

What Does It Mean That East Main Is a Presbyterian Church?

It means that we are people whose roots are in the Reformed Tradition, a branch of the Protestant Reformation that developed mainly in Switzerland in the 16th century. In terms of core beliefs, Presbyterians have long emphasized the sovereignty of God, Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and the authority of the Bible as the main source for learning the truth about who God is and how God calls people to live.

Presbyterian also refers to the way we organize ourselves to make decisions. Unlike hierarchical churches in which decisions are made mainly by leaders who are appointed for the congregation, or congregational churches in which each person has a vote, in Presbyterian churches the congregation elects leaders to a board called the Session which makes or delegates decisions about the church's life and ministry. At East Main, five elders are elected each year to serve for a term of three years. Ordained ministers must be elected by the entire congregation, while other staff members are approved by the Session.

In the U.S. today there are a number of Presbyterian denominations. East Main is part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the largest of these denominations with roughly 10,700 congregations and over 2 million members across the country. Especially in recent years, many of us at East Main have strongly disagreed with some policies and pronouncements of the denomination which we believe to not be in keeping with the teaching of the Bible. One way we express our disagreement is by choosing not to support the national church financially, except for specific missionaries whom we know to be faithful to the Lord as revealed in Scripture. While we are not averse to stating our disagreements in other ways, our posture generally is to pour energy positively into proclaiming the historic Gospel of Jesus Christ in our contemporary world. We also rejoice in the fellowship we have with other Presbyterian congregations in Western Pennsylvania, which tend to be more Christ-centered and biblically focused than in other parts of the country.