrets from one of the parties who is unwilling to fulfill their obligations, suspicion of child trafficking, and even problems of child discipline and estate inheritance.

EFC holds that doctors may use technology to solve the problem of fertility for infertile couples, but they cannot replace God or violate His regulations. If it is not within the scope permitted by law, doctors cannot use high-tech medicine to help couples give birth. And based on the Christian belief of marital fidelity and family ethics, artificial insemination, whether in vivo or in vitro, should only involve the husband’s sperm and the wife’s egg. Pregnancy through a mistress or third party is not to be accessed. However, in the event of infertility, couples may also consider the option of adopting orphans, and raise and teach them according to God’s will.

According to the Bible, we believe that children are a heritage from the LORD, and offspring a reward from him (Ps 127:3). Therefore, EFC emphasizes that, when making decisions regarding artificial insemination, the parties involved must examine their faith in God and their knowledge and submission to God’s sovereignty, seek earnestly God’s will, and do things carefully according to God’s ways and time. Only in so doing can they be blessed by God.

Abortion

Abortion is the forcible removal of an unformed fetus from the womb, or the loss of an unformed fetus through taking medication, resulting in its death. This is a serious issue of bioethics. The Ten Commandments clearly state that one shall not murder (Exo 20:13). This commandment specifically points out that one shall not kill deliberately. Man has no right to kill another man, which should include impending on a fetus’ right to survival. The key controversy related to abortion is the point at which life begins. Some people think that life begins the moment one is born, but the Bible points out that God already knows the fetus in the womb, before birth (Ps 51:5, Ps 139:13-16; see Jer 1:4-5, Luke 1:15,41). And, in medicine, it has been proven and shown that life already exists before a baby is delivered.

Let us look at the gestation progress of a baby in the womb: after conception, the egg becomes fertilized with life characteristics that undergo constant cell division; after two weeks, the fertilized egg continues to grow after being implanted into the uterine wall; at eight weeks, the embryo has the human form with miniature face, fingers, toes, internal organs, and bones, and a constant heart beat; after three to four months, the mother can feel the fetus’ movement in her womb; after a full-term of five months, if the baby were delivered prematurely, he/she could still live on machines; after six to seven months, if the baby were delivered prematurely, he/she could live on their own. Therefore, at any stage, removing the life embryo or fetus would be terminating life.

In today’s society, people have different views on whether a fetus is considered a person or not, resulting in various stances opposing or approving abortion. The table below is a summary of three viewpoints on fetus development and the decision to abort:

View on the unborn fetus	A complete person	A person with potential	Inferior to humans
Abortion or not	Absolutely not	Sometimes	Anytime

Principle of judgment	Sanctity of life	Risk of life	Quality of life
Mother's rights	Life is more important than privacy	A balance of rights (權利的配合)	Privacy is more important than life

A baby's development in the womb is a great and private project, and a wonderful thing to be excited about; however, in the face of the abortion issue today, who is qualified to decide about the unborn fetus' rights to life? Government regulations? Medical care units? Family of the pregnant woman? Religious people? The pregnant woman herself? The fetus in the womb? EFC stresses that life is sacred, and that the sovereignty of life is in God, which man cannot replace. Therefore, man is to take great care of any pregnant women and fetus. If the fetus does not have any adverse signs, the pregnant woman and her families do not have the right to decide on an abortion, but must care even more for the fetus in the womb. In principle, abortion is not permitted; however, in the real world, due to various special circumstances, pregnant women, their families, and relevant persons may need to consider the option of abortion. We think the following situations and conditions can be considered: if the women became pregnant by rape or incest; the growth of the embryo is endangering the life of the mother; tests have made it known that the fetus is unhealthy; and it is certain that the fetus has no possibility of survival in the womb.

When faced with these situations, one must carefully examine the principles, circumstances, and motives, and then make the proper judgment. Amongst these, if medical tests find that the fetus may have a congenital disability, one should not rush to make the major decision of abortion from the test results. Remember, what God gives to the fetus is always the best present. One should remember to pray earnestly to God, and to look to God in faith, for God is able to give peace that transcends all understanding, and protect both the fetus' growth and the hearts and minds of the pregnant women and their families.

When one decides to have an abortion, the pregnant woman and relevant persons not only have to face the damage done to the woman's body and the fetus, but also the shock brought about by these circumstances. This requires God's immense mercy and grace, because those people suffer from some degree of loss and damage, and need great comfort and support. Brothers and sisters at church need to give their care and support.

Euthanasia

Euthanasia is not equivalent to hospice care. The Euthanasia Society of America (American Association of Euthanasia) gives this definition: In order to alleviate the extreme physical pain of some terminally ill patients, some painless methods and means are used to end the life of these patients. This is a bioethics-related issue, and treatment of it must be handled with caution. Euthanasia can be divided into two categories:

1. Voluntary euthanasia: By voluntarily taking the life of the patient, three conditions will occur:
 - i. Patient's voluntary initiative
 - ii. Not the patient's wishes
 - iii. Against the patient's wishes (murder)

2. Passive euthanasia: Under the passive state, by not taking any measures or resuscitation to prolong life, death is permitted.
 - i. Removal of the medical life support system
 - ii. Cessation of provision of natural life support substances

Although dying with dignity is the moral right of human beings, we must be very careful when considering euthanasia for people suffering from terminal illness. For persons suffering from terminal illness for a long time, euthanasia is a means of relief from pain. For the suffering families, this is an act of charity, which relieves the family from the mental, physical, and financial burdens. For the society, it will reduce the social burdens. Euthanasia as an option takes humane considerations into account.

However, we cannot overlook the fact that the right to begin and end life is not held in the hands of man, but of God. Mankind has no moral right to suicide or homicide. Human life is

priceless, and one cannot rely on the single reason of terminating pain to actively end the human life. Passive euthanasia is also a serious issue that is not easy to address; whether or not to adopt it is a painful choice. Several important factors must be considered: the number of days that can be extended for the patient as a result of medical and nursing care; the quality of life (including joy and pain) when the patient is alive; families' financial burden and social costs; and relatives and friends' spiritual and physical burdens. The final decision cannot be made by the patient or doctor alone, but needs to be made by all; it must be a collective decision by the patient, families, doctor, minister, and lawyer, under the permission of the law. When the patient is still alive, his/her family and doctors should fulfill their humane obligations by trying to maintain the patients' lives, and by reducing the pain of the patients, so that he/she can have the quality of living. In addition, for those who belong to the Lord, they must have the realization of life that pain is not at all bad. Physical pain may make man treasure all the more the preciousness of life, keep families close, and learn valuable lessons in life.

Suicide

Suicide refers to the deliberate decision to end one's life without the instigation and assistance of others. Suicide is the intention of the person involved, and is invoked solely by the person. Suicide can be divided into two categories: egoistic suicide – to reduce one's own pain without considering others; and altruistic suicide – to reduce the other person's pain through death. Either category is a life tragedy.

In recent years, terrorists have used the so-called Bin Laden-style suicide terrorist attacks to cause the deaths of many innocent people, as well as societal panic, and have profoundly undermined global safety. This kind of suicide has gone beyond the two types mentioned above and is an insane behavior that must be stopped.

EFC opposes suicidal behaviors. The courage to commit suicide is not the same as the spirit of martyrdom, because suicide is immoral and violates the principles of natural law and love. Suicide is a destructive behavior, which ruins the integrity of society and undermines the stability of communities. Human life is a sacred gift endowed by God. Only God owns the life of man. Mankind

does not have the right to end their lives. Suicide oversteps the authority granted by God.

The value of life lies in the process of fighting against hardship, and pain can bring about the training and breakthrough needed for life and character building. The pressures of life and pain index in today's society remain high, and many intend to commit suicide to escape from that pain. They are weak people, who need special help and teaching. The church and society must take the initiative to care for those who have the desire to attempt suicide, and to give them proper counseling, so as to help them out of the shadows of suicide and self-enclosure or self-mutilation, and to walk with courage towards a positive life.

Death Penalty

The death penalty is an extremely severe punishment to criminals, and is generally used in two circumstances. One is when the person has committed a capital crime (usually murder) that hurt or attacked others, and another is when a person has committed a felony that violates specific national laws (for example, some countries have capital punishment laws for drug trafficking and corruption); so the national law enforcement agencies may decide to deprive the criminals of their right to life. The death penalty thus becomes a sanction that law enforcement personnel in authority impose on offenders convicted of violating the law, in accordance with the regulations.

The principle of statutory penalties is that all offenders must be punished, and their sentence must be equal to the severity of their crime. One purpose of statutory punishment is to meet the requirements of justice. For murderers, they have, because of their attack on others, not only caused fatal injuries to the victim, but have also left a mess for the victim's families and friends to clean up, which results in insurmountable pain. There are two ways to fulfill the requirements of justice: one is to compensate the victim, and the other is to punish the offender. If there were no other way that could satisfy the requirements of justice, punishing the murderer by way of the death penalty is one possible method. This is because every person has the right to live, but when A took away B's right to live, then A's right to live should also be subject to the punishment of being taken away. As for those major criminals, who violated specific national laws and brought

immense harm to society as a whole, punishing them with the death penalty also satisfies justice requirements. The other purpose of statutory punishment is to deter crime; and death penalty is the attempt to use the most severe punishment to deter unscrupulous criminals from committing a crime, thereby preventing major criminal acts from taking place and avoiding repetition of these crimes. Such enactment of the law is the last resort, and serves as a tool for control and maintenance of societal order.

Despite these undeniable reasons, Christians still have to ponder a few things with respect to the death penalty: Is the death penalty humane? Does it ever go too far? Can man take another person's right to live? What do we do if the implementation of the death penalty is unjust? How great is the deterring effect of the death penalty? On these questions, we can think from the angle of Christ's salvation. When a woman caught in adultery, who ought to have been stoned to death according to the Mosaic Law, was brought before Jesus, the situation and result (John 8:1-11) offer us direction of thought. Jesus released that woman in grace, which showed that the ultimate end for sanctioning criminals is correction, not punishment. Criminals should be subject to correction, not sentenced to death. This is not to connive at crimes in grace, but to restore sinners in grace. If the death penalty seeks to retaliate, it only deepens hatred and social tragedy, but also denies the basic dignity of the offender as a person. Executing the death penalty in retaliation and deterrence does not really fulfill social justice.

Whether society should have the death penalty or not is not an easy question to answer; but today, the incidence of the death penalty in various countries is decreasing by the year. With respect to serious offenders, legal personnel can formulate ways to strike a balance between the punishing the offenders and compensating the victims. And they should actively consider rehabilitation in place of the death sentence, in order to make it possible for offenders to repent and be thoroughly renewed. Christians, on the other hand, have the responsibility to preach the gospel to them.

Organ Transplants

Organ transplants are a new concept. In the application of the latest medical technology, the

doctor can remove the organs of brain-dead persons or organ donors, and plant them in patients with damaged organs to prolong their lives. In terms of ethical considerations, and having weighed the pros and cons of the donor's act of love to sustain the recipient's life, organ transplants can be acceptable good deeds, as long as business interests do not taint them. The donor's good deed not only saves the patients, but also comforts their families. It also makes contributions to society, by saving long-term treatment costs for the patient, increasing social welfare and productivity, and creating a more harmonious and happy social culture. Nevertheless, organ transplants are an act of love, not an obligation. Although traditional Chinese thinking emphasizes keeping the entire cadaver, and prefers not to remove the organs for other purposes, EFC, based on the biblical principle that it is more blessed to give than to receive, encourages her members to participate in the good deed of organ donation, to show the love of Christ, and to enable men to understand more about the Christian faith, and experience the love of Jesus Christ for the world.

How do we engage in organ donation? Participants should pay attention to several controversial issues, and handle them carefully. If it is a living organ donation, the donor must be mindful of his/her own health, because living organ transplants pose potential health risks to the donor. If the transplant surgery fails, it will make the donor feel regretful, and the recipient ashamed and uneasy. Additionally, if complications or infections result after organ transplants, dissatisfaction or hostility from the recipients and their families may result. Therefore, both the donors and their families, and the recipients and their families, all need to have a thorough understanding of the entire organ donation process before they decide to act on it.

With regards to obtaining the organs, generally, it is extracted from the body of a brain-dead person. The doctor may declare the person brain-dead in order to obtain the organs, and thus lose the last chance for resuscitation. If the deceased had agreed to donation, but his/her families are unwilling to execute it, it can become a tricky matter. It is especially difficult if the deceased did not sign the agreement form when he/she was alive; if the family is opposed, then organs may never be obtained. Another situation

is to extract the organs from the body of a person on death row. It is even possible to execute the death penalty earlier than it would otherwise take place, in order to meet the needs of the patient whose illness may not wait; this is improper. A final relevant situation is that currently there is a supply and demand imbalance, with few donors and many recipients in waiting, making organ distribution a difficult issue on many levels. While organ extraction has something to do with government regulations and medical ethics, the aforementioned situations deserve our attention.

Human Cloning

Since 1996, when the Roslin Institute of Edinburgh, UK, announced the successful replica of Dolly the sheep, a mammal just like humans, human cloning has aroused much attention from scientists, and instantly became a global hot topic. Cloning is a single-sex reproductive technique, which is also called asexual reproduction. According to the explanation of the World Health Organization in 1997, cloning refers to the asexual production of genetically identical mechanism or cell line (strain), the genes of which are fully provided by the line or strain providing the nucleus. It does not rely on the sperm-egg fusion of germ cells, and no genetic recombination is involved during the reproduction process. The cloning of Dolly the sheep underwent 276 failures in the laboratory before it was successfully cloned. Some scientific research units claimed that humans would be successfully cloned by the year 2000, but so far it has not been achieved.

Why do some people want to clone humans? Reasons include: to treat infertility; to clone oneself equals having an eternal life; some lesbians would like children; to obtain organs and save them for transplants in the future, on themselves or others; to replace relatives who died; and to replicate great men and geniuses would be a good thing for society. These benefits may seem reasonable, but many of them are myths. Think about it. Would the cloned human be your double? Is it really eternity if one keeps cloning oneself? Can the cloned person really replace deceased relatives and friends? Can great men and geniuses really be replicated?

If human cloning is truly successful, they are also part of the human race. That is, they are independent individuals, and not ongoing successive “doubles”. Dolly the sheep clearly

showed signs of premature aging (its life expectancy is less than half of the life of general sheep). If this characteristic also appears in human clones, the fear is that the great men and geniuses replicated by cloning would not be great men and geniuses, and the reliability of the organs “reserved” would be quite worrying.

In order to clone humans, human embryonic cloning research will kill countless embryos in the laboratory. When the stem cells of the embryo are extracted, the embryo will die a natural death. It is against the principle of bioethics to regard embryos as a good amount of readily available cells for use. Even if human cloning is successful, we must face up to the purpose of life and remember that the purpose of life comes from the creator God, not from man.

In addition, the biggest problem at present is what to do with the failed clones. Not letting them live, or destroying them, is immoral. And the life development of the clones will be subject to the expectations of others. Their human rights will also be restricted. For society as a whole, there are several ethical problems: blood relationship will be confusing; obtaining a large number of eggs will result in the exploitation of women; mass producing human beings will make humans into a commodity; genetic discrimination will be enhanced; human clones will cause a reduction in genetic diversity, and subjecting mankind to crises of extinction. These situations are all in violation of Christian ethics. When men examine their deepest motives, they may find that they are faced with the rebellious thoughts and actions of wanting to be God themselves.

Based on the above analysis, EFC opposes human cloning.

Conclusion

Since ancient times, mankind has not stopped searching for the meaning and value of life. However, it is only when they come before God that they can find this true meaning and value of life. And only on such a basis can we truly address issues related to bioethics. As this text is limited by space, it has not touched on other issues related to bioethics. And for the seven topics above, it has only provided simple principles and directions for thought, among which a considerable part that still requires ongoing research and reflection. However, we can find

that every topic, whether directly or indirectly, entails some kind of helpless human tragedy, which shows the human predicament, and reminds us that men must repent and turn to God for salvation. By God's grace and mercy, mankind can restore the Eden prosperity that they once had at creation.

Part VI World Missions

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When the Lord Jesus Christ left the world and ascended to heaven, He reaffirmed to the disciples God's salvation for mankind and, by the authority in Him, He asked them to complete the Great Commission – to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything He has commanded them. And surely He is with them always, to the very end of the age. (Mat 28:18-20).

EFC is a church that observes the Great Commission. Since the establishment of our first church forty years ago, we have seen the spreading of the gospel as our duty and aspiration, and have been constantly expanding the kingdom ministries through church planting. In the past, our focus was more on Chinese groups, which is necessary. However, in the final spiritual battle before Jesus Christ's coming again, and with many people yet to be saved around the world, EFC must take up the mission and responsibility of evangelizing all nations and peoples. For EFC to undertake the Great Commission entrusted by Jesus Christ, we need to affirm the biblical basis of missions in the entire church, and let our congregations understand their mission and responsibility. This article will begin by exploring the biblical basis of missions, and provide some recommendations for churches and congregation members participating in missionary activities.

Establishing the biblical basis for church missions

God's people need the mission mandate because mankind has broken their relationship with God, so God will raise those who are His in Christ and, through them, lead the all peoples back to Him (Mat 28:19-20; 1 Pet 2:9; Col 1:28). When God created mankind, they were made in the image and likeness of God. God and mankind had a very close relationship, but mankind misused their God-given free will, sinned against God, and became disobedient, breaking off their harmonious relationship with God and destroying their relationship with other men. However, God loves them and is determined to save them. After Adam and Eve sinned, what God said to the serpent – the offspring of the woman will crush its head (Gen 3:15) - shows that He had prepared salvation, and in so doing had opened a way of return for mankind to reconcile with Him through Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Heb 10:20). The goal of

the mission mandate is to reconcile mankind to God, to men, and to the world through God's people, so that those who believe and are saved in Jesus Christ will be renewed and transformed in Christ by the Spirit, and become the person God had first created.

The mission history has shown that God's desire is to use His people as His instruments to reveal His salvation to all nations and all peoples, so as to accomplish the mission mandate. Such is the core of mission theology. The text below will elucidate the biblical basis for mission by the saved people of God in three aspects, namely, Old Testament missiology, New Testament missiology, and modern missiological reflections.

Old Testament missiology

God chose Abraham and made a covenant with him, promising that he would raise a nation, and that all peoples on earth would be blessed through him (Gen 12:1-2). This proclamation of blessing to all peoples showed that God chose him to be the channel through which He would prepare salvation for the world. The Christ would come from him, and he and his offspring would become witnesses for God in the nations, to reveal God's blessings for the nations. Abraham was chosen for a responsibility. Therefore, his descendants, the Israelites, were to become the servants of God in the nations (Isa 44:1-2), and they were to be vessels for God in history. God would testify to the nations that He is God through His presence with and protection of Israel. Unfortunately, the Israelites did not obey God's commandments and orders, and rebelled against God repeatedly. So God's judgment came upon them; the northern and southern kingdoms were destroyed, one after another, and the Israelites were exiled and scattered. However, God still testified to the nations that He is God through the Israelite Diaspora. In their most humiliating and depressing moment, the Israelites, who were meant to be God's instrument of witness to the nations, were finally able to proclaim, "The LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you." (Isa 49:7).

The book of Jonah records a special mission operation. God sent Jonah to Nineveh to speak of God's mercy, love, and grace upon the Assyrian Gentiles. Jonah was called, but he did not understand God's heart. After initially running away, he reluctantly went to Nineveh to preach

repentance. The whole city eventually repented, and so God did not destroy Nineveh, but Jonah was thus angry with God. Whether or not Jonah had such a reaction due to an ethnic grudge, he really didn't understand that God was not only the God of Israel, but also the God of the world. And he also didn't understand that he was called to become an instrument of salvation. Jonah's condition is a representation of Israel's comprehension of God's salvation. They were proud to be God's chosen people, but they didn't realize that God had chosen them, first from one person, and then to the entire nation, to witness of God to the nations and to spread salvation to all peoples.

In the Old Testament, God expressed this heart of His continually through leaders, prophets, and poets. For example, the book of Isaiah clearly demonstrates that God desires to save all peoples, and that He wants the Israelites to be His vessels. Some passages are as follows: all peoples will wait for the LORD and trust Him (51:5); the glory of the LORD will be revealed (40:5); all from ends of the earth will turn to Him and be saved; for He is God, and there is no other (45:22); I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles (42:6); he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (49:6); many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob" (2:3); the LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance" (19:25); on this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine— the best of meats and the finest of wines (20:6).

From the history of God's chosen people, Israel, we clearly see that the reason God raised them up was to bless them, and so that they, in turn, would become a blessing for all nations, and fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD (Hab 2:14).

New Testament missiology

Salvation is God's plan, borne out of His mercy and unfathomable love. The salvation He

prepared for mankind was accomplished through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So long as mankind turns away from sin, confesses their sins, and believes in Jesus, then their sins will be forgiven and their relationship with God restored. The completion of the salvation of Jesus Christ is a work of God transcending all eras. As it turned out, sinful mankind was subject to the control of the evil one, but the Son of God appeared to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8), making it clearly known that the gospel is the only hope for mankind, and revealing the unique nature of Christ – that salvation is found in no one else but Him (Acts 4:12), who is the only way to God (John 14:6).

When Jesus Christ first came to the world, he proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven is near and among us (Luke 17:2; Mark 1:15; Mat 4:17). This means that the reign of God has come upon all nations and all peoples through Christ's coming into the world. Proclaiming that God reigns was the center of Jesus' ministry and the core of His missionary work. Therefore, He commanded the world to repent and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15). And this reign does not just refer to the future, but also to the present. God's reign brought new order, and Christ's salvation brought new life, so that mankind could enter into a freedom that is free from both the evil one and the bondage of sin (John 8:32). This is not a distant or future hope, but a hope that starts now.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, He entrusted the Great Commission to His disciples, who belonged to a new group of God's people on earth, that is, the Church. By stating the Great Commission, He also revealed the two core concepts mentioned above to His people. "Go and make disciples of all nations" shows that salvation is prepared for all peoples. He is not only the Savior of the Jews, but also the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14). And every disciple of the Lord is an instrument for preaching this good news and making disciples to follow the Lord. All disciples have the responsibility to make men confess Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord of their lives. The Lord's disciples can be sent because all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ. The disciples' mission is to bring God's reign, and freedom in Christ, to all nations, all races, and all individuals, for Christ has overcome Satan and the power of death; and, because God

has reigned, the Church can face the mission mandate with courage. Today, the Church is not only God's instrument to be sent out for missions, but also a group that hopes for the imminence of God's kingdom.

As the first Jerusalem church was persecuted and the disciples were scattered, the evangelical mission also spread following their footsteps. Many disciples only spread the good news among the Jews, but some also preached to the Gentiles (Acts 11:19-20). Paul and Barnabas were the two apostles whom God appointed for the Gentiles, called by the Holy Spirit and commissioned by the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-4). After being called to be the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, a Pharisee, who studied under the Pharisee Gamaliel in perfect manner, not only transcended the legalism he had kept, but clearly understood that the salvation of Jesus Christ was for all peoples, so that he could declare that the Jews and the Greeks (Gentiles) were all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). Such a huge leap in thought shows that Paul had the correct missions concept, which is that salvation was prepared for all nations and all peoples by God. This is what many law-keeping Jewish believers did not see.

The vision conveyed by Paul's mission concept is global. He knew that missions are universal, and that the good news must reach every place in the world. Therefore, he had the ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known (Rom 15:20). Naturally, the center of the Western world then, Rome, was the place he wanted to go. He hoped to stand before Caesar, the Roman Emperor, and testify for Jesus. Paul's universal mission concept is an example for today's church.

And his mission strategy is also worth imitating for churches today. Paul emphasized team missions, by combining mission teams and local churches to form a mission partnership network. His team first had Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy, and then he had Aquila and Priscilla and so on. In local churches, he also worked with their representatives such as Gaius and Jason. He chose the political, economic, and cultural centers of the Roman Empire as the core for developing his mission ministry. Through these hubs, the gospel was brought to various places. His attitude on his missions to the Gentiles was that he would become all things to all people (1 Cor 9:22), so that he could bring them before God. And his self-

sufficiency, through tent making (see Acts 18:3), has even become a model for work place missions today. These mission strategies and principles of Paul are what EFC should further research and adopt today.

Modern missiological reflections

In recent decades, as a result of certain theological developments, some liberal theologians have changed their perceptions of missions. In the past few centuries, missions were seen as a means to deliver mankind from eternal condemnation and judgment, and were a recognized method of church expansion. Now missions is seen as a means to transform the world into an ideal kingdom of God on earth. In the development of this perception, God's deity is being pulled out, and only grace is emphasized. Christology, soteriology, and the Trinity, which were once paramount to the Christian faith, are being diluted during this process, making missions into a people-oriented social gospel. Such missiology is not accepted by EFC. Below are some of the modern missiological concepts that we agree with:

1. **Mission is missio Dei.** This sentence means that mission is God's mission, derived from the very nature of God. He has a heart and plan for the world. He created the world according to His heart and plan, and after the fall of mankind, He chose individuals, a people, and a nation to be His vessel, according to the saving plan He had set. Therefore, missions cannot only be understood from the doctrines of soteriology and ecclesiology, but also thought of and understood from the perspective of the triune God. From the four gospels and Acts, we see clearly how the Father sends the Son and the Holy Spirit, and how the Son sends the Holy Spirit, and how the triune God, the Father, the Son and the Spirit, sends the Church into the world, so as to accomplish the mission mandate before Jesus Christ's second coming. The power of the missionary initiative comes from God. This concept helps the church recognize that missions are not what man and the church wants to do, but what God is doing. And we need to understand how the Church, as the sent group, can participate in the "missio Dei," representing Him in the world, and testifying that the promise of the kingdom of God will definitely be fulfilled. As far as EFC is concerned, to engage in missions today, we must try to fathom the

pulse of the Holy Spirit in the world, and look at missionary directions and strategies from this big picture.

2. Doing missions together with God.

Missions are led by God, but God chooses men to be His instrument to witness to all peoples. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, we have continued to see God choosing His servants, such as Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, and Paul, to lead His people, and to become the instruments for making Him known to all peoples, so that the whole earth may be filled with His glory. Today, God is still calling the Lord's disciples and churches worldwide to participate in His missions work, in order to inspire people to come to Christ around the world. Undertaking missions together with God is a process of knowing and experiencing God, since through missions we can personally experience that God is love, and know that God is omniscient and omnipotent. Doing missions means to work together with Jesus, the King of kings. Participating in missions work makes us workers in the kingdom of God. As we work with God, we need to know the way God works, and we need to meet with God and know how He would like churches and individuals to participate in His plan to accomplish His mission in this era. Therefore, as far as EFC is concerned, when we participate in the missions ministry that God is currently undertaking, the church and the individuals all need to be renewed, in order to accept this glorious office of working with God, and to respond to His invitation for participation.

3. Missions should focus on making disciples of men. After Christian overseas missions began after the eighteenth century, the focus of missionary work was for missionaries to bring the gospel to the unreached, so that they may be saved by the gospel. However, modern missiology has a new understanding of "making disciples of all peoples" – a mature disciple of the Lord is a person who can make disciples of the Lord, possessing the ability of spiritual reproduction and multiplication. In other words, disciple training is only completed when the person making disciples of men also has his/her disciples making disciples of men. As far as the church and missionary institutions are concerned, such transformation has contributed to a new paradigm shift model and action trend, making missionary work no longer focused on how many

missionaries the missionary institution (mission society or church) can send, but on how many missionaries they can train locally. Missionary institutions can no longer just be sending institutions, but need to be institutions that conduct missionary training, with methods that progress from "giving students fish" to "teaching students to fish." As far as EFC is concerned, this is our goal.

4. Missions should be centered in the Bible.

The Bible and world missions are closely related. World missions is God's command to the Church, and the message preached by missions comes from the Bible, which is God's message to the world. The Bible does not just contain the good news; the Bible itself is good news. Although early missionaries have entered the missionary field through medical and educational channels, as missions have always been concerned with improving society, they have never forgotten to use the Bible as the basis and purpose for their missions. They have always understood that the message they preach must be based on the Bible, so that men may receive God's revealed truth and teaching by hearing the word of God in the Bible. The core message of missions is the Bible, which no other material can replace. Missions today needs to return to the Bible, because the eternal truth of the gospel comes from the Bible, and it is the core of our preaching. Only when we act according to the word of God can we bring forth the power that is needed on the mission field. God used the Bible to proclaim the truth to us. We should also learn to use the Bible to proclaim this good news.

EFC's participation in world missions

For the Chinese churches, participating in world missions is only a relatively recent development, just as is the case in EFC. When our experiences and participation are relatively little, there is great room for learning, growth, and development. Although each year the EFC local churches and their members have grown in awareness of their involvement and the ways in which they can participate in world missions, the situation is not yet ideal. If today EFC were to become an effective member of the Great Commission, every local EFC church would need to be set up as a missional church, so that every church member would have a deep understanding that church is not just a group called to be set

apart for the LORD, but also a group that is to be sent into the world as a witness to God's salvation.

To set up a missional church, the most important thing is that all the members clearly understand the meaning, connotation, and mandate of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. They are to be taught to willingly obey the Lord's command and become involved in world missions. Besides the teaching related to missions of the Great Commission, we must also cultivate their kingdom mentality to have the love of God for the world, so that their head and heart may come together to produce lasting missionary initiatives. In the aspect of actively promoting missions education in the local churches, some practical recommendations are as follows: (1) pastoral and lay leaders should first receive missions courses and training at seminaries or missionary institutions, then encourage members to receive such courses and training; (2) preach missions messages in the pulpit on a regular basis, set a quarter every year as the missions quarter (at least a missions month), and then schedule programs related to world missions; (3) conduct planned missions education through adult Sunday School and children's Sunday School; (4) fellowships/small groups can arrange missions activities for the church's mission committee to promote mission and cultivate missionaries; (5) invite coworkers and missionaries from missionary institutions to share their vision and ministries; and (6) set up a missions prayer group in the church to engage in missions education through prayer.

Besides the above missions education approaches in the churches, the function of missions education has also been served by short-term missions over the last few decades, which is something that EFC local churches should continue to act upon. In recent years, some Chinese missionary pioneers have regarded short-term mission activity of a few days to a few months as "visitation mission," because the actual missions effectiveness delivered by most of those participants in the mission field is limited. Often, it is considered good enough work when they do not cause any burden in the field. This is the concern that these missionary workers have for many of the short-term mission activities. Yet it is these opportunities that have enabled many church members to witness the actual field

situation and expand their horizons. By seeing God's work in all the earth, they have begun to care and get involved in world missions, making the short-term missions process an excellent way to educate missions. Therefore, when the church understands the benefit and importance of this, and after having had careful and proper design and arrangement, good use of short-term missions will function very well for missions education, and facilitate the church into building a missional church.

Regarding taking actual missionary actions, due to the vast field and great needs of world missions, accomplishment of the missions mandate cannot be undertaken solely by one single church or denomination. In the face of this reality, the EFCGA, the local churches, and the affiliated missionary institutions all need to find their respective position in world missions. Whether it is sending people, sending money, sending resources, or other aspects, they must seek God's guidance, and understand God's will for themselves in world missions, so that they can see clearly the vision and mandate God gives to every church and institution. In this process, it should be noted that EFC local churches are mostly medium and small in size, and several missionary institutes are still not large in scale. It is not easy for them to undergo growth and self-development, while at the same time derive their respective missions ministry focus from their own vision and mandate, and integrate resources thereof; but they must work on it. Today, as the local churches and institutions cooperate with the development of the EFCGA's vision for missions, four factors need to be considered for forming visions and strategies. They are a reference for the local churches and institutions, and serve as a basis for seeking their own missions ministry development:

1. Search and find the missionary group that God has entrusted the church and institution with. Doing missions means to overcome cultural barriers, and clearly and effectively communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ. And cultural barriers have shades of differences, varying from same culture and ethnicity to different culture and ethnicity. The study of missions uses E-1 to E-3 to indicate the amount of cultural barrier that must be overcome. E-1 indicates the barrier to be overcome between those who preach the good

news and the unbelievers in the same culture and ethnicity. E-2 increases the level of barrier in culture or language. E-3 faces the immense difference in both language and culture. As the cultural barrier increases, the level of difficulty to achieve effective communication also increases. Therefore, when the individual church/institution considers involvement in missions, in their response to God's entrustment, they must not forget to have a deep understanding of the entrusted group, and consider the resources and expertise required to overcome all kinds of barriers.

2. Seek God's entrustment in geographical location. This is closely related to the above point. Due to the influence of globalization and mass migration of populations, E-3 missionary work can be done locally. In Taiwan, there are many foreign laborers. For EFC churches in Taiwan, an example of E-3 missionary work would be ministering to those laborers. There are, however, many clusters of Chinese around the world, and EFC must send missionaries to them as well, so this would be E-1 or E-2 missions. Of course, the world today still has many unreached people in the E-3 category, and missionaries must be sent for them to have the opportunity to hear the gospel. So for individual EFC churches participating in missions, they must also consider the geographical location.

3. Consider the ministry items to be committed when participating in missions. From pre-evangelization work, direct rally, and social care, to disciple training, pastoral care, leader training, and missions education, the entire missions cause has numerous relevant ministries. On top of this, considering that the same ministry can be carried out in different ways and with different strategies, there are simply too many items in the mission ministry today that are worth our commitment to. When the individual church/institution participates in missions, they need to discern their advantages and shortfalls, so that they may be wise stewards as it relates to the sending of workers, money, and resources.

4. Evaluate the short and medium-term missions activities from the long-term missions vision and focus. In the past, the local churches' commitment to world missions was mostly in the form of shotgun spots, and lacked integration and a long-term missions strategy, resulting in the inability to produce any impact or sustainability.

This was only able to deliver limited contributions to the missions cause. It also caused church members to lose motivation for long-term cultivation due to excessive short-term stimuli, and if serious, even caused them to become numb to the missions ministry. If various EFC churches are to commit to world missions, this must be avoided. A more effective approach is to take ten years as a unit, and determine the short and medium-term missions activities from the missions vision, consolidated through the integration of the three aforementioned aspects. Such focused actions will be able to produce results.

The above are considerations for the missions activities in EFC local churches and institutions. Due to size, they must begin from small and have focused missions ministry, developing from points and lines to planes, and gradually forming an effective missional church. Taking it a step further, we can even overcome the size limitations of each individual church/institution, for today's missions emphasize building teams, and not just the input of each individual church or institution. Therefore, with respect to world missions, the EFCGA can play an important role by becoming the link and integrator of missions resources. In addition to leading all the EFC churches to face the 20-200-20000 challenge, EFCGA can also coordinate various local churches and institutions, integrate missions activities and strategies, and even liaise with other denominations to form inter-denominational teams. From missions training to field activities, all can work together to expand the kingdom of God.

As far as the individuals of the EFC church are concerned, it must be understood that, as God's people, participation in world missions is every person's business. Although not every layperson will become a missionary in remote areas, all are a member of the church, the sent group, so everyone must be a kingdom citizen dedicated to the kingdom ministries. From actively caring for missions, prayer, and offering, to caring for missionaries, participating in visitation mission/short-term mission, and committing to local evangelism, there are many items one can get involved with. Additionally, God's guidance for individuals should be sought. Beginning from short-term missions, one may then consider long-term missions. Whether full time or part time, we

are to cross cultures and win all peoples for the Lord.

Conclusion

This article does not detail the theology, strategies, and methods of world missions. There are still many issues that need to be further explored. Actual missions activities require all the more innovation and determination to undertake. Nevertheless, in the face of the Great Commission entrusted by the Lord Jesus Christ, we know deeply that the missions cause shall still go on before He comes again. “Go and make disciples of all peoples” is the mandate that all EFC members must take up, as God has not yet been worshipped in all the earth. This is the reason we must do missions. Nevertheless, this glorious task of working with Him will end when He comes again. By that time, missions will no longer be needed. Jesus Christ will fully reign in all the universe forever and ever. And we shall be in the New Jerusalem, with people of all nations and all races, to worship the eternal King forever. This is our ultimate hope for missions.

A single local church, institution, or denomination cannot accomplish the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus alone. Today, if we are to effectively witness for Christ, we can no longer have local churches and evangelical organizations working by themselves, but must cooperate with one other and build teams, so that the partnership formed through the connected network can produce the function that the “whole” is larger than the “sum of its individual parts.” This is the concept of synergy that is commonly seen today. This concept is critical to the development of EFC. As we emphasize that local EFC churches are to establish new EFC churches through church planting, we should also encourage ourselves to continue learning and engaging in partnerships with other churches and institutions to expand God’s kingdom together. Learning the following concepts shall help EFC local churches and institutions further develop comprehensive partnerships.

Importance of partnerships

The emphasis on partnerships is actually recognition of the fact that a single church or institution cannot accomplish the Great Commission. To truly face this fact, the only option is to work hand in hand and accomplish the Great Commission with effective resource integration, allocation, and utilization. The following concepts can help us understand more about the importance of partnerships:

1. Partnership is biblical teaching. Before Jesus died, He commanded the disciples to be of one mind. In the last supper, He prayed twice for His followers, and hoped that they would be united, so that the world may know and believe in Him as the Messiah God sent to save the world (John 17:20-23). This means that our missions message today is trustworthy because we are one in Him (see John 13:35, 17:11; 1 Cor 12:4-17; Eph 4:1-15; Phil 1:27). Just as individual churches display unity, the partnership between churches and institutions will demonstrate the power of their witness as one body, showing to unbelievers the God in their lives.

2. Partnerships are derived from the kingdom mentality that is God and kingdom-centered. Missions is God’s mission. What the church and institutions strive to expand should be the kingdom of God, and not their individual

power and territories. If a church or institution forgets that they should be centered on God and His kingdom, then their efforts will be devoted to establishing their own brand and reputation. Such sectionalism and narrow-minded mentality not only limits resource sharing and ministry development, but also destroys the testimony of unity. Just as in Paul’s exhortation to the brothers and sisters in Philippi, local churches and evangelical institutions should have the same mindset as Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5); that is, to be God and kingdom-centered when considering ministry development in churches or institutions. This challenges the members in churches and institutions to learn and give up not only the self in individuals, but also the self in groups, and to take up kingdom expansion as their own duty.

3. Partnership is the most effective way to build and develop a church. The ultimate goal of missions is to build a laypersons’ group that functions – the church. Relying on medical care works cannot build a church, and neither can gospel broadcasts, gospel tracks, Bible translation, or education alone. A church planter can begin a church, but the building and developing of it will be much easier with the assistance, contacts, and sowing of these aforesaid gospel works. The strategic missions developed through partnerships will facilitate the more effective establishment of new churches.

4. Partnership is the tool for embracing the immensely changing world. The world is rapidly changing. Besides change, there is nothing but change, and change itself is also changing. Changes in politics, economics, culture, and technology have brought crises as well as opportunities for kingdom ministries. Partnerships can facilitate risk-sharing and seizing opportunities together, so as to quickly make timely and appropriate responses. Furthermore, partnerships can quicken the participants to integrate their views on current situations and future prospects, consolidate long-term ministry directions and strategies, and produce feasible plans and actions. When such partnerships function, resources will be utilized to the maximum effect.

Relationship between local churches and institutions

In the history of church development and missions, in order to complete His saving plans,

God has raised up many different institutions, such as seminaries, campus work groups, text and audio-visual publishing institutions, and missionary societies, to work with local churches, so as to complement and help the local churches to accomplish their mandate. Different than the local churches, which are groups fully manifesting salvation, institutions are groups that God has raised for completing unique missions. Their establishment is entrusted with unique tasks of the era. They are characterized by the specific group of people they serve, which is different than local churches that serve a wide range of people, from infants to the elderly, and with diverse backgrounds. Therefore, institutions must conduct the ministries they have received from God with expertise related to their respective ministries, which is a requirement imposed on their staff.

Due to the uniqueness and professionalism of the ministries of different institutions, they are not subject to the restraint of denominations and local churches. They can provide their service to different denominations and local churches, and even rise above them to develop ministries that they have no full capability to or cannot engage in. This is why the institutions have reasons to exist. Therefore, in order to accomplish the Great Commission entrusted by the Lord, the local churches and institutions have a shared relationship, like lips to teeth, and need coordination and support from one another.

For institutions to properly exercise their functions, they must master several aspects: (1) The institution must have a clear vision and mission, based on which it can execute specific tasks. It must also be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guidance in their environment and time, and make necessary adjustments, so that the ministries have a correct developmental direction, and the institution's mission can be accomplished. (2) The institution is unique but not independent. The ultimate goal of the institution's ministry is to assist the local churches and expand God's kingdom. (3) Between the institutions there must be mutual cooperation, support, and edification. A competitive approach should not be adopted, and they should not take precautions against or exclude each other. (4) The institution must avoid overemphasis on organizational operations, framework, strategies, and methods, and avoid

losing reliance on the Holy Spirit and the spiritual qualities.

With respect to the partnership mentioned in this article, the local churches and institutions must have a clear recognition of each other's role and function in the kingdom, so as to overcome the gap between them. This is necessary so that partnerships can be formed and developed and that, given the scattered or limited resources in today's ministries, concrete coordination and integrated utilization of resources can be made.

Partnership between internal members within EFC

EFC has developed over a hundred local churches and gospel bases to date, and that number is still increasing. Through the leadership of the General Assembly and Regional Assemblies, she has become a cohesive denomination. From the perspective of the organizational framework, the EFCGA, Regional Assemblies and various local churches and gospel bases already have very good structural systems and partnerships with sound operational functions. However, in terms of linking between the local churches, currently this is mainly done through the General Assembly and Regional Assemblies, and less through collateral linking. Therefore, if real partnerships are to be formed, various churches will need to exert some effort.

Currently, it is more practical to act on geographical considerations. Partnerships between member churches in the various Regional Assemblies should be further developed first, then move over to cross-regional development. In the past few years, some concrete actions have been taken to serve as development examples. Take for instance the annual ABC church ministry training workshop conducted in Southern California over the last few years. By inviting many pastors and scholars with expertise and accomplished pastoral and missionary work to participate, EFC members are being trained to get involved in ministries. This approach of training the individuals has the function of connecting the churches. In addition, the elder, deacon, and coworker's training once held by the EFCGA in Southern California also served a similar function. From these foundations, if we can promote some practical actions of cooperation and connection, then we can

definitely deepen the partnership between churches.

Besides local EFC churches, the EFCGA also has under its umbrella the LOGOS Evangelical Seminary, EFC Communication Center, Bethel Prayer Garden, Taiwan Mission Center, Global Life Enrichment Center, and Global Enrichment Theological Seminary as institutions. They are subordinate and accountable to the EFCGA. Together with the EFCGA, they take up the responsibility of evangelism, missions, talent cultivation, leading the churches, and expanding the kingdom commission. As these institutions have a unique focus in their ministries, currently they rely on the EFCGA to exercise the linking function. And they, in addition to undertaking their specific ministries, need to be a supporter and strength of the EFCGA, so that the EFCGA can accomplish its mission in leading and promoting EFC church growth and missions movement.

These institutions also need to build partnerships with local EFC churches, which is an aspect that still needs to be worked on. Therefore, the EFCGA needs to offer assistance by providing the institutions with opportunities to visit various local churches and share their vision and services, and by encouraging the local churches to make offerings and pray for the needs of these institutions. When various institutions go to the local churches to share their vision and services, the pastoral coworkers and lay leaders should encourage members to understand and participate in the ministry of the respective institutions. And when the institutions need to invite church coworkers and laypersons to participate in their ministries, it is best to share their needs with the senior pastor of the respective church or coworker in charge, so as to collaborate in an orderly manner. The collaboration between various churches and institutions is done to bring out mutual edification. The institution can carry out its ministries as a result of the church's support, while church members are fulfilled because they are involved in the ministry of, or training by, the institution.

Connecting with other churches and institutions

Since its establishment, EFC is no stranger to the concept of building partnerships with other denominations and institutions, and has had a considerable number of developments. In

particular, the EFCGA and its subordinate institutions have had many opportunities to work with other churches and institutions. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that there are way too many ministries and areas in which EFC needs to develop partnerships with other churches and institutions. At present, connections and collaboration should be considered under the Holy Spirit's guidance, by screening them with aspects such as the EFC vision, ministry development, and opportunities, so as to produce the maximum effect. As to how we can build effective partnership with other churches/institutions, there are several principles that can serve as a reference.

1. Both (or multiple) parties may begin by building a good relationship, to evoke the motivation for initiating a ministry together. To collaborate, the parties must have a partnership; and quality partnerships are built upon mutual trust. Only when everybody can enjoy the rights, obligations, and reciprocity of partnerships can their participation be optimized. If the parties were to complete all collaboration tasks, then the relationship between them would be far more important than the passion of a single party. Building this relationship is the starting point for collaboration, and this requires open-mindedness and a kingdom mentality.

2. Connection and collaboration require cross-cultural wisdom. Today, ministry that requires partnership to undertake is often very big, and often involves cross-cultural requirements. The churches and institutions with which we partner will have different organizational and operational cultures than us, and even different cultural backgrounds. In the process of connecting and collaborating, if everyone can recognize, respect, and have the wisdom to deal with the different and diverse cultures, then the probability of forming quality partnerships will greatly increase.

3. Both (or multiple) parties must have common goals. Parties usually enter into a partnership because they have the same vision for a certain ministry. However, visions are remote and relatively abstract. For churches/institutions, and the individuals within, participating in partnerships to have effective collaboration, they must also have ministry development goals and plans that they can both commit to. And they

must both recognize that they need the full support of their partners in order to complete their tasks together.

4. The parties are to understand the responsibilities they each need to undertake and the necessary constraints, and give their best.

The ultimate goal for building a partnership is not to establish a friendship among the parties. When all the members are clear about their respective roles and functions, and the necessary responsibilities and constraints in the entire partnership, and give their best, then the goal for establishing the partnership will be achieved, which is to complete the ministry that was supposed to be completed.

5. The parties need to maintain mutual care and constantly conduct performance appraisals.

Partnership needs to be worked on and deepened continuously. One should not think that, since they came to an agreement or tacit understanding at the beginning of the partnership, their cooperation and involvement will go smoothly. Many partnerships fail because they have not continued to care for each other and suspicion, contradictions, and conflicts result, making it impossible to continue ministry collaboration. Constantly evaluating whether the partnership is effective, and then making the necessary adjustments, will help partnership development. In addition, when ministry collaboration comes to an end, relationships with one another are able to have good closure.

Conclusion

Development with other churches and institutions to form partnerships is a goal that EFC will continuously pursue, because we are deeply mindful of the fact that the Commission entrusted to the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ is not yet accomplished. We are willing to have an open mind and a kingdom mentality to work humbly with churches and institutions that are also working for the Great Commission, and to carry out in obedience what Christ the head has entrusted to us. For His glory, and for His kingdom, we unify in Christ so as to exalt Him, proclaim Him, and glorify Him. Through our concerted efforts, may God's kingdom come soon, and may His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.