

September 30, 2024

Members of Faith Church,

We pray this letter finds you well and encouraged in the Lord. At our congregational meeting on September 18, the elders presented a proposed amendment to the Faith Church Bylaws. The proposed amendment would eliminate the requirement our bylaws currently place on our staff pastors to seek accreditation with the Great Lakes District of the Evangelical Free Church of America within three years of assuming their role as a lead or associate pastor (see Articles 7, Sections 2 & 3).

Attached you will find the proposal the elders presented at the congregational meeting. The proposal outlines the rationale for the recommended change. It also provides important background as to why the elders are currently out of compliance with our bylaws regarding the accreditation of the staff pastors, which the administration committee appropriately communicated to the congregation at the May congregational meeting.

The elders provided initial discussion opportunities at the September congregational meeting, but please know that we are happy to discuss this proposal further and answer any questions you may have. Please reach out to any of the elders if you have further questions or would like to know more about the proposed amendment. ***Lord willing, we will vote on the proposal at our next regularly scheduled congregational meeting on Wednesday, January 22.*** On Sunday, November 17, immediately following the conclusion of the corporate worship service, the elders will host a Q&A for any members who would like to learn more about the proposal and ask any remaining questions prior to the vote.

We are grateful for your partnership in the gospel and your love for Faith Church. May the Lord continue to knit our hearts together in love and grow us in every way into him who is the head, Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:15).

Affectionately,
The Elders of Faith Church

Proposed Bylaw Change

Presented by the Elders of Faith Church on: September 18, 2024

Proposed Change:

In Article Seven Section 2 and Section 3, in respect to the lead pastor and pastoral staff, eliminate the following phrase:

“and seek accreditation as a minister in good standing with the Great Lakes District of the Evangelical Free Church of America within three years of assuming the position.”

Basis for the recommended change:

- 1) As our pastors began pursuing the accreditation process last year, we learned that to be accredited would require the pastors to support the validity of both infant and believers’ baptism as defined in the book *Evangelical Convictions*.¹ The EFCA does not allow individual churches to divide over the timing or mode of a baptism as it relates to church membership. Timing refers to *when* an individual was baptized: either as an infant in anticipation of their profession of faith in Christ, or as a believer after their profession of faith in Christ. Mode refers to *how* an individual was baptized: by immersion, sprinkling, or pouring. While EFCA churches and their pastors are free to practice and teach either infant or believers’ baptism (or both), in order for pastors to be accredited in the EFCA, they must affirm the validity of both infant and believers’ baptism as it relates to an individual’s membership in the church.
- 2) The elders have been actively studying this topic for the last 18 months and have talked with EFCA regional and national leadership concerning this issue. The EFCA executive director of theology and credentialing, Greg Strand, has confirmed that, to be accredited, our staff pastors would need to allow into membership those who have been baptized either as an infant or as a believer as defined in *Evangelical Convictions*, thus affirming both forms of baptism. While our staff pastors wholeheartedly affirm the EFCA Statement of Faith, they cannot affirm the validity of infant baptism as defined in *Evangelical Convictions*.² They believe Scripture only teaches the doctrine and practice of believers’ baptism. Furthermore, Faith Church has never practiced infant baptism, and historically has only practiced and taught believers’ baptism. Additionally, over 95% of current EFCA churches only practice and teach believers’ baptism. The elders of Faith Church also support believers’ baptism. While believers’ baptism is not currently required for membership, it is the position we teach and have taught historically.

¹ *Evangelical Convictions* is a theological exposition that provides a commentary on the EFCA Statement of Faith, expounding its truths and clarifying both what it says and does not say. It is also the authoritative standard used for accreditation, meaning that in order to be credentialed in the EFCA, our pastors would need to affirm its contents, without any exceptions. For its exposition on baptism, see *Evangelical Convictions* (Minneapolis, MN: Free Church Publications, 2011),169-176.

² *Ibid.*, 175-176.

- 3) We do not want to put our staff pastors in a situation where they would be forced to violate their consciences or compromise their convictions regarding baptism. Nor do we want to remain out of compliance with our church bylaws. Therefore, it is the elders' recommendation that we remove this requirement from our bylaws.

Further Thoughts:

- 4) Over 70% of EFCA churches are led by pastors who have not been accredited. Being accredited is not a requirement to be an EFCA church in good standing. Removing this requirement from our bylaws would not affect our relationship with the EFCA in anyway.
- 5) Eliminating this requirement opens our flexibility for future pastors. Requiring pastors to accept both infant and believers' baptism as valid limits our options significantly. Most pastors either hold infant baptism or believers' baptism, not both.
- 6) Finally, requiring accreditation with the EFCA places an extrabiblical requirement upon our pastors. Thus, removing the requirement keeps us aligned with the qualifications Scripture itself places on the office (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9).

Fortunately, our relationship with the EFCA continues to be strong. Our elders and pastors regularly interact with EFCA leadership (regional and national), and both sides are very supportive of one another. Our pastors continue to have an ongoing, positive connection with the EFCA. Over the past 7 years our pastors have attended and will continue to attend local EFCA pastor gatherings. We have hosted many of these gatherings here at Faith Church. This proposed amendment would not impact our position in the EFCA either short term or long term. It would simply remove a requirement from our staff pastors that Scripture does not require of them, while allowing them to continue faithfully pastoring our church without violating their consciences.

If the amendment is adopted, Sections 2 and 3 of Article 7 “Ministry Staff and Officers” would read as follows:

Article 7
Ministry Staff and Officers

Section 2. Lead Pastor. In accordance with the purpose statement of the Church (see Church Constitution Article III), the Congregation may call a Lead Pastor. As Lead Pastor, he shall also supervise and evaluate staff members according to the policies established by the Elder Board and the Administrative Team. He shall be a man of mature Christian character and experience, and shall meet the requirements of Elder as stated in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The selection and call of a Lead Pastor shall take place in accordance with Article Three, Section 7 of these Bylaws.

The Lead Pastor shall apply for membership in the Church, ~~and seek accreditation as a minister in good standing with The Great Lakes District of the Evangelical Free Church of America within three years of assuming the position.~~ The Lead Pastor shall be a voting member of the Elder Board, and agree to an accountability relationship with at least two other men approved by the Elder Board. It is strongly recommended that current or former Elders, who are current Church members, be selected. The Lead Pastor shall report at each Elder Board meeting, and submit a minimum of an annual report to the Congregation at the March Congregational meeting and any update or as needed report at other Congregational meetings. The Elder Board is responsible for the oversight of the Lead Pastor’s performance. The Elder Board shall perform an annual evaluation of the Lead Pastor. After following the procedure outlined in Matthew 18:15-18, the Lead Pastor may be removed by approval of 75% of the votes cast by members in attendance at any Congregational or Special Meeting of the Congregation.

Section 3. Pastoral Staff. Additional Pastoral Staff may be added upon consensus of the Elder Board and HR member of the Administrative Team and final approval of the candidate by the Congregation. Such staff shall meet the requirements for Elder as stated in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. They shall report to the Lead Pastor or another Pastoral Staff member so designated, and give direction to staff members and ministry leaders according to the policies established by the Elder Board and the Administrative Team. Pastoral staff should participate in Elder Board activities as needed to guide their ministry initiatives. The selection and call of Pastoral Staff shall take place in accordance with Article Three, Section 7 of these Bylaws.

Each member of the Pastoral Staff shall apply for membership in the Church, ~~and seek accreditation as a minister in good standing with The Great Lakes District of the Evangelical Free Church of America within three years of assuming the position.~~ He shall agree to an accountability relationship with at least two other men approved by the Elder Board. It is strongly recommended that current or former Elders, who are current Church members, be selected.

After following the procedure outlined in Matthew 18:15-18, Pastoral Staff may be removed by approval of 75% of the votes cast by members in attendance at any Congregational or Special Meeting of the Congregation.