

NEW HORIZONS

MARCH 2025

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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BRINGING GOOD NEWS TO A LOST WORLD



JEREMIAH W. MONTGOMERY

Imagine starting a conversation about Jesus with a non-Christian relative, friend, colleague, or classmate. Do you feel eager, or hesitant?

While we may not like to admit it, most of us feel some hesitance. We are afraid of looking foolish or facing rejection. Rico Tice shares the following recollection:

In the week before my grandmother died, I did not speak to her about Jesus. I loved her, but I didn't say anything to her. . . . Why didn't I tell her about Christ? . . . I was afraid of what she'd say, and I was afraid of what my family would say . . . I loved myself more than I loved her and more than I loved my Lord. . . . When it came down to it, the hard truth was that I wanted my family to respect me more than I wanted to bring Jesus glory or see my grandmother saved. . . . I kept my mouth shut. (*Honest Evangelism*, 47–48)

Has this ever been true for us? The first step toward overcoming such sinful fear is to confess it, not just to ourselves but to our Lord (1 John 1:9). What is the next step?

The key toward overcoming our specific fear of personal evangelism is to *remember the goodness of Jesus*. If you are

a Christian today, it is because his goodness invaded your life. Whether or not you remember the moment it all began, the wonder is the same: At some point God gave you the faith to put your heart in the hands of Jesus (Ps. 31:5). Then God put his Spirit in your heart (Eph. 1:13–14). You are not going to the hell you deserve, but to the heaven you don't deserve—because God changed your destiny! How good is that?

Whether you are naturally extroverted or naturally introverted, more outgoing or reserved, all of us feel most comfortable talking about things we love and enjoy—things that we believe are good. Have we forgotten the *goodness* of the good news?

CULTIVATING A “TODAY TESTIMONY”

How can we refresh our sense of the goodness of Jesus? We see the answer in one of the most vivid episodes in all the Gospel accounts: the time when Jesus was met by a man possessed by a legion of demons (Mark 5:1–20). Undaunted, Jesus casts this army of darkness into a nearby herd of pigs, who then rush down a hillside into the sea and drown. In the aftermath, the terrified locals “beg Jesus to depart from their region” (v. 17). Then:

The man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him but said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled. (vv. 18–20)

Note the personal emphasis in Jesus's command to the man: “Tell them how much the Lord has done for *you*, and how he has had mercy on *you*” (v. 19, emphasis added). Jesus transforms the man's painful, recent history into the basis for a powerful, personal testimony. “And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled” (v. 20). *Everyone* marveled, including the man himself.

Let's ask ourselves these same questions: How has the Lord had mercy on *you*; how much has Jesus done for *me*?

Christians usually think of our testimony in terms of the question, “How did I become a Christian?” But this episode indicates that our testimony should also be a matter for *today*. Why am I still a Christian? What does believing in Jesus mean for me today? How has the Lord had mercy on me recently? Cultivating such “today testimonies” will cause our hearts to marvel afresh at the goodness of Jesus.

These testimonies also encourage and equip us for per-

sonal witness. As we think more about what Jesus is doing in our lives, we will think more about what he could be doing in the lives of others—and we will look and pray for opportunities to speak. And when God opens a door, we will have words to share that are warm, personal, and authentic.

KNOWING THE TIMES

As he sent out his apostles, Jesus commanded them to be “wise as serpents” (Matt. 10:16). Biblical wisdom includes understanding the times in which we live (1 Chron. 12:32; Esther 1:13). As we seek to bring good news to a lost world, it is therefore wise for us to understand the challenges presented by our age.

Within the past century, the background assumptions of our society have undergone a profound shift: the shift from a “fixed” to a “fluid” view of reality. (See Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 39. He uses the terms “mimetic” and “poetic” rather than “fixed” and “fluid.”) Instead of assuming that the universe was created by God with a “fixed” order and a definite purpose, the acting assumption of our society now is that there is no God. If there is no God, the universe is simply raw material. Human beings, harnessing all the power that advancing technology puts at their disposal, are therefore free to shape this raw material to craft their own order and purpose. The meaning of life becomes a matter of individual self-expression.

The influence of this fluid view has not been limited to philosophical circles. As its influence has spread, our culture has shown an increasing willingness to erase distinctions (such as “male” and “female”) that have stood for millennia. A growing number of once-faithful churches have surrendered clear biblical teaching on gender and sexuality.

A particular challenge for evangelism is the way this fluid view has reduced the space for disagreement when it comes to moral or spiritual choices. If reality is just raw material, and if all people have the right to create their own meaning, then *any* failure to affirm another person’s chosen identity becomes a crime against their humanity. Why? Because it denies the fluid view’s most fundamental human right: the right of individual self-expression.

This emphasis on individual self-expression fosters an à la carte approach to spiritual life:

More and more Americans . . . envision themselves as creators of their own bespoke religions, mixing and matching spiritual and aesthetic and experiential and philosophical traditions. The Remixed hunger for the

same things human beings have always longed for: a sense of meaning in the world and personal purpose within that meaning, a community to share that experience with, and rituals to bring the power of that experience into achievable, everyday life. But they’re doing it differently. . . .

Shaped by the twin forces of a creative-communicative Internet and consumer capitalism, today’s Remixed don’t want to receive doctrine, to assent automatically to a creed. They want to choose . . . the spiritual path that feels more authentic, more meaningful, to them. . . . And they want, when available institutional options fail to suit their needs, the freedom to mix and match, to create their own daily rituals and practices and belief systems. (Tara Isabella Burton, *Strange Rites*, 10)

It is also worth noting that such quests for personal authenticity are no longer limited by geography: “With the growth of the internet and globalization, it is possible for people to identify with incredibly exotic communities and lifestyles” (Alan Noble, *Disruptive Witness*, 78).

Yet for all its dark power, the fluid view has not eradicated humanity’s religious craving. The hunger for meaning, purpose, community, and ritual that even our non-religious neighbors experience is a hook for gospel conversation: “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world” (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 115). Christians should therefore be aware of the fluid view as we share the good news today, but we need not fear it.

MAXIMIZING ACCESSIBILITY WITHOUT SACRIFICING ORTHODOXY

The Apostle Paul asked the Colossians to pray “that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak” (Col. 4:3–4).

Paul knew that the content of the gospel would always be offensive to unconverted hearts (1 Cor. 1:18). In asking prayer for clarity, he was not seeking *acceptability* but *accessibility*. He would never water down the truth or sacrifice orthodoxy, but Paul wanted even those who rejected his message to understand what it was they refused.

Paul did not take this accessibility for granted. Even after years of experience, he knew it was possible that he might *not* make it clear—which is why he asked for prayer! As we seek to share the good news of Jesus, do we share Paul’s prayer and concern for clarity?

It is very easy for us to fall into using “Christianese” toward outsiders—words or expressions that are familiar to us but foreign to them. Do we even realize it? In light of today’s à la carte spirituality, we cannot automatically assume that our unbelieving neighbors share our definitions of even such basic ideas as “God,” “sin,” or “salvation.”

This does not mean we should discard important biblical or theological terms. It simply means we must be careful to define them. The catechisms of the Reformation did this (see, for example, Westminster Shorter Catechism questions 14, 33, and 35). For terms that we retain, we should develop and use simple, accessible definitions.

Our “today testimonies” should be expressed in language that is as free from Christianese as possible. This will not just make our witness clear to others; it will also make it clearer to ourselves: “If you cannot translate your thoughts into uneducated language, then your thoughts were confused. Power to translate is the test of having really understood one’s own meaning” (C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 98).

MAKING THE GOSPEL BEAUTIFUL

The gospel of Jesus is not just news. It is *good* news. Our evangelism must show how the gospel is beautiful. Our witness cannot rest content with simply denouncing sin; we must go on to show why Jesus is better. The Apostle Paul noted that it was the “surpassing worth” of Jesus that enabled him to let go of lesser things: “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8).

Imagine you want a dog to drop a stick. Do you grab the end of the stick and pull, or do you show the dog something that is more desirable—such as a Frisbee? What is most effective?

The same thing is true of every human soul:

The love of the world cannot be expunged by a mere demonstration of the world’s worthlessness. . . . The heart is not so constituted; and the only way to dispossess it of an old affection, is by the expulsive power of a new one. (Thomas Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*, 46, 49)

This adds a third question for our “today testimonies”: Can we explain what’s *so good* about believing the good news? Why is living for Jesus *better* than living for anything else? “Jesus must become more beautiful to your imagination, more attractive to your heart, than your idol. . . . If you uproot the idol and fail to ‘plant’ the love of Christ in its place, the idol will grow back” (Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 172).

GIVING OTHERS A TASTE OF HEAVEN

How do we put all this together in daily life? In a culture with so little space for exclusive claims, how do we meet and engage new people in spiritually significant ways? Or with people we already know, how do we move past “good morning” to sharing good news?

We must begin with prayer: prayer against our fear, prayer for the lost, prayer for open doors, and prayer for clarity and beauty in our witness. Do our churches pray for these things regularly and specifically? As individuals, we can pray something like this each morning: “Lord, help me to give others a taste of heaven in every interaction today.”

As OPC pastor Eric Hausler taught me years ago, most of us don’t need new contacts; we simply need to embrace the many contacts that already exist in our lives. The cashier at the grocery store, the clerk at the bank, the many individuals we encounter during our daily activities—rather than see them as landscape or machines, we should see them as souls with everlasting destinies. And rather than worry about what they will think, we should ask what God might do if we reached out to them.

How do we do this? Read name tags and greet clerks by their names. Seek to get on a first-name basis with people you see regularly, then look and pray for openings. For example, asking people about their tattoos is a proven way to start a conversation—even if you dislike tattoos.

The key to doing this well is to treat others as we would want to be treated (Matt. 7:12). When in doubt whether it is appropriate to press further or to introduce a spiritual element, *ask permission*: “Do you mind if I ask you a spiritual question?” “Would it be OK with you if I shared with you how my faith in Jesus connects to how I see this?” “Would you be offended if I offered you a tract?” Before saying something controversial, *give permission*: “You may think this is crazy or offensive, but I want to be open with you about what I believe. . . .” Following this Golden Rule in evangelism communicates “gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15), without compromising our integrity or the integrity of our message.

In times of cultural hostility, the most fruitful venues for evangelism are informal and personal. This is good news, because informal and personal evangelism is accessible to every Christian. What if, simply by being “friendly to people, liking people, and talking to people” about Jesus (as OPC pastor Eric Watkins puts it), you could be used by Jesus to bring new souls to heaven? **NH**

The author is general secretary of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension.

THE MYSTERY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER



LARRY E. WILSON

What exactly happens in Communion? Don't ask me. Christian believers have never succeeded in agreeing on precisely what happens at the Lord's Table. But that's OK. The mystery is too big to fully analyze or explain. What you really need to know is that when you come to the Lord's Table in faith, you come to Jesus himself. When you receive the Lord's Supper in faith, you receive Christ himself.

That's what our church confesses. It does so because that's what the Bible teaches: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16). Even so, many in our churches balk at embracing it. That's surely partly because our fallen

hearts are prone to doubt and distrust God's gracious person and promises and power. But could it also be partly because we haven't been adequately instructed?

NOT AN OBJECT LESSON

Somehow—in reaction against Roman Catholicism—the teaching that the Lord's Supper is essentially a God-ordained object lesson began to spread. In this view, Christ instituted Communion to remind us of what he did for us; it basically serves as a devotional tool by which we can remember Christ's sacrifice and stir ourselves to gratitude and rededication. This view became the majority report among nondenominational Protestants. But it also influenced many who regard themselves as Presbyterian and Reformed—including pastors and theologians. (We generally blame Huldrych Zwingli for this view, but many Zwingli scholars insist that Zwingli's view has been misconstrued. I don't know about that. What I do know is that whatever its origin, this "memorialist" view did spread widely, it did become associated with Zwingli, and it did diminish practical expectations of our Lord at his Supper, even among those whose standards teach differently.)

But it's not what our Presbyterian and Reformed confessions teach. They do reject the notion that Christ is *locally* present in the elements of the Lord's Supper. But at the same time, they insist that Christ is really and truly present in the Lord's Supper, albeit *spiritually* present. Note well, however: When they say Christ's presence is "spiritual," they don't mean that it's not real. They don't mean that it's just in our minds. They mean that the whole Christ is really and truly present in the Lord's Supper by means of the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, for instance, insists that the Roman Catholic dogma of transubstantiation—that, through a priest's blessing, God turns the substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Christ—is unbiblical, not only obscuring the true meaning of the Lord's Supper but also giving rise to superstitions and errors. Even so, the Confession goes on to insist that the Bible does teach that when you take the Lord's Supper in faith, you don't just eat bread and drink wine with your physical mouth—you at the same time receive Christ himself and all the benefits of his death with your spiritual "mouth," which is faith. This happens by the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. It's not because Christ's body and blood are somehow located in the bread and wine. It's because *by the Holy Spirit and through faith*, Christ's body and blood really are just as present to your soul as the bread and wine are to

your body (see Westminster Confession of Faith 29.6–7).

AN AWE-INSPIRING FACT

John Calvin affirmed that this mystery of Christ’s presence in Communion is simply too big for our minds to fully analyze or explain. He said,

I here embrace without controversy the truth of God in which I may safely rest. He declares his flesh the food of my soul, his blood its drink (John 6:53 ff.). I offer my soul to him to be fed with such food. In his Sacred Supper, he bids me take, eat, and drink his body and blood under the symbols of bread and wine. I do not doubt that he himself truly presents them, and that I receive them.

He then admitted,

Now, if anyone should ask me how this takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And, to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it. (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.17.32)

Instead of trying to shrink the Lord’s Supper down to something we can fully analyze and explain, we’d do better to simply embrace this awe-inspiring fact: When we take the Lord’s Supper in faith, we actually do receive Christ and all the blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation that he’s merited for us.

WORD AND SACRAMENT

But we do that just by hearing the gospel and trusting Christ, don’t we? Yes, praise God, we do! But because of his great love for us, God—who is rich in mercy and shows compassion to those who fear him, who knows our frame and remembers that we are dust (Ps. 103:13, 14; Eph. 2:4)—gives us even more than that. He reinforces his words by also reaching out to us through the physical elements of bread and wine. Think of it this way: when loving parents comfort their little children, do they limit themselves just to using words? No, they seal their words with tangible hugs and kisses to better convey the reality their words express. That’s what the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are—God sealing his gospel promises with tangible signs to better convey the reality they express.



A Scottish Sacrament, 1850, by Henry John Dobson, public domain

Scottish Presbyterian Robert Bruce (1554–1631) put it this way: “The Word leads us to Christ by the ear; the Sacraments lead us to Christ by the eye” (*The Mystery of the Lord’s Supper*, 39). “Eye” here alludes to *all* our senses—especially sight, smell, touch, taste. The sacraments not only make the Word visible; they also make it tangible. When we, through faith, take Communion, we receive Christ himself! Bruce went on to say that it’s not that we can receive a better Christ by receiving in faith the Lord’s Supper in addition to the preached Word, but it is that—by God’s gracious design—we can receive Christ better.

Hallelujah! Does that encourage you? Could it change what you expect from our Lord at his supper? Does it call you to repent of practical unbelief with its low expectations of our great God? Could it change how you approach the Lord’s table? Does it challenge you to cultivate living faith with its high expectations of our great God? **NH**

The author is a retired OP minister.

BRINGING SINGLES INTO CHURCH FELLOWSHIP



MARY VAN WEELDEN

The OPC raised me well. Even in my earliest memories, my church felt like home. But when I returned as a young adult from serving two years on a mission field, I began to feel deeply the tension of being single and childless in a church community that centers much of its energy on families. Although I felt no less loved by my church or the churches in my presbytery, I sensed the strain of not quite having a place in the family and the unintended pressures of well-intentioned church members who so dearly hoped—like I myself did—that I would find a spouse. In 2020, as so many of us sequestered in isolation, the unique need of Christian singles to be wrapped up in the fellowship of the family of Christ became more apparent. So, I began a series of interviews with Christian singles of various ages and backgrounds—some of which have been included here—to try to better understand how the church can care for these particular members of its body.

No two people are exactly the same, nor are any two churches. Some congregations may have already invested well in their singles; others may wish to do better. This article aims to be a starting point from which further conversations can be had between the saints of all ages and life stages about what it looks like to bring singles into church fellowship.

THE NEED TO BELONG TO THE FAMILY OF CHRIST

Humans need other humans for companionship, care, and accountability. Singles are no exception. Brenda Landmon, who grew up in an OPC in Long Beach, California, did not get married until she was thirty-four. She observed that churches can miss the pressing need of providing singles with genuine fellowship if they focus heavily on “opportunities to meet other Christians so [singles] can be married.” There’s value to those singles events, Landmon explained, but “I was always afraid to go because I was like, ‘Can I just go to meet other people?’”

The Apostle Paul—notably single himself—encouraged the saints across the Roman empire to recognize that the members of Christ’s body are each different and each valuable. These members might be married *or* single, and there is goodness, value, and God-ordained purpose in both. “There is more to serving singles than finding them a mate,” Landmon said.

The biblical model for walking a life of faith is to do so within the context of a church. Including singles in fellowship is no different from including any other Christian who has been brought into the household of God.

Joel Ellis, who was pastor of Reformation OPC in Apache Junction, Arizona, for nine years and is a father of five, noted that churches can lose covenant children because they have not brought them into the church as participating members. “They grow up and leave the church because they were never part of it,” he said.

This applies to singles all too well—many of whom are covenant children who are now too old for youth or college ministries but do not have a place in the married-, parent-, and family-oriented programs a church might support. Ellis warns, “The people that are the least connected are the ones that are the most liable to fall away from the faith.”

All believers should feel they have a family in their church. To do this well, Ellis says, believers need to practice intentional cross-demographic fellowship. “The church needs to be intergenerational, just like it needs to be interethnic and inter-economic—every other distinction that matters in the world doesn’t matter in the

church,” he said. “The church is God’s family, so as much as that family can be together, I think the church is better off.”

BEING TOGETHER

Intergenerational fellowship is clearly outlined in Scripture as a model for the saints. Courtney Van Hooser, who spent many of her single years at an OPC in Southern California, said a group of older women made it their “duty and task” to look after her, even as Van Hooser struggled with singleness.

The secular world idolizes romantic love, and the broader Christian community can idealize marriage and family, leaving many singles feeling pressured and torn in their seasons of singleness. Has God not been faithful to them? Are they missing out on something essential to the Christian life? Will they be less fulfilled, less a part of the church family, or have less purposeful lives?

Van Hooser said that rising above these doubts can feel impossible. Her friends helped. “I’ve really appreciated it when some of these older women . . . will just flat out say, ‘Yeah, [marriage] might not be God’s plan for your life,’” Van Hooser said. “It was just such a relief to hear someone say that, because it’s so hard to battle lies on your own.”

Singles also benefit from being welcomed into brother-sister fellowship. Dana Schnitzel, a member of Calvary OPC in Glenside, Pennsylvania, said there can be wonderful blessings when brothers and sisters in Christ are able to wrap each other up in their lives, such as a married couple adopting a single guy or gal in friendship or serving one another practically when needs arise. As co-laborers in the church, and coheirs to an eternal inheritance, healthy fellowship is both a bulwark and a gift.

“When we seek out healthy intimacy, we are less likely to be tempted by unhealthy intimacy,” Schnitzel said. “As a single woman, I do need my brothers in the church. Sometimes I need their help and advice, and sometimes I just need help changing my tire. I think there can be, to some degree, healthy friendships that help meet some of those needs.”

Although it can be convenient to provide individualized ministries—to men or women, wives, mothers, singles, children, young adults—these lines do not always accurately reflect the needs of the congregation.

Lisa Howard, a longtime Sunday school teacher at Harvest OPC in San Marcos, California, said, “One of the reasons I didn’t want to join a singles’ Bible study is because I love my married friends, too, and have so much to learn from them.” Now in her seventies, Howard said it has

been her joy to pray for, encourage, and support the married couples in her church. Enjoying “intergenerational, inter-situational” fellowship has enriched her life and her walk with the Lord. “We can only grow from each other’s unique experiences,” she said.

“I wouldn’t want to be in a church where the singles are only interacting with other singles. That’s not healthy,” said Joel Ellis. “Where are the married couples’ kids going to find single role models if some of them are called to singleness? My kids, and my wife and I, need our single brothers and sisters in our lives, but my single brothers and sisters also need the wackiness of my household in their lives. That’s a blessing to them, and they need that too.”

DEEPLY KNOWN

Christian fellowship is a labor of love. Sitting in the quiet nursing home room of an elderly saint for an hour, setting aside time to help a single person move apartments, or preparing the house and a dinner for company requires effort, planning, and time that often feels in short supply.

“Relationships aren’t efficient—they take time and energy,” Schnitzel said. “In order to cultivate fellowship and friendship, you have to do it on purpose; it doesn’t happen by accident. And if it happens to you by accident, it’s because someone else did it on purpose.”

But precious joy resides in being truly, deeply known by those in the church.

“You can take off the mask of pretending to have everything together and all your ducks in a row and actually be real with someone with what it is you’re struggling with, what it is you need prayer for,” Van Hooser said. “You can cry on their shoulder.”

We are meant to rejoice together and suffer with one another. The communion of the saints found within our churches is one of the means by which God richly blesses his people. What a sweet comfort this communion can be for single brothers and sisters in the church, often without organic family structures in their own lives, who are in great need of spiritual siblings, parents, and children. Our mutual fellowship nourishes the saints, further binding the body of Christ together in unity and love until at last the Lord comes again for his people. **NH**

The author is a member of Skyview Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Centennial, Colorado.

GOOD NEWS FOR NORRISTOWN, PA

NATHANIEL G. JEFFRIES

The Lord Jesus is establishing a new outpost of his kingdom in West Norriton, Pennsylvania, a quiet suburb of Norristown, the once-industrious, now somewhat infamous and ill-kempt county seat of Montgomery County. The eighteen households of Good News OPC meet in a public elementary school for Lord’s Day worship, and in homes and coffee shops for weekday Bible study and prayer. Aside from Jubilee Presbyterian, a thriving Korean American Presbyterian church, Good News is the only NAPARC congregation within the Norristown Area School District, made up of West Norriton, East Norriton, and Norristown proper, a community of about 65,000 residents.

THE GENESIS OF GOOD NEWS

In the summer of 2022, Calvary OPC in Glenside called together a church-planting seed group. I was about to begin my second internship at Calvary, and Pastors Mark Sallade and Steve McDaniel gave me the opportunity to lead a Bible study for the new group. In September we began meeting weekly in my home in Oreland. We ate potluck dinners, studied the Gospel of John, prayed, and sang praises. We invited believing and unbelieving neighbors and friends to join us. Informally, we started doing church together.

Like the sojourners that we are, we met in several homes for the next eight months (the Lees’, the Tricaricos’, and at least once at the Avellinos’). Our one problem (and maybe it seems silly) was that we didn’t know where to put the new church. Our members came from Glenside and from every direction around it, without any concentration in one area. There were plenty of communities around us that needed a new gospel witness, but it wasn’t clear which one we would be best equipped to reach.

SYNAGOGUE SUMMER

In the end, we settled on King of Prussia as an area without a NAPARC church that was within driving range of our seed group households. Regional home missionary Dave Holmlund found a synagogue, Temple Brith Achim, that



Before Good News OPC, Norristown had no English-speaking NAPARC church

welcomed us as renters, gave us a generous rate, and even allowed us to have potlucks in their dining space as long as we didn’t bring pork.

At last, we met for evening worship on the Lord’s day. I didn’t preach. I remember the date—April 23, 2023—because my daughter Wisdom was born two days before. It was a busy April for Amy and me, but it was a joy to see Good News move from home group to worship service.

We started getting into a rhythm of regular worship. Everyone in the seed group served in some way or another. Stacey Jung became a skillful piano accompanist seemingly overnight. Al Tricarico, Dave Holmlund, and Doug Clawson shared the preaching with me as I finished my last semester at WTS and worked through my ordination exams. In May, the Presbytery of Philadelphia received us as a mission work, and in June, I was ordained and installed as evangelist.

One of the delights of that summer was the appearance in our midst of the Joubajians. Mourad Joubajian was an Armenian Orthodox priest who became convinced of Reformed theology and found his way to Good News. Throughout that summer, Mourad spent his Sunday mornings officiating the liturgy at Saint Gregory Armenian Apostolic church, and his Sunday evenings worship-

ing at Good News OPC, along with his wife and young daughters. At the end of the year, after his efforts to reform his church bore no fruit, Mourad resigned the priesthood and moved to California with his family to take up studies at Westminster Seminary California. Although the Joubajians never officially joined Good News, we will in some ways remember them as our first new family.

As the summer came to a close, we started looking for a new location. We wanted to move to morning worship, and Brith Achim wasn't available on Sunday mornings. Other rental opportunities in King of Prussia were pricey. Meanwhile, two of our seed group families had moved to the Norristown area, north of King of Prussia across the Schuylkill river.

HOME AT WHITEHALL

In September, we made the big move from evening worship in King of Prussia to morning worship at Whitehall Elementary School in West Norriton, Pennsylvania. I think we all took a deep breath before this move. No one had to sign anything on the dotted line, but the people who came to Whitehall with Good News knew they were leaving our mother church, Calvary OPC, at least for a time.

It was a time of change. We had new Sunday tasks, like coffee prep and, especially, sound. Jon Jung worked hard to design a sound system and, along with others, to get it up and running each week.

And at first we didn't get a lot of visitors. When we met in the evenings, Christians could visit without missing their church, and skeptics could visit without feeling like they were going to church. No longer. But we settled into the new normal and focused on worshipping God.

In December, my family and I moved to a house in East Norriton, five minutes from Whitehall. We started getting to know our neighbors. We had them over for meals and did our family worship thing. "Scott," my four-year-old asked one of our new friends, "have you turned to the Lord yet?" In short, we tried to be good neighbors in word and deed, and we waited for the Lord to give growth.

A NORRISTOWN CHURCH

One of the lessons I have learned is the value of ecumenicity in church planting. Our first new members from outside of our mother church were sent to us from Jubilee KAPC. Alex and Ada Wheelis were a young couple who recently moved to Norristown. They started attending Jubilee because it was a faithful church, but there was one problem: They didn't speak Korean. So the pastors at Jubilee referred them to us. (We're only about one-third Korean at Good News.)



Nate Jeffries (far left) leading a men's Bible study

In September 2024, we started seeing new faces at Good News almost every week. Especially exciting was the arrival of Isaiah, a young man in Norristown who had come to Christ at eighteen but never made a public profession of faith, and who now had been away from church for several years. The Lord brought Isaiah to us eager to devote his life to God. He made his public profession in November and joined Good News.

When Good News began, not one of our seed group households lived in the Norristown area. Between people moving and people joining, we will, Lord willing, soon have six.

WHAT NEXT?

Our goals remain what they were when we started: to worship God, build up the church, and reach the lost.

Some of our short-term goals are to reach more unbelievers in Norristown with the gospel, to root Good News more deeply in the Norristown community, and to raise up elders who will carry on the torch from Calvary's session.

In the long term, it's our prayer to see Good News become a church-planting church, whether in the towns around us or in the Norristown area itself. If the Lord should bless our efforts, we would love one day to have thriving OP churches in West Norriton, East Norriton, and Norristown proper.

The author is the church planter of Good News OPC in Norristown, Pennsylvania.

REVIEW: TRUEMAN'S *TO CHANGE ALL WORLDS*

ETHAN J. BOLYARD

Since publishing *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* in 2020, Carl Trueman has become something of an authority on the plight of modern man. His latest book, *To Change All Worlds: Critical Theory from Marx to Marcuse*, only confirms this reputation. Here Trueman provides “an introduction” to the hot topic of “critical theory” (4). Whether it involves Black Lives Matter riots, elementary school curriculum, or resolutions at the Southern Baptist Convention, critical theory has become both a lightning rod of controversy and a litmus test of orthodoxy.

Instead of simply taking sides (i.e., for it or against it), Trueman charts a more nuanced course. Although certainly critical of critical theory, he sees his primary “task as explaining it on its own terms” (4). This descriptive focus will disappoint readers looking for a polemic against critical theory (e.g., Voddie Baucham’s *Fault Lines*) or an appropriation of it (e.g., Christopher Watkin’s *Biblical Critical Theory*). That said, Trueman’s aim is not simply to describe. He also suggests a way forward. Whether his proposal constitutes an adequate Christian response will be addressed toward the end of this review.

At the very least, *To Change All Worlds* is a good read. Al Mohler perhaps overstates the case when he says it “reads like a novel and unfolds like a detective story,” but given its abstruse subject matter, the book is surprisingly readable and engaging. As the subtitle suggests, it traces a line of development from Hegel and Marx through Marx’s disciples Karl Korsch and Georg Lukács to the members of the Frankfurt School, whose Jewish identity in Nazi Germany played a significant role.

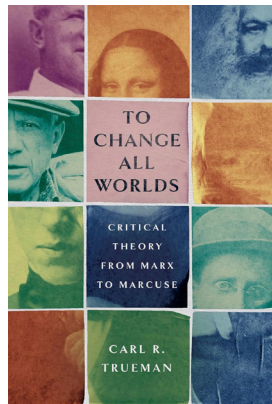
Among recurring themes (e.g., alienation, reification, dialectic, consciousness), what unifies this story is the revolutionary character of critical theory (3). Instead of merely describing society, critical theory seeks to trans-

form it by unmasking and thus destabilizing the status quo (83). As Marx said, “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it” (27). This revolutionary approach to economic class was applied by later theorists to gender, sexuality, and race (73) in ways that continue to influence debates over racial reparations, same-sex unions, and preferred pronouns. Although these discussions are often political

in nature, Trueman argues that the root issue is metaphysical, specifically “anthropology, the understanding of what it means to be human” (2). Against an essentialist view of human nature, critical theorists argue that everything is culturally conditioned and socially constructed.

Of course, this perspective raises a self-defeating question: If everything is open to critique, does that include critical theory itself? The only consistent answer is “yes,” but to answer in the affirmative is to undercut the whole project. This internal contradiction is related to another problem—namely, “an inability to articulate a clear vision of what the future of human society should look like” (5). At the end of the day, critical theory (like Goethe’s Mephistopheles) is “the spirit that always negates” (13). It tears down but cannot build. It raises questions it cannot answer.

What then is the use of critical theory? Despite his descriptive focus, Trueman does offer a Christian response. Much of what he says is helpful. Against the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention resolution, he demurs from calling critical theory “a useful and constructive tool for cultural analysis” (224). Instead, he likens the value of critical theory to the study of Arianism. Like the ancient heresy, “critical theory does not so much provide Christians with a useful tool to think about the world as clarify a set of questions to which we have the answers already” (227).



Truly, “we must offer something better, a vision of what it means to be human and a taste of the transcendent” (224).

That said, Trueman’s proposal is not above criticism. In several places, it appears uneven and incomplete. For example, in warning against the unqualified use of critical theory (especially by those on the political right), the book seems allergic to any kind of revolutionary (or counter-revolutionary) political action (222–223, 226). Indeed, one gets the impression that Christians should never seek to destabilize the status quo. That might be good advice in an orderly Protestant commonwealth, but when a secular revolution has occurred marked by anarcho-tyranny, conservative Christians find themselves in the position of counterrevolutionaries. In this situation, the shrewd use of political power against public enemies to disrupt the status quo is often warranted (cf. Jehoiada’s counter-coup in 2 Kings 11). Indeed, American Presbyterians fought a revolutionary war under less dire circumstances. This is not the specter of the so-called “woke right” but the retrieval of historic Protestant political theory, including a theology of civil resistance. Humanly speaking, if we do not know what time it is, we are not going to make it.

Instead of equipping Christians to meet the diverse exigencies of the hour, Trueman reduces his proposal to the narrowly spiritual. This is related to his tendency to equate a Christian response with the activities of the institutional church (225)—a misleading move because the church is only one of three governments ordained by God, just as the spiritual realm is only one of two kingdoms under his rule. However important (even primary) her mission, the church does not exhaust a Christian response. According to their various vocations (e.g., civil magistrate), individual Christians may do all sorts of things in the name of Christ that would be forbidden to the church *as the church*, including the strategic use of political power and social influence. Trueman downplays (if not denies) this truth when he describes the Christian alternative in terms of dropping one’s “own claims to power” (226). Of course, the key to all this is making proper distinctions (e.g., public/private, political/personal, temporal/spiritual, earthly/heavenly).

Despite these shortcomings, *To Change All Worlds* remains a thoughtful introduction to a timely topic by a rigorous scholar, whose proposals—however open to critique—will certainly promote fruitful discussion.

The author is pastor of Heritage OPC in Wilmington, NC.

To Change All Worlds: Critical Theory from Marx to Marcuse, by Carl R. Trueman. B&H Academic, 2024. Hardcover, 256 pages, \$34.99.

ON READING OLD BOOKS

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

—C. S. Lewis

Mendelssohn: A Life in Music (2005)

by R. Larry Todd

When only seventeen years old, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy wrote what is perhaps his most famous work, the Overture in E major, op. 61, which contains the famous “Wedding March,” since played in “untold millions” of weddings. Music scholar George Grove called it “the greatest marvel of early maturity that the world has ever seen in music” (54). After a trip to Italy Mendelssohn composed his radiant Italian Symphony, which “breaks forth in the opening like a burst of Mediterranean sunlight” (277). In 1829, at twenty years of age, Mendelssohn reintroduced to his generation J. S. Bach’s St. Matthew Passion, precipitating a Bach revival after one hundred years of relative neglect of Bach’s music. Mendelssohn was a man of diverse interests. His library included the Greek and Roman classics, editions of Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Hegel, Sir Walter Scott, Dickens, foreign language lexicons, Bibles, and hymnals.

In this biography of Mendelssohn by Larry Todd, large portions of the text are devoted to technical analysis of Mendelssohn’s music. Yet there is much of interest in Todd’s biography for those of us with less erudite musical knowledge. The author presents considerable evidence of Mendelssohn’s Christian faith. Born into a Jewish family, Felix was baptized as a Protestant at age seven. He habitually began his compositions with the letters H.D.m., for *Hilf Du mir*, “Help me (O Lord).”

Among Mendelssohn’s many works are the St. Paul and Elijah oratorios and the Reformation Symphony, which Felix composed for the tercentenary of the Augsburg Confession (225). According to Berlioz, Felix believed “firmly in his Lutheran faith” (238). At his funeral on November 7, 1847, a chorus of four hundred sang “Jesu, Meine Zuversicht” (“Jesus my confidence”) before Pastor Samuel Rudolph Howard of the Reformed Church preached a sermon on Job 1 (“The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away”). The tune to this music is #512 in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*.

—Thomas Champness

NEW MISSIONARIES TO MBALE: MICHAEL AND JENNIFER KEARNEY

The OPC's newest missionaries to Mbale, Uganda, gained an appreciation for cross-cultural ministry in a very different context: teaching English in Korea. Michael (Mike) and Jennifer Kearney spent their first year of marriage in Seoul, South Korea. The idea was to finance Mike's further education at Westminster Theological Seminary, which they did. But God was also opening the doors to laboring in a culture not their own.

KOREAN-AMERICAN MINISTRY

While studying at Westminster, "many of my fellow students who were Korean-American encouraged me down the route" of serving in the Korean-American church, Mike explained. Their encouragement bore fruit. After graduating from seminary in 2003, he was called to be an assistant pastor in a Korean American Presbyterian church.

"We served in the Korean-American church context at three different churches for about eleven years," Jennifer said. "During this time, God blessed us with many precious friends and with our three daughters, Miriam, Lydia, and Joanna." Miriam and Lydia, now both in college, will remain in the States while Joanna will move with the Kearneys to Mbale.

In 2015, Mike was called as pastor of Covenant OPC in Cedar Falls, Iowa, and the Kearneys became part of the OPC. They were "ten wonderful years," as Mike said. They served Covenant and homeschooled their daughters.

THE MISSION OF KNOX SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Now, as they anticipate their new place of service, Knox School of Theology in Mbale, Mike feels that "things are coming full circle, and yet going in a completely unprecedented direction at the same time, as this promises to be a very different kind of overseas, cross-cultural experience."

After hearing of the need for missionaries in Uganda and visiting the field, the Kearneys became convinced of the strategic value of teaching pastors and future church leaders. "It's a part of the world desperately in need of



Mike, Joanna, and Jennifer Kearney with Heather, Esther, and Ben Hopp in Mbale

equipped, sound men of God, certainly if confessionally Reformed and Presbyterian churches are to be planted and established," Mike said. "We have become convinced that, in the hands of our gracious God and Father, even we can be useful there."

PENNSYLVANIA BORN

The Kearneys see the Lord's hand of grace throughout their lives. Both are from Pennsylvania. Jennifer was eight when she remembers talking to God for the first time. "My parents both worked, and I would go to a neighbor's house before and after school. My babysitter was a Christian woman who shared the gospel with me and taught me Bible verses and praise songs. I remember climbing up into the tree in her backyard and praying, asking Jesus to be my Savior." The Lord was working in her parents, too; around the same time as Jennifer's prayer, her parents began attending church regularly.

Mike was converted after college. After some "ups and downs," he found his way to Tenth Presbyterian Church in

Philadelphia, a PCA congregation. “In God’s kind providence, I discovered and was grounded in Reformed theology and practice, largely through attendance and eventually membership at Tenth Presbyterian.”

When he began to sense a call to the ministry, Mike resisted it. At that time, he was working as a technical writer, and his editor came one day to tell him that Mike was not cut out for that line of work. “Somehow the thought of no longer writing about copiers and printers and their dots-per-inch capabilities didn’t deeply sadden me. But it was still the push I needed to start exploring a different path.” He began to consider seminary.

Mike was Jennifer’s introduction to Reformed theology. “The first time I went to church with him, babies were being baptized, which started a conversation about infant baptism. That was the start of many conversations about theology, the doctrines of grace, and God’s electing love,” she said. Reformed theology gave Jennifer a new understanding of verses that she was already familiar with, like Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace you have been saved . . .”

“I am so thankful to God that my salvation, from start to finish, is the work of Christ on my behalf,” she said.

EXCITING AND DAUNTING

Moving across the world for the second time in their lives is “exciting and daunting,” Jennifer said. The Kearneys take solace in the prayers being offered by the church on their behalf.

“We are counting on the body, the prayers of the saints. May it be that the Holy Spirit would be at work in us and through us, through our ministry and through the church’s overall kingdom work of worship, discipleship, and outreach,” Mike said.

The Kearneys at Sipi Falls in Uganda



IN MEMORIAM: WILLIAM RALPH ENGLISH

John W. Mahaffy

On January 14, 2025, following a battle with Parkinson’s disease, the Reverend W. Ralph English entered glory, and his body began its rest in the grave until the day of resurrection.

Ralph was born on September 30, 1936, in Grants Pass, Oregon. After graduating from Grand Canyon College, he received a BD from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1969. I recall him being a regular participant in a group that met to pray for missions. He was ordained that year as an OPC missionary to Korea, where he labored until 1987. As Korean churches assumed more responsibility for evangelizing their country, the Committee on Foreign Missions asked Ralph and his family to serve in Suriname, which they did until 1996.

English served a pastorate in Bridgewater, South Dakota, and as stated supply in Abilene, Texas, before returning to Oregon to plant a home mission work in Roseburg. He then served for a decade as a teacher at Cornerstone Presbyterian in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Upon retirement he was declared pastor emeritus.

He lived in Flintstone, Georgia, when he died. Nick Thompson, pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian, testifies that Ralph was “a shining example to us of Christ-ward faith and Christ-like love.”

He is survived by his wife, Joan (Grotenhuis), to whom he was married for sixty years; their sons Paul, Timothy, Daniel, and William Ralph Jr.; twenty grandchildren; and nineteen great-grandchildren.

A FAITHFUL REUNION

JOHN H. TERPSTRA

On October 5, 2024, a sweet unification event through the merger of two church federations (denominations) took place in the town of Kampen, Netherlands. The Reformed Churches (Restored), formed in 2003 and known as De Gereformeerde Kerk (DKN), joined with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, formed in 2009 and known as Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) to form the new Synod of Reformed Churches, Netherlands. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church rejoiced in this event, as it had previously been one of the two sponsors for the GKN in joining the International Conference of Reformed Churches.

Each federation's synod met separately so that their members would not be denied the opportunity to bring on appeal any constitutional concerns they might have over the merger. This was done not only to hear latent objections, but also to recognize the freedom they had to differ from one another in non-consequential areas of conscience or practice.

The synods confessed sins of division and looked back to sad periods of separation and sometimes painful estrangement. At the same time, joy arose over the prospect of growing together in service of the Lord. They sought to pray together and to cooperate in preserving and nurturing the growth of the Lord's church. All thanks, praise, and honor go to the Lord for his work and the wonders we experience in life as the Holy Spirit sanctifies and builds his church.

The historical roots of the two federations are tied to the departure of members who left the Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijmaakt), "Reformed Churches (Liberated)," a federation whose members helped establish the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia in 1950 and 1951, respectively. However, in modern times the Reformed Churches (Liberated) turned from the biblical teaching on office. The OPC separated from its relationship with this church in 2022.

Both the De Gereformeerde Kerk (DKN) and Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) had taken strong stands



At the October 5 unification of two Dutch federations

against the admission of women to the offices of the church according to the Word of God. Both federations were holding firmly to confessional orthodoxy, a matter beyond any negotiation. Yet there were differences that might hinder a merger, but thankfully, both federations were resolute in the commitment that "if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that" (James 4:15).

The OPC recognizes churches of like faith and practice such as the GKN. We actively seek to establish and maintain appropriate relationships because the Scriptures teach us that the elect who were chosen in him before the foundation of the world are one body in Christ. The constitutional standards and practices of churches establish a framework that helps us to distinguish between those that are like-minded and those that are not. The OPC recognizes the unity of the faith and thus works actively to build strong ecclesiastic relationships so that churches of like faith and practice may mutually encourage each other, pray together, and share in the kingdom work.

The author is a member of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations.

PRAYER CALENDAR

MAR 2025

1 **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for the Salvos por Gracia congregation's transition from evening to morning worship services. / Pray for **Lacy (Debbie) Andrews**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast.

2 Pray for Home Missions general secretary **Jeremiah Montgomery**. / Pray for stated clerk **Hank Belfield** and others helping to prepare for the 2025 General Assembly.

3 Affiliated missionaries **Dr. Mark & Laura Ambrose**, Cambodia. Pray for God to raise up mature men to serve as elders and deacons. / Pray for those coordinating and leading **short-term mission teams** as they prepare for summer missions.

4 **Micah & Eileen Bickford**, Farmington, ME. Pray for the continued outreach and evangelism of Grace Reformed. / Affiliated missionaries **Jerry & Marilyn Farnik**, Czech Republic. Pray that God will bring together a good English camp team for the summer.

5 Pray for **Charles (Margaret) Biggs**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic. / Pray for the **Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel**.

6 Pray for provision, health, and hope for those imprisoned for their faith in **East Africa** and for their families. / Yearlong intern **Jon (Stacey) Jung** at Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA.

7 Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Douglas Clawson**. / **Christian & Hanna Repp**, Doylestown, PA. Pray for God to raise up officers to serve at Park Presbyterian Church.

8 **John Paul & Corinne Holloway**, Manassas, VA. Pray for the

members of Acacia Reformed Church to walk alongside each other with love. / Yearlong intern **Josiah (Hannah) Stockwell** at Pilgrim OPC in Bangor, ME.

9 Pray for **Ben & Heather Hopp**, Africa & Haiti, as they travel to the US to visit their adult children and others. / Yearlong intern **Stuart (Simone) Ireland** at Covenant Presbyterian in New Bern, NC.

10 Pray for Home Missions associate general secretary **Al Tricarico**. / Pray for solid pastoral training for the **Ethiopian Mercy Reformed Church (EMRC)**.

11 Pray for **Chris (Megan) Hartshorn**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / Pray for able-bodied, mercy-minded servants to register their interest with **OPC Disaster Response**.

12 **Heero & Anya Hacquebord**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for the church's teenage ministry, led by church members, as they reach unchurched teens. / Yearlong intern **Isaiah (Calli Jade) English** at Grace OPC in Sewickley, PA.

13 Affiliated missionaries **Craig & Ree Coulbourne** and **Linda Karner**, Japan. Pray for people to be drawn to Jesus through their ministry. / **Christopher & Sara Drew**, Grand Forks, ND. Pray for the discipleship and ministry of Faith Presbyterian Church.

14 **Andrew & Abby Wann**, Bluffton, SC. Pray that the Lord would bless the ministry of Covenant Presbyterian Church of the Lowcountry. / Yearlong intern **William (Mayra) Devenney** at First Church of Merrimack in Merrimack, NH.

15 **Mr. & Mrs. F.**, Asia. Pray for Mr. F. to present the gospel effectively despite the stress of his daily teaching work. / Yearlong



The Bickfords (day 4)



The Jungs (day 6)

intern **Luke (Laura) Walkup** at Reformation OPC in Morgantown, WV.

.....
16 **Brad (Cinnamon) Peppo**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Pray for **Mr. & Mrs. M.**, Asia, to have fruitful interactions with Bible study students in the U.S. and that students will come to faith.

.....
17 Pray for Home Missions administrative coordinator **Lauren LaRocca**. / Pray for the **Committee on Christian Education (CCE)** as it meets March 17–19.

.....
18 Retired missionaries **Cal & Edie Cummings**, **Mary Lou Son**, and **Brian & Dorothy Wingard**. Pray for joy and a faithful witness. / Pray for **Danny Olinger** as he conducts interviews for the internship program.

.....
19 Associate missionaries **Octavius & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Pray for the church to be a source of hope, healing, and strength for the nation. / **Dave (Elizabeth) Holmlund**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Philadelphia.

.....
20 **Matt & Christine Ezzell**, Holly Springs, NC. Pray for unity and growth within the congregation of Zion OPC. / Yearlong intern **Brian (Kelsey) Bowen** at Providence OPC in Rockford, IL.



The Peppos (day 16)

.....
21 Pray for Foreign Missions administrative coordinators **Ling Lee** and **Joanna Grove**. / Pray that the *Ruling Elder Podcast* would be encouraging to all elders as they serve and love their congregations.

.....
22 **John & Katie Terrell**, Dorr, MI. Pray for God to lead new people to believe in him and join Living Hope OPC. / Pray for **Mike and Jenn Kearney**, Mbale, Uganda, as they pack, say goodbyes, and travel to Uganda in late March.

.....
23 **Bradney & Eileen Lopez**, Guayama, Puerto Rico. Pray for God's Spirit to direct the gospel witness of Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura. / Pray for **Linda Foh**, technical assistant for OPC.org.

.....
24 Pray for **Fred & Kaling Lo**, Mbale, Uganda, to effectively communicate cross-culturally in Fred's teaching and in activities of daily life. / **Rachel Kinney**, video and social media coordinator.

.....
25 Associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the AYPC clinic would grow in providing spiritual care with physical healthcare. / **David & Leah Vogel**, Kannapolis, NC. Pray for the continued growth and spiritual development of Kannapolis OPC.

.....
26 Pray for **Erik (Heather) Watkins**, evangelist for Chicago, IL, and Daytona, FL. / *New Horizons* editorial assistants **Ayrian Yasar** and **Diane Olinger**.

.....
27 **Travis & Bonnie Emmett**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for Travis and Pastor Julius as they train men for church office. / Pray for the **Committee on Diaconal Ministries** as it meets today.



John Fikkert (day 29)

.....
28 **Andrew (Rebekah) Miller**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania. / Pray for missionary associate **Beatrix Taverne**, Nakaale, Uganda, to be an encouragement to her fellow missionaries and local believers.

.....
29 **David & Rebekah Graves**, Wichita Falls, TX. Pray that the Lord would build his church in Wichita Falls. / Pray for **John Fikkert** director of the Committee on Ministerial Care (CMC).

.....
30 Pray for associate missionaries **Christopher & Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Uganda, to have time to be with people to build deepening relationships. / **Melisa McGinnis**, financial controller.

.....
31 Tentmaking missionary **Tina DeJong**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for missionary kids to grow in their love for the Lord and desire to serve him. / **Matt & Hyojung Walker**, Yorktown, VA. Pray for the congregation of Peninsula Reformed Presbyterian Church to grow in Christlikeness.

BE PREPARED: SAFETY IN CHURCH

MATT BUTLER

Imagine you are sitting in the pew with your family as usual on Sunday morning. After helping your child find the hymn selection in her hymnal, you stand and see an elderly gentleman make his way into the aisle, walking toward the back of the church. As the hymn begins, you realize you can't seem to focus on singing. Your gaze is fixed on the unsteady footing and ashy skin tone of the elderly man. You glance around to see if others notice. The man makes it to the narthex, but once there, he collapses. You lower your hymnal to exit, but a few congregants you know to be nurses are already on their way. You breathe a sigh of relief and close your eyes to silently pray.

Or imagine that you are chatting after the service when a mom hurries back inside the sanctuary. "I can't find Susy!" she yells over her shoulder. Susy is five years old and on the autism spectrum with compulsive behavior that includes wandering. Some people start casually looking around, but mostly in the same area. A few minutes later a door opens and someone calls, "We've found her!" Susy was an eighth of a mile down the road—she had seen a dog and tried to follow it. Everyone is relieved but wonders how it could have been avoided.

Both stories are from OP churches. Many congregations have a church safety program in place for such events. If your church doesn't, where can you start?

BE PROACTIVE

The first step is to engage the elders, deacons, and trustees in the discussion of the importance of proper safety planning and considerations. Think broadly about church safety. It is certainly prudent to consider attacks, vandalism, and crime when forming your thoughts around an action plan, but it is also important to think through background checks for those who work with children or vulnerable congregants. (Many states now require background checks for anyone who volunteers with children.)

Create a medical plan to include basic first aid and CPR training. Perhaps make provisions for evacuating less- or non-ambulatory members or visitors if needed. Maybe consider purchasing an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) and other basic first aid provisions and make sure the safety team members are trained on their use.



Lake Sherwood OPC in Orlando, FL

Engage with your local law enforcement agency to see if they have programs on crime prevention and self-protection. Many police departments and sheriff's offices have personnel dedicated to this kind of private sector engagement and can provide good tips on situational awareness and tactics to mitigate harm to the saints in your church.

If your church has members of the safety team armed, it is important that group training and discussions occur. If your church doesn't have someone with a solid background in this area, it is advisable to engage an outside source to receive training. Scenario-based training and rehearsal are important to deconflict armed responses, and of course, many legal and liability issues are resident with this facet of safety team planning.

Finally, use the resources and knowledge of your brothers and sisters in other congregations. Other churches in your presbytery may have a policy template for a safety program. Modify it to fit your congregation's needs and revisit annually to assess its fit. You can find our church's policy document at www.opccdm.org.

When we join the people of God to worship him in our local congregations, we are glimpsing into heaven and joining the saints and martyrs and heavenly creatures in adoration and praise. Our other-worldly experience is, however, anchored firmly in this world, and thus we are subject to the reality of sudden illness, disruption, or even danger. Creating and participating in a safety team is an act of ministry. Pray for one another as you seek the welfare of the Lord's people and those coming to our churches to hear of the One who gave himself as a ransom for many.

Matt Butler is an elder at Lake Sherwood OPC in Orlando, FL.



At the January 25 installation of Dr. George “Chip” Hammond (center)

NEWS

HAMMOND INSTALLED AT WHEATON, IL

On January 25, Rev. Dr. George “Chip” Hammond was installed as a pastor of Bethel Presbyterian Church in Wheaton, Illinois, to labor alongside the church’s current pastor, Rev. Dr. Daniel Schrock. Rev. Lane Keister, Rev. Dr. David Noe, Rev. Philip Proctor, Rev. Dr. Daniel Schrock, and Rev. Dr. Alan Strange were all involved in the service. Dr. Hammond gave the benediction. We give thanks to God for his faithful provision of godly ministers to serve at Bethel.

SLOAN INSTALLED AT CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA

On January 11, William Sloan was installed as pastor of Providence OPC in Charlottesville, Virginia—just across the road from Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello. Retired OP minister Gerry Malkus preached from Ephesians 4:11–16, and two charges were given from Acts 20 by regional home missionary Charles Biggs and retired OP minister Jerry Taylor. Prior to being installed at Providence, Pastor Will (along with his wife, Lauren, and daughters Isabel and Mary) had served faithfully at the mission work Good Shepherd OPC in Onley, Virginia, from January 2024 until its closing in December.

apologetics and systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary.

- On January 11, **William H. Sloan** was installed as pastor of Providence OPC in Charlottesville, VA.
- On January 25, **Dr. George C. Hammond** was installed as a pastor at Bethel Presbyterian in Wheaton, IL.

MILESTONES

- **W. Ralph English**, 88, retired OP minister and former OP missionary to Korea and Suriname, died January 14.

REVIEWS

Calvin’s Ecclesiology: A Study in the History of Doctrine, by Tadataka Maruyama. Eerdmans, 2022. Hardcover, 480 pages, \$65.00. Reviewed by OP pastor David C. Noe.

Calvin’s Ecclesiology (CE) both succeeds and fails, leaving this reader both grateful and deeply frustrated. The former president and professor of church history at Tokyo Christian University, Maruyama labored exhaustively to elucidate Calvin’s view of the church, particularly how it developed from earliest days until his death in May 1564. This volume is a natural prequel to Maruyama’s 1978 monograph on Theodore Beza’s ecclesiology.

As one would expect, given Maruyama’s long tenure in the field and groundbreaking volume on Beza, *CE* is exemplary for its use of primary and secondary sources. In this way, Maruyama avoids past errors of Calvin scholarship: anachronistic readings, or a too narrow focus on one aspect of his writings, mostly



At William Sloan’s January 11 installation (center, bow tie)

UPDATE

MINISTERS

- On December 31, **Dr. K. Scott Oliphint** retired from his teaching role after thirty-three years as professor of

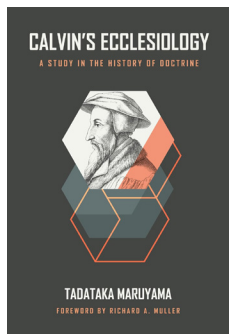
the *Institutes*, at the expense of the treatises and commentaries. Thus, Maruyama canvasses a very broad range of Calvin's works, including the mostly neglected *Duae Epistolae* of 1537, as well as classics from the secondary literature (Doumergue, Ganoczy, Milner) and newer contributions (Gordon, Manetsch, Tuininga). This gives *CE* a commendable breadth of research.

Second, the work is noteworthy for its ambitious scope. Beginning with chapter 1, "Academic Formation and Catholic Ecclesiology," Maruyama carefully traces the discrepant and sometimes confusing threads of Calvin's thought through the whole fabric of his career and writings. Every potential contributing element—from the influence of Lefèvre d'Étaples and Farel, to the extent of Calvin's departure from Bucer's notions—is analyzed. *CE* thus has a comprehensive feel, assembling a wealth of research and a wealth of investigation into virtually every factor constituting Calvin's ecclesiological thought.

Third, *CE* is soberly modest in argumentation, advancing no novel theories, making no outlandish or unsupported claims, and claiming to sail few uncharted waters. For example, at the conclusion of chapter 2, "The Early Genevan Reformation and Practice of Catholic Ecclesiology," Maruyama writes: "Concerning the three Genevan documents, over against the traditional view attributing them to Calvin's authorship, while we hold Calvin's sole authorship of the *Instruction*, we attribute both the *Confession* and the *Articles* to Farel's primary authorship, but with some possible assimilations with the *Instruction* and partial contributions by Calvin" (223). Quite modest. Another example of welcome temperance in scholarship is on *CE*'s final page, where Maruyama writes: "On the one hand, the Reformation church was viewed as 'the orchestra' in the

European theater and 'the living/visible image of Christ's kingdom.' On the other hand, it was viewed as 'a remnant' or the church 'under the cross' and 'in resistance'" (444).

As the Roman poet Martial once noted to Avitus, "some of my poems are good, some bad, most average." The same is true of research volumes, and *CE* is no exception. Though the book is attractive and well put together, it clearly should have been read a few more times to reduce the number of errors. Some basic items were incorrect (most painfully the repeated Johannes *Strum*, not the correct *Sturm*; the latter was apparently victim of a drive-by autocorrect). The style of the work is a more delicate question, because Maruyama's first language



is not English. This reader has much sympathy for how difficult an enterprise like this must be. Nevertheless, the acknowledgements name several individuals who specifically sought to help him overcome this challenge. Yet, it needed more readings. The prose is at places labored and confusing, as for example in chapter 3, "The Strasbourg Period and a Transition to New Ecclesiologies," where Maruyama writes: "Instead, Calvin interpreted its history [i.e., sacred history] as a particular pattern of salvation history, namely, the history of justification by faith" (316). Reading slowly did not bring much clarity, with strange terminological choices, as in chapter 4 where Maruyama toils to distinguish between his categories "Reformed Ecclesiology" and "Reformation Ecclesiology." Finally, the book suffers from inadequate organization. As previously stated, the book's depth of research and ambitious scope are admirable. Regrettably, however, it bears the marks of many decades of meticulous research that have not been carefully distilled. *CE* could have been reduced in length by at least one hundred pages, and thereby

made a much more cogent contribution to this important field. While *CE* will be an important volume for Calvin scholars to consult, this reader cannot recommend it for a broad audience. There are simply too many obstacles to a smooth appreciation of the content.

***Raising Sexually Faithful Kids and Parenting Boys and Girls in a Gender-Confused World*, video series by Harvest USA. Reviewed by OP pastor Dale Van Dyke.**

Harvest USA has done the church a great service by releasing two excellent video series for Christian parents: *Raising Sexually Faithful Kids* and *Parenting Boys and Girls in a Gender-Confused World*.

As a pastor, I have a confession to make. I haven't done a very good job of equipping parents to help their children face the onslaught of sexual perversion and confusion erupting from our "dark and evil age." In significant ways, today's parents grew up in a different world than their children. Fifteen years ago, gender was a fixed term. Porn was not instantly accessible on your phone. Sexting wasn't a thing. No one knew a trans person. But all this is now mainstream, and Christian pastors and parents are being blindsided by the sexual struggles and gender confusion of their churchgoing, Bible-believing children.

It is essential for the church to take seriously our communal baptismal vows and help our parents help their children. That's why I am so thankful for these videos.

Raising Sexually Faithful Kids is biblically rooted, culturally aware, gospel-saturated instruction for Christian parents. Through eight, thirty-minute presentations, Mark Sanders and Ellen Dykas equip you to have regular, intentional talks about sexuality with your kids in an age-appropriate way. This material is extremely practical, offering step-by-step guidance for parents who want to help their children treasure God's beautiful design for human sexuality.

I particularly appreciated the lessons on how to help your child when they are struggling with sexual sin. When a parent discovers that their ten-year-old son has been looking at pornography or their fifteen-year-old daughter has been sexting, the natural instinct is to panic and make stricter rules. But better rules are powerless to transform a human heart. This material is uniquely designed to help you, the parent, gain a biblical understanding of sexuality, the nature of sin, how people change, and how the gospel transforms. These are not lessons on how to make better rules. They are lessons on helping your child discover Christ in the midst of their sin and God's wisdom concerning their sexuality.

This is accessible, easy-to-understand material. The illustrations and diagrams are memorable and useful. For instance, I've begun using "The Tree Model" whenever I counsel someone about how sin impacts our whole person and how change must begin in the heart. Parents will find this material informative and easy to explain to their children.

Parenting Boys and Girls in a Gender-Confused World applies the lessons of *Raising Sexually Faithful Kids* to the specific issue of gender confusion. We all know parents and grandparents who are grieving a precious child who has embraced homosexuality or is in the process of a gender transition. This is undoubtedly the best material I've seen to help parents understand the twisted worldview of our age and give their children the biblical information and gospel motivation they will need to renounce the cultural lies they are being told and embrace God's loving plan for their sexuality.

To make these materials fully accessible, Harvest USA is offering it all *for free!* To make them fully useful, each lesson includes a participant's guide for taking notes, a discussion guide (which would be ideal for a small group study), and an extremely helpful resource list for further study.

As a pastor, father, and grandfather, I can't recommend these materials more highly. Your children will one day thank you for giving them biblical truth and gospel encouragement as they navigate the path of God-honoring sexuality.

***The (Not-So-Secret) Secret to Reaching the Next Generation*, by Kevin DeYoung. Crossway, 2024. Paperback, 28 pages, \$4.99. Reviewed by OP member Emily Van Dixhoorn.**

If there were ever a highly relevant book that you do have time to read, it is *The (Not-So-Secret) Secret to Reaching the Next Generation* by Kevin DeYoung. Are we not all concerned for the next generation? Are we not all heartbroken to see a covenant child walk away from the church? Is the book not only 28 pages in length? More of a pamphlet than a book, this quick read gives us hope that God has provided a way that we can meet the urgent need to reach the next generation with the gospel.

In his characteristic style, DeYoung points his readers away from gimmicks that we, perhaps in a moment of panic, might be tempted to entertain and back to God's promises and provision in his Word.

The book can be summarized as 2 Peter 1:5–8 applied to youth ministry. DeYoung writes, "If we are growing in faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love, we will not be ineffective ministers for Christ. If there was a secret to effective ministry, these verses give it to us" (12).

DeYoung unpacks this secret with five suggestions. In Goldilocks fashion, they are not too many and not too few:

1. Grab Them with Passion (Rom. 12:9–11)
2. Win Them with Love (John 13:35)
3. Hold Them with Holiness (2 Pet. 1:5–8; 1 Tim. 4:15)
4. Challenge Them with Truth

5. Amaze Them with God (Acts 17:23; Rev. 4)

Because these tactics are backed by God's Word (and a touch of sociological study), the book assures us we can have hope for reaching the next generation in our day.

DeYoung uses a tone that is both confident and convicting, making for a memorable read and motivating for action. For example, DeYoung concludes

the section on "Challenge Them with Truth" with, "The church in the twenty-first century must go big on truth or go home" (22). This statement could be the theme for a youth study on the Westminster Confession of Faith or another in-depth doctrinal study.

For such a short piece, it is packed with a punch. Because of its drive away from trendy programs, it is especially well suited for confessional churches attentive to the means of grace.

I would love to hear of churches giving this brief book to all youth workers and parents as a way of building unity and focus in reaching the next generation and spurring on all its members in growth in Christ.

***Grounded in Grace: Helping Kids Build Their Identity in Christ*, by Jonathan D. Holmes. New Growth Press, 2024. Paperback, 128 pages, \$16.99. Reviewed by OP pastor John W. Mahaffy.**

"Who am I?" How can parents (and grandparents) help their growing children who are dealing, or will have to deal, with that question? Holmes suggests, "Our children are under enormous pressure to figure out who they are in an environment and culture that is sending them conflicting messages" (3). The author hopes to help not only parents but also others who interact with children.

Traditionally, children found their identity by following in their parents'



footsteps and achieving approval from them and other adults. Boys might follow in their father's trade, while the goal of girls would be to become a loving and submissive wife. More recently in our culture, "the determiner of identity has moved from something outside of you to something inside of you" (7). Your inner voice is crucial.

Holmes criticizes both approaches. Christian parents may think that they can create an environment that is protective enough that their children will simply follow them in choosing a good identity. But Holmes argues that this approach

depends heavily on a parent's ability to control a child's sense of identity, adding, "that is far too much power for any flawed human—even a wise, loving parent—to wield" (15). The values of the culture around us do impact our children. He goes on at more length pointing out the problems with the modern identity construct, showing that it is incoherent, crushing, enslaving, fragile, performative, and ultimately an illusion.



and opposes the seductiveness of the world's temptations. He goes to Scripture to evaluate and to steer a better course. There are corners of Christianity that recognize some of the evil of our age and seek to solve it by isolation or by moving back in history. This book is far stronger because it is biblically grounded. It sets its compass by Scripture, not simply by opposition to the sinful world.

One might not agree with every suggestion—this book, like every other, Scripture excepted, ought to be read critically. But parents will find the book practical and helpful. In his concluding chapter, Holmes lists the five areas again and summarizes:

In each of these categories, a child can wrongly root and base their sense of who they are in an activity (academics, athletics, moralism) or feeling and perceptions (gender identity and sexual orientation). What I hope you've seen is that none of these is unimportant in the development of who we are, but none of these should be the primary narratives in building who we are. . . . What matters is what God thinks of you. (102–103)

If God has blessed you with children, do not wait until they are struggling with issues of identity. Read the book now. (The book is for parents to read, not simply to hand to children.) Practice good communication. Now is the time to be pointing your children to the Savior. He has to be central in their lives, not simply introduced as an escape from the problems of the surrounding culture. While practical, this book does not provide you with simple rules that will solve your parenting challenges in this crucial area—sort of a Reformed version of the health and wealth gospel. Rather, it will push you to your knees and encourage you to continue looking to Christ yourself, and for your children.

But the situation is not hopeless. Early in the book Holmes suggests, and this becomes a theme: "The greatest problem our kids are facing regarding the issue of identity is this: an anemic and even nonexistent notion of who the Lord is and what he has called us to be" (4).

The bulk of the book is devoted to exploring five areas where young people tend to struggle with identity: academics, sports, moralism, gender, and sexuality. In each chapter the author provides an example of a child whose identity is being structured by that particular focus and describes the problems flowing out of being caught up in that identity. He includes an extended section for each entitled, "How Can Parents Help?" with practical suggestions and guidelines, emphasizing the importance of good communication, but always encouraging the parents to steer their children to look to Christ.

That focus on Christ is the strength of this book. The author understands

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Pastor: Living Hope Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Allentown, Pennsylvania, is seeking a full-time pastor. We are a suburban church located in the Lehigh Valley. The successful applicant will be experienced in preaching expository sermons, appreciate wonderful congregational singing, and be an outgoing apologist for the gospel and Reformed theology. View our website at www.livinghopeopc.org. Send inquiries to lhopc.psc@gmail.com.

Pastor: New Life Fellowship (OPC) in Holland, Michigan, a small, intergenerational church, is seeking a full-time pastor. The ideal candidate will deliver bold, biblical messages focusing on expository preaching and have a shepherd's heart for pastoral care. New Life is dedicated to supporting our ministries and fostering a welcoming and supportive community. To learn more, send inquiries to PSCNewLifeFellowship@gmail.com.

Pastor: Spencer Mills OPC in Gowen/Greenville, Michigan, is seeking a full-time pastor with pastoral strengths in teaching God's Word, community outreach, and developing relationships within the congregation. Previous ministry experience is desired, but we strongly desire to allow God to fulfill our need of a pastor. Greenville is an expanding community with a large potential for ministry. For inquiries or résumé submission, please email cheapjeep@att.net.

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In spite of language, culture, and geographic barriers, God’s people have a beautiful bond through the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing like a missions trip to give testimony to that connection!

Jules Woody, Covenant Community OPC, Taylors, SC, on her short-term missions trip to Puerto Rico in 2024.



Where will you make your connection in 2025?

- Colombia
- Czech Republic
- Hungary
- Japan
- Mexico
- Puerto Rico
- Quebec
- Uganda
- Wildwood, NJ



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