

Evaluating our Denominational Affiliation *Last Updated: April 11, 2023*

During the fall of 2022, the income of Emmanuel Church began to fall behind expenses in a significant way. As the Elders considered our shortfall, we considered all our major expenses to see if we should make adjustments. One of the major expenses is the cost of being affiliated with our denomination; the Congregational Christian Churches in Canada (CCCC).

This document includes the main insights gained from our evaluation, and we hope it will function as a discussion paper. This means that in this document the elders are not trying to make the case to either stay or leave. Instead, by sharing insights in several main categories, we hope to provide the background and insight that will help our congregation to consider our evaluation in an informed manner.

1) Understanding our History and Context

Before diving into our current affiliation with the CCCC, it is important to understand 'church polity,' which refers to 'the operational and governance structure of a church or denomination'. There are three types of church governance models:

- a) Episcopalian (i.e. Roman Catholic, Anglican)
- b) Presbyterian (i.e. United Church of Canada, Presbyterian)
- c) Congregational (i.e. Baptist, Congregational)

You will notice by the examples provided that Episcopalian is a more 'top down' governance structure while Congregational is at the other end of the spectrum with each church being autonomous. This understanding is extremely relevant to our discussion as even under our current affiliation with the CCCC we are an autonomous church; the building belongs to the local organization and the decisions are made at the local level. We are voluntarily associated with the CCCC, who have certain standards in place we need to meet in order to be acceptable to them. For example, our Statement of Faith must agree with denominational beliefs and our practices must adhere to our denomination's position on issues like family and human sexuality.

Another piece of relevant church history is that in the 1980s the United Church of Canada (UCC) voted to allow for the ordination of homosexuals. This caused great turmoil within local UCC congregations; with many church splits as a result. With buildings belonging to the denomination, break-away groups had to start over. Never wanting to have a national office set the agenda at the local level like this again, these new churches adopted a congregational model of governance. However, they longed for a group to belong to, and in 1988 dozens of churches joined with 6 Congregational churches in Ontario that never joined the UCC when it was established in the 1920s. This union became the Congregational Christian Churches in Canada. ECCC joined this group in 1994 after a local church split led to our founders having to start over again.

2) Benefits of Belonging, Including Oversight & Accountability

In general, denominations function as a resource of information and teaching to the individual churches. And so, our National Pastor is available to provide teaching and guidance on a wide variety of subjects, including church governance, discipleship, evangelism, labour law, etc. In

addition, through the credentialing of pastors, the denomination helps the local church discern a pastor's theological beliefs. Our National Pastor writes a blog and leads online prayer meetings and teaching sessions for pastors on a variety of subjects. Today, however, much of this expertise is readily available to anyone with access to the internet. This brings us to a special focus on oversight and accountability.

Whereas churches under the Episcopalian and Presbyterian models of governance will receive far more oversight and direction from their respective denominations, congregational churches by design receive a lot less.

Currently, our denomination requires both our church and pastor to submit completed questionnaires on an annual basis. Each February, we are asked about attendance, conversions, proof of insurance coverage, adherence to denominational positions on issues like family and human sexuality, and a long list of other items, including very personal accountability questions for our pastor. If our answers are problematic, the denominational credentialing committee may get involved. Though our denomination does not have the authority to mandate direction, it can withdraw our affiliation.

One question to consider is whether we can function in a healthy way without the external accountability provided by our denomination. For example, can our Personnel Committee ask tough questions of our pastor? And, are our Elder and Deacon boards strong enough to ensure that we will always have proof of insurance, and that we will continue to adhere to our statement of faith?

3) Functional Affiliation

As mentioned earlier, 'resourcing local congregations is one of the main purposes of a denomination. The Canadian Evangelical Small Church Study report (released earlier this year), points to this:

"In the 2000s, it was common to hear denominational leaders describe their roles as resourcing their congregations. This model of denomination-as-resourcer came with several assumptions. First, it assumed denominations had the resources their congregations needed. Second, it assumed that these resources could be delivered promptly" (Pg 135).

In the early years of Emmanuel Church, the CCCC did fulfill this role as much could be learned from the experience of other churches that had started over. Great comfort was found in being in relationships with churches that had experienced the pain of a church split. However, as our church healed, the CCCC became less of a 'resourcer' for our church. Instead, the most effective resources for us have come through our association with Church Renewal (CR). CR exists to renew and equip the church for Christ's mission. Currently, many of our people are actively engaging with CR's training materials like 'Abide In Christ', 'Growing in Character', 'Set Free Retreat', Pre-Service Prayer, and Prayer Summits.

The above-mentioned report also points out the importance of ministry networks and just what those are. This statement explains:

"...ministry networks are best understood as networks of individuals, not organizations. For example, denominational relationships are best understood as being between

pastors and denominational leaders, not between the pastor's local church and the denomination" (Pg134)

From this, it is understood that the relationship between a pastor and the denominational leaders is the essential point of connection. For the last six years, the ministry network that our Pastor has been a part of and benefited from is the Church Renewal network. He has been actively mentored and is personally involved in mentoring several other pastors through this association with Church Renewal. The importance of these mentoring opportunities is summed up in this statement a ministry leader made in the above-mentioned report:

"...that the biggest thing that we get from the denomination – the biggest resource – would be the pool of relationship[s] to draw on that we're afforded to have with other pastors" (Pg 136).

The Church Renewal network has provided that "pool of relationship(s)". Our Pastor has been actively involved and it has been a life-changing, life-giving dynamic that has impacted our whole community and is completely outside of our denomination.

4. Present Situation of the Congregational Christian Churches of Canada:

There is serious concern about the long-term viability of the CCCC. Here are a few statistics:

Year	# Churches	Total Attendance	Budget	Proj Surplus/(deficit)
• 1988	70			
• 2004	81	6119		
• 2014	45	2530	\$246,900	(\$3,100)
• 2022	29		\$145,016	(\$36,030)

Over the past number of years, God has graciously provided for this shortfall through the generosity of churches that ceased operations, sold their buildings, and donated (part of) the proceeds to the denomination. This trend, however, is concerning and needs to be factored into our discerning process around Emmanuel's future affiliation. This is especially true considering there has been little indication from the national office that there is a plan in place or in the making to deal with this financial issue.

5. Financial Considerations at the Local Level

We are presently required to allocate 5% of our church's 'current income' (referring to our general income) to the National Office. This is mandated by the denomination. These funds have traditionally been paid out of our budgeted outreach fund. As a church we have an 'Outreach Policy' in which we commit ourselves to spend a minimum of 10% of our current income on outreach. We do this through the support of local, national and international ministry. Currently, the funds go to ministries like King's Kitchen, Church Renewal, and The Nazarene Mission in Sri Lanka.

With half of this 10% allocation going to the Congregational Christian Churches in Canada, only 50% of our outreach funds are being used for its intended purpose. To be clear, in 2023 we are required to send \$8,000 to the National Office.

Regardless of whether we remain with the CCCC or decide to leave, we will have to come to terms with whether our denominational allocation should be paid for out of our outreach funds.

6. Other Considerations

1. If we decide to leave the CCCC, will we seek out affiliation with another denomination, or become a non-denominational?
2. If we become a non-denominational church, there would be no change in the day-to-day life, focus, and ministry of Emmanuel Church.
3. Our charitable status would continue as we currently are an autonomous church.
4. Our connection to Church Renewal and Aaron Ministries would continue to be resources and support for our pastor. To be clear, we would not 'come under' under these organizations; they would merely continue to be a resource for our church
5. We would need to decide how to best apply the \$8000 currently allocated to our denomination. Options are to simply double the allocation for our current local, national and international partners, or we could choose to find more outreach partners
6. Emmanuel will need to adopt position statements on issues like family and human sexuality, as we currently 'have' these statements simply by being part of our denomination.
7. We would have to pay for our access to Right Now Media.
8. Emmanuel Church will have to apply to Nova Scotia Vital Statistics directly so our pastor can perform marriages in our province. (This is currently looked after by our denomination)

It is our hope that these points of consideration will help us have a helpful discussion of our affiliation with the Congregational Christian Churches of Canada. As a community of believers, we want to be sure that we are following God's leading and not continue to operate a certain way merely because that's the way we've always done them. Please prayerfully consider these things so that Emmanuel Church can authentically fulfill its calling in this Annapolis Valley and beyond.