

February 27, 2022 - Meeting Minutes

I. Call to Order and Adopt Agenda

- A. Ken Wright called the meeting to order and opened in prayer.
- B. Agenda presented: New Hope Church conducts its governance according to our Constitution & Bylaws. While the core principles and beliefs are to remain unchanged, it is a living document that needs revision from time to time. This was last done in 2013-14. At the May 16, 2021 Congregational Meeting, the Board of Elders formally communicated the recommendation for revisions to be made. Voting will take place at the May 2022 Congregational Meeting.
- C. Jason McNutt & Paul Schoolmeesters were presented as part of the Revision Committee.

II. Constitution & Bylaws Revisions (Jason McNutt & Paul Schoolmeesters)

- A. Constitution & Bylaws Revision Committee Overview—A Constitution & Bylaws Committee was formed last year consisting of two Elders, Jason McNutt & Cort Cieminski, along with three members at large, Mike Brown, Paul Schoolmeesters and Amy Witty. They began meeting in the fall of 2021. In consultation with the Board of Elders and pastoral staff, a draft recommendation of revisions was developed. Those revisions and the approval process were then reviewed by our attorneys.
- B. Summary of Proposed Changes—There were two versions distributed. Be sure to reference the Corrected Final version dated February 22, 2022.
 - 1. Pastor Matthew will discuss the Statement of Faith later in the meeting tonight.
 - 2. Inclusion of technology for notification and participation in congregational matters: “by mail” changed to “in writing (which shall include by postal or electronic mail)”; changed throughout bylaws (3B4, 3D3d, 10) and constitution (Article 7). These are small but important changes.
 - 3. Other notable updates:
 - a. Note strikethrough errors in the first draft document sent out:
 - a. On page 2 – 1D and 1E1- strikethrough is incorrect; proposed column is accurate. (or its delegates should be in italics)
 - b. On page 4 – 3B7ai – “voting may take place” is not in the original, remove entirely.
 - b. Updating to reflect current structure; the staff doesn’t always report to the senior pastor. Changed to “or to his delegate.” Terminology was inconsistent.
 - c. 3B1 – Added: “Meetings may be attended in person and or virtually.”
 - d. 3B6 – Voting. Revised absentee ballot process. It now includes electronic voting.
 - e. Other minor proofing edits correcting capitalization, punctuation and numeric formatting, consistency in terms (staff grouping titles, congregational meeting) were made.

III. Statement of Faith Article 9

- A. Background about the process by Pastor Matthew: At the 2019 Evangelical Free Church of America National Conference, delegates voted to approve a change in the Statement of Faith whereby the word premillennial was dropped from Article 9 and replaced with the word “glorious”.

That was the culmination of years of work with conversations back to 2008. The Spiritual Heritage Group commissioned by the EFCA Board of Directors had been discussing this for years with a variety of Evangelical Free Church constituents. It was officially presented at the 2017 Annual meeting with a motion to vote at the 2019 meeting.

- B. Ken Wright: The Elder Leadership Team reviewed this change in prayer and conversation over about 18 months. With unanimous approval from the Board, they made the recommendation to accept the change at the May 2021 Congregational Meeting, with voting to occur in May 2022.
- C. Background and theological foundation from Pastor Matthew: The Evangelical Free Church is a unique movement committed to focusing on primary things or “closed-fist” things, i.e. the deity of Christ, salvation by faith alone, the authority of the scriptures. We say these are non-negotiable. Then there are also issues that we call “open-fist” dynamics. We consider them secondary theological or doctrinal items that don’t rise to the non-negotiable level but are still very important. Within our broader movement a second tier or open-fisted item might relate to spiritual gifts or signs, predestination or free will. Non-negotiable items might relate to the character of the gospel and the salvific work of Jesus. I (Pastor Matthew) am firmly a premillennialist and believes in pre-tribulation in my understanding of the scriptures. There are wonderful, Godly scholars and pastors who hold all the closed fist items with great delight and yet they may not be pre-millennial. They may have a different eschatological grid. Leadership within the EFCA discerned that we weren’t being consistent with our prevailing ethos (values) by holding on to an eschatological scheme that is important but doesn’t rise to the non-negotiable level. Also, we’ve had many pastors and leaders within our movement themselves just having some tension around this. They might participate in Evangelical Free Churches, but they aren’t necessarily willing to become credentialed within those churches because in good conscience they could not yield to premillennialism. They may be amillennial in their thinking and out of integrity they could not become credentialed or ordained in the EFCA. The leaders discerned there was an incongruence with regard to how we think about our ethos regarding the issue of premillennialism. Additionally, the one thing all of us would agree on, whether premillennial or amillennial, is that our Lord Jesus in His majesty and greatness will return in glory. That is what is non-negotiable. By focusing on Christ’s return, we create space for thoughtful diversity around exactly when that will be or how it will be manifested. This makes us a community that focuses on non-negotiable things while holding an open hand on secondary issues.
- D. Questions from the audience:
 - 1. I understand that within the EFCA there is a requirement for agreement theologically for pastors. While we can have a lot of diversity within the EFCA, in a church like ours where we have a team teaching approach, how do we teach if our pastors don’t have the same position? Response from Pastor Matthew: Throughout my years at NHC I’ve done a small number of series relating to eschatological things. When I teach, if I have convictions about theological things and I’m going to walk those out and present those as my own, you will know where I stand. I share my convictions and also try to validate them from the scriptures. I also hold these things with an open hand. Others may have differing convictions. The key is acknowledging that there are others who have different convictions around some ideas and we will navigate with gentleness and humility.
 - 2. As a church I would say we historically have been more premillennial in our stance. I’m understanding the EFCA is saying that church by church there may be variation and so I’m wondering, if that’s really been the historic stance of New Hope Church, and we’re okay with other brothers and sisters having a different position even within the EFCA, why does that necessarily need to change our position as a church at NHC? Response from

Pastor Matthew: The prevailing reason we want to conform to the broader Statement of Faith from the movement is as a gift of congruency, so we can say with integrity that we are an Evangelical Free Church. As it is now, if we decide to not become congruent with the broader Statement of Faith, we will still remain an Evangelical Free Church as we get grandfathered in. But our Elders and I feel very strongly that we be congruent with the movement and also as a sign of healthy accountability. This gives space for future pastors with a different viewpoint than myself and still be within the high and safe banks of our broader theological system.

3. I think we are living in more of the end times and we've got this warning out there to be wise about what might sneak in. I've always been taught premillennial, so now to be taught that maybe amillennial is OK, I don't fully understand it. Also, where's the stop in all of this? What if somebody else comes in with other approaches? Where's the checks and balances in this? Response from Pastor Matthew: I think one of the advantages of the process that the EFCA went through is a fruition of a long number of years of deliberation. There is nothing about it that was hasty. As I understand it, it was something that began probably in the early 2000's by way of discussion. I think this process will mitigate against any hasty or what might be considered potentially flipping kind of decision making. In very general terms, a distinguishing feature between amillennialism and premillennialism is the degree to which one sees some of the portraits of things to come as more symbolic and or metaphorical, or more literal. I tend to lean a little more literal. Amillennialists may see the thousand year reign as more metaphorical, an elongated moment in time as opposed to an actual set of years. Both persuasions believe that at some point in actual time, Jesus will return powerfully and gloriously and make all things new again. This is non-negotiable. I don't believe our movement was hasty or going with the latest fad or whim. I wouldn't be in this movement if they were.
4. Are there other viewpoints besides premillennialism and amillennialism? Response from Pastor Matthew: Yes, there are three millennialistic views. One is premillennial, the idea that Jesus will return in glory and then commence a literal thousand-year reign. Amillennialism sees the thousand-year reign not as a literal set of years, but as an undefined epoch or era in which God is unfolding his purposes in time and space. Then there is postmillennial which is not as common today. They believe that the thousand-year reign of Christ and/or some kind of epoch period has come to conclusion and that now we're on the other side of that reign and God is doing yet new things in terms of unfolding his purposes. The idea was that everything was getting better, but when WWI decimated the world, the western world concluded things aren't getting better, so postmillennial just didn't make sense.
5. This is more of a comment. I have noticed that there are many groups that we would definitely not agree with theologically that hold to the amillennial view. It is very concerning for me that something like that could be embraced here because there are so many other groups that have so many other views, i.e. God doesn't have any plan for the Jews or the church has replaced Israel. It seems that if we're embracing people who believe in amillennialism, that seems so much more congruent with ideologies that we would not agree with. Response from Pastor Matthew: Imagine we're on a river with really high banks on either side. The river we are in is thoroughly evangelical, biblically rooted in the creedal and biblical history of our faith. There is safety in the banks of this river. We won't crash into the banks or go tumbling down a hill. Within this river we can

maneuver from one side of the river to the next. Over here this canoe might be for those who are amillennial and this canoe over here might be for premillennials. Sometimes we bump into each other because of robust interaction, but we're still on the same river, safeguarded by these nice high banks. Well within evangelicalism is space for all millennials; amillennialists, premillennialists and postmillennialists who can live together even with some of the theological tensions that those items might suggest. If we look at the whole other river, a different location, maybe it's not an evangelical river but Catholic or something we would consider on the far fringes of any Christian movement or we wouldn't even call it Christian like Jehovah's Witnesses, they may be premillennial in their thinking but we would never imagine that because they're premillennial that somehow our premillennialism is suspect. Within the stream of evangelicalism, the banks are high and safe within the stream that we all float in. There may be other movements of people that may or may not be orthodox in their approach to the scriptures and the things of Jesus who are premillennial or amillennial, but we are in a context where within our banks there is plenty of room for us to have these conversations safely and none of it violates our non-negotiable commitments to the personal work of Jesus and His unfolding work regarding salvation. There are a lot of different nuances even within premillennialism and how we see God's plan unfold.

6. A Congregant spoke in favor of the motion. I know people who have views other than premillennial views. I think the non-negotiables and secondary issues are very important. I appreciated when pastor preached on these things and said that some people may disagree, allowing for negotiable issues. The Chicago Statement from the 1970's on Biblical inerrancy is a series of affirmations and denials. You can run a premillennial, postmillennial or amillennial view through that grid and say we are Biblically inerrant. We agree with all these things as non-negotiable but we are also able to say there is room for faithful Bible believing sisters and brothers, to say you're welcome here at a local body level. Response from Pastor Matthew: Well said. I want to underscore what you're reflecting on is that our whole creedal tradition, going back to the church fathers, would have differing views and yet were so committed to the authority and inerrancy of the scriptures.

IV. Congregational Voting at May 16, 2022 Annual Meeting (ELT Chair Ken Wright)

- A. We will be voting on bylaws revisions that we just walked through and the Statement of Faith at the Annual Meeting in May.

V. Closing Prayer & adjournment (ELT Vice-Chair Cort Ciemensi.

Respectfully submitted,

JaNan E Cavanaugh
Church Vice-Clerk