

February 11, 2022

Dear New Hope Church Family,

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. The first key area proposed was New Hope Church's Statement of Faith Article 9. In 2019, the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA), the denomination with which we are affiliated, revised this article. According to our constitution, NHC may amend its statement of faith to adapt to EFCA changes, but it must be formally approved. The Board of Elders have recommended this for Article 9. The other key area proposed was the inclusion of technology for notification and participation in congregational matters.

A Constitution & Bylaws Committee was formed for the purpose of processing these changes, along with reviewing the bylaws for any other minor recommended updates. This committee consisting of two Elders (Jason McNutt and Cort Cieminski) along with three members at large (Mike Brown, Paul Schoolmeesters and Amy Witty) met in the fall of 2021 to undertake this process. In consultation with the Board of Elders and pastoral staff, a draft recommendation of revisions was developed. Those revisions and the approval process was then reviewed by our attorneys.

Attached is a side-by-side summary of the proposed changes. Please note only the changes are shown here, not the complete document. Copies of the current Constitution & Bylaws are available upon request from the church office. Also attached are two resources from the EFCA related to the change in Article 9 of the Statement of Faith.

On Sunday, February 27 at 6:30pm, we are holding a Congregational Meeting for these revisions to be presented in more detail and to provide space for questions and discussion. The proposed changes are structured in three vote items which will be voted upon at the May 15, 2022 congregational meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Jason McNutt, Chair

On Behalf of the Constitution & Bylaws Revision Committee:
Mike Brown, Cort Cieminski, Jason McNutt, Paul Schoolmeesters and Amy Witty

VOTE ITEM 1: CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION - STATEMENT OF FAITH ARTICLE 9

Presented by Board of Elders at May 16, 2021 Congregational Meeting

Current Language, May 2014 New Hope Church Constitution Proposed deletions indicated by striketrough . Proposed additions are shown in <i>italics</i> .	Proposed Language
<p style="text-align: center;">Christ's Return</p> <p>9. We believe in the personal, bodily and premillennial <i>glorious</i> return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Christ's Return</p> <p>9. We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.</p>

VOTE ITEM 2: CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION - TECHNOLOGY

Presented by Board of Elders at May 16, 2021 Congregational Meeting

Current Language, May 2014 New Hope Church Constitution Proposed deletions indicated by striketrough . Proposed additions are shown in <i>italics</i> .	Proposed Language
<p>Article 7. Amendments and Revisions</p> <p>A. Amendments and revisions to this constitution may be made at a regular congregational meeting of the church by an affirmative vote by secret ballot of two-thirds of the members present, when said proposed amendments or revisions have been presented in written form and discussed at a regular congregational meeting at least three months prior to the time of their adoption. All members must be notified by mail <i>in writing (which shall include postal or electronic mail)</i> of proposed amendments or revisions at least thirty days prior to their adoption.</p>	<p>Article 7. Amendments and Revisions</p> <p>A. Amendments and revisions to this constitution may be made at a regular congregational meeting of the church by an affirmative vote by secret ballot of two-thirds of the members present, when said proposed amendments or revisions have been presented in written form and discussed at a regular congregational meeting at least three months prior to the time of their adoption. All members must be notified in writing (which shall include postal or electronic mail) of proposed amendments or revisions at least thirty days prior to their adoption.</p>

VOTE ITEM 3: CHANGES TO THE BYLAWS

Presented by Constitution & Bylaws Revision Committee at February 27, 2022 Congregational Meeting

GENERAL CHANGES

- Corrections to punctuation and capitalization
- Consistency in numeric formatting
- Consistency in terms:
 - >> "elder board" corrected to "Board of Elders"
 - >> "this church" or "the church" clarified to "*New Hope Church EFCA*"

Current Language, May 2014 New Hope Church Bylaws Proposed deletions indicated by strikethrough . Proposed additions are shown in <i>italics</i> .	Proposed Language
Article 1.C Admission to Membership 4. Senior pastoral <i>Associate-level senior</i> staff members and spouses shall become members upon beginning their ministry in this church and are encouraged to attend membership classes.	Article 1.C Admission to Membership 4. Associate-level senior staff members and spouses shall become members upon beginning their ministry in this church and are encouraged to attend membership classes.
Article 1.D. Discipline of Membership Dismissal from membership requires action by the Board of Elders and notification of the congregation at the next congregational meeting and <i>communication to the congregation as determined by the Board of Elders</i> . If any member of the church is found to live or teach contrary to the Word of God and the Statement of Faith of this church, a written complaint must be submitted to the Board of Elders. That member shall be admonished in love according to Matthew 18:15-17. If there is no repentance, consideration for exclusion from the church membership and leadership positions shall follow according to I Corinthians 5, II Corinthians 2:5-11, Galatians 6:1-2 and Matthew 18:15-17. If the dismissed member repents, and where possible makes restitution, the dismissed member will again be considered for membership. Termination of pastoral staff positions must be according to the applicable portion of Article II of the bylaws.	Article 1.D. Discipline of Membership Dismissal from membership requires action by the Board of Elders and communication to the congregation as determined by the Board of Elders. If any member of the church is found to live or teach contrary to the Word of God and the Statement of Faith of this church, a written complaint must be submitted to the Board of Elders. That member shall be admonished in love according to Matthew 18:15-17. If there is no repentance, consideration for exclusion from the church membership and leadership positions shall follow according to I Corinthians 5, II Corinthians 2:5-11, Galatians 6:1-2 and Matthew 18:15-17. If the dismissed member repents, and where possible makes restitution, the dismissed member will again be considered for membership. Termination of pastoral staff positions must be according to the applicable portion of Article II of the bylaws.
Article 1.E. Termination of Membership 1. Withdrawal from Membership Withdrawal from membership will be granted upon request to the Board of Elders <i>or its delegates</i> .	Article 1.E. Termination of Membership 1. Withdrawal from Membership Withdrawal from membership will be granted upon request to the Board of Elders or its delegates.

<p style="text-align: center;">Current Language, May 2014 New Hope Church Bylaws Proposed deletions indicated by striketrough. Proposed additions are shown in <i>italics</i>.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Proposed Language</p>
<p>Article 2.A.2. Duties</p> <p>He shall preach and teach the Word of God in complete agreement with the Statement of Faith of this church, lead the church and manage the staff in support of the church accomplishing its objectives. He shall be an ex-officio <i>ex officio</i> member on all boards, councils and committees. He shall provide the Board of Elders with at least an annual evaluation of the staff that report to him, including current job descriptions, and including recommendations for additions to staff and termination of staff annually <i>evaluate the staff that report to him and report to the Board of Elders on these evaluations.</i></p>	<p>Article 2.A.2. Duties</p> <p>He shall preach and teach the Word of God in complete agreement with the Statement of Faith of this church, lead the church and manage the staff in support of the church accomplishing its objectives. He shall be an <i>ex officio</i> member on all boards, councils and committees. He shall annually evaluate the staff that report to him and report to the Board of Elders on these evaluations.</p>
<p>Article 2.B. Associate-Level Senior Staff and Program Directors</p> <p>1. Associate-level senior staff are those persons who report directly to the Senior Pastor <i>or his delegate</i>. Program directors are those who report to an associate-level senior staff person.</p>	<p>Article 2.B. Associate-Level Senior Staff and Program Directors</p> <p>1. Associate-level senior staff are those persons who report to the Senior Pastor or his delegate. Program directors are those who report to an associate-level senior staff person.</p>
<p>Article 3.B. Church Congregational Meetings</p> <p>1. Congregational meetings will be held at least one (1) time <i>once per year</i>, with additional meetings scheduled as determined by the Board of Elders to be necessary and in accordance with Article 3.B.5. <i>Meetings may be attended in person and/or virtually.</i></p>	<p>Article 3.B. Church Congregational Meetings</p> <p>1. Congregational meetings will be held at least once per year, with additional meetings scheduled as determined by the Board of Elders to be necessary and in accordance with Article 3.B.5. Meetings may be attended in person and/or virtually.</p>
<p>Article 3.B. Church Congregational Meetings</p> <p>4. Notice of all congregational meetings shall be given by announcements at the regular Sunday services of the church at least two (2) days prior to the date of the meeting, or by written notice (<i>which shall include postal or electronic mail</i>) mailed in time to reach all resident members at least three (3) days prior to the date of the meeting, unless purpose of such meeting requires longer notice according to state law. The purpose and proposed agenda of the meeting shall be included with the notice and/or announcement.</p>	<p>Article 3.B. Church Congregational Meetings</p> <p>4. Notice of all congregational meetings shall be given by announcements at the regular Sunday services of the church at least two days prior to the date of the meeting or by written notice (which shall include postal or electronic mail) in time to reach all members at least three days prior to the date of the meeting, unless purpose of such meeting requires longer notice according to state law. The purpose and proposed agenda of the meeting shall be included with the notice and/or announcement.</p>

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<p>Article 3.B. Church Congregational Meetings</p> <p>5. When necessary, a special congregational meeting of the church may be called, either by vote request of the church membership or by the Board of Elders or <i>by request of the church membership to the Board of Elders</i>. The agenda of this meeting shall be limited to the published and/or announced agenda.</p>	<p>Article 3.B. Church Congregational Meetings</p> <p>5. When necessary, a special congregational meeting of the church may be called, either by the board of Elders or by request of the church membership to the Board of Elders. The agenda of this meeting shall be limited to the published and/or announced agenda.</p>
<p>Article 3.B.6. Church Congregational Meetings</p> <p>a. <i>Voting.</i></p> <p>a. <i>i. Voting Rights.</i></p> <p>Only active members who are eighteen (18) years of age or older may vote. Members must be present <i>attend the congregational meeting</i> in order to vote (except as specified in 3.B.6.a.ii).</p> <p>g. <i>ii. Absentee Election Ballots.</i></p> <p>When members cannot attend a congregational meeting because of temporary change of address, serious illness, employment or vacation taking them away from this area, they may ask the church clerk Clerk or church office for an <i>a paper or electronic</i> absentee ballot. <i>Paper absentee ballots must be received by the church office prior to the congregational meeting. Electronic absentee ballots must be completed prior to the conclusion of the congregational meeting. To be valid, all absentee ballots must include name verification of members. Each valid ballot must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "Absentee Ballot," on which is written the name, local address, date and reason for absence.</i></p> <p>Ballots must be received in the church office at least six (6) hours prior to the congregational meeting. An appointed representative from the Board of Elders and the church clerk Clerk shall check the ballots for validity, and the names shall be recorded in the minutes. The ballots without the identifying information shall be given to the tellers at the meeting. Absentee ballots not deemed valid shall be returned unopened with the reason for such action.</p>	<p>Article 3.B.6. Church Congregational Meetings</p> <p>a. <i>Voting.</i></p> <p>i. <i>Voting Rights.</i></p> <p>Only active members who are eighteen years of age or older may vote. Members must attend the congregational meeting in order to vote (except as specified in 3.B.6.a.ii).</p> <p>ii. <i>Absentee Election Ballot.</i></p> <p>When members cannot attend a congregational meeting, they may ask the church Clerk or church office for a paper or electronic absentee ballot. Paper absentee ballots must be received by the church office prior to the congregational meeting. Electronic absentee ballots must be completed prior to the conclusion of the congregational meeting. To be valid, all absentee ballots must include name verification of members. An appointed representative from the Board of Elders and the church Clerk shall check the ballots for validity.</p>

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<p>Article 3.C.1. Meetings of Boards, Councils and Committees</p> <p>c. Minutes of Meetings</p> <p>Accurate minutes of all meetings must be maintained by the respective secretaries <i>and made available to the Board of Elders. Copies should be given to the Board of Elders as soon as available.</i></p>	<p>Article 3.C.1. Meetings of Boards, Councils and Committees</p> <p>c. Minutes of Meetings</p> <p>Accurate minutes of all meetings must be maintained by the respective secretaries and made available to the Board of Elders.</p>
<p>Article 3.D. Requirements for Church Elections</p> <p>1. Time of Election.</p> <p>Elections for the elected positions identified in articles 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the bylaws, unless otherwise designated, shall take place at a congregational meeting of the church prior to the beginning of the new fiscal year (Article 3.B.4). Vacated offices with more than six (6) months of the term remaining may be filled through special appointment by the Board of Elders and confirmed or rejected by congregational vote at the next Annual Business Meeting <i>annual congregational meeting</i>. Elections for vacated elder <i>Elder</i> positions are governed by Article 5 of these bylaws.</p> <p>3. Nominations and Elections</p> <p>b. Names placed on the ballot for elected positions identified in Articles 4, 6 and 7 by the nominating committee <i>Nominating Committee</i>, or names placed in nomination at the congregational meeting must be with the prior consent of the potential nominee and only after the potential nominee has been informed in writing of the qualifications and responsibilities of the office by the nominating committee <i>Nominating Committee</i>, or the nominator, respectively. For nominations from the floor, the nominator shall be responsible to obtain a written copy of the qualifications and the applicable responsibilities and deliver them to the potential nominee at least three (3) days prior to the congregational meeting. (See Article 5 for election of elders <i>Elders</i>.)</p>	<p>Article 3.D. Requirements for Church Elections</p> <p>1. Time of Election.</p> <p>Elections for the elected positions identified in articles 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the bylaws, unless otherwise designated, shall take place at a congregational meeting of the church prior to the beginning of the new fiscal year (Article 3.B.4). Vacated offices with more than six (6) months of the term remaining may be filled through special appointment by the Board of Elders and confirmed or rejected by congregational vote at the next annual congregational meeting. Elections for vacated Elder positions are governed by Article 5 of these bylaws.</p> <p>3. Nominations and Elections</p> <p>b. Names placed on the ballot for elected positions identified in Articles 4, 6 and 7 by the Nominating Committee, or names placed in nomination at the congregational meeting must be with the prior consent of the potential nominee and only after the potential nominee has been informed in writing of the qualifications and responsibilities of the office by the Nominating Committee. (See Article 5 for election of Elders.)</p>

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<p>Article 3.D. Requirements for Church Elections</p> <p>3. Nominations and Elections</p> <p>d. The slate of nominees shall be mailed <i>sent in writing (which shall include postal or electronic mail)</i> to all resident members at least two (2) weeks prior to any elections. Along with the slate of nominees, specific instructions on placing nominations from the floor must be included for positions identified in Articles 4, 6 and 7. In the event of a nominee's withdrawal from the ballot, the Nominating Committee may present a replacement nominee at the congregational meeting.</p>	<p>Article 3.D. Requirements for Church Elections</p> <p>3. Nominations and Elections</p> <p>d. The slate of nominees shall be sent in writing (which shall include postal or electronic mail) to all members at least two weeks prior to any elections. In the event of a nominee's withdrawal from the ballot, the Nominating Committee may present a replacement nominee at the congregational meeting.</p>
<p>Article 4.B. Clerk</p> <p>1. Nominations and Elections The clerk <i>Clerk</i>, elected annually, shall keep an accurate record of the proceedings and decisions at all congregational business meetings, such minutes to be approved at the next congregational business meeting.</p> <p>2. A permanent file of copies of approved congregational business meeting minutes must be maintained in the church. (See Article 3. B. 7. f.)</p>	<p>Article 4.B. Clerk</p> <p>1. Nominations and Elections The Clerk, elected annually, shall keep an accurate record of the proceedings and decisions at all congregational meetings, such minutes to be approved at the next congregational meeting.</p> <p>2. A permanent file of copies of approved congregational meeting minutes must be maintained in the church. (See Article 3. B. 7. f.)</p>
<p>Article 5.E.1. Authority and Responsibilities</p> <p>b. Keep informed of the needs of the constituency of the church, remembering those needs in prayer and communicating them, when appropriate, to the congregation or to the constituency of the church.</p>	<p>Article 5.E. Authority and Responsibilities</p> <p>b. Keep informed of the needs of the church, remembering those needs in prayer and communicating them, when appropriate, to the congregation.</p>
<p>Article 5.E.2. Authority and Responsibilities</p> <p>c. Assume responsibility for the counseling and admonition of the constituency of the church, including the refutation of false doctrines and the rebuke of inappropriate conduct and the administration of church discipline.</p>	<p>Article 5.E. Authority and Responsibilities</p> <p>c. Assume responsibility for the counseling and admonition of the church, including the refutation of false doctrines and the rebuke of inappropriate conduct and the administration of church discipline.</p>

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<p>Article 5.E. Authority and Responsibilities</p> <p>3. The oversight of the church <i>New Hope Church EFCA</i> by the Board of Elders includes the ministry of managing the church as one would manage his own household (I Timothy 3:5). In discharge of this responsibility, the elders <i>Elders</i> shall perform or delegate as appropriate the following:</p> <p>g. Open and maintain such bank <i>financial</i> accounts and rent such safe deposit boxes, on behalf of the church, as they shall deem appropriate, and designate the persons authorized to draw thereon or enter thereinto.</p> <p>k. Receive and disburse <i>Oversee the receipt and dispersal of</i> all church funds, maintaining appropriate records, providing fiscal control, and submitting documented financial status to the congregation at each regular congregational meeting.</p> <p>l. Require job descriptions for all paid positions associated with church operation, and annual <i>regular</i> reviews and assessment of employee performance and job satisfaction through the appropriate staff lines of authority headed by the Senior Pastor.</p> <p>n. Present a written report annually <i>an annual report to the congregation</i>.</p>	<p>Article 5.E. Authority and Responsibilities</p> <p>3. The oversight of New Hope Church EFCA by the Board of Elders includes the ministry of managing the church as one would manage his own household (I Timothy 3:5). In discharge of this responsibility, the Elders shall perform or delegate as appropriate the following:</p> <p>g. Open and maintain financial accounts on behalf of the church, as they shall deem appropriate, and designate the persons authorized to draw thereon or enter thereinto.</p> <p>k. Oversee the receipt and dispersal of all church funds, maintaining appropriate records, providing fiscal control, and submitting documented financial status to the congregation at each regular congregational meeting.</p> <p>l. Require job descriptions for all paid positions associated with church operation, and regular reviews and assessment of employee performance and job satisfaction through the appropriate staff lines of authority headed by the Senior Pastor.</p> <p>n. Present an annual report to the congregation.</p>
<p>Article 6.B. Deacon Council Structures</p> <p>1. The chairman <i>Chair</i> and the vice chairman <i>Vice Chair</i> of each council shall be elected by the congregation for a two (2) year <i>two-year</i> term and may not serve more than three (3) terms in succession, not counting the filling of any unexpired term. Nominees for these positions must be members of the church.</p> <p>3. The council chairman <i>Chair</i> shall appoint a secretary of the council from among the members of the council.</p> <p>6. The chairman <i>Chair</i> of a council, the assigned elder, and the respective pastoral staff member together will recommend persons to the Board of Elders for appointment to council membership.</p>	<p>Article 6.B. Deacon Council Structures</p> <p>1. The Chair and the Vice Chair of each council shall be elected by the congregation for a two-year term and may not serve more than three terms in succession, not counting the filling of any unexpired term. Nominees for these positions must be members of the church.</p> <p>3. The council Chair shall appoint a secretary of the council from among the members of the council.</p> <p>6. The Chair of a council, the assigned elder, and the respective pastoral staff member together will recommend persons to the Board of Elders for appointment to council membership.</p>

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<p>Article 7.A.2. Nomination Committee</p> <p>a. Composition, Selection, and Qualification</p> <p>2. Four (4) members of the Nominating Committee shall be elected by the congregation. These shall be elected for two (2) year <i>two-year</i> terms, two (2) elected each year. <i>Elections shall be held in such a way that approximately half of the positions shall be filled annually.</i></p>	<p>Article 7.A.2. Nomination Committee</p> <p>a. Composition, Selection, and Qualification</p> <p>2. Four members of the Nominating Committee shall be elected by the congregation. These shall be elected for two-year terms. Elections shall be held in such a way that approximately half of the positions shall be filled annually.</p>
<p>Article 10. Amendment of Bylaws</p> <p>Proposed amendments to the bylaws shall be presented in written form and discussed at a congregational business meeting. At a subsequent congregational business meeting, the proposed amendments may be approved by an affirmative vote by secret ballot of two-thirds (2/3) of the members present. All members must be notified by mail <i>in writing (which shall include postal or electronic mail)</i> of proposed amendments at least thirty (30) days prior to the congregational business meeting scheduled for their adoption.</p>	<p>Article 10. Amendment of Bylaws</p> <p>Proposed amendments to the bylaws shall be presented in written form and discussed at a congregational meeting. At a subsequent congregational meeting, the proposed amendments may be approved by an affirmative vote by secret ballot of two-thirds of the members present. All members must be notified in writing (which shall include postal or electronic mail) of proposed amendments at least thirty days prior to the congregational meeting scheduled for their adoption.</p>

The Proposal to Amend our Statement of Faith: A Rationale for the Change

At our EFCA One General Conference in June of 2017 the Board of Directors introduced a motion to amend our Articles of Incorporation by replacing the word "premillennial" with "glorious" in Article Nine of our Statement of Faith (hereafter SOF).¹ This motion will be considered for action at our Conference in 2019. In order to foster discussion of this motion, we offer this rationale for the proposed change.

Why should we speak of the "personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ" rather than the "personal, bodily and premillennial return of our Lord Jesus Christ" as a required theological position in the EFCA?

1. This change better reflects what we say about ourselves.

We believe that one of the most positive features of our movement is that we are centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the inerrant Scriptures, and that we aspire to be an association of believers only, but of all believers who can join with us in affirming those truths integral to the biblical gospel. So we say that we "major on the majors and minor on the minors." In light of this distinctive EFCA value of uniting around the central doctrines of the gospel, our SOF is silent on significant issues on which we have divergence of conviction and agree to disagree, such as Calvinist/Reformed vs. Arminian/Wesleyan views of conversion, cessationist vs. continualist views of the miraculous gifts, believer vs. infant baptism and the young vs. old age of the earth.

In presenting this EFCA identity we believe there is a significant inconsistency in continuing to include premillennialism as a required theological position when it is clear that the nature of the millennium is one of those doctrines over which theologians, equally knowledgeable, equally committed to the Bible, and equally Evangelical, have disagreed through the history of the church. All, however, have agreed that Christ's return will be "glorious"!

Premillennialism is clearly a minority position among Evangelical believers around the world and one widely recognized among us as a doctrine that is not central to the gospel. Broadening the acceptable millennial views in our SOF would allow us to be consistent with who we say we are, and the proposed change will allow us to speak with greater integrity when we affirm that our essential theological convictions are all vitally connected to the gospel and that they set forth "sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God," which he has now entrusted to us (1 Tim. 1:10-11).

¹ The Statement of Faith is found in Article III of the EFCA Articles of Incorporation.

2. This change will improve our SOF inasmuch as our current failure to affirm that the return of Christ will be "glorious" is a significant deficiency in what we proclaim about the coming of Christ.

The conviction that our Lord Jesus Christ will return *in glory* was fundamental to the faith of the first Christians, and this aspect of his return is currently missing in our SOF.

His return in glory was asserted by Jesus himself (Mt. 24:30; 25:31; Luke 9:26), and it reflected the notion that his vindication through the resurrection would be revealed to all at his return (Mt. 24:30; Rev. 19). His glorious return was also an assurance to the first believers that their suffering would not be in vain, for when he returns they would share in his glory (Phil. 3:21; Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 4:13). Indeed, it is integral to faith, for as Paul writes, "We wait for this blessed hope: the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

It is this glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ which is our "blessed hope." This, furthermore, is foundational for living our lives with "constant expectancy," which is the mark of Christians. And while we wait for the Lord's return, we are joyfully motivated "to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission."

The affirmation of the "glorious" return of Christ was included in the 2005 draft presented by the Spiritual Heritage Committee to the Board of Directors, but it was removed when the word "premillennial" was added in its place. We believe our SOF would be strengthened if this change was reversed.

A similar expression was included in Article 9 in the Norwegian-Danish Free Church Association Statement of Faith adopted in 1912 as part of their merger: "We believe that Jesus Christ who ascended into heaven, shall come again in great power and glory." Some have stated that removing premillennialism would be a move away from our history. This earlier SOF suggests that including "glorious" instead of "premillennial" is equally a part of our EFCA heritage.

The Evangelical Free Church of Canada adopted a 2007 draft of our SOF which included "glorious" as a description of the return of Christ.² We believe that its absence among our evangelical convictions is a significant deficiency.

3. This change will help to strengthen the integrity of our SOF as it operates in our churches.

Many churches in the EFCA, recognizing that premillennialism is merely a denominational distinctive and not an essential of the gospel, simply do not enforce it as a required doctrinal position for members, elders or even for pastors.³

² Article Nine of the SOF of the Evangelical Free Church of Canada reads as follows: "We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ with His holy angels when He will bring His kingdom to fulfillment and exercise His role as Judge of all. This coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission."

³ However, all pastors *ordained* by the EFCA must currently affirm premillennialism.

They want their church to do what we in the EFCA say we do—"major on the majors and minor on the minors." In addition, ReachGlobal sometimes makes an exception for premillennialism in partnering with churches and other movements.⁴ This exception, either explicitly recognized or implicitly allowed, may have the long-term effect of diminishing the overall authority of our SOF and potentially weakening the theological health of our movement.

The proposed change is by no means a concession to a weakened view of biblical truth. It is rather a recognition that not dealing with the widely held discrepancy between our commitment to uniting around the central truths of the gospel and our inclusion of premillennialism as a required theological position may, in fact, undermine the authority of our SOF in our churches.

4. This change will not diminish our adherence to biblical inerrancy nor change our framework for interpreting the Bible.

These were the two central theological objections to broadening the acceptable millennial views in our earlier revision of our SOF, and both were addressed at the EFCA Theology Conferences of 2006 and 2007.

In 2006, respected church historian John Woodbridge and New Testament scholar Grant Osborne, both from TEDS, affirmed strongly that there is no necessary link between one's millennial position and a commitment to biblical inerrancy.⁵ In fact, some of the strongest proponents of inerrancy in Christian history and today have *not* been premillennialists, including Jonathan Edwards, B. B. Warfield, and J. Gresham Machen.

In 2007 we had respected Evangelical scholars representing four different eschatological views discuss their interpretive principles (hermeneutics), and it was clear that the amillennialist and at least one of the premillennialists were nearly identical.⁶ The particular interpretive framework found in a Dispensational understanding of the Bible is not currently mandated by our SOF, so the proposed change would not alter the hermeneutical approaches that are already widely accepted within the EFCA.

This change is fully consistent with our unwavering adherence to biblical inerrancy and to our shared framework for interpreting the Bible which entails discerning the intended meaning of the biblical writers understood in the context

⁴ An emphasis on the importance of premillennialism is largely an American phenomenon and is generally found internationally only among churches heavily influenced by American missionaries.

⁵ Both Woodbridge (since 1971) and Osborne (since 1978) are credentialed in the EFCA, and, as faculty members at TEDS, they are required to affirm annually their reaffirmation of the EFCA Statement of Faith.

⁶ On this, cf. "Inerrancy, Hermeneutics and Eschatology: A Report of the 2007 Midwinter Ministerial Conference," *The Ministerial Forum*, 17.1 (Fall 2007), especially the summary discussion on pp. 7-8. This document can be accessed here: https://go.efca.org/sites/default/files/resources/docs/2013/03/ministerial_forum_fall_2007.pdf

of the whole of the canonical Scriptures which ultimately point us to Jesus as "Israel's promised Messiah."

5. This change will be in the best interest of the future of our movement.

In 2008 a compromise was reached in the interest of our unity and as a way of honoring our past. We now sense that it is time to reconsider our position and to move forward in the best interest of our future.

The doctrine of premillennialism is simply not a pressing theological issue among most preparing for ministry today. Many District Superintendents are facing this issue with young church planters, pastoral students at TEDS and churches that would otherwise be eager to join with us. Many who would be highly qualified and fully committed to a strongly biblical, gospel ministry, simply cannot affirm the premillennial position "without mental reservation," and so cannot join our movement. In the same way, some otherwise highly qualified missionary candidates cannot serve with ReachGlobal because of their millennial position.

One of the great challenges that faces the EFCA is replacing the many pastors and mission leaders who will be retiring in the next decade, not to mention the challenge of finding those who will plant new churches here and around the world.⁷ The retention of premillennialism as a required theological position in our SOF is an unnecessary hindrance to this mission imperative.

Conclusion

Some in our EFCA past have believed that we in the Free Church had been raised up with the special purpose of proclaiming a particular eschatological viewpoint. That view is much less prevalent among us today, particularly as the eschatological viewpoints represented by credentialed pastors and leaders in the Free Church, while all still premillennial, are much more diverse in the way that the millennium is spelled out and in what it means for understanding the Old Testament and the relationship between the Church and Israel. As a result, many in the Free Church see things very differently than did our forebears. What seemed obvious and essential to them no longer seems that way to many among us today.

⁷ We recognize there are always some limiting factors for people to serve in these various ministries in the EFCA. Even if premillennialism were removed as one of those limitations, there would still be others. Although the retirement of many is forthcoming, and the need for replacing those individuals is a reality, including this as one of the reasons for the change is not merely a pragmatic matter. It is true there are other more important theological reasons for the change, which is why this is stated last, but it is a reality, one which we want to steward faithfully as we consider where we are today, and where God is leading is in the future. As we do so, we are assured "God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). J. Hudson Taylor articulated the truth of this Scripture, "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply."

In the light of the present circumstances, we have to ask whether retaining premillennialism in our SOF is now actually *contrary* to the spirit of our founding principles. Theologian Alister McGrath, in his book *The Genesis of Doctrine*, makes an observation with regard to the formulation of doctrinal statements that seems applicable here:

Certain specific contingent historical circumstances lead to the perception that a given doctrine is of normative importance for the self-definition of a community in that situation. . . . With the passing of those circumstances, the community may wish to define itself with reference to different parameters.⁸

In proposing this change, we believe we would *not* be *re*-defining ourselves. Instead, we would simply be affirming who we have always been, but in a new way because of our present circumstances. If we really do major on the majors and minor on the minors, as we say we do, we believe that our statement of the central and essential matters of the gospel should not include a specific statement on the millennial issue. This change will not require anyone to change their own eschatological view. It simply means that no one view will become a boundary that excludes other Bible-believing Evangelical brothers and sisters from full fellowship in our churches. We would thus treat the millennial issue in the same way that we currently treat issues such as Calvinist/Reformed vs. Arminian/Wesleyan views of conversion, cessationist vs. continualist views of the miraculous gifts, believer vs. infant baptism and the young vs. old age of the earth. We believe that just as the change from an exclusively pre-tribulational view to one that includes mid- and post-tribulationists⁹ has been a healthy and positive change, enriching our movement, so we believe a move to allow non-premillennialists to join us is not only appropriate in principle but will also allow other godly men and women to partner with us in our churches to reach the world for Christ.

The decision ten years ago looked to the past—now we want to look to the future. We need to allow the EFCA to be who we always were—but in the present circumstances in which we are more engaged with a broader swath of born-again, Bible-believing, orthodox Evangelicals. In a culture that is becoming more hostile to the gospel we need to unite more than ever around the essentials of the gospel.

This is the rationale for the proposal that was presented in our June Conference. We look forward to opportunities at District Conferences and at the EFCA Theology Conference to consider further the issues related to this proposal. We trust that our discussions will be held in a spirit worthy of the gospel and honoring to our Lord.

⁸Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Blackwell, 1990, reprinted Eerdmans, 1997), p. 47.

⁹This change was officially recognized in 1977 by the Board of Ministerial Standing and was affirmed by the Conference in 1985.

DOCUMENT

Motion to Amend Article 9 of the EFCA Statement of Faith

On June 19, 2019, delegates of the 132nd EFCA Conference approved the **Motion to Amend Article 9 of the Statement of Faith** (<https://www.efca.org/resources/announcement/motion-passes-amend-article-9-efca-statement-faith>) – 79% of voting delegates affirmed the Motion.

The **EFCA Board of Directors** (<https://go.efca.org/resources/document/efca-board-directors>) has introduced a motion to amend Paragraph 9, Article III of the Articles of Incorporation of the EFCA, the Statement of Faith, as follows:

*We believe in the personal, bodily and premillennial **glorious** return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.*

This motion was unanimously and enthusiastically adopted by the Board of Directors in February, 2017. Because the motion involves a proposed amendment to the Articles of Incorporation, the motion was presented to the 2017 Conference but cannot be acted upon until the 2019 Conference and must receive the affirmative vote of two-thirds of the membership of the 2019 Conference present and voting. The board strongly believes that this motion allows time for necessary and important conversations as a movement.

The proposed amendment of Article 9 of the Statement of Faith came to the Board of Directors as a recommendation of the Spiritual Heritage Committee, and was based on multiple interactions the Spiritual Heritage Committee had with EFCA pastors and leaders across the country, and ReachGlobal staff around the world. The board endeavored to listen, pray, seek the input of our district superintendents, and discern God's direction for the EFCA movement. Having given careful and prayerful consideration to the recommendation of the Spiritual Heritage Committee, the Board of Directors is in full agreement that this is the right time for these conversations.

The **EFCA Statement of Faith** (<https://go.efca.org/resources/document/efca-statement-faith>) is composed of theological convictions central to our faith. The affirmations are theological essentials because they relate to our salvation; they are all vitally connected to the gospel. We believe this, and nothing else, should be our primary point of identity in the EFCA. The proposed amendment to remove the word *premillennial*, and replace it with *glorious*, seeks to embody a principle that has been at the core of who we are in the EFCA, a principle considered by many to be our greatest strength, and one of the most cherished features of our spiritual heritage: we are a believers' church with a strong commitment to biblical unity in Jesus Christ. The EFCA is a gospel-centered movement, united in common commitment to the essentials of the gospel – and further united in mission.

The motion to amend Article 9 of the Statement of Faith was **introduced** at the business session of the 2017 EFCA Conference but **cannot** be acted upon until the 2019 Conference. The EFCA Board of Directors is available to answer any questions you might have regarding the proposed amendment and to receive any input that you may wish to share. The conversation this motion initiates is vital to the EFCA movement. If you would like to communicate with the board, you are welcome you to do so at

boardofdirectors@efca.org

(mailto:boardofdirectors@efca.org?subject=Motion%20to%20amend%20EFCA%20Statement%20of%20Faith).

RELATED RESOURCES

Proposal to Amend EFCA Statement of Faith (/resources/document/proposal-amend-efca-statement-faith)

Transitional Rules for Implementation of the 2019 Statement of Faith (/resources/document/transitional-rules-implementation-2019-statement-faith)

Letter from Board of Directors - Support of the Motion to Amend Article 9 (/resources/document/letter-board-directors-support-motion-amend-article-9)

Resources and References (/resources/document/resources-

2019 Business Session (/resources/document/2019-business-session)