

EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# RIVERS & LAKES PRESBYTERY

May 21, 2015

Jeff Jeremiah, Stated Clerk  
Evangelical Presbyterian Church  
Office of the General Assembly  
17197 N. Laurel Park Drive  
Suite 567  
Livonia MI 48152-7912

Dear Jeff,

I'm copying below draft minutes regarding an overture created by Rivers and Lakes Presbytery at our 14<sup>th</sup> meeting on April 24, 2015. Please handle as you think appropriate.

Sincerely,



Carolyn Nystrom, Stated Clerk  
Rivers and Lakes Presbytery, EPC

#### **14.07 Ascending Overture. Regulative Principle of Worship**

The session of Edgington Presbyterian church along with her pastor Rev. Zach Hopkins submitted the overture below asking that Rivers and Lakes Presbytery overture the EPC General Assembly on the subject.

The Session of Edgington Evangelical Presbyterian Church hereby respectfully overtures Rivers & Lakes Presbytery with consideration to Descending Overture 14-A from the 34<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, and the historic and modern definition and application of the Regulative Principle of Worship, with a subsequent motion for an overture to the 35<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to create a study committee to examine and report on the Evangelical Presbyterian Church's understanding of the Regulative Principle of Worship in our Reformed and Confessional heritage, and its application thereunto.

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CAROLYN NYSTROM, STATED CLERK

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**Grounds:** The work of the Constitutional Revisions Committee (appointed by the 29<sup>th</sup> GA) is to review the *Book of Order* in all of its parts for the purposes of assuring clarity of intent and meaning of implementation. The revision to the *Book of Worship* was first received at the 33<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly (June 2013), and then adopted as a Descending Overture to be submitted to Presbyteries at the 34<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (June 2014). Although identified as “not a substantive change,” the revision calls for the striking of the word “prescription” to be replaced with “foundation,” upon grounds that this more clearly communicates the EPC’s position on the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW). The position however is not substantiated apart from the point that adherence to the RPW has “never been the case in the [EPC],” and that the word foundation “better describes the EPC’s longstanding view and practice.” This overture calls for a full study of the EPC’s understanding of the RPW by a committee erected by the 35<sup>th</sup> General Assembly with respect to our rich confessional heritage in the tradition of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as a Presbyterian and Reformed denomination.

**Whereas** the *Book of Government* grants the authority and responsibility of particular Church Sessions “to overture Presbytery on matters it believes vital or helpful to the whole Church,” (BOG 18-3.N); and

**Whereas** the *Westminster Confession of Faith* represents the avowed system of doctrine and interpretation of Scripture for all EPC Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders, (BOG 13-2.A.3); and

**Whereas** the *Westminster Confession of Faith* affirms that all things pertaining to God’s own glory and to man’s salvation, faith and life is either explicitly stated in the Bible or may be deduced from good and necessary consequence (WCF 1.6), and that this principle is applied to the public worship of the Church stating positively, “The acceptable way of worshiping the true God is established by God Himself,” and negatively, “God is not to be worshiped... in any other way than that prescribed in Holy Scripture,” (WCF 21.1); and

**Whereas** the *Westminster Larger Catechism* asks: “What does the second commandment require?” and answers: “The second commandment requires us to receive, respectfully perform, and preserve completely and purely all the regulations for religion and worship that God has established in His Word,” and also asks: “What particular sins does the second commandment forbid?” and answers: “The second commandment forbids... approving any religious worship not established by God Himself,” (WLC 108-109; cf. WSC 50-51); and

**Whereas** the *Book of Government* disallows changes made to the *Book of Order*, in any of its parts, that would be contrary to the *Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (BOG 23-1.B), and in recognition that all EPC Officers “voluntarily limit their free exercise of conscience to the lawful bounds” of our constitutional documents (BOG 25-2);

**Therefore, be it resolved** that the Edgington Evangelical Presbyterian Church Session overtures the Rivers & Lakes Presbytery and requests a subsequent overture to the 35<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the EPC to erect a study committee to examine and report on the Evangelical Presbyterian Church’s understanding of the Regulative Principle of Worship in our Reformed and Confessional heritage, and its application thereunto.

Adopted by the Session of Edgington EPC at its stated meeting March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
Attested by /s/ RE Steven Morrison, Stated Clerk; TE Zachary Hopkins

The presbytery considered this matter. We heard support from Rev. Zach Hopkins with Edgington ruling elder Mic Penry and others. We heard rebuttal from Rev. Dr. James Wilhoit and others.

Arguments included:

### **Support**

--On the first page EPC's revised *Book of Worship* we find "proper worship therefore finds its ~~prescription~~ foundation in Holy Scripture." This change in wording from "prescription" to "foundation" violates Westminster Confession 1:6 which says positively, "The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is established by God Himself and negatively, "God is not to be worshiped . . . in any other way than that prescribed in Holy Scripture." WCF 21.1

--Westminster Larger Catechism speaks similarly in 108—109 and in Westminster Smaller Catechism, WSC 50-51.

--Pastor and elder vow 3 commands us to "receive and adopt" these documents. (BOG 13-2-3)

--I'm in a service business and customers "prescribe" to us what they want. We could do what we think best, but that would make unhappy customers. God is specific on his worship commands—something like a doctor writing a prescription. He tells us in Isaiah 55:89, "My thoughts are not your thoughts . . . my thoughts are higher than your thoughts."

### **Rebuttal**

Prescription is not the longstanding view of EPC. We do not sing only psalms or cover our heads during worship. We do not prohibit pipe organs and drama as part of our worship. The EPC has allowed freedom in worship that is consistent with Scripture and does not conflict with the teachings of Scripture. In EPC we worship in much the same way we make decisions in the rest of life. We determine this through prayer, Scripture, Westminster, and cultural context.

The proposed substitution of the word "foundation" for "prescription" is intended to make it clear that we are to worship God as he wants to be worshipped and we determine this as we would anything in life—through the study of his Word, prayer, consulting the saints of old, looking at the Westminster standards and seeking counsel of others. Our heritage is one of worship freedom, grounded in the Scripture, the Westminster standards and theological reflection.

It was moved seconded and carried to send the overture to EPC's General Assembly. The standing counted vote was:

27 in support of the motion

14 against the motion

Motion carried.

CN      C V