

## **PARAMETERS OF CONGREGATIONALISM FOR NEW EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCHES**

The Evangelical Free Church of America is an affiliation of local churches who agree with a common 12 article Statement of Faith and who share certain principles, practices, and a common purpose. Article 10 of the Statement of Faith reads, "We believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Head of the Church, and that every local church has the right under Christ to decide and govern its own affairs." In the history and practice of the Evangelical Free Church this statement has been interpreted as prescribing a congregational form of church government. The choice of the word "Free" in the name of this affiliation of like-minded churches also denotes a congregational form of government. Since the form of church government is a distinctive, care must be taken by the new Evangelical Free Church congregation to develop a system of church governance that remains within the bounds of congregationalism. Each local church has the freedom to form and if necessary, change its own government provided it remains within these bounds.

The boundaries or broad parameters of Evangelical Free Church congregationalism are listed below. These, along with a definition of congregationalism, are intended to serve as guidelines for the new church seeking to form its own approach to church government.

"Congregationalism is that type of church government which holds: (1) that the local church's highest authority under God and His Word resides in the collective will of the local church membership, and (2) that the responsibility for ministry also belongs to the entire local church membership."<sup>1</sup>

Any decision made by any officer or committee or Board can be affirmed or overruled by the congregation in a corporate decision.

The biblical emphasis given to the leadership in a local church is on spiritual, moral and relational characteristics, not upon a person's gifts or abilities (Matthew 20:2528; I Timothy 3:116; Titus 1:519).

Any Board of Elders or official church leadership which becomes self-perpetuating, or which allows its members to serve indefinitely at their own discretion has moved outside the bounds of Evangelical Free Church congregationalism. The leadership must be chosen for a definite term of office, and if necessary, disciplined or dismissed by the membership of the congregation.

Each congregation should strive for the maximum use of its spiritual gifts by the membership in the conduct of church government. The responsibility for ministry rests not with a few but with the entire congregation, each member being gifted by the Holy Spirit to minister for Christ and to exercise individual choice in the decisions of the church.

As the local church experiences growth in size and complexity, an increasing number of decisions may need to be delegated to the leadership by the congregation. This is within the bounds of congregationalism provided the congregation as a whole retains the authority to review and if necessary, reverse any decision.

<sup>1</sup>Consultation on Congregationalism, Notebook (Bannockburn, Illinois: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1987), p.