



Pastoral Care



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From the Editor

An essential aspect of pastoral care is encouragement. In 1972—a Christian for a little more than a year—I was attending The Bible Institute of New England in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. I was asked to preach at the annual meeting of the board of directors. I was scared blue since I had almost no experience in preaching and had always feared public speaking before becoming a Christian. So, I decided to help myself by preaching on encouragement from 1 Samuel 30:1–31. I reflect on this passage in *Servant Thoughts*: “Encouragement for Leaders: 1 Samuel 30:1–31.”

Along these lines I recently received two unsolicited articles that look at different aspects of pastoral care. The first is Wayne Veenstra’s “The Value of a Study Break for Pastors.” Until recently sabbaticals were almost unheard of in the OPC. More common was a study week that was added to the month of vacation in a pastor’s call. Veenstra helpfully discusses the value of an annual week or two devoted to study.

The second article is one I would never have thought of. So, kudos to Deacon Tim Hopper for sending me a lecture he gave to his presbytery, “Promoting Happy Pastors.” It is clearly one of a deacon’s main tasks to relieve pastors of the temporal necessities of ministry, such as caring for the poor and needy, as we see in Acts 6, leaving the pastor to his central tasks of preaching and praying. But now this article proposes a very positive form of encouragement for pastors.

Alan Strange nears the completion of his commentary on the Form of Government with chapters 28 and 29. The thoroughness and wisdom of this work should benefit generations of OPC ministers to come.

Joel Fick reviews *The Pastor: His Call, Character, and Work* by the Faculty and Friends of Old Princeton. Bringing the best of Princeton’s famous nineteenth-century faculty into a single volume on the nature of pastoral ministry is a notable feat. Fick notes that the theme of the importance of genuine piety in the minister pervades the volume.

Shane Lems reviews *Augustine’s Theology of Preaching* by Peter T. Sanlon. One of the premier preachers of the ancient church, Augustine still serves as a model for preachers today. A highly trained master of rhetoric and a powerful theologian, he always sought to be understood by his diverse congregation.

Our poem “The Ministry of Angels” by Edmund Spencer (1552–99) reminds us that there is an invisible care for the whole church provided by our Lord through the angelic host. It is taken from Book II, Canto VIII, 1–2 of Spencer’s best-known poem *The Faerie Queene*, an epic poem celebrating the Christian chivalry during the Tudor dynasty and Elizabeth I. One of the greatest English poets of his age whose greatest influence was Virgil (70–19 BC), the great Roman poet of the Augustan Age.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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- “Ministerial Study.” (J. W. Alexander) 1:3 (Sep. 1992): 69–71.
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- “Fatigue in Christian Ministry – Its Causes (and Cure).” (Lawrence Bilkes) 12:2 (Apr. 2003): 32–33.
- “Taking Care of Your Pastor.” (Chad Van Dixhoorn) 16 (2007): 47–50.
- “Sabbaticals for Pastors.” (David VanDrunen) 18 (2009): 93–97.
- “Pastors Need Care, Too.” (Charles M. Wingard) 29 (2020): 136–39.

Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

Servant Thoughts

Encouragement for Leaders from 1 Samuel 30:1–31

by Gregory E. Reynolds

When I was attending the Bible Institute of New England in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, in 1972, I was asked to preach at the annual meeting of the board of directors. I was scared blue since I had almost no experience in preaching and had always feared public speaking before becoming a Christian. So, I prayerfully decided to help myself by preaching on encouragement from 1 Samuel 30:1–31.¹

Discouragement is one of the great plagues of Christians and especially church officers. Life is full of discouragements, but officers in the church are acquainted with trouble, grief, and care more than most. Often in our congregation, perhaps in yours, officers feel a bit of “battle fatigue.”

During his exile David was rejected by the Philistine army as they marched on Israel. David had been given charge of the Philistine city of Ziklag where he lived (near the western border of the tribe of Simeon). Originally, he had left to fight with the Philistine army but had to turn back, only to find his home, Ziklag, destroyed, and the women and children kidnapped by the arch enemies of Israel, the Amalekites. “David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep. . . . David was greatly distressed . . .” (vv. 4, 6). There was certainly reason to be very discouraged. But how did David respond?

I. Our Heavenly Father Orders Our Lives to Teach Us to Seek Encouragement in Him

First notice how the Lord kept David from great folly. Loyalty to the Philistine chief Achish, who gave David temporary refuge from King Saul, made him willing to attack his own people. He also left his home in Ziklag unguarded. Then the Lord allowed the plunder of Ziklag in order to draw David to trust him in the worst of circumstances. The lesson was learned: “David strengthened [KJV encouraged] himself in the LORD his God” (v.6). He did not first seek a human solution. That came second, because the Lord uses secondary means (“second causes” WCF 3.1, 5.2) to achieve his sovereign purposes.

As a type of Jesus Christ, the Messianic King, David is in royal training. Here he seeks direct guidance from the Lord through the high priest Abiathar as to what to do. This lies at the heart of Messianic obedience. “Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart”

¹ This article is based not only on the original sermon preached to the board of directors of the Bible Institute of New England but also on a revised sermon preached at Amoskeag Presbyterian Church in Manchester, New Hampshire on May 14, 2010.

(Ps. 40:7–8). “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34).

In the midst of trial and discouragement we grow in Christ-likeness: “we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:28–29).

This same Son, the Lord and king of his church, wants his officers to find strength in him. Paul is a great example of this regarding his thorn in the flesh, which is unidentified so that we may identify our own thorn. “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9).

II. Our Loving Covenant Lord Is Himself the Ground, Source, and Reason for All Our Encouragement

David went to the source of encouragement by exercising faith. The first thing he did was to seek the Lord in prayer. In our frenzied lives we take too little time for this. While not all depression and discouragement are due to a lack of faith, we should wonder how much is? Look at Nehemiah under attack for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. “For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, ‘Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.’ But now, O God, strengthen my hands” (Neh. 6:9). “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:6–7). He did not seek from men what he could only receive from God. Sometimes we unwisely seek wisdom first from human counselors.

Here is a lesson for officers in dealing with criticism. In verse 6 the people blamed David for what had happened and wanted to stone him. Since he had left Ziklag unprotected, there was some truth to their criticism. But in their great “distress” the people looked in the wrong place for a solution. David did not. Faith is only as good as its object. So, David trusted in the “LORD his God” (v. 6). Note well this name of God. The unique covenantal name Yahweh (“LORD”) coupled with the general name for the sovereign-creator God is the exclusive source of encouragement and strength in trouble. Why is it exclusive? Because the Lord of the covenant of grace has established a unique relationship with his chosen people through the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, the God-man. So, because the Lord has favored us, we may be utterly confident as we trust him amid trouble. David’s God and ours is not a distant sovereign, but an intimate friend. David was as confident as Job that this God was *his* God. “Though he slay me, I will hope in him” (Job 13:15). The Lord wants us to love him above all as David says elsewhere, “The LORD is my portion; I promise to keep your words” (Ps. 119:57). And Jeremiah in the midst of his heart-rending lament over Israel’s idolatry, “‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him’” (Lam. 3:24).

Look at the ultimate goal of our trials: the New Jerusalem:

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. . . .

its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” (Rev. 21:3–4; 22–23)

This reality, known only by faith, alone can penetrate the sadness and darkness of a fallen world.

III. Our Lord Encourages Us to Make Us Fruitful

David’s example is a call for us to encourage others in the Lord as they face various trials and troubles. We must be an example to others of how we face discouragement. This is Christ’s work through us by the power of his Spirit. Paul understood that his afflictions were part of a learning process to teach him to encourage others.

Blessed be the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Cor 1:3–4)

Facing trails in this way also helps us in waging spiritual warfare as Paul knew. “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Cor 10:3–4). The Puritan Thomas Brooks counsels us to “answer all temptations with this short saying ‘the Lord is my portion.’” The enemy in 1 Samuel 30 is the Amalekites. Amalek was the sworn enemy of the Lord: “The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Ex. 17:16). This reminds us of the Lord’s declaration of war on the serpent in Eden (Gen. 3:15). The Satanic forces of history may only be defeated by the warrior Lord.

How central to encouragement is Scripture, the Word of God. Judas and Silas, “who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words” (Acts 15:32). “For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged” (1 Cor. 14:31). David, of course, lived in a period of redemptive history different from ours. He sought direct guidance from the Lord through the high priest (v.8) and was an author of Scripture. Now Scripture is complete. The Ziklag story is now part of Scripture and thus useful for encouragement as Paul told the Roman church, “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). The preached Word is central to the church’s encouragement.

The Word refers to Jesus as “the consolation of Israel” (Luke 1:25). “Consolation” is the same Greek word for the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete, the Encourager (*paraklēsin* παράκλησιν). We must give people Jesus and the hope of his Gospel, “that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ” (Col. 2:2). The Gospel and the Christ of Scripture are our greatest encouragement.

Obedience must accompany encouragement. As pointed out above, David coupled the encouragement of the Lord with his commitment to sanctification: “The LORD is my portion; I promise to keep your words” (Ps. 119:57). “[W]e exhorted each one of you and

encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12).

This passage also calls us to encourage our fellow officers, ministers, elders, and deacons in the Lord. One of the beauties of biblical Presbyterianism is the plurality of leadership. Ministers of the Word do not minister alone but with a session of ruling elders. Deacons meet as a diaconate and regularly with the session. As those who bear the burdens of the congregation as well as the frustration and quandaries of their own ministries, officers are especially subject to discouragement.

Shoulder to shoulder in ministry it is easy to forget that we need mutual encouragement. To the Roman church Paul said, “For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine” (Rom. 1:12).

David encouraged the exhausted two hundred men (vv. 10, 21–23), like the parable of the laborers in Matthew 20:1–16, a parable of the kingdom of heaven, reminding us of Christ’s unmerited favor. Barnabas (lit. “son of encouragement”) was an encourager (*uios paraklēseōs* Υἱὸς Παρακλήσεως, Acts 4:36; 9:27) who encouraged Paul. No one can encourage everyone, but everyone can encourage someone. Resolve to “Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18).

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ServantCare

The Value of a Study Break for Pastors

By Wayne M. Veenstra

Every congregation that gives its pastor a week or two each year for study is making a great investment—and I want to congratulate congregations that do so. The investment I am talking about is pastoral study breaks; and, at the risk of sounding self-serving, on behalf of my fellow pastors, I want to express how helpful it is that a congregation grants its pastor(s) regular study breaks.

In my own call, the church has granted me two weeks of study break each year. Whenever I return from one of these study breaks, people will ask me about them. Admittedly, most occupations do not get study breaks (when is the last time the tradesman or stay-at-home mom got a study break?), and so study breaks are unfamiliar to many in our churches. So, you might have questions: what typically happens on a study break? Why are they helpful?

The concept of a study break is fresh for me, since my most recent study break was mid-October of last year. Sometimes pastors will get out of town for study to allow for some more uninterrupted time. Shifting locations can sometimes help us turn our attention from ordinary routines to more focused study and planning. For my most recent break, we spent some time in Canada (where our families are located) and the rest at home since we now have our oldest daughter's school schedule to work around.

Typically, it takes a day or two to begin “shutting off.” I have typically had to press harder before the study break to tie up loose ends and then my brain is still thinking about pastoral concerns, to-do lists, and other projects. But then the rest of the time is spent reading, writing, planning, resting, and spending time with the family—all while resisting the urge to check my email or phone.

Though each pastor's study break is different, my own goal is to spend four to six hours per day on study related things. Some specific projects I have worked on in the past during my study break have included preparing an adult Sunday School class, pulling together small group leader training, planning a long-term initiative for developing a culture of disciple-making at our church, and studying for my next preaching series. On other study breaks I have chosen to focus less on specific projects and more on reading as much as I can to develop personally and as a pastor.

But why give your pastors time to do this sort of thing? Let me quickly suggest five benefits.

1. **The pastor gets to read and think.** On my study break in October, I was able to start and finish four books. I was also able to finish up another three books that I had previously started. Some of these books were read for leisure, others were read for

personal edification, and still others were read for specific church work. Being able to get away and read is an opportunity to help me grow.

2. The pastor can get some perspective on his ministry. When your weeks are stuffed with counseling appointments, meetings, and sermon preparation, you can lose sight of the “big picture” of ministry. What are our goals for this season? What things do I need to work on? What things do I need to begin planning for in the future? These are bigger vision and strategy questions that sometimes get lost in day-to-day duties. One important aspect of leading an area of ministry in the church is that you need to be able to think not only in terms of week-to-week responsibilities but also in six- or twelve-month intervals so that there is clarity on long-term direction. A study break can give pastors a time to provide clarity on ministry vision and strategy that can strengthen congregational ministry and support the ministry of congregational members.

3. The pastor can recharge, replenish, and have some fun before jumping back into the fray. Pastoral ministry is a great and demanding calling. I find that getting the chance to retreat, read, spend time with friends, and pray does wonders to restore energy levels that can be invested back into my family and church. Study breaks are useful tools to help your pastors persevere in ministry.

4. The pastor’s family gets to see him around in the evenings. An occupational byproduct of being a pastor is that your evenings are quickly filled up by evening appointments. This is understandable because most congregants are at work or school during the day, and so evenings are when a lot of meaningful pastoring gets done. The result is that the pastor is away from home several nights a week. A study break is a great gift to the pastor’s family because it means that they can have a week where dinners are unhurried, and the pastor’s family receive more focused attention. An important qualification for a teaching elder is how he leads and cares for his family. By encouraging the pastor to have some extra time with his family, the congregation is helping him to safeguard his ability to minister to his family.

5. The pastor gets to reset devotional routines. Yes, even your pastors can struggle with their personal devotions. At least I do. Having a week without meetings can give me some runway to reestablish some healthier habits of devotion. This is so important because pastors must be meeting Jesus in his Word if they are to lead the congregation spiritually.

For these reasons, I am grateful to my congregation for the support they show their pastors in granting us regular study breaks. I am so thankful for how they encourage us to take study breaks and how they inquire about them, without making us feel guilty for taking the time away from our normal labors. Speaking for my fellow pastors, we are blessed by this, and we hope that our congregation in turn is blessed through its pastors being sharpened and renewed for ministry.

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ServantReading

Promoting Happy Pastorates

By Timothy D. Hopper

A deacon has countless opportunities to bless his pastor and make his calling a joy. R. C. Reed said, “A good deacon is the pastor’s most valuable ally.” Here are fifteen practical ways to do that.¹

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. *Let them do this with joy* and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Hebrew 13:17)

To avoid friction between members, *to promote happy pastorates*, and to develop the grace of liberality, nothing is more important than a good deacon, one who can be patient, who can smile at unreasonable people, and speak a soft word to turn away wrath, one who is willing to give time and take trouble on himself, and make himself “all things to all men” in order to promote the interests of his Master’s cause. *A good deacon is the pastor’s most valuable ally*. Officially he is worth two good elders.²

1. Know the Flock

“I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name” (3 John 13–15).

Diaconal aid is easier when you know the people personally, face to face. You may start with small talk, but do not stop there. Aspire to know something you could be praying for for everyone in your congregation.

Recommended Reading: Ed Welch, *Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

2. Grow in Wisdom

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5). “Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty” (Acts 6:3).

¹ This article is based on a presentation given to the presbytery at Heritage OPC in Wilmington, North Carolina, on January 30, 2022.

² R. C. Reed, “The Deacon,” *The Union Seminary Magazine* 15.2 (1903): 215–24.

We learn wisdom by knowing Scripture and by reading good books about the truth of Scripture and its application. Ask God for wisdom in applying his truth to your life and ministry. Surround yourself with wise saints and learn from them.

Recommend Reading: *Letters of John Newton* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2007)

3. Befriend Your Pastor

“May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.” (2 Tim. 1:16–18)

Since pastoring can be a lonely calling, deacons have a unique opportunity to encourage the pastor. Take care to discover the unspoken needs of your pastor and his family.

4. Speak the Truth in Love

“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another” (Eph. 4:15).

The diaconate provides many opportunities to encourage, admonish, and counsel. A deacon must have the wisdom, courage, awareness, and love to make the most of these situations. Remember 1 Corinthians 13 and Ephesians 4:29—“give grace to those who hear.”

5. Promote Peace

“A soft word turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1).

Deacons often hear frustrations and complaints. How you respond to them will have a significant impact on your church. R. C. Reed says the deacon must be always ready to “speak a soft word to turn away wrath”; in doing so, you stop a cancer before it grows and bless your pastor and elders. Most of all, a deacon must not grumble and spread discontent by his own speech.

6. Guard Your Tongue

“Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued . . .” (1 Tim. 3:8)

John Lorimer in *The Deaconship* counsels us: “A deacon, to be relieved from the annoyances sometimes connected with the discharge of his duties, is tempted to put the poor off with insincere words—to say one thing to one man, and an opposite to another.” Fight this temptation.

Deacons should speak well of the session and support them. Consider the Larger Catechism on the fifth commandment (Q. 127).

Recommended Reading: John G. Lorimer, *The Deaconship: A Treatise on the Biblical Office* (1842).

7. Keep Your Word

“Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (Matt. 5:37).

John Lorimer on keeping promises in *The Deaconship*: “He is in danger also, perhaps, of promising to the pastor, and not fulfilling. This is justly fatal to character and to usefulness. It prevents confidence and creates contempt. The deacon, then, must be sincere.”

Diaconal work comes with many tasks that need to be done. You need a system to help you keep track. Do not build a reputation as one who does not keep his word. Recommended Reading: Tim Challies, *Do More Better: A Practical Guide to Productivity* (Cruciform, 2015).

8. Anticipate Needs

“Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear” (Isa. 65:24).

Our Father in heaven knows our needs before we even ask (much like we do our own children)! Be on the lookout for financial, physical, and emotional needs within the congregation; keep your ear to the ground. Look for things your session may have overlooked, and do them.

9. Spend and Be Spent

“I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls” (2 Cor. 12:15).

Our Lord came not to be served, but to serve. (Not to be deaconed, but to deacon!) The diaconate is an office of sacrifice and service. It is an opportunity to lay down your life and work tirelessly for the needs of the saints. Being a church officer is not convenient.

10. Communicate Clearly

“The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips” (Prov. 16:23).

Communicate regularly with your session (Form of Government 11. 5). Let them know of your labors and your struggles. Work together on common concerns. Communicate clearly with your congregation about your work and how they can work together with you. Learn to run a profitable deacon meeting, including preparing an agenda, moderating discussion, and keeping minutes.

Recommended reading: Alexander Strauch, *Meetings That Work: A Guide to Effective Elders' Meetings* (Lewis & Roth, 2001).

11. Delegate Duties

“Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you” (Acts 16:6).

Deacons do not have to do everything; in trying to do so, you remove opportunities for others to find joy in serving the Lord. Delegate anything inhibiting you from your core concern: carrying the poor, sick, and lonely in the body.

12. Manage Your Household Well

“For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Tim. 3:5). “But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided” (1 Cor. 7:33–34).

Giving yourself to Christ’s church is not at the expense of your family. You set an example to the congregation of family life. It will not go unnoticed.

13. Humble Yourself

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love . . . (Eph. 4:1–2).

Deacons, like elders, are to be examples of humility, “not domineering over those in your charge” (1 Pet. 5:3). Study the humility of Christ, who “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). Be open to advice and correction from your pastor and elders—and congregation.

14. Pray for Your Pastor

“[Pray] also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel . . . (Eph. 6:19).

All saints should pray for their pastor, deacons doubly so. Let your pastor know how you are praying for him.

15. Sit at the Master’s Feet

“But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her’” (Luke 10:41–42).

Do not let the business of diaconal labors distract you from the worship of God. Be diligent in your private, family, and public worship. Hide God’s word in your heart and meditate on it.

“We are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.” (Larger Catechism 117)

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Servant Standards

Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapters 28–29

by Alan D. Strange

Chapter XXVIII Ministers Laboring outside the Church

1. A minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church may under certain circumstances and conditions labor in churches other than those of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. A candidate for ordination who seeks or intends to labor in such a church may under certain circumstances and conditions be ordained by a presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Such labor may be distinctly missionary in its nature and purpose in that it may provide the minister with the opportunity of ministering the gospel to unbelievers and of promoting the cause which the Orthodox Presbyterian Church represents. Such labor may, in certain cases, be that of a pastor or of a teacher, presenting the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with the opportunity of providing other churches with a ministry which otherwise they might not enjoy.

Comment: Various circumstances may occur, and conditions may prevail, that prompt a minister of the OPC to seek to labor in a church other than an OPC. The same may be true for a candidate for ordination in the OPC, who has a call from outside the OPC. Perhaps examples of each will help clarify the rules here.

An OPC minister, for instance, may labor in a church in independency, or in some other denomination, that desires to be, in some measure, Reformed; not usually, however, in a congregation that is part of one of the NAPARC churches, as a man seeking ministry there would commonly simply transfer into one of those denominations. The minister in view here labors in that church, which remains, at least for now, outside the OPC, though the minister's credentials and accountability remain in some particular presbytery of the OPC.

Similarly, a licentiate, for the second example, could be called to serve in such a church as described herein and could be ordained by an OPC presbytery for such a purpose.

The FG reflects at this point that “such labor may be distinctly missionary in its nature and purpose.” This brings into focus that not only may a minister laboring outside the church do so in the context of pastoring another church (as noted, in independency or part of a non-Reformed body) but also in the capacity of an evangelist serving, say, in a nursing home, hospital, university, or prison chaplaincy. It is important, to use the distinctive language of this chapter, that OPC ministers “have opportunity of ministering the gospel to unbelievers and of promoting the cause which the OPC represents.” Ministers, in other words, are called not only to labor as pastors, teachers, and missionaries serving the agencies of the OPC, but they also may be called to serve in

other churches, teach in various Christian institutions, and do evangelistic work in other bodies, etc. In this way, the OPC can engage in official ministry beyond the bounds of its own churches and agencies, bringing a distinctly Reformed and Presbyterian witness that might otherwise be lacking in churches and agencies outside the OPC.

2. Although it is impossible to delineate all the practical circumstances and conditions under which it may be proper for a minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to engage in such labor, the following general principles based upon the standards of the Church must be adhered to in all cases:

a. Ministers cannot undertake to labor in other churches if such labor requires the performance of functions inconsistent with their ordination vows or with the other provisions of the standards of the Church. They cannot undertake such work if the relationship requires that they preach anything contrary to the system of truth taught in the Holy Scriptures or requires that they refrain from preaching the whole counsel of God. Such work cannot be undertaken if the relationship requires them to conduct worship that is not in accord with the standards of the Church. Ministers cannot participate in the government of such churches if such government is contrary to the principles of presbyterian government set forth in these standards. And such discipline as the relationship may require them to administer must be in accord with the principles of discipline set forth in these standards.

b. Ministers who perform such labor shall remain under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the churches concerned shall be advised of this fact.

c. Though the churches in which such ministers labor are in no respect under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the presbyteries and the general assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church shall always exercise oversight of the work being performed by such ministers, and shall take due care that the work being performed is consistent with the standards of the Church.

d. Ministers may act as pastors of such churches provided none of the foregoing conditions is violated in the assumption of such a responsibility.

e. Presbyteries cannot install ministers as pastors of churches other than those of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

f. If ministers are installed as pastors under other auspices, the installation must not be such as in any way prejudices the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church over them. Such pastoral installation cannot take place if the installation formula prescribed by the church concerned prejudices this jurisdiction.

g. The ultimate objective of all such labor cannot be anything less than the establishment of such churches as churches of Presbyterian and Reformed testimony, provided that the churches concerned are not already such. To make the objective less than this would be inconsistent with the profession and vows made in ordination.

Comment: The leading comment in this section reflects, importantly, the significant reality that it is impossible to detail all the circumstances in which it is permissible for ministers to labor outside the church. This means that the minister's presbytery will have to exercise discretion in his case. The rule here, arguably, should be one of charity on the part of the presbytery, not undue strictness. In other words, if a reasonable argument can be made for such outside labors, it likely should be granted to the minister seeking permission to do so. The section then proceeds, such discretion notwithstanding, to enumerate in letters a.–g. a set of general principles that must be adhered to in any case.

The first principle (a.) makes it abundantly clear that a ministerial member of the OPC laboring outside the church must do so in a way that is in keeping with his being a minister in the OPC, reflected particularly in his ministerial vows and the primary,

secondary, and tertiary standards of the church. This section is at some pains to detail this: ministers laboring outside the OPC cannot preach in circumstances that forbid them from preaching the whole counsel of God, especially as set forth in the doctrinal standards, which give expression to the system of truth taught in the Bible; they cannot conduct worship contrary to the standards, as set forth in the DPW; they cannot participate in government contrary to Presbyterian principles as set forth in the FG; and they cannot administer discipline in a way that is contrary to the principles set forth in the BD. Finally, a minister laboring outside the OPC must do so in a way that is fully consonant with his being a ministerial member of the OPC.

Section b. stipulates that ministers laboring outside the church remain entirely under the jurisdiction of the OPC, and those churches in which they labor must be made aware of this and, obviously, have no problems with such an arrangement. Further, section b. makes the presbytery having jurisdiction over such a minister clearly responsible for his oversight, as well as the general assembly, as much as if the man were laboring in an OPC, though he is laboring in a church that is not under the jurisdiction of the OPC. Section c. makes clear that this permission for a minister to labor outside the OPC goes as far as permitting a minister to labor as a pastor of a church outside the OPC. In doing so, however, all of the cautions hitherto noted that apply when an OPC minister labors outside the church must be heeded. Presbyteries of the OPC can only install ministers of the OPC into churches of that presbytery in the OPC, as section d. sets forth.

Men may be installed, per section e., to pastorates outside the OPC by other church bodies, but such installations may not adversely impact the jurisdiction that the OPC has over these ministers. More specifically, the language employed by the installing body may not prejudice the proper jurisdiction of the OPC, which is the burden of section f. In other words, such installations may not in any way compromise the ministerial vows and commitments that the minister has taken as an OPC minister. Ultimately, as section g. reflects, the objective of allowing a minister to labor outside the OPC is to encourage and enable those churches, if they have not already begun to pursue closer Reformed and Presbyterian identity, to do so. All of this is with a view to such churches on the outside coming into the OPC, ideally, or at least coming closer to doing so. For a minister laboring outside the church, anything less than this goal—for the church in which he labors to become OPC or at least more consistently Reformed—would be contrary to his ordination vows as a ministerial member of the OPC.

3. The principles of Sections 1 and 2 shall also apply to the relationship of ministers to nonecclesiastical religious organizations.

Comment: Everything said in the two foregoing sections applies not only to ministers serving in churches outside the OPC but also applies to ministers who are serving in or with religious organizations that are extra-ecclesiastical, i.e., that are not under the jurisdiction of any church at all. Perhaps a man in a pastorate resigns to take up a teaching position in the religion department of a non-denominational Christian college. He may well be permitted to do so by his presbytery; every provision of sections 1 and 2 shall still apply to him, whether he does that or takes up the pastorate in a local independent church that may be looking to come into the OPC.

4. Such ministers shall report at least once each year to the presbytery under whose jurisdiction they are. This report shall concern their ministerial activities, and shall include especial reference to the relationship of these activities to the interest and welfare of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Comment: Ministers laboring outside the OPC would not report to a local session as ministers laboring as pastors in particular OP churches customarily do. Since they are not accountable to any particularly local session, ministers laboring outside the OPC must report to their presbyteries annually instead. The reports are to consist of, naturally, all the ministerial activities in which they are engaged, particularly as those activities might pertain in some way “to the interest and welfare” of the OPC. An example of this might be a minister laboring in an independent church (or one of another denomination) in which his report would particularly highlight the interest in and efforts of that congregation in becoming a part of the OPC.

Chapter XXIX

Organizing and Receiving Congregations

A. Organizing Congregations

1. A group of believers, meeting regularly for worship on the Lord's Day and under the jurisdiction of a session or presbytery, and not yet organized as a separate congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, shall be denoted in the records of the presbytery as a mission work. Such persons may be enrolled as members of an existing congregation or as members at large of the regional church. The mission work may, with the permission of the session or presbytery, use the name Church in its publicity.

Comment: This section describes how a group of believers may become a recognized mission work of the OPC. Such a group may begin simply as a Bible study, perhaps led by a pastor or elder of a nearby OPC (or the regional home missionary or others in service of a sessional or presbyterial missions committee). The group functions under the authority of a session or presbytery. After they begin regular Lord's Day worship (generally the most immediate goal), they are denoted in the records (minutes) of the presbytery as a mission work. Those part of such a group may become members of a local church that has oversight of the work or, if the presbytery has such oversight, members at large of the regional church that is governed by the presbytery having oversight. The mission work, if it wishes to use the name “church” in its publicity (advertising, mailings, etc.), may do so with the permission of the session or presbytery that has oversight of it.

2. A group of believers may be organized as a separate congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church only under the supervision of presbytery. The presbytery of the regional church to which the congregation would most naturally belong shall have the jurisdiction in the matter.

Comment: Such a group as described in 1, above, may be organized as and become a separate congregation of the OPC, i.e., a particular church in its own right, only under the oversight and supervision of the presbytery. As to the question of presbyterial jurisdiction, it shall be vested with the presbytery that has been overseeing such work or with the presbytery of the regional church to which the congregation would most

naturally belong by reason of its location. If it has been under the oversight of a particular session, it would also customarily become a part of the regional church and be under the presbytery in which the session resides.

3. In organizing a mission work of an existing congregation as a new and separate congregation (church) the procedure shall be as follows:

a. The session shall designate a list of members for the proposed new congregation according to the preference of the members. This list shall become the charter roll of the new congregation.

b. The session shall call joint or separate congregational meetings of the continuing congregation and the mission work for the purpose of petitioning presbytery to organize the mission work into a new and separate congregation.

c. The session shall call a congregational meeting of the mission work for the purpose of electing ruling elders and deacons (Form of Government, Chapter XXV) and the calling of a pastor (Form of Government, Chapter XXII) to serve as officers of the new church.

d. When the above actions have been approved by presbytery, a service of recognition and installation shall be conducted by the presbytery or a committee appointed by the presbytery. At the appointed time the congregation shall be informed of the action of the presbytery and the moderator shall address to the members of the congregation the following question:

In reliance upon God for strength do you solemnly promise to walk together as a church of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God and the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?

The members shall answer in the affirmative by raised hand. After this the congregation shall be recognized as a new and separate church of the regional church and the officers shall be (ordained and) installed according to this Form of Government.

Comment: Section 3 and its subsections detail how a mission work of an existing congregation shall be organized as a new and separate congregation, i.e., how it shall become a separate congregation of the OPC. First, as section a. notes, it shall draw up a list of members, considering their own preference and consent, for the new and separate congregation being proposed. This list shall serve as the charter roll of the new congregation. Further, section b. notes, the session having oversight shall call a congregational meeting(s), either separately or jointly, of the church-planting congregation and its church plant, i.e., the mission work. This meeting shall be for the purpose of asking the relevant presbytery, by way of petition, to organize the mission work into a new and separate congregation. Then the session shall call a congregational meeting of the mission work for the purpose of electing ruling elders and deacons, in accordance with FG 25, and also for calling a pastor to the newly organized church in accordance with FG 22.

When these actions are duly approved by the presbytery having oversight, the presbytery, as section c. notes, shall set the time, date, and place for a service of recognition (for the church) and installation (for the officers). Such a service is to be conducted either by the presbytery or by a committee appointed to act on its behalf in this matter. At the time of such a service of recognition and installation, in keeping with section d., the congregation, having been duly informed of all that has previously transpired by the moderator of the meeting, shall have proposed to it the question about walking together now as a new OPC. Further comment about the question itself seems

unnecessary. When the members indicate their affirmative response to the question (by the raising of their right hands), the moderator will declare that they are hereby recognized as a new and separate congregation of that regional church and proceed to ordain (as necessary) and install all the officers thereof.

4. In organizing a mission work of a presbytery as a new and separate congregation (church) the procedure shall be as follows:

a. While it is preferable to have members of a mission work as members of a local congregation under the jurisdiction of a local session, circumstances may make it easier to enroll such members as members at large of the regional church under the direct jurisdiction of the presbytery. In such cases the presbytery shall maintain a list of such members at large of a mission work.

b. When it appears that it is desirable and feasible to organize a mission work of the presbytery as a new congregation, the presbytery, with the concurrence of the members at large, shall designate the list of the members at large of the regional church of the mission work as the charter roll of the proposed new congregation.

c. The presbytery shall call a meeting of the members at large of the regional church of the mission work for the purpose of petitioning presbytery to organize them into a new church.

d. The presbytery shall call a meeting of the members at large of the regional church of the mission work for the purpose of electing ruling elders and deacons (Form of Government, Chapter XXV) and the calling of a pastor (Form of Government, Chapter XXII) to serve as officers of the new church.

e. When the above actions have been approved by presbytery, a service of recognition and installation shall be conducted by the presbytery or a committee appointed by the presbytery. At the appointed time the congregation shall be informed of the action of the presbytery and the moderator shall address to the members of the congregation the following question:

In reliance upon God for strength do you solemnly promise to walk together as a church of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God and the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?

The members shall answer in the affirmative by raised hand. After this the congregation shall be recognized as a new and separate church of the regional church and the officers shall be (ordained and) installed according to this Form of Government.

Comment: Section 4 and its subsections detail the particulars involved in organizing a mission work as a new and separate congregation of the OPC, what some call “particularization.” It is preferable, as section a. points out, to have members of a mission work as members of an OP congregation (presumably fairly close to it). Thus, the folks of the mission work enjoy the oversight of a local session, being under its jurisdiction and pastoral care. Sometimes, however, a variety of circumstances (perhaps distance) make such local oversight difficult, and it is preferable to have the members of the mission work as members on the roll of the regional church under the direct care and oversight of the presbytery. Often a committee (perhaps Home Missions or a special committee) is given the particular oversight on behalf of presbytery, and that committee reports to the presbytery under the appropriate rubric (shepherding committee, missions committee, etc.). In such cases, the presbytery, as the body of oversight, maintains the roll of the mission work whose members are on its regional roll.

When the mission work has developed so that it is viable to operate as a separate and distinct congregation, i.e., when it is desirable and feasible, which is a matter of judgment

both locally and on the part of the presbytery, the presbytery may, in keeping with b., designate a charter roll for the new congregation from those of the mission work who have been members at large on the roll of the regional church. The presbytery may then call a meeting of those designated to be on the charter roll for the purpose of their petitioning presbytery, per c., to organize them into a new church. Further, as noted in d., the presbytery shall call for a meeting of the same group to elect ruling elders and deacons (per FG 25) and to call a pastor (FG 22), and these men will serve as the officers of the new church.

When the actions prescribed in a.–d. have been approved by the presbytery, a service of recognition and installation shall be conducted by the presbytery, or a committee appointed by the presbytery. At the time of such service, the actions of the presbytery shall be reported to the congregation, and the moderator shall propound to the members of the mission work seeking to become a church a question that expresses their desire and commitment to come together and to walk together as a new particular church. They shall affirm such by raising their hands. Then the congregation will be recognized as a new and separate church of the regional church. The officers shall all be (ordained as needed and) installed in keeping with the FG.

5. In organizing a group of believers who are not members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and are not an existing congregation of another church as a new and separate congregation (church) of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church the procedure shall be as follows:

a. Such persons as are associated together in a desire to be a new and separate congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church shall apply to the presbytery, through its clerk, to be received. In their application they shall state the reasons which have moved them to apply for membership in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

b. The presbytery, a committee of presbytery, or a session appointed by the presbytery shall examine the applicants as to their Christian faith and life and their knowledge of and willingness to submit to the standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. If the presbytery or the appointed session is satisfied regarding these matters it may proceed to approve them for membership and appoint a time for their reception and organization as a particular congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

c. At the appointed time the group of believers shall be informed of the action of the presbytery and the moderator shall address to them the vows of membership and the following question:

In reliance upon God for strength do you solemnly promise to walk together as a church of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God and the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?

The members shall answer in the affirmative by raised hand. After this the congregation shall be recognized as a new and separate church of the regional church.

d. The presbytery or the appointed session shall then see to it that there are officers to serve the new church according to the provisions of this Form of Government, Chapters XXV and XXII.

Comment: This section addresses the circumstances of a group of believers not organized as a church or mission work who wish to come into the OPC as a new and separate congregation. Such persons may apply to the presbytery of the OPC that would govern the regional church local to them, stating the reasons that they wish to be members in the OPC. The presbytery or its appointees (a local session or committee of

the presbytery) shall examine the applicants in two primary areas: their Christian faith and life and their knowledge of and willingness to submit to the standards (both secondary and tertiary standards as befits each of those) of the OPC. If the presbytery is satisfied in all this, it may proceed to approve the applicants for membership and appoint a time for reception and organization as a particular congregation of the OPC.

As in other such cases, the applicants, having been informed of the actions of the presbytery, will come together at the appointed time to be recognized and received as a new and separate congregation of the OPC. They answer the membership vows and the standard question to that effect (will you walk together as a new OPC?) by the raising of hands. After that, the presbytery, or a session appointed for that purpose, will see to it that the new congregation has the officers it needs to function, in accordance with FG 25 and 22.

B. Receiving Congregations

1. A congregation not belonging to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church may be received only under the supervision of presbytery. The presbytery of the regional church to which the congregation would most naturally belong shall have jurisdiction in the matter.

Comment: In addition to forming new congregations (missions works and groups of believers), presbyteries may also receive already existing congregations that either wish to leave their denomination or to come into the OPC from independency. Such a congregation is received only under the supervision of a presbytery, preferably and ordinarily the presbytery of the regional church to which the congregation would most naturally belong. It is to that presbytery that jurisdiction will belong in such cases.

2. In receiving an existing, local church not belonging to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a new and separate congregation (church) the procedure shall be as follows:

a. A congregation which desires to become a congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church shall apply to the presbytery, through its clerk, to be received. In its application the congregation shall state the reasons which have moved it to apply for membership in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

b. The presbytery or a committee appointed by the presbytery shall examine the applicants as to their Christian faith and life and their knowledge of and willingness to submit to the standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

c. The elders of the congregation, if there be such, shall be examined as to their qualifications as set forth in Chapter X and as to their subscription to the formula for the ordination of elders in Chapter XXV, Section 6, of this Form of Government.

d. The pastor of the congregation, if there be such, shall be examined according to Chapter XXIII, Section 2, of this Form of Government.

e. When the above actions have been approved by presbytery, a service of recognition and installation shall be conducted by presbytery or a committee appointed by the presbytery. At the appointed time the congregation shall be informed of the action of the presbytery and the moderator shall address to the congregation the following question:

In reliance upon God for strength do you solemnly promise to walk together as a church of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God and the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?

The congregation shall answer in the affirmative by raised hand. After this the congregation shall be recognized as a new and separate church of the regional church. Then the officers shall be (ordained and) installed according to this Form of Government.

Comment: What follows details the process of receiving an outside congregation into the OPC. First, of course, an outside congregation seeking entrance into the OPC should notify the clerk of the presbytery in which it seeks such entrance of its desire to be a part of the OPC. In the entrance application, the congregation needs to state its reason(s) for applying for membership in the OPC. Such reasons would commonly include why they wish to leave the denomination of which they are currently a part (or independency) and, positively, the reasons that the OPC is the new place to which they wish to go so that they may better and more faithfully serve the Lord.

In response to such application, the presbytery, or usually a committee thereof, shall proceed to examine the applicants (the members of the congregation seeking entrance) in terms of both their Christian faith and life and their knowledge of and willingness to submit to the standards, both the doctrinal and polity ones, of the OPC. This can be accomplished in different ways, depending on the particulars of the congregation. In whatever way it deems necessary, however, the presbytery must assure itself of the credibility of the professions of faith of all the members applying. Ordinarily, assurance of credible professions would be ascertained through the presbytery or its committee working with the local minister(s) and other church governors in securing such through oral interviews or written statements.

If the church has elders (as would one coming from, say, the PCUSA or CRCNA), they are examined as to their qualifications, in accordance with FG 10. Further, they are asked if they are willing to answer affirmatively to the ordination questions of FG 25.6. If there is a pastor, he shall be examined in keeping with FG 23.2. When all this is reported to and approved by the presbytery, a service of recognition for the church as a new church in the OPC and of installation of the elders and pastor(s) as newly minted OPC officers shall be held. At this service, conducted by the presbytery or a committee thereof, the moderator shall ask the members of the incoming church if they are willing to walk together as a new OPC in keeping with God's Word and the constitution of the OPC. After they affirm such by raised hands, they shall be recognized as a new and separate congregation of the regional church, and the officers shall be duly (ordained, if needed, and) installed as OPC officers in keeping with the FG. Thus, a church may come from the outside into the OPC.

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