

NEW HORIZONS

— *in the* ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH —

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During COVID-19 //
by B.A. Snider

AUGUST 2020

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New Horizons

in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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At the socially distanced reopening of the OPC administrative office on June 8 (left to right): Charlene Tipton, Abby Harting, Mark Bube, Annelisa Studley, Robert Jones, Diane Olinger, Danny Olinger, John Shaw, Douglas Clawson, Shenise Medina, Al Tricarico, David Nakhla, and Tin Ling Lee.



SETTING THE MENU: SUNDAY SCHOOL OR WORSHIP FIRST?



ROGER W. SCHMURR // COVID-19 has caused significant changes to church ministries. *Zoom* no longer refers only to the Corvette passing you on the interstate but also to how parishioners have been participating in worship, Bible studies, and fellowship. Even congregations now meeting corporately find themselves

distancing from other worshipers, lamenting the closure of the church nursery, and searching for the offering plate at the back of the auditorium.

Some churches may use this time to promote another change that Orthodox Presbyterian congregations started to employ a few decades ago: starting the Lord's day with the worship service and following that with Sunday school.

Sequence, of course, is important in life. If you are eating in a nice restaurant, hors d'oeuvres come first. And at home, kids must eat their dinner before indulging in dessert. Neither hors d'oeuvres nor dessert probably appear on breakfast menus for OP members preparing for church, but those members *are* interested in what their first experience at church will be: Sunday school or worship?

Traditionally, of course, Sunday school has preceded the worship service. But the OP church directory shows that 35 percent of congregations now schedule worship first. That percentage has held rather constant over the last twenty years. When the worship wars grew hot

in the 1980s and '90s in the evangelical world and a denominational study committee worked to produce a revised Directory for the Public Worship of God, OP churches began changing their schedules. In 1980, 18 percent set worship first, in 1990 this rose to 28 percent, and by 2000 it reached 35 percent. Why is this? And are these churches serving the main meal first?

To answer such questions, the OPC's Committee on Christian Education surveyed the denomination's pastors by email. Interest was high. Of the 275 churches that schedule a Sunday school adjacent to worship, 204 responded to the survey (42 churches hold Sunday school later in the day, between two morning worship services, or not at all).

The responses indicate significant differences among OP churches concerning the relationship between Sunday school classes and worship services. And the sequence of these events can impact attendance at both.

Attendance

Historically, many America church-

es developed out of the Sunday schools established by the American Sunday School Union. As in England, these schools aimed to educate poor children in both secular and religious studies—and usually outside the walls of the church. However, by the mid-1800s the evangelical church saw the benefit of taking Sunday school under its wing and using it effectively as a teaching tool. Come early to church, and you'll receive good biblical instruction; arrive later, and you can join in worship. Hors d'oeuvres precede the main meal.

In an attempt to increase attendance at Sunday school, some OP churches have switched the traditional schedule. By placing worship first, these churches hoped that more people (especially adults) would remain afterward for Sunday school classes. Of the 97 churches holding worship first, 28 mentioned attendance results. Of these, 22 reported increases in Sunday school attendance, 5 described no increase, and 1 saw a decrease.

Adam York reports that a few years ago, his congregation switched to a

worship-first schedule. “The upshot was that our Sunday school attendance and participation greatly increased.” He added that “no one stopped coming to our church because we changed the order. . . . I highly encourage other churches to consider it.” Bruce Hollister says that his worship-first schedule “encourages a much higher percentage of our folks to attend Sunday school—consistently 70–75 percent.” Jeffrey Scott says that when his church shifted to Sunday school post worship three years ago, “We saw a large increase in attendance—up to 50 percent of the congregation attend now.” Worship begins at 10:30 a.m., and when



Sunday school at Reformation Fellowship in Roseville, CA

Sunday school classes follow, they are preceded by a light lunch. Four pastors remarked that they tried a worship-first schedule but discarded it. Bradley Peppo explained that his congregation turned back to Sunday school first “to accommodate families that couldn’t make the early time [for worship].” Specifically, some pastors hesitate to put worship first out of concern that members who live at a distance or are older wouldn’t be able to make it to worship.

Disconcerting was the admission by several pastors that many adults wouldn’t attend Sunday school no matter what time it was slated. Schedule Sunday school first, and adults arrive later for worship; schedule worship first, and adults leave afterward. (One pastor lamented that some parents take their children to Sunday school classes and then return to their cars to snooze.)

John Canales came up with a resourceful solution for engaging more adults in Christian education. With Sunday school first, he schedules fellowship time after worship. During that fellowship time he offers a fifteen-minute, multi-generational session called “Windows on Westminster” during which he teaches portions of the Westminster Confession of Faith and catechisms. About half the congregation takes advantage of this value-added approach, including Sunday school teachers who otherwise couldn’t attend an adult class.

Some churches question whether such schedule changes are proper. For instance, Ronald Pearce responded that “our session has felt it is manipulative to put the worship service first with the only goal being to increase Sunday school attendance.”

Theology

Bolstering Sunday school attendance, however, isn’t the most significant consideration for churches making schedule decisions. Theology is. Pastors planning worship first

believe that worship should start the Lord’s Day since it’s the central calling of God’s people. Those favoring Sunday school first believe that it should be the prelude to worship and preaching and that the latter should be resonating in people’s minds and hearts as they head home.

Is there a correct sequence to feeding God’s people spiritually on Sunday?

Churches that schedule worship first do so to prioritize worship. Lane Tipton describes this as “the church at her very best,” making clear “that we are commanded to worship.” He emphasizes this by using the first fifteen minutes of Sunday school, which follows worship, for discussion of the sermon. Hank Belfield states this boldly: “Having worship first emphasizes the primacy of public worship.” Similarly, Timothy Gregson writes, “The advantage of

having worship first is that people come with a mindset for worship.” Larry Wilson says that “we do well to renew covenant with God and his people and then learn [the] implications of . . . that renewed fellowship.”

A number of churches scheduling Sunday school first responded that they have a combination of theological and practical reasons for this approach. They, too, want to prioritize worship, and that leads them to view Sunday school in these ways:

- “Most folks are bleary-eyed when Sunday school begins. If we reversed our schedule, they would be bleary-eyed (and maybe disengaged?) for the worship service.”
- “I think Sunday school first can be helpful to set our minds on things above even prior to entering into worship.”
- “Sunday school is a good warm-up to worship. We learn about the Lord as fuel for worshipping him the next hour.”
- Sunday school first “may help people be on time for worship.”
- With worship second, “you are left with the Word preached primarily on your mind, and the last thing you hear is what you are more likely to discuss that afternoon.”
- “If someone is going to miss anything (oversleeping, late work shifts), I want it to be Sunday school, not worship service.”
- “I would rather have worship be the pinnacle of the Lord’s Day, the climax toward which every other church event moves. I would rather Sunday school ‘gets them there’ for worship, both physically and doxologically. . . . That is, Christian education should lead to and find its reason for being in worship.”

Fellowship and Visitors

The Sunday school-first arrangement usually doesn’t provide for much informal fellowship before worship. By contrast, David Landow says that having worship first “facilitates a robust fellowship time between the [worship]

service and Sunday school.” Jonathan Peters concurs: “Refreshment and fellowship time has experienced a big boost. We have to urge people to leave [for Sunday school].”

Most churches count on fellowship meals to promote close associations. However, Sunday school second, notes Brett McNeill, “would make fellowship and meals afterward harder” because that would require a lengthy stay at church—cutting into nap time for young children. Jay Bennett says that this latter challenge is easily handled: “We pause once per month to have a fellowship meal instead of Sunday school—without adding anything extra to the schedule.” A time of congregational prayer for the church’s ministry precedes these meals. This also facilitates attendance at such meals by persons who normally don’t attend Sunday school. And meals together are important, says Benjamin Snodgrass, for “much good happens at lunches for evangelism and shepherding.”

Some pastors expressed concern that a worship-first schedule would inhibit visitors from attending because the culture expects late-morning worship

services. Dave Sarafolean, who schedules worship first, states the concern boldly: “I am certain that our worship time prevents some people from visiting.” Also, notes Stephen Oharek, “We want worshipers, including visitors, to be able to fellowship after worship without being expected to also attend Sunday school [later].” But pastors using a worship-first approach didn’t cite that as a significant drawback to having visitors attend. The fact that eight of the ten largest OP congregations schedule worship first may suggest that visitors aren’t necessarily put off by that schedule.

Gregory Thurston schedules worship first but acknowledges that worship second would “enable lunch invitations to visitors to be fulfilled immediately.”

Ministry Strategies

Others respond that in addition to theological concerns, placing Sunday school classes second can help with some ministry concerns. It provides an opportunity for sermons to be discussed, a buffer time for longer worship services, and initiation into small group ministries. Matthew Judd, who schedules Sunday school first, acknowledges that “Sunday school first makes the transition to worship more difficult.”

Young children usually need a mid-morning snack just as adults like a coffee break. Worship followed by a fellowship time handles both concerns, some pastors report. Children are more alert first thing in the morning but begin to get fidgety in late morning. Having children participate in formal worship first and informal classes later helps children benefit

from both. Underlining this strategy appears to be the statement in the Directory for the Public Worship of God that “children of believers have . . . a right . . . to the outward privileges of the covenant people, the church.”

James La Belle isn’t buying that approach to morning wakefulness. He writes, “We’re all a little dull first thing in the morning, and Sunday school is an informal time to get the blood flowing.” He, too, believes that Sunday school “serves as a means to warm the heart and prepare the mind for worship.”

Several pastors appreciate the worship-first sequence because it allows them to extend worship services for the Lord’s Supper. Anthony Monaghan keeps the morning events from stretching much into the afternoon by limiting Sunday school to forty-five minutes for children and thirty minutes for adults (after a refreshment time). However, James Hoekstra says that having worship second “makes it easier to have a more lengthy service on communion Sundays.” In both cases, the full main meal is served.

Pastors considering a worship-first schedule wonder if people will worship earlier. *Time* magazine (9-16-19) noted that “with bedtimes getting later [and] the influence of electronic devices in the evenings . . . kids and parents don’t wake up early enough to get ready for the day.” Of course, most church members rise early during the week to attend school or to head to work. Is it possible that churches expect too little from their members when it comes to worshipping our Savior?

One pastor cautiously acknowledged that part of the problem is that people fill Saturday evening so full that it’s hard to roll out of bed Sunday morning. But as one non-OP wag put it, “On Sunday morning Jesus rose from the dead; on Sunday morning you can certainly rise from your bed.”

A full spiritual meal awaits you—even if you are masked and six feet from fellow worshipers. □

The author is an OP minister.

Food for Thought

- All pastors expressed desire to feed their flocks well. Most proponents of both schedules have given serious thought to what they are doing. The majority of pastors report that tradition has a heavy influence; nevertheless, worship is central in their planning.
- Most churches that have switched to a worship-first schedule have experienced moderate to considerable increase in Sunday school attendance.
- Churches want young children in worship services, although the survey didn’t ask if any churches offer a children’s church.
- The role of Sunday school varies widely, especially its adult classes. A study of Sunday school’s role might help congregations. And a way for churches to access—and give input to—a source of best practices for adult classes would probably be welcomed.

SUNDAY SCHOOL ROUNDUP



PATRICIA E. CLAWSON // Sunday schools have changed in the eighty-four years since the OPC began, yet their goal has remained the same: to foster belief by teaching Reformed theology. The OPC's Second General Assembly in 1936 confirmed the importance of Sunday school by directing congregations to use whatever

evangelical and Reformed materials were available. Not satisfied with existing curriculums, the fledgling OPC soon mimeographed its own materials that reflected its theology. By 1975 the OPC and the new Presbyterian Church in America jointly formed Great Commission Publications for the purpose of producing Sunday school materials that were solidly Reformed and biblically based.

Today OPC sessions have several Reformed and biblically-based curricula to choose from as they develop Sunday schools best suited to the needs of their flocks. Nearly forty percent of OPC members attend Sunday school, according to OPC statistician Luke Brown's 2019 report. Six OPC churches with higher-than-average Sunday school attendance share how they educate their flocks, even in the midst of a pandemic.

Redemption OPC

Organized nine years ago, Redemption OPC in Gainesville, Florida, sees about half of their 110 morning

worshippers attend Sunday school. They offer a non-traditional, two-pronged approach to Christian education, which might include sanitizing and social distancing when it reconvenes this fall. The first, Evening Instruction, is their best-attended program. Even at the height of the COVID-19 restrictions, it continued through Zoom. It is held on the first three Sunday evenings of the month, with the last Sunday night reserved for a worship service. As a united assembly, they meet for prayer, a psalm or hymn, a Sunday school lesson, and Scripture and catechism memory time, which involves learning one verse of a longer passage each week. The meeting concludes with Missions Moment, which updates the church on news from the OPC's missionaries, a church in their presbytery, or a chaplain.

The second component involves Bible studies on various weekdays for various ages. Toddlers and elementary-age kids are taught using GCP materials on Sunday mornings, while teens are taught with GCP curriculum weekly in various homes. Throughout the month,

the men's and women's studies also meet in different homes.

"Our format is non-traditional with traditional elements," said Pastor Joel Fick. "We have to work within the constraints of our rental agreement."

As the congregation grows, new classes have been added, including one for toddlers, said Fick. But "our joint Evening Instruction time has been the backbone of our program and has been a wonderful way to sanctify the whole day."

Providence Presbyterian

On a typical Sunday, around half of the 117 people worshipping at Providence Presbyterian Church in Pflugerville, Texas, also attend Sunday school. Due to COVID-19, Sunday school was suspended until fall 2020. Usually, their Sunday school program uses GCP materials for five age-appropriate classes for preschoolers through teenagers, although the eighth-tenth graders also have Bible studies. Pastor Glen Clary leads the adult class in studies.

"The joint efforts of the OPC and

PCA in producing a Reformed Sunday school curriculum guard against doctrinal error,” said Vince Lam, a ruling elder and Sunday school coordinator. “[Sunday school] provides an additional medium to edify the church more thoroughly.”

Teachers are seasoned members of the church well versed in the Reformed faith. New teachers watch experienced teachers lead classes before taking their turn. The impact of these volunteers has been lasting. “Our witness as caring, godly adults has eternal consequences,” said Greg Eddings, an elder and Sunday school teacher. “I have very fond memories of Sunday school teachers from my childhood. They made an impression because they were kind and genuinely interested in me and my well-being. They took the time to get to know me and made it clear I had value in their eyes.”

Covenant Presbyterian

Covenant Presbyterian in Vandalia, Ohio, is so serious about Sunday school that they commissioned a committee to evaluate how to reform their curriculum. The survey showed the importance of applying the Sunday school lessons to their lives, making certain the material is age appropriate, incorporating Scripture memory and catechism for all ages, providing periodic breaks for teachers, improving parental communi-

cation, adding more group singing, and finding ways to practically serve, such as making cards for the elderly.

Pastors Matthew Patton and Jeremiah Montgomery cast a vision for how important Sunday school is through announcements, emails, and a rally day every September—a practice they hope



Greg Eddings teaching a high school class

to resume this fall. Their efforts typically draw about 79 percent of their 120 worshipers to Sunday school.

During the pandemic, pre-recorded videos of instruction with handouts were provided for the congregation, but the pandemic taught them a key lesson: “Being in person is so much more engaging for both teachers and students,” said Patton. “We feel that our video approach is a suitable stop-gap measure but a considerable impoverishment of our previous teaching ministry, and we are greatly looking forward to being back together again.”

The children learn through GCP curriculums, although an elder writes his own Old Testament material for the middle schoolers. Teens join the adults in classes, which focus on such topics as the doctrine of man, OT prophets, a biblical worldview of marriage and sexuality, church history, and evangelism. “[Teens participating with adults] is a purposeful decision in

that we want them to start dealing with adult issues,” said Patton. “I am regularly telling them that this is *their* Sunday school class too, and that they should feel free to participate (which they do).”

Sometimes Patton asks students for anonymous input on the material. “I am always wanting to answer the question: ‘So what? Why is this important and why should I want to know this?’”

New Hope OPC

Sunday school is so important to New Hope OPC in Frederick, Maryland, that they knocked down a wall between rooms and moved their offices to make space for growing classes. About 54 percent of the 241 members attend Sunday school.

To find space for their regular 130 attendees, they added an elementary and an adult class, which meant finding nine rooms, fifteen teachers, and two nursery volunteers. The schedule typically runs for two thirteen-week semesters, and a mini January–February term, with summers off.

The elementary-aged children and middle schoolers are taught the Bible using GCP materials. The high school class focuses on systematic theology, worldviews, apologetics, and preparation for college and the world. They met via Zoom for five weeks while the church building was closed. “We desire to have all the elementary-aged children receive teaching on all of the Bible before they reach high school,” said Ginny Socash, New Hope’s Sunday school coordinator. “The benefits to the class divisions are that we are able to teach to the level of learning for the children and have fewer students in each class.”

The adults choose from three classes, such as a Ligonier video series, a book study on *Renovation of the Heart*, and lessons on the joy of suffering with Christ. Topical classes, such as sexual ethics, baptism, parenting, and the Westminster Confession, have drawn the most interest, said Socash. “It

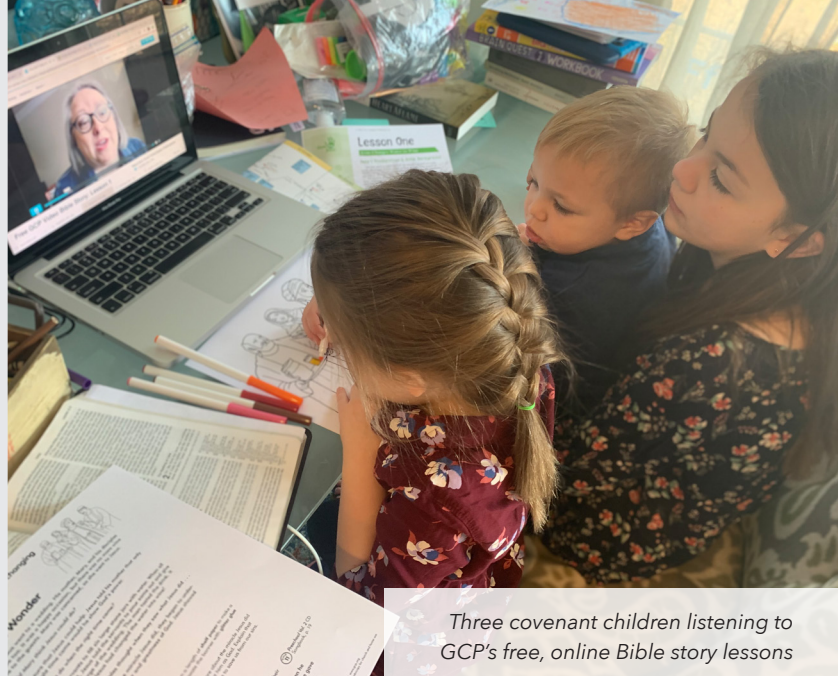
[Continued on page 21]



Covenant Presbyterian in Vandalia, Ohio

GCP SUPPORTS CHURCHES DURING COVID-19

// B. A. SNIDER



Three covenant children listening to GCP's free, online Bible story lessons

Almost overnight in mid-March, many of our churches had to make the tough decision not to meet in person. Immediately my heart went out to all the children who love to come to church on Sunday morning, where they have a special Sunday school teacher who shares God's Word in a way that they can understand. Having been a children's director for more than twenty years, I also thought of all those in charge of children's ministry who love their covenant children and want to continue ministry in their lives. After some quick consultation with our staff at Great Commission Publications (GCP), we set out on a path to provide free video Bible story lessons that could be used at home. We chose one of our *Show Me Jesus* spring quarters, "Jesus Is God," and we have been providing free weekly lessons since March 22.

The free lesson includes:

- A six-to-nine-minute video of the Bible story lesson with visuals families can play anytime.
- A parent page explaining the lesson focus and Scripture memory, giving parents good Bible background to go further with their kids.
- A coloring sheet and activities page that families can do together.

Parents and their children can watch the Bible story together, read the Scriptures, and use the materials to launch into great family discussions that are so relevant to where we are right now. The thirteen lessons, designed for preschool and young elementary kids, focus on events from the New Testament that tell us who Jesus is and show us that:

- Jesus teaches us to trust him to take care of us all the time.
- Jesus, our loving Savior, provides for all our needs.
- Only God can make sick people well.
- Jesus can forgive sin and heal sickness because he is God himself.

- Jesus has power over death.
- Just as he promised, Jesus gives his people life that lasts forever.

These wonderful truths of God's Word encourage not only our children but adults as well, reminding us that Jesus is God even in the midst of a pandemic.

As we spread the word about the availability of these lessons, we had 341 churches immediately sign up. Now as I write this article, we have over 600 churches using the lessons, and each week the email is being opened in about 3,200 homes. GCP has received many emails, Facebook posts, and phone calls from families about how much they are enjoying GCP's help in teaching their children. This brings great joy to my heart as I see God's Word being lived out from Psalm 78:4-6:

We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children.

"God Keeps His Promises": More Free Lessons

As our churches transition back to in-person worship and ministry, GCP felt the need to continue crafting free lessons into the summer. We are offering thirteen more lessons from the *Show Me Jesus* curriculum called "God Keeps His Promises."

In these scary and changing times, isn't it good to remind ourselves and to teach our children that God always keeps his promises? In these thirteen lessons, families will follow God's amazing unfolding promises to Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and David, all the way to their fulfillment in Jesus the Savior. Even families who know the Bible well will be encouraged by God's love and faithfulness shown in these lessons.

With both these Bible video series, GCP will have twenty-six lessons and downloadable materials that can be used for virtual teaching at home but also can support the teaching done together as we gather on Sundays. Learn more and sign up for the free lessons on our website, www.gcp.org.

Pilgrim's Progress: A Gospel Adventure and Limited-Time Special Offer

Another great way to teach multiple ages together is to use our *Pilgrim's Progress* curriculum. *Pilgrim's Progress* is the classic allegory written by John Bunyan in 1678. GCP rewrote a true-to-the-original version for six-to-twelve-year-olds. An allegory is a story with two meanings. First, this is an exciting adventure story of a man and his friends on a dangerous journey to a wonderful place. But it's also a story that teaches important truths about Jesus and every Christian's journey through life.

The adventure begins with a man named Christian who reads a book and discovers that the City of Destruction, where he lives, is going to be destroyed. He also learns that he has a huge burden on his back. What must he do? A man named Evangelist tells him to head toward the Shining Light. We follow Christian as he comes to the Place of Deliverance, where the burden falls off his back and he cries tears of joy as he says, "Jesus has given me rest from my sadness and life through his death."

That sounds like the end to the story, but our children will find out that this is only the beginning. Christian still has a long journey to the Celestial City. One of my favorite sections is when he meets a friend named Hopeful, who recounts how he himself met Jesus on his journey: "I told Jesus, 'I am a very great sinner.' And Jesus replied, 'My grace is enough for you.' Then I asked, 'Can I truly be accepted by you?' Jesus said, 'Whoever comes to me I will never drive away.'"

I remember this section well because I was driving and listening to the dramatic reading, which is a word-for-word audiobook of the story with different character voices and sound effects. I had to pull over because streams of tears were coming down my face as I heard Hopeful's testimony and thought about Jesus's great grace for such a sinner as me.

The curriculum teaches these truths in thirteen lessons, following the thirteen-chapter storybook. A student pack for each child includes the storybook (112 pages) and activity papers to reinforce the lesson truths. What's the special offer? With each student pack, we will include a free download of the dramatic reading (1 hour, 43 minutes) and seven songs! This offer is only good by phone at 800-695-3387 until August 31, 2020. Learn more and download a sample lesson at www.gcp.org.

GCP is here for you in the ministry of discipling our covenant children and equipping families and churches with Christ-centered resources.

The author is marketing coordinator for GCP.

Favorite Psalms and Hymns **Trinity Psalter Hymnal no. 148A** **"Oh Praise the LORD, for It Is Good"**

Larry E. Wilson

Long ago at Geneva College, my wife and I were introduced, not only to each other, but also to the *Book of Psalms for Singing* (RPCNA, 1973). Among other metrical psalms, we learned and have continued to love Psalm 148. *The Book of Psalms for Worship* (RPCNA, 2009) retained that setting—with a slight revision to the text. We're delighted that the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* included it, with that revision, as no. 148A.

This is a good setting that highlights both the psalm's point and outline. When we sing Psalm 148, the point is to call the whole creation to worship and serve the LORD. The outline is like an upside-down pyramid—the psalm starts broad, then it keeps narrowing down to a point.

Stanzas 1–2 begin, "From heaven O praise the LORD!" Then we summon the angels to praise the LORD. Then the sun, moon, and stars. Then the atmosphere.

Stanzas 3–5 narrow it down even further: "From earth O praise the LORD!" Then we summon the sea and skies to praise the LORD. Then the land, vegetation, and creatures.

Finally, we call the human race to praise the LORD—first all peoples; then civil rulers; then all old and young, male and female individuals. Why? Because the LORD is supreme, and he redeems a people for himself: "The Lord alone be praised / above the earth and sky! / He for his saints has raised / a king to rule on high." And here's where that revision I mentioned is such a good improvement. It makes clear the focal point of Psalm 148—the LORD has raised up the messianic King for his redeemed people.

The tune, "St. Catherines," fits the text. And it's accessible. For congregations that sing harmony, the parts are pleasing. If none sing parts, they're not necessary; the melody alone is nice. If some are learning to sing parts, these are fairly easy, and yet interesting. It's fun to sing. Simple, yet profound.

☆ **Congratulations**

The **Shorter Catechism** has been recited by:

• **Isaiah Stahl, Redeemer OPC, Atlanta, GA**

The **Children's Catechism** has been recited by:

• **Jesse Stahl, Redeemer OPC, Atlanta, GA**

THE CHURCH AFTER GEORGE FLOYD



ERIC B. WATKINS // “Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them” (Eccles. 4:1).

On May 25, our nation watched in horror as a police officer held his knee down on a man’s neck until the man, George Floyd, tragically died. One person with power and authority, bearing the image of God, took the life of another person bearing the image of God.

Several things were additionally troubling about this event. First, a bewildered crowd surrounded the event with camera phones, making the world an eyewitness. Second, his death was immediately perceived to be the emblem of systemic police brutality and injustice. But what drew the public ire more than anything else was the fact that the police officer was *white* and the man on the ground was *black*. In the eyes of many, George Floyd died simply because he was black.

Since that day, evil has multiplied evil because sin multiplies sin. Violent protests, murder, and destruction of property have been rampant. Police stations have been overtaken by angry mobs. Historical monuments have been defaced and destroyed. Politicians have weaponized these events to their own

advantage in what was already a tense election year. Watching the news has become an agonizing reminder that this world is not our home. In short, the world is on fire. How can the church respond in such a difficult time?

Looking to Christ

It is important to begin by attempting to understand the pain many people are feeling. Where there is pain, there is often an opportunity for the church to be the church and to do what no other institution in the world can fully do: point people to Jesus Christ. People are hurting and angry. Losing a friend is always difficult. Losing a loved one to senseless violence is far more difficult. In a moment, George Floyd became like a family member to the world that watched in horror as his life was slowly taken from him by force while no one intervened to help. Such grief is often accompanied by anger and frustration. In times like this, one of the best things we can do is to genuinely grieve with those who are grieving. Sin is grievous and traumatic, and words cannot easily

“fix” such agitated emotions.

The gospel, however, has much to say. Jesus did not come into the world to be comfortable; rather, he came to redeem those who had been ravaged by the horrors of sin and death. His humiliation began upon his entrance into the world (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 27). He was not only estranged from the comforts of heaven; he was immediately engulfed by the oppressive realities of sin. He was born under the dark star of genocide. As he fulfilled his earthly ministry, he was “despised and rejected by men,” as Isaiah prophesied (53:3). At the climax of his ministry—at the cross—when he suffered most, there was no one to comfort him or spare him from his cruel oppressors. The weight of our sin was upon him, and he was crushed for our iniquities.

This world could not offer Jesus any lasting comfort, but the resurrection carried him beyond this present evil age into that heavenly land of peace and rest. Scripture not only calls us to fix our eyes upon the resurrection of Jesus as our only source of hope, it also

compels us to comfort others with the same resurrection comfort (2 Cor. 1). Only by taking our eyes off the broken things of this world can we find genuine comfort and peace; not by abstract escapism but by looking to Christ and his resurrection victory over this world and over the prince of the power of the air who pretends to rule it.

Love Tangibly Expressed

But is looking to Christ all we are called to do? While our attempt to comfort others needs to be focused on Christ and the hope of heaven, it should also be tangibly and practically expressed.

Our church, Covenant OPC in St. Augustine, Florida, recently had the opportunity to express this hope in tangible ways. Church leaders in our area decided to gather for prayer downtown in our city square. We had no interest in staging a protest or a riot, but the idea of drawing Christians and church leaders from different churches together to pray seemed appropriate. Ecumenical events often poorly communicate the gospel, and trite sentiment frequently eclipses important theological distinctions. But in this case, an elder from our church and I were asked to lead the event, with me preaching and him leading a focused time of prayer.

As the church, the first thing we should do is pray. We should be known for prayer. We cannot fix this world's problems on our own. People are painfully realizing how broken and bruised this world really is. Sin is a ruthless master and it lies within the heart of each of us—male, female, black, and white. It has endless expressions and wears many masks, including bitterness, an-

ger, rage, racism, murder, and rioting. Sin leaves people ravaged and brutalized. It fractures families and divides nations. When people see the church come together to pray, it sends a calming signal of hope. When the gospel is proclaimed, hearts are either hardened against it or softened by it. The Spirit of God is always at work when the Word of God is read and preached, calling us to repent of our sins and turn to Christ to be healed by him. Only the gospel can convince, convert, and comfort (Shorter Catechism Q. 89).

An informal comment made by a senior police officer at the community prayer was striking. According to him, recent events have set local law enforcement back fifty years in their relationship with the community. The tensions of the Civil Rights Era have been revived. Whether black or white, law enforcement officers have been smeared with blame for a crime they themselves did not commit. Much like when the media hears of a pastoral scandal and uses it to defame the church, the same has happened to those who labor to protect our lives and property. In response to this, our church decided to bake “pies for police” and deliver them to local police stations along with a letter of prayerful support. To say that it meant a lot to them is an understatement.

Another conversation was even more striking. I met a young, black minister who grew up in St. Augustine. His father was a pastor who marched with Martin Luther King Jr. The young man pointed to a place

on the street where his father was beaten up and had stones thrown at him for marching with MLK. His dad has since passed away, and now this young man preaches where his father once stood. The death of George Floyd deeply troubled him and brought back painful memories of sadness, helplessness, and anger. But he was willing to talk, and he and I are now building a valu-



Covenant OPC elder Tarence Dickerson (second from right) leading in prayer in St. Augustine

able friendship together. My family and I plan to visit his church soon.

When the world is on fire, the church has an opportunity to bring gospel streams of living water. Love, tangibly expressed, often becomes a stage for gospel witness, if we are patient and genuine. Wisdom in such times is essential. There is a time to speak and a time to listen. There is a time for weeping and a time to bring comfort. In time, justice will be served. In time, peace will be restored. But in times of pain, unrest, and anguish, the church needs to be the church, and we should remind ourselves and the world what the Heidelberg Catechism beautifully summarized long ago in its first question and answer: “What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own, but belong—both body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.” He is our only and lasting comfort. □

The author is pastor of Covenant OPC in St. Augustine, Florida.

Outward OPC podcast

Visit Outward OPC (outwardopc.com) for two podcast episodes with Eric Watkins and Covenant OPC elder Tarence Dickerson on responding to this summer's racial unrest as churches and as families.

WHAT SHOULD THE CHURCH SAY?



ALAN D. STRANGE // Does the church have something to say in the present civil crisis? Yes, it does. As the prime recipient and interpreter of divine writ, by the Spirit's enablement, the church has something to say about racism and civil governance: it does because the Bible has something to say about such matters.

Certainly, we, as followers of the Lord Jesus, abominate the death of George Floyd, as one made in God's image, and decry the police brutality that it so clearly demonstrated; yet while protests that begin and remain peaceful are permissible, Christians call for proper submission to civil authority, condemning rioting and looting as violent and destructive. We support our civil magistracy in the proper wielding of its power.

The Spirituality of the Church

Some may assume that the doctrine of the spirituality of the church (SOTC) would forbid the church from saying anything about this. Charles Hodge, when he first encountered the usage of the SOTC by Southern Old School Presbyterian theologians in the late 1850s, was quite skeptical of it, fearing that it tended to muzzle the prophetic voice of the church. Hodge believed that the doctrine might be used to prohibit the church from addressing matters that were regarded as out of its province but that Hodge and others thought warranted the church's attention, since they received notice in the Bible. Specifically,

Hodge did not agree that the church could not address slavery as an institution, as it had in condemning it and calling for its end at the 1818 PCUSA General Assembly and as Hodge himself had in articles that he wrote, beginning in 1836, calling for emancipation.

For Hodge, the SOTC ought not to be adduced simply to keep the church from dealing with difficult matters that it would prefer to ignore. He wrote, in reflecting on the SOTC and the 1859 GA, that "there is a great temptation to adopt theories which free us from painful responsibilities," going so far as to say that "to adopt any theory which would stop the mouth of the church, and prevent her bearing her testimony to the kings and rulers, magistrates and people, in behalf of the truth and law of God, is like someone who administers chloroform to a man to prevent his doing mischief." Hodge found this sort of SOTC unjustifiable.

Hodge, on the other hand, came to appreciate and adopt a nuanced doctrine of the church's spirituality. Although an ardent unionist and Lincoln supporter, vigorously opposing se-

cession, Hodge believed that it was not the place of the institutional church to determine whether secession was permissible; that was a political question to be determined by political means. Hodge embraced the spirituality of the church, coming to understand that the doctrine at its heart means that the church is an institution that is Spirit-created and Spirit-filled, using spiritual means (the Word, sacraments, and prayer) to achieve spiritual ends—union and communion with Christ and each other as members of his mystical body. The church, as it goes into all the world evangelizing and discipling, does so in a spiritual manner (Matt. 28:18–20). It is a spiritual institution, one possessing the keys to the kingdom, not a biological institution, as is the family (having the rod), or a civil institution, as is the state (bearing the sword).

Unity of the Human Race

Although general revelation, in showing God and judgment, teaches equity, it is God's special revelation that tells us, contra Neo-Darwinian naturalism, that man was made, male and

female, in the image of God, and that there is a unity to the human race, even in all its ethnic diversity (Acts 17:26–28). Such diversity means richness of expression (Rev. 7:9–12), while it does not impede oneness in Christ (Gal. 3:28). All in him are a new humanity, though even outside of him, as Hodge wrote, there exists a remarkable “Unity of Humankind,” over against all the racialists and eugenicists of Hodge’s time.

Christians understand clearly that racism is contrary to the Bible’s witness to the saving of persons from every tribe, kindred, and nation. At the same time, it is also the case that the Christian church, the Presbyterian Church especially, was complicit in the racism that underlay and accompanied chattel slavery in America. Sadly, the most articulate theological justifiers of chattel slavery were certain Old School Presbyterian theologians. It should also be noted that the Covenanters, represented, at least partly, by the RPCNA, always opposed chattel slavery and employed ecclesiastical discipline for it. The church has, as no other institution, the theoretical basis for opposing all racism and like oppression, though we have in some quarters justified it and in others fought against it.

It is right that in recent years Presbyterian churches (one thinks especially of those in the South) that supported slavery and opposed racial equality should make amends for such by repudiating those positions and rescinding and expunging odious racial strictures from their minutes. It is also right that all of our churches have begun to be more intentional in condemning both historically held racist positions and reaching out across racial lines, seeking greater racial inclusivity internally and fostering fellowship with predominately African-American churches. We in the confessionally Reformed Christian churches need better to live out our convictions about the unity of the human race as those made in *imago Dei*. This is particularly true in the church as the new humanity who are one in Christ and are called to live out that identity

in this poor, sin-benighted world. We do believe that black lives matter, together with all races, though the organization of that name (BLM) is another matter, unfortunately, having tenets that directly contradict the Bible.

Institutional Abuse and Proper Authority

It is the case that not only have the churches, lamentably, not done what they should have done over the course of American history respecting racism and slavery, but neither have the civil authorities. There has been much institutional abuse, roaring back after the Civil War with the rise of Jim Crow laws and the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, ironically, who was “progressive” in many respects but re-segregated the federal work force, among other atrocities. Civil authorities since the Civil Rights Era have done much better and, generally, the laws as written are no longer racist. This doesn’t mean racism is dead, of course, as it involves heart issues, like hatred and lust, and will not be eradicated completely until Christ returns. We should, however, labor hard to eradicate such both in our own hearts and in civil society around us.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness not only of racism but also of other sorts of abuses. This abuse (familial, sexual, racial, class-based, etc.), either previously unknown or swept under the carpet, has emerged into greater public consciousness. Black men have long suffered excessive police attention: this and other sorts of abuse at the hands of officials has become more widely acknowledged. Radicalized social forces, like some in BLM and Antifa as a whole, have latched onto the claim of abuse (sometimes a valid claim, sometimes invented) and have used it as a sort of wedge to argue for and seek to bring about the far-left social views that they represent.

While it has been good to bring to light abuse(s) hitherto covered up, because leaders in every area of life need proper accountability, one of the real downsides of such revelations has been

a loss of respect both for institutions and their office-bearers. Many now think that because husbands and fathers have abused their positions, all in those positions have forfeited their authority and rights. There is a prevalent sense all about us of revolution and the rejection of all due authority and the right exercise of power in the church, in the state, in education, in industry, etc. Opposing all power use by the “advantaged” is both Marxist and postmodern, but distinctly not biblical, which would teach us that the abuse of authority on the part of a father, elder, police officer, or governor does not invalidate all such authority. The abuse of something does not mean that no proper use can be made of it.

This systemic rejection of authority has resulted in widespread disrespect for our civil officials, especially our police, with many claiming that “all cops are bad cops.” Thus the cry of “abolish the police” goes up, meaning by some, serious reform and restructuring, but meaning something more radical to others. The church needs to witness to the world that we ought to respect due authority (1 Pet. 2:13–17) and yield proper submission to the lawful commands of the civil magistrate (Rom. 13:1–7).

We ourselves, as both Peter and Paul make patent, not to mention our Lord himself in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), ought to be the most just and merciful with all ethnic groups and classes of persons (James 2:1–13) as well as those most properly submissive to proper authority (Matt. 22:15–22). That we all have failed in this is part of the reason that Jesus came to live and die for us. We are all natively sinners with respect to these things: loving only our own, being rebels, etc. We need to die to our self-centeredness and live in the love of God and neighbor. We must not allow differences of class, race, and other distinguishers to keep us from loving our neighbor. This is what the gospel empowers us to. □

The author is an OP minister and professor of church history at Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

HOME MISSIONS

THREE INTERNS REFLECT ON CHURCH PLANTING

// JUDITH M. DINSMORE



Tyler Detrick preaching at First Street Reformed Fellowship, a church plant in Dayton, Ohio

Editor's note: Initials are used for J. K. due to security concerns.

J.K. packed his bags in a hurry last fall. He quit his job, called his landlord, and flew to Naples, Florida. A recent graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, K. had been told about the opportunity to do a year-long church-planting internship with Pastor Eric Hausler in Naples. He applied in July and moved in October. “My prayer was that I just have fun doing ministry,” K. said.

The internship ended up being many things—including, yes, fun. “I am having a great time,” K. laughed. Over the past year, he has not only preached the evening services at Christ the King Presbyterian Church, but also enjoyed meals with members of the church. He has motorcycled with men, including an elder at the church, who have been riding longer than K. has been alive. And he has done home visitations in driveways and become a cameraman for Sunday morning worship, thanks to COVID-19.

But two special highlights for K. have been jail ministry and ministry to immigrant young adults. Eric Hausler serves as a chaplain for two local jails, visiting almost daily, and before COVID restrictions, K. would accompany him. “Being able to share the gospel with people who are vulnerable and at very low places . . . I really enjoyed it in some sense. You think about how the gospel relates to them more and more.” K. also spent time with kids of local Haitian families who, before COVID, were coming to Christ the King for worship. “I would pick them up on Sunday, drop them off, have them come to my house and eat, or go somewhere to hang out.”

Pastors Mentoring Future Pastors

It's not just the act of ministering in a church plant that K. has learned from, but the act of ministering *alongside* Eric Hausler. “I am introverted, and Eric is the complete opposite,” K. said. “He is very jolly, but pleasant. He is always unassuming, loving, and caring.” Hausler's schedule as a church planter

and chaplain is busy enough that it limits how much time he spends with people, but the way that he spends that time is instructive, K. said. When Hausler does a visitation, his church members know just what to expect: “He has a great routine of going, visiting, hearing people, asking for prayer requests, sharing the Word, and praying for them.”

Hausler is also efficient with administrative work, but at the same time careful—“One time I remember he sent me the worship bulletin on Monday to proofread,” K. said. The goal is excellence.

Tyler Detrick agrees that working closely with a church planter as mentor is immensely instructive. Another recent graduate of Westminster, Detrick is halfway through his church-planting internship at First Street Reformed in Dayton, Ohio, under church planter Brad Peppo. “Brad is very educational, very visionary. He's also very patient,” Detrick described. Peppo not only offers feedback on Detrick's preaching—they are tag-teaming the Gospel of Luke, preaching on alternate Sunday mornings—but he also asks Detrick for feedback on Peppo's own preaching. This wowed Detrick.

It was Peppo's big picture thinking that got Detrick excited about Dayton in the first place. Detrick is originally from Springfield, a suburb about twenty minutes from Dayton. His family lives nearby. Knowing this, Peppo told Detrick that he already had capital that could be used for God's kingdom. “The more time you spend with people, the more credibility you build up—so to return to an area where I already have so much invested, where I grew up, is exciting,” Detrick explained.

Detrick quickly learned, however, that ministering in downtown Dayton is much different from living in Springfield. “I thought I knew Dayton. I always told people I was from Dayton. But I didn't. I didn't know its streets, I didn't know its diversity.” First Street Reformed is currently located in the business district of downtown Dayton, which most residents have long since vacated in favor of the suburbs. “The

whole urban vibe of downtown Dayton has been a game-changer—with lots of different opportunities,” Detrick said.

When COVID-19 restrictions came into play, Peppo and Detrick used the extra free time to think about those opportunities. Normally, Peppo leads several college ministries a week, which Detrick shadowed. After COVID-19, Detrick kept busy with still preparing sermons and Sunday schools over Facebook Live, pastoral visits in members’ driveways, going on walks with other members, and weekly prayer groups over Zoom. But he and Peppo also “really took some time to think of what First Street Reformed has to offer to the area as a way of ministry.” They decided on, and began a concrete plan for, an English as a Second Language ministry for the many refugees in their city, which will hopefully be located in their rented facility that is easily accessible by public transit.

Differences Between Seminary and an Internship

Internships, including church-planting internships, are valuable training beyond what a seminary is able to provide.

“The internship has been really helpful in that I came out of seminary with a system in place in my mind, but then actually translating that to people has been hard,” Detrick said.

“The internship fills in holes that seminary can’t fill,” Jeremiah Dickinson articulated in an email. He is the third OP church-planting intern for 2020, serving with church planter Dick Gerber at Harvest Church, in East Had-dam, Connecticut, a church plant of Westminster OPC in Hamden, Connecticut. In seminary, the situations are all hypothetical or in the past, Dickinson observed. But in a church plant, all situations involve real people and real problems.

Dickinson graduated from Reformed Theological Seminary in 2019 and was licensed last October. After that, Dickinson preached almost every Sunday morning at Harvest. Although he enjoyed seminary and was well equipped for gospel ministry through both class and mentorship by professors, “seminary can’t be the church, and shouldn’t try to be,” he wrote.

In seminary, you certainly practice preaching and then actually fill the pulpit on occasion at different churches. But Tyler Detrick pointed out that preaching consistently to

one group of people during the church-planting internship is a significant step up. “I love to bring God’s Word to [the church]. It’s a small enough group—about thirty-five to forty-five people—that I can really get to know them and preach in a way that’s directed toward them,” he explained.

Real-Life Joys and Challenges

Serving in the church through this church-planting internship confirmed Dickinson’s sense of call and exposed him to the “joys and challenges” of serving Christ in his church.

One big challenge for Dickinson has been watching Harvest move toward closing its doors. Although this was in the works before COVID-19, the extensive restrictions in early March—Harvest was meeting in a school—seemed like the right time to conclude services. Most attendees will transition to attending Westminster OPC.

“There have been many challenges during the internship, and my wife and I are thankful for the things we have learned, most of all about God and his unfailing faithfulness to us,” Dickinson wrote. “It has become very clear to me how reliant we are on the Holy Spirit.”

Unless the Spirit builds the work, there will not be growth, he explained.

Dickinson is also coming away with a strong sense of what it means to be Presbyterian. “I have been able to see and experience the benefit of the support of the church on the denominational, regional, and local church level,” he explained. Throughout the internship, he met weekly not only with his mentor, Dick Gerber, but also

with Westminster’s pastor, Jonathan Holst, and teacher, James Campbell.

The internship has also taught Dickinson the importance of each and every member of a church. In a small church plant, you quickly realize how the presence or absence of each person makes a difference. “In larger churches, it is possible to lose sight of this, but that’s not an option for a church plant! People are the living stones being built together in Christ, and this internship has taught me the value of each person, the importance of equipping and using the gifts Christ has given to his people, and the necessity of paying attention to all the flock,” Dickinson wrote.

The church-planting internship, which pairs interns with OP church planters for one year, is jointly funded by the Committee on Home Missions and the Committee on Christian Education.

“I have truly loved the internship and am so grateful,” Tyler Detrick concluded.

The author is managing editor of New Horizons.



Jeremiah Dickinson leading worship at Harvest Church

Home Missions Today

For up-to-date news and prayer requests, receive our newsletter by emailing HomeMissionsToday@opc.org. New editions: August 5 & 19.

STEWARDSHIP

GIVING TO OPC WORLDWIDE OUTREACH

// ROBERT M. JONES

As the interim administrator for the Committee on Coordination, I have had the privilege of assisting our program committees of Home Missions, Foreign Missions, and Christian Education, to reach their budget goals. We give thanks for God's provision through all the churches' generous gifts so that we can meet the financial goal for the OPC for 2020. Just like you plan your home budgets, we plan our budget based on expectations of continuing support to meet our needs. Our assembly approves the work of the committees and their combined budgets, which comprise what we call Worldwide Outreach, for church planting, mission work, pastoral training (including new interns), and *New Horizons*.

We are dependent on consistent giving from each church. Otherwise, we would have to say no to prospective pastoral internships or mission works. Imagine, if giving were to continue to decline over a period of time, we might be forced to remove missionaries from the field, or reduce support for church plants. Therefore, it is critical for the local churches to plan for consistent giving each year and increased giving over time to cover inflation and expanding needs.

Asking and Special Offerings

Based on our budgeting, the General Assembly issues what we call "askings" to our churches, which is the fixed amount per member of the church that it would take to support our budget for that year.

Note that each church is encouraged to give throughout the year so that our committees have monthly funds to cover needs. Some churches are able to give monthly; others schedule special offerings to meet Worldwide Outreach needs and, in addition, each person is encouraged to give to the annual Thank Offering. However, church giving through the year often falls short of the budget needs, and November's Thank Offering has become necessary just to meet the budget. This is unfortunate in that we must wait until the end of the year to confirm that we can meet a budget that was approved at

general assembly in June. Therefore, each church is encouraged to give what is possible through the year, even if they cannot afford the asking amount. A line item in the church budget could be a reminder to give what is possible and to work toward giving the asking amount and more, as the church grows.

A Heritage of Kingdom Work

In a 2004 article for *New Horizons*, "Worldwide Outreach—What, Why, and How," Donald Poundstone and Larry Wilson explain the connection between giving and ministry:

The church corporately pursues her mandate by going, baptizing, and teaching. She goes by sending preachers and helpers (Rom. 10:13–17): "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." This implies by definition that she must plant and build up churches. She baptizes converts into the church (Acts 2:41–42, 47; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13). And since our Lord wants disciples (and not just "decisions") an integral part of her mission program is providing resources in order to help train and nurture them.

The OPC always honors the requests of members who wish to give money to support particular missionaries or ministries. But, giving to Worldwide Outreach as a whole is also important—and presbyterian! As Poundstone and Wilson also stated,

given the importance of the church, given the oneness of the body of Christ, given the responsibility and authority of the officers of the church, given the full scope of the Great Commission, and doing things decently and in order—it is desirable that individuals give through their local churches. And it is desirable that local churches support the ministries of Worldwide Outreach as a whole.

As we review the present trend for the 2021 budget, we are recording fewer funds as compared to previous years, and we are now behind in giving to meet our 2021 budget. Prayerfully, we are asking the Lord to provide the funds needed for his work through the OPC, and his continued blessing of that work, through the giving of our members and churches.

The author is interim administrator for the Committee on Coordination.

AUGUST



The Bakers

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- 1** **BEN & HEATHER HOPP**, Haiti. Pray for God to guide the process of training elder and deacon candidates in the local churches. / **JEREMY & GWEN BAKER**, Yuma, AZ. Pray for more year-round members at Yuma OPC.
-
- 2** Associate missionaries **OCTAVIUS & MARIE DELFILS**, Haiti. Pray that the church in Haiti may continue to grow. / Pray for active duty military chaplains **JOHN (LINDA) CARTER**, US Navy, and **DAVID (JENNA) DERIENZO**, US Army.
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- 3** **LARRY & KALYNN OLDAKER**, Sandusky, OH. Pray for a deepening desire in the church to fellowship and worship. / **JOHN FIKKERT**, director for the Committee on Ministerial Care, and **MELISA MCGINNIS**, controller.
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- 4** Home Missions general secretary **JOHN SHAW**. / Summer interns **GRANT (STORMIE) ALLARD** at Christ Covenant Presbyterian in Amarillo, TX, and **DUSTIN (EMILY) KARZEN** at Branch of Hope in Torrance, CA.
-
- 5** **MARK & JENI RICHLINE**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for the salvation of those who sought help from the church during COVID-19. / **CARL & STACEY MILLER**, New Braunfels, TX. Pray for God's blessing in officer training.

6 Assoc. missionaries **CHRISTOPHER & CHLOE VERDICK** and **LEAH HOPP**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the clinic will remain well supplied to meet patient needs. / **CHRIS & GRACE ANN CASHEN**, Clarkston, GA. Praise the Lord for new refugee contacts.

7 **STEPHEN & FELICIA LAUER**, Wilmington, OH. Pray for outreach opportunities at Wilmington Reformed. / Summer interns **JAMES STAFFORD** at New Covenant Community in Joliet, IL, and **LUKE (LAURA) WALKUP** at Faith OPC in Indiana, PA.

8 Associate missionaries **JAMES & ESTHER FOLKERTS**, Nakaale, Uganda, give thanks for the time to focus on and progress with language studies. / Pray for **DANNY OLINGER**, general secretary of Christian Education, as he edits *New Horizons*.

9 **RYAN & ROCHELLE CAVANAUGH**, Merrillville, IN. Pray for effective outreach at Mission Church. / Summer interns **DAVID (LEAH) VOGEL** at Redeemer Presbyterian in Charlotte, NC, and **NATE (AMY) JEFFRIES** at South Austin Presbyterian in Austin, TX.

10 Summer interns **A. J. (CHELSEA) MILLSAPS** at Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA, and **BEN (VICTORIA) CIAVOLELLA** at Delta Oaks Presbyterian in Pittsburg, CA. / Pray for **HEERO & ANYA HACQUEBORD**, L'viv, Ukraine, as fall ministry planning begins amid COVID-19 uncertainty.



The Holdas

11 **BOB & GRACE HOLDA**, Oshkosh, WI. Pray for an increase of knowledge and good works at Resurrection Presbyterian. / **MTIOPC INTENSIVE TRAINING**, Aug. 11-13, for Ecclesiology (Troxel) and Hebrew Refresher (Patton).

12 **MARK & CARLA VAN ESSENDELFT**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for missionary children coping with lockdown. / **DAVID & REBEKAH GRAVES**, Coeur d'Alene, ID. Pray that the Lord would draw visitors to church.

13 Pray for missionary associates **JOANNA GROVE** and **JONATHAN ROBBINS**, Nakaale, Uganda, as they assist with diaconal efforts. / Pray for stated clerk **HANK BELFIELD** and his staff as they prepare the 2020 GA reports.

14 **DAVID & RASHEL ROBBINS**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the work of recording Scripture to distribute. / Pray for **CHRIS (NANCY) WALMER**, area home missions coordinator for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania.

15 Tentmaking missionary **TINA DEJONG** and missionary associate **ANGELA VOSKUIL**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for open doors to travel and to settle on the field. / **STEPHEN PRIBBLE**, senior technical associate for OPC.org.

AUGUST



Boardwalk Chapel volunteers

21 Home Missions administrative assistant **KATHARINE OLINGER**. / Summer interns **DUSTIN (AMYE) THOMPSON** at Trinity Presbyterian in Medford, OR, and **EUGENE (KATHERINE) MCKINNON** at Christ OPC in Marietta, GA.

22 Missionary associates **DR. JIM & JENNY KNOX**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for safety during COVID-19 and that the number of cases remain low in Uganda. / **J.K.**, church-planting intern at Christ the King in Naples, FL.

23 **ANDREW & REBEKAH CANAVAN**, Corona, CA. Pray that Corona Presbyterian would honor Christ. / **CHARLES & CONNIE JACKSON**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray that Charles's eye treatments will have encouraging results.

24 Home Missions associate general secretary **AL TRICARICO**. / Yearlong interns **KEN (MANDY) KRUCKOW** at Oakland Hills Community in Farmington Hills, MI, and **JOSHUA VALDIX** at Westminster in Hollidaysburg, PA.

25 **ETHIOPIAN REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**, Ethiopia. Pray for the diaconal needs of members affected by COVID-19. / Summer intern **CHRISTIAN (JOLENE) MCARTHUR** at Providence Presbyterian in Temecula, CA.

26 **ETHAN & CATHERINE BOLYARD**, Wilmington, NC. Pray for the Lord to raise up deacons at Heritage OPC. / **MICHAEL & SAMANTHA SEUFERT**, St. Paul, MN. Pray that the Lord would bless Mission OPC with endurance and wisdom.



The Bekkerings

27 Pray for **MR. AND MRS. F.**, Asia, that their happiness at being reunited after travel restrictions are lifted is a good gospel witness. / Loan Fund manager **MARK STUMPPFF** and database coordinator **CHARLENE TIPTON**.

28 **BILL & MARGARET SHISHKO**, Deer Park, NY. Pray for the Shishkos as they relocate to the Deer Park area. / Yearlong intern **ANDREW (ANESSA) BEKKERING** at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, MI.

29 **MR. AND MRS. M.**, Asia, give thanks for their time in the US to complete many translation projects for the benefit of the church. / Yearlong intern **ELIJAH (GRETA) DE JONG** at Faith OPC in Grants Pass, OR.

30 Pray for affiliated missionaries **CRAIG & REE COULBOURNE** (on furlough) and **LINDA KARNER**, Japan, and **DR. MARK & LAURA AMBROSE**, Cambodia. / Yearlong intern **DAVID (LEBO) BONNER** at Tyler OPC in Tyler, TX.

31 Pray for **TONY & KATHLEEN CURTO**, Ethiopia, that travel to Ethiopia and Europe may resume by early next year. / Pray for **MARK (PEGGY) SUMPTER**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southwest.

16 Pray for **BOARDWALK CHAPEL** volunteers and staff. / Pray for associate **P. F.**, Asia, that God would provide good friendships on the field as he misses his family in the US.

17 Pray for **DAVID (JANE) CRUM**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / **DAVID NAKHLA**, Disaster Response Coordinator. Pray for volunteers for the post-flood rebuilding efforts in Midland, MI.

18 **TYLER (NATALIE) DETRICK**, church-planting intern at First Street Reformed in Dayton, OH. / Pray for **RETIRED MISSIONARIES** Cal & Edie Cummings, Brian & Dorothy Wingard, Greet Rietkerk, and Young & Mary Lou Son.

19 Pray that affiliated missionaries **JERRY & MARILYN FARNIK**, Czech Republic, may resume their normal ministries in biblical counseling. / Pray for **MARVIN PADGETT**, executive director of Great Commission Publications.

20 **BEN & MELANIE WESTERVELD**, Quebec, Canada. Pray for growth in spiritual maturity for the members at St-Marc church. / **BRADNEY & EILEEN LOPEZ**, Arroyo, PR. Pray for the ministry at Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura.

[Continued from page 7]

appears people are struggling with a lot of questions on how to live in a fallen world as a Christian and so these classes help to bring a biblical approach to living in our culture.”

Reformation Fellowship

At Reformation Fellowship in Roseville, California, 72 percent of the 211 people attending worship also go to Sunday school, which resumes this fall after their traditional summer hiatus. “Sunday school is a format for presenting biblical truth topically, incrementally, and age appropriately,” said Pastor Kevin Van Der Linden. “The reason we do this is to fulfill Scripture’s requirement to teach sound doctrine.”

The high school/adult class of one hundred studies doctrinal and practical topics while the ten-student junior high class alternates between two yearlong courses. The fifty-five younger children are divided into four classes, with most using Children’s Ministry International Scripture memory and Children’s Catechism memory. Associate pastor Adrian Crum has written supplemental notes to help teachers improve the curriculum, said Van Der Linden, who teaches an eight-week membership class each fall and spring.

Crum also helps to train the teachers, who have been identified as those who are mature in the faith, have the respect of the congregation, appear to do reasonably well in training their own children, and have been approved by the session. When it is difficult to find an adult teacher, Reformation Fellowship sometimes provides video instruction with an elder leading a discussion.

The pastor periodically shares with the congregation the session’s belief that Sunday school is an important aspect of the discipleship ministry of the church and urges members to attend. Pastors,

elders, deacons, and their families seek to set the example by attending themselves. Teachers are urged to put reasonable effort into preparing to teach in a way that is insightful, helpful, clear, and engaging, said Van Der Linden.

Sunday school is held after worship. “First we focus on the worship of God while everyone is fresh and fed,” said Van Der Linden. Then Sunday school instruction is offered as a secondary means “that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28). “It must become the culture of the church—this is just what we do.”



The junior high class at Reformation Fellowship

Harvest OPC

One might think providing Sunday school at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, Michigan, would be a breeze with its weekly attendance of 725 morning worshipers. Yet accommodating so many students is not easy, says Congregational Life Coordinator Nikki Veurink. “Our rooms are not large enough for large class sizes. We need multiple teachers and assistants per grade, and sometimes have trouble finding volunteers.”

During COVID-19’s stay-at-home orders, Sunday school went on hiatus for most classes, although some teachers recorded Zoom videos for their students. This summer, Harvest planned a church-wide memorization program to keep their kids in the Word. They hope that Sunday school will return to normal this fall but understand they may still need a remote option for their

largest class if size limitations continue.

Their congregation prefers a traditional approach to Sunday school, but they also offer small group meetings in homes. Following the morning service, children as young as two years old attend a singing time prior to classes for all ages. Most of the children’s classes use GCP material, although the fifth- and sixth-graders study the catechism. Adults age eighteen and older choose between several classes, on topics such as parenting, officer training, church membership, help for those dealing with or ministering to those with sexual addiction, and knowing Christ. “We place a high value on education for all ages,” said Veurink.

Teachers receive training under the direction of the Sunday School Committee, which is overseen by the session. Team teaching is implemented for youth classes. “It makes the classes run smoother and also has increased our volunteer base,” said Veurink. “More people are willing to volunteer knowing that they aren’t solely responsible and that they have a built-in partner to teach when they are unable to attend.”

Even before COVID-19 restrictions, Sunday schools have changed over the years. In OP churches, however, the goal remains the same: to teach the congregation using God-centered materials that are solidly Reformed and biblically based so that the sheep will not stray.

“If you pour tons of effort into your Sunday school program to make it the highest quality possible, you will see the people responding with hunger and interest,” reflected Patton. “It also has been instrumental in bringing new members and helping people who have just joined to learn about Reformed theology.” □

The author is a member of Calvary OPC in Glenside, Pennsylvania. The statistics are from the 2019 Yearbook of the OPC.

NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS



Neil and Susan Lodge

IN MEMORIAM: NEIL J. LODGE

Lane G. Tipton

Rev. Neil James Lodge went to be with the Lord on June 18 after a two-year battle with pancreatic cancer. He is survived by his wife of forty-eight years, Susan; his sister; his four children; and his six grandchildren.

Neil graduated from Gordon College with a philosophy degree in 1972 and earned his master of divinity from Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) in 1975. As a minister in the OPC, Neil pastored in Middletown, Delaware (1975–1981), Abilene, Texas (1981–1998), Bridgeton, New Jersey (1998–2005), Cherry Hill, New Jersey (2006–2014), and West Collingswood, New Jersey (2014–2019). Even after his retirement, while struggling with cancer, he was instrumental in planting an OP church in Bryan, Texas, and led its first service on May 24.

Neil loved preaching, teaching, and pastoring God's people. He started Covenant Christian School in Abilene, Texas, serving as its principal and Bible teacher for many years. He is remembered by many for his participation in Bible camps and conferences. He mentored seventeen pastoral interns. Most of all, Neil loved his faithful Savior Jesus Christ, and he now beholds his glory with the angels and "spirits of the righteous made perfect" atop heavenly Mount Zion (Heb. 12:23).

UPDATE

MINISTERS

- On April 25, the Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario dissolved the pastoral relationship between **Mika D. Edmondson** and New City Fellowship in Grand Rapids, MI. Edmondson plans to transfer to the PCA.
- On May 30, the Presbytery of Pennsylvania erased from its roll **Jody O. Morris**, who previously served as pastor of Redeemer OPC in Carlisle, PA. He requested that information concerning his ministerial credentials be sent to the Presbytery of Baltimore of the PCUSA.
- On May 31, the Presbytery of Philadelphia dissolved the pastoral relationship between **Caleb M. Smith** and Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA.
- On June 12, **David C. Noe** was ordained as a minister and installed as teacher of the Word at Reformation OPC in Grand Rapids, MI.
- On June 12, **Jeffrey C. Waddington**, formerly stated supply, was installed as

pastor of Faith OPC in Fawn Grove, PA.

- On June 26, **Casey M. Bessette** was installed as pastor of Pilgrim OPC in Raleigh, NC. Bessette previously served as teacher of the Word at Christ Presbyterian in Janesville, WI.
- On June 30, the Presbytery of Ohio dissolved the pastoral relationship between **Robert Y. Eckardt** and Redeemer in Dayton, OH, upon his retirement. His ministerial credentials were transferred to the Presbytery of the Southeast.
- On July 1, **Jonathan L. Master** began his duties as president of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, having previously served as dean of the School of Divinity of Cairn University and ministerial advisor to Cornerstone OPC in Ambler, PA.
- On July 1, **Douglas M. Withington** retired as pastor of Pilgrim OPC in Raleigh, NC.

MILESTONES

- Retired OP minister **Neil J. Lodge**, 75, died on June 18, having served OP congregations in DE, TX, and NJ.



At Noe's ordination and installation: (front row) David Vander Meer, Bill Carson, Everett Henes, David Noe, Kevin Klopfenstein, Shane Bennett; (second row) Jonathan Cruse, Drew McGinnis, Terry Thole, Vern Picknally, Stephen Pribble, Bruce Buchanan; (third row) Bob Jackson, Don McCrory, Ken Smith, Robert Van Manen

LETTERS

NOT A SUITABLE GUIDE

Editor:

Neither *Beyond Authority and Submission* nor its review (June) reflect careful research of the cultural issues of authority and submission. This is understandable: most of us don't know we need to research the "facts" we learn in school about enlightenment feminism, ancient history, and postmodern egalitarianism. *Beyond Authority* is not a suitable guide for OP members and officers as we try to sort through lies about authority and submission. We must do the hard work of truly understanding our past and present culture (reading whole original works and not relying on hearsay), submitting ourselves unreservedly to the grace-filled authority of Christ, and immersing ourselves in his Word so we know how to obey him and not be deceived by the spirit of the age.

Dana Bertino
Tyler, TX

REVIEWS

***Systematic Theology*, by Robert Letham. Crossway, 2019. Hardcover, 1072 pages, \$32.78 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP minister Brian Wingard.**

This reviewer echoes the words of Sinclair Ferguson in pronouncing this work to be a magnum opus. Yet, in the world of systematic theologies, it is concise when compared to many multivolume works (e.g., Hodge and Bavinck) that are available. This makes the reading of it from beginning to end possible without undue effort, while allowing it also to be quite comfortably used as a reference source. It is titled a systematic theology, but it is almost as much a history of doctrine. This feature has its positive aspects, though perhaps some negatives as well.

Dr. Letham divides his work into eight parts and thirty-one chapters. In these, he covers the recognized *loci* of systematic theology, though in his titles he doesn't always use the standard names

associated with these *loci*. Each part and each chapter commence with a summary statement of their contents that is very concise and, on the whole, helpful. Letham's writing style is fluid and free of the opacity that may be found in some works of this nature. At the end of every chapter, he includes a list of books for further reading, as well as study questions, which are features that would be useful in making this a textbook for classes or small group use.

Letham does not pursue the *loci* in what might be the expected manner. His first part is titled "The Triune God," and in it he covers "The Revelation of God" as the first chapter, instead of placing it under the heading of prolegomena, which is often done. Letham declares in a letter distributed to reviewers that in starting with the Trinity he means to show that his focus is on God. It does more than that, however, in reminding us that central to our understanding of God is his triune nature. The doctrine of the Trinity is not to be built upon a foundation of general theism in a building block fashion. The Trinity is who God is.

One feature that Letham underscores in the above-mentioned letter is his inclusion of the sacraments in the *ordo salutis*. He feels that evangelicals and some of the Reformed have neglected this out of a misplaced fear of Rome and its sacerdotal views. After reading his discussion on this topic, one may wonder whether Letham has feared Rome enough. Is it Post-Enlightenment individualism or is it a fear of finding salvation mediated through the sacraments and not through faith in the gospel of Christ that has caused Reformed theologians to ignore the connection that Letham wishes to emphasize?

Another key doctrine for the author is the doctrine of the incarnation. He helpfully reminds us at several points that without the incarnation we could not be saved, for example, in his discussion of the Nestorian controversy (491). Yet it is my impression that he writes as if salvation is in incarnation per se, rather than

in its preparation for the atoning sacrifice of the incarnate one, Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, his coupling of the incarnation with the doctrine of union with Christ is most helpful.

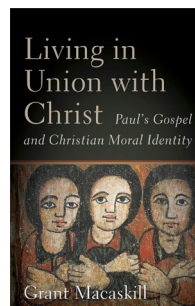
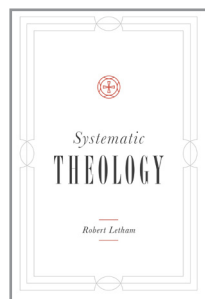
Letham deals with many contemporary issues, for example, open theism, biblical feminism. At these points, he is stronger in his critique than in any other place in his writing. However, in other areas, he introduces figures such as Karl Barth with scarcely a reference to their overall heterodox positions. It is true that this is not done with reference to their specific points of heterodoxy, but he does not sound an alarm that their heterodoxy may seep from one area to another.

This work is to be recommended to pastors, scholars, and informed church members. It ought at some points, however, to be read with caution.

***Living in Union with Christ: Paul's Gospel and Christian Moral Identity*, by Grant Macaskill. Baker Academic, 2019. Hardcover, 176 pages, \$24.99. Reviewed by OP member Jeremiah Dickinson.**

Who, or what, defines my identity? We are naturally curved inward and look to ourselves to answer that question, and this problem doesn't go away for the Christian. But from beginning to end, Jesus is the "defining reality" for the believer, and that is very good news (145). In *Living in Union with Christ*, Grant Macaskill offers a much-needed account of the believer's union with Christ, and the hope we have in him.

The main argument of the book is that "talk of the Christian moral life must begin and end with Paul's statement, 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'" (1). Macaskill looks closely at key New Testament texts that speak of our identity in Christ and applies them to our contemporary



NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS *Continued*

questions and issues.

Chapter 1 places the discussion in its historical and theological context. Chapters 2–6, the substance of the argument, focus on Galatians and Philippians, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the war between the flesh and the Spirit, and our future hope.

Chapter 7 brings all the strands together in application. It is practical theol-

ogy at its best. The reader will especially appreciate and be challenged by the conclusions drawn in chapter 7, supported by the close reading of the text in the previous chapters.

This book will be helpful for pastors, students, and all those who lead and teach in any capacity, but it will also prove beneficial to any believer who seeks to dive deeply into the text of Scripture.

Macaskill writes with pastoral care and wisdom. He centers our gaze on the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is our hope. In the author's words, "The possibilities of our lives are limited not by our own natural capacity for goodness and love but by the perfections and prospects constituted by this other person, Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God" (vii).

Thanks be to God, indeed.



WHO WILL NEED HELP NEXT?



OP members Linda and Tom Kennedy



Making a Way Out of the Mud in Midland

On May 18, residents in Midland were told to evacuate to higher ground and leave their things behind. Two dams swelled and failed, sending water rushing over low-lying areas. The Kennedys' walkout basement was ruined. OPC Disaster Response has been privileged to work through this disaster with them.

Join our
volunteer list.

*Could you be our
300th volunteer?*

opcdisasterresponse.org