

# The Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO)



The mission of **ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians** is to build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.

## How ECO Began

In the summer of 2010, seven pastors from the Presbyterian Church (USA) spoke of finding new ways to encourage each other in faith, ministry, and mission. They were concerned by the declining membership within their denomination (from four million to two million in 40 years). And they worried that growing denominational disputes over theology and bureaucracy stole focus from their pastoral calling of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and equipping a new generation to lead. These pastors dreamed of reclaiming a sense of covenanted community among leaders from a Presbyterian and Reformed heritage, and to find new ways for churches to connect, grow, and multiply.

January 2011, these pastors sent out a letter to PC(USA) pastors around the country, asking if others wanted to join in crafting a new way forward. The response was overwhelming: just seven months later, in August 2011, nearly 2,000 men and women gathered in Minneapolis to dream and pray. This became the birth of **The Fellowship of Presbyterians**, a ministry association that seeks to equip and connect those in various Presbyterian denominations including the PC(USA). But some pastors and congregations felt God calling them to leave the PC(USA), and many young seminarians were looking for a different context for ordination. As a result, in January 2012, at a conference in Orlando with more than 2,200 in attendance, a new denomination was formed: ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians.



## Our Name

The name ECO is not an acronym. It reinforces our passion for strengthening the ecosystems of local churches. We believe the church is a living organism that needs life-giving resources to help it grow, thrive, and multiply. ECO is committed to cultivating a healthy, diverse, resource-rich ecosystem where pastors and congregations can flourish.

Our full name (ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians) speaks to our core commitments:

**Covenant:** *To connect leaders in accountable relationships and encourage collaboration.*

**Order:** *To commit to a shared way of life as we unite around a shared theological core.*

**Evangelical:** *To advance the gospel of Jesus Christ and plant new missional communities.*

**Presbyterian:** *To stand within our Reformed heritage and celebrate the life of the mind.*

## Our Work

Today ECO is a rapidly-growing Presbyterian denomination that exists to serve the local church and reclaim a sense of covenanted biblical community. By 2018, ECO churches seek to **baptize more than they bury**. We will pursue this goal by focusing on four priorities:

- Lift up the centrality of the gospel.
- Grow with an emerging generation of leaders.
- Prioritize a wave of church innovation.
- Create an atmosphere of relational accountability.

## A Common Theological Core

One of the founding principles of ECO was uniting pastors and congregations around a common theological core. The goal is not to be same-minded, but like-minded. We affirm that theological consensus around certain essentials is foundational for a healthy denomination. As a covenant community, our unity derives from a clearly-articulated theology that is Christ-centered, Reformed, and evangelical.

The ECO constitution outlines behavioral and theological essentials and requires that all officers “receive, adopt, and be bound by” these essentials. ***Download ECO Essential Tenets & Confessional Standards***

## ECO Polity

Our structure and Policies are intended to serve the local church, not the other way around.

### The Nature of Our Polity

The polity of ECO is intended to foster a new way of being the Church, just as traditional, mainline denominations rose to serve in their day. We aspire to reclaim a sense of covenanted biblical community, where unity is derived from a shared mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ more than structural mandate. Congregations will gather together not to debate process or policy, but to collaborate, share best practices, encourage a Jesus way of life, and spur one another on to love and good deeds. Many aspects of our polity rely on the good work of our Presbyterian heritage, while other parts are new; all these recommendations require ongoing willingness to adapt along the way. As a new denomination, our bias is to encourage a spirit of innovation, of Spirit-filled risk-taking that might lead to new possibilities not yet in sight.

### The Distinctive Elements of Our Polity

- Flat, nimble structure to facilitate an atmosphere of high trust and low control
- Affirmations of micro-expressions of church, with smaller worshiping bodies supported
- Commissioning of elders and deacons for greater service
- Fostering accountability and encouragement through the local presbytery and Mission Affinity Groups
- Churches retain full ownership rights to their property
- Less time and money invested in maintaining a denominational structure
- More time invested in training pastors and leaders