

Church Life, Health, and Mission in the EPC's Presbytery of the East

[[**Note:** This was originally published on March 1st, 2022. It was updated on September 13th, 2023 and September 9th, 2025, mostly for typos. I have not updated this paper to reflect the successes and struggles of implementation over the past three years, my shift in priorities and perspectives during that time, changes that have since occurred in the denomination or world, nor to directly address some of the other approaches to church health still common in the EPC. The following is the opening paragraph of the [original blog post](#) in which this article was embedded, which sets out its initial context.

“I’ve drafted a white paper as a proposal to guide a presbyterially strategized, congregationally executed approach to church health. It is tailored to the EPC’s Presbytery of the East, where I am and the congregation I pastor are members. But the principles apply to any connectional denomination. David Brooks recently [in *The New York Times* highlighted](#) Tim Keller’s 8-point plan for Christian renewal in the United States. Jake Meador [today drew out some of the implications](#) of this plan for institution building. That is what this paper I drafted is trying to capture: a fresh, rooted, and aggressive approach to concrete institution building oriented by the church as God’s institution for mission.”]]

The purpose of this paper is to sketch out a framework of principles and priorities for strategically and concretely pursuing healthy church life and mission within the Presbytery of the East (POTE) of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC).

Church health and mission should be congregationally executed and presbyterially strategized and supported. Too often POTE’s committees operate siloed off from each other. There is not a unified vision for presbytery operations, and execution of our mission is haphazard. POTE’s council is also not an effective forum for strategizing, nor should it be. POTE is presbyterian, and so any missional approach should be owned by the presbytery. This paper does not prescribe an administrative solution to the places where POTE is not missionally effective, but rather ignores the bureaucracy altogether. Organization should reflection mission. Get the mission down and rehabilitate the organizational bureaucracy to achieve it. Where your heart is, there your committee structure will be also.

There are numerous recommendations in this paper that cost a lot of money. There is no illusion about the current financial state of POTE and contributions from member churches. The priorities sketched out here are aspirational, and implementation should be gradual, though deliberate.

1. Church Health and Life

The church receives its life from Jesus. The church is united to him spiritually and mystically, and receives its life from him. He is the vine, we are the branches. No approach to church health, revitalization (i.e. literally “re-lifeing”), or mission can proceed biblically without this reality foregrounded.

Churches are alive and healthy insofar as they truly united to Christ and practicing the means by which that communion is deepened. Any conversation about church life cycles, budgeting practices,

change management, congregational outreach, effective small groups, etc. is all tertiary to the redemptive work of God in Christ and the means by which the church receives those benefits.

Assuming this or backgrounding it in conversations about church health and mission only results in unhealthy churches and mission unaligned with God.

God has instituted means through which Jesus by his Spirit effectively applies to the church the benefits of his redemption: the word of God, especially preached; the sacraments of the new covenant; and prayer. Churches are true and pure churches in their use of these. A church's health must be evaluated by whether the gospel is preached and received, the ordinances of God administered in their integrity, and the worship of God performed in purity.

It is the Spirit who gives life, not the flesh. No program, strategy, or culture sanctifies. Yet the Spirit uses these means of grace to work faith in Christ's people. These means are the true elements of church health because these are the ways in which Christ calls and unites us to himself. The work of the church and its ministers is to steward these ordinances. We plant, labor, shepherd, but God gives the growth. De-emphasizing the ordinary means of God's grace is to de-emphasize God and life in Christ.

The three predominant scriptural metaphors of the church are sheep being shepherded, the household and family of God, and the body of Christ. In these metaphors the congregation is being ministered to by the church: the sheep are being fed by the shepherd, the parents take care of the children, the weaker parts of the body are cared for by the stronger. In the latter example particularly, officers of the church are set up as those who lead and care for other parts of the body. Not all are prophets, not all are pastors, not all are elders or deacons, not all administer the ministry of the ordinary means of grace. In none of these biblical metaphors is there an expectation that every single congregant is called to carry out the ministry of the church. Rather, the expectation is that every single congregant is called to receive the benefits of the ministry of the church, i.e. the means of applying the benefits of Christ's redemption, which is ordinarily administered by pastors.

A church's health is determined by the food being served to the sheep, not the quality of their wool. Fruit in ministry (loving fellowship, care for the poor, enthusiasm for mission, eagerness to repent, striving for holiness) is a result of God's means of grace. But they are *God's*; he gives the growth. It is the Spirit who produces fruit. Churches feed and water. Church health should not be reverse-engineered from the appearance of good or bad effects. Church health should be determined by faithfulness to the means that God has given to the church to sanctify it.

The fruit of the Spirit is good and should be desired and cultivated, but it is cultivated through the means of grace. Loving fellowship in the church should be desired and cultivated, but is cultivated through the means of grace. Faithful witness by Christians in the world should be desired and cultivated, but it is cultivated through the means of grace.

If someone is sickly, overweight, eating poorly, and weak, those are all symptoms of bad health. A doctor does not prescribe the results (have good health, be able to lift massive weights) but means of getting there (eat better and less, take medicine, exercise). When the church is not loving enough the solution is not law: be more loving! It is grace, namely the ordinary means by which Jesus sanctifies his people. The church through its pastors administer the medicine of Christ, and he gives the fruit.

Any presbytery effort to assist congregations in church health must start here. Are the means of grace being faithfully administered? Is the gospel being clearly proclaimed? Th Bible faithfully expounded? Is God's worship being performed purely? Is the congregation praying? Without these, all other efforts just lead to a streamlined, well-oiled, gospel-less organization. It is only after this has been addressed should questions of organizational administration and culture be examined.

2. Presbytery Church Health Coaching

The ordinary means of grace are given to the local church. The presbytery's role in assisting member congregation towards health should involve i) coaching towards the diligent use of the ordinary and ii) aggressive pursuit of competent pastors.

Coaching a congregation along these lines should include using our confessional standards to focus on what a church is, and what the church's duties are in relation to the means of grace. Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) Q&As 153-186 provides an excellent guide on this. Questions include, "What doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us by reason of transgression of the law", "What is required of those that hear the word preached?", "How is baptism to be improved by us?" "How do they that worthily communicate in the Lord's supper feed upon the body and blood therein?", "How are they that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper to prepare themselves before they come unto it?" "What is the duty of Christians, after they have received the sacrament of the Lord's supper?", "How are we to pray?"

These are a sampling of imminently practical questions for the church. If a church is to be healthy, properly receiving the gospel of Jesus as he gives himself to his people by the means of grace is essential. Without this anything else is busywork.

For church leaders, such as pastors and the Session, reviewing Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) 21 on worship; the sections in the Standards on the duty of the pastor regarding God's word, sacraments, and worship; and WCF 30 on church censures is critical. These areas orient the church's leadership to their duty under Christ for his sheep. These duties are the means by which the sheep are fed. Conformity to God's scriptural regulations for worship are far more integral to church health than understanding the organizational life cycle of a congregation.

Any church health coach the presbytery provides needs to be able to help congregations cherish God's means of grace. They need to be able to assess and critique sermons and other teachings under our confessional rubric. They need to speak to a congregation's practices for meditating on God's word. They need to be able to give Sessions and pastors tools for assessing their worship services in biblical, 2nd commandment, regulative principle categories. They need to evaluate the prayer life of the congregation. They need to be able to help churches understand the importance and practical implementations of church discipline.

Without this, any appearance of health is just a grace-veneer over a works-righteousness body.

The EPC currently prioritizes the use of interim pastors ("transitional pastors") during a pastoral vacancy. There is good and bad with this. The good is the opportunity to assess and stabilize a church's health, biblically, and hopefully by a seasoned and wise pastor. The bad is delaying installing the pastor who is called to the church to lead its biblical ministry — or worse, an interim pastor who

“stabilizes” a church by fixating on cultural cohesion and organization efficacy instead of clarifying the gospel-centered, ordinary-means-of-grace-rhythm of discipleship. Congregational-cultural exegesis is important, but it must be clearly subordinated in focus to God’s means of grace. No presbytery possesses the wisdom to prescribe interim pastors as the default for every pastoral vacancy. POTE needs to recognize its diverse congregational situations and not push interim pastors indiscriminately. If interim pastors are to be recommended, an emphasis on maintaining and growing church health in these biblical categories should be made.

3. Pastoral Recruitment

Pastoral recruitment is essential for church health. Pastors are those called by God, affirmed by the church, to administer the means of grace in the life of the congregation. It is pastors who are called to oversee the worship of the church. Key to the health of a church is a faithful, godly, competent pastor.

The cultural placement of each POTE congregation is different. The body of Christ is one with many members, and so it is for congregations and pastors. Not all congregations are going to be able to do everything well and not all pastors are going to bring the same skill set and cultural savvy with them. POTE should require biblical competency, faithfulness, and godliness from its ministerial candidates, and no more. When vacancies in churches open, POTE’s coaches and liaisons should assist search committees in prioritizing pastors who can faithfully administer God’s means of grace. The objective should not be to provide a cultural analysis of the congregation, as beneficial as that may. If insights occur in the coaching, so be it, but the objective is to secure biblically competent, faithful, and godly pastors. That must come first and stay fronted.

The biblical standard for ordination is competent handling of God’s word for the life of the church. That means exegetical skill following the hermeneutic of our confessional standards. That means being able to articulate and own the doctrines and hermeneutic of our confessional standards accurately and sincerely. That means being able to read the Bible in Greek and Hebrew. It means being able to preach and teach. All of these are EPC requirements.

The congregation through its search committee process is tasked with assessing the cultural fit of the candidate. What POTE must absolutely inquire after for pastoral candidates, especially during the under-care process, is godly character and biblical competency. This is the primary responsibility of presbyteries and the main way POTE works towards healthy churches: through qualified ministers who feed the sheep. Examinations of the candidate, wherever phase that is done, should be rigorous to ensure that candidates are not hirelings, but are able to lovingly shepherd the church.

The EPC has effectively outsourced pastoral education to other organizations since we do not have a denominational seminary. This allows POTE to cast a wide recruitment net, but also requires us to be more discerning in pastoral vetting. Since there is no natural seminary-to-church pipeline for the EPC, POTE needs to be aggressive and proactive in pastoral recruitment.

POTE needs to establish regular presence and relationship with feeder seminaries. These are seminaries that are able to train pastors to our standards: accredited Master of Divinity or equivalent (a proxy for training for competency in handling God’s word), training in the biblical languages, and educated in our Reformed dogmatic and hermeneutical tradition. POTE should prioritize schools

that meet these standards within the geographic bounds of our presbytery, followed by schools that meet these standards within the geographic bounds of the EPC overall, and finally schools within the geographic bounds of POTE that do not meet our language or confessional standards but overlap with our values nonetheless. See Appendix A for a detailed breakdown of these three categories.

Befriending faculty and sending POTE pastors to recruit are the key ways to do this for students who are already at these schools but not yet associated with the EPC.

POTE should ramp up our support for seminarians. Seminarians are pastors-in-training. They are the future of a healthy EPC and POTE. Having freewill offerings at POTE meetings is a lame way to work towards a healthy future of the church. POTE should be investing heavily in its future pastors.

POTE should begin by identifying which schools it recommends its member churches send future seminarians. A little noticed, 2017 amendment to *Book of Government* 11-2.G already states that candidates under care should pursue a course of study at an accredited seminary approved by the presbytery. POTE is free to both approve courses of study and to recommend preferred schools. Courses of study at schools that are not confessionally Reformed or do not require the biblical languages should necessitate securing advanced approval from POTE, and only if a plan is established to properly train the seminarians in these erstwhile categories.

POTE should only recommend schools that meet all the aforementioned criteria. By identifying the schools that POTE recommends, we both provide guidance to churches and candidates and foster better recruiting relationships with these schools. It also guides church search committees as they assess the education of potential pastors.

POTE should fund scholarships to these recommended schools. Our churches should put our money where our mouth is. Money is limited, so these scholarships may need to be built up over time. By doing this POTE provides financial flexibility to people studying for the pastorate. This is crucial if we are interested in having pastors who are coming from impoverished backgrounds or who also need to support families during their studies.

Establishing scholarships at these schools would accrue several other benefits. First, the schools would like POTE more and it would be easier for us to recruit from there.

Second, it allows POTE to be more selective in pastoral recruitment. Endorsing candidates for coming under care should not include automatic scholarshiping, but would be a first criteria. Intent to pursue ordained, pastoral ministry in a congregation should be another. Investigating need, godly character, academic skill, and a potential landing spot post-seminary would all be needed. Flexibly requiring the scholarship recipient to intern at several different POTE congregations in differing contexts during their studies is a viable standard, as is requiring a period of paid internship at a POTE congregation upon graduation. While there needs to be freedom on the student's part to discern without penalty that they are either not called to pastoral ministry or are not a good fit for the EPC, the candidate mentor assigned to the recipient would have to be diligent in connecting with them throughout their under-care process to ensure POTE's investment is not wasted.

Diligence in mentoring those candidate's under POTE's care is also essential for long-term pastoral health and therefore long-term church health. POTE's committees should develop a deep bench of pastors able to mentor candidates, mentors who are able to take the initiative to pastor the candidates as they prepare for pastoral ministry. If the pastors of POTE are not invested in future pastors, the church will die.

4. Ecumenical Partnerships

The EPC alone is not in the kingdom of God. When it comes to church planting, as with campus ministry, POTE should hold firm its values, but not its parochialism. The kingdom of God is bigger than the EPC and we have a duty first to the kingdom. The rest follows.

Practically, POTE should pursue organized and collaborative ecumenical and fraternal partnerships. Doing so protects against reduplication of efforts and fosters greater communion among the church. The EPC has blind spots and can learn from our denominational neighbors, and we have much that they could learn from us.

POTE should consider increasing the scope of the Stated Clerk's duties and expand them to include forming a team for ecumenical relationships and coordination. While novel in the EPC, doing this on a presbytery level is not uncommon in other denominations.

Productive partnerships across denominational lines need to have stronger commonalities than orthodoxy or evangelicalism. These partnerships should be moored with confessional commitments to reformational theology and significant overlap of cultural ethos. Priority should be given to existing EPC fraternal and corresponding partners, especially those in the World Reformed Fellowship.

Beyond correspondence for the sake of correspondence, or an appearance of unity where there is no real unity, the practical benefit would be potential pooling of resources for seminarians, college campus ministries, ministries to the orphan, and coordination with church planting. Though the EPC is not part of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council, their Golden Rule Comity Agreement is worth emulating for church planting. See Appendix B for this document, along with a proposed starting list of potential denominational partners.

5. College Campus Ministry

Graduation from high school and enrollment in college is the time in life that Christians are most likely to abandon the faith.¹ Moving from the regular routines and structures of their parents' home to relative independency correlates with losing the habit of attending church. This in turn correlates with losing faith. The means of grace work, and abandoning them is perilous.

The most direct way congregations can address this is by counseling students to select either Christian colleges or schools where access to a strong church community is possible. Churches

¹ See this sobering 2017 report on the subject from LifeWay Research: <http://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Young-Adult-Church-Dropout-Report-2017.pdf>

should recommend specific congregations, and if possible college campus ministries, for the young adult to attend while in college. Directing them to participate in an uninterrupted way to the household of God is critical for their faith.

Not all colleges have campus ministries, and not all campus ministries are created equal. Campus ministries can be effective ways to nurture the faith of college students, but that effectiveness is only healthy if the college ministry functions as a subsidiary to the local church. If campus ministries function as an alternative to the God-ordained congregation and Christ's means of grace, they are undercutting God's institutions.

No college ministry organization consciously thinks of themselves this way, though you will find that from time-to-time among specific campus ministers. For the congregations of POTE, that means directing college students with discernment to campus ministries that will encourage the student to prioritize the local church even above the campus ministry itself.

Cru, DiscipleMakers, InterVarsity, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Navigators, and YoungLife are all fine organizations, but they operate independently of the local church by design. Leaders on particular campuses are going to vary in their ties to the local church and their level of encouragement for students to be involved in the local church. EPC congregations cannot assume that a student engaging with these organizations is the same as the student being encouraged to avail themselves of God's means of grace.

The EPC does not have an established campus ministry. The CRC's Resonate Campus Ministry and PCA's Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) are solid, Reformed campus ministries that emphasize the importance of the local church. The goal for EPC graduates is to continue in church, not the EPC. If they attend a CRC or PCA church, that is good. Yet, the institutional ties between Resonate and RUF on the one hand, and local EPC congregations on the other, will always be somewhat weak due to the difference in denominations.

This means that congregations in POTE should consider a different strategy: when possible, start a campus ministry. The EPC's partnership with the Coalition for Christian Outreach (CCO) is intended to achieve this. CCO partners with local congregations near college campuses, with the congregation developing a ministry plan and CCO providing coordination. The campus minister is staff of the local congregation with professional oversight and resourcing given by CCO. The model is designed to achieve maximum coordination between the church and the campus ministry. The limitation, of course, is when local churches of conflicting theological values partner with CCO on a college campus before an EPC church.

However, this model is still worth embracing for several reasons, even if CCO is not the partner of every POTE congregation. First, by having POTE congregations in close proximity to college campuses sponsor and fund campus ministry, the ministry will definitionally work in concert with and elevate the importance of the local church. Second, by having a congregation invested directly in the campus ministry, the minister is freed from having to be a professional fundraiser. The local congregation is the supporting structure for the campus ministry, just as they are for other ministries of the church. Third, while not every POTE congregation can afford to have an employed college minister, not every POTE congregation is close to a college campus. POTE could support its college students by funding college campus ministries in conjunction with local congregations near

the college campus. In cases where friendly ecumenical partners are also available, this could be a cross-denominational collaborative project.

6. Church Planting

Church planting in the United States has been overcomplicated in the last half century. This complication stems from two factors. First, by church planters needing to be fundraisers instead of presbyteries directly funding the plant. Second, by treating “church planter” as a distinct spiritual office with distinct qualifications and necessary skills instead of as a pastor first.

Doubtless, pastoring a church plant is a different context for ministry than pastoring an established church. But the church must first always emphasize the ordinary means of God’s grace, which are to be stewarded by pastors. Church planting ought to still be first and foremost pastoring through these means.

There are a variety of different church planting models, but they all reflect one of two options: start a new church with people from an old church or start a new church by drawing in people who are unchurched. There is often blending between these, but the mother-daughter model, where an established church sends a portion of their members to begin a new church, or the parachute model, where a church planter goes into a new area to begin recruiting church members from within the neighborhood without the benefit of members being sent from an established church, are the two broad versions of these options.

Parachute church planting cannot be planned effectively. While POTE could identify neighborhoods that are ripe for planting, unless we could also recruit a church planter who wants to plant in that specific neighborhood the plan ends there. That recruitment is difficult. Typically, church planters who want to parachute into a neighborhood approach the church planting organization, not the other way around. “Wait and hope someone has a plan” is not a good plan.

Mother-daughter church plants are easier to implement strategically. Mother-daughter church plants do not even have to go from one church area to another. The daughter church could be planted in an area underserved by churches or target an underserved demographic if it is within reasonable range of the sent members.

POTE should prioritize this model. That priority should be reflected in several ways. First, since church planters should first be pastors, POTE should begin recruiting planters in much the same way we should begin recruiting other pastors. Second, the practical ins-and-outs of church planting are different enough that additional training is valuable. Fostering church planting residencies within POTE should be a goal.

Church planting residencies would require the recruited church planter to spend significant time (1-3 years) working at another POTE or EPC church under the guidance of those with church planting and pastoral experience. Models, such as the Greenhouse residency implemented by First Presbyterian Church of Trenton, Michigan, have potential and current church planters come and spend multiple hours a week studying, conversing, and laboring together under the guidance of an experienced pastor. The proposed church planting residency at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Simsbury, Connecticut is another effective model. Here, the resident ministers alongside an

experienced pastor for several years while both forging relationships in the congregation and in the broader community and region. After identifying a good, under-churched location, the resident will begin the church plant with members sent from the mother church.

Third, learning from Redeemer City-to-City and from the PCA's Mission to North America on a presbytery level should be required of all involved in leading church planting in POTE. Access to that culture and its insights will be invaluable in increasing the effectiveness of church plants in our presbytery. It will also better equip POTE in developing cultural soft skills and system knowledge for church planting support.

Fourth, POTE should fully fund these church plants. Church planting has been overcomplicated by making "fundraiser" a necessary skill for a pastor. Presbyterianism as a system of government is the perfect model to rid us of this barrier. No other pastor is expected to be fundraising for his church constantly.

Fully funding these church plants provides several key benefits. The first is greater selectivity in the church plants being supported and the planters being supported. Second, it would force POTE to remain targeted. POTE's resources are finite, and by committing to this kind of church planting well, and putting our money there, ensures that we stay committed and focused.

Embracing this strategy of mother-daughter plants has several additional benefits. The model allows other POTE churches to partner in the church plant. This can be done by sending their own members if close enough and by providing opportunities for church planting residents to come and minister in their context on an interim basis.

It also makes church planting networking more effective. The rise of church planting networks in the EPC that operate outside the presbytery structure is a stunning indictment of the effectiveness of presbyteries to carry out their God-given mission. If the very same churches that make up the presbytery are unwilling to use the presbytery, which the members church believe to be a biblical system, it stands to reason that the administrative structure and priorities of the presbytery are off kilter. The embrace of the mother-daughter model restores balance to the presbytery and leverages networks more effectively.

POTE would not have to predetermine where church plants would go. Instead, the churches in regional hubs (D.C., New York City, New England, Philadelphia, etc.) who can better identify needs and resources would take the lead in determining location. Location strategy would be democratized by the churches supporting the plant rather than determined by the presbytery. But by funding and backing this specific model, POTE would be providing guidance, structure, and security to network churches on how to proceed. Different networks are going to have different native funding bases, so even though POTE would commit to funding church plants, by providing support to the networks a confidence is given to the network churches that any funding they provide directly will not be alone or wasted. In other words, POTE pledging to financially support church plants will lower POTE's overall longterm costs because network churches will not fear that their additional support will be in vain.

Networks also mean better collaboration and oversight. The *Book of Government* allows a presbytery to govern a mission church through one of three means: i) by appointing an evangelist or commissioned pastor; ii) through appointing another church's Session as the temporary Session; iii)

by appointing an administrative commission as the temporary Session. These latter two options should always be taken, with a preference for the third option. Church plants are expensive and risky; oversight should never rest with a single individual. Temporary Sessions, especially with a diversity of congregations represented, helps keep POTE congregations invested in the church plant. Networks provide a natural pool from which POTE could appoint temporary Sessions.

Not every mother-daughter should automatically qualify for full POTE support. Beyond the question of planter assessment and ordination exams, the area a church is planted in matters. POTE should only fully fund mother-daughter that are being planted in areas or among a demographic lacking a confessionally Reformed gospel witness.

There will be mother-daughter church plants and parachute planters that come to POTE for support, and support should be given in following prayer, vetting the plant's feasibility, guidance and advice, connecting the plant with other POTE congregations, providing governance oversight, and ordination examination. Financial support should be limited to what is available after all other strategic priorities are met.

No church plant should be approved by POTE without providing a tenable long-term financial plan approved by the church planting leaders. POTE needs to assure itself that if we are going to take on a money-pit of a church that we do so knowingly. Each church plant that POTE approves for support should have a timeline that progressively descales POTE's support and has an end point for financial support.

Church plants should be considered as plants by POTE until they are particularized by the election of their own Session. Funding for the plant can continue beyond this time if necessary. There is the potential of planting in impoverished areas such that the church never becomes financially self-sustaining, no matter the membership numbers. POTE cannot support an indefinite number of churches in this situation indefinitely, and so should exercise wisdom in taking on such a plant and be willing to pull support if necessary. However, the ministry of the gospel is good news for the poor, and so there must be a willingness to support churches who minister to those who cannot pay.

7. The Orphan

In 2021 the EPC removed our endorsement of Bethany Christian Services (BCS). This was prompted by BCS placing children into foster and adoptive homes of same-sex parents. In 2021, the EPC General Assembly also sent an overture to the presbyteries for approval that would clarify that courts have a special responsibility to seek out ways to care for the orphan. POTE approved this overture in February, 2022 and it is likely to receive approval for constitutional ratification at the 2022 General Assembly.

Care for the orphan is part of the church's mission. Individual Christians and congregations should actively seek out opportunities to foster and adopt children. The current cultural landscape in America is becoming more hostile to orthodox Christian belief on sexuality and the family. BCS was notable for its shift for being one of the final state-approved agencies that declined to place children with same-sex couples. With the exception of Roman Catholic foster agencies, there are few to no other placement agencies within the geographic bounds of POTE that still hold to our orthodox position on the family.

Adoption and foster agencies are necessary to effectively place children in loving homes. Finding an agency that will uphold orthodox family practices is getting more difficult. Finding one that will place children in families, rather than sinful imitations of them, is even more rare.

The Christian church has historically championed the cause of the downtrodden and suffering. Hospitals and orphanages were established in great part out of Christian mercy. In July, 2021 the Supreme Court held that the city of Philadelphia had failed to demonstrate a compelling reason in barring a Roman Catholic adoption agency from working within the city in placing children with families. It is likely that a stated, confessional basis for placing children in natural homes would withstand legal attack by the constitutional protections of the First Amendment.

POTE should create a regional foster and adoption agency that is committed to our values. This is a momentous task, but one that the church has done many times in the past. This work is beyond the scope of any single congregation, and would require the cooperation of our churches. POTE should consider relying on our regional ecumenical partners in this labor.

8. Foreign Missions

Missionaries should not have to be professional fundraisers. There are a variety of different approaches to foreign missions, but if the sending church is truly committed to the work of the missionary then there should be a financial commitment significant enough to relieve the gospel worker from fundraising. As with church planters and campus ministers, Presbyterianism is well positioned to provide financial security to its foreign gospel workers so they may be devoted to their call.

POTE should directly and fully fund World Outreach workers sent from our presbytery. POTE would be able to more be selective and targeted in our foreign mission work. Along with similar recruitment strategies to pastors and church planters, POTE could use this selectivity to have higher standards and more intentional ministries and destinations.

Particularly, POTE should prioritize missionaries who are also ordained as Teaching Elders (TE). There is a variety of mission work, but POTE should privilege work that either focuses on establishing churches or training local Christians for pastoral ministry. Missionary establishment of churches is pastoral work — establishing and shepherding the congregations of God that rely on his means of grace. Pastoral training is equipping for this purpose. The standard for pastoral work on the mission field should never be less than it is within the United States.

While specialized training facilitated by World Outreach and the EPC's partner mission agencies is indispensable, training for the ministry and sacrament, and ecclesiological oversight of that ministry, should remain the purview of presbyteries. Presbyteries ordain TEs, and it is TEs who are ordained to administer the gospel by word and sacrament. In fully supporting missionaries, POTE should vet and examine the missionaries in the same way we do for other pastors.

Specialized missionary training is in addition to this pastoral expectation. Fully funding missionaries provides POTE with the leverage to ensure that missionaries are accountable to the church in this way. This also means that POTE has predetermined the kind of mission work that it plans on

funding: church planting and pastor training. This gives POTE a specific recruitment target for missionaries. The mission connections of local churches, the guidance of World Outreach, and the particular missionaries that are recruited would determine the specific locale of the missionary's work.

Foreign missionaries as TEs would then operate out of bounds in their approved call, or transfer their ordination credentials to a native Reformed church with which the EPC has partnered.

Local churches would of course continue to be free to sponsor and fund a variety of different mission practices. This would also not bar nonordained POTE congregants from the mission field or from becoming World Outreach workers, only direct POTE efforts towards those missionaries who are ordained.

Appendix A

Seminary Options for POTE Pastor Recruitment

1) Seminaries that are located within the geographic bounds of POTE, offer a Master of Divinity or equivalent, offers or requires the biblical languages, and its faculty affirm and expressly teach from the vantage point of the Reformed Confessions (Westminster Standards, Three Forms of Unity, 39 Articles).

Name	Location	Notes
Reformed Episcopal Seminary	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	
Reformed Theological Seminary	New York, New York and Washington D. C. campuses	Washington D. C. campus is led by EPC TEs
Westminster Theological Seminary	Glenside, Pennsylvania (outside Philadelphia)	

2) Seminaries that are located outside the geographic bounds of POTE but within the geographic bounds of the EPC, offer a Master of Divinity or equivalent, offers or requires the biblical languages, and its faculty affirm and expressly teach from the vantage point of the Reformed Confessions (Westminster Standards, Three Forms of Unity, 39 Articles).

Name	Location	Notes
Calvin Theological Seminary	Grand Rapids, Michigan	Denominational school of EPC fraternal partner, Christian Reformed Church
Covenant Theological Seminary	St. Louis, Missouri	Denominational school of PCA
Erskine Theological Seminary	Due West, South Carolina	Denominational school of EPC fraternal partner, Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary	Greenville, South Carolina	
International Reformed University and Seminary	Los Angeles, California	Associated with World Korean Presbyterian Church and The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Korea
Mid-America Reformed Seminary	Dyer, Indiana (outside Chicago)	
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary	Grand Rapids, Michigan	
Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	Denominational school of RPCNA
Reformed Theological Seminary	Atlanta, Georgia; Charlotte, North Carolina; Dallas, Texas;	Charlotte campus led by EPC TEs

	Houston, Texas; Jackson, Mississippi; Orlando, Florida	
Trinity School for Ministry	Ambridge, Pennsylvania (outside Pittsburgh)	Presbyterian track is led by EPC TEs
Western Theological Seminary	Holland, Michigan (outside Grand Rapids)	Denominational school of RCA
Westminster Seminary California	Escondido, California (outside San Diego)	

3) Seminaries that are located within the geographic bounds of POTE, offer a Master of Divinity or equivalent, offers or requires the biblical languages, and have significant cultural and theological overlap with the EPC.

Name	Location	Notes
Alliance Theological Seminary	New York, New York	Denominational school of Christian and Missionary Alliance; only in “Bible and Theology” track is <u>either</u> Greek or Hebrew required.
Cairn Divinity School	Langhorne, Pennsylvania (outside Philadelphia)	
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary	Hamilton, Massachusetts (outside Boston)	Mentored Apprenticeship Program focused on EPC students
Metro Baltimore Seminary	Baltimore, Maryland	Accredited through ARTS as an extension of Metro Atlanta Seminary. Unclear if this meets EPC accreditation requirements. Not clear if the Biblical Languages are taught or required.
Missio Seminary	Hatfield, Pennsylvania (outside Philadelphia)	Only in “Language Track” for M.Div are Greek and Hebrew required
New Brunswick Theological Seminary	New Brunswick, New Jersey	Denominational school of RCA; Greek and Hebrew offered as electives
Palmer Theological Seminary	St. Davids, Pennsylvania (outside Philadelphia)	Denominational school of American Baptist Churches USA; only in “Pastoral Leadership” track is <u>either</u> Greek or Hebrew required
Princeton Theological Seminary	Princeton, New Jersey	Denominational school of PC(U.S.A.); Greek and Hebrew offered as electives

Appendix B

Ecumenical Comity Agreement and Fraternal Partners

North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) Golden Rule Comity Agreement

Comity has meant different things to different people. We representatives of the home missions agencies and committees or boards of our denominations resist territorial statements on comity in the light of the social and cultural complexity of North American society and the great spiritual need of our many countrymen who are apart from Jesus Christ. Out of a concern to build the church of Jesus Christ rather than our own denominations and to avoid the appearance of competition, we affirm the following courteous code of behavior to guide our church planting ministries in North America:

1. We will be sensitive to the presence of existing churches and mission ministries of other NAPARC churches and will refrain from enlisting members and take great care in receiving members of those existing ministries.
2. We will communicate with the equivalent or appropriate agency (denominational missions committee or board, presbytery missions or church extension committee, or session) before initiating church planting activities in a community where NAPARC churches or missions ministries exist.
3. We will provide information on at least an annual basis describing progress in our ministries and future plans.
4. We will encourage our regional home missions leadership to develop good working relationships.

Potential ecumenical partners for POTE, including their overlapping jurisdictions (e.g. classis, dioceses, presbytery).

Denomination	Doctrine	Jurisdictions	Relationship to EPC
Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church	Westminster Standards	Northeast Presbytery	Fraternal Partner
Christian Reformed Church	Three Forms of Unity	Classes Atlantic Northeast, Hackensack, Hudson	Fraternal Partner
ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians	Book of Confessions (includes Three Forms of Unity and Westminster Standards)	Presbyteries of Cornerstone, East Central, Heritage, Northeast Coast	Fraternal Partner
Presbyterian Church in America	Westminster Standards	Presbyteries of Chesapeake Bay, Eastern Pennsylvania, Heritage, Korean Capital, Korean	Corresponding Partner

		Northeastern, Metro New York, Philadelphia Metro West, New Jersey, New York State, North New England, Philadelphia, Potomac, South New England, Susquehanna Valley, West Hudson	
Alliance of Reformed Churches	Three Forms of Unity	Still forming, not yet public; 10 churches connected to ARC currently in POTE geography, 2/28/22	None
Anglican Church in North America	39 Articles	Dioceses of Living Word, Mid-Atlantic, Missionary Diocese of All Saints, New England, Northeast & Mid-Atlantic (REC)	None
Korean Presbyterian Church in America/Abroad	Westminster Standards	Unclear, not publicly available information	None
North American Lutheran Church	Book of Concord	Mission District of Atlantic	None
Orthodox Presbyterian Church	Westminster Standards	Presbyteries of Connecticut and Southern New York, Mid-Atlantic, New Jersey, New York and New England, Philadelphia	None
Reformed Hungarian Church (Calvin Synod)	Heidelberg Catechism, Second Helvetic Confession	Eastern Classis	None