

Pastoral Paper
on the
“The Empowerment of the Holy Spirit
and Church Officers”
KPC Session
November 2003

The Session of KPC is committed to building a charismatic church. As we have stated in our Values and position papers, we believe the Bible teaches that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are fully valid, operational, and important in our day. Secondly, the history of KPC is uniquely charismatic. Throughout the late 70s and early 80s, KPC experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that continues to this day.

Therefore, as a matter of faithfulness both to Scripture and to God’s distinctive work at KPC, the Session affirms a policy that all elders and deacons shall have experienced the “infilling” or “empowerment” (some use the word “baptism”) of the Holy Spirit before being ordained and/or seated in their offices. This policy touches three areas: *theological, constitutional, and pastoral.*

Theological

We believe the pattern for ministry in the New Testament was charismatic:

1. The Old Testament time and again pictures supernatural gifting of the saints as the Spirit of God came upon them in power (Numbers 11:17-29; 24:2-3; 1 Samuel 10:10-13; 1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 2:9-15).
2. While the Old Testament pictured supernatural empowerment by the Holy Spirit, it also looked forward to a day when the Holy Spirit would be available to all the saints, not just a select few (Numbers 11:29; Joel 2:28-29).
3. The Messiah, the one anointed by the Holy Spirit, would be the one to both model and release the Holy Spirit to all of God’s people (Isaiah 11:1-2, 42:1, 61:1-3; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 4:16-21; Matthew 12:15-18; John 16:7; John 20:21-23).
4. Just as Jesus moved in the power of the Spirit, so did the New Testament Church (Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-21; 4:16; 6:8; 8:6; 19:11; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; 1 Thess 1:4-5).
5. The Apostles took care to make sure the Church was charismatic, leading Christians who had not experienced the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit into the same (Acts 8:4-17; Acts 19:1-7) and teaching the gifts of the Spirit and their operation to the Church (1 Corinthians 12, 14).
6. This empowerment by the Holy Spirit was an intentional and specific moment before God (Mark 1:9-11; Acts 8:17) and was accompanied by an expression of “sign gift(s)” either in the moment (Acts 2:4; 10:44-46; 19:6) or sometime thereafter (for example, Paul was “filled with the Spirit” in Acts 9:17 and later we find him moving in these “sign gifts” in Acts 19:11; 1 Thess 1:4-5; 1 Corinthians 14:18).

We believe the leaders of the New Testament Church were charismatic:

- Jesus (Isaiah 6:1-3; Luke 4:16-21; Matthew 12:15-18; Matthew 12:28)
- The Apostles (Acts 2:1-3; Acts 9:17; 1 Corinthians 14:18)
- Deacons (Acts 6:3)
- Pastor/Teacher (1 Timothy 1:6)
- Prophets (Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11; 1 Corinthians 14:29)
- Evangelists (Acts 21:8 in association with Acts 6:3-4)

We acknowledge that no specific statement is made with regard to the office of elder and charismatic ministry. However, we believe that the entire pattern of charismatic ministry in the New Testament is so obvious and overwhelming that this is simply assumed. As we understand the entire weight and scope of Scripture on this subject, we believe the New Testament could no more have imagined elders who were not charismatic than they could have imagined a Savior or Apostles who were not charismatic. If both Jesus and the Apostles went out of their way to make sure that the average disciple experienced the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 8:14-16), then how much more so those who would lead a charismatic Church?

We understand that as we take this position we are taking it *only* for that which we have authority—KPC. We do not mean to speak to any other church or any other Session in our denomination. The Constitution of the EPC makes it clear that local churches under the direction of their Session are free to conclude this matter of the Gifts and Work of the Holy Spirit according to their own conscience and conviction. Other Sessions in the EPC may conclude differently than we have on this matter. It is their freedom to do so—just as it is ours to conclude as we have.

Constitutional

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church and Kempsville Presbyterian Church are constitutionally committed to a republican, representative form of church government.

With regard to the election and ordination of officers, our Constitution teaches two principles that must be held in simultaneous tension:

1. The inalienable right of the church and its members to elect its own officers . . .

Certain rights and privileges are irrevocably reserved to a particular church and its members . . . the particular church has the right to elect its own officers. (EPC Constitution, Book of Government, Chapter 7, paragraphs 1-2)

2. The inalienable right of the Session to ordain and/or approve the election of any particular officer . . .

It is God through the Holy Spirit who calls persons to office in the Church. This call is confirmed in three ways: first, the inward call to the individual where that person bears testimony that God has called him or her; second, a confirming call of a particular church, court, or other appropriate agency to fill that office; third, the approval of that call by an appropriate court of the Church.

Because the call to fill an office must be confirmed by an appropriate calling agency, the right of a calling may never be taken away or conditioned for non-scriptural reasons. This right is inalienable and may not be changed.

However, because a call to office must be confirmed by an appropriate court of the Church, the particular court also has the inalienable right not to confirm a particular individual for reasons the court may determine to be proper and in keeping with Scripture. (EPC Constitution, Book of Government, Chapter 11, paragraphs 1-3)

This is republican, or representative, democracy in action. Unlike a pure democracy which honors only the voice of the congregation (congregational church government such as the Baptists), ours is a form of government that seeks to blend the will of the congregation, the inward call of the Holy Spirit in an individual's life, and the oversight of the appropriate ruling court of the Church.

This same principle can be seen in Presbytery governance. While a local congregation has the right and responsibility to vote and call a pastor they believe God is leading to their flock, the Presbytery has the responsibility and right to either confirm or disconfirm that call. A congregation may vote to call a pastor, but he is placed in office only when the Presbytery concurs. Thus, when a pastor assumes leadership in a local church, he has in effect been placed there by that local congregation *and* by the overseeing Presbytery. Such a method of seeking God's Will provides maximum wisdom and input from a variety of sources. Ours is a form of church government that seeks to bring together congregational voice (as in the Baptist church) with appropriate ecclesiastical oversight (as in a church governed by an episcopal form of government—or a bishop).

The Session of KPC then has a dual responsibility. We must seek to foster free and open elections so that the congregation can express its will. At the same time, the Session cannot avoid its Constitutional responsibility to examine, ordain, and seat only those officers it believes are qualified and called of God. The reality then is that neither the congregation nor the Session can act apart from one another. The Session cannot ordain or seat elders that the congregation has not elected, and yet the congregation cannot act apart from the Session. We are bound together, and thus a double safeguard is provided.

Given the Session's theological stance on charismatic ministry (and the freedom of our denomination to hold such a position), we cannot in good conscience ordain or seat officers who have not personally experienced the infilling or empowerment (some use the term "baptism") of the Holy Spirit. As described above, we believe it to be beyond debate that the Scriptures teach the New Testament Church operated in a charismatic frame of reference and, therefore, charismatic ministry was the norm both for the Church and those who led the Church.

In the fall of 2002, we took this question to the Stated Clerk of our Presbytery and asked for a ruling on our practice of ordaining and seating only those officers who the Session judged to have a clear testimony of this empowering work of the Holy Spirit. In citing the same Book of Government references listed above, the Clerk issued a ruling that the KPC Session was in fact acting in a manner that was both constitutionally faithful as well as ecclesiastically wise.

Our experience has been that any confusion on these issues generally stems from a misunderstanding of our form of government. Many at KPC come from a congregational background and, thus, are used to the congregation voting in direct manner upon all subjects at hand. Yet, given that we are a republican democracy (as our forefathers who constructed this nation), the Session also has a “vote” in the matter. In like manner, those who come from an episcopal form of government must transition to a governance in which there are congregational elections and votes on various issues. What may have been decided only in a bishop’s office is determined in what we believe to be a more open and inclusive manner in our setting.

Those of us who are Presbyterian love our system and find in it a great balance between competing truths. We believe in democracy as a Scriptural principle, and so we seek to find expression for the congregation’s voice. Yet, we also acknowledge Scripture’s principle of ecclesiastical authority. The clear pattern in both the Old and New Testaments was that of those already in authority placing the mantle of leadership on those who sought to join the ranks of those who would govern the people of God. It was the elders who tested and approved of both Moses’ (Exodus 4:29-31) and David’s call to leadership (2 Samuel 5:3) before these leaders assumed their public responsibilities. When controversy arose with regard to his ministry, Paul went before the Apostles and elders to defend his calling, doctrine, and practice of ministry (Acts 15:1-29). Timothy grew up under Paul’s spiritual guidance, and it was at Paul’s hand that he was ordained and released into pastoral ministry (2 Timothy 1:6).

The consistent pattern of Scripture is that of ecclesiastical oversight, examination, ordination, and confirmation of those who would enter ministry. David was the people’s favorite, but it was the elder who seated him as king. In this particular issue (Church officers and the infilling of the Holy Spirit), we as the church Session find ourselves bound by both Scripture and our own Constitution to exercise our responsibility of ordaining and/or approving only church officers with a clear testimony of this particular work of the Spirit.

Pastoral

Experience tells us that the application of these beliefs must be loving, as well as consistent, in nature. First of all, we recognize that from time to time individuals will be nominated who have yet to experience this wonderful gift of God’s empowerment. Our approach will continue to be one of love and faith . . . we will make ourselves available as a Session to pray with any such individuals that the Spirit of God would come upon them in power. We’ve seen this very thing happen before our eyes!

We also recognize that there is a certain subjectivity involved in listening to a prospective officer’s Christian experience. While we look for a clear testimony of having received the Spirit’s power and accompanying evidence of one or more of the “sign gifts” of 1 Corinthians 12:7-10¹, we also know that people experience the same Holy Spirit in different ways. We

¹ Some believe that the gift of tongues is *the* sign for receiving the filling of the Holy Spirit. Certainly this is *a* sign as evidenced in Acts 2:4; 10:44-47; 19:6. Paul also was filled with the Holy Spirit Acts 19:17, and we know he had the gift of tongues by virtue of 1 Corinthians 14:18. Yet, Acts 8:17 says nothing about tongues (or any other gift) and yet the Samaritans had the Spirit “come upon” them in charismatic power. Suffice it to say that there is some gray area in this matter of particular gifts confirming the experience of the Spirit coming upon an individual in power.

also are aware that some are concerned about the “subjective” nature of listening to someone’s testimony of experiencing and moving in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. We’re sympathetic to the thought that fully grasping the work of God in another person’s life is not always an easy thing to do.

In some ways we have here the same dilemma as when we listen to someone’s testimony about salvation in Jesus Christ (another charge the Book of Order gives the Session—every prospective officer must be examined with regard to their testimony of saving faith). This also is subjective for we must listen to a person’s heart as well as their words. We must make a judgment call in both instances. Please pray for the Session that we would have the ears to discern the work of God in the lives of all prospective nominees. Our goal is to be faithful to what the Lord is doing in a person’s life, as well as to honor our responsibilities and theological commitments.

Finally, we believe that our position is pastoral in the sense that ordaining and seating only charismatic officers is consistent with the unique grace of God given to KPC. We are fundamentally a charismatic church and so must be led by those who share this same work of the Holy Spirit. In like manner, the Presbytery was careful in the screening of those pastors recently sent to our congregation. Prospective pastors were carefully interviewed on the subject of the Holy Spirit as to their beliefs as well as experience. The Presbytery itself was convinced that a church such as KPC uniquely needed experienced charismatic leadership. Thus the Session finds itself in accord with the same principles applied to those pastors whose calls the Presbytery has approved.

Our heart is not to be in any way exclusivist. Rather, we seek only to steward the gift of charismatic ministry the Lord has given to KPC. Any elder or pastor currently seated on Session would be more than happy to answer your individual questions on this subject as well as pray with you. Perhaps you’d like to learn more about the Holy Spirit for your own life. We’re always available to talk with you.

The position of the KPC Session is that both Old and New Testaments record this work of the Spirit as a definite event in an individual’s life. As one reviews the whole of the Scriptures in this matter, the result in the vast majority of instances is supernatural activity on the part of the recipient. Whether it was the elders prophesying (Number 11:17-29), the Apostles speaking in tongues (Acts 2:1-4), or Jesus casting out demons (Matthew 12:28), there was little doubt as to the supernatural power of God’s Spirit working through their lives in such a way so as to confirm the truth of God’s Word. Time and again the pattern was the event of the Spirit coming upon an individual in power and then a demonstration of the Spirit’s power through spiritual gifts.

In several New Testament passages, tongues and/or prophesy are mentioned in association with initially receiving the infilling of the Holy Spirit. We find it significant that both of these are listed among the “sign gifts” of 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. Therefore, we look for expression of supernatural ministry as evidenced through any of the sign gifts of 1 Corinthians 12. We believe this position is “tight” enough so as to assure genuinely charismatic officers, yet at the same does not commit ourselves to the “tongues only” position which we cannot Scripturally defend as an absolute standard.