

NEW HORIZONS

JULY 2025

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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AND PLEASANT IT IS
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BEHOLD, HOW GOOD AND PLEASANT IT IS WHEN BROTHERS DWELL IN UNITY



DANNY E. OLINGER

At the opening of every general assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), there is a worship service led by the previous moderator, which in the case of the Ninety-First General Assembly was the Rev. John V. Fesko. What is not always the case, however, is that the sermon theme matches the disposition of the assembly that follows as well as Mr. Fesko's sermon on Psalm 133 and the unity of the brethren in Jesus Christ matched last month's assembly. A spirit of love for others and humility marked the six days that 142 ministers and ruling elders from the OPC's seventeen presbyteries gathered to conduct the business of the whole church on the campus of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois.

In his sermon "Are You a Christian?" Mr. Fesko declared that the rich imagery of oil flowing down the head of the

John V. Fesko, moderator of the Ninetieth General Assembly, preached on Psalm 133.



high priest upon his collar and robes in Psalm 133 foreshadowed Christ's anointing as our great high priest. Upon Aaron's collar were stones with the names of the tribes of Israel and upon his breastpiece there were twelve precious stones representing all twelve tribes. When Aaron and the high priests after him were anointed in the Old Testament, the oil would flow from the head to the rest of the body. This image in shadow points us to Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit and how we, his body, share in this anointing. The church's unity comes from union with Christ through the bond of the Holy Spirit. The sermon was often referenced in speeches and prayers throughout the rest of the week as the brethren rejoiced in Jesus Christ and the unity found in him that was being evidenced in love for others.

After the worship service ended, the assembly then enrolled those present and elected Brian De Jong, pastor of Grace OPC in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, as moderator. Mr. De Jong, the son of OPC pastor Norman De Jong (1935–2022) and father of Elijah DeJong, a commissioner at the assembly and a pastor at Concho Valley OPC in Concho, Arizona, served the assembly well with a steady hand and

Brian De Jong, moderator of the Ninety-First General Assembly



a cheerful smile. In a moment that brought laughter to the body, Mr. De Jong with a wonderfully self-deprecating delivery announced the availability of a new book, “OPC Moderating for Dummies.”

His clear direction helped the assembly to finish its work in a timely manner, but more so, his servant-like leadership set a tone for others to follow. This was invaluable given the fact that thirty-four commissioners were attending an assembly for the first time and that nearly half the assembly had been ordained for fewer than ten years. Lending their wisdom to the proceedings in a quiet but steady manner were three commissioners ordained in the decade of the 1960s: Lawrence McHargue, John Jamison Jr., and Stephen Phillips.

THURSDAY, JUNE 5

According to the statistician’s report, the OPC’s membership grew to 33,566 persons, including 601 ministers, 24,637 communicant members, and 8,328 baptized children (non-communicants). This was in spite of the withdrawal of two congregations with a combined membership of 442, and the dissolution of six congregations with a combined membership of 231. During the last decade, the OPC has had eleven congregations (2,102 members) withdraw, including some of its largest in size. It has also had twenty-four congregations (889 members) dissolved during the same time period.

As the work of the assembly began, God’s covenant faithfulness was evident in the number of commissioners and standing committee members present who were fathers and sons. In addition to Brian and Elijah DeJong, also present (with the father listed first in each pairing) were Warren Bennett Jr. and Warren Bennett III, Alan and Jeremiah Montgomery, M. Joe and Andrew Moody, Jim and Peter Onnink, Bruce and Benjamin Stahl, and Timothy and Matthew Walker.

After the advisory committees completed their task of reviewing and preparing recommendations for the work



Fathers and sons at the Ninety-First General Assembly

that would be before the assembly, General Secretary Douglas Clawson reported on behalf the Committee on Foreign Missions (CFM). Although two missionaries, Mark Richline (Uruguay) and L. Charles Jackson (Uganda), came off the field in 2024, Mr. Clawson expressed thankfulness to our Lord for two new missionary evangelists who were called, Frederick Lo (Uganda) and Michael Kearney (Uganda), and one missionary, Benjamin Hopp, who was called to the position of regional foreign missionary to Africa and Haiti. Four missionary associates, Joshua and Danielle Grimsley, Jedidiah Homan, and Beatrix Taverne, served in Uganda.

Mr. Clawson also described 2024 as a year in which the work done in multiple OPC mission fields was preparation for the changes that are anticipated in 2025. A Bible study in Maldonado, Uruguay, has turned into a new place of worship. Men who graduated from seminary in Korea have completed their internships and are planting churches in a closed country. Buildings were constructed in Mbale so that new students could be added to Knox School of Theology and so that the school could satisfy all the physical plant requirements for full charter status.



The Committee on Arrangements



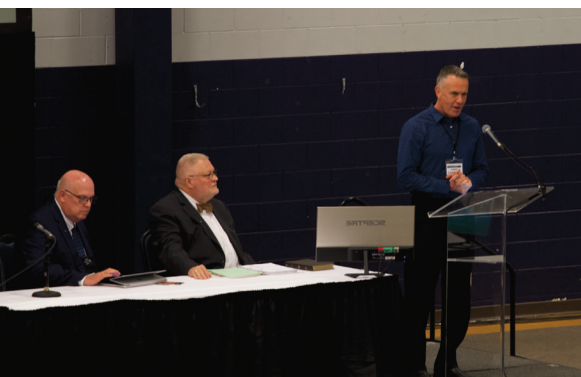
David Noe with daughter Sophia Noe



Missionary Ben Hopp

Plans were begun in Karamoja and Mbale to lead to transitioning oversight of church plants from the mission to the indigenous church.

Mr. Clawson emphasized that the CFM continues to look for men who are willing to go wherever it pleases Christ, through his church, to serve. Needed particularly are experienced pastors and presbyters who are able to mentor those who have little exposure to functioning sessions and presbyteries. What a blessing it is to be able to send ordained servants who are humble and wise, and who love the sheep as Jesus loves them! He finished by urging the assembly to continue to pray, “Here I am Lord, send me.”



*Missionary
Heero
Hacquebord
presenting for
the CFM*

FRIDAY, JUNE 6

The Committee on Christian Education (CCE) presented before the assembly the Modern English Study Version (MESV) of the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of the OPC that the Eighty-Ninth (2023) General Assembly requested the CCE to prepare. The previous assembly had instructed the CCE to make morphological changes (for example, “hath” to “have”), archaic word and phrase changes, and necessary alterations of word order. The previous assembly also requested the CCE to replace the text of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:2–17) and the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13) with a modern English version.

The assembly directed the stated clerk to send a digital copy of the MESV text to the clerk of the major assembly of each of the churches/federations with whom the OPC has an ecclesiastical relationship of either Ecclesiastical Fellowship or Corresponding Relations, together with that of each of the churches/federations that are member churches of the International Conference of Reformed Churches or North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, for their information, comments, or advice. The assembly further requested the CCE to prepare a printed version to be made available to all OP ministers and sessions that request copies, and that all feedback regarding the MESV be submitted to the CCE by the end of 2027.

*John Dunahoo
presenting
for Great
Commission
Publications*



Great Commission Publications (GCP) Interim Executive Director John Dunahoo praised God for fifty years of joint ministry between the OPC and the Presbyterian Church in America in overseeing the Sunday school materials of the two churches. Mr. Dunahoo showed a video to the assembly that featured OPC minister and past GCP curriculum director Allen Curry.

Eric Hausler, the chairman for the Special Committee on Criminal History and Officer Qualifications, presented the report of the committee. The assembly determined to distribute the report to the presbyteries and to their candidates and credentials committees for study and to make the report available for interested parties who wish to study it.

*Church planter
Chris Drew
presenting for
the CHMCE*



Jeremiah Montgomery, general secretary of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (CHMCE), reported that the Lord is blessing CHMCE with more opportunities for ministry than ever before—more opportunities, in fact, than the current level of giving to OPC Worldwide Outreach can support. According to Mr. Montgomery, this wonderful problem before CHMCE of increased opportunities means that the committee may soon be facing a time when its funds are exhausted in supporting its existing commitments.

Mr. Montgomery declared that it is his prayer that the OPC would be as faithful in reaching the unconverted as it is in reaching the under-disciplined. He asked the assembly

to pray that the Lord would continue to save new souls, directly or indirectly, through the ministry of the OPC.

David Nakhla, administrator for the Committee on Diaconal Ministries (CDM), gave thanks to the Lord for the benevolent giving that the committee received in 2024. He also reported that the CDM is making plans for the Fifth National Diaconal Summit for the deacons of the OPC at Wheaton College, June 2026. He urged all congregations to consider sending their deacons to this event, held only once every four years.

Jon Eide, regional director of Mission to the World in Ukraine, shared an update on the diaconal ministry being carried out in Ukraine through giving to “Crates for Ukraine.” Those interested in participating can find further information at cratesforukraine.com.

The CDM also debuted an impactful video presentation of the disaster response effort (small homes are being built from the ground up for those who lost them) being carried out in North Carolina following the devastating effects of Hurricane Helene. The CDM is hopeful to have the full video available to the whole church during the month of July on opcddm.org. They also shared that *The Reformed Deacon* podcast completed its third year, having produced as many as twenty episodes each year.

Committee on Ministerial Care (CMC) Director John Fikkert reported on the service and projects of the committee in the past year. The CMC has continued its administration of the OPC 403(b) Retirement Plan, financial planning services, insurance offerings, and the Obadiah Fund for retired ministers and their widows. Fikkert made special mention of the Haney Memorial Fund and its provision of sabbatical grants and retreat grants for ministers. Since 2020, more than fifty churches have received a sabbatical grant from CMC for their minister, with over \$150,000 allocated. Anneke Fesko, CMC’s care coordinator for ministers’ wives, hosted a fellowship on Thursday for women in attendance at the assembly and area pastors’



At the CMC’s event for ministers’ wives, hosted by Anneke Fesko (far left)

wives and an outing to downtown Chicago on Friday for the same group.

SATURDAY, JUNE 7

On Saturday morning, the assembly continued consideration of a complaint on appeal that began the previous evening when the body had determined that it was in order and properly before the body. After hearing from the presentation of the appellant and the session and asking questions of both, the assembly reconsidered whether the appeal was properly in order before the body. After the morning break, the assembly allowed the appellant to withdraw his complaints.

SUNDAY, JUNE 8

On the Lord’s Day, the commissioners attended the local congregations in the Chicagoland area to worship in the morning and then regathered on the Trinity College campus for a joint evening worship service. The session of Covenant OPC in Oreland Park, Illinois, conducted the worship service with Iain Wright preaching on Luke 1:1–4, “Persistent Compassion.”

MONDAY, JUNE 9

The major business on Monday was consideration of an overture from the Presbytery of the Midwest that the assembly erect a special committee to review the Form of Government (FG) and the Book of Discipline (BD) that are contained in the 2025 edition of the *Book of Church Order*. The assembly granted the overture and elected David Winslow Jr., Archibald Allison, John Fesko, Alan Strange, Mark Bube, John Mallin, and Peter Van Doodewaard to serve on the Special Committee to Review Amendments to the FG and BD.

TUESDAY, JUNE 10

Jeffrey Dronenburg Sr. reported for the Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel. The assembly approved

Of 142 commissioners, 34 were attending their first assembly.





GA commissioners at work, including (from center, in blue) David Veldkamp, Zecharias Weldeyesus, and Chris Cashen

the committee's recommendation that the United Reformed Churches of North America be received into full membership in the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains (PRCC). The assembly also approved a commitment of financial support of \$1,500 to the PRCC for each of the thirteen active and full-time OPC chaplains. Mr. Dronenburg stated that the thirteen chaplains are comprised of seven endorsed active military chaplains: Richard Brasher, David DeRienzo, Joshua Jackson, Cornelius Johnson, Kenneth Kruchkow, Stephen Roberts, and Jeffrey Shamess; four endorsed reserve military chaplains: Jeffrey Corbett, Daniel Halley, Kenny Honken, and Benjamin Johnson; and two civilian chaplains: C. Phillip Hollstein and Charles McIlhenny.

The assembly honored Luke Brown for his forty years of diligent, sacrificial, and valued work as statistician of the OPC. With Mr. Brown's retirement, the assembly passed a resolution that offered thanksgiving and praise to God for Mr. Brown's gifts and service as statistician.



Luke Brown, statistician of the OPC for forty years

The meeting closed with a standing ovation in appreciation for Mr. De Jong's service in moderating and the announcement that the Ninety-Second General Assembly will be held at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, from June 3 to June 9, 2026. **NH**

The author is editor of New Horizons.

NINETY-FIRST (2025) GENERAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Appeals and Complaints

Ministers: Everett A. Henes, John W. Mallin III, S. Scott Willet (alternate)

Arrangements

Ministers: Andrew E. Davis, Robert E. Tarullo

Chaplains and Military Personnel

Ministers: Jeremy A. Brandenburg, Jeffrey W. Dronenburg Sr.,
Elder: Pete Spaulding (California, MD)

Christian Education

Ministers: Alan D. Strange, Stephen J. Tracey, David M. VanDrunen, Harrison Perkins
Elders: John R. Muether (Oviedo, FL), Luke T. Shannon (Oreland Park, IL)

Coordination

Ministers: M. Scott Johnson, Daniel R. Svendsen
Elder: Ashraf Guirgues (New Bern, NC)

Diaconal

Minister: Adrian R. Crum
Elder: Peter R. Haines (Concho Valley, AZ)
Deacon: John J. Voss Jr. (Oreland Park, IL)

Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations

Ministers: L. Anthony Curto, Robert E. Tarullo, Peter C. Van Doodewaard, David B. Carnes, John R. Nymann

Foreign Missions

Ministers: James T. Lim, Philip T. Proctor, John D. Van Meerbeke
Elders: John S. Emmett (Garland, TX), Hayo Jager (Raleigh, NC)

Historian

Minister: Brian L. De Jong

Home Missions

Ministers: James J. Cassidy, Jeffrey M. Scott, Mark A. Winder
Elders: Michael C. Cloy (Marion, NC), Steven S. Vanderwey (Wyoming, MI)

Ministerial Care

Ministers: Brett A. McNeill, Ronald E. Pearce, John S. Shaw
Elder: John E. Hearn (Orlando, FL)

Trustees

Minister: Richard N. Ellis
Elder: John E. Hearn

Statistician

Michael I. Hammonds (St. Augustine, FL)

THE SILENT LAMB



ANDREW S. WILSON

Silence can be unsettling, especially for those of us whose experience with the world is so predominantly tech-mediated. We tend to assume that most everything in life can be managed by some pill, procedure, product, policy, protocol, or pioneering innovation. Being subjected to silence reminds us that there is a reality external to our will that imposes itself upon us.

In the Bible, silence is the posture of those who are exposed to divine judgment (see Isa. 41:1; Hab. 2:20; Rev. 8:1). When the guilty stand before the righteous Judge of all the earth, there is nothing they can say. They are sinners, and they have absolutely no control over the situation.

When Jesus was brought before his human judges, he too was silent. But his muteness was by no means an indicator of guilt or lack of control. As the spotless Lamb of God, he was completely innocent of the charges that had been brought against him. And as the eternal Son of God,

he was in full control over everything that was happening to him. In light of this, his silence speaks volumes to us today.

A RIGHTEOUS SILENCE

Jesus's silence before the bar of earthly justice was a *righteous* silence. During what was essentially a show trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus did not refute the false testimony that was brought against him. Instead of defending himself against the trumped-up charges, he submitted to death on a cross in obedience to the will of his Father. He thus showed himself to be doubly righteous. That is, in addition to being innocent of any wrongdoing, he was also perfectly obedient to God. His righteousness was even confirmed by the man who ended up condemning him to death: When Jesus was examined before Pilate, the latter repeatedly said, "I find no guilt in this man," underscoring that Jesus's execution was unjust (Luke 23:4, 14; see also Mark 15:14; John 19:6).

The righteousness of Jesus's silence is also evident when we consider the argument that he could have put forth in his defense. He might have been acquitted if he had told Pilate that his kingship was no threat to Caesar. However, it would have been misleading for Jesus to say such a thing. While it is true that his kingdom is "not of this world" (John 18:36), its spread through the proclamation of the gospel subverts human governments' propensity to make themselves supreme. Moreover, the consummation of Christ's kingdom at his return will result in the destruction of every earthly power. As the prophet Daniel foretold, the kingdom of God "shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever" (Dan. 2:44). Jesus refused to bear false witness about this.

A SOVEREIGN SILENCE

Jesus's silence before his human judges was also a *sovereign* silence. That is, it was the means by which he exercised control over the outcome of his trials. When he was brought before Pilate on the charge of being a conspirator against Rome, he did not answer Pilate's questions about this accusation. In fact, Jesus comes across as the one who was conducting the interview with Pilate, not Pilate with Jesus. Jesus was not being forced. Unlike silent sinners before the bar of divine judgment, he was in complete control of everything that transpired when he was put on trial. His silence before Pilate only underscored that he was laying down his life entirely of his own accord.

Jesus spoke of this in his Good Shepherd discourse, saying,



Sheep Near the Seashore (1913),
Frans Van Leemputten,
public domain

I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. (John 10:14–15, 17–18)

By laying down his life, Jesus secured eternal life for those he was given to save. His death was not the death of a helpless victim. He willingly laid down his life in obedience to the will of his Father. His silence before his judges bore witness to this. Even when he appeared to be utterly powerless, he was in control over everything that was transpiring around him.

A NECESSARY SILENCE

Lastly, Jesus's silence when he was on trial was a *necessary* silence. We can see this when we consider Pilate's amazement at Jesus's silence (Matt. 27:14). Pilate marveled because he suspected that Jesus could have successfully defended himself against his accusers. But this is precisely why Jesus's silence was necessary. He was silent because he needed others to do what he himself could not do: condemn the innocent to death.

While Jesus was sovereign over what transpired at his trials, he exercised his sovereignty through the personal moral agency of others. Jesus was the only perfectly righteous man who ever lived. More than that, he was God in

human flesh. His condemnation was the greatest act of evil that has ever been perpetrated. Obviously, Jesus could not be the one who committed such a grave injustice. He is God, and God cannot do anything that is evil. His silence ensured that he would be subjected to the unjust judgment that he could not render on his own.

Because Jesus was the silent Lamb (Isa. 53:7), he is now the conquering Lamb (Rev. 5:5–6). Because he was mute before his human judges, he is now at the right hand of God continually interceding for us (Rom. 8:34). And because he opened not his mouth, we now open our lips and proclaim:

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! (Rev. 5:12) **NH**

The author is pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Laconia, New Hampshire.

GROWTH FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

CHRISTOPHER J. VERDICK

There is a vast distance between our regeneration and our glorification. God's work in our sanctification has what looks to us like surprising twists and turns. Think of the first-century believers in the church at Corinth who were practicing sins that Paul suggested would make even their pagan neighbors blush—but who were being changed. Jesus suggests that we should expect as much because the kingdom of God grows secretly like a seed underground. The seed of the Word swells in the human heart, taking root in ways we do not see or understand until the plant unexpectedly bursts from the earth.

THE GOSPEL GOING OUT FROM NAKAALE

The effects of the work of the Word here in Uganda have been no different. One rainy afternoon, I was sitting in the library of Knox School of Theology in Mbale, across the table from Lokiru Timothy. I asked him what he thought about the spread of the gospel among his tribe. He has just

graduated and started his journey to ordination as the new pastoral intern at Nakaale Presbyterian Church, so his response sounds less like wishful thinking and more like a ministerial goal.

He envisions Nakaale as a hub (maybe *the* hub) for gospel transformation in Karamoja and beyond. "If Nakaale can really embrace the gospel—by God's grace, by God's will—it will be of great value and great help to many parts of Karamoja. Christ has really instructed us—it's a command from him—to take his Word out. Starting from home, we are then to take the Word to other parts of the world." In Timothy's thought, the transformation of Karamoja brought about by the gospel starts in his humble village and branches outward in all directions, seen first in spiritual quickening and then in righteous living.

To look at Nakaale today, twenty-five years into the OPC's ministry here, this still appears to be a tall order. Nakaale is a place where one would be hard pressed to find



Locoro Emmanuel
with his children
and friends

someone who could even recite the Ten Commandments, let alone have a go at living them. Still, the growth is there, as subterranean and fragile as a seedling's first rootlet.

THE GOSPEL'S WORK IN SECOND-GENERATION CHRISTIANS

It is hard to pinpoint this new kingdom culture as it grows in Nakaale, but its tiny green stems can be seen. Polygamy, the cultural curse that has dogged the search for church leaders for many years, has so far failed to grab the generation of young men that is coming up in the church. Likewise, drunkenness—prevalent in Nakaale—is increasingly rare among those in the church. Former missionary James Folkerts's incisive comment on Nakaale Presbyterian Church, that “this is not a church, it's just a group of Christians that meets on Sunday,” no longer describes our body. The members are growing in their mutual concern over the material and spiritual welfare of their fellow members. They keep each other accountable. They give their time volunteering in church activities. They show hospitality.

In the believers' homes, God's kingdom is sending up shoots. When I asked a member of our ministry team, Locoro Emmanuel, how we could best pray for him, he expressed a desire to better direct his wife and children to Christ. Having grown up with no exposure to God's Word, his strong desire is that his wife and children should be saturated with it, and he recognizes his responsibility in this regard. Here in germ form is the seismic upheaval that the lives of believers in this world cannot fail to bring because of the power of the gospel. We are seeing now the first generation of believers who are concerned to evangelize their own families.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

The import of this should not be missed. Despite having left polygamy behind, young Christian men have struggled to enter godly marriages to Christian women. The culture surrounding marriage and the payment of dowry to the woman's family means that the parents have an overriding say in whom their daughter marries. Pagan

families in most cases want a large dowry of cows above any other consideration—dowries which young Christian men who have not participated in the culture of cattle raiding or who have not focused on accumulating wealth are not in a position to pay. Thus, a number of our young people, serious as they are about their faith, perceive no alternative but to marry whoever comes along and hope that their unequal yoke will be a minimal burden. In this, some are more successful than others, and those who are not in many cases feel the sting of their decision acutely.

While the dowry system does allow for two individuals from two families to come together in a way that is both public and entails certain expectations and responsibilities, it is also attended by an understanding that the “wedding” will not take place until the full dowry is discharged. Since dowries are rarely ever fully paid in Karamoja, the more explicitly Christian or covenantal aspects of the marriage agreement are rarely solemnized, and most marriages remain tentative, subject to the whims of the woman's family.

Though still captive to the larger Karimojong cultural expectations, the generation of believers who have grown up with some form of Christian teaching in their lives are now trying to honor God in their marriages while also honoring their parents. We hope that these circumstances—often complicated and painful—will result in Christian growth and change. We hope that today's young Christian couples will raise their children with the admonition to marry within the church, and in years to come that they will give their blessing to such marriages even if the change comes at the material cost of a merely nominal dowry. For Christians in Karamoja to see real change, the dowry system, while it may persist, will have to be redeemed. The children of one generation will have to be guided and benefit from the critical Christian thinking of their parents as the believers here move from the seeds of regeneration to the full flower of glorification.

The author is an associate missionary in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda.

WHAT'S NEW

In late May 2025, **Rev. and Mrs. Michael (Jennifer) Kearney** (Presbytery of the Midwest) and their daughter Joanna arrived in Mbale, Uganda, where Mike is laboring at Knox School of Theology.

THE LABORERS ARE FEW: ADDRESSING NEEDS IN THE OPC AND BEYOND

DAVID S. VELDKAMP

At the time of writing, the OPC's list of vacant pulpits has twenty-nine openings—about one-tenth of all OPC congregations and the highest number in several decades. (Not all openings are for solo pastor positions.) Our brothers and sisters in the Presbyterian Church in America have calculated a need for 220 new ministerial candidates *annually* over the next ten years (for context, Reformed seminaries graduated only about 180 MDiv students this past year). Twenty percent of the pulpits in the United Reformed Church are vacant. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, with over 600 congregations, reports that nearly 50 percent of its ministers plan to retire in the next five years. In other words, the OPC is not an anomaly, and there is not a bucket of spare Reformed ministers “out there” to meet the need for pastors, church planters, and foreign missionaries.

Though I hope these statistics stir us, we should not find the need for more laborers novel or unanticipated. Didn't our Lord say that “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Matt. 9:37)? Whatever the present need, the church has a continual interest in seeing a growing number of gospel ministers in the fields for the gathering and perfecting of the saints to the glory of God.

A BIG OPPORTUNITY FOR A SMALL CHURCH

The OPC has never been numerically large or outwardly glorious. And yet, several observers have noted that the Lord has been pleased to use the efforts of this modest part of his church in noticeable ways. One historian has called the OPC “the pea beneath the mattress . . . very small, but it is rock solid and undeniably there.” A fraternal delegate to general assembly once remarked that the denomination “punches above its weight class.” These comments, I suspect, are owed to the outsized influence the OPC has due to the gift of the theology represented within our ranks.

The present situation presents an opportunity for the OPC to “punch above its weight class” in another way. The need within our own denomination for pastors, church planters, and foreign missionaries is significant. That need extends to our siblings in sister denominations. What if



Chad Van Dixhoorn with students at RTS Charlotte

the OPC's outsized influence extended to the supply of qualified, faithful, and competent ministers, so that we provided not only for the needs of our own churches but also contributed to the needs of others?

STEPS FOR THE WHOLE CHURCH

There are a few steps the whole church can take toward that end.

Pray. The Lord Jesus Christ is head of his church, and he has promised to build it (WCF 25:6; Matt. 16:18). Apart from him we can do nothing (John 15:5). In keeping with Jesus's instruction, pray that the Lord of the harvest would raise up more laborers for the harvest—including those currently preparing for ministry—in your private, family, and public worship.

Watch. Look around you. Are there men in your congregation who meet the qualifications for ordained office and evidence the gifts for pastoral ministry (1 Tim. 3)? Often in our context, the internal sense of calling to ministry precedes external prompting or recognition, but not always. An external prompting may spark an internal desire.

Encourage. A decision to pursue a call to ministry does not ordinarily come after one conversation. Nor will one conversation sustain a candidate through their preparation. Before seminary, during seminary, and even after graduation, men can wrestle with doubts, nerves, and other

obstacles that threaten to derail them. The encouragement and feedback from fellow believers plays a significant role in helping candidates to persevere, clarify their sense of call, and shape their pastoral skills and instincts.

Give. The Reformed tradition has always placed a significant value on well-prepared ministers who know the Scriptures, are theologically grounded, and are skilled in pastoral practice. The OPC and other conservative Presbyterian denominations continue to affirm this value, ordinarily requiring candidates for ordination to obtain a Master of Divinity degree. This preparation takes significant financial resources, both for the students and for the institutions who train them. If you are able, consider giving above your tithe to support seminaries and scholarship funds.

CONSIDER THE MINISTRY YOURSELF

If you are someone who meets the qualifications for office, consider whether you might be called to ministry. An often-repeated bit of advice goes like this: “If you can do anything other than ministry, do it.” (Had John Calvin followed this advice, he might have contented himself with practicing law.) To be sure, those in ministry should have a desire to minister. But this advice should be balanced by another perspective: If the Lord has given you the gifts to minister his Word, cultivate them for use!

If you think this might be you, talk to your session. Your pastor and elders are uniquely positioned to help you explore whether you should take further steps in preparing for ministry. They will likely offer some reading suggestions and may encourage you to come under the care of your presbytery as a ministerial candidate.

If you are younger than twenty-five, consider attending the Timothy Conference. It is designed to help young men explore preparation for and the practice of ministry in the OPC. If you are somewhere above twenty-five, don’t think you are too old to consider ministry. At the seminary in which I serve, Reformed Theological Seminary, the median student age is thirty-four, and our oldest student is seventy-six!

One article would not be sufficient to address the challenge before the OPC and its Presbyterian siblings. The need for ministers, however, is surely critical, for “how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Rom. 10:14–15).

The author, a ruling elder at Reformation OPC in Oviedo, Florida, is chief enrollment management officer at RTS.

ON READING OLD BOOKS

“It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between.”
—C. S. Lewis

***A Simple Way to Pray* (1535) by Martin Luther**

Even Martyn Lloyd-Jones admitted he found “it difficult to start praying in the morning.” We all need help in prayer, which is why I regularly return to Luther’s *A Simple Way to Pray*. Written in response to his barber’s questions, this little book (my copy is only thirty pages) is a rich resource.

First, it is realistic about the Christian’s struggle to pray. Like Lloyd-Jones, Luther knew what it was like to become “cold and apathetic about prayer.” He acknowledged his tendency to deceive himself, saying, “Oh, I can wait a little while. I’ll pray in an hour or so, but first I need to do this or that.” Conscious of this weakness, he made prayer the first and last thing he did each day.

Second, it is relevant for those living in a distracted age. Even without iPhones or Google, Luther traced his feelings of coldness and apathy to “all the things that are distracting me and filling my mind.” How much more so for us!

Third, it is eminently practical. Often we struggle to pray because we cannot find the words to articulate our desires. At this point, Luther encouraged his barber to use scriptural and creedal language to organize and prompt his prayers. He began by reciting the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, and portions of Scripture (like the sayings of Christ, Paul’s letters, or the Psalms). From there, he prayed through the Lord’s Prayer, developing each petition into a free prayer, followed by the Decalogue and the Creed. For the latter texts, he made “a wreath of four strands”: instruction, thanksgiving, confession, and prayer.

A Simple Way to Pray is not only a devotional classic but the perfect entry point to reading the great Reformer.

—Ethan Bolyard

CONGRATULATIONS

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

- **Henry Barnett**, *Grace Presbyterian, Doniphan, MO*

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

- **Lillie Sharpe**, *Calvary OPC, Tallahassee, FL*
- **Gideon Stumph**, *Harvest OPC, Grand Rapids, MI*
- **Jonah Stumph**, *Harvest OPC, Grand Rapids, MI*

FRESH TAKES IN ARIZONA

JUDITH M. DINSMORE

When Brad Peppo drove from Ohio to northern Arizona in a camper in January to scout possibilities for a new OP work, he knew what he needed was a conversation-starter for new acquaintances, a “crutch,” as he called it. “Chit-chatting is not my strong suit.”

But what began as a crutch has become a fine effort in its own right: a photojournalistic blog by Peppo that documents what it means to flourish—as plant, animal, or human—in the Verde Valley. You can read it at landsoftheliving.com.

Peppo’s landscape photography reveals his love for the desert and mountains of the Southwest. As a kid, he had extended family in Arizona, and nothing was better than a visit. “There were spiders and snakes and scorpions—it was every eight-year-old boy’s dream,” he said. As an adult, he captures something of that eight-year-old’s obsession. The first collection on the blog is of Arizona birds—one does briefly wonder how the fast-moving Peppo remained still long enough to photograph them—and another, of lichen spreading and pooling on desert rock. A third post documents the history and culture of an old mining town.

Most striking, however, are his features of local residents on what they think it means to flourish. The interviews, like Peppo’s landscape photography, also betray an affection, this time for his new neighbors.

QUESTIONS ABOUT LIFE

Peppo had cold feet the first day he pulled into Cottonwood, Arizona, and parked at a coffee shop to begin work in the area without knowing hardly a soul. “Not for the first time in my life, I had this feeling, *What are you doing?*” he remembered.

That coffee shop’s owner happened to be someone with enthusiastic and articulate opinions on what it means to be human, a woman named Kassie who happily agreed to be a part of Peppo’s project. “There’s some people who just open up. From there, my first morning, it just cascaded,” Peppo said. (See sidebar for an excerpt from Kassie’s story.)

In his interviews, Peppo begins with the basic question: *Do you think the world is real?* Then he follows up with:



OP evangelist Brad Peppo has loved the Southwest since he was a kid.

Where did the cosmos come from? How did it come into being with the finetuned parameters it needs to support life? What is life? Does biological life have value? Does it have purpose? From life in general, Peppo moves to humans in particular: What distinguishes humans from other forms of life? How do you think those differences came about? Do our differences reflect our sense of purpose? Do humans have purpose? What about our moral sensibilities? Where do those come from—are they legitimate? And finally, he goes meta: What is morality? Where does it come from? If the status quo remains the status quo, where is it going to end? Is there hope for a better ending than the present trajectory would suggest?

Questions this big take time to answer, and the process builds trust. Peppo’s purpose is evangelistic, and he isn’t sneaky about it. He tells his interviewees that he’s a pastor; they know that the blog is the project of someone hoping to help plant a church in the area. When interviewees realize that he is cool with hearing what they *really* think, they open up about their opinion of organized religion. Each one has thoughts. Not all are flattering. Yet typically, even as Peppo listens, they in turn are ready to hear his take.

After Peppo goes back to his camper or to a coffee shop and writes a synthesis of the answers—the writing can take awhile—he gives it to the interviewee to read. “That might be the most important part of the encounter,”



Peppo said. None have ever attempted this kind of written summary of their views on life, death, and everything in between. It's meaningful. Peppo then, with their permission, publishes it on his blog.

The blog is meaningful in another way. It allows us church OP-ers to glimpse one minister's conversations with unchurched friends who have vastly different belief systems. "I want believers to see what's going on inside the heads of nonbelievers," Peppo said. "And I want believers to see how willing some people really are to talk if you just go about in a slow, methodical way."

The fracturing of American society is a truism by now. But the break between what is and what ought to be is as old as Eden. What's newsworthy is the life from above that knits and transforms, like lichen covering split rock. Peppo's conversations have that sense of slow, colorful growth.

This month, Peppo will, Lord willing, begin a Bible study in the Cottonwood area. If it goes well, a worship service will follow. He is receiving support and oversight from Prescott Presbyterian, an OPC congregation in Prescott, Arizona, and from the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension. He is still a regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio. Peppo and his wife, Cinnamon, appreciate your prayers for their short-term labor in Arizona.

Photos by Brad Peppo



KASSIE

Brad Peppo, excerpted from landsoftheliving.com

Kassie's ideas about the origin of the world and life and humanity are less than completely formed; the fun, she says more than once, in considering such matters, comes in never actually being able to arrive at any definitive answers. Humans, it is true, seem to her to be more than merely material beings; she strongly feels that they have something like a soul. But she does not say, or seem even to care to know, how this all might have come about. She thinks it all could be just a happy accident. But, as becomes clear through the course of our conversation, Kassie's lack of clear answers to these questions is not itself an accident, but is rather itself a function of her ultimate commitment to human autonomy.

For when it comes to her thoughts about human value, human purpose, and human moral responsibility, Kassie's answers are definitive and crystal clear: There are no ultimate objective external standards for any of these. Humans define their own value. They decide their own purpose. They choose their own moral standards. Humans, in fact, determine their own reality.

While Kassie is glad that other people choose not to live as if there is no real right and wrong, and while she has been happy to adopt certain aspects of the traditional Western morality with which she was raised, she is clear that these are merely personal, or at the most, societal choices, choices that have no true ultimacy.

Kassie's undergraduate study of philosophy is where, it seems, she learned the term she expressly uses to identify the worldview she has embraced: existentialism. But it is evident that this choice was mostly an *ex post facto* label that she adopted (despite her general uncomfortability with labels) to denote an approach to life with which she had already been operating from her adolescence.

It was expressly in accord with her own autonomy that she decided to undergo Christian baptism at the age of sixteen. And it was expressly in her accord with her own autonomy, two years later, that she decided to walk away from her profession of that faith. Christianity, she says she realized, if definitively true, would serve as too severe a limitation, not just on her right and ability to determine her own truth, her own purpose, and her own morality, but upon the fundamental right of all other people to do the same.

THE COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION'S BUDGET

When you give to the OPC to support Worldwide Outreach, where does your money go? On this page for the next few issues will be snapshots of the budgets of the three standing committees of the OPC (the Committee on Christian Education [CCE], the Committee on Foreign Missions, and the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension) as well as the Committee on Diaconal Ministries. This month, take a look at the CCE.

MINISTERIAL INTERNSHIPS

(approved 2025 budget: \$304,000)

Ministerial internships place qualified ministers-in-training alongside pastors in a local church to labor for either one year or one summer. The CCE supports and organizes this effort. At the end of 2024, the CCE raised the available support to \$2,000 monthly for approved summer and yearlong internships, provided that the local church matches or exceeds that amount. In 2024–2025, there were nine yearlong and thirteen summer internships.

NEW HORIZONS

(approved 2025 budget: \$315,000)

New Horizons, the denominational magazine of the OPC, reports on the work of the church through its three standing committees and publishes articles edifying to the church. The *New Horizons* budget includes honorariums for writers, art, shipping costs, and printing costs. (*New Horizons* is distributed free of charge to all OP members.) It also includes compensation for the managing editor, editorial assistants, and proofreader, as well as a percentage of editor Danny Olinger's salary.

INTERNET MINISTRIES

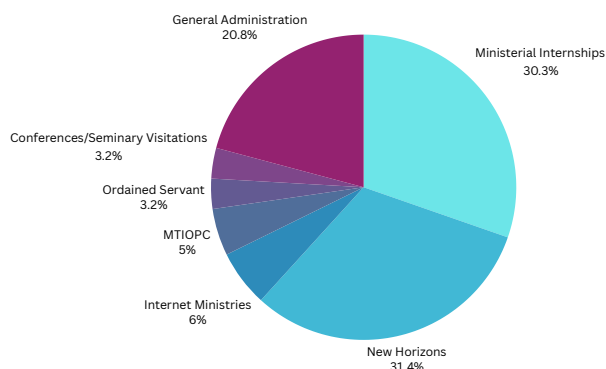
(approved 2025 budget: \$60,000)

This funds the maintenance of OPC.org and compensations for its administrators.

MINISTERIAL TRAINING INSTITUTE OF THE OPC

(approved 2025 budget: \$50,000)

The Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC (MTIOPC) is designed to provide men who are preparing for the gospel



ministry and current OP elders and ministers with instruction supplemental to that which they might receive in seminary. The semester of work is done remotely with a three-day in-person intensive training. The budget covers the defraying of travel expenses of attendees as well as honorariums for the faculty instructors.

ORDAINED SERVANT

(approved 2025 budget: \$32,000)

Ordained Servant, a monthly online magazine, exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers. *Ordained Servant* is also printed annually. Its budget covers printing, proofing, and editing costs, as well as compensation for the editor and editorial assistant.

CONFERENCES/VISITATIONS

(approved 2025 budget: \$32,500)

Although there are a variety of conferences CCE has hosted in the past, currently its primary focus is the Timothy Conference, which gathers session-recommended young men interested in ministry to learn from experienced pastors and teachers. The CCE also hosts the Shiloh Conference for seminarians and occasionally the Candidates and Credentials conference.

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

(2019 budget: \$209,000)

This covers the salaries of Danny Olinger and the CCE staff. It also includes office rental, and costs and travel expenses for the staff.

1 **Heero & Anya Hacquebord**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for the English camp ending on July 5 and for fruitful follow-up with attendees in the coming months. / **Kevin & Cami Godsey**, Peoria, IL. Pray the Lord would bless the ministry of Radiant OPC.

2 **Lacy (Debbie) Andrews**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast. / Pray for **Hank L. Belfield**, stated clerk of the OPC, as he works on matters related to the completion of the Ninety-First General Assembly.

3 Associate missionaries **Octavius & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Pray for divine intervention to heal the nation and bring unity, peace, and restoration. / Pray for the OPC's **Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel**.

4 **Brian (Nicole) Tsui**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Northern California & Nevada. / Pray for the church planting and theological training work of the **Presbyterian Church of the Reformation** in Colombia, a longstanding participant in the OPC's Mobile Theological Mentoring program.

5 **Phil & Melanie Hollstein**, Madisonville, LA. Pray for the congregation of Prince of Peace Presbyterian Church to be strong in the Lord. / Pray for **Short-Term Missions Team Colombia** this coming week as they help with vacation Bible school at Iglesia Ra'ah, a sister church in Chia, Colombia.

6 Give thanks that **Ben & Heather Hopp**, Africa & Haiti, have opportunities to host Mbale church members at their home and encourage their walk with Christ. / **Judith Dinsmore**, managing editor for *New Horizons*.

7 Pray for spiritual nourishment for pastors of the **Sudanese Reformed Church** (supported by the Committee on Diaconal Ministries) as they care for members in refugee camps. / **Jefferson (Ellen) De Oliveira**, Spanish language evangelist for Springfield, OH.

8 **Charles (Margaret) Biggs**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic. / Pray that the Lord would bless **Team Hungary's** labors to conduct an English Camp for unbelieving children and their families next week in Miskolc, Hungary.

9 **David & Jazmine Rios**, Commack, NY. Pray that the Lord would continue to grow the congregation of The Haven OPC. / Pray for the short term missions trip to the **Czech Republic** to teach English and share God's Word.

10 Pray for Home Missions General Secretary **Jeremiah Montgomery**. / Tentmaking missionary **Tina DeJong**, Nakaale, Uganda (on furlough). Pray for reflection and refreshment in God's Word.

11 Pray for the **Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe** in Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine, and especially its Ukrainian churches. / Pray for **Danny Olinger** as he directs the pastoral internship program.

12 Associate missionaries **Christopher & Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the renewal of the Mission's license to operate and extend visas to the missionaries. / Summer intern **Andrew (Cassidy) Baugh** at Grace OPC in Sheboygan, WI.

13 **Travis & Bonnie Emmett**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that God would bless the vacation Bible school work of the short-term missions team serving Nakaale Presbyterian Church. / **Chris Byrd**, regional evangelist for New Jersey.



The Hopps (day 6)



The Biggses (day 8)

14 Pray for Home Missions associate general secretary **Al Tricarico**. / Summer intern **Dane (Olivia) Bothun** at Covenant Reformed Church (OPC) in West Plains, MO.

15 Pray for traveling mercies and reacclimation for missionary associate **Beatrix Taverne**, Nakaale, Uganda, who is concluding her term of service and returning to the United States this week. / Summer intern **Jon (Elyssa) Vos** at New Life OPC in Montoursville, PA.

16 **Chris (Megan) Hartshorn**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / Associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for rest and refreshment as she makes a short visit to family and friends in North America.

17 **Devin & Megan Gaye**, Richmond, VA. Pray for the members of West Creek Presbyterian Church to grow in their love for God. / Summer intern **Frank (Martha) Wang** at First OPC in Sunnyvale, CA.

18 Affiliated missionaries **Mark & Laura Ambrose**, Cambodia. Pray for the young women at the Dahlia Dorm, a home for human trafficking victims, who are new students in a baptism class at church. / Summer intern **Stephen (Sage) Byrd** at Trinity Presbyterian Church (OPC) in San Clemente, CA.

19 Give thanks for the **Ethiopian Mercy Reformed Church's** recent translation and publication of

the Five Points of Calvinism in Amharic. / **David and Leah Vogel**, Kannapolis, SC. Pray for the Lord to work through Kannapolis OPC as they minister to returning visitors.

20 **Brad (Cinnamon) Peppo**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Summer intern **Trent (Alicia) Hordyk** at Grace Fellowship OPC in Zeeland, MI.

21 Pray for affiliated missionaries **Jerry & Marilyn Farnik**, Czech Republic, as they oversee the short-term teams for English camp and vacation Bible school. / Pray for **Team Praha** as they teach, evangelize, and minister to Czech youth in the coming weeks.

22 **Paul & Rachel Johnson**, Laveen, AZ. Pray for the Lord to grow Laveen Presbyterian through new members. / Pray for **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Montevideo, Uruguay, on their furlough as they spend time with family and visit churches.

23 **Andrew & Abby Wann**, Bluffton, SC. Pray for the Lord to grow Covenant Presbyterian. / Pray for **Linda Foh**, assistant technical associate for OPC.org

24 Pray for the health of retired missionaries **Cal & Edie Cummings**, **Mary Lou Son**, and **Brian & Dorothy Wingard**. / **John Fikkert**, director for the Committee on Ministerial Care.

25 **Fred & Ka-Ling Lo**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for Fred as he prepares for the Knox School of Theology classes he will teach in the upcoming semester. / **Andrew (Rebekah) Miller**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania.

26 **Jacey & Julie Davison**, Grand Rapids, MI. Pray for the continued growth and spiritual development of Ascension Church. / **Greg Reynolds**, editor of Ordained Servant.



The Hordyks (day 20)

27 **Mike & Jenn Kearney**, Mbale, Uganda. Give thanks for Knox School of Theology and pray for its students, faculty, and start of the academic year. / Pray for the **OPC Short-Term Missions team** traveling to Japan to serve alongside missionaries there.

28 Home Missions administrative coordinator **Lauren LaRocca**. / **Mr. and Mrs. F.**, Asia. Pray for seminarian Mr. H. as he graduates this month and returns to serve in his home country.

29 **A. J. & Chelsea Millsaps**, Athens, TN. Pray that the Lord would help the members of Zion OPC to warmly welcome visitors. / **Esther Parks**, office administrator.

30 **Mr. and Mrs. M.**, Asia. Pray for the class on church polity for students in Asia interested in Reformed Presbyterianism. / Pray for the continued **Disaster Response efforts** in western North Carolina as volunteers serve with the compassion of Jesus.

31 Pray for Foreign Missions General Secretary **Douglas Clawson** and Administrative Coordinators **Joanna Grove** and **Tin Ling Lee**. / **Corey & Andrea Paige**, Kyle, TX. Pray for the outreach and evangelism efforts of Hays County OPC.



The Vogels (day 19)



Mitchell Watson (dark suit, with Bible) at his ordination and installation as pastor at Knox OPC in Silver Spring, MD



Members of the presbytery and friends at Godsey's ordination (center, blue suit)

NEWS

GODSEY ORDAINED AND INSTALLED AT PEORIA, IL

Bruce Hollister

On May 30, Kevin Godsey was ordained and installed as pastor of Radiant OPC in Peoria, Illinois. The brethren at Radiant were thankful and encouraged, not only for the ordination and installation, but also for the robust attendance of ministers and elders of the presbytery, most of them traveling from two to three hours away. A PCA elder from Springfield, Illinois, and Eric Watkins were also in attendance. A wonderful evening! Dan Svendsen preached the sermon, Alan Strange gave the charge to Godsey, and I gave the charge to the congregation. Moderator Lane Keister presided.

UPDATE

CHURCHES

- On May 24, **Acacia Reformed Church** in Manassas, VA, formerly a mission work, was particularized.

MINISTERS

- On April 1, the Presbytery of the Dakotas dissolved the pastoral relationship between **Thomas B. Brown** and Bethlehem Reformed Church in Freeman, SD.
- On April 25, the Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario dissolved the relationship between **Markus G. Jeromin** and the Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario and erased his name from the roll.
- On April 26, the Presbytery of Connecticut and Southern New York dissolved the pastoral relationship, at his request, between **Lloyd J. Sterrett** and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Franklin Square, NY.
- On April 29, **Silas P. Schreyack**, formerly a minister in the Presbytery of New York and New England, demitted the ministry.
- On May 2, the Presbytery of the Southwest dissolved the ministerial relationship, at his request, between **Robert W. Mossotti** and Mid Cities Presbyterian Church in Bedford, TX.
- On May 2, **Tyler J. Freire** was ordained and installed as a pastor at Redeemer OPC in Beavercreek, OH.
- On May 4, **Jeremiah M. Mooney**, formerly a pastor of Covenant Community in Greenville, SC, was dismissed to the PCA.
- On May 9, **Mitchell D. Watson** was ordained and installed as a pastor of Knox Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Silver Spring, MA.
- On May 16, **Caleb T. Harriman** was ordained and installed as a pastor

At Tyler Freire's ordination and installation as pastor of Redeemer in Beavercreek, OH



Members of the presbytery and friends at David Garrett's ordination (center, bow tie)

of Covenant Community OPC in Greenville, SC.

- On May 17, **David M. Garrett** was ordained and installed as pastor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Franklin Square, NY.
- On May 24, **John Paul Holloway**, formerly organizing pastor, was installed as pastor of Acacia Reformed Church in Manassas, VA.

At Acacia Reformed's May 24 particularization with pastor John Paul Holloway (front, blue suit), new officers, and members of the presbytery



LETTERS

A QUESTION OF GENERAL OFFICE

Editor:

I appreciated the recent article “Bringing Singles into Church Fellowship” and was disappointed to read the critique in the June issue’s Letters section. Writing for *New Horizons* is not limited to officers but an opportunity for believers to build up the church. While some tasks are rightly reserved for those holding special office, it is biblically faithful to be taught and edified by those holding the general office in Christ’s body—both men and women.

Like many others, I have been taught and encouraged by women who love God’s Word and explain it clearly and faithfully. I want the women in our churches—especially in my congregation—to know that their insights are valued and their voices are welcome.

Finally, we can affirm the goodness of marriage without assuming it is the only or central goal for every single believer. There is wisdom in reminding our churches that fellowship in Christ is not reserved for the married.

J. Mark Sallade
Glenside, PA

Editor:

Andrew Smyth’s letter to the editor (June) misunderstands both the nature of the publication and the scope of ecclesiastical authority. The article in question is not a sermon but an essay reflecting on the lived experience of singles in the church and offering insights born out of compassion and observation. To suggest that this

amounts to an illicit exercise of authority risks silencing the voice of half the church who are ontologically equal—all are made in the image of God—and collapses the distinction between ordained teaching and the broader, mutual edification of the church.

The letter also seems to have an imbalanced view of singleness and marriage. Yes, marriage has a high place within the Christian life as stated by WLC 138. But let us not neglect the equally biblical teaching that singleness is a legitimate and even preferable calling for some (1 Cor. 7:7–8, 32–35). May the church nurture not only those called to marriage but also those called to serve in undivided devotion as single persons.

Smyth’s letter risks creating a church culture where women may not speak publicly, where singleness is treated as deficiency, and where only men may contribute meaningful reflection to the church’s discourse.

Aaron Mize
Houston, TX

REVIEWS

Music to the Glory of God: Why You Should Think About Music, by Humphrey Dobson. Shepherd, 2024. Paperback, 256 pages, \$19.99. Reviewed by OP member Lauren LeMahieu.

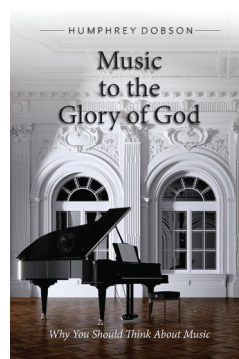
Many Christian musicians have, over the years, authored wonderful books to help us grow in our understanding and enjoyment

of God’s wonderful gift of music. These books have been a blessing to the church. *Music to the Glory of God*, by Humphrey Dobson, is another must-read for anyone interested in worship and music. Dobson, born and educated in England, started his musical journey at age six by studying piano and later organ with an elderly Welsh woman. This early relationship resulted in laying the foundation for a life-long love of music. Dobson earned a music degree from Durham University in the United Kingdom and has been a church musician for many years. He is currently the director of international outreach at Ligonier Ministries and a member of the OPC.

In *Music to the Glory of God* we learn how music can play an important part in discovering how to glorify God and to enjoy him forever (Shorter Catechism Q. 1). Dobson carefully develops his thesis by laying out how music plays a significant role in both our church life and in our daily lives. He takes us through the Scriptures as he develops a biblical view of music and augments these biblical themes by quoting liberally from church

fathers, including Augustine, John Calvin, John Flavel, Thomas Watson, and Martin Luther. Dobson shows how the art form of music shapes our hearts and minds toward God.

Dobson begins his book by guiding



us through an understanding of beauty and the arts. He encourages us to love beauty and the arts because they are a gift from God, the creator of all that is good, true, and beautiful. Dobson summarizes this section with a quote from Herman Bavinck:

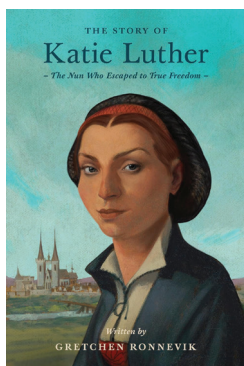
Beauty always awakens in us images, moods, and affections that otherwise would have remained dormant and not even known to us. . . . It deepens, broadens, enriches our inner life, and it lifts us for a moment above the dreary, sinful sad reality; beauty also brings cleansing, liberation, revival to our burdened and dejected hearts.

Helping us to view beauty more deeply, Dobson continues by giving us a crash course in music theory and music history. In his survey of composers, Dobson shows us God's gift of beauty in music. Dobson then moves to the history of psalmody and hymnody in the church with a concise survey of its beginnings and development. Dobson helpfully uses the Westminster Confession to address the use of psalms and hymns in worship. This is a very thoughtful and informative section.

Finally, Dobson brings his treatment of music theory, music history, and psalmody and hymnody together to help us better understand the use of music in worship today. Is music worship or entertainment? This book will encourage your heart in using the precious gift of music to prepare us for eternity where music will have a central role. *Music to the*

Glory of God will help you see through the eyes of Scripture how we can best serve Christ and his kingdom through how we view and use music. Keep your Bible with you as you read through this book, and you will likely discover new ways to glorify God through his great gift of music. As image-bearers of God, we can glorify him through our music and draw closer to him in the process. I highly recommend this book.

***The Story of Katie Luther: The Nun Who Escaped to True Freedom*, by Gretchen Ronnevik. Crossway, 2024. Paperback, 160 pages, \$11.99. Reviewed by OP member Elianna Hsi (eighth grade).**



The Story of Katie Luther is a biography of Katharina von Bora Luther. Author Gretchen Ronnevik covers the full history of Katie's life. The biography begins with Katie's childhood in Brehna, Germany, and continues with her life as a nun, her hearing the true message of the gospel, and her dramatic escape from a convent. At age twenty-six,

she marries the Reformer Martin Luther, and we learn about their children, life at home, her husband's death, war in Wittenberg, and finally, Katie's own death, as well as her legacy.

The book's greatest strength is that it is very engaging and easy to understand. It is best suited for young Christians, especially those ages nine to twelve, but with its charming illustrations, cool facts, maps, study questions, and timeline, anyone interested could read and be satisfied.

Before I read *The Story of Katie Luther*, I only knew that Katie was Martin Luther's wife, and not much else. Through reading, I learned that her life as a nun was strict, tiring, and lonely. She was trying to

PRESBYTERY OF OHIO WOMEN'S RETREAT

September 26–27: The 2025 Presbytery of Ohio Women's Retreat will be held September 26–27 at Grace Presbyterian Church in Columbus, Ohio. Author Sarah Zylstra will speak on "Gospelbound: God's Guidance in an Anxious Age." We would love to have you join us. For more information, visit our website: graceopc.org/womensretreat.

earn God's favor through her works and prayers, but nothing she could *do* could make her holy enough to earn God's satisfaction. One day, through reading some of Martin Luther's writings, likely including his Ninety-Five Theses, Katie learned that salvation and holiness is a gift from God. She discovered that it was the love and grace of God that saved her, and by this grace, she was freed and enabled to love and serve her neighbors. Katie decided to run away from her life as a nun after reading *The Freedom of the Christian*, in which Martin Luther told monks and nuns that if any of them had been forced against his or her will to take vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity, he or she was released from those vows. She fled the convent and embraced her freedom in Christ.

Studying church history is valuable for Christians. It allows us to learn about the development of the church and the many heresies that had to be fought along the way. It allows us to learn from the mistakes of earlier Christians, so we won't repeat them. It helps us to better understand and defend the reasons for our beliefs. Most importantly, church history shows us how God has worked in the lives of his people through the Holy Spirit time and time again. Church history reminds us about the purpose of the church: to further the work of God's kingdom and spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, this book is an excellent resource for learning about one of the

CORRECTION

In the Great Commission Publications retrospective in the June issue, "Robley Johnson" should have been "Johnston."

many lives that influenced church history. Reading it will deepen your understanding of the gospel, as well as the lives of the nuns and monks living around the time of the Reformation.

***Making Sense of Man: Using Biblical Perspectives to Develop a Theology of Humanity*, by Vern S. Poythress. P&R, 2024. Hardcover, 784 pages, \$49.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Zachary C. Herbster.**

What is the greatest challenge of Christian doctrine today? Consider the doctrine of man, or “biblical anthropology.” Confusion about mankind abounds. In a strange twist, we have lost our grip on what is closest to home: ourselves.

Like other works in Dr. Vern Poythress’s voluminous output, *Making Sense of Man* is even more than a book on biblical anthropology. It is also a book on biblical hermeneutics, that is, the methods of interpreting the Bible. From the beginning, Poythress offers four interpretive methods to understand better the doctrine of man: “presuppositional apologetics, semantics, analogies, and attention to metaphysical frameworks” (20).

In part 1, Poythress raises some difficulties with interpreting Genesis 1–3, particularly the phrase, “image of God.” Does the Bible use this phrase in Genesis 1:26–27 as a technical term? That is, do the words “image of God” contain all there is to say about the concept of male and female persons made in God’s image? Some summarize the “image of God” with things like rationality, relationality, righteousness, or a whole host of ideas. But Poythress argues that man is like God “holistically” (91). This opens many possibilities!

In part 2, “Principles and Framework for Interpretation,” Poythress (with help from Timothy P. Yates) develops “an ana-

logical use of the Ten Commandments.” He calls this interpretive framework the *Lex Christi*, or “Law of Christ” (129). Instead of one or two ways to understand mankind (for example, as “rational,” or as “body and soul”), Poythress uses all ten of the commandments as analogies to relate God and mankind as made in God’s image. For example, God is supremely contented (tenth commandment). Mankind images God as analogously contented (and so on with every commandment). This *Lex Christi* framework adapts to examine mankind in any of the “estates” (pre-fall, fallen, redeemed, glorified).

Poythress’s approach offers a multifaceted view of the “image of God” that focuses our attention on the ethical and filial (that is, “sonship”) relations we have with God. Certainly, humanity is like God in “knowledge, righteousness, and holiness” (Shorter Catechism Q. 10; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). But what about in intimacy (seventh commandment)? Or in dynamism (fourth commandment)? In short, man is like God at every turn. If this is true, then no aspect of our humanity is exempt from the creative and redemptive work of God. The Lord redeems whole persons made like God, not only a “part” or separate “parts” of us.

In the rest of the book, Poythress applies this *Lex Christi* framework to topics like human nature, body and soul, covenant, free will, and sexuality. The results are intriguing. For example, his analysis of Paul’s description of his potential death in Philippians 1:20–26 gives many perspectives on when we “depart [to] be with Christ”

(v. 23). We gain greater intimacy with Christ (seventh commandment) and enter greater rest (fourth commandment) (338). Sometimes assumptions about the “body” and the “soul” as distinct “parts” of us distract from the fact that we go to be with the Lord, even as we await final resurrec-

tion. This is mysterious. But Poythress is content with mystery.

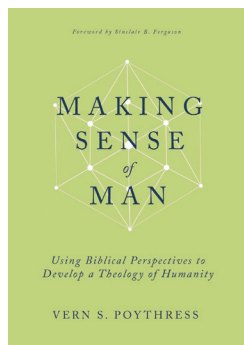
In the end, some may not appreciate this contentment. After all, don’t the great creeds and the Westminster Standards assume some of the frameworks Poythress critiques? It seems to me that the author draws out more precious marrow from these time-tested creedal bones. Read Poythress, be refreshed, and then confess Westminster with more pep in your step.

***Daily Doctrine: A One-Year Guide to Systematic Theology*, by Kevin DeYoung. Crossway, 2024. Hardcover, 432 pages, \$32.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Tyler C. Detrick.**

How do we pass along the study of systematic theology to a new generation? How do we help newcomers to the Reformed tradition sharpen their theological vocabulary and to start to think as Christians who rightly divide the word of truth? Kevin DeYoung provides a helpful resource to this end in his *Daily Doctrine: A One-Year Guide to Systematic Theology*.

Daily Doctrine is designed in the style of a yearly devotional, but it is in fact a systematic theology. Over the course of 260 days (breaking for two days each week), DeYoung covers the primary topics of theology, including prolegomena, theology proper, anthropology, covenant theology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. The reading for each day covers a complete subtopic but is no longer than a page and a half. Thus, the reader has an accessible volume that he can use either as a daily devotional or as a mini systematic theology. Consider this volume the utility knife of systematics.

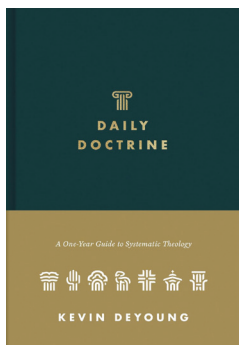
I have appreciated DeYoung over the years for his clear, concise, and contemporary writing. He is gifted at taking seminary-level topics and transposing them into conversations at your family coffee table. *Daily Doctrine* does not disappoint in this respect! DeYoung does an excellent job of introducing technical terms like “archetypal” and “*ordo salutis*” without



confusing his readers with unnecessary jargon. I also appreciate how DeYoung demonstrates the same skill while explaining tough topics; for instance, on Day 109 he contrasts Baptist and Presbyterian covenant theologies by using a memorable analogy of a puppy growing into a dog.

I also found *Daily Doctrine* to be rich in pastoral application. Although the transition between explanation and application occasionally feels clunky, I do appreciate DeYoung asking, “so what?” on a regular basis. For example, after a week of reading on the doctrine of the Trinity, he takes a day to ask (and answer), “So why does the doctrine of the Trinity matter? What is the ‘payoff’ for the ordinary Christian?” (72). DeYoung also includes relevant sections on pressing issues of our own day, including transgenderism, homosexuality, and church membership, as well as some controversial issues like creation days and republication. As a result, this volume feels relevant to our day and time.

One possible critique of this book is that it errs so much on the side of brevity that readers will walk away having only scratched the surface of each topic. Can someone really have a solid grasp of the doctrine of regeneration after reading only one page? DeYoung, however, is banking on his readers developing an appetite for faithful systematics and turning from his book to older and reliable theologians with hunger for more. DeYoung regularly quotes theologians like Bavinck, Hodge, and Turretin, as well as the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity so that his readers know where to go for a deeper dive into these topics. Equipped with new vocabulary and trained to think theologically, readers of *Daily Doctrine* will find after a year that Turretin or Berkhof are far less intimidating. They might even move Bavinck from the shelf to their coffee table.



One final thought on DeYoung’s *Daily Doctrine*: He has done an excellent job of getting systematic theology into the hands (and ears) of a new generation. I was surprised to find on Spotify this past week a podcast through Crossway called *Doctrine Matters with Kevin*

DeYoung. This free resource complements *Daily Doctrine*, bringing systematic theology into the world of digital streaming. May our churches be blessed by an ever-increasing set of resources that encourage us to think deeply about our infinite God!

***Fullness of Joy: A Biblical Theology of God With Us*, by Dan Ragusa. Reformed Forum, 2024. Paperback, 79 pages, \$12.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Peter Sim.**

This brief yet insightful introduction to covenantal theology presents profound biblical truths in a clear and accessible way, equipping both congregants and leaders.

Less than eighty pages, yet rich with theological depth, *Fullness of Joy* by Rev. Dan Ragusa reflects a pastoral heart eager to help God’s people grasp the ultimate blessing of redemption—God’s presence with his people. Through nine concise chapters, Ragusa unfolds the redemptive-historical theme of joy, tracing it from creation to Christ’s return. He shows how Scripture tells one continuous story of God making his dwelling among us, from Eden to the tabernacle and temple, through the incarnation of Christ, and ultimately to the new heavens and new earth.

Our joy, he explains, is made full—“like a thousand oceans into a single bucket”—when we truly grasp the depth of our friendship with God. To delight in being with him, and to know he delights in being with us, is the heart of Christ’s

gospel. Ragusa highlights the extraordinary lengths God has gone to ensure this communion, engaging with the covenantal promise that he is our God and we are his people. More than just a call to salvation, *Fullness of Joy* is a powerful reminder that the gospel is about being brought into the deepest possible relationship with our triune God.

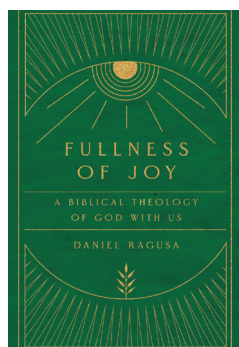
One of Ragusa’s greatest strengths is his ability to blend theological depth with pastoral application. He is not content to leave his readers with abstract doctrinal truths—he wants them to taste the joy of God’s presence even now. By grounding his reflections in Scripture and the Westminster Standards, he reminds us that the Reformed faith has always understood communion with God as central to the Christian life. His engagement with Psalm 16:11—“In your presence there is fullness of joy”—anchors this theme biblically, showing that true and lasting joy is found in God himself.

Though brief in length, *Fullness of Joy* is weighty in substance. It is the kind of book that invites both careful theological reflection and personal meditation. Pastors, elders, and laypeople alike will

find it a valuable resource for understanding the richness of our fellowship with God. A ten-class course can also be found on YouTube through the Reformed Forum website to complement a deeper study. Whether used in personal study, small groups, or Sunday school classes, this book will deepen the reader’s

love for Christ and heighten anticipation for the day when our joy will be made complete in his presence.

If you want to grow in your understanding of God’s redemptive plan and be encouraged in your walk with him, get this book. It will remind you that the chief end of man—to glorify God and enjoy him forever—is not just a distant hope, but a present reality in Christ.





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