

Recommendation 41-14

Theology Committee
RE: Recommendation 40-16
“Connectional/Connectionalism”
January 2021

The 40th General Assembly of the EPC referred to the Theology Committee (with assistance from the Ministerial Vocation Committee) the task of defining the terms “connectional” and “connectionalism” as understood by the EPC.

General Historical Usage

Connectionalism is ecclesiastical networking, where laity and minister are connected to each other in order to support one another in relationship and ministry. This is how The United Methodist Church formally understands its polity.¹ The Methodist articulation of connectionalism seems to be the most common understanding of connectionalism within the EPC as generally evidenced by the following phrases: “*We’re better together*,” “*We’re a movement of churches*,” “*We’re not alone*,” etc.

Specific EPC Usage

The term “connectional” however, is used in the EPC’s constitution and relates to our system of polity. Book of Government 9-8: “When appointed to participate in Presbytery or General Assembly, [Ruling Elders] shall watch over the spiritual welfare and participate diligently in the workings of that portion of the Church to which they are commissioned, recognizing that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church is a connectional church.” The connectional nature of the EPC is directly linked to its presbyterian nature: Ruling Elders participating in Presbytery or General Assembly.

Act of Assembly 93-05 also uses the term “connectionalism.”² It states: “Leadership and resources are of little value if the solid commitment of Teaching and Ruling Elders of each church *to the connectional form of government* is absent [emphasis added].” Connectionalism is again closely linked to the EPC’s presbyterian form of government.

Book of Government 16-3 uses the term “connection” to describe the relationship between courts of the church, and states, “This mutuality and connection finds expression in the right of review and control in the ascending order of the courts. Actions and decisions of one court may be appealed to higher courts.” Here, use of the word “connection” is a reference to the duties owed among the courts depending on their relationship to each other. A Presbyterian church is connectional by virtue of its church councils exercising authority and practicing submission in the areas listed in Westminster Confession of Faith 31.2 (e.g. Matthew 18:17-20; Acts 15; 1 Corinthians 12).

Perhaps the best definition of connectionalism in the EPC can be found in Book of Government 5-6A. In this section, any church seeking entry into the EPC must affirm that “[T]he congregation and its governing body have concurred in the request, and have agreed to *walk together as a church, based upon the faith and government of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, to be faithful to one another, to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, to the support of the whole Church, to be obedient to the order and doctrines of our faith, submitting themselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promising to promote its purity and peace*” [emphasis added].

¹ “The principle, basic to The United Methodist Church, that all leaders and congregations are *connected* in a network of loyalties and commitments...” For more see: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/glossary-connection>

² A statement on presbytery development now superseded by *Acts of Assembly* 12-05.