

NEW HORIZONS

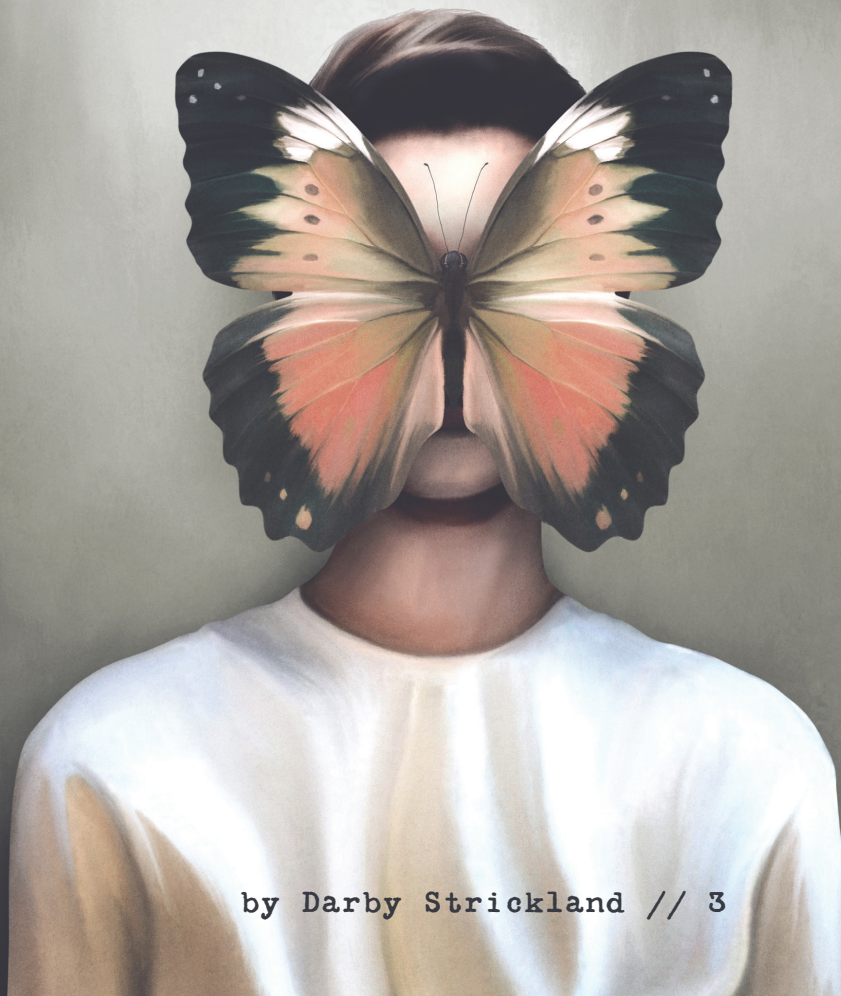
≡ *in the* ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ≡

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Sexual Abuse in the Church
// by Richard L. Guido

JAN - FEB 2021

11 The Church's Response
to Abuse *// An Interview*
with Robert B. Needham

[THE DIFFICULTY OF SEEING DOMESTIC ABUSE]



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New Horizons

in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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Editorial Board: The Committee on Christian
Education's Subcommittee on Serial Publications

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Articles previously published may be slightly edited.

New Horizons (ISSN: 0199-3518) is published
monthly except for a combined issue, usually August-
September, by the Committee on Christian Education
of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 607 N. Easton
Road, Bldg. E, Willow Grove, PA 19090-2539; tel. 215-
830-0900; fax 215-830-0350.

Letters to the editor are welcome. They should deal
with an issue the magazine has recently addressed.
Their language should be temperate, and they may not
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Send inquiries, letters to the editor, and other corres-
pondence to the editor at danny.olinger@opc.org.

Send address changes to ccesecretary@opc.org. Allow
six weeks for address changes.

The digital edition (PDF, ePub, mobi) and an archive of
previous issues are available at www.opc.org.

Views expressed by our writers are not necessarily
those of the editors or official positions of the
Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Copies are distributed free to members and friends
of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Nonmembers
are asked to donate \$20.00 for an annual subscription
(USD \$30.00 if sent to addresses in Canada; \$40.00
elsewhere abroad). A free email PDF subscription is
also available. Requests for a subscription should be
sent to ccesecretary@opc.org or the address below.

Periodicals postage is paid at Willow Grove, PA, and at
additional mailing offices. **Postmaster:** Send address
changes to *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian
Church*, 607 N. Easton Road, Bldg. E, Willow Grove, PA
19090-2539.

On October 24, 2020, Christopher Byrd was ordained and installed as an evangelist at Grace OPC in Westfield, New Jersey. Mr. Byrd will be laboring to grow the church through reaching the lost in the Westfield area with the gospel and leading and equipping the whole congregation of Grace OPC to take part in that work. Rev. Timothy Ferguson preached from Matthew 4:18-22, "Go Fish for Souls." The charge was given by Rev. Thomas Martin, pastor of Knox OPC, Silver Spring, Maryland. The charge to the congregation was given by Rev. Dr. Hendrik Krabbendam.



THE DIFFICULTY OF SEEING DOMESTIC ABUSE



DARBY STRICKLAND // In every observable way, Rebecca and Steve's marriage is a good one. They are at church every Sunday with their five beautiful children. Steve volunteers on church committees, and he is full of just the right kind of humor. Rebecca is friends with many of the young mothers in the church.

One Sunday, Steve approaches the pastor. He says that his marriage has hit a rough patch. "I am working overtime, and Rebecca is growing resentful. I have tried everything, but Rebecca remains cold and is not tending to the house and children."

Steve goes on to explain that Rebecca is silent during family devotions, and he fears her attitude will harm the children. He suggests that maybe Rebecca has not gotten over her father's abandonment, but he feels she should not be taking her pain out on him and their children.

He then asks the pastor if one of the ladies of the church could disciple Rebecca. The pastor thinks it reasonable to agree to the support, as Rebecca is managing five young children with a husband who often travels.

So, Sue begins a book study with Rebecca. Sue sees Rebecca tense up when they talk about Steve, but she links it to the bitterness Steve reported. A few weeks later, Rebecca tells Sue,

"I am feeling more discouraged, even though I have been trying harder than ever. Some nights I stay up until two in the morning to do all my chores. But Steve still seems frustrated. He told me that if I do not get organized, the children's education will suffer." Sue feels her burden and offers to come help.

When Sue arrives, she is shocked. Rebecca's home is immaculate. Rebecca anxiously presents her calendar, asking how she can stay more organized. She says she struggles to remember things, so she writes everything down.

Suddenly, Rebecca gets a text from Steve, and her eyes flood with tears. She blurts out, "Steve says I am stressing him out. Unless I get my act together, he is going to go to the cabin for a few days to get away from my chaos."

Sue is confused. Nothing she has seen validates Steve's concern. Perhaps Rebecca is being oversensitive? Maybe she is upset to be left with the children while Steve travels? The pastor had told Sue to help Rebecca better support

Steve. So, she asks to see Steve's text.

What Sue reads is far worse than what Rebecca had conveyed. The text is a five-paragraph rant, filled with cruel names and accusations. Worse, Steve inappropriately used Bible verses in the text to question Rebecca's faithfulness to God and to him.

Sue is shocked. She cannot make sense of what she is reading. "Has Steve been this upset before?" she asks. Rebecca answers, "Nearly every day. When he travels, he texts, but if he is home, he tells me about my failures. I know I fail him, but I really try. His work is stressful, and I can't make him happy. What should I do?"

No one at church could have imagined that the man they all served alongside was capable of being so cruel. When Sue reports back to the pastor, she is glad she took screenshots of the texts, because the pastor also struggles to believe it. Perhaps Steve was having a bad day, or had too much to drink? The pastor would prefer any other

explanation than seeing these texts as an expression of Steve's heart toward his wife.

Why Is Abuse So Hard to See?

No one in Rebecca's church suspected that Steve abused her. Sadly, similar scenarios are likely happening in Reformed churches.¹ To help us grow in recognizing victims of abuse, I have outlined some of the reasons why abuse is hard to see.²

We don't actually see the abuse happen. It typically occurs out of sight, in the privacy of homes. Since we aren't eyewitnesses, we must rely on another's testimony. We often don't know how to discern the truth in this context.

We think we know people. We all like to believe that our perceptions are correct. But abusers are deceptive. They create a public image designed to gain trust. However, the Scriptures warn us to be alert within our churches for empty talkers, deceivers, and wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15; 2 Cor. 11:13; Titus 1:10).

We assume that another person's level of depravity is like our own. When we hear about a self-absorbed spouse, we map it onto how we sin against our loved ones. Our imaginations fail us, and we minimize the horror of another's sin.

We are confused by the oppressor's blame-shifting. When confronted, abusers will twist the details around so you believe that they are the victims. It might be helpful to consider prominent cases of abuse by fallen church leaders and recall how they worked to conceal the evil they were perpetrating. People who abuse others are masters at redirection.

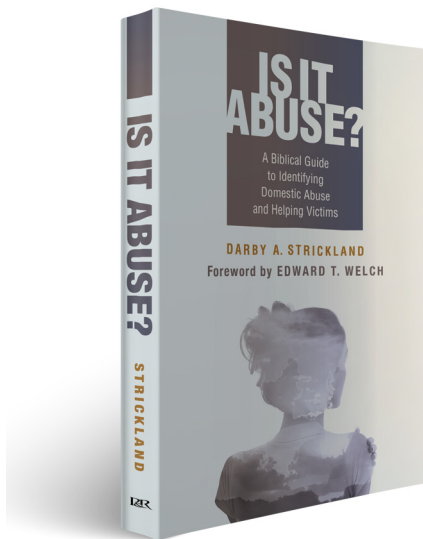
Besides becoming aware of these barriers, we also need to have a biblical understanding of oppression. To help us do so, I will give four underlying heart dynamics of oppressors, and then I will provide five suggestions for how to grow in discerning abuse.

The Dynamics of Oppression

1. Abuse Begins with Idolatry

Domestic abuse is disorienting, and not just for victims, like Rebecca, who believes she is failing Steve, but also for those who seek to help. As Steve's pastor experienced, it is difficult to conceptualize what drives a person to oppress their spouse. To understand oppressive hearts, it is best if we start with our own.

The way we love others represents what we think about God. If I do not trust that God will provide for my family, I might struggle to be generous towards others. Jesus links these ideas together when he sums up the law: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great



and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37–39). To love others well, we must first love God. Oppressors, however, see themselves, not God, as the center of all things.

2. Our Relationships Expose Our Idols

Our relationships are great indicators of our idolatry. When we fail to love others, our hearts' desires are exposed. For example, at the end of a long day, I have a choice whether to serve my family or my idols. If I idolize my own comfort, I will turn on the TV rather than engage in conversation. If I desire power, I will shame my children until they obey me. If I prioritize my own achievements, I will rush back to the

office rather than do the dishes. What we worship affects those we are called to love.

3. An Abuser's Idolatry Is Fueled by Pernicious Entitlement

While idolatry harms all relationships, oppressors worship their idols to such an extent that they see others as existing only to fulfill their desires. They have a pernicious sense of entitlement. It sounds a bit like, "Serve me or suffer the consequences!"

Steve not only idolized having a perfectly kept and peaceful home, he felt entitled to it. Clear signs of pernicious entitlement are the punishments that oppressors dole out when their idols are threatened. Steve was belligerent if he found dog hair on his chair, and silent for two days if Rebecca dared talk to him while the Cubs were playing. He wanted his world to work his way, no matter the cost to Rebecca.

Of course, we all struggle with entitlement. However, oppressors' sense of entitlement is of a different magnitude. Oppressors desire to usurp God and live as if they should be worshiped and obeyed. Like the bad kings in the Old Testament, they are willing to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord for their own gain (see, for example, 2 Kings 21:1–18 and 2 Chron. 32:33–33:9). Oppressors are willing to disobey God and wound others to fulfill their desires.

4. An Abuser's Idolatry Leads to Self-Justification

Oppressive hearts also have a unique faith problem. Because they usurp God's rightful place, they also fail to see their need for a savior. Oppressors excuse their sin while focusing on their spouses' sin, and thereby feel justified in using coercive control.

Listen to what Steve says when his pastor calls him in to address his text to Rebecca: "I had no choice! Unless I stay on top of Rebecca, our house descends into chaos! Sure, I could use less vulgar language, but she needs to do better. I work hard, and she shows me no grace and zero appreciation. The one time I lose it, she makes a federal case about it!"

Steve believes that his punishing behaviors are justified. He does not have sorrow for his sin; instead, he blames Rebecca for his actions. A prideful and unrepentant heart is in a perilous spiritual position (Rom. 2:5).

Discerning Abuse

So what does all of this mean for us, the Christian brothers and sisters of women like Rebecca? I would like to offer five suggestions that flow from these underlying dynamics of abuse. My hope is that they will give you clear ways to grow in discerning the presence of abuse.

1. Listen for Blame-Shifting

Most oppressors are brilliant at blame-shifting. This is where helpers often get lost. But if helpers listen carefully, we can pick up on this pattern: Are they more concerned with their spouses' sin than their own? Are they grieved by the harm they have done, or do they focus on their own suffering? Steve blames his wife for his failures. When his pastor presses him about his sin, Steve deflects responsibility by talking about how his father had mistreated him. When someone is not broken by his sin but instead excuses it, we should take a closer look.

2. Listen for the Effects of Blame-Shifting

Because of this blame-shifting tactic, victims often believe that the abuse is their fault. Victims think, "If only I were more submissive, or exercised more to restore my pre-baby body, or were a better mother or housekeeper, then my husband would not be so angry."

Rebecca struggles to see Steve's treatment of her as unreasonable because she has come to see herself as a worthless burden. When Sue asks her how she can help, Rebecca does not report Steve's seething lectures and unreasonable expectations. She offers up her own failings.

3. Ask More Questions

Whether the situation is a friend talking about a marital conflict or a victim making a formal complaint, your

first step should be to gather more information before offering advice. We can keep victims from telling us more by stepping in with premature counsel. So, before you speak into a situation, spend time seeking to learn more. Gain a fuller sense of the person's homelife, how often conflict occurs, and how intense it is. Depending upon what you hear, you might then screen for fear, controlling behaviors, and punishing behaviors.

If you want a victim of abuse to feel safe sharing her story, you also need to demonstrate concern. This is harder than it seems, as we tend to lead with our disbelief and make comments like, "Are you sure you remembered that right?"

4. Expect to Hear Confusing Stories

Many victims have been so traumatized by their spouses that they struggle to remember the horrors they faced or fail to present them logically. Victims of abuse tend to tell circular stories with missing details. Because of this, they can be labeled as unreliable or overemotional. Oppressors, on the other hand, tend to be smooth, deceptive talkers (Ps. 55:21; Prov. 26:23). Focus on the content of what is shared, not the presentation. Recognize that you will likely need twenty conversations with a victim before you gain clarity on her situation.

5. Remember That Abuse Is the Opposite of God's Design

One of God's great purposes in marriage was to picture the relationship between Christ and his redeemed people forever. As such, marriage should be characterized by humility, love, service, and gentleness. Oppressors live out the opposite of God's design for marriage. They pursue their own self-interests through a pattern of coercive and punishing behaviors. To see if this is the case in a particular situation, identify with specificity what behaviors occur in the marriage. Remember, God calls us to expose the deeds of darkness (Eph. 5:11), so seek to unearth how oppressors use physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual violations to control their spouses.

Consider Our Calling

Within the walls of Reformed churches are many oppressed spouses, but they largely remain unseen. Perhaps they are like Rebecca and do not recognize that they are being abused. Or maybe they know something is off, but they are afraid to ask for help because they fear disbelief from the church or punishment from their spouse.

God calls us to care for the vulnerable in our midst. To do this, we must first see them. My hope in introducing you to Rebecca is to show how we can be misled by the outward appearance of a marriage and by how a marital problem is first presented to us. To counteract this, I want you to learn more about those you are helping. Try to spend time alone with a potential victim to learn more about her story. It is essential to learn about the specific person in front of you.

We also struggle to see abuse because we cannot imagine the distorted idolatry of an abuser. Hence, I provided an overview of an abuser's underlying idolatry because I want to alert you to the general patterns of abuse.

If I could encourage readers to do just one thing for the sake of the vulnerable in their pews, it would be to learn more about the dynamics and impacts of abuse. We need to understand the darkness if we want to be wise helpers who bring the hope of the gospel to hurting people. □

The author counsels and teaches with the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation and is the author of [Is It Abuse?](#) (P&R, 2020).

Notes:

1. Some situations are so dangerous and intense that it is imperative to get professional counselors, domestic abuse experts, or law enforcement involved right away. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 if you need immediate help or advice.

2. Men may also be victims of domestic abuse. However, abuse statistics show that men abuse women far more than the other way around, so the examples I use reflect the prevalence of female victims.

MY STORY OF BEING SET FREE FROM ABUSE



NAGHMEH (ABEDINI) PANAH // **From the moment that I became a follower of Christ as a child, my life was centered around God. As an adult, I experienced incredible darkness in an abusive marriage, but God has always proved faithful. He has delivered me.**

My family moved from Iran to San Jose, California, in 1986 due to the war in Iran. We were Muslims. As a result of what I witnessed in Iran, I had many questions about God and why God would allow so much suffering. My Muslim family did not know who Jesus was. Soon after we entered America, I was told of Jesus and his great sacrifice. I learned that Jesus had died on the cross so that I could have eternal life. Having heard of such a great love of God, I could not hold my own love back (1 John 4:19), and Jesus made me his follower at the age of nine.

A Muslim Convert

Soon after conversion, I was given a Bible, but my parents took it away from me. My father was so angry about my conversion that he considered moving us back to Iran and back into the dangerous war zone because, he said, becoming a Christian was worse than dying in the war. In God's providence, we ended up staying in the United States and my parents started read-

ing the Bible that they had taken away from me. A decade later, they both became followers of Christ. Praise God!

In high school, Jesus was all that I could think of. Partying or dating did not interest me. Every free moment that I had was spent on my knees praying for my parents' salvation, but at the same time I could not wait to leave home and go to college in order to be able to freely read the Bible and go to church. My college years were spent in Bible studies, evangelizing on campus, and going to church whenever possible. I was a pre-med major and planned to become a missionary doctor, but in my last year of college I sensed God calling me to go back to Iran to share the gospel.

Ever since I was a young girl, I had believed that the solution to the conflict in the Middle East was the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, soon after September 11, 2001, while other people were canceling their flights and there were rumors of war in the Middle East, I booked a flight to Iran. After arriving,

I began sharing the gospel with family members and relatives. A few of them became followers of Christ. That was a cause for rejoicing!

The Beginning of Abuse

In Iran in 2002, I met a very charismatic man who seemed to have the same passion for Jesus and evangelism that I did. How wrong I was! Having never dated, I was naïve, and my emotions were easily manipulated. Though I was guarded from the outside world, I did not anticipate the deception and manipulation that could come from inside the church, where I felt safe and where I easily accepted anyone who called themselves a Christian. It was not until years later that I learned many might claim to be Christians but not know Christ (Matt. 7:21–23).

Almost from the moment I met my husband, his abuse started. At first it was subtle and hard to pinpoint. He began questioning my relationships with my parents, siblings, and friends. Over time, he isolated me from

everyone I knew, until my relationship with him was the only relationship I had. The belittling was especially subtle. It started with criticism of my looks and the way I dressed. Soon I began questioning my own judgment and started relying on my husband as the head of the family for every decision. Uncritically, I assumed that submitting to my husband was what a godly wife was supposed to do. Not surprisingly, he was soon controlling everything.

In the first year of our marriage, 2005, the beating started. We had just fled Iran due to intensified persecution and landed in a nearby country. Arriving late at night at an apartment, I was exhausted. Scrambling through my suitcase for my nightgown, I was making a mess. My husband looked at me with anger and pointed out the mess that I was making. I said something like “who cares,” and before I knew it, I was being kicked and punched all over my body. Afterward, I was black and blue with huge bumps on my head. I was at that time pregnant with our daughter.

A Twisted View of Marriage and of God

My husband was the only man I had ever been with, and I took my marriage vows seriously. I believed strongly that God hated divorce and, with a child coming into the world, I saw myself bound to my marriage for life. After that beating, I walked around on eggshells, knowing what he was capable of. In this way, my husband achieved what he wanted: complete control over me. I was bound up in fear and in emotional and social captivity. Subsequently there were a few near-beatings, but I knew better than to resist and submitted before it got worse. As the years progressed, his violence included my parents, my pet, and objects around the house.

From the beginning of our marriage, my husband was often absent. He was restless and did not like staying around for very long. The times he was around were dark and filled with abuse, so it was a relief when he would

leave. He claimed he needed to travel to do ministry. Later, I learned that those trips were filled with partying, porn, and womanizing. While he was gone, I stayed behind and worked, as the sole provider for our family. I was even responsible for funding his trips. My husband believed that he was a “Levi” and should only do ministry.

I had become a slave in our marriage, feeling that life was being sucked out of me. I was like a dead person walking. When my husband was home, I was afraid to show any emotion. If I cried, he told me that I was trying to manipulate him with my tears. If I showed concern about his behavior, he told me that I was being angry. He treated even laughter harshly.

Before my marriage, I had a thriving relationship with Jesus. Having come boldly to Iran, by the grace of God, I had not denied the name of Christ even when guns were pointed to my head and I was told to deny him. Yet at this point, eight years into my marriage, I barely read the Bible anymore. I barely prayed, because I had a wrong understanding of God. I believed that God required this kind of marital submission from me and that he prioritized the institution of marriage over the safety and well-being of the wife and children. I could not pray to that kind of a God. He seemed so similar to the god of Islam that I had come away from. What drew me to Christ when I was a Muslim was his great love and kindness to me, yet because of the marital abuse I endured through the misrepresentation of Christ, my view of God had become twisted.

“God Set Me Free”

In summer 2012, my husband traveled to Iran. I called him one night from our home in the United States only to discover that he was with another woman. For the longest time, I had closed my eyes to the possibility of adultery in our relationship. I was devastated. I cried out to God and questioned why he would allow this pain in my marriage for the rest of my life.

Soon after that prayer, my husband was arrested and put in prison in Iran.

I did not see the imprisonment as an answer to prayer but only as another painful trial that I had to endure. I began three and a half years of advocacy to get my husband out of prison, including speaking three times before Congress and meeting with high government officials. Our story received national attention. Then-President Obama even flew to my city and met with me.

During this time, I prayed much and began reading the Bible again seriously. The more I read the Bible, the more I rediscovered God’s great love for me and my identity as his beloved child. I also began to realize just how much I feared divorce—I feared that it would mean that I was damaged goods and useless in the hands of God.

After years of imprisonment, my husband gained access to a smartphone in prison and began contacting me. Through this communication, I realized that he had not changed for the better. Instead, he had become even more abusive and paranoid. He accused me of stealing his fame through my advocating for his release. He saw me as his enemy. When he was released from prison in 2016, I asked him to repent of his abuse and adultery, but he refused and divorced me instead. What had been my worst fear—being divorced—was God setting me free!

God set me free in order to serve him and has enabled me to put my focus back on him and teach my two children to do the same. Since then, God has blessed me and the children with true joy and peace. My children are flourishing and growing in their faith, and God has enabled me to re-dedicate my life to Christ. May all praise, glory, and thanksgiving be to him for his abundant love and mercy to me in Christ. □

The author is a member of Calvary Boise Church (Calvary Chapel) and director of the Tahrir Alnisa Foundation. Photo courtesy of The Idaho Statesman.

A LAWYER'S PERSPECTIVE ON SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE CHURCH



RICHARD L. GUIDO // What are the church's obligations when a member of the church reports sexual abuse against her by a family member, another member of the church, or by a church officer? A survivor of sexual abuse comes to the church as one of Christ's lambs whom the church has an obligation to nurture and protect.

(See John 21:15–17.) And the church's ministerial responsibility is not only to her, but also to the alleged abuser and to the entirety of the congregation. (Although men may also be victims of abuse, this is less common, and this article will reflect this.) The church may also have important obligations to the civil magistrate and others outside the church. The church, then, must carefully take into account all these ministerial relationships and external obligations as it deals with reports of sexual abuse.

Internal Church Investigation

The church's investigation must be thorough, sensitive, and confidential. The church should acquaint itself with the particular characteristics of sexual abusers, some of which may mislead and disarm investigators. It will be most helpful if the church has developed a policy beforehand to deal with cases of sexual abuse.

The church's first impulse may be to seek to achieve reconciliation with-

in the church itself (using, e.g., Matt. 18:15–19), but the church should be wary of rushing into this before other steps have been taken. The essence of biblical reconciliation is personal interaction between brothers and sisters in Christ. Given the nature of the harm suffered by a survivor, and the power inequality between survivor and abuser, however, their further interaction, especially at this early stage, may do more harm than good.

The church's investigation must also recognize that, to the survivor, it is an ordeal. She is called upon to reveal the most sensitive things to men having religious authority over her.

The church will also have ministerial obligations to the accused. Allegations of sexual abuse have important family, economic, and reputational ramifications. The accused also has rights that must be respected, including a presumption of innocence. The church must therefore act with care and confidentiality in hearing his side

of the case.

Of course, the other members of the church must also be of compelling concern to the church as it investigates reports of sexual abuse. The church has a duty to warn, even as it endeavors to preserve confidentiality.

Government and others may be helpful allies. The church may need to reach out to police, legal counsel, professional counselors, health professionals, social workers, private investigators, and child protective services. In this sense, the church may be more a coordinator of help to the survivor than the sole provider of help.

If an employee of the church is implicated in the complaint, the church should provide notice to its insurance company without delay.

In the case of sexual abuse involving children, the church will have a legal obligation to report abuse to state authorities. Failure to do so is punishable by law. There is not a general legal duty for churches to report other

domestic abuse, though many states do impose that duty on medical personnel if they discover injuries evidencing abuse.

The costs to the church and to the survivor in proceeding further are other important considerations, especially if outside civil litigation is recommended. Will the church consider helping the survivor with such expenses? Diaconal help? Help in locating an attorney for her? Another key issue concerns state statutes of limitation, which impose time limits within which claims for legal redress must be brought. In some states these begin to run only when a victim becomes able to recall and appreciate the consequences of an abuser's action, not when the abuse actually took place.

The Immediate Steps

If the church determines from its investigation that the survivor is in danger, it may need to take immediate steps to keep her from further harm. This may mean isolating her from her abuser, as difficult as that may be, especially if the accused is a church officer or a spouse or other family member. If relatives or friends of the survivor are not available, the church may offer a pre-selected "foster family" within the church as a haven. Providing meals and childcare may also be undertaken. The survivor may also take action under her personalized domestic violence safety plan, if she has one. This may include such things as changing locks in her home, opening new bank accounts in her name alone, obtaining new credit cards, making sure she has copies of car and house keys, and relocating to pre-selected and undisclosed emergency locations using predesignated evacuation routes.

The church may also recommend that the survivor seek a protective or restraining order from a court. These take many forms under state law. In general, they temporarily prohibit an abuser from having contact with the survivor, and sometimes her children, except for specified reasons. They may sometimes

be obtained on an emergency and confidential basis without prior notice or hearing. Violations of protective orders may subject the abuser to arrest.

Formal Church Discipline

Having completed its investigation, a church may decide to proceed with formal church discipline against an abuser. (The church should, however, avoid confronting an abuser in the courts of the church until the survivor is ready for it.) In such a case, the church acts in its name against an individual for the preservation of the church's purity, peace, and good order. Church discipline is thus unlike a criminal case, where the state acts to preserve public order and to punish wrongdoing. It is also unlike a civil action, where an injured party seeks monetary compensation for her injuries. Church discipline sanctions may include admonition, rebuke, suspension from office and the Lord's Supper, deposition from office, and excommunication from the church.

Nevertheless, formal church discipline may be problematic until other remedies have been thoroughly reviewed. Criminal and civil remedies provide means of punishing an abuser or compensating the survivor that the church does not possess. Church disciplinary action may also prejudice privileges that might otherwise be claimed in a civil or criminal proceeding and may risk involvement of the church in later outside legal proceedings.

Criminal Action

The church may recommend that the survivor proceed with a criminal action against her abuser. In a criminal prosecution, a public matter, the civil magistrate and not the survivor brings the case. The state also bears all the costs involved. In order to obtain a conviction, a prosecutor will have to establish, beyond a reasonable doubt (the highest standard of proof in the law), each element of the crimes charged under the state's penal code. Examples include sexual assault, sexual battery, false imprisonment, kidnapping, domestic vio-

lence, rape, sexual harassment, stalking, and indecent exposure. (Almost all states have removed marriage as a defense or exemption when one spouse accuses another of sexual abuse.) The prosecutor will undertake an exhaustive investigation that may require the survivor to relive her ordeal. If there is a criminal trial, the accused will have the constitutional right to confront and cross examine the survivor.

A matter of concern to churches may also be the "clergy-penitent privilege," a privilege that exists under the laws of every state. Under this privilege, a minister may not be compelled to reveal a matter disclosed to him by an accused who comes to him in confidence as his spiritual advisor.

The length of imprisonment for sex crimes under state law may range from up to one year for misdemeanors to life imprisonment for the most serious felonies. An abuser may also be required to register as a sex offender. The accused will have a right of appeal. The ability of the government to appeal is much more limited.

Civil Action

A survivor may seek monetary compensation for her injuries in a civil action against her abuser, whether or not criminal proceedings are commenced. Some Christians may have a scriptural concern about Christians going to law against one other (1 Cor. 6:1-2, 5-6). However, the Scripture's concern appears to be vexatious lawsuits involving trivial matters. Lawsuits in themselves are not proscribed. In cases involving great personal damage and intentional wrongs, many commentators agree that Christians may rightly seek redress from other Christians in the civil courts.

One advantage of a civil lawsuit is that the survivor (the "plaintiff") maintains control of the case against the abuser ("the defendant"), not a state prosecutor as in a criminal case. Civil actions, however, are expensive, time-consuming, require the assistance of experienced legal counsel (often on a

contingency fee basis), and are not always successful. The defendant may also bring counterclaims, like defamation, against the plaintiff and provide defenses, like the survivor's consent. The defendant may also compel her to be deposed, to answer written interrogatories, to undergo an examination by a physician picked by him, and to turn over documents, such as tax returns, bank account information, and prior medical histories. Further, "rape shield" laws, which prevent an accused in a criminal case from introducing evidence of a survivor's previous sexual behavior or reputation, have more limited applicability in civil cases.

The standard of proof in a civil case is a preponderance of evidence, lower than the standard in a criminal case. The survivor or her abuser may

appeal a court's adverse judgment.

Civil actions may be undertaken not only against the abuser for his own intentional misconduct but also against others for their negligent conduct, such as an abuser's employer (for negligent hiring or supervision) or the owner of the premises on which the abuse took place (for negligent failure to maintain a safe premises). The distinction between intentional and negligent harm is also significant from a church insurance standpoint. Church liability insurance generally does not cover or provide a defense for intentional harm caused by an insured. It is for this reason that many churches have purchased optional coverage that does address church liability for sexual misconduct by its agents.

Damages for personal injury, post-traumatic stress, pain and suffering, loss of consortium, lost wages, or emotional harm may be recovered. It is important to note that in a civil action, the survivor of sexual abuse must be able to prove not only that the abuser committed the act but also the extent of her injuries. (In a criminal case, the state must only prove that the abuser committed the prohibited act. The survivor's injuries need not be proven.) The survivor's emotional and psychological injuries may far outweigh the severity of her physical injuries. Yet these kinds of injuries are often difficult to prove.

A key issue is whether the defendant has sufficient assets to pay a civil

judgment. Further, an award of damages by a court does not necessarily mean a survivor will actually receive that compensation. The survivor must still record and "execute" on the court's judgment. This may entail still further time and expense involving seizures of assets by local law enforcement and wage garnishment orders from the court.

Out-of-Court Settlements and Confidentiality Agreements

It is not unusual for sexual abuse claims to be settled out of court. Out-of-court settlements are legally binding contracts between a survivor and her alleged abuser that avoid further legal process. The survivor receives compensation; the alleged abuser neither admits nor denies misconduct; and the parties pledge to hold in confidence the alleged abuser's identity, his conduct, and the settlement itself. Out-of-court settlements thus have benefits to the parties: publicity is minimized and settlements may be arrived at relatively quickly and with less expense.

However, non-disclosure provisions in out-of-court settlements are highly problematic in sexual abuse cases. They are built upon secrecy—and abusers feed on secrecy. Further, there is often a power differential between the survivor and the abuser: he may have the ability "to buy her silence." Most egregiously, secret settlements put at risk others who might have been protected had the matter been made public. Confidentiality obligations may also limit what the church may later be able to do in terms of disciplinary action and in warnings to the congregation.

Conclusion: The Church Is Vital

Unlike the courts and the civil magistrate, the church has the power of the gospel: the hope and means whereby sinners may repent and be reconciled as Christian brothers and sisters. But the resources of government and the courts may be necessary to aid its ministry, punish wrongdoers, and compensate victims. As churches seek to act wisely,

Resources on Abuse for Churches and Victims

Compiled by OP pastor Daniel F. Patterson

Called to Peace: A Survivor's Guide to Finding Peace and Healing after Domestic Abuse, by Joy Forrest. Blue Ink, 2018. Joy's story of abuse will both help victims to recognize abuse and point them to Jesus. Called to Peace Ministries provides Christ-centered counsel and help to individuals who have been impacted by domestic abuse, as well as victim advocate training at www.calledtopeace.org.

Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused, Brad Hambrick, general editor. B&H, 2019. This book seeks to outline best practices for handling various abuse situations. Online training can be found at www.churchcares.com.

Is It My Fault? Hope and Healing for Those Suffering Domestic Violence, by Justin S. and Lindsey A. Holcomb. Moody, 2014. This is a graciously written book for victims that both points them to Christ and gently helps them to know what they can do to escape domestic abuse.

The Heart of Domestic Abuse: Gospel Solutions for Men Who Use Control and Violence in the Home, by Chris Moles. Focus, 2015. Written by a batter interventionist and pastor, this explores the controlling principles of domestic abuse in the heart of the abuser and provides direction on what repentance should look like in an abuser.

The Emotionally Destructive Marriage: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope, by Leslie Vernick. Water-Brook, 2013. This book addresses the dynamics of emotional abuse and helps victims assess emotionally abusive behaviors.

THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO ABUSE



AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT B. NEEDHAM // William Shishko, pastor of The Haven, OPC, in Suffolk County, New York, here interviews OP minister and Navy chaplain Robert Needham, coauthor of [What to Do When You Are Abused by Your Husband: A Biblical Perspective](#) (2003; republished 2018).

WS: How did you come to write *What to Do When You Are Abused by Your Husband: A Biblical Perspective*, coauthored with Debi Pryde?

In January 2002, I taught a counseling course at Westminster Seminary California. Part of the material I used was on wife and child abuse and proper responses to it by counselors and by the church. (I had encountered many domestic abuse cases during my years as a Navy chaplain.) One of my students, Debi Pryde, not only told me that I should put that material into print, but also helped me to do it and gave me substantial input and ideas as well.

WS: You have called the toleration of domestic abuse “the great scandal of the evangelical church.” Why is that the case?

Three particular reasons: First, our Lord desires compassion, and domestic abuse robs the most helpless, the most vulnerable, and the most needy of Christ’s ministry. Failure to deal biblically with abuse puts the most vulnerable people at risk. Second, it is largely

ignored or denied in churches of all stripes—liberal, conservative, and everything in between. Third, when domestic abuse is admitted, the victim is often punished, and the guilty abuser is rewarded. This should not happen in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

WS: What are some big mistakes that church leaders make when they learn of domestic abuse within the congregations they serve?

This is not an exhaustive list and not in any particular order:

1. Not believing or taking seriously the words of the abused. This is particularly a problem if the abused doesn’t have physical evidence, such as severe bruises or lacerations.
2. Failing to immediately begin to investigate the matter carefully.
3. Failing to protect a wife and children when the husband finds out he has been reported.
4. Failing to understand that an abuser develops a public persona of a “great guy”—a reasonable, cheer-

ful, pleasant person. The mind of deceit in an abuser is phenomenal. Often, abusers have a high profile in the church; unwary church leaders can easily be misled by this. An abuser can out-manuever an entire session, especially at first.

5. Thinking that the abuser only needs fine tuning of minor marriage problems and not a major overhaul.
6. Thinking that the abuser’s tears of remorse and saying “I’m sorry” are equal to genuine repentance.
7. Failing to notify legal and civil authorities when mandated by law. Abusive behavior brings the abuser into the civil sphere of authority, not just the church’s sphere of authority. The church cannot punish criminal behavior.
8. Failing to realize that dealing properly with abuse situations may take months or even years. A wife herself may have allowed the abuse to go on for a long time without reporting it because she was afraid, ashamed, heartbroken, and fearful.

[Continued on page 18]

A MESSAGE TO THE WORLD: WELCOME TO THE FEAST!

// ALBERT J. TRICARICO



Everybody loves a feast. Delicious food. Good company. Interesting conversation. What is not to love about being with friends and sharing a meal? With that in mind, who can be surprised to see food imagery in the Bible used to picture the blessings of the gospel?

The world is invited to eat and drink freely: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1). Jesus names himself the “Bread of Life” and calls thirsty people to come to him and be satisfied (John 6:48; 7:37). And what did the angel tell John to write down? “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9).

Food and occasions for eating and drinking provide powerful metaphors for all God’s kind provisions in the gospel. His provisions are rich. They are abundant. They satisfy the longings of the soul. Like a good meal, they give joy to those who come and taste.

The Lord has placed more than thirty organizing pastors, church-planting interns, and regional home missionaries across North America as banquet hosts. Their calling is to welcome hungry people to a gospel meal where they can be nourished and refreshed in Christ. From Pasadena, California, to Farmington, Maine, mission works and their church planters are serving rich and delightful food (Isa. 55:2) for all to receive and enjoy for the blessing of their souls.

Jesus taught about God’s provision and the role of banquet hosts in what we call the “Parable of the Great Banquet” in Luke 14. This chapter of Luke’s gospel actually records three food stories: one historical account of a dinner party and two parables about dinner parties that Jesus told while he was at the party. So, they are lessons about parties, given at a party. It is the second parable that delivers the invitation, in verses 12–24.

A Generous Invitation

The host in the parable invited a lot of people to a feast and then had food prepared for those he was sure would come. When the feast was ready, with everything in place, the notice went out. The time had come for the guests to arrive.

But they wouldn’t come. They made their cases, but they were not good ones. A new field, some new animals, and even a new marriage did not provide acceptable reasons to miss a party that was carefully prepared just for them. Theirs were weak and offensive excuses. The dinner guests who listened surely felt the offense, as Jesus described the situation.

The servant reported back, and the master became angry. These guests had blown him off with no regard for the investment he had made for their comfort. All the effort to provide generously for them—wasted!

The parable is not really about food, of course, as much as we all love to eat. It is about God generously inviting people into his home. The invitation is sincere. It is universal. Preparations have been made. All are now welcome to enter the fellowship of God’s family through faith in Jesus Christ, the only name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Our Call to Invite

As God’s nourished people, we all ought to think much about God’s welcome to sinners. Do you? Do you think deeply about your place as a member of God’s household and a guest at his table? Are you glad to be a child of God? Do you often reflect on all that God has given you in Christ—your loving Savior who gave his life for you, is always present with you, helps you, provides for you, protects you, guides you, and will one day bring you to heaven, a place of never-ending joy and fellowship with him and all his children?

Do you want others to join the family and enjoy all the blessings that come with faith in Jesus? Then please do extend

the invitation. Imagine thirty-one thousand invitations going out to our neighbors in 2021. If invitations are given at the rate of one for every member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church for the year, the number is reached. You can more than imagine it. Raise the goal to two per member. How about three?

God is a generous host who has called us all to join him in welcoming the world. We do join him by supporting our missionaries at home and overseas. Let's keep doing that while we directly participate in God's hospitality by inviting people to the feast. The food is delicious and full of spiritual nutrients that our malnourished world desperately needs.

Jesus's parable continues with a broad delivery of the invitation. When the first invitees declined, the poor and crippled and blind and lame were invited. Yet there was still room (v. 22). So "the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled'" (v. 23).

That is strong language. *Compel* them. Not force them or drag them, but urge them, persuade them, invite them, and surely welcome them. The master's house must be filled with hungry souls ready to eat and be satisfied. The food is ready. There is room at the table.

The gospel invitation is broad and generous. While there is time, there is hope for the world. But there will not always be time. While all are invited, not all will accept the invitation. There is a tragic note at the end of the parable. We all do well to hear it and receive the urgent call to make Christ known. There is much at stake.

A Shocking Exclusion

Jesus told this parable as a warning not to invite familiar and wealthy people to dinner with the hope of getting something in return. It is better to invite the poor, crippled, blind, and lame. Blessings will come precisely because they cannot repay. Rewards will be given later when the just are raised (vv. 12–14). For now, be generous without the expectation of return.

This created an awkward moment. Jesus told the host not to invite the very people he had invited. The guests were there, listening to Jesus speak! One oblivious guest blurted out, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" (v. 15). Jesus's banquet parable was given directly to him, and, through him, to the others who were there.

Will that day be a blessed feast? Not for everyone. There will be people who imagined themselves there but who will be excluded because they did not accept God's welcome. The

Home Missions Today

For up-to-date news and prayer requests, receive our newsletter by emailing HomeMissionsToday@opc.org. New editions: January 6 & 20 and February 3 & 17.

The Parable of the Great Banquet

Luke 14:12-24

He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

invitation to come is generous. It is also urgent. Here is the chilling conclusion: "For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet" (v. 24).

There are many in our day who think things are well, when they are not. Or they think things are lousy but have no idea how to cope with the problems of the world or trials they face. They are feeding on ideas and patterns of conduct that seem to satisfy, but do not. They are making "a wretched choice," as the hymn goes, "and rather starve than come" ("How Sweet and Awesome Is the Place").

They are starving even as they lay aside the invitation to feast. It is our privilege to deliver the invitation to come and eat. This is the age of welcome. Let us support the welcomers we send and extend God's welcome to our neighbors. Invite the world to "taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8). Welcome to the feast!

The author is associate general secretary for the Committee on Home Missions.

THE DIFFERENT FACES OF HAITI'S CHURCHES

// BENJAMIN K. HOPP



Flyboats bring passengers to the island of La Gonave

How long does it take you to get to church on Sunday? Half an hour? An hour? More? Less? We may have different routines and even different challenges when it comes to getting to worship, but we all have the same goal—to worship and praise our Savior.

A Two-Day Trek to Worship

For me, getting to the island of La Gonave to preach is a two-day trek. On Saturday morning, I head to the public wharf, which is a mile from the Kaliko mission home, to catch a flyboat (better known in the States as a speedboat). Waiting is a significant part of the trip—there are no scheduled voyages to this island of one hundred thousand inhabitants. The ferry comes from La Gonave and heads back once a day. Flyboats go back and forth until early afternoon.

I wait for a flyboat to arrive, and then I wait for it to be deemed full enough to leave—usually when it's loaded with about twenty-five to thirty passengers. Once we're away from the wharf, we might have to bob up and down in the middle of the strait a few times as the crew removes plastic bags and other trash from the propeller blades. The flyboat ride takes anywhere from forty-five minutes to an hour. When the boat arrives at the Anse-à-Galets wharf, I wait for everyone to pile off the boat with all their stuff, and then I get off. Then I wait for a ride to take me to where the Kawasaki Mule is stored—the mission's vehicle for transport on the rough roads of the island. Lots of waiting!

Once I have the Mule, I need to prepare it for the trip out to the

churches. It is dusty, so I have it washed at the local car wash. The men scrub it clean by hand and rinse it with a power washer, using water stored in fifty-five-gallon drums. La Gonave's roads continue to deteriorate, so I ensure that the tires are properly inflated and that I have enough diesel to get up to the churches and back. The Mule's ready, but the wait continues!

Now my focus turns to the guesthouse. I purchase fuel for the small generator, and get it up and running so I have electricity. I pump water into the storage tank on the roof so I have running water to the kitchen and bathroom. Then I make supper, have a quick shower, and head to bed.

The next morning is Sunday, and the wait is finally over! I head out to the churches shortly after 7:00 a.m. In an hour or two, I will finally be with the saints. Is all the waiting and preparation worth it? Absolutely! What a joy it is to meet the Lord together with the saints, to preach the good news of Jesus Christ, and to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. Even though the travel and all the associated waiting may be hard, the end result is a blessing. Once the services are over, I head back to town and do the trip in reverse. I arrive back at the Kaliko mission house on the mainland on Monday morning. I do this trip every other weekend to be with the saints on La Gonave.

Driving to Worship in Port-au-Prince

On the weekends that I'm not on La Gonave, I worship with my family at the Port-au-Prince church plant. Getting there is a very different story. We remember well how poor the highway conditions were when we arrived in Haiti in 2007. Potholes and speed bumps meant a jarring trip. Some areas would flood, making for a slow ride through deep puddles.



The Kawasaki Mule in the car wash

But by 2011, the highway was redone with good drainage, and they even painted lanes on the road. The trip went from an hour-and-a-half hardship to a much easier one-hour trip.

These days we get up on Sunday morning, have breakfast, pray, and are on our way by 8:00 a.m. An early coffee keeps me alert—a necessity because crazy drivers are out in force. The roads are smooth, but the traffic is challenging. People often pass even though they see oncoming traffic. We are forced to brake and pull off on the shoulder. Motorcycle drivers are some of the worst offenders. They drive the wrong way into oncoming traffic, and constantly cross in front of you at the last minute. Buses hog the middle of the road at top speed. We give them a wide berth. The stress of the drive is not exactly conducive to good preparation for worship, but the trip is a lot shorter than it is to the island churches!

Different Churches, the Same Christ

Externally, the church in Port-au-Prince and the churches on La Gonâve look very different. The congregation in Port-au-Prince gathers under a large, vaulted ceiling in a space that typically holds between sixty to seventy-five worshippers. There is a platform at the front with a pulpit where fellow missionary Octavius Delfils and I lead worship. A musician plays a keyboard off to the side. We have a sound system and fans. The congregation is relatively young with plenty of high school and college students sitting on the benches. Some come with their Bible and Haitian hymnbook, but books are hard to keep in good condition because of the heat and humidity, so many use apps for the hymnbook and Bible instead. During worship, big trucks pass on the road outside, and there is plenty of noise from the surrounding capital city of nearly three million.

In contrast, the Nan Mangot church on La Gonâve is serenely nestled in the mountains about two hours outside of the main town. A literal cow path leads off the main road up to a small, wood-framed shelter covered in tarps that provide



Worship on La Gonâve

shade from the sun and protection from the rain. No trucks, no cars, no street noise out here. The small congregation of twenty sits on narrow wooden planks singing praises to God from memory. There are no musical instruments, just their voices. They sing forcefully and the strains of their songs hang in the air. There are a few older widows in the congregation, and even one family with three generations worshipping the Lord. I am always reminded of Psalm 45:17: “I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore nations will praise you forever and ever.”

But are these two different churches actually poles apart? Through faith we can see that they are spiritual kin who serve the same Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The saints faithfully worship their king week by week. They celebrate the Lord’s Supper. New members and infants are baptized. It is not about the attendance numbers here or there, but rather about the gospel-transformed hearts of the believers. The apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:18 that “the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” These saints are all living stones being built up into a common spiritual house. They are a holy priesthood offering acceptable sacrifices to God through the gracious work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It doesn’t matter how easy or difficult it is to get to these churches. It doesn’t matter what kind of roof the saints have over their heads. The gospel that is preached is the same. Their sacraments are celebrated according to Jesus’s command, just as yours are. In the prayers of the people, even though they use a different language, you will hear a word that sounds familiar: *Jezi* (Jesus). They are your brothers and sisters in Christ. *Senyè Jezi Kris*, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the one who protects us on our way to worship and who gives us strength to sing and glorify him whether we are many in number or few, whether we are under a tarp or in a building. Where do you worship? What does your trip to church look like? In the end, we all worship before the same throne of grace, giving our praise and honor to the same Lord Jesus.

The author is an OP missionary in Haiti.



Celebrating a baptism and three generations of Christians

What’s New

// Comings/Goings

The Rev. and Mrs. Mark E. (Jeni) Richline and their children, Julia and Isaiah, returned from Montevideo, Uruguay, and began their two-month furlough at the beginning of January 2021.

SOME ADVICE TO PREACHERS ON PREACHING

// THOMAS E. TYSON



Thomas and Jean Tyson celebrating their 62nd anniversary earlier this year

Be-coming a pastor of a congregation is truly an awesome responsibility and a challenge with broad implications. What can I say in the space of one brief article that might prove to be particularly on target and might actually help ministers or licentiates as they embark on, or persevere in, this venture? As I think about this task in light of not only what the Bible says about it, but also what I have learned myself over the years, I want to focus attention on one facet of the pastoral ministry: preaching. Yes, pastors will need to be shepherd, counselor, teacher, model, leader, disciplinarian, and more. But *preachers* they will most certainly be—they will prepare and deliver many sermons.

Let me make very clear that I am not saying, “do what I have done, and you will be a good preacher.” I have preached altogether too many bad sermons, but I did receive helpful advice from sessions, congregations, and other preachers who encouraged me in the task. When invited to critique what I was doing, they didn’t hesitate, and what they said has stuck with me over the years. So, permit me to identify in this article at least three things in particular that I believe ought to characterize preaching.

Preaching Is God’s Means of Communicating His Message to the Hearers of Sermons

When men preach, they speak for God. That’s why they do well to not concentrate on talking about what men think about the topic under consideration—this view and that, this explanation and that. They will listen to the text of Scripture, and say *that* to the church they serve. Preaching is not just verbally conveying information. It’s not teaching data, even data that’s true. There is a place for that: seminars, Bible studies, Sunday school lessons, testimonies—yes, even books. But preaching is something special, and it is unlike every other form of communication. In a sermon, God is talking to his

people! Now, admittedly, that is an overwhelming thought! What about all the sin, all the weakness, all the error that clings to the preacher? All I can say is that God has determined to deliver his message this way, in spite of the cracks in the vessels.

That’s why, when preachers preach, they should do so using the second person plural. In the preaching of biblical sermons, God is talking to the hearers, and their name is “you.” Preaching is what the people in the pew need to hear and obey—and they should be addressed by their proper name: “you.” And, that’s exactly why preachers need to use that second person plural, time and again in their sermonizing. They need to say to their hearers: “this is what you need to hear God saying to you.” This is no *grammatical* piece of advice that I give—it’s a matter of the most serious consequence. Without it, preachers will make it very easy for the congregation to escape what’s happening: God is speaking to them.

Preaching Is God’s Means of Communicating His Gospel of Grace Through His Son, Jesus Christ

The Bible is not so much *about* Jesus Christ. It is the very Word that *is* Jesus Christ. To understand the difference between those two sentences, one needs to understand the basic outline of the Holy Scriptures. The first part of the Bible consists of Genesis 1:1 through 3:15. The second part consists of Genesis 3:16 through Revelation 22:21.

Now, how would you characterize those two main parts of the Bible? How about this: the first is the covenant of works, broken by Adam and Eve, with the resultant condemnation of all their posterity, and the need, therefore, for a Deliverer. The second is the covenant of grace, whereby God provides that needed Deliverer, and applies his saving grace to a worldwide church. And do you notice the common denominator? Yes, it is Jesus Christ himself! So, you don’t need to search for him in the Bible—he’s everywhere! Every text of Holy Scripture speaks of him, in one way or the other, and it

is the job of preachers to draw attention to him in every one of their sermons.

If they're preaching on any verse or verses in the first two and a half chapters of Genesis, they're going to call their hearers to confess their need of Jesus, and to respond in faith and obedience. Whatever else they might say, they will not fail to do *that!* Then, if they're preaching on any verse or verses in the rest of the Bible, they're going to call their hearers to trust in that Deliverer, Jesus, and him alone for salvation. They won't make the mistake of dividing the covenant of grace in two, between Malachi and Matthew. The Judaizers in the church of Galatia tried that route, and the apostle Paul condemned their effort in a very potent and hard-hitting epistle. There's only one covenant of grace, and it's the same in both the Old and the New Testaments: not Jesus plus circumcision, baptism, church attendance, minimum law-keeping, or anything else—it is Jesus *only*. Paul put it this way in his first letter to Corinth: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). And preachers realize that there was no New Testament yet when the apostle said that. He was referring to the Old Testament, and he said that he received the gospel message from *that* source—the old, yet new, covenant of grace.

Preaching Must Be Worked At with Care and Diligence

So far, in this article, I've been talking about the content of sermons. Now just a word or two about their delivery—and that starts with the preacher's work in the study. Right here I find myself a bit out of step with some of the homiletical advice in recent books and articles. It seems that one major thrust today, in the area of preaching, lies in the direction of the preacher's opening himself to the activity of the Holy Spirit in the pulpit and in the preaching moment. Consequently, composing the wording of a sermon ahead of time is discouraged—it is thought to restrict and actually interfere with a much freer presentation of it. It is better to get away from a prepared script, and to open oneself to the Spirit's movement to freshen and therefore create a more effective delivery of the sermon.

Now, please don't misunderstand me—I wouldn't want to see any preacher so bound by a written sermon that he totally loses not only eye contact with the congregation but also heart contact with them. But I do want to affirm that the Holy Spirit of God is as much present in the pastor's study as he is in the pastor's pulpit. Let that Spirit guide the sermon-preparer as he reflects upon God's text and upon what he wants delivered to his people, and let the sermon-preparer make sure he is ready to do *that* on Sunday.

When I began preaching sixty years ago, I took very skimpy notes into the pulpit, because I thought that I was ready to work out the delivery on the spot with effectiveness. It wasn't long before I realized that that way of going about

Introducing the Grace Internship Fund

by David Winslow Jr.

The Committee on Christian Education recently established the Grace Internship Fund. The fund's specific purpose is to be a financial blessing to smaller OP congregations that need help funding the pastoral internships that are vital to the ongoing life and development of our church.

A donor, wishing to honor the memory of a sister in Christ already resting with Jesus, suggested this idea to the committee. Our general secretary, Danny Olinger, field-tested the concept during the past two years and found that there were indeed churches that could certainly use the extra help that the Grace Internship Fund is intended to provide. The fund will be administered by the Committee on Christian Education's Subcommittee on Ministerial Training and managed professionally by the same advisors that serve the OPC's ministerial pension fund.

The fund has a long-term perspective. This means that only market gains and income, as well as up to 10 percent of the principal (depending on the needs) may be used in any given year to assist with internships. The Committee on Christian Education welcomes additional gifts from churches and readers of *New Horizons* to the Grace Internship Fund.

preaching was not only sometimes embarrassing but, more importantly, it failed to feed the flock and to glorify the Great Shepherd. A brother minister said, "Tom, you need to write out your sermons ahead of time!" I tried it, and have been doing it ever since. At first, I suppose it looked like I was reading them, and I was—but in time I learned how to have the sermon on the podium without being chained to it.

Preachers are not going to be ready to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, if all they've done is satisfy themselves that they understand, in general terms, the text they've selected. They need to think deeply about how exactly *this* text applies to *this* congregation, and then decide how they are going to preach that. Now, if they can do it without writing it out ahead of time, I would say, "Go for it!"—but to do that, one must be especially gifted! And if they can write it out, but not take it into the pulpit, and still "deliver the goods"—that would be fine, too.

But whatever method is employed, preachers need to work every week toward *this* end: that the sheep hear their Good Shepherd's voice, are challenged by hearing his voice addressed to them by their proper name, and meet their redeemer Jesus Christ, who is himself the Word made flesh.

The author is a retired OP minister who served as the general secretary of the Committee on Christian Education.

[Continued from page 11]

WS: Many pastors have had little or no experience counseling abusers. What pitfalls should they avoid?

1. Assuming that this is just another case of marriage counseling. It's not. You can gravely endanger a woman in a domestic abuse situation by simply telling her to be more submissive. Remember that abusive men have under-the-radar lifestyles that will not be immediately apparent.
2. Only hearing the wife's story while the husband is present. A woman knows that she will get it "in spades" when she gets home if she speaks freely about abuse in the presence of her husband.
3. Meeting with the abused wife as a counselor without having another person present as a witness—preferably a godly older woman, such as an elder's wife. Women often communicate differently than men, and having another woman in the conversation may help a pastor to better understand the wife's story.
4. Failing to recognize that the requirement of two or three witnesses (see 2 Cor. 13:1) usually can't be met in abuse situations *initially*. Children, for example, will rarely testify against their fathers. You must wait on God to provide confirmation. I have never seen him fail to provide corroborating witnesses.

WS: What are the marks of true repentance in an abuser?

An abuser will admit that he is guilty of abuse. He won't just cry and say he's sorry. He will then willingly agree to have the church leadership get involved in the situation so that he and his family receive help. He will not resist close dealings with his personal life. He will be willing to meet on a regular basis, that is, every week or every other week, with a prayer partner to whom he will be accountable. And he won't give up on this. He will also be willing to do a thorough study on biblical repentance

and to assess his life with that standard before him. He will demonstrate tangible, visible evidences of a repentant heart. A truly repentant person will bring forth fruits in keeping with his repentance, including accepting the leadership and direction of the session.

WS: What are some of the costs of dealing rightly with domestic abuse as a church?

Working with an abuse case is a long, drawn-out process. There are no easy solutions. Church leadership may divide over the various issues involved and how to handle them, especially if church discipline is involved. A pastor or counselor may lose support for pursuing a resolution that is biblical. Abusers may turn against the pastor or counselor.

WS: When should civil law enforcement be called in on a domestic abuse situation?

Churches should be aware of their state's abuse reporting requirements and follow them. Wives can be threatened in various ways by abusive husbands. Perhaps it goes without saying, but the threat, "I could kill you," must be taken seriously. The law should be notified, the abuser should be dealt with by the civil authorities, and the wife and children should be brought to a place of protection. Remember that the pastor or counselor may be the one threatened in a counseling session and may be the one placing the call to law enforcement.

WS: Discuss the procedures of church discipline in dealing with accusations of abuse.

The church leadership should immediately begin a process of careful investigation and examination, using the process of "two or three witnesses" (2 Cor. 13:1) with all due diligence. Generally, a godly wife will not object to this process, although the church should be sensitive to fears or shame that she may have. Follow Matthew 18:15–17 as a touchstone, remembering that the be-

havior of the accused in these confrontations will determine how to proceed.

Work carefully with the legal authorities who are involved. Ask them how you can be of help to them. They will appreciate that, and God will bless it. Don't assume that the legal authorities are bad guys who are out to persecute the church.

WS: How does child abuse affect the congregation as a whole?

First, as a matter of course, churches should take preventative measures for children's activities at church, such as a policy of having two or more people working with children and not leaving children unsupervised. Having these policies in place and engaging the congregation so that it participates in oversight and accountability is 50 percent of the battle. If abuse does occur (or is even alleged), the session must carefully consider how it will inform the congregation, and what its legal obligations are as it does so. This too can be addressed as part of the church's policy.

WS: How can churches best minister to the victims of domestic abuse?

In addition to any outside help, material and spiritual help from within the church can be a great blessing to victims. Abusers often cut off support when their spouses report them. The church should also develop a plan if the abuser is too dangerous for his wife and his children to live with; they may need to be housed at a far distance away from their current home. A church should have a well-thought-out plan for caring for minors who suddenly need help.

You will need a team to help the victim of abuse. Teach your deacons to meet material needs that will come up in abuse situations. Train godly women in your congregations to comfort abused women and guide them through the jungle of abuse. The abused woman should have a prayer partner whom she can trust, speak honestly to, and pray with. Finally, church leaders should be in constant prayer about abuse situations. □

JAN-FEB

Items pertaining specifically to February are in italics.



The Hacquebords



David and Lebo Bonner

1 **HEERO & ANYA HACQUEBORD**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for a larger worship space and a manse for a future Ukrainian pastor. / **MARK (PEGGY) SUMPTER**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southwest.

2 **ANDREW & REBEKAH CANAVAN**, Corona, CA. Pray for faithful and fruitful outreach to Corona Presbyterian's community. / Pray for Christian Education general secretary **DANNY OLINGER** as he directs the intern program.

3 Pray for **MARK & JENI RICHLINE**, Montevideo, Uruguay, as they report to churches during their furlough. / Active duty military chaplains **JOSHUA (STEPHANIE) JACKSON**, US Army, and **CORNELIUS (DEIDRE) JOHNSON**, US Navy.

4 **STEPHEN & FELICIA LAUER**, Wilmington, OH. Pray for new evangelism opportunities. / Associate **P. F.**, Asia. Pray for a wise and faithful witness as he teaches the last class of students at the university.

5 Home Missions associate general secretary **AL TRICARICO**. / Pray for yearlong interns **BEN PETERSEN** at Covenant Presbyterian in Abilene, TX, and **JOSHUA VALDIX** at Westminster OPC in Hollidaysburg, PA.

6 **MR. AND MRS. F.**, Asia. Pray that those in studies will be brought under the ministry of the church. / **ALAN STRANGE**, president of the board of trustees of Great Commission Publications.

7 **BEN & MELANIE WESTERVELD**, Quebec, Canada. Pray for the congregation as they move into a new church building. / **CALVIN & CONNIE KELLER**, Winston-Salem, NC. Pray that God would raise up qualified and willing officers to serve at Harvest OPC.

8 Yearlong interns **ANDREW (ANESSA) BEKKERING** at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, MI, and **ELIJAH (GRETA) DE JONG** at Faith OPC in Grants Pass, OR. / Yearlong intern **SETH (EVA) DORMAN** at Limington OPC in Limington, ME.

9 Pray for affil. missionaries **DR. MARK & LAURA AMBROSE**, Cambodia, as they minister to eight rescued girls living at a safe house. / **GREGORY REYNOLDS**, editor of *Ordained Servant*, and **KERRI ANN CRUSE**, video and social media coordinator.

10 **JAY & ANDREA BENNETT**, Neon, KY. Pray for evangelistic faithfulness and continued growth at Neon Reformed Presbyterian. / Missionary associates **DR. JIM & JENNY KNOX**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for contentment and faithfulness in working at JOY clinic during busy and slow seasons.

11 **CHARLES & CONNIE JACKSON**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for safety and security in their work and travels in Uganda. / Yearlong intern **DAVID (LEBO) BONNER** at Tyler Presbyterian in Tyler, TX.

12 **MICAH & EILEEN BICKFORD**, Farmington, ME. Pray for new visitors to come to Grace Reformed and for new opportunities to reach the lost. / **ARCHIBALD ALLISON**, chairman of CCE's Subcommittee on Internet Ministries.

13 **BEN & HEATHER HOPP**, Haiti. Pray for continued faithfulness of church members as they travel to attend worship during times of possible unrest and insecurity. / Home Missions administrative assistant **KATHARINE OLINGER**.

14 Pray for **DAVID (JANE) CRUM**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / Pray for stated clerk **HANK BELFIELD** and others preparing for the 87th General Assembly in Sioux Center, IA, July 7-14, 2021.

15 Associate missionaries **OCTAVIUS & MARIE DELFILS**, Haiti. Pray for the security of the missionaries and church leaders as they minister to the churches. / Yearlong intern **DAMON (ELISABETH) YOUNG** at First Church in Merrimack, NH.

JAN-FEB

Items pertaining specifically to February are in italics.



Tyler and Natalie Detrick

21 Affil. missionaries **CRAIG & REE COULBOURNE** (on furlough) and **LINDA KARNER**, Japan. / **GREGORY & GINGER O'BRIEN**, Downingtown, PA. Pray that God would bless Christ Church with additional families.

22 *Pray for Foreign Missions general and associate general secretaries* **MARK BUBE** and **DOUGLAS CLAWSON** as they report to the committee this week. / Pray for **CHRIS BYRD**, evangelist of Grace OPC in Westfield, NJ.

23 Tentmaking missionary **TINA DEJONG** and missionary associate **JOANNA GROVE**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the missionary children might find their joy in the Lord. / **SARAH PEDERSON**, proofreader for *New Horizons*.

24 Assoc. missionaries **JAMES & ESTHER FOLKERTS**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the Lord would raise up faithful Karimojong leaders. / **LARRY & KALYNN OLDAKER**, Sandusky, OH. Pray for growth in grace for Firelands Grace OPC.

25 Pray for assoc. missionary **ANGELA VOSKUIL**, Nakaale, Uganda, as she manages Karamoja Education Outreach. / **MIKE & NAOMI SCHOUT**, Zeeland, MI. Pray for God's blessing on the ministries at Grace Fellowship.

26 **BRADNEY & EILEEN LOPEZ**, Arroyo, PR. Pray for God's Spirit to direct and empower the witness of Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura. / **BILL & MARGARET SHISHKO**, Deer Park, NY. Pray that The Haven, OPC would continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.



Ryan and Rochelle Cavanaugh

27 **RYAN & ROCHELLE CAVANAUGH**, Merrillville, IN. Pray that the Lord would lead Mission Church in developing loving relationships. / **DAVID & RASHEL ROBBINS**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for refreshment as they finish furlough.

28 Associate missionaries **CHRISTOPHER & CHLOE VERDICK**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for grace and discernment in the management of clinic employees. / **JOHN FIKKERT**, director for the Committee on Ministerial Care.

29 **MATTHEW & LOIS COTTA**, Pasadena, CA. Pray that the Lord would provide strength to Pasadena OPC to endure the trials of COVID-19. / Yearlong intern **DUSTIN (AMYE) THOMPSON** at Trinity Presbyterian in Medford, OR.

30 Pray for **MARK & CARLA VAN ESENDELFT** and associate missionary **LEAH HOPP**, Nakaale, Uganda. / **DAVID NAKHLA**, Short-Term Missions coordinator. Pray for a missionary associate to help with English camps in Quebec.

31 **BOB JONES**, interim administrator for the Committee on Coordination. / **RON & CAROL BEABOUT**, Mifflintown, PA. Pray for the session at Grace and Truth OPC.

16 **TYLER & NATALIE DETRICK**, Dayton, OH. Pray for the outreach and evangelism of First Street Reformed this winter. / **MR. AND MRS. M.**, Asia. Pray for Mr. M's work in examining candidates for licensure and ordination.

17 Yearlong intern **JOSEPH (ANNIE) POLLARD** at Calvin Presbyterian in Phoenix, AZ. / **TRISH DUGGAN**, communications coordinator, and **SARAH KLAZINGA**, administrative assistant, for Short-Term Missions and Disaster Response.

18 *Pray for Foreign Missions administrative assistant* **TIN LING LEE** and office secretary **STEPHANIE ZERBE** as they prepare for committee meetings next week. / Home Missions general secretary **JOHN SHAW**.

19 Pray for affil. missionaries **JERRY & MARILYN FARNIK**, Czech Republic, as they teach biblical counseling courses in several cities. / Year-long intern **SILAS (ANASTASIA) SCHREYACK** at Merrimack Valley in North Andover, MA.

20 **DAVE (ELIZABETH) HOLMLUND**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Philadelphia. / Pray for **RETIRED MISSIONARIES** Cal & Edie Cummings, Brian & Dorothy Wingard, Greet Rietkerk, and Young & Mary Lou Son.

NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS

SERVICE OF RECEPTION FOR THE HAVEN, OPC

William Shishko

God greatly blessed the November 1 service of reception for The Haven, OPC. Grace Reformed Baptist Church of Merrick, New York, graciously allowed the use of their beautiful facility. The Presbytery of Connecticut and Southern New York had a special meeting to install Rev. William Shishko as pastor, to ordain and install John Vaeth as a ruling elder (in God's providence, in the very building in which he was baptized over thirty-five years before), to install Jimmy Brewer as a ruling elder, and to install Paul Toto as deacon. Rev. Al Tricarico preached from Luke 14:12–24, Rev. Ben Miller of Trinity OPC in Syosset, New York, charged the newly installed officers, and Rev. John Shaw charged the congregation. Thank the Lord for his rich blessing on this very special Lord's Day, and pray for the growth of The Haven, OPC in its outreach to gospel-needy Suffolk County, Long Island, New York.

MACHEN RETREAT AND CONFERENCE CENTER

Anne Jones

Machen Retreat and Conference Center (MRCC), located in McDowell, Virginia, is designed to be a place of retreat for the church. A ministry of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic, MRCC hosts Science Camp, Stronghold Camp, Labor Day Family Conference, Singles



At the reception of The Haven, OPC (left to right): Tom Harmon, Charles Oliveira, Lloyd Sterrett, Sam Chung, William Shishko, Dr. David Innes, Al Tricarico, John Shaw, Jimmy Brewer, Ben Miller, John Vaeth, and Paul Toto

Retreat, and Ladies Retreat. For twenty-five years, MRCC has connected individuals, families, and churches in a happy, God-centered environment.

Tax-deductible donations have provided for the maintenance and upkeep of this extraordinary place. Currently, MRCC is raising money to build new bunk beds. Materials for one bunk are \$300. Donations of other amounts are also appreciated. If you and your family have been blessed by your time at MRCC, please consider a contribution. For more information, visit machen.org or contact the director, Bennett Wethered, at director@machen.org. Our [Facebook page](#), [@MachenRetreatandConferenceCenter](#), provides information about conferences, work parties, and pictures of MRCC and the people who help make it the ministry it is today.

87TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY LOCATION AND DATE CHANGE

Hank Belfield

Due to ongoing restrictions and uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 87th General Assembly is rescheduled to meet at Dordt University in Sioux Center, Iowa, beginning with a worship service at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 7, 2021, and concluding no later than noon on Wednesday, July 14.

Please pray that our gracious God would be merciful to remove this health crisis gripping our nation and creating so many logistical challenges from the efforts to mitigate the spread of the virus. We sincerely hope no further changes will be necessary for the 87th General Assembly to convene in 2021.

THOMPSON ORDAINED AT CHATTANOOGA, TN

On October 30, 2020, Nick Thompson was ordained by the Presbytery of the Southeast and installed as pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Pastor Michael Waters preached from Jeremiah 3:15 on "The Giver and His Gifts." Pastor Zecharias Weldeyesus led in the ordination prayer, Pastor Wayne Veenstra gave the charge to the minister, and Pastor James Ganzevoort gave the charge to the congregation.



Science Camp at the Machen Retreat and Conference Center

UPDATE

MINISTERS

- On October 24, **Christopher I. Byrd** was ordained as a minister and installed as an evangelist at Grace OPC in Westfield, NJ.
- On October 30, **Nicholas J. Thompson** was ordained as a minister and installed as pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian in Chattanooga, TN.
- On November 6, **Tyler C. Detrick** was ordained as a minister and installed as an evangelist of Covenant Presbyterian in Vandalia, OH, to serve at First Street Reformed Fellowship in Dayton, OH.
- On November 6, **Adam R. Wells** was ordained as a minister and installed as pastor of Calvary OPC in Middletown, PA.
- On November 7, **Jeremy R. Allen** was ordained as a minister and installed as pastor of El Camino OPC in Goleta, CA.
- On November 13, **Charles B. Williams** was installed as pastor of Westminster Presbyterian in Corvallis, OR. He previously served as associate pastor of Bethel Presbyterian in Wheaton, IL.
- On November 13, **Robert S. Arendale** was installed as pastor of Redeemer OPC in Beaver Creek, OH.
- On November 13, **David B. Carnes** was ordained as a minister and installed as associate pastor of Lake Sherwood OPC in Orlando, FL.
- On November 20, **Curtis A. Molerterno**, previously pastor at Westminster OPC in Hamill, SD, was installed as pastor of Grace OPC in Wasilla, AK.

MILESTONES

- On November 17, **Meindert Ploegman**, 66, died after a severe fall. Ploegman was pastor of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Bohemia, NY.
- **Jay E. Adams**, 91, died on November 14. Previously an OP minister, Adams taught at Westminster Theological Seminary and Westminster Seminary California and founded the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation.

REVIEWS

Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms—Study Resource, edited by Peter H. Holtvliwer. Reformed Perspective Press, 2020. Hardcover, 4 volumes, \$70.00. Reviewed by OP minister Larry E. Wilson.

Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms is a commentary on the psalms, but much more. It calls itself a “study resource.” Its distinctive contribution is to show the Christ-centered focus of each psalm (cf. Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; John 5:39), along with its application to believers and the church in the new covenant era. And it does so exceptionally well, not by imaginative allegorical reveries, but by sound grammatical-historical and redemptive historical methods of interpretation and application that comport with good scholarship and a framework of sound doctrine. The introduction to the whole resource is so good that it could be published separately as a useful booklet introducing the book of Psalms. By the way, don't confuse this resource with *Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms—Devotional*, a single volume of daily devotions that reflect fruit from these studies.

Under the guidance of Peter H. Holtvliwer, a team of Canadian Reformed pastor-scholars worked together to study and distill how each psalm should be understood in its original context, including: how it fits into the book of Psalms as a whole; how it reveals Jesus Christ; how it applies to new covenant believers in Christ (individually and corporately)—for example, it has an excellent discussion of how the imprecations (prayers for God's curse) apply in the new covenant; how it relates to other Scriptures in the Old and New Testaments; and suggested occasions for its apt use in Scripture reading, preaching, singing, and counseling.

Its strong pastoral character makes it evident that it's written by pastors. But this resource is not meant to be limited to pastors. It's written in a very accessible, user-friendly style. Still, pastors will find it especially useful. For instance, when a pastor preaches a psalm, he'd do well to be

able to show how that psalm in its context specifically calls people to follow Jesus in faith, repentance, and newness of life today. When a pastor selects a psalm to read to the congregation in worship—or to be read by the congregation—he'd do well to make it clear how it fits appropriately at this particular point in this particular service. When a congregation sings a psalm, a pastor would do well to introduce it by showing its meaning and Christ-centered relevance to the worshipers, so that they can sing it with understanding. This resource is an outstanding help toward each of these ends.

In a nutshell, this resource suggests doctrinal, devotional, practical, and occasional uses for each psalm in a Christ-following, new covenant context. I can't recommend it highly enough. Even more, I urge that we try to serve the broader body of Christ and seek to stimulate her gospel renewal and biblical reformation by not allowing this superb resource to remain hidden under the basket of our small Reformed circles, but by making it widely known—even gifting it out—throughout the broader body of Christ.

Domestic Abuse: Recognize, Respond, Rescue, by Darby A. Strickland. P&R, 2018. Paperback, 56 pages, \$3.00. Reviewed by OP elder Joseph W. Smith III.

When was the last time you heard an explanation of the bramble story in Judges 9? How about some solid biblical teaching on domestic abuse? If you're like me, your response is, “Maybe never.” Darby Strickland manages both in this excellent booklet. Rather than “abuse,” Strickland prefers the more scriptural term “oppression.” She then provides tools to identify marital oppression—specifically, a series of pointed questions such as, “What happens when you disagree with your spouse?”



Correction

In the December issue, Mike Dempsey and Mike Lynch were incorrectly identified in a photo with Bill Gekler.

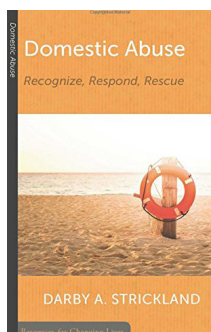
Presbytery of Southern CA Women's Retreat

April 9-11 • Idyllwild, California

- "Grace Gets More Amazing"
- Speaker: Valerie Elliot Shepard
- opcwomensretreat.org

and, "Do you ever feel fearful around your partner?" (5). Later, Strickland articulates seven common traits of oppressors, including their feeling of entitlement, desire to maintain control, and tendency to view themselves as victims (28). She likewise warns that abusive spouses often manipulate counseling situations to their own advantage, dominating the discussion while making it look like marital struggles are the wife's fault.

Strickland also lays out specific principles for assisting both victims (protecting, comforting) and oppressors (confronting, reorienting the heart). One of her most vital recommendations is patience, as the process of disentangling can seem to take forever. Best of all is the author's frequent use of Scripture, including Ecclesiastes 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:14, and Psalm 69.



Most powerfully, the brash, bragging bramble in the parable told by Old Testament figure Jotham (Judg. 9:7-15) is presented as a textbook example of oppression. Rather than providing protection and shade like the other trees, the bramble hurts, chokes, and threatens—and those who seek to rescue people from its clutches often find victims almost hopelessly ensnared in unyielding barbs. Strickland beautifully contrasts this thorny menace with Jesus, the genuine Servant-King who yielded control for our sake, and who also provides fruit, shelter, and protection. This serves not only as a refuge for suffering victims, but also a model for abusers, if and when they decide to seek a more Christ-like form of marital leadership.

***Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims*, by Darby A. Strickland. P&R, 2020. Paperback, 360 pages, \$11.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Daniel F. Patterson.**

Did you know that one in three women has lived through domestic abuse in her lifetime? Sadly, the statistics in the church are no better, and women in the church regularly report that their pastors and church leaders dismiss, minimize, and sometimes even cover up domestic abuse. Darby Strickland's new book *Is It Abuse?* not only provides clear and comprehensive insights into the dynamics of domestic abuse, but is also a clarion call to the church



New Church Plant in Wisconsin

Monroe County OPC, previously Kendall Evangelical Free Church, recently became a church plant of the Presbytery of the Midwest under the oversight of Five Solas Church (Reedsburg, Wisconsin). Please share this information with any in the Tomah, Wisconsin, area who might be interested in visiting. The church is also seeking a pastor. Contact elder Dave Rischette at (608) 387-3415 or Rev. Christian McShaffrey at mcschaffrey.1@opc.org for more information.

and its officers to take abuse more seriously than it has. *Is It Abuse?* is intensely practical, stunning in scope, and gracious in tone.

The book has a three-fold goal of equipping helpers to: pick up on cues that something is wrong by outlining the dynamics of oppression; patiently draw out stories so helpers can get clarity on whether abuse is occurring; and provide Christ-centered counsel while navigating the complexities of abuse (16).

Strickland helps the reader understand oppression, uncover oppression, and then uphold the oppressed. Using the biblical language of oppression alerts the reader to the reality that when we talk about abuse, we are not simply describing physical abuse. In fact, the entire second part of the book gives church leaders and helpers the tools to assess whether physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual and/or financial abuse may be occurring in a relationship. This is accomplished through the use of at least nine inventories—lists of questions—that seek to assess everything from the entitlement mentality of abusers to the tactics that emotionally abusive spouses use to control their victims.

Foundational, however, to understanding oppression is the recognition that abuse occurs when "one spouse pursues their own self-interests by seeking to control and dominate the other through a pattern of coercive, controlling, and punishing behaviors" (24). Though oppression can take many forms, the goal of the oppressor is always the same: "to punish and wound a victim so that an oppressor gets their world the way they want it" (24). Oppressors are not, therefore, fundamentally out of control, but rather seek control

Position Available

Pastor: Rockford Springs Community Church in Rockford, Michigan, is seeking a new senior pastor. This medium-size OP congregation is located about fifteen miles north of Grand Rapids. We are a well-rounded church in age and backgrounds, searching for a gifted preacher and teacher of the Reformed faith and practice to shepherd us to a greater maturity in Christ and reach out to our community. If interested, please send resume and letter of interest to our search committee at baasscott@gmail.com.

NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS *Continued*

by any means. Oppressors hurt not *because* they've been hurt, but because they want to shape their world exactly the way they want it to be and because they believe they are entitled to such a world (34). This means that oppression isn't a marriage problem that can be remedied through marriage counseling. It is a control problem, a problem that says, "I demand. I am owed. I have the right to insist. What I want matters the most" (63). Simply put, oppressors have a worship problem.

Though Strickland spends many pages describing the dynamics of the oppressor, her heart is clearly for the oppressed because God's heart is for the oppressed. In coming alongside the abused, Strickland encourages us to slow down and be patient. Most victims of abuse will not initially come to us pastors or elders for counsel about abuse, but rather for counsel about anxiety, depression, or even how to be a better spouse. Many victims know that something is not right, and they need people who will patiently sit with them and draw out their stories. Rushing to conclusions and solutions may very well push them back into a situation that is dangerous. Helping the oppressed navigate their abuse "is usually a slow and deliberate journey—one that cannot be rushed" (44).

It is hard to overestimate the contribution Strickland has made to the church in this volume. Saturated with biblical wisdom and years of experience, *Is It Abuse?* helps pastors, counselors, and laypeople understand the gut-wrenching dynamics of abuse and lead those who have been abused to rest and freedom. The church will no doubt be drawing from this book's wisdom for many years to come.

***The Creaking on the Stairs: Finding Faith in God Through Childhood Abuse*, by Mez McConnell. Christian Focus, 2019. Paperback, 240 pages, \$10.31 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP pastor Calvin Golliger.**

In the foreword, Rosaria Butterfield says that this is the most disturbing book she has ever read, and also that she cannot recommend it highly enough. After reading the book for myself, I can only agree with her on both points.

This really is a disturbing book. Drawing from memories of his own childhood, Mez McConnell gives us a hair-raising glimpse of the evil of abuse. At certain points, I noticed my face wincing, my heart pounding, and my gut twisting. I do not recommend that anyone read this book casually, or just before bed.

I do recommend that you read it, though, for several reasons. First, it powerfully communicates the basic message of the Bible. The author interweaves his own story with the biblical story that involves all of us. The book will leave you aching for the goodness of God's creation, weeping at the tragedy of human sin, humbled by God's majesty, silenced by his mercy, and rejoicing in hope for his redemption.

Second, this book is focused on Christ. One of the chapters is entitled "Consider Jesus" (from Hebrews 12:30; the whole book could fit under that title). Full divinity, true humanity, amazing compassion, innocent suffering, righteous judgment—this is the vast terrain in which the author

considers the subject of abuse. In particular, the sufferings of Christ for us are described with a vividness both piercing and refreshing. It seems to me that this is one of the ways that God has brought good out of the terrible evil in the author's life.

Third, this book shows the meaning of the gospel for both abuse survivors and their abusers, and it does so with amazing grace and gritty realism. There are no easy answers here, no band-aids, no hollow pieties. There is just the truth that we all

(like abusers) deserve God's judgment, and that we all (including abusers) can hope in God's mercy. This point is fraught with difficulties, and the book navigates most of these well. At a couple points, though, it seems to take the line that "all sins are equal." This sentiment contains enough truth to be attractive, but its logical conclusion is

an unbiblical moral insanity. The Larger Catechism rightly counters it with an insistence that some sins "are more heinous in the sight of God than others" (Q. 150). In the context of this book's consistently biblical and realistic perspective on sin, though, this is but a minor misstep in a field that is often filled with major blunders.

Church leaders should be sure to read the interviews at the back of the book, as well as the chapter "What do we mean by 'childhood abuse'?" These real-life scenarios and clear definitions will help you to prevent abuse and also to prepare for the day that an abuse survivor or even an abuser will ask you to help them consider Christ.

