What is a National Evangelical Alliance?

***An Evangelical Alliance** is simply a representative group of Christian leaders who have agreed to work collaboratively together to see the kingdom of God advance within their nation or region. They associate and work together for the purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They may be leaders from local churches, denominations, Christian ministries, NGOs, and individual people who believe the mission of God is achieved*

"better together."

UNITY:

At the heart of a National Evangelical Alliance is the biblical imperative of unity. This was the central theme of the inaugural gathering of Evangelical leaders in 1846, when 1200 delegates gathered in London from different parts of the world. Their primary objective was: "Not to create Christian union, but to confess the unity which the Church of Christ possessed as His body." Jesus specifically prayed for those who would follow him, that they "may be one." Unity and collaboration amongst Christ-followers, Jesus said, would be a means by which the world would come to believe that the Father sent him into the world. The apostles picked up the same theme in their writings, encouraging us to make "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace," to "put on love which binds us together in unity," and to view each other as integral parts of the one body of Christ. Though today the Christian church meets in many ways and styles, reflecting different emphases and expressions of Christian faith, when God looks at his church, he sees just one. An Evangelical Alliance seeks ways to celebrate that unity, in the midst of diversity, and to find ways of working together that harness our unique contributions as fellow disciples of Jesus.

DIVERSITY:

National Evangelical Alliances come in all kinds of shapes and sizes. There is no “one-size-fits-all.” Some are large and employ many staff, others are small and run by volunteers. There are Alliances with a long history dating back more than a century, and others that are new and forming. The particular agenda an Alliance pursues in one country may not be the same in other countries. Rather than following a rigid formula, Evangelical Alliances pursue the direction they discern God is giving them. In some Alliances, their emphases face the church and how they can express their unity through prayer, encouragement, resourcing and evangelism. In other places, particular needs mean the Alliance is more focused on social justice issues like relief and development, human rights, religious persecution and prophetically speaking to power. Alliances gather around a range of issues as they discern the particular leading of the Spirit.

MODUS OPERANDI:

Within their diversity, National Evangelical Alliances typically operate around three broad areas:

A **"GATHERING"** function: Ministries, leaders, personnel come together (in different forms) to celebrate, collaborate, and to express unity across the body of Christ—exploring ways of working together to advance God's kingdom. For instance, city or nation-wide prayer events, evangelistic programs, seminars for pastors and ministry leaders, or any number of gatherings or events that demonstrate the mosaic of God's church. Those from one ministry (or denomination) are enriched through engaging with the breadth and depth of the body of Christ.

A **"RESOURCING"** function: Publishing, facilitating, brokering resources and training events that equip the body of Christ. Conferences (large or small), retreats, symposia, publications, discipleship materials, best-practice dialogue — literally anything that helps strengthen, encourage and advance Christian ministries within a nation.

A **"VOICE"** function: Addressing social and moral issues that are impacting society, speaking to power on matters of justice and human rights, advocating and standing with the powerless and disenfranchised. Alliances leverage the collective influence as an evangelical community in the marketplaces of our world, for the common good.

Another way of defining the modus operandi of a National Evangelical Alliance is to describe it as "Resource Centre" that equips the church, a "Table" that gathers creative and qualified minds around issues and best-practice dialogue, and a "Megaphone" that amplifies the voice of Christ on moral, social and justice issues within our world.

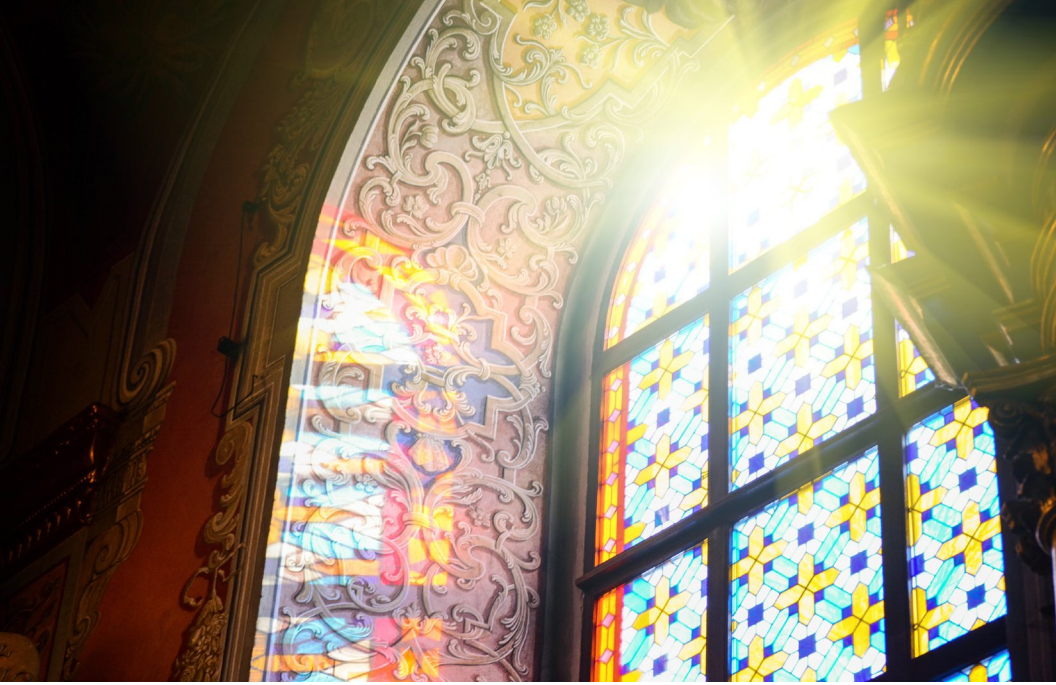
SERVANTHOOD:

National Evangelical Alliances are not authoritative bodies that are "over" the church or ministries within a nation. Nor do they have the objective of achieving structural ecumenism. Rather than being hierarchical, an Evangelical Alliance is more like a servant to the body of Christ. Churches and ministries do not surrender their sovereignty to an Evangelical Alliance. The Alliance is simply a mechanism for bringing them together, or harnessing collective strength, around significant issues and mission that no individual church/ministry can do on their own. The example of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples defines the attitude of an Evangelical Alliance. They are driven by the desire to serve their constituency and help them fulfil their call under God.

MEMBERSHIP:

Most National Evangelical Alliances have a formal membership system whereby churches, denominations, Christian ministries, institutions, NGOs, and individual people sign up to a simple evangelical doctrinal statement and pay an annual fee. An Evangelical Alliance may well minister to, and have a voice on behalf of, more than those who are formally their members, but the concept of belonging and identification is encouraged. From membership comes opportunity to appoint, and hold accountable, those appointed to lead an Alliance, and through financial contributions there is opportunity to pay for those who serve. The make-up of an Alliance's membership varies. For instance, a National Evangelical Alliance may determine membership is for:

- Denominations, local churches, and parachurch groups, or
- Denominations, local churches, parachurch groups and individuals, or
- Local churches and individuals, etc.



GOVERNANCE:

National Evangelical Alliances are typically overseen by a representative governance board or council or Executive Committee. They operate according to an agreed-to charter or constitution that defines how decisions are made and finances are accounted for.
The governing body in turn appoints its Chair and other officers such as Secretary and Treasurer, etc. An Alliance governance body typically defines a clear and concise (mission) statement that defines why they exist and their fundamental purpose (reason for being).
Selecting people for the oversight of a Christian organisation (e.g., a church, denomination or an Evangelical Alliance) is a crucial spiritual responsibility for which the New Testament gives clear advice.
The character of a leader is what accredits (or discredits) people for positions of leadership, rather than their status or wealth or ability. Likewise, care is taken to include representation from a cross-section of the evangelical constituency. Governance leaders will personally support the Alliance with their time, talents, and their treasure, and be people whom others recognize for their good reputation. Most Alliances appoint governance leaders for a set term (e.g., two years, renewable twice) so as to allow for rotation of leadership and the involvement of younger leaders with new ideas and perspectives.

LEADERSHIP:

In most National Evangelical Alliances an overall leader is usually appointed (using terminology like General Secretary, Director, President, CEO, etc.) who leads a team of other staff (paid or volunteer) to manage specific projects and emphases. Appointment of an Evangelical Alliance's leadership is usually for a fixed term (3-5 years) and able to be renewed upon review. Staff are appointed with a clear job description that defines responsibilities, authorities and remuneration. In many parts of the world, Evangelical Alliances appoint special interest groups (e.g., Commissions, Networks, Task Forces, Committees, etc.) that gather around specific topics and "bring to the table" key people to share ideas and plan best-practice strategies. In many Alliances these relate with international counterpart groups under the banner of World Evangelical Alliance, acting as local representatives. A survey of Evangelical Alliance special interest groupings include:

- Evangelism and church planting
- Administration and finance
- Missions
- Relief and development
- Public advocacy (justice)
- Religious liberty
- Church relations
- Resource development
- Theology and training
- Women's concerns
- Youth ministries
- Family and children
- Prayer and renewal
- Christian education
- Research
- Publications and media
- Pastoral care

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOVERNMENT:

Wherever possible, a National Evangelical Alliance registers with the government of their nation. This may take a variety of forms but there are several reasons why this is an important step to take:

- It demonstrates government recognition that the Alliance legally exists
- It usually allows for tax exemption status as a charitable entity
- It gives a sense of stability and continuance to the Alliance
- It separates the liabilities of the Alliance as an organization from that of its governance board
- It enables the Alliance to own (or lease) property or enter into formal contracts
- It enables the Alliance to open a bank account in its own name

In some instances, a National Evangelical Alliance that is duly registered affords them authority to accredit its member bodies for certain civic functions (e.g., performing marriage ceremonies) or other verification of credibility. The mechanism for government registration varies from country to country, but it is an important status to acquire when possible.

INTERNATIONAL:

While each National Evangelical Alliance is autonomous and self-governing, they typically have a formal link to the World Evangelical Alliance, and also a Regional Evangelical Alliance that covers their part of the world. Again, these international bodies do not exercise authority and control over what an Alliance does, but they do exist to serve and support the development of their member Alliances. They are a further expression of unity across the world-wide body of Christ. The WEA currently represents between 6-700 million evangelical believers around the world and is by far the fastest growing Christian communion. The WEA and respective Regional Alliances are likewise governed by their own board, managed by staff (employed and voluntary), and are charged with helping their member Alliances develop and prosper. In the same way an Evangelical Alliance is able to leverage off its representative size, there are many ways that the WEA is able to do the same thing, including evangelism, mission and discipleship resourcing, speaking out on social justice issues, accreditation of theological training, peace and reconciliation initiatives, and advocacy before governments and the United Nations.

SUMMARY:

A National Evangelical Alliance initiates action, set priorities and mobilize churches and ministry partners within their nation. The Alliance brings together diverse stakeholders in pursuit of a Gospel-focused common vision that is relevant to their context. Founded around Evangelical theology, and led by called and competent people, National Alliances are positioned to provide unity and collaborative action on matters of Gospel concern. Intentional collaboration with churches, ministries, commissions, affiliated networks, and other partners accelerates the health and growth of the whole community.

WEA Alliance Engagement Department
worldea.org/AED