

NEW HORIZONS

≡ *in the* ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ≡

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Planter's Journey
// by Michael J. Schout

MAY 2021

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New Horizons

in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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On March 28, heavy rains flooded Neon, Kentucky. OP mission work Neon Reformed Presbyterian Church sustained water damage in three of its main floor rooms, including pastor Jay Bennett's office. OPC Disaster Response sent its trailer with commercial dehumidifiers and fans to aid cleanup. For any updates, follow [OP Disaster Response on Facebook](#).



CHURCHES PLANTING CHURCHES



CARL W. MILLER // This is a story of a mother-daughter church-planting work. This is a story of God's grace in the Texas Hill Country. As God goes about his kingdom-expansion work, he does so wonderfully by working in the hearts and lives of his people. He strengthens, equips, motivates, and mobilizes us to

proclaim the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ and bring in the harvest.

Praying for a Daughter

God worked in the hearts of two families in this way, giving them a desire to plant an OP church. The Davis and Lovelady families had been members of South Austin Presbyterian Church (SAPC) in Austin, Texas, since 2015. As the commute was over an hour's drive, they both desired to have an OP church closer to their community in New Braunfels, Texas.

The session of SAPC was already considering planting a church. "Because SAPC was itself a daughter mission work of Providence Presbyterian in Pflugerville, Texas, we were already convinced of the strategic role of mother-daughter church planting," Jim Cassidy, pastor of SAPC, reflected.

"It was our desire, from the beginning of our work in 2014, to give birth to a daughter church of our own. So we began to pray. Not too long after

that, the Lord brought us the Davis and Lovelady families. We brought them into our church family and nurtured them as we would any of our sheep. Our commitment to them, and their commitment to drive up to Austin for worship and fellowship every Lord's Day, established a tight bond and connection. That is why 'giving birth' to New Braunfels OPC seemed to us so organic and natural," Cassidy explained.

The families approached their session, expressing their desire to begin a work in New Braunfels. In God's timing, after much prayer and consideration by all involved, the session approved their request and actively began church-planting efforts.

The Humble Beginning of God's Work

In March 2016, Phil Lovelady started a Bible study in his home. Later, he and Jon Davis led a weekly men's Bible study at a New Braunfels cof-

feehouse. There was a steady group of men, but while they all enjoyed learning together, these men did not have an interest in joining a new work. The Davis and Lovelady families then worked with the session and Mark Sumpter, the regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southwest, to set up an information meeting in town to see who would be interested in joining the work. They invited folks, and, as the day of the information meeting arrived, they were hopeful.

How many people showed up to the meeting? One. Just one. And that person was a friend of both families.

This could have easily deflated their church-planting balloon! However, God had other plans. There was kingdom work to be done, and there was a harvest to be gathered in New Braunfels, which the Lord would soon make evident.

The Lovelady and Davis families persevered and led a few more Bible studies that started to gain

momentum. The Hoekstra family soon joined them in the effort. Others gradually joined as well. In 2018, this growing group began renting a hotel meeting room. Once the group had over twenty people who showed interest in planting a church, the session approved them to start meeting on Sundays for worship. Their first Sunday afternoon service was on March 25, 2018, at the building of another local church. This was a wonderful day in the life of the congregation and the start of a new chapter in the development of the work.

God blessed the group with consistent pulpit supply by Jim Cassidy and by ministers in the presbytery, as well as some from other NAPARC denominations.

I also had the pleasure of being in the pulpit supply rotation. In our first encounters with the congregation, my family and I were truly blessed. The people were warm and friendly. We had great connection and fellowship with them. By God's grace, the group continued to be edified and to grow in peace and unity.

During these months, the officers and members of SAPC frequently prayed for the new little work, attended worship, and supported the daughter work in its service. The deacons helped set up the group's bank account and finances. Officers would bring their families down and attend worship monthly. SAPC members would attend as well, especially for baptisms. Their participation and love were a great encouragement to the folks in New Braunfels!

Gathering and Growing

In January 2019, God brought about the next momentous marker: the group petitioned and was approved by the Presbytery of the Southwest as a



The congregation of New Braunfels OPC outside its building

mission work. This was a strengthening step. Not only was the mother congregation working with them to plant a church, but the saints in New Braunfels now had the support and prayers of the regional church as well. They also had the formal recognition of being a mission work of the OPC.

"The development of a vibrant church body from a tiny and seemingly insignificant beginning is testimony to the enormous work of the risen Christ, who lives and reigns over all he has made," SAPC elder John Terpstra shared. "Men must never take credit for the work that only the Lord can do. To him be all glory."

Mark Sumpter held a brainstorming, goal-setting session with the group to plan next steps. One of the goals was to grow toward enough financial stability to be able to call an organizing pastor. In fall 2019, I was called as the evangelist to serve New Braunfels OPC and hit the ground running on October 1.

The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (CHMCE) approved the four-year funding package, which began on my start date. However, New Braunfels OPC was also recipient of another tremendous blessing: fund-

ing from the Neilands Fund (see box on page 5). This gave the work another "runway" to take off from. The extra financial support from the fund boosted congregational confidence, reduced stress, and provided more resources toward developing this daughter work.

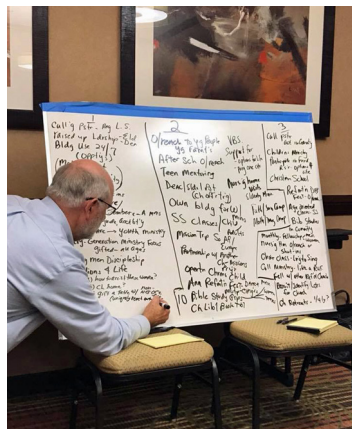
A few weeks later, on October 18, 2019, I was installed. This was such an exciting time for the congregation and for me and my family. Folks were still talking weeks later about how much they liked the installation service and how meaningful the charges to me and to the congregation were.

What God Is Doing Now

It's hard to believe that it has been one and a half years of ministry already. Time has flown! There are so many good things to share about what God has done and is doing in our midst.

We've added twenty-one new members and have more interested in going through the membership process. In June 2020, God brought about the right timing to start officer training. This training will continue through June of this year. We currently have three men pursuing the office of elder. God blessed the congregation to be able to lease its own building in November 2020. This has been wonderful! Now we can hold morning and evening worship, expand our Christian education programs, and watch other ministry opportunities bud and blossom.

Although COVID has changed how we do outreach, our outreach



Mark Sumpter's brainstorming board for New Braunfels

efforts continue and have borne fruit. One of our members, a man gifted in evangelism, was approached by a stranger during a Saturday night get-together. “I think I need to go to church,” this stranger said. The next day, he came to church, thanked me afterward for my sermon, and went home. On Monday, the man received tragic news. Later, when we met to talk and pray, I said to him, and he agreed, that the weekend’s timing could not have been a coincidence. God was at work.

“The church has seen rapid growth, mostly via professions and reaffirmations, and has a true evangelistic zeal to reach the lost,” SAPC elder Francesco Spadini commented. “What a joy it has been to see new faces with each visit to New Braunfels—to see new visitors, regular attenders, and members; and to see new Christians rejoice at the peace with God that is theirs through being united to Christ!”

When I sat down with one young girl and her dad to talk about their upcoming baptisms, the daughter was so excited. Her eyes got big and her jaw dropped as I explained what baptism means and what it would look like. Later, we overheard her telling her friends that she was going to be baptized. It just



Baptism of new members at New Braunfels OPC

warmed my heart.

“New Braunfels OPC has a wonderful collage of people that our Lord is gathering and bringing into his fold. The Word is being faithfully proclaimed to those from all walks of life and to both new and experienced believers, that all might be presented as mature in Christ,” SAPC elder Paul van Oudenaren said.

This collage has been a true blessing. We have folks who have been in Reformed churches for years, and those who had never previously set foot in a Reformed church. We have salesmen, nurses, engineers, active and retired members of the armed forces, artists, college students, a seminary student,

teachers, construction workers, farmers, and ranch workers. God has brought them all together to worship and serve him in this body.

From a congregation with a vision for a daughter work, to two families with a desire for a church, to a vibrant congregation of more than twenty-five families serving the Lord together, look at the harvest and rejoice! See what God has done, and give him all the praise and glory for building his church in the Texas Hill Country—and in OP church plants around the nation. □

The author is a church planter in New Braunfels, Texas.

The Neilands Fund and Mother-Daughter Church Planting

John Shaw

Church plants are started in a variety of ways. Sometimes a group of friends or acquaintances begins meeting for Bible study and eventually approaches a presbytery out of a shared desire to see a new church in their community. Other times, a presbytery identifies a geographic region with fertile soil for church planting, and they send a gifted evangelist to gather a group. The Lord has often blessed both these approaches in the planting of new Orthodox Presbyterian congregations.

A third approach, the mother-daughter model, usually provides the greatest stability for a new mission work. This model involves an established, healthy church sending families and officers to plant a church in another part of their community. The new mission work is supported by a familiar church and session, and that stability offers long-term benefits for the new work. This model also provides an opportunity for the local

church to think strategically about where and how to plant new churches. We have found that not only does the new mission work benefit from this approach, but the mother church is also spurred on to healthier church life and more robust evangelism as she works alongside her daughter.

To encourage this model of church planting, the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension set aside the Neilands Fund (a significant fund of designated gifts through a bequest) to provide additional support for mother-daughter church plants. Beyond the regular support offered to new mission works, CHMCE offers an additional \$40,000 matching gift to support daughter church plants.

Two daughter church plants to receive support from the fund are New Braunfels and Grace Fellowship (see page 6). We hope to see more examples of vibrant church planting through the Neilands Fund in coming years.

ONE CHURCH PLANTER'S JOURNEY



MICHAEL J. SCHOUT // There are many different ways to plant a church, and one model isn't necessarily better than another. But, as the church planter in a mother-daughter church-planting relationship, I've been blessed to enjoy the benefits of a mother church's vision, nurture, and resources, as Grace Fellowship OPC

in Zeeland, Michigan, has grown from a mere idea to a soon-to-be particularized daughter congregation of Harvest OPC in Wyoming, Michigan.

In this article, I'd like to share a little bit about my experience: what it included, how Harvest cared for me as a church planter, and where the Lord has taken Grace Fellowship since that initial seed was planted.

A Mother's Vision

One paragraph of Harvest's mission statement reads: "To be a vibrant, multiplying, Reformed church making a significant impact in West Michigan and the nation."



Worship service at Grace Fellowship

Note that word, "multiplying." Harvest is dedicated to being a church that plants churches. A vision statement alone, however, does not make a church-planting culture! That takes leadership, public prayers, the wise stewardship of resources, a mentality of kingdom generosity, and a willingness to be stretched, to lose members to a new plant, and to take on additional oversight. At Harvest, church planting is a priority built into the very fabric of the church's mission and identity.

I was graciously invited to be a part of Harvest's mission in fall 2018. My family and I came with the intention of planting a gospel-centered church in my hometown of Zeeland.

One of the ways a church like Harvest can make church planting a reality is through a financial boost from the Neilands Fund (see box on page 5). Pastor Wayne Veenstra, an associate pastor at Harvest, observed that this fund was a helpful impetus: "The Neilands Fund served to reinforce to our leadership team and to

our congregation that church planting was important. We could point to the denomination's support of our efforts in a way that underscored the emphasis we were trying to place on church planting in West Michigan. I think that helped our efforts get momentum."

A Daughter's Nurture

I was installed as a church-planting pastor in October 2018. I had an office at Harvest's church building so that I could be part of the leadership team, learn more about Harvest's culture, and build relationships within the church. My family worshiped at Harvest every Sunday and tried to immerse ourselves in the life and activities of the congregation. It was a sweet season of learning, planning, reading, and asking questions.

I was also invited to take part in ministry at Harvest so that the congregation could get to know me better. I was able to preach, do shepherding visits, and teach a midweek high school theology class.

Although I had been a pastor for about twelve years in a previous context, I had never planted a church before.

There was much to learn and discover! The beautiful thing about Harvest's timeline was that I had time to do that. I wasn't thrown into the deep end without a life preserver. There was a space for me to think, to tend my own heart and family, and to learn about Harvest even as I prepared to lead the planting of a daughter church.

With the help of the Harvest staff, and under the oversight of its session, ten core values for a daughter church developed that, in many ways, became the glue for our church plant. When we were ready to host our first informational meeting in Zeeland, this list was a helpful way to communicate our vision in tangible ways. Our core values are:

- Gospel centrality
- Culture of evangelism and hospitality
- Reformed doctrine
- Prayer dependency
- Expository preaching
- Morning and evening worship
- Authentic fellowship
- Multigenerational discipleship
- Shepherd leadership
- Place for weakness

Starting in January 2019, we held weekly core value studies in the Zeeland Public Library where we could further develop these things, give people the space to ask questions, and spend time cultivating relationships.

Then, in March 2019, we began worship services on Sunday evenings before fully launching morning and evening services on Easter Sunday.

Involvement of Officers

One of the ways Harvest continued to shepherd and nurture us during those early months was by sending an elder and a deacon to every service. The elder would pray after the offering was received, which helped our congregation put a face to a name. The officers were also available after the service to connect with their sheep, meet visitors, and minister to our needs.

As visitors turned into members, the Harvest session was involved in

membership interviews, shepherding visits, and all the normal responsibilities of elders. Planting in Zeeland took work, commitment, and a willingness to expand the Harvest session's shepherding districts for a season. Planting a daughter church takes more than the excitement of the pastor. It takes the entire session, the deacons, the staff, and the congregation.



At Schout's installation

After those early days, we were able to identify in our Zeeland group elder interns and deacon interns who were trained over the course of a year. These men attended Harvest session and deacon meetings in addition to our own meetings as a church plant.

We now have four elders and four deacons who are serving at Grace Fellowship. We are hoping, by God's grace, to particularize this spring. God is so good.

A Gospel Harvest

The cost to the mother church in church planting is vast. But what about the benefits? Why invest in planting churches?

Pastor Dale Van Dyke, the senior pastor at Harvest OPC and a wonderful mentor to me, explained it this way: "Each time we have planted a church, we've seen the Lord bless us both in giving and in new visitors. Nothing is lost when we are pursuing Christ's mission!"

No, that's not just a nice quote for *New Horizons*. That's how Pastor Van Dyke really feels, despite the fact that people he loves have left Harvest

for Grace Fellowship. It's all worth it. Why? Because of the great joy of seeing healthy, gospel-centered OP churches planted.

Pastor Wayne Veenstra agrees. "What we've found is that having an outward-focused orientation has been critical to our health as a congregation, and it has also tended to attract people."

We received about ten families from Harvest, which does a couple of things. On Harvest's side, it creates new opportunities for leadership and service. Whenever Harvest has planted churches, losing some of its members to the church plant, others step up at Harvest. Sometimes people step up who haven't previously served. Additionally, the families we've received from Harvest have been able to bring Harvest's culture along with them. They're excited about church planting, about serving, and about the mission of Jesus Christ to make disciples.

I am so thankful that the Lord brought me and my family to an OPC church plant. Over and over again, we have seen firsthand God's faithfulness and power in raising up a new gospel outpost in Zeeland. My experience as a church planter in a mother-daughter model has been incredible.

Now, it's my hope and prayer that one day Grace Fellowship will become a mother of our own daughter, continuing the vision that our "grandma," Harvest, has established. Can you imagine that? Churches planting churches who plant churches? May the Lord raise up a harvest of church-planting churches, to the praise of Christ's glorious grace. Or, in the words of another church planter, the Apostle Paul:

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (2 Cor. 9:10–11) □

The author is a church planter in Zeeland, Michigan.

THE SABBATH AND CHRISTIAN LIVING



RYAN M. MCGRAW // The Sabbath is not a popular subject. Even using the term brings thoughts of disunity, contention, and legalism to the minds of many. Some church members want their pastors to teach about the Sabbath more than what is appropriate, while others hope that he will stop bringing it up.

Yet the fact that the Sabbath belongs among the Ten Commandments means that every Christian, Reformed or not, thinks about it on some level with rhythmic regularity. The fourth commandment is:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exod. 20:8–11)

One good way to develop a healthy view of the Sabbath is to understand its place in the law of God and the Christian life.

The Westminster Larger Catechism tells us, among other things,

that the Sabbath enables us “better to keep all the rest of the commandments” (Q. 121). My goal here is to illustrate why this is the case by showing how the Sabbath helps us to know and worship God according to the first table of the law and how it increases our love for others through the second table of the law. Ultimately, as a day dedicated to worship, the Sabbath exemplifies and promotes a life of communion with Christ in self-denial.

If you are looking for a convincing argument that there is a Christian Sabbath and that it is Sunday instead of Saturday, then this is not the place to look. If you are looking for a full biblical argument against worldly employments and recreations on the Lord’s Day, then, again, keep looking. This has been done elsewhere. The point of this short article is to connect the dots between the Sabbath and Christian living more broadly.

The Sabbath and the First Table of the Law

All Ten Commandments are in-

tertwined. In this regard, the Sabbath is both common and special. It is common because it is not unusual for the breaking or keeping of one commandment to entail the breaking or keeping of others. It is special in that it sets a context for the public worship of God, without which true religion would likely soon be forgotten. WLC 121 wisely calls the Sabbath “a short abridgement of religion” in light of its connections to creation and redemption in Exodus 20:8 and Deuteronomy 5:14–15. The Sabbath helps us to keep the first four commandments by setting an appropriate time and context for worship.

The first four commandments are like a four-stringed instrument made to be played in tune. The first commandment teaches us whom we should worship. The second commandment teaches us how we should worship him. The third commandment emphasizes the respect we owe to him in worship. The fourth commandment stresses the time set apart to worship him exclusively. While we worship the true God

as God and our God, and we reverence his name in every area of life (Rom. 12:1–2; 1 Cor. 10:31), he commands us to set the Sabbath apart as “holy” (for example, in Exod. 31:14), focusing our attention on worshiping him directly for one whole day in seven. Just as a holy marriage gives exclusive rights of husbands and wives to each other, so a holy day gives exclusive rights of the Lord and his people to each other.

By learning to worship God directly and exclusively for one whole day in seven, we are better able to worship and serve him indirectly in every other area of life. The Sabbath teaches us to set our minds on things above, where Christ is seated (Col. 3:2), to long for our room in the Father’s heavenly household (John 14:2), and to yearn by the Spirit for the full possession of what we have in title now (Rom. 8:23, 26). Setting aside our worldly employments and recreations once a week for the purpose of worship teaches us how to engage in our worldly employments and recreations the rest of the week as acts of worship. Devoting some time exclusively to worship helps us better to view all our days as part of a life of worship. On the Sabbath, we honor the triune God as the object of worship, in the right way, with right hearts, and at the right time.

The Sabbath and the Second Table of the Law

The Sabbath helps us keep the second table of the law better as well. This should not surprise us, because we love others when we love God and keep his commandments, and we love God and keep his commandments by loving others (1 John 3:14; 5:1–3). Sin teaches us to love ourselves first, then to be kind to others, and then to add religion if we think it is helpful in promoting these first two goals. The Sabbath teaches us to love the Lord our God first, to love our neighbors for his sake, and to love ourselves last. Inverting the sinful order marks friendship with God in his Son, by means of his Word and Spirit.

The God-centered and Christ-

exalting focus of the Sabbath enables us to love our neighbors better. What better way is there to love other believers than to edify one another in public worship and in the fellowship of the saints? Heads of household should lead in family worship daily, but especially on the Lord’s Day. Does this not flow naturally from being transfixed with how to glorify God best and how to serve our wives and children for his sake? The Sabbath should also lead us to pray for our enemies and to invite our unbelieving friends to come and behold the glory of the Lord among us. Hospitality stretches the blessings of public worship around the table as we invite believers, and even unbelievers, to see the Father’s works, in the body of his Son, with the presence of his Spirit, in his holy temple.

We need not only pursue works of necessity, such as by feeding our families, our friends, and ourselves, but we can pursue acts of mercy as well. Some families in our local congregation do this by going to a local nursing home to minister to those who are lonely and in need. When we seek the glory of God and the good of others above what we think is restful for us, then the possibilities for mercy and evangelism in the context of worship are more than we can pursue.

Even our private worship on the Sabbath day forces us out of ourselves in Christ-honoring self-denial. We must prioritize public worship as the place and time when the triune God meets us the most powerfully. Yet we must know the Lord for ourselves, and, if we have families, we must lead our family members to know him. When we have had a bad week at work, or have struggled with teaching our children, or are concerned about our finances, or are anxious over how to care for aging relatives, the Sabbath makes us pause to meditate on our Savior instead as both Creator and Redeemer. We should meditate intentionally in private, in families, and in public worship, on his suffering and obedience for us. We should exult in his glorious resurrec-

tion and what this means for this life and for the world to come. In short, we should be so preoccupied with the Son of Righteousness that we dispel, if only for a day, the darkness that threatens to consume us.

This requires a measure of self-denial and trust. This weekly rhythm is precisely what we need to refocus our lives. Our problems do not dissolve with meditation, but meditating on the great works of our Savior corrects our spiritual vision and keeps us on the right path. This will make denying our desires for our worldly employments and recreations on the Sabbath more natural as we look to the self-denying Savior. Doing so, in turn, will take our gaze off ourselves and remind us that others need a day of worship as well.

Delighting in the Lord of the Sabbath

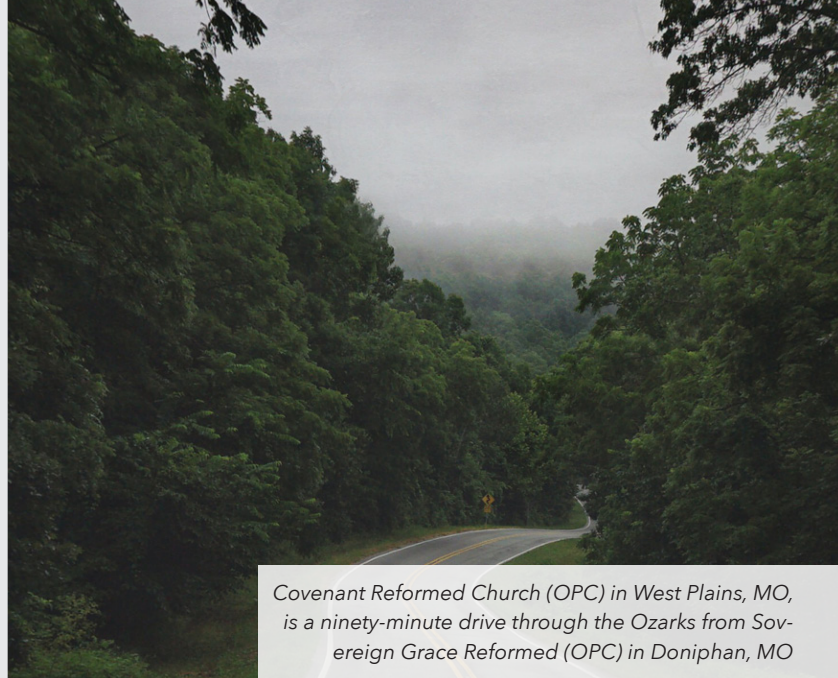
The Lord designed the Sabbath to teach us to long for glory. The Sabbath is not the entirety of the Christian life, but the Sabbath is a vital component of healthy Christian living. Through it, we delight in the Father as the head of our household. In it, we have communion with Christ our Savior in his humiliation and exaltation. By it, the Spirit renews us in the image of God as those who worship in Spirit and in truth. By dedicating a day to worship, we honor the object of worship through the public means that he has appointed, with reverent hearts, at the appointed time. By meditating on God’s great works through his Son and their application to us by his Word and Spirit, we learn better both to love God and to love others.

The Sabbath should be a delight to us because the Lord of the Sabbath is a delight to us. The more we delight in the Lord of the Sabbath, will we not be better equipped to serve and love the Lord’s people and those outside the church as well? □

The author is professor of systematic theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

THE ROAD TO CHURCH PLANTING IN THE OZARKS

// PAUL A. MOURREALE



Covenant Reformed Church (OPC) in West Plains, MO, is a ninety-minute drive through the Ozarks from Sovereign Grace Reformed (OPC) in Doniphan, MO

Church planting has many ups and downs. This has certainly been our experience in West Plains, Missouri.

For the first year or so of church planting, our family made the ninety-minute trip from West Plains to Doniphan each week for church. The journey along MO 142 was beautiful, filled with twists and turns. The highway resembles ribbon candy, which is sweetly bent this way and that. Each turn of the road brought a great vista here or a low hollow there. There was great joy in that drive. However, along with the beauty and sometimes excitement of the journey, there were times we had to stop and pull off the road, as one of our children inevitably got carsick on the way.

Church planting is a lot like a drive through the Ozarks. Sometimes it's full speed ahead with joy, and sometimes you're pulled off the road to clean up!

Nestled in the wooded hills of the Ozarks, not far from the Arkansas border, West Plains is about as rural as anywhere you might find in America. Trees and cattle cover the hills. Churches of many flavors dot the landscape. The people are friendly, but there are deep spiritual needs, including an abundance of what used to be "big city" problems that are

now all too common in rural America: broken homes, broken lives, and rampant drug abuse. The soil in the Ozarks is quite literally rocky in parts, and so are the hearts of many. Our mission is to plant the seeds of the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the region. Our prayer is that the Lord would till deeply the soil of these hearts—that they could receive the seed of the Word joyfully. We earnestly desire your prayers for this as well!

The Beginning of Covenant Reformed Church

Like the twisting roads through the Ozark hills, the story of Covenant Reformed Church has had some twists and turns. Our work began with a small group of like-minded people who desired clear and biblical teaching and reverent worship. In 2015, a small group began to meet weekly for a Bible study. This initial effort began at the impetus of Dr. Curtis Horstman, a ruling elder at Sovereign Grace Reformed Church (OPC) in Doniphan, with the encouragement of his pastor, Kent Harding. As the Lord would have it, there was another turn in the road and that initial effort came to an end. Afterward, it was determined that what was needed was someone who could come and devote greater attention to church planting. Along with working as a doctor in a local clinic,



The congregation of Covenant Reformed, with church planter Paul Mourreale on the far right

Horstman also served on the board of the local Christian school, where there was a need for some new teachers. This gave him an idea—he thought that perhaps he could convince an OP minister to come and teach at the school and begin the work of planting a church in West Plains. After talking it over with his pastor, they began to make inquiries.

In spring 2018, our family was looking for a new call as the work in St. Louis had run its course. After much prayer and discussion, we felt God was calling us to West Plains, first to teach at the school but with the larger goal of seeing a new church established there. Both my wife, Sarah, and I were hired as teachers to instruct at Ozarks Christian Academy, and the children were enrolled in school. By early 2019, there was little to speak of concerning a potential church plant, although some contacts were made. We assumed that this work would take years to materialize—but the Lord had other plans. In his wonderful providence, he was connecting many like-minded people aside from the Horstman family and our family. By summer 2019, there was a monthly Bible study, which soon began meeting twice a month. By September, we were meeting for worship every Lord's Day.

Responding to the Pandemic

We began 2020 praying for five new families, but the year soon brought another twist in the road. By March, we, like everyone else, were affected by the coronavirus pandemic. For the first few weeks, we met online because we were not allowed to meet indoors. We were convinced, however, that we needed to find a way to meet in person without creating a controversy in our community. In April, we purchased some sound equipment and began meeting outdoors in my front yard. For the most part, these were “drive-in” style because it rained for all but one of those Sundays! What a turn of events this was; it actually cemented and strengthened our group.

We had prayed for five new families in 2020, and the Lord was pleased to bless us with that and more. In these, the early months of 2021, we continue to enjoy the blessings of the Lord. Our men and women each have regular studies on rotating Wednesday evenings. We continue to have regular

visitors who find us both through the internet and by invitation from members of our church. We look forward to planning outreach events when life begins to normalize after the pandemic.

The Prayers of the Saints

The journey of Covenant Reformed Church has been, to some degree, no different from other mission works. A variety of ingredients divinely coincided: a committed core group, generous giving, oversight from the broader church, and of course the prayers of God's people. The book of Acts describes how the church “devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Our work has seen wonderful devotion to God's Word, to the fellowship of the saints both on the Lord's Day and throughout the week, and to prayer.



During spring 2020, Covenant Reformed met in the Mourreales' front yard for worship

In the epistles, the Apostle Paul regularly prayed for the churches and asked that they pray for him as well (see, for example, Rom. 1:10; 15:30; Col. 1:9; 4:3). The prayers of God's people have had a significant impact on the efforts in West Plains. The journey for our family began in 2018, and the “official” start to our church plant was in 2019, but, as we learned recently, prayers for our work began almost forty years ago! A few believers, none of whom are currently part of the mission work, had been praying nearly forty years ago for a Reformed church in West Plains. Although in many respects an unlikely place to establish a new Orthodox Presbyterian church, this city was being prepared by the Lord all along.

Perhaps some will read this article and be encouraged, for the Lord has heard their prayer for a Reformed work in this area and has answered abundantly. We are certainly grateful for the prayers of many in the OPC.

We are reminded in Scripture to “continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2). Pray expectantly, that the Lord would establish churches in many places. Pray for missionaries, both at home and abroad, that they may be effective stewards of the grace of God. Please continue to pray for the growth and strength of our mission work here. Pray that God would be pleased to use this work to establish more Orthodox Presbyterian churches in the region.

The church-planting road is long and winding, just like the highways through the Ozarks. But each turn on our road has seen the hand of God at work.

The author is a church planter in West Plains, Missouri.

Home Missions Today

For up-to-date news and prayer requests, receive our newsletter by emailing HomeMissionsToday@opc.org. New editions: May 12 & 26.

A CYCLE OF LOCKDOWNS IN HAITI

// OCTAVIUS DELFILS



New members of Église Presbytérienne Réformée de Delmas in 2020, with Ben Hopp on far left and Delfils, far right

You may have not visited Haiti yet, but you probably have seen this country frequently in the news in recent years. The country has been going through a political crisis since 1986, when Jean-Claude Duvalier (Baby Doc), the dictator who ruled over Haiti for several decades, fled the country. However, over the last three years, the situation in Haiti has grown worse with a cycle of violence and lockdowns.

Political Lockdown

Since July 2018, political opponents have used violent means to try to overthrow the current government. Ironically, the Haitian people they claim to be fighting for have suffered the most through these tactics, which effectively lock down everyone in their homes for weeks at a time. From September 2019 to January 2020, this situation intensified as roadblocks and armed gangs controlled Haitians' freedom and livelihoods, throwing the country into turmoil.

More than half of Haiti's population make their daily living through activities in the streets and markets. To bring food home for their families and dependents, these Haitians have to be able to leave their homes. But the political violence kept everyone indoors. Children could not go to school. Jobs, transport, and commerce were disrupted. The lockdown escalated unemployment and inflation rates and crippled access to daily education and the most basic of necessities across the nation.

We know that the Lord is on the throne and in control and that he understands what his people are going through.

The circumstances did not remove our joy and eagerness to come and worship the Lord! Our church members who could walk to church continued to meet for worship and fellowship regardless of the danger in the streets. Though some were attacked and suffered loss, God preserved their lives and protected us.

COVID-19 Lockdown

After four months of political lockdown, there was a relative calm in the beginning of 2020. Businesses and schools were opened again. The church was able to meet freely. However, as we all know, in mid-March COVID-19 hit, and the country was locked down once more. Schools shut down. Churches did not meet, and many businesses closed their doors.

However, there were still a lot of people in the streets because of the day-to-day fight for a livelihood. They exposed themselves to the risks of catching the coronavirus not only because of the lack of information about it, but also because it is just so difficult to stay home.

The government reports that Haiti has had about 12,500 cases of COVID-19 with 250 fatalities. In fact, it is difficult to have a good estimation of the real number, because most of the people in Haiti do not have access to a hospital or to a test. However, we did not have people infected in our congregations. If you know how deficient or really almost non-existent the sanitary system in Haiti is, you will understand how gracious the Lord has been to us in this pandemic.

Although the church couldn't meet, we broadcasted the worship services and Bible



Violence and kidnappings are on the rise in Haiti

studies through Facebook. We encouraged church members to follow the services and to worship at home with families and neighbors. Not all of them had access to the internet, but we were able to send sermons to them through the church's WhatsApp group.

After four months of the COVID lockdown, the government decided to open the country. We praise the Lord that we were able to resume services in the middle of July 2020. The Lord preserved our church family in Port-au-Prince and La Gonâve from the coronavirus. Most of them have returned to church. Please pray for our continuous protection as the pandemic is not over yet, and infection is still a possibility.

Lockdown Because of Fear of Violence

While the country is officially opened, people are still in voluntary lockdown in their houses out of well-founded fear of violence, which is increasing in Port-au-Prince and on the roads to the provinces. Since November 2020, the number of kidnappings has climbed, particularly in Port-au-Prince. The threat of being kidnapped or killed is real.

We all know victims of the street violence. Most tragically for the broader church in Haiti, Pastor Jean Jacob Paul, a missionary colleague and PCA pastor who was working alongside us in the formation of the presbytery in Haiti, was shot and killed on the way to his church in August 2020.

Besides the personal loss, the loss of Jean Paul is a big blow to the plans for a presbytery, but the Lord has his purpose for his church in Haiti. We know that he is on the throne and his plan for his church will go forward. We do not lose hope. We live day by day, resting in his mighty hands.



Fellow missionary and PCA pastor Jean Jacob Paul was shot and killed in August 2020

Slowing of Some Activities but Progress in Others

The political, COVID-19, and fear-of-violence lockdowns have slowed some activities, but in other areas there

has been progress. The benefit of the confinement is that worshippers appreciate more fully the privilege they have to gather together to worship the Lord and fellowship with the saints. It was so hard when we could not meet together for such a long time!

After resuming services, we had the joy of starting a new members class in September. After about two months of teaching the attendees, we held a service with professions of faith and baptisms. The Lord added six members to the church, including a non-communicant member. Our prayer is that the Lord will continue to call a people out of darkness and bring them into his fold. May he bring families and individuals who are hungry for the Word and who want to worship and serve him.

For security reasons, and then because of the pandemic, we have postponed our plans to form the presbytery. We are praying that the Lord will bless our plans for the remainder of 2021, so that we may finally meet as a regional body. Please pray that the Lord will provide everything we need for the churches to carry out this plan.

Translation Ministry

One of the other benefits of the COVID-19 lockdown was the opportunity to work on translation projects. I had more time to finish reviewing the translation of Morton Smith's *Systematic Theology*. I have been able to complete and revise the Bible curriculum for the elementary grades at Adoration Christian School. (This school is part of the Adoration Christian Center, a Reformed ministry that has been a tremendous support and partner for our church, even giving us a space on their property to worship.) The goal is that these books may be useful for the nurturing of those students in the Word and that other schools might be able to use them to teach the Word of God to several generations of children.

We don't know what the coming months will bring. It doesn't seem like the political situation is going to resolve soon. However, we know that the Lord is good. He will continue to preserve his church and establish his kingdom, though the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain. Our God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. He will be exalted among the nations; he will be exalted in the earth! That's our prayer, and yours with us also. May he continue to bring more people to hear the Word and believe!

The author is an associate missionary laboring with the Haiti Mission in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.



Congregational meeting

NEW MTIOPC COURSE: DISABILITY AND THE CHURCH

// STEPHEN J. TRACEY



Members of Lakeview OPC celebrate the birthday of Finley (center, wearing a crown)

Like many pastors, I did not really think about ministry to those with disabilities until a little covenant child with disabilities was added to our church.

I am still surprised by this. In my own family background, I had an aunt with Down Syndrome. She was part of my life until I was forty years old. She was part of my home church, and yet I never thought how churches should help families impacted by disability or how churches could reach out to find people with disabilities. The subject never came up in the late

eighties when I was in seminary, nor do I remember anyone discussing disability and the church during my early years of pastoral ministry.

So I think that what happened to our church—Lakeview OPC in Rockport, Maine—is that I started to hear the experience of this one family as they ministered to their child. Then I started to see. Then I started to listen. Then I started to look.

In 2018, 12 percent of Americans reported a disability, including hearing, visual, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care and independent living disabilities (see Erickson, Lee, and von Schrader, “Disability Statistics from the 2018

More Information on 2021 MTIOPC Courses

What are the 2021 courses?

- Disability and the Church (taught by Stephen J. Tracey)
- OPC History (taught by John R. Muether)
- Greek Refresher (taught by David C. Noe)

When do the MTIOPC courses begin?

Classes will begin on June 1, 2021, with online assignments. Mandatory in-person intensive training sessions for Disability and the Church and OPC History will be held in Rockport, Maine, August 10–12. Greek Refresher offers weekly online one-hour classes and two two-hour sessions during the online intensive training.

Who can attend?

Admission is open to OPC ministers, elders, licentiates, and men under care. **Admission to Disability and the Church is also open to other members who serve in the Christian Education or Sunday school ministries in their local OP congregations.** A non-ordained member who wishes to participate needs to be recommended by his or her session in a written letter sent to the MTIOPC director (danny.olinger@opc.org). To ensure that the session supports the

non-ordained participant’s desire to minister more effectively to those with disabilities, it is ordinarily required that a session member should take the class along with him/her. However, if this is not feasible or convenient, the session should affirm and explain its commitment to ministering to those with disabilities in its letter of recommendation.

How much does it cost?

All students must pay a \$50 registration fee, which is fully refundable upon successful completion of the course. Tuition for OPC History and Greek Refresher is \$50 for OP elders and free for OPC ministers, licentiates, and men under care. Tuition for Disability and the Church is free for all students. To help defray the cost of travel to intensive training, travel scholarships of up to \$350 are available to OP ministers, licentiates, and men under care. If necessary, an additional \$100 in travel reimbursement is available if the student’s session or presbytery matches that amount.

Where do I apply?

Applications are available at www.opc.org. Go to Worldwide Outreach, then Christian Education, then Ministerial Training. Click on [MTIOPC](#).

When is the deadline?

Deadline for registration is May 28, 2021.

American Community Survey,” Cornell University Yang-Tan Institute, www.disabilitystatistics.org). That would be one out of every eight people in your church. Some states have higher percentages. For example, 16.3 percent of Maine residents reported a disability (or roughly one in six people). There are people with disabilities in your church. There are people with disabilities that have never been to any church.

Every church is on a journey in its ministry to those with disabilities. We may still be unaware of the need, or we may have started reaching out to serve, and serve with, people with disabilities. Ministering to families impacted by disability is not about offering them something; it is about sharing. It’s about learning how to say, “sit beside me; come eat with me; ride with me; visit with me; come to the park with us; come to church with us; worship with us.” The New Testament is full of little phrases about “one another”: love one another, greet one another, encourage one another, accept one another, bear with one another, bear one another’s burdens, serve one another, and show hospitality to one another. Disability ministry is one way in which we fulfil these commands.

At some point, our session realized that our whole congregation needed to begin to learn how to serve, include, and disciple people and families impacted by disability. This was not an extra program, but something the whole congregation needed to participate in.

The church should minister to people impacted by disability because we must seek to serve everyone with the whole of the gospel. It’s not an optional app for our iPhone church menu, it is simply our responsibility to take the gospel to every creature: “He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation’” (Mark 16:15). And it is our responsibility to disciple all who come: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

A Reformed Perspective on Disability and the Church

A new MTIOPC course is designed to help pastors, elders, and members to think biblically and practically about disability and the church. It provides an introduction to disability and the church from a Reformed perspective. Readings are selected to review the major theological themes of creation, the fall, providence, salvation, the church, and the resurrection.

The course will emphasize, among other things, that:

- Every person you meet bears the image of God (Gen. 1:27).
- Every person you meet suffers from the effects of the fall into sin in Genesis 3. The whole of creation is groaning under it, too (Rom. 8:23).
- Every person you meet needs the Savior, and he offers himself freely to all (John 3:16).
- Every person you meet is heading to an eternal state; there will be a resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15:42–44).

Following the assigned reading, there will be an in-person

Favorite Psalms and Hymns *Trinity Psalter Hymnal no. 425* “How Sweet and Awesome”

Christopher Folkerts

Rev. Isaac Watts, renowned “Father of English Hymnody,” wrote some 750 hymns over the course of his ministry. The *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* has retained an impressive twenty-two, including the beautiful hymn “How Sweet and Awesome Is the Place.”

A good hymn has sound theology, beautiful poetry, and pleasing music seamlessly interwoven. An excellent hymn, like “How Sweet and Awesome Is the Place,” has something more: it has soul.

Unique to this hymn is how it joins election and evangelism. The Lord’s parable of the great banquet undergirds the hymn as it transports us to heaven and the presence of Jesus. A delightful banquet is being prepared. Ministering love carries sumptuous dainties from the King’s larder and sets them on tables before the arriving guests, who break forth into joyful song. Watts sees himself in the company and begins to sing in wonder, “How sweet and awesome is the place with Christ within the doors, while everlasting love displays the choicest of her stores.”

He marvels that he, of all sinners, should be invited to the feast. “Why me?” is the question all the guests share. Thousands have made a wretched choice, choosing to starve rather than come. The guests know they did not come of their own volition. Divine love irresistibly drew them. As Watts contemplates the unspeakable wonder of being present at this heavenly feast, he also thinks of those who have not yet accepted Jesus’s glorious invitation. In stanzas 5 and 6, his heartfelt prayer ascends to God:

Pity the nations, O our God,
constrain the earth to come;
Send your victorious Word abroad,
and bring the strangers home.
We long to see your churches full,
that all the chosen race
May, with one voice and heart and soul,
sing your redeeming grace.

intensive training session in Rockport, Maine, to think more carefully about practical issues. In it, we will address these areas:

- Assessing your church: barriers, accessibility, attitudes
- Welcoming people and families with disabilities: signs of hospitality
- Christian education: classroom, adapting curriculum, friendship, buddies
- “The other six days”: respite, support, diaconal assistance

The author is pastor of Lakeview OPC in Rockport, Maine.

WHERE DOES YOUR DONATION TO HOME MISSIONS GO?

When you give to Worldwide Outreach, about 40 percent of each undesignated gift will be used by the Committee on Home Missions. How will it be used to advance the evangelistic efforts of the OPC?

Church Planting

2021 budget: \$700,000

It's mostly likely that your donation will directly aid church planting. The Committee on Home Missions provides financial assistance for new OP mission works. In fact, it may provide up to 50 percent of the work's total budget if the presbytery and/or the mission work cannot fully support the labors of a full-time evangelist for that work. (This support is typically given for no more than four years.) In 2020, there were eight new evangelists and interns. In 2021, there may be as many as seventeen new evangelists and church-planting interns, for a total of thirty-three evangelists and five interns. Three church plants are featured in this issue (see pages 3–7, 10–11).

While the Lord has truly blessed our mission works during the difficult circumstances of the past year, the pandemic caused several new mission works to pause. Also, several presbyteries temporarily interrupted their search for regional home missionaries. For that reason, the number of works supported was lower in 2020, but we expect a higher than normal number of new works and regional home missionaries in 2021.

Church-Planter Training

2021 budget: \$125,000

Or, your donation could go toward training church planters. Each year, Home Missions holds a church-planter training conference for church planters and their spouses. In addition to the conference, Home Missions visits three seminaries annually to meet future OP pastors and church planters and teach them about ministry in the OPC. It also provides a variety of online training tools for church planters

and others interested in learning more about evangelistic outreach. One of these tools is outwardopc.com.

Regional Home Missionaries (RHMs)

2021 budget: \$350,000

Your dollar may also go toward supporting RHMs, who are church-planting representatives of their presbyteries and serve as liaisons with Home Missions. RHMs perform a wide variety of church-planting tasks, including leading Bible studies, following up with contacts, leading or coordinating a mission work's first months of worship, and more. In 2021, Home Missions is budgeting support for twelve RHMs (two part-time, ten full-time). Four of the new RHM positions have been filled as of May 2021.

Home Missions Staff

2021 budget: \$368,525

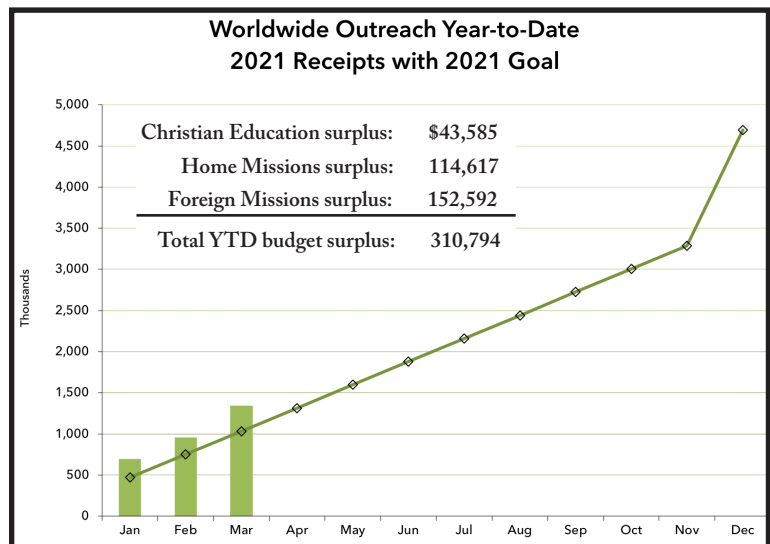
Home Missions may also use your funds to support its staff: general secretary John Shaw, associate general secretary Al Tricarico, administrative assistant Katharine Olinger, and one-third of the salary of Committee on Diaconal Ministries coordinator David Nakhla—as well as the travel and other expenses that make their work possible.

Promotion

2021 budget: \$60,000

You may have seen the Worldwide Outreach videos last fall; that was the work of Home Missions in partnership with the Committee on Coordination. Home Missions also assists mission works with creating videos and other promotional materials. If you'd like to see an example of their promotional work, visit graceop.org.

Thank you for your generous support of Home Missions. With your support, more people are hearing the gospel and worshipping God.



MAY



The Bekkerings



The Canavans

-
- 1** **JAY & ANDREA BENNETT**, Neon, KY. Praise the Lord for new members at Neon Reformed. / Yearlong intern **ANDREW (ANESSA) BEKKERING** at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, MI.
-
- 2** **BILL & MARGARET SHISHKO**, Deer Park, NY. Pray that God would provide a suitable and stable facility for the Haven, OPC. / Pray for the **BOARDWALK CHAPEL** as they begin another season of training and evangelism.
-
- 3** **BEN & HEATHER HOPP**, Haiti. Pray for the family as they adjust to being on furlough and begin to visit churches in the US and Canada. / **MELISA MCGINNIS**, controller, and **CHARLENE TIPTON**, database administrator.
-
- 4** Missionary associates **DR. JIM & JENNY KNOX**, Mbale, Uganda. / Associate missionaries **OCTAVIUS & MARIE DELFILS**, Haiti. Pray that the church would be able to gather for worship as street violence and kidnappings rise.
-
- 5** **GREGORY & GINGER O'BRIEN**, Downingtown, PA. Pray that the congregation of Christ Church would have awe and joy in worship. / **MARK STUMPF**, manager of the OPC Loan Fund.

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- 6** **CHARLES & CONNIE JACKSON**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for a new church plant in Mbale scheduled to begin meeting this month. / Pray for **GREAT COMMISSION PUBLICATIONS** as it produces Sunday school materials and other resources.
-
- 7** **LACY (DEBBIE) ANDREWS**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast. / **HEERO & ANYA HACQUEBORD**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray that the Lord would provide space for the church to worship under COVID social-distancing rules.
-
- 8** **MIKE & NAOMI SCHOUT**, Zeeland, MI. Praise God for how he has grown the congregation at Grace Fellowship OPC. / **MR. AND MRS. F.**, Asia (on furlough). Pray for the remaining students and staff as the university finishes up its final semester.
-
- 9** **RYAN & ROCHELLE CAVANAUGH**, Merrillville, IN. Pray that the Lord would bless Mission Church's outreach and evangelism efforts. / **GREGORY REYNOLDS**, editor, and **AYRIAN YASAR**, editorial assistant, of *Ordained Servant*.
-
- 10** **DANNY OLINGER**, general secretary of Christian Education. Pray for his rehabilitation following a COVID attack that led to a 21-day isolated hospital stay for antiviral treatment and lung recovery. / **BEN & MELANIE WESTERVELD**, Quebec, Canada. Pray for wisdom and winsomeness as Ben shares the gospel with participants in an Islamic Christian dialogue.

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- 11** **MR. AND MRS. M.**, Asia. Pray that their family will wrap up well both their work and school and that they would get their visas to leave soon. / Yearlong intern **JOHN (SHARON) CANAVAN** at Grace Presbyterian in Vienna, VA.
-
- 12** Home Missions administrative assistant **KATHARINE OLINGER**. / Pray for **OPC DISASTER RESPONSE**, heading into another hurricane season and continuing to add to their 277 volunteers.
-
- 13** Pray for **MARK & JENI RICHLINE**, Montevideo, Uruguay. / **BRADNEY & EILEEN LOPEZ**, Arroyo, PR. Pray that opportunities for sharing the gospel would be presented to Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura.
-
- 14** **LARRY & KALYNN OLDAKER**, Sandusky, OH. Pray that Firelands Grace OPC's spring outreach would bear fruit. / **LING LEE**, administrative assistant, and **STEPHANIE ZERBE**, office secretary, for Foreign Missions.
-
- 15** Pray for affiliated missionaries **JERRY & MARILYN FARNIK**, Czech Republic, as they teach many biblical counseling seminars in person and online. / Yearlong intern **DAMON (ELISABETH) YOUNG** at First Church in Merrimack, NH.

MAY



The Franks

21 Pray for **DAVID & RASHEL ROBBINS**, Nakaale, Uganda, (on furlough). / Pray for stated clerk **HANK BELFIELD** and others preparing for the 87th General Assembly in Sioux Center, IA, July 7-14.

22 **DAVID (JANE) CRUM**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / Tentmaking missionary **TINA DEJONG**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that missionary kids might grow spiritually this summer.

23 **TYLER & NATALIE DETRICK**, Dayton, OH. Pray the Lord would bless First Street's ESL outreach and the search for a new worship location. / Yearlong intern **ISAAC (MASHA) BAUGH** at Covenant OPC in Kennewick, WA.

24 Pray for **MARK & CARLA VAN ESSENDELFT**, Nakaale, Uganda, as they consider new and more sustainable techniques for the farm project. / **STEPHEN PRIBBLE**, senior technical associate for OPC.org.

25 Pray for associate missionary **ANGELA VOSKUIL**, Nakaale, Uganda, and the needs of teachers and children in the Karamoja Education Outreach. / Active duty military chaplain **STEPHEN (LINDSEY) ROBERTS**, US Army.

26 **CALEB & ERIKA SMITH**, Thousand Oaks, CA. Pray for zeal for worship, discipleship, and outreach in the Conejo Valley. / Missionary associate **JOANNA GROVE**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the ladies in Bible study as they practice leading their own studies for women.



The Verdick family

27 **MILLER & STEPHANIE ANSELL**, Waco, TX. Pray for the retention of visitors at Trinity Presbyterian. / Assoc. missionaries **CHRISTOPHER & CHLOE VERDICK**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the provision and training of a new employee.

28 **MICAH & EILEEN BICKFORD**, Farmington, ME. Pray for five new families to join the congregation at Grace Reformed. / **BRAD (CINNAMON) PEPPO**, regional home missionary of the Miami Valley for the Presbytery of Ohio.

29 Assoc. missionaries **JAMES & ESTHER FOLKERTS**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for good discipleship for first-generation believers. / **ABBY HARTING**, office secretary for Christian Education and **ANNELISA STUDLEY**, office manager.

30 Assoc. missionary **LEAH HOPP**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for gospel outreach and follow-up with clinic patients. / **CHRIS BYRD**, Westfield, NJ. Pray that God would bring great fruit through the outreach of Grace OPC.

31 Pray for **RETIRED MISSIONARIES** Cal & Edie Cummings, Brian & Dorothy Wingard, Greet Rietkerk, and Young & Mary Lou Son. / Yearlong intern **ELIJAH (GRETA) DE JONG** at Faith OPC in Grants Pass, OR.

16 Home Missions general secretary **JOHN SHAW**. / Yearlong interns **BEN (CHERIE) FRANKS** at Ketocin Covenant in Purcellville, VA, and **DUSTIN (AMYE) THOMPSON** at Trinity Presbyterian in Medford, OR.

17 **ANDREW & REBEKAH CANAVAN**, Corona, CA. Pray for growing love, maturity, and zeal for the gospel at Corona Presbyterian Church. / **KERRI ANN CRUSE**, video and social media coordinator.

18 Pray for affiliated missionaries **CRAIG & REE COULBOURNE** and **LINDA KARNER**, Japan. Pray for the challenges of church life and worship when not in person. / Home Missions associate general secretary **AL TRICARICO**.

19 Pray for affiliated missionaries **DR. MARK & LAURA AMBROSE**, Cambodia. / **MATTHEW & LOIS COTTA**, Pasadena, CA. Pray for the training and service of Pasadena OPC's church-planting intern, **ISAAC ZHOU**.

20 **RON & CAROL BEABOUT**, Mifflintown, PA. Give thanks that Grace and Truth OPC has found a new meeting facility. / **DAVID NAKHLA**, administrator for the Committee on Diaconal Ministries.

NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS

WATKINS INSTALLED IN SAN MARCOS

On January 17, Eric Watkins, formerly pastor of Covenant OPC in St. Augustine, Florida, was installed as pastor of Harvest OPC in San Marcos, California.

Watkins's longtime friend, Joel Fick, pastor of Redemption OPC in Gainesville, Florida, preached from Jeremiah 33:10–11 and John 3:22–36. Fick reminded Pastor Watkins that a minister's calling is to "point to the one who has the power of eternal life" and expressed his hope that God, through Watkins's preaching, would "bring dead men to life [and] wash his bride in the Word, so that she might be presented to him without spot or blemish . . . and shine the spotlight of the Spirit upon the Groom, so that he appears beautiful in the eyes of his bride," the church.

Jonathan Moersch, pastor of Trinity OPC in Capistrano Beach, California, lead Watkins and the congregation of HOPC through the installation questions.

Mark Schroeder gave the charge to Watkins from 1 Timothy 6. Not only is Schroeder the former pastor of HOPC, he is also former pastor to Watkins. They met over twenty years ago when Watkins was a student at seminary. Schroeder



At the installation of Eric Watkins: David Winslow, Jonathan Moersch, Joel Fick, Eric Watkins, Mark Schroeder, Mike Jennings, Gabe Nave, John Kent, and Tim Tierney

ministered to Eric and Heather Watkins and mentored Eric during summer and yearlong internships.

David Winslow, elder at Westminster OPC in Westminster, California, gave the charge to the congregation. Pastor Watkins gave the benediction.

UPDATE

MINISTERS

• On February 5, the Presbytery of the South dissolved the pastoral relationship between **William V. Welzien** and Keys

Presbyterian Church, upon his retirement and with the concurrence of the congregation.

MILESTONES

• Retired OP minister **Joseph H. Hall**, 87, died on March 20. He was a professor of church history and librarian at Covenant, Knox, Mid-America, and several international seminaries.

REVIEWS

Growing Together: Taking Mentoring Beyond Small Talk and Prayer Requests, by **Melissa B. Kruger**. Crossway, 2020. Paperback, 192 pages, \$16.19 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP member **Christine Wilson**.

"Would you mentor me?" Those words express the humble longing of a child of God for deep and honest relationships, for growth in Christ and fellowship in Christian community. We rejoice to hear such godly desire—especially in the abstract or when "you" refers to someone else. But it may strike fear in our hearts when that question is put to us directly, when we are asked to mentor another Christian.

In *Growing Together*, Kruger guides women into intentional Christian relationships by removing the mystery



Pastor Anthony Myles giving the benediction at New City Fellowship in Grand Rapids, MI. He was installed as pastor on February 19.

surrounding mentorship and discipleship. While she does incorporate the biblical foundation for requesting and providing mentoring, her focus is guidance for the process: helping one another into deeper fellowship with Christ in the midst of life's joys and sufferings.

"You don't drift toward holiness," Kruger writes, quoting one of her own mentors (34). Discipleship is intentional, and, whether one-on-one or in a small group, it benefits from some structure. Kruger begins with practical tools for the process, for example, setting expectations, anchoring the relationship in the Word, and providing questions that foster conversation and deepen friendships.

Kruger demonstrates how the lifelong process of sanctification is imaged in the mentoring relationship. God, in his wisdom, sanctifies each of us in different ways, in different areas, at different times and stages, and so both mentor and mentee have something to offer—each learning from the other's gifts and graces, and both growing together within the body. Throughout the book, Kruger emphasizes the beauty, humility, and godliness evidenced by this mutual growth in wisdom. The heart issues that motivate a child of God to seek a mentor—desire to know God and his people, or desire to be free of anger, discontent, shame, or guilt—are, by the love and work of Christ, wrestled with and illuminated by a godly perspective.

Contentment is learned, Kruger reminds us with reference to Paul in Philippians 4. "He learned contentment" (127). It stems from knowing God and realizing that "the cross of Christ was not a random act of violence that God worked for good" (133). It was a providentially planned event, and we—fallen and suffering sisters in Christ, mentor and mentee—are the beneficiaries of his work and invited into his fellowship.

Intentional Christian relationships

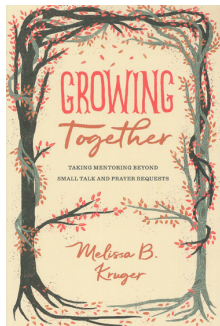


image that invitation. Our days, Kruger reminds us, are numbered; time "is not a renewable resource" (140). She urges us to seek our contentment together, in life amid the struggle, spending out time storing up heavenly treasure.

Growing Together points us to many additional resources: recommended readings and Bible studies, websites, apps, and information on free classes, video series, and helpful downloads. Appendix 2, in five precious pages, presents a biblical view of submission (with examples of godly submission in difficult circumstance), contrasted with some sinful distortions.

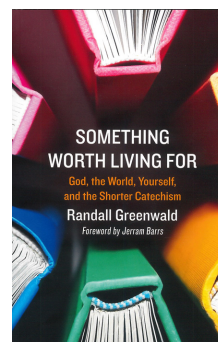
Growing Together encourages us to invest in one another, generation after generation, to share the treasure we've been given in order to love God and one another.

***Something Worth Living For: God, the World, Yourself, and the Shorter Catechism*, by Randall Greenwald. Christian Focus, 2020. Paperback, 256 pages, \$12.99 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP professor J. V. Fesko.**

Ever since the Westminster divines penned the Shorter Catechism, theologians have written books to explain the document to would-be catechumens, ranging from Thomas Watson's (ca. 1620–86) *A Body of Practical Divinity*, which was a series of 176 sermons on the catechism, to the second edition of G. I. Williamson's *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: For Study Classes* (2003). While the Shorter Catechism was originally written for the instruction of children, theologians have found the catechism a useful tool for instructing adult believers. This is the nature of Randall Greenwald's *Something Worth Living For*. Greenwald was discipling a young college graduate but was dissatisfied with the book they initially selected, so he wrote this book (251). Unlike Watson's or Williamson's works, Greenwald's book is devotional in nature. Greenwald reflects upon one to three questions at a time and then offers a one- to three-page reflection upon the doctrines discussed.

There are two noteworthy observations about the book. First, Greenwald's treat-

ment of the second commandment leans away from the teaching of the Westminster Standards. He claims, "the second commandment directs the character of our Sunday morning worship" (146). In a footnote, he then argues that the "second commandment has public worship, not public art, in view" (146 n.1). An isolated examination of the Shorter Catechism might allow for such a view (Q. 51). But read within the context of the standards, the divines were explicit in rejecting images of any type, regardless of whether they were for public worship or beyond. The Larger Catechism rightly argues that the second commandment prohibits "the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness . . . under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretense whatsoever" (Q. 109). Greenwald does not claim his view is aligned with the Shorter Catechism's but in his rejection, he misses an important opportunity to press the truth of Christ's unique place as the uncreated image of God and believers as God's redeemed image bearers, indeed bearers of Christ's image (Eph. 4:20–24).



Second, readers should note that Greenwald's book is aimed primarily at adults, not children, as the Shorter Catechism was originally intended. A number of illustrations from R and PG-13 rated movies (86, 167, 185, 229), a 13+ TV show (123), and a contemporary philosopher (135) might either prove ill-suited or beyond the grasp of a child's mind.

Among the book's positive features are the way that Greenwald engages doctrine in a practical and accessible manner. Greenwald plies his years of pastoral and parenting experience as he explains the Bible's teaching. There are anecdotes and stories that amply connect doctrine and life. The brevity of each chapter also commends the book. I envision the book

being valuably used in a discipleship context or for Lord's Day reading.

***Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, by L. Michael Morales. InterVarsity, 2020. Paperback, 224 pages, \$18.41 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP pastor Cliff L. Blair.**

Can a book be both academic and devotional? The answer is yes, and Michael Morales's *Exodus Old and New* is proof. This slim volume is a recent addition to the Essential Studies in Biblical Theology series that aims to introduce readers to basic themes of biblical theology. It is geared for the serious student of Scripture but is accessible to non-academics.

This is not a commentary on Exodus but an examination of the core idea of the exodus event across Scripture.

At heart, the exodus is about redemption; about God bringing those exiled from himself home. In the introduction, Morales quotes another's wonderful observation that "the exodus 'is the only thing that ever happens' in the Bible" (4).

The return to God finds its grandest Old Testament demonstration in the exodus from Egypt. Morales explores how that event—broadly and in many details—is woven into much of the Bible. Indeed, his examination of the theme begins in the history that predates the event. The introductory chapter presents Genesis chapters 3 through 11—from the fall through the flood to the Tower of Babel—as setting the stage for the "exodus" of nations, that is the worldwide return of humanity from spiritual exile to God.

This is followed by thirteen chapters in three sections: an examination of the historical exodus, of the prophesied second exodus, and these themes in the New Testament.

The historical examination includes chapters on the Passover, Moses, and the exodus as a slaying of the Sea Dragon (exploring the themes of evil represented in the serpent and the sea). Perhaps most fascinating is the first chapter which explores the exodus pattern in the life of

Abraham who, obviously, predated the event. Morales writes: "As the first human being to experience a reversal of the spiritual exile narrated in Genesis 11, Abraham himself stands as the firstfruits of an international deliverance—the call out of Ur was, in other words, an exodus" (21). He then explores other exodus-like events in the patriarch's life.

The prophetic section looks to the prophecies of the return from exile as a second exodus—indeed a greater and more glorious event than the first. Yet, the actual event fell far short: only a fraction of the people returned, the rebuilt temple was a shadow of the original, there was no Davidic king, and no outpouring of the Spirit, thus making "the return from Babylon . . . a subdued and tragic parody of the original exodus" (122). It is a disappointment

that forces the eye forward to a greater exodus to come that will be centered on a new Moses-figure identified famously by Isaiah as the Servant of Yahweh.

The final section looks at the exodus themes of the New Testament with a chapter devoted to John's gospel, another on the outpouring of the Spirit (the way by which believers join Jesus in his greater exodus), and a last chapter on the hope of the resurrection, the final exodus event.

The simple survey just outlined does not do justice to the book. As Morales draws connections between words, details, and images across Old Testament scenes and on to Christ in the New Testament, the reader, and perhaps the preacher in particular, is given fresh enthusiasm

for the wholeness of the whole counsel of God. Are there connections or details where one may differ with the author? Of course, but the effect of the whole is to elevate not only our fascination and wonder in the Scriptures but in the God who saves and is bringing us home to himself in Christ. Highly recommended.

***Tethered to the Cross: The Life and Preaching of Charles H. Spurgeon*, by Thomas Breimaier. IVP, 2020. Hardcover, 288 pages, \$24.64 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP member Daniel Kunkle.**

There is a great deal in *Tethered to the Cross* that the Spurgeon admirer will appreciate. The author's stated goal is "to provide the first sustained investigation of Spurgeon's hermeneutics and in so doing demonstrate that the cross and conversion were central to any understanding of his approach to biblical texts" (19–20). The author achieves his goal.

The book begins with a chapter that summarizes Spurgeon's childhood, early education, and conversion, which played



Positions Available

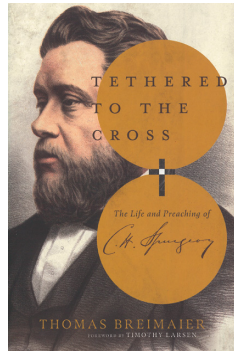
Pastor: Trinity OPC in Medford, Oregon, is seeking a senior pastor. This established congregation is located in beautiful Southern Oregon and consists of about 120 regular attendees. We are searching for a gifted preacher and teacher to unfold the riches of Scripture, to shepherd us toward ever greater maturity in Christ, and to guide us in developing a vision to better serve our community. If interested, please send a resume and cover letter to: brumley4@charter.net.

Principal: Robinson Township Christian School in Robinson, Pennsylvania, is looking for a principal to start the 2021–22 school year. We are a college preparatory school, located minutes from the Pittsburgh airport, that has provided a Christ-centered, classical education in the Reformed tradition since 1978. Our students, preschool through twelfth grade, come from many different districts and churches. Please visit tcs.org under "about-us" for more details, or contact Dave West at dwest@rtcsonline.org.

an important role in what would become his hermeneutical method. Chapter 2 looks at Spurgeon's early years in ministry and his developing hermeneutical method. Chapters 3 and 4 take a detailed look at Spurgeon's interpretation of Old and New Testament texts, respectively. Chapter 5 considers Spurgeon's later years of ministry, particularly outside the pulpit. Chapter 6 investigates Spurgeon's interest in education, especially at the Pastors' College, which would later become Spurgeon's College.

It was Spurgeon's practice to preach from a single verse of Scripture. In doing so, he often ignored the immediate context of the verse to drive home "an interpretation that was directly crucicentric [centered on the cross] . . . often coupled with a strong appeal toward conversion" (37). Spurgeon believed that all sermons should include a direct reference to Christ, his sacrifice on the cross, and a free offer of the gospel, whether these things were embedded in the text upon which Spurgeon was preaching or not. Breimaier calls this "creative interpretation" (168).

Tethered to the Cross also demonstrates how Spurgeon's crucicentrism and evangelistic intent drove his devotional writings, his book reviews, the boundaries of Christian fellowship, and his theology of church growth. When writing devotional material, Spurgeon's primary goal was to direct the lay reader of the Bible to the cross and to a decision for Christ. As a book reviewer, Breimaier states that, "For Spurgeon, the final litmus test for a book remained whether it could be used to support conversionistic and crucicentric aims" (141). Finally, Spurgeon enjoyed a wide range of Christian fellowship across denominational boundaries, with the unifying bond being the centrality of Christ's substitutionary atonement and the free offer of the gospel. Spurgeon believed that the key to church growth, both in breadth and depth, was cross-centered evangelistic preaching and "its absence would ultimately leave church buildings empty" (240).



The book adds considerable insight into aspects of Spurgeon's ministry, not so much to his life, however. Spurgeon was mostly self-educated. This quote stands out: "The man who never reads will never be read, he who never quotes will never be quoted. He who will not use the thoughts of other men's brains, proves that he has no brain of his own. Brethren, what's true of ministers is true of all our people.

You need to read" (43). I also found it helpful to come to a better understanding of the roots of his Reformed/Puritan theology, his fondness for Charles Hodge, and his interaction with theological issues of the day—especially theological liberalism. The nature of the book, a reworking of a doctoral thesis, makes it meticulous although sometimes tedious reading. Still, for the person who knows and loves Spurgeon, *Tethered to the Cross* provides welcome insights into the character of his ministry and his approach to interpreting the Bible.

***The Confession of Faith: A Critical Text and Introduction*, by John R. Bower. Reformation Heritage, 2020. Hardcover, 440 pages, \$30.00. Reviewed by OP elder John R. Muether.**

This is the second of a projected six-volume series on the principal documents of the Westminster Assembly that Dr. Bower is coediting with Chad Van Dixhoorn (*The Larger Catechism* was released in 2010 and *The Shorter Catechism* is forthcoming). Here Bower offers a critical text of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and he includes a parallel-column comparison of four "authoritative texts," paying careful attention to alterations in spelling and punctuation.

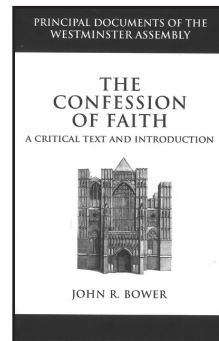
As important as a critical text is, readers will benefit as much from Bower's study of the composition of the confession in a nine-chapter introduction that is nearly half the book. He begins with the original mandate of the assembly to revise the Thirty-Nine Articles. After three months (and drafts of 14 of the first 15 articles), the work was abandoned

when Parliament ratified the Solemn League and Covenant, which altered the assembly's mandate. But the effort was not wasted; Bower notes that the editorial experience from that exercise led to concision and clarity in the confession's articulation of doctrine and correction of error.

Bower's narrative underscores how the divines leaned on antecedents, most notably the Irish Articles of 1615 and the 1581 *Harmony of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (a collection of confessions published to advance doctrinal consensus among emerging Protestant churches). Although the Westminster Standards contain no explicit reference to the Apostles' Creed, Bower explains that the Creed served as a "prototypical confession" in form and content (43).

Over the course of seventeen months and 275 sessions the assembly worked through a "rhythm of report, debate, and revision" (50). Its minutes are often frustratingly minimalist (50), but Bower presents a plausible account of its deliberations while restraining his speculation.

We learn that circumspection often guided the assembly's wording. There was careful compromise in the chapter on baptism (151). Debate on "the author of sin" threatened to divide infralapsarians and supralapsarians, a path the assembly was determined to avoid (59). While the discussion on justification was limited, an issue arose from a proposal



to assert that God "continues to justify" his people. As this seemed to obscure the distinction between justification as an act and sanctification a continual work of God, the assembly modified the language to "God doth continue to forgive the sins of those who are justified" (77). The Christian liberty chapter prompted the most lengthy and complicated debate, much of that focusing on what American Presbyterians would later revise in 1789: the role of the state in enforcing the true

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religion (20, 90).

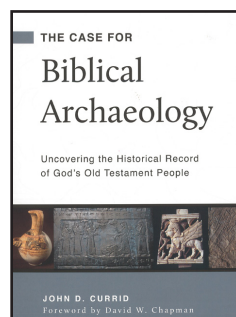
Particularly enlightening is Bower's description of the assembly committees, including three standing committees (each composing drafts of different sections), special committees on antinomianism and Christian liberty, a proof-texting committee, and an influential "wording committee" which labored to hone and harmonize language.

Bower's purpose is limited to explaining the confession's creation and not its meaning. But he is surely right in noting that "direct events influencing a text may open windows into its meaning" (51). Further work on the Westminster Assembly will lean heavily on Bower's study.

***The Case for Biblical Archaeology: Uncovering the Historical Record of God's Old Testament People*, by John D. Currid. P&R, 2020. Paperback, 288 pages, \$22.50. Reviewed by OP elder James S. Gidley.**

An introduction to biblical archaeology may seem to hold little interest to a generation that values personal authenticity and tends to discount even the possibility of historical accuracy. But the Bible is the revelation of God's mighty acts in history, and if we wish to retain the essence of redemptive religion, we cannot afford to be indifferent to the physical relics of that history that form the subject matter of archaeology.

Dr. Currid provides a compact, readable introduction to biblical archaeology.



As indicated in the subtitle, he focuses on archaeological findings that are relevant to Old Testament study. The book is well adapted to serve as a textbook for an introductory college course. Ordained officers, church members, students in Christian high schools, and home schoolers will also profit from using it as a reference work in Bible study. Each chapter ends with a short list of

key terms and a few discussion questions. Currid writes clearly and defines technical terms, with the result that I was able, as a novice, to grasp the material readily.

The book is organized into three main parts of roughly equal length. The first part, "Setting," provides a general orientation to geography, history, and method. Currid gives a brief history of archaeological investigations in Palestine, explaining major changes in method that have strongly influenced the value of the findings. He also gives a brief history of the lands of the Bible.

The second part of the book, "A Journey Through the Land," describes the principal archaeological findings in seven geographical regions of Palestine. (I am using the word Palestine, as does Currid, without intending any political implications.) Currid describes the major archaeological sites in each region and the most important findings at them. He typically covers a site in about one page. Often the findings include settlements that predate the time of Abraham, sometimes by thousands of years. One takeaway from this part of the book is that the period of the judges and kings of Israel only encompassed a fraction of an overall history spanning several thousand years.

The third part, "Aspects of Society," organizes the material thematically, containing chapters entitled: "Agriculture and Herding," "Water," "Architecture," "Ce-

ramics," "The Hebrew Language in Archaeology," "Burial Practices," and "Small Finds."

The book is rounded out by three appendixes, a glossary, a bibliography, and two indexes.

The title of the book, "The Case for Biblical Archaeology" led me to expect a philosophical or theological argument about why the study of biblical archaeology is important or necessary. Currid gives a little of that in the introduction, but for the most part, his "case" for biblical archaeology is the subject matter itself.

***Pastors and Their Critics: A Guide to Coping with Criticism in the Ministry*, by Joel R. Beeke and Nick Thompson. P&R, 2020. Paperback, 192 pages, \$10.86 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP minister Albert J. Tricarico.**

I don't know many people who enjoy being criticized. I surely don't. And yet, we should all welcome criticism as God's means of helping us grow in self-understanding and in grace. *Pastors and Their Critics* helps readers consider the place of criticism in ministry and guides them through the process of giving it and receiving it in the best ways.

The book has four parts. "Biblical Foundations for Coping with Criticism" surveys the Old Testament with examples of criticism and then orients us all with a portrait of Jesus, our meek and bold redeemer and example. "Practical Principles for Coping with Criticism" provides gentle excavations designed for the spiritual growth of the criticized. More than cope, Christ's servants can flourish when they embrace the right perspectives. "Practical Principles for Constructive Criticism in the Church" includes helpful guidance on how to criticize in the most constructive ways. The section headings include words like affirmation, hope, and compassion—all powerful descriptions of healing speech. "Theological Vision for Coping with Criticism" urges us to live in light of the reality of Christ—his glory, his kingdom, and his return.

Here are some insights I gained from the second part.

A realistic servant of the church can expect both affirmations and corrections.

NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS *Continued*

There are positive ways of responding to each, and pastors should learn those ways.

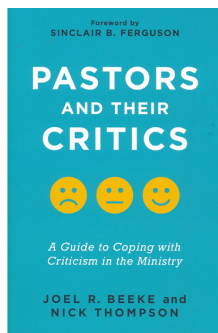
We need to remember that there are unseen spiritual forces at work. Satan wants to undermine ministry. God desires our flourishing and uses all things toward that end. The criticisms we receive, while sometimes uncharitably given, are always tools of the Spirit used for our good and the good of those we love and serve.

The authors urge us always to seek the Lord—specifically in response to criticism, which God uses “to breathe new life into our praying” (90). “Search me” petitions (Ps. 139:23–24) ought to be regular in the prayer life of the Christian. This is all the more vital for a pastor.

We should receive all criticism with open humility, regardless of the motive of the critic and whether or not the criticism is altogether valid. Assuming that there are lessons contained in every criticism will advance the cause of personal sanctification. It also harmonizes with what we know about ourselves—we are sinful, profoundly imperfect, and in regular need of correction.

The book includes a helpful, soul-penetrating checklist to aid pastors in examining their actions, emphases, tone, motives, and personality. Self-reflection will prepare us to receive criticisms well.

In an appendix, Thompson provides a helpful list of things to consider on the subject while in seminary.



Dr. Chad VanDixhoorn confesses in his commendation that he regrets this little volume was not published ten years ago. As I reflect on my own training and subsequent labors in the church, I want to say, “Make that forty years.”

***A Place to Belong*, by Megan Hill. Crossway, 2020. Paperback, 184 pages, \$15.49 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP pastor Aijalon B. Church.**

Three years into my pastoral ministry, one of the most distressing and recurring experiences for me has been interacting with people who dismiss the value and beauty of the local church. Megan Hill’s book was to me in my discouragement like salve on a sunburn or a warm fire on a stress-tightened back. She admits that the church may often look quite plain or even ugly on the outside, but denies that such externals are as revealing as spiritual realities. Her book is about re-orienting yourself to get a peek at the church through God’s glasses. There are no lenses as accurate! Each chapter looks at a different biblical name for the church, giving us a true perspective on something we may be a bit too familiar with to see clearly. The goal? “To see the church as God sees the church and then to embrace the privilege of being part of it” (13). Built into this goal is the assumption that, “when we take seriously what God says about his church, it will shape our experience of belonging there” (14).

Hill’s book can be organized into four parts. First it examines the identity of the

church (chs. 1–2), then its goal (ch. 3), its organization (chs. 4–5), and its communion (chs. 6–9). Readers may appreciate that this book is written by a layperson who has been a member of different types of churches over many years, rather than a pastor who might be accused of talking up the institution that pays him. I loved the female perspective of her illustrations and found her writing style warm and compelling. Each chapter ends with a plea to the reader like this in chapter 1: “Come, belong to God’s beloved” (28). She often gently reasons with the reader to take seriously the implications of her

words: “Dear Christian, in light of these glorious realities, don’t forsake the church’s assembly (Heb. 10:24–25). Be there when you are rejoicing (Ps. 122:1). Be there . . . when you are facing great trials . . . when you are tired and when you are doubting” (55). The overall impression is not forceful or pushy but genuine and persuasive.

I highly recommend this book. It is clearly written and includes questions for group discussion. It is neither a difficult nor a simplistic read, but includes some great biblical theology (the different gifts and roles of the tribes within Israel connected to the New Testament teaching about the church as a body with parts! 74–5), relevant church history (“pew rentals” was a thing? 44–5), and much that is practical (“My holiness is intimately connected to the holiness of my fellow saints,” 97). It will warm you, challenge you, and persuade you to love your local church.

