

# NEW HORIZONS

in the ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

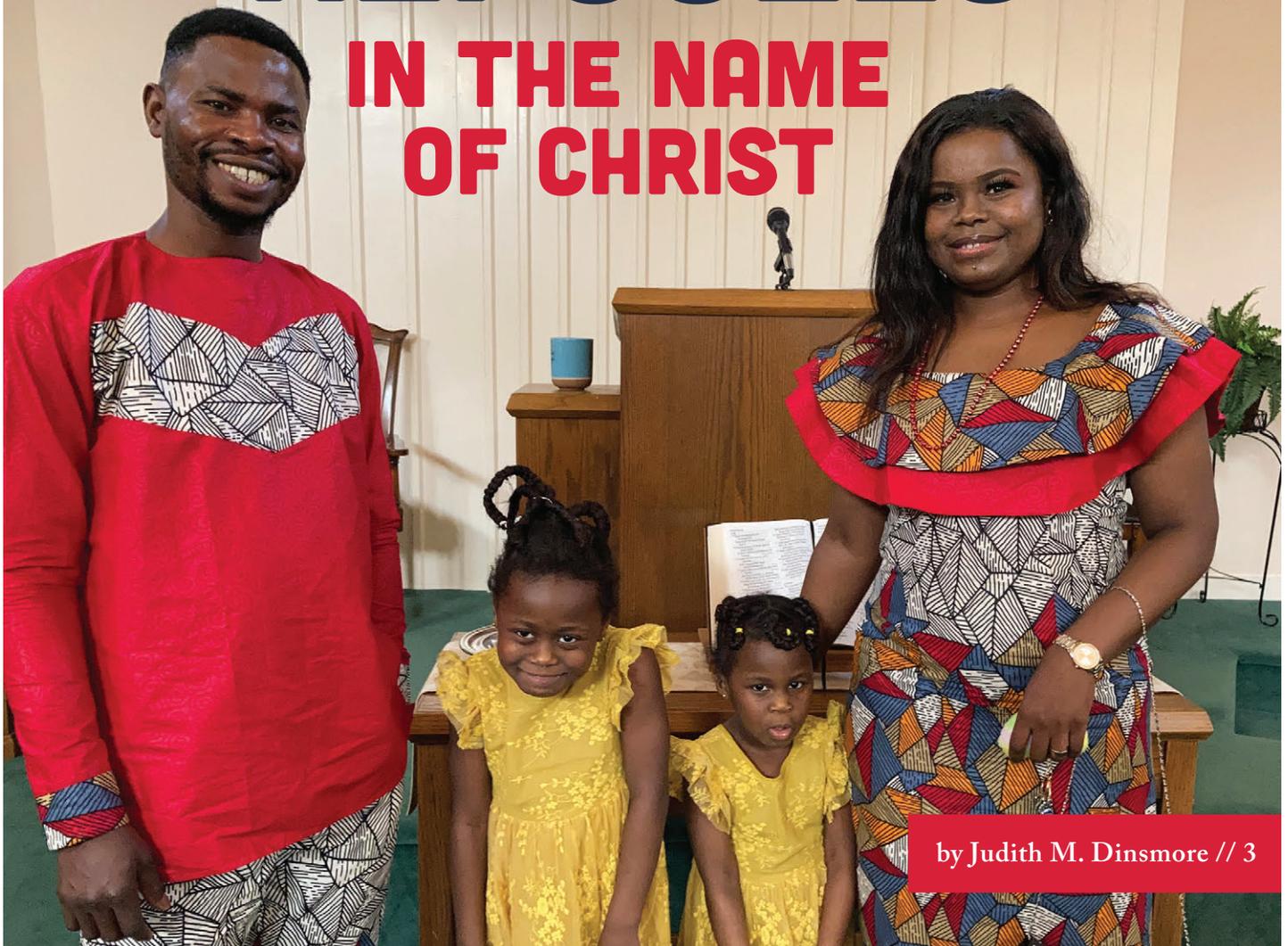
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APRIL 2021

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## WELCOMING REFUGEES

### IN THE NAME OF CHRIST



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*Cover photo and photo on page 4 courtesy of Doug Furce*

## New Horizons

in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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

Letters to the editor are welcome. They should deal with an issue the magazine has recently addressed. Their language should be temperate, and they may not charge anyone with an offense. They should be brief, and they may be condensed by the editor.

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Send address changes to [ccesecretary@opc.org](mailto:ccesecretary@opc.org). Allow six weeks for address changes.

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

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

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

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

In early February, 720 pounds of groceries were delivered to twenty-two families in the Manzanamayo Church in Peru, purchased through the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Fund. It has been a year since this fund was established to aid brothers and sisters in the developing world, and the Committee on Diaconal Ministries gives thanks to the Lord for donations over the past year of \$90,000. Thus far, \$44,000 has been dispersed to countries including Haiti, India, Kenya, and Ethiopia. If you would like to contribute, please go to [give.opc.org/diaconal-ministries-summary](http://give.opc.org/diaconal-ministries-summary).



# WELCOMING REFUGEES IN THE NAME OF CHRIST



JUDITH M. DINSMORE // Last December, a twenty-seven-year-old shared his testimony during the Sunday school hour at Redeemer OPC in Atlanta, Georgia. He spoke in Tigrinya, the language of his native Eritrea, and a church member translated. “This morning, I’m here before you to tell you the story, not just

about me, but about the work God has done in my life,” Amanuel quietly began.

## A Refugee’s Inexpressible Joy

Amanuel (not his real name) grew up in the capital of Eritrea. His dad, a Christian, led the family in worship every evening. When Amanuel was in high school, his dad was imprisoned and detained for several years for his faith. During the imprisonment, Amanuel’s father became paralyzed from rough treatment.

Amanuel knew, as all young people in Eritrea know, that the government had a shoot-to-kill policy for anyone caught crossing the border into Ethiopia, at that time its enemy, and severely punished anyone caught crossing into Sudan. “But at the end of the day,” Amanuel said to *New Horizons* through a translator, “it is a decision of faith. If I was going to leave Eritrea and come to a place where I can enjoy religious

freedom, where I can work and support my family, then I would have to take risks.” So he fled.

In December 2018, he came to the port of entry at the US-Mexico border and sought asylum in the United States, which historically has provided refuge to many afraid for their lives. Amanuel was sent to a detention center, first in South Carolina and then in Georgia. His time in detention was extended, time and again, for reasons he didn’t fully understand. His plea for asylum was denied, so he appealed. His appeal was then denied. Deportation became a constant possibility, and, because his asylum paperwork recorded that he was a Christian, a return to Eritrea meant death or imprisonment. “I started feeling like God did not care about me. I felt very, very isolated,” he said.

Every day, he woke up early to read a chapter of Scripture and pray. From nine to three he worked in the kitchen for four dollars an hour. Then he rested

until dinner. After dinner, although he could interact with other inmates, he usually didn’t. “Most of them were unbelievers, and sometimes they became very angry with our situation and with people,” he said. So, typically, he’d return to his room and continue reading.

After a year and a half in detention, the Lord brought help to Amanuel through a remarkable chain of contacts that led to Yonas Isaac, a fellow Eritrean and worshiper at Redeemer OPC. In April 2020, Yonas and a friend drove south to the detention center to meet Amanuel.

“To this very day, the joy that I felt from that morning has only grown bigger,” Amanuel said. “When these men came to visit me, not only being Eritreans but also believers, it was a powerful reminder that God actually cares for me. That was the reason for my inexpressible joy.”

When Amanuel was released from his two-year detention in November

2020, with Redeemer as his sponsor, he wept. The detention officer asked him why he was crying. “I told him, I am not crying, I am rejoicing,” he remembered. “I told him, I am going to be released, but not only that, . . . I am going to go to a church where I can worship, where I can fellowship with other Christians. So the Lord has fulfilled his promise to me.”

Currently, he lives in a ministry apartment rented through the church. His case is still pending, and his future uncertain. He may yet be deported. But for now, Redeemer has provided both a physical and spiritual resting place—a source of “great encouragement and spiritual growth,” he said.

### Ministry to Refugees

The pastor of Redeemer OPC is himself a political asylee from Eritrea and as such is eager to welcome the stranger (Matt. 25:35). Four years ago, Redeemer decided to begin a ministry to refugees and immigrants “down the street” in Clarkston. They called Chris Cashen as their first evangelist. The ministry was jointly funded by the presbytery’s home missions committee, the OPC’s home missions committee, and the OPC’s Committee on Diaconal Ministries.

While the refugee ministry has offered Bible studies, English classes, and an after-school program, perhaps its most lasting impact to date has



Marie and her daughters with GraceAnn Cashen, outside Redeemer OPC

been with a couple who, like Amanuel, have not been granted asylum status—yet. Gabriel and Marie (not their real names) and their two young daughters came to the States from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Two and a half years ago, like many other Congolese, Gabriel and Marie found themselves on the wrong side of the country’s leading political party and its president. (In 2019, 43 percent of all refugees admitted to the United States were from the Congo.) Both had friends and family who had been physically harmed by the police. Gabriel and Marie were protesting the leadership at a university in Kinshasa, Congo’s capital, when Gabriel joined a group of protesters peacefully burning the party’s flags. Both he and Marie, who had been supporting him, were visible

at the protests, and, a few days later, the police found their apartment. The police beat Marie, who was home alone with their three-year-old and infant, and destroyed some of the family’s belongings. After that, Gabriel said, “we had to find a way to flee.”

After a harrowing journey, they, too, came up to the port of entry at the

US-Mexico border. Gabriel and Marie were immediately separated and placed in detention—he with the baby, she with the toddler.

Around the same time, the refugee ministry in Clarkston had decided to make themselves available to help a temporary shelter for asylum-seekers in Austin, Texas, that was full to capacity. When Gabriel and Marie were released from detention into this temporary shelter, the shelter worker pulled up contact information for Chris Cashen.

“I was really surprised to hear about Atlanta,” Gabriel said. “I asked the worker, what is this place? Will we like it? And the worker said, ‘The man is a pastor, you are going to be taken care of.’” So, on November 23, 2019, Gabriel and Marie got on a bus and settled in for the ride to Georgia.

“When we arrived in Atlanta, it was very noisy and extremely cold—we had never experienced this kind of cold,” Gabriel said. Chris Cashen arrived in the rain to pick them up, and they were so amazed at his care, they said, that they had an “instant affection” for him. Cashen’s wife had supper ready and beds made. Gabriel and Marie lived with the Cashens for the next year.

“They showed us so much love, and we had the feeling that they were considering us to be their own children,” Gabriel said. “They helped us in all our difficult moments.”

### A Local Church’s Work to Welcome

And there were many difficult moments.

Those with refugee status work with a resettlement agency to receive what they need—Social Security numbers, permission to work and attend school, and ESL classes. But as asylum applicants, Gabriel, Marie, and Amanuel have none of those resources. First steps include applying for permission to work and enrolling independently in English classes.

“Ministry to those seeking asylum is a step up from refugee ministry,”

## An Asylee or a Refugee?

What’s the difference between an asylee and a refugee? Both meet the US legal definition of a refugee as one who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her home country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The difference is that applicants for refugee status are outside the United States and applicants for asylum are inside the United States or at a port of entry. In fiscal year 2019, the United States admitted 29,916 refugees and granted asylum to 46,508 asylees.

(Source: “Immigration Statistics Yearbook,” Department of Homeland Security, [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov).)

Chris Cashen explained. A licensed attorney, he was able to offer some legal help. Gabriel started working last May and has been supporting the family since last July. When they moved into their own apartment, they needed furniture and household supplies. Gabriel needed a driver's permit and training in how to navigate Atlanta's traffic. And even at church, they faced the language barrier.

"The way I communicate with Gabriel is with Google translate," Doug Furce, a member at Redeemer, explained. "He speaks into his phone in French, and the phone translates to English, and then I do the opposite."

Debora Furce, also a member of Redeemer, has worked with the refugee community in Atlanta, primarily women and children, throughout her career. To serve refugees, she explained, you have to be interested enough to really learn about them, so that you can discover what they need. Talking to a bilingual person from the refugee's culture can be very helpful. "Learning about these very different people that you would never have met otherwise is a blessing because God's Word comes alive right in front of you, that the kingdom is for every nation!"

At first, Doug didn't see it that way. He wasn't excited about helping a family who had not taken a more traditional path to immigration. "It took me awhile to get over that," he said. "When I got to know Gabriel a little more, and built a relationship with him a little more, . . . I just really wanted to help in any way I could." And so he does. Working with Gabriel and his family, Doug explained, has been an answer to his prayer to be a servant of God. Doug lately spent a few weeks working on the family's donated van so that it would pass Georgia's vehicle emissions test.

Progress is slow. COVID-19 has impeded both church fellowship and the asylum application process.

But every Sunday morning, Gabriel and Marie are at church with their two daughters. Amanuel is there, too, sitting next to Yonas, who translates the sermon. "It's not important how many we reach as much as it is that whoever we reach, we embrace them and welcome them," Debora said. Doug is looking into headphone devices with multiple channels for transmitting the service in multiple languages in real time.

Despite the challenges of welcoming the stranger, Debora said, God is at work. "You come to our little, itty-bitty church, and you see people from Ethi-



*Keys Presbyterian in Key West, FL, donated this van, making transit to better jobs possible for Gabriel and Marie*

opia, Eritrea, Asia—you see Hispanics and Congolese. God's doing something, and that in itself is the blessing," she said.

### **Showing, and Being Shown, Christ**

The Committee on Diaconal Ministries, along with others in the denomination, first considered refugee ministry during the historic migrant crisis in 2015. The OPC, however, has a long history of welcoming refugees. In the 1980s, OP churches welcomed families from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Lately, refugees are most likely to be from Congo, Burma, Ukraine, Eritrea, or Afghanistan.

The CDM would like to see more OP churches engaged in refugee ministry and, last November, created a subcommittee toward that end. It will soon be

sending out an information-gathering survey to all OP churches with experience in such ministry. (The survey can also be found at [opccdm.org/ministries/refugee-ministry](http://opccdm.org/ministries/refugee-ministry).) For those OP churches interested in ministry to refugees or asylum-seekers, contacting local resettlement agencies is a great place to start. These agencies are usually looking for, and ready to train, new volunteers. Some, like World Relief, partner with churches specifically as part of their mission.

Refugee ministry, the CDM believes, is a way to obey the Lord's special command to welcome the stranger.

Through the ministry of the Cashens and love from the church, Gabriel and Marie have been shown Christ.

"We see the hand of God and his protection through this whole thing. We have buried brothers and sisters. We have seen people drown. We ourselves have come to Atlanta and have been welcomed, and we can look to the Lord and say, thank you," Gabriel said. "We know the presence of God is at Redeemer, because we have seen this love for the neighbor that

Jesus talks about and calls for. To this day, the people in the church welcome us, and we feel like we are in Africa, with our family, at home."

And through the perseverance of refugee believers, home-grown church members can also be shown Christ.

When he was in detention, Amanuel studied the book of Exodus with Chris over the phone. "I learned that the way to joy in the Christian life under any circumstances is to submit to the will of God," Amanuel said. That calling is the same for Christians in any situation. "Whether we are refugees or people who were born and raised in America with many, many privileges, we are here on earth to glorify our God," he concluded. □

*The author is managing editor of New Horizons.*

# FROM THE RESURRECTION COMES MERCY



DAVE SARAFOLEAN // Spring 2020 arrived in a way no one could have foreseen. When government shutdowns began to occur in mid-March due to COVID-19, life changed dramatically. Like many churches, ours—Christ Covenant in Midland, Michigan—was conflicted about the best path forward.

Initially we shut down, then we reopened using an FM radio transmitter to conduct worship in our church parking lot. Everyone, it seemed, had an opinion about face coverings, social distancing, and when to resume worshipping the way we did pre-COVID. Neither the elders nor the congregation were united on the best path forward. Shepherding God's people under such conditions is not easy and can make one despair.

Then, on top of it all, a historic flood hit Midland in the middle of May.

## The Fall and Natural Disasters

When Jesus was crucified two thousand years ago, the disciples faced a crisis of much greater magnitude than our flood. Out of that hopeless situation, God did the unexpected by raising Jesus from the dead three days later. Ever since, Christians have celebrated Jesus's resurrection and properly understood it to be central to our faith. As the Apostle Paul writes, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ

has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor. 15:13–14).

Some Reformed theologians categorize redemptive history as having three phases: creation, fall, and redemption. If Jesus's crucifixion was a consequence of the fall, then his resurrection must be understood as a reversal of the fall and part of the phase of redemption. The Apostle Paul understood Jesus's resurrection to be a harbinger of what awaits us when our bodies are raised from the dust and reunited with our souls (1 Cor. 15:35–57). This stun-

ning truth points to a restoration and renewal that will occur worldwide, when sin and evil will be purged forever (2 Pet. 3:10–13 and Rev. 21).

Where do natural disasters fit into the rubric of creation, fall, and redemption? Contrary to our age's popular belief that the wilderness is pristine and pure, the Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8:19–25 that creation, both wilderness and city, is groaning in its current condition. In Genesis 3:17–19, we learn why the creation groans: it is under a curse resulting from Adam's sin. The text mentions thorns and thistles as obvious manifestations of this curse, but other aspects of life in a fallen world, such as diseases and natural disasters, can also be included.

## Redemption and the Work of Deacons

If natural disasters are the result of the fall, then the diaconal work of the church in providing relief is, in a sense, part of reversing the effects of the fall. When disaster strikes, deacons are called upon to bind up the broken-



Rich Duggan and Caleb De Ruiter  
in Midland relief efforts

hearted. In so doing, they emulate what Jesus did when he visited Mary and Martha following the death of their brother, Lazarus. Jesus wept, in part, because of their sorrow (John 11:28–35). When disaster strikes, deacons are also called upon to minister to physical needs. They must provide expertise to assess the situation, manpower to clean up the mess, and resources like skilled labor to rebuild.

At times, deacons may also need to minister to spiritual needs. This involves praying with and for those who have suffered loss. Deacons can speak about the sovereignty of God and help believers to affirm God's goodness, despite their loss. God, the divine vinedresser, uses tragedy to prune the branches of those who are in him to make them more fruitful (John 15).

### Diaconal Ministry in Midland

Following the flood in Midland, we experienced all these things firsthand through the OPC Diaconal and Disaster Response ministries.

Even before the floodwaters crested, I received numerous texts, emails, and phone calls from ministers in our presbytery inquiring what their churches could do to help. Soon, Doug Vos, a deacon at Oakland Hills Community Church in Farmington Hills, Michigan, called. He is the chair of our presbytery diaconal committee. Within a few minutes, I learned how the OPC handles disaster response. He became the contact person for everyone who wanted to help. He also notified David Nakhla, coordinator for OPC Diaconal Ministries and OPC Disaster Response, for resources outside our presbytery.

Soon we learned that a trailer full of equipment used for hurricane recovery was on its way. The trailer arrived in town with two deacons from our presbytery who had many years of experience with disaster response. The fact that deacons were among the first to call and first on the scene was not lost on me or our church. Their presence modeled for us that the office of deacon can be broader than the boundaries of

one's local church.

These deacons met with our session and diaconate to explain how OPC Diaconal Ministries and OPC Disaster Response works. Their counsel led our elders and deacons to unanimously agree to embark on disaster response although still unsure how we, with our limited resources, could make much of a difference. That same day, we toured affected neighborhoods in Midland and visited the two families from our church whose homes were flooded. As the deacons assessed each situation, their gentle demeanor and wise counsel brought hope to these families.



*This painting in a Christ Covenant couple's home marks the flood's water line*

A few days later, David Nakhla visited, offering encouragement to the affected families, to our congregation, and to me as the pastor. Under David's guidance, God put together a team to make disaster response happen. God raised up Sam Phillips, from California, to recruit and schedule trained volunteers. God raised up Mike Greene, retired engineer and project manager and a member of our church, to coordinate volunteers and oversee work at the damaged homes of the two families. My wife, Rhonda, stepped up to coordinate hospitality for volunteers. Our church fellowship hall was converted into a dormitory. Classrooms became private bedrooms. A shower trailer was brought in from Reformed Mission Services, a ministry of the United Reformed Church. OPC Disaster Response volunteers from several states and Ontario came to offer their services. As all this was going on, the

work of the church continued. We met regularly for worship. A young couple from church was able to get married. We were even able to have a graveside service for an elderly saint who died just before the flood. Now, several months after the flood, both homes have been completely repaired, and, for both families, life has pretty much returned to normal.

### Looking Together Toward Restoration

Two thousand years ago, the disciples were devastated when Jesus died, yet his resurrection and the sending of his Spirit empowered them to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. By the same token, Christ's resurrection points to the reality of a restored creation that awaits all believers. Mucking out homes and sorting through waterlogged possessions is not glamorous work, but it is necessary. Such labors are just a foretaste of the great restoration that God will accomplish when the new heavens and earth are revealed.

The sheer scope and size of natural disasters can try the faith of even the most stalwart believers. These words from the Apostle Paul put such losses in perspective: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). OPC Diaconal Ministries and OPC Disaster Response testified to this reality, both in word and deed, as they came alongside our church and those who suffered loss to help rebuild what the flood destroyed.

Some readers of *New Horizons* may know that our church is relatively new to the OPC, having joined in 2017. God used this disaster to strengthen ties with our presbytery and our denomination. OPC Diaconal Ministries and Disaster Response modeled what it means to be part of a connectional church and what it means to point to the great restoration that awaits all God's children. □

*The author is pastor of Christ Covenant in Midland, Michigan.*

# THE “TRUE FANS” OF DISASTER RESPONSE



**BRAD HERTZOG // An OP missionary, home on furlough, gives a presentation to your church about life on the mission field, reaching the nations for Christ. You feel a tug and wonder if you could get involved. You read and hear about church plants around the country, about new people, new converts, and new churches—**

churches that seem to always be embarking on the adventure of finding a place to worship. You wonder whether, if the opportunity were to arise, you would go and serve them, or stay where you are comfortable. You hear of OPC Disaster Response heading into difficult places where people have lost homes and livelihoods. Would you go help? Should you go help?

And these amazing gospel opportunities are just within the OPC! Add to them the local pregnancy center ministering to hurting young women, the local school that needs tutors, and the refugee ministry or homeless ministry that needs volunteers. You hear the stories. You hear the amazing opportunities. You want to serve. You know you should serve. But how do you know where to serve?

## Rest in the Gospel

First, let me encourage you to *rest* in the gospel. The tug you feel may be a heart to serve, or it may be guilt for not serving. Rest assured that, in the gos-

pel, you are no more of a Christian for volunteering and no less of a Christian for not volunteering. Jesus isn't tallying the score of how many times you've served versus how many excuses you've made. Rather, the gospel truly frees you to serve from a thankful heart.

We say things like that a lot and maybe don't pause to really let them sink in. So let it sink in: your service

isn't fulfilling your holiness quota. So, as you think about serving or as you feel a tug when you hear a report or a call for volunteers, work deep into your heart the truth that you are free to serve for the sake of the gospel and the advance of his kingdom. You are free to serve out of gratitude and not guilt.

## Finding the True Fans of Disaster Response

The question remains: Where do you serve? We want to answer that question from the perspective of OPC Disaster Response. We put out a fair number of calls for volunteers each year. Perhaps it may surprise you to learn that we don't need everyone in the OPC to serve in Disaster Response. What we need is to find our “true fans.”

There is a popular idea in the entrepreneurial and creative world that a songwriter, or an artist, or nonprofit needs to find its one thousand true fans. Those true fans are the people who want to read, hear, or watch



*Jeff and Gloria Davis with a homeowner after the Houston flood. The Davises, from Cedar Presbyterian in Jenison, MI, gave eight months to the Houston disaster response.*

everything you create. Your work speaks to them. They resonate with you. Others may listen or may occasionally read about your work, but your true fans want to see everything. They want to be on your email list and get first crack at whatever you offer. These true fans are what help you survive and thrive.

Now, we don't want to borrow too heavily from the world of products and business, but the organizational idea is powerful. A ministry, even an OP ministry, needs to find its true fans. Others will pray at times, maybe go on a trip sometime in their life, or contribute money if there is opportunity. But a ministry still needs to find those who want to hear about everything they are doing; those who want to read, watch, and listen to everything they create. OPC Disaster Response needs to find its true fans who want first crack at every opportunity. Not that they have to respond to every need, but they do say, "Disaster Response, that's me. That's where I should be serving."

### Are You a True Fan?

So, how do you know if you are a true fan of OPC Disaster Response?

First, a general principle: Serve where you feel the strongest tug to serve. We aren't giving squishy theology with that statement. It simply makes sense to serve where you are most inclined. In these kinds of questions, God often, though not always, works through what you are most desirous to do. Reformed pastors and theologians have often discussed this reality. You may have heard R. C. Sproul's famous answer when a young man asked, "How do I know whom I should marry?" Sproul told him that if there were two women he was interested in, and both were in the Lord, then he could pursue a relationship with either one! That same reasoning applies here. If a number of godly service opportunities are presented to you, then serve in whichever one you want!

So, who is most likely to feel the

strongest tug to serve with Disaster Response?

**1) People who have experienced great loss.** It may be loss of worldly goods or it may just be great loss throughout life. People who have experienced great loss resonate with what



Mark Palmer (center), from Providence OPC in Huntsville, AL, has contributed to multiple Disaster Response efforts including in Japan to aid missionary Woody Lauer after the tsunami of 2011.

people are going through in times of disaster. It is especially true of people who were blessed in their time of need by a church or ministry and want to pass on that blessing to others in the throes of loss. These are the people who feel the tug to Disaster Response. Their loss means that they think and feel differently than most when watching and reading the news about hurricanes, fires, and other disasters.

**2) People who are naturally adventurous.** Some people are wired to live on the edge. Being a Christian doesn't change that wiring. Some people hear about the OPC's Disaster Response team going into Houston a week after Hurricane Harvey, and they're looking for their boat and their Bible—in that order. If that describes you, Disaster Response may be the place for you.

**3) People who may not feel like they have much to offer.** Disaster Response teams need a wide range of people. A tenderhearted person who can listen to a homeowner's story—just

sit and listen—is an important part of the team. Maybe you could put a meal together. Let the adventurous do their thing and build the house. You may be a better background person, unsung, just making the whole thing go. Disaster Response teams are just that—teams. They need varying types of people with varying gifts and graces. Can you imagine if a team had ten adventurous types heading into a disaster zone? We'd probably have to send another team just to recover them!

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is blessed with remarkable gospel opportunities for service in varying fields with varying needs. Just like disaster response volunteers are a team, so the denomination is essentially a team, and it needs people with varied gifts and graces to serve it in various ways. The local congregation functions in this way as well—each member of the local body has different gifts that are used to build up the congregation as a whole.

The long-term health and long-term effectiveness of a ministry like Disaster Response comes, not from the involvement of everyone, but from the involvement of those who are gifted and moved to be involved—from its true fans.

Do you have a soft spot for people who have great loss? Are you adventurous and want to see the kingdom march into difficult circumstances and help those who are in need? Do you feel like you don't have much to offer in terms of carpentry or drywalling, but would enjoy sitting and talking with hurting people or making a meal for them? Then you just may be feeling the tug to Disaster Response. If not, that's OK. But if so, send us an email, call, or just sign up and say, "I'm here. True fan ready for action."

Visit [opcdisasterresponse.org/volunteer-registry](https://opcdisasterresponse.org/volunteer-registry). □

*The author is video director and communications advisor for Disaster Response.*

# FIFTEEN YEARS OF DISASTER RESPONSE: A LABOR OF LOVE



DAVID P. NAKHLA // Almost from its beginning, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has been concerned with bringing “a cup of cold water” in the name of Christ to those affected by disasters. Yet most would agree that it was Hurricane Katrina in 2005 that served as the catalyst for our current form of disaster response.

The Lord used the devastation on the Gulf Coast caused by that hurricane to impel the church to action. Initially, that action came through the offering plate as OP churches and individuals gave more than \$450,000 for ministry to those suffering in Mississippi and Louisiana, most of whom had no affiliation with the OPC.

Ruling elder David Haney was then called upon to head up the disaster response effort on behalf of the OPC, initially overseen by the Committee on

Home Missions and Church Extension, later by the Committee on Diaconal Ministries (CDM). He reached out to the Presbyterian Church in America to coordinate with the OPC, visited the disaster sites, organized teams, acquired equipment, and placed ongoing oversight on the ground. In the end, ten teams over ten weeks were organized and sent to bring a special ministry of mercy to those who had lost so much.

## Japan Tsunami in 2011

In September 2010, I began work as the OPC’s Disaster Response coordinator. On March 11, 2011, an earthquake, measuring 9.0 on the Richter scale, occurred just off Japan’s coast near Sendai, causing a cataclysmic tsunami that gobbled up Japan’s four-meter-tall protective sea walls, surged inland as far as three miles, and devastated two hundred and fifty miles of Japan’s coastline.

For this particular disaster, establishing lines of communication took the form of encouraging OP missionary Woody Lauer and others to purchase

supplies in Tokyo, rent trucks, and drive supplies up to Sendai, amid concerns of radiation breeches at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. These supplies, once delivered to local churches in the Sendai area, became a means of opening hearts and homes to the gospel, serving as that cup of cold water in the name of Christ.

Within the next few years, the OPC sent thirteen teams to Japan. Those teams rebuilt two church buildings, remodeled a building to serve as a disaster response center (eventually named Nozomi [Hope] Center), and joined in the various ministries of Nozomi Center for the benefit of those in and around the town of Yamamoto.

## Hurricane Sandy in 2012

In 2012, the northeastern United States was surprised by Hurricane Sandy on the New Jersey shore. The storm surge inundated large portions of New York, including Long Island, where a number of OP families live. The denomination’s response to Sandy forced



*Disaster response relief after Japan’s massive 2011 earthquake*

us to learn how to coordinate a disaster response effort in two presbyteries simultaneously. The complexity of working with two separate regions at the same time made clear the need for an overseer on the ground in each location, and so the committee adopted the concept of a site coordinator, a major role that has been essential in each disaster response effort since.

Over the next five years, the Lord began to open our eyes to the need for more presbytery involvement in the oversight of disaster response. This was crystalized in my mind when, sitting in my office in Pennsylvania, I received an email asking if the OPC would be responding to the flooding in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I thought to myself, "Who am I, sitting more than one thousand miles away, to decide if this is a disaster we ought to respond to? This really is a question for the Presbytery of the South." Subsequently, the Disaster Response Subcommittee of the CDM worked on developing an initial structure to give presbyteries increased oversight in those disasters occurring within their bounds.

### Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria in 2017

In 2017, over a five-day period, Hurricane Harvey dumped as much as sixty inches of rain on the city of Houston, resulting in historic levels of flooding. All three OP congregations in the Houston area were significantly impacted. While I was on the ground in Houston, carrying out my initial assessment just days after the rain had



Seventy-four volunteers traveled to Houston to help local homeowners

stopped, I heard the news begin to report another hurricane, this one named Irma, building up steam in the Atlantic. Irma proceeded to wind its way up the Florida peninsula, impacting several OP congregations in a second presbytery, the Presbytery of the South. Finally, less than ten days later, Hurricane Maria ravaged the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico, the strongest hurricane to hit the island in eighty years. Members of all three OP congregations in Puerto Rico were affected.

One of the things we learned in the process of the Harvey, Irma, and Maria response efforts was the importance of keeping homeowners in the driver's seat when it comes to the reconstruction of their homes. We also learned the importance of homeowners knowing early on the extent to which OPC Disaster Response would be able to assist financially. Typically, Disaster Response assists in covering the cost of building materials lost to the disaster, as well as supplying volunteer labor, both of which are limited by the number of volunteers and the amount donated for the disaster.

Following Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, the Lord taught us the importance of the ministry of presence. The plea from one of the pastors in Puerto Rico following Maria was, "Please don't forget us!" In this, we were reminded of the important emotional and spiritual blessing of sending teams of individuals who bring a taste of the communion of the saints as we share in one another's suffering, as one body of Christ.

At this time, we also adopted the practice of establishing a disaster oversight committee particular to each disaster. The disaster oversight committee ideally includes members and deacons from the affected church, representa-

tives from the presbytery diaconal committee, and a member of the CDM. The disaster oversight committee serves to approve the disbursement of disaster funds (which will typically come as a recommendation of the site coordinator), advise coordinators in their roles, and facilitate promotion of the disaster response effort so as to keep the denomination as a whole informed on the progress of the work.

### Site, Volunteer, and Hospitality Coordinators

In response to these natural disasters, we learned that

the roles of site, volunteer, and hospitality coordinators were essential in organizing relief. The site coordinator focuses on overseeing the projects that are needed to help affected homeowners. The volunteer coordinator serves as the point of contact for volunteers. Over time, we discovered that, while the site coordinator role had to be filled by someone living locally in the disaster region, the volunteer coordinator role could actually be filled by someone working remotely. In 2020, the volunteer coordinator for the Midland, Michigan, flood response effort lived and worked in Santa Barbara, California, three time zones away!

We also created a third role, the  
*[Continued on page 18]*



Dick Ellis with an OP family in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria



Harvey relief in Houston included demo

# JESUS HAS RISEN, AND NOTHING IS THE SAME

// DANNY E. OLINGER

Part of the purpose of John's Gospel is to challenge us concerning our faith in Jesus Christ. That is the case in John 20, which presents to us the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. How does his resurrection impact our faith? Does it change the way that we live? Or do we go on our way as if nothing has happened?

In John 20, Mary Magdalene is the one who tells the disciples Peter and John that the Lord has been taken out of the tomb. They run to get there and see the burial clothes left behind with no body. They see and believe, but they do not understand, and they go back to their homes. Jesus's resurrection from the dead is the turning point of the ages, and yet, Peter and John do not know what to do in response, other than to go on with life as it has been.

But Mary remains. She might be distraught and confused, but she is not going anywhere. She is not leaving the empty tomb. Fighting through her tears, she looks again inside the tomb. This time, she sees two angels in white. They are marking the spot where the body of Jesus had lain, much like how the cherubim marked the mercy seat in the temple (see Ex. 37:6–9).

Their presence testifies to the glory of what has just happened. In this place, the empty tomb, the promise of God has been fulfilled. Death has been swallowed up in victory. The sentence of condemnation has been annulled. The penalty has been paid and satisfaction has been rendered.

## An Empty Tomb

The angels know that there is rejoicing taking place in heaven because of what has happened, but Mary remains in the dark. She cannot see anything through her tears but the fact that Jesus's body isn't there. This causes the angels to ask, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

It is a great question. As the angels see it, if the body of

Jesus were still there, then tears should flow. It is as if they are saying, "Mary, if you had found a dead corpse, then what joy would there be?"

Mary answers, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Her presence indicates that she longs to be with Jesus. Where he is, even his corpse, that is where she wants to be.

She turns everything intended to help her—the stone rolled away, the empty tomb, the angels' presence and question—into another reason for doubt and grief. And yet, there is something utterly admirable about Mary's posture. She does not return to her home like Peter and John. She stays because Jesus is everything to her.

It is personal for Mary. Jesus is the one who cast out seven demons from her (Luke 8:2). He is her one and only Savior. She says to the angels that they have taken away "my Lord." She knows what her condition was prior to knowing Jesus. And now, all she can think of is that he is gone.

To be removed from him, what hope does she have? She might be confused about the empty tomb, but she is not confused about Jesus. She believes that salvation only comes through being united to him.

Weeping, she has missed every clue about the significance of what has happened with Jesus's resurrection from the dead. But Jesus loves her. He has witnessed her struggle—her coming repeatedly to the tomb, her crying, her answer to the angels. On his first day as the risen Lord of Glory, she is the first person to whom he shows himself, a lowly and contrite believer crying in a garden. He says to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She thinks he is the gardener, and so she says to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

But then he says to her a personal word: "Mary." Hearing his voice, she knows it is her Lord. It is not through seeing that she recognizes Jesus, but through his word.

It is the word of the Good Shepherd who calls his own sheep by name. "Mary," he says. As one of his lambs, she hears his voice, and she replies, "Rabboni." It is a personal response to a personal word, and in an instant her world is changed. She knows that Jesus is alive, and that he is here with her. It is what she wants above all else, and so she clings to Jesus.

## Triumph in the Garden

But Jesus says to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father."

Why was it important for Jesus to ascend to the Father? Earlier in John's Gospel, Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper [that is, the Spirit] will not come to you. But if I go, I

will send him to you" (John 16:7–8).

Jesus needs to ascend in order to send the Spirit. It is the Spirit's function to declare the things that are to come, and that includes the realization of the hope of eternal communion with God.

What Mary wants—to be with Jesus always—should be the desire of every heart. It is the realization of the goal set before Adam and Eve in the garden—full fellowship with God without end in a holy realm.

Because of sin, that goal was not reached by Adam and Eve in the garden. But whereas Eve fell in the first garden, Mary triumphs in this new garden. But how is it that Mary, a new Eve, triumphs? Her triumph is not through her work. She triumphs because of the work of the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

Jesus does that which the first Adam did not. He obeys the word of God. He does the will of his Father. But he does not stop there. He also takes the sins of his bride to himself. When Eve sinned in the garden, she had no one to take her place. But Jesus dies for his bride. Jesus gives his life for his church, which includes Mary.

What the ascension of Jesus accomplishes is full fellowship with God in the heavenly places for those who are joined to him by faith. Jesus declares to Mary, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

### Fellowship—Now and Forever

We have to grasp this, just as Mary did. While Jesus is not here bodily on this earth for us to hug, that does not mean that his presence is not among us. On the first day of the week, the day of resurrection, as we gather together to hear his Word proclaimed, we are worshipping in his presence as we worship in Spirit and truth. He has given us his Spirit as a pledge of the world to come, and with the Spirit there is resurrection power.

In fact, the same power that God the Father worked in Jesus Christ in raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavenly places is the power that is at work in us as believers. In Jesus Christ, we have passed from death to life.

Nothing can remain the same. Returning to our homes, like Peter and John, just will not do in light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In fact, this event is the beginning of a new order, the inauguration of a new environment that is not of this world. Jesus is the resurrection and life now. We have resurrection life already, the forgiveness of sins and communion with God, even as we prayerfully await Christ's return and the consummation, when that resurrection life will be in body and in full.

What we long for is what Mary longed for, to be with Jesus bodily, but not in this earth which is fallen and passing away. It is in the new heavens and the new earth, ushered in through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that we will have fellowship with our Savior forever.

Being joined to the risen Christ by faith, we are gaining

## Favorite Psalms and Hymns *Trinity Psalter Hymnal no. 353* "Lamb, Precious Lamb"

*J. Mark Sallade*

One of my favorite selections in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* is "Lamb, Precious Lamb," an excellent new hymn by OP pastor Jonathan Landry Cruse. The text of the hymn leads the worshiper through the passion and atoning death of Christ, all the way into the heavenly chorus that we join by faith each Lord's Day. The poetry is beautifully composed: crisp, unforced, easily sung, and easily remembered.

Each stanza is anchored by the opening imagery of Jesus, the Lamb of God: he is precious, spotless, willing, mighty, and worthy. This theme is sung too infrequently in Christian hymnals, that Jesus is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29), and the Lamb who is worthy of all praise (Rev. 5:12).

One particularly powerful dynamic of this hymn is that not only do we sing of the Lamb's progression from humiliation to exaltation, we also are swept into this life of the Lamb as we follow him home. Stanza 3 begins by exalting the "Lamb, willing Lamb, who walked the sufferer's path," but by the end we are asking him, "O faithful Shepherd, keep us in thy way." This verse—and the hymn as a whole—captures an important dynamic in hymnody: that we find our life hidden in the one of whom we sing.

The music is marvelous as well! Paul S. Jones has composed a setting worthy of the text, each verse swelling from a contemplative beginning to a triumphant ending. It fits well, because, praise be to God, that is the movement of our lives as we make our way home in Christ the Lamb.

strength unto that goal. Our bodies are weakening, but we share in his resurrection. Through the gift of the Spirit, we have fellowship with God now even as we await that fellowship in full.

We know this to be a true, just as Mary did. And as she is commanded by Jesus to share this good news, so are we. For, like Mary, our world has been changed.

## ☆ Congratulations

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

- **Maran Scott**, *Covenant Grace Church, Roseburg, OR*

# DIFFERENT PLACE, SAME ANSWER

// TINA M. DEJONG



*Tina DeJong (far left) growing accustomed to a new food, cooked rat, after a church service in Nakaale, Uganda*

As the Lord has brought me to my third OP foreign mission station, he has made it clear that no matter how different things look around me, the problem of sin is still the same, and the only answer continues to be Christ.

Growing up in rural America, I became independent and self-sufficient from an early age. “Do it myself” is a favorite first phrase of toddlers in South Dakota. While it is certainly good to learn how to work hard and to fix things that break, being self-reliant can lead you to believe that you don’t really need God because you can do it yourself! Even in a Christian home, where you understand the need for forgiveness and salvation, you can easily develop a false sense of being able to control your life, instead of humbly laying your thoughts and desires in the Lord’s hands.

The first major step God placed in my path to humble me was my move to northeast Asia. The food and the smells were different. I didn’t know how to get around. I could not read signs. I didn’t have a clue if people were speaking in Chinese, Korean, Russian, or Japanese—let alone know what they were talking about!

## Different Idols, but One True God

As I slowly got to know people, I learned that they too were seeking security and control of their lives. They attempted this through education. If they could just study hard enough in middle school to get a high test score at its end, then they could get into a good high school. By studying hard enough in high school, people hoped to test well enough to get into a good college,

which would give them a job with enough money to have a secure life. That idea of studying hard in order to succeed was similar to my pitfall of working hard enough in order to succeed.

Next, the Lord moved me a little to the south where the food and language changed again. I had to learn how to get around in a huge city and make lifestyle adjustments to stay physically healthy. Here I also encountered people who used drinking and gambling to make fast money or build relationships that could serve the same goal: success and a higher position at work.

Now the Lord has placed me in rural Uganda where, all over again, I’ve had to learn how to get around, adjust to new food, and absorb new languages and cultural customs. People here are usually hungry and never really in a position where they can save for the future. There is a level of dependence on others that I have not seen before. As the new foreigner, it often feels like people are trying to tell me the most convincing story that will make me feel sorry for them. I am constantly praying for wisdom to see what God wants me to see, to hear what God wants me to hear, and to do what God wants me to do.

In each place I have served, people eat different foods, speak different languages, and make decisions based on different patterns of thinking, but they are all seeking to have some kind of control and security in their life. Some worship work, others worship sports, grades, friends, fame, money, or self; but all are worshiping. Yet there are believers in each place who are worshiping the one true God and eagerly waiting for Christ’s second coming when every knee



*Team fellowship over a meal*

shall bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord.

### No Stranger to Suffering

It is heartbreaking and emotionally exhausting to watch as families are separated or forced to move and change jobs because of governmental decisions, or are impacted by widespread poverty and lack of resources. Yet these situations are also a reminder of how God uses persecution and suffering to spread his Word and plant it deep within the hearts of his people.

“Couldn’t there be an easier way?” is a question I often ask. God’s answer remains the same: “Trust me.” Jesus told us that in this world we would have trouble, but he has overcome the world (John 16:33). He told us that just as the world hated him, so it will hate us (John 15:18–21). He told us that we are weak, but he is strong (2 Cor. 12:9–10). He told us that what is impossible with man is possible with God (Luke 18:27). It is Christ alone who brings light to our dark hearts and opens our eyes to see the love, grace, and mercy of God.

It is amazing to see God’s creativity throughout the different places he has taken me and in the many people he has brought into my life. He has made it clear that he created us with differences so that we can be brought together as one and understand him more fully. We need to be reminded that we are weak and need his help. At the same time, if we are trusting in Christ alone for salvation, then we have the same Spirit living in us who raised Christ from the dead and therefore have nothing to fear (Rom. 8:9–11). No matter where he has put us in this world, we will experience times of pain, happiness, sorrow, confusion, confidence, frustration, rejection, and more, but we can face all of this knowing that we have a High Priest who has already endured it all for us so that our future is secure (Heb. 4:14–16).

I’m humbled and grateful that the Lord has and is chang-



Selfie with children at a local village

ing me from the inside out and using me in different places to spread his love. In my years in these three mission stations, I cannot point to any instance and say that God used me to directly bring one of his sheep into the fold. However, he has allowed me to discuss Bible passages with both unbelieving and believing ladies so that we could be mutually encouraged. He has also allowed me to work with covenant youth so that their parents could proclaim the gospel to others. To me, that is a picture of

how God gives us different talents to bring us together.

My prayer continues to be that God would unite his global church to give him the praise and honor that he is due. By God’s grace, he is developing a greater spirit of thankfulness in me to see what a blessing it is to be a part of his body, the church. My prayer is that we all would be encouraged through his Word and Spirit to shine his light to everyone in our lives and in all the places he takes us!

*The author is a tentmaking missionary laboring with the Uganda Mission in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda.*



Teaching science to children of missionaries



Clockwise from left: Tina DeJong, Chloe Verdick, Leah Hopp, Carmel and Zion Verdick

## What’s New

### // Comings/Goings

The **Rev. and Mrs. Mark E. (Jeni) Richline** and their children Julia and Isaiah returned to Uruguay in February 2021 after their two-month furlough.

The **Rev. and Mrs. Benjamin K. (Heather) Hopp** and their children Elijah and Esther arrive in the United States from Haiti in April 2021 to begin an eleven-month furlough.

## HOME MISSIONS

# REFORMED AND WEARING TOE SHOES

// G. MARK SUMPTER



Welzien, retiring after thirty-two years as pastor of Keys Presbyterian, will continue his easel evangelism in toe shoes.

For many of us, when we think of the ministry of Pastor Bill Welzien at Keys Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Key West, Florida, it might come to mind that he is indeed one with feet fit with readiness to preach the gospel of peace. Have you seen his shoes? The funky looking beachwear on his feet? Some of us wear Clarks or Longwings, but nuh-uh, down on the Keys, you'll see the finger-toes, with the earth-hugging design for comfort and feel. Some have called them the smart shoe. Pastor Welzien is not hanging up his beach shoes, but he has retired from Keys Presbyterian Church. What a run it has been!

### Looking Back

Bill, who grew up in Chicago, experienced the hippie movement firsthand. After graduating from high school, he traveled the world with little money in his pocket to find adventure and discover himself. For more than two years, he moved from place to place as a free spirit, looking for answers and experiences. But in his travels, he repeatedly encountered obnoxious but well-meaning Christians, who told him he would find the answers he was looking for in a relationship with Jesus Christ. John 14:6, a well-loved verse, echoed in his ears. Finally, at a desperate moment in his travels, God gloriously saved him, and Bill spent the first months of his Christian life being disciplined at an evangelical church in Jerusalem. (His conversion story is a powerful one that is still featured on Chicago's Pacific Garden Mission radio drama series *Unshackled*.)

Then it was home to Chicago, where he began to study at Moody Bible Institute. During his studies at Moody, his teachers noticed that he had a steel-trap mind and remembered ev-

erything he read in the Bible and also that he had a natural inclination to tell everyone he met about Jesus Christ. Soon he was leading Moody gospel teams. One of those was a visit to a homeless ministry in Key West. When he graduated, an offer was waiting for him to take over that ministry.

But by the time Bill and his young family arrived in the Florida Keys, the ministry that drew him there had all but evaporated. He was left with an apartment to live in, a handful of supporters to help pay the bills, and a ministry he would have to develop on his own from scratch. As he walked the streets of the city, he discovered that nearly everyone in town would visit the Sunset Celebration at least once or twice a week. It's a large gathering to watch the sun fade over the Gulf of Mexico. So, with the help of friends from Open Air Campaigners, he devised a gospel presentation and became one of the "performers" on the pier. Over the next two or three years, his presentations got deeper and fuller as he learned to appreciate and incorporate the crisp truths of the Reformed faith. You can find videos of several of his messages at [Keys-Christians.org](http://Keys-Christians.org).

It has always been a thrilling experience to stand shoulder to shoulder in the crowds that throng the pier as he introduces Jesus and God's plan of salvation to people of all walks of life and of every lifestyle imaginable. It is equally thrilling to watch him spend hours after a message answering questions, handling objections, and using his knowledge of the Scriptures to allow God to speak to listeners directly from his Word. He's known around Key West as Bible Bill. After his easel message, and with his large Bible, pages wide open, in hand, he's eager to say, "You know, Jesus Christ has something to say about that; here, it's right here, look with me."

Bill, in the early years, was rarely alone in delivering the



saving news of Jesus Christ. Over time, others from his developing group—at first as a Bible study—came out to support what he preached and the God he represented. With Bill and the developing core saints from this outreach ministry, things started to click. Back in 1989, he called the OP offices to inquire what he could do with the group of followers who had gathered around him, many of whom were converts from his preaching. “We meet together on Sundays to study God’s Word and to praise him and pray; and I think we have a church,” said Bill. And since that time, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has had a warm and continuing relationship with the man and the group that God raised up around him. Early in his ministry, the Lord brought to him Cecilia “Sessie” Bonilla. They married in 1977 and the Lord blessed them with nine children. Sessie’s godly warmth, showing kindness and hospitality and demonstrating care in her tireless service, meant Bill could focus on preaching and teaching. Sessie went to be with the Lord on September 6, 2019.

Brother Welzien was welcomed as a ministerial member of the Presbytery of the South in 1990. I first met Bill bunking downstairs in the home of Bill and Gladys Vermeulen in Ada, Michigan, in 1990. Western Michigan became the meeting spot during denominational training seminars, in which Welzien and I participated as OP church planters. Someone had the idea to house together Sumpter from Alaska and Welzien from Key West—the far north, far south dynamic. Bill, from that point, started calling me *Kodiak*.

From those early days at Keys Presbyterian, Bill carved out ministry that would thrive in worship and outreach. Growing in membership and leadership and holding forth the Word of Life, Keys Presbyterian Church has seen herself cultivating ministry among a unique blend of people: military, civilians, tourists, transients, and aged.

### Bill and Keys Presbyterian Looking Ahead

Pastor Welzien announced his coming retirement back in early 2020, and Keys Presbyterian Church (KPC) knew it would not be easy. Bill, who represented the congregation to the Lower Keys for thirty-two years, worked hard to cultivate the church’s unique missionary feel. There’s promise this missionary feel will continue!



*Welzien called the OPC office in 1989 to ask about his group of followers. “I think we have a church,” he said.*

Each year when winter moves in to the northern United States and Canada, “snowbirds” make their way down to the Lower Keys. As they settle down to last out the winter, some also settle into the worship and fellowship at KPC. At one longer-term residence for snowbirds, Venture Out, Bill leads a weekly Bible study, most recently through the Apostles’ Creed. Having taught at Venture Out for three decades, rotating in their teaching schedule, Bill has provided long-term discipleship. Here’s the key, strategic thing that happens: the church has been a missionary training center of sorts. These snowbirds, who are now equipped, catch a little more of the vision for reaching their *own* neighbors as they return home.

Similarly, through relationships with local military personnel and with teams of adults and youths who come to Keys Presbyterian Church for ministry, Bill and the saints of KPC contribute to development, training, and sending. This is the missionary feel of KPC. The church has gladly worked alongside our denomination’s Short-Term Missions programs, too. Bill sees his preaching and teaching as equipping others for their next place of service after leaving Key West.

What’s next? Bill’s retirement calls for celebration. It also calls for prayer. Keep praying with Bill and the congregation. Bill and his new wife, Denise (married September 2020), are asking the Lord to open doors for the next opportunities for growth at KPC. Elder Tim Warner, a long-term ordained servant at Bill’s side, commented: “We are in a strange way at the uttermost end of the earth. As such, many people come south to Key West as a place of escape from responsibility and reality. Concerning our future at KPC, we don’t merely want to still be here, we want to be strong for the kingdom and growing.”

Welzien asks for God’s people to join him in prayer as the mantle of pastoring will be passed along to a younger man who can lead the flock into the future. “My desire is that this work continue faithfully until the Lord Jesus returns,” Welzien said.

Bill’s feet are shod with the gospel of peace. He is the bringer of good news. It’s the news of God’s saving love and power found through faith in Christ alone, where lives are changed by God’s grace and built up in the local church. The pulpit will be vacant until the Lord provides a new pastor at Keys Presbyterian Church, but the “pulpit” down on the pier at the Mallory Sunset Celebration will still see Welzien doing his easel evangelism. “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’s sake” (2 Cor. 4:5).

*The author is the regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southwest. Rev. Ross Graham also contributed to this article.*

### Home Missions Today

For up-to-date news and prayer requests, receive our newsletter by emailing [HomeMissionsToday@opc.org](mailto:HomeMissionsToday@opc.org). New editions: April 14 & 28.

# FIFTEEN YEARS OF DISASTER RESPONSE

[Continued from page 11]

hospitality coordinator. This is often a member of the local congregation whose focus is caring for the volunteers' meals and lodging once they arrive. This coordinator is in contact with the volunteer coordinator to confirm the needs. The creation of the hospitality coordinator role relieved much work from the site coordinator.



Fred deRu, site coordinator for Hurricane Florence disaster relief

## Hurricane Florence in 2018

In 2018, Hurricane Florence ravaged the coast of North Carolina, surging bay water into the historic streets of New Bern and affecting two OP churches. In the midst of this response effort, the Lord introduced us to a member of one of those OP churches who was retired from forty years of working



Commissioning the Disaster Advance Response Team trailer

in disaster recovery work. Through his counsel, we learned the importance of properly detoxifying, sanitizing, completely drying, and sealing a home's structure prior to reconstructing. This process is complex, but if not done exhaustively and in the correct sequence, the good intentions of a quick rebuild can result in a second wave of misery when mold reappears. This is just one example of the many gifted individuals in Christ's church whose gifts contributed toward the overall effectiveness of disaster response efforts.

The Lord additionally taught us through the Hurricane Florence response the tremendous value and blessing of having an advance team equipped to serve in the immediate aftermath of a hurricane. The diaconal committee of the Presbytery of the Southeast, in coordination with OPC Disaster Response, now has a cadre of men, certified by FEMA, to serve in the early aftermath of a disaster and equipped with a trailer loaded with the proper equipment vital to immediate response, even before roads are cleared and power restored. The Disaster Advance Response Team is yet another means of broadening and strengthening the ministry of OPC Disaster Response, as it seeks to minister mercy in the name of Christ.

In 2019, OPC Disaster Response worked behind the scenes to roll out its [first video](#) sharing the impact of the testimony of this ministry following Hurricane Harvey and to encourage future involvement by church members. A registry of volunteers for disaster response was established as a means to clearly identify those with a serious interest in future service in this ministry. That [registration portal](#) remains open for all those interested in being the first to hear about opportunities. The registrants periodically receive a newsletter specific to them, the Disaster Response Insider Post (the DRIP). Since fall 2019, nineteen editions of the DRIP have been sent out. To date, the registry consists of 276 volunteers. More are always welcome!

## Midland Flood in 2020

On May 19, 2020, due to heavy rains upstream, the Edenville Dam in Beaverton, Michigan, gave way, overflowing the Sanford Lake downstream, and flooding the homes alongside the lake, including the homes of two OP families who are members of Christ Covenant OPC in Midland, Michigan. We were blessed to see members of the presbytery's diaconal committee arrive within a week of the flood.

The Midland response effort taught us the value of including the Disaster Response's communications coordinator, Trish Duggan, at disaster oversight committee meetings. Her job has been to hear the volunteer and equipment needs or matters for prayer and to communicate these things to the broader church family for consideration, using our various online outlets: the OPC Disaster Response [Facebook](#) page, the



Rebuilding in Midland

OPC Disaster Response [website](#), the [S.T.O.R.M. Report](#) e-newsletter, [OPC.org](#) articles and news items, [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and of course, the DRIP.

OPC Disaster Response is a work in progress, as we continue to learn and grow. The Lord encourages us by introducing more and more of his servants who are eager and willing to serve. We see that his mercies and grace know no bounds. □

*The author is the Disaster Response Coordinator for the OPC and administrator for the Committee on Diaconal Ministries.*

APRIL



The Medcalfs



The Holmlunds

- 
- 1** **KEVIN & RACHEL MEDCALF**, Cumming, GA. Pray for spiritual growth in Christ at Providence. / Associate missionary **ANGELA VOSKUIL**, Nakaale, Uganda, asks for prayer for the Mission's outreach to hundreds of children.
- 
- 2** **MICAH & EILEEN BICKFORD**, Farmington, ME. Pray for five new families to join the congregation. / Pray for **DANNY OLINGER**, general secretary for Christian Education, as he directs the intern program and MTIOPC.
- 
- 3** Foreign Missions general secretary **MARK BUBE** and associate general secretary **DOUGLAS CLAWSON**. Pray for traveling mercies as they visit mission fields. / Home Missions associate general secretary **AL TRICARICO**.
- 
- 4** Yearlong intern **JOSHUA VALDIX** at Westminster OPC in Hollidaysburg, PA. / **BEN & MELANIE WESTERVELD**, Quebec, Canada. Pray for Ben's outreach to personal friends who do not attend church.
- 
- 5** Pray for **MIKE (ELIZABETH) DIERCKS**, area home missions coordinator for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Active duty military chaplain **DAVID (JENNA) DERIENZO**, US Army.

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- 6** Associate missionaries **OCTAVIUS & MARIE DELFILS**, Haiti. Pray for the safety of ministers and church members during political instability. / Praise for continued giving to the **COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE FUND**, which aids churches worldwide.
- 
- 7** **BEN & HEATHER HOPP**, Haiti. Pray for a good transition for the family as they return to the US for furlough this month. / **TYLER & NATALIE DETRICK**, Dayton, OH. Pray that the Lord would guide First Street Reformed in its search for a new worship space.
- 
- 8** Associate missionaries **JAMES & ESTHER FOLKERTS**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for James's language studies and for good translations as he preaches. / Yearlong intern **JOSEPH (ANNIE) POLLARD** at Calvin Presbyterian in Phoenix, AZ.
- 
- 9** Missionary associate **JOANNA GROVE**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the Lord would encourage the ladies Bible study as they commit to pray for others. / **MELISA MCGINNIS**, controller, and **CHARLENE TIPTON**, database administrator.
- 
- 10** **CALVIN & CONNIE KELLER**, Winston-Salem, NC. Pray that Harvest OPC would find a larger worship facility to rent. / Assoc. missionaries **CHRISTOPHER & CHLOE VERDICK**, and **LEAH HOPP**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the Lord would open doors for housing renovations for the clinic workers.

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- 11** Pray for **DAVE (ELIZABETH) HOLMLUND**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Philadelphia. / Pray for **PAT CLAWSON**, MTIOPC coordinator, as she prepares for summer classes.
- 
- 12** **MARKUS & SHARON JEROMIN**, Battle Creek, OH. Pray for God's blessing on evangelism and local networking. / Pray for tentmaking missionary **TINA DEJONG**, Nakaale, Uganda, as she navigates a new culture.
- 
- 13** **ANDREW MOODY** and **LINDA FOH**, technical assistants for OPC.org. / **ANDREW & REBEKAH CANAVAN**, Corona, CA. Pray that Corona Presbyterian would grow in its commitment to the ordinary means of grace.
- 
- 14** **CHRIS BYRD**, Westfield, NJ. Pray that the Lord would bring great fruit through the outreach and evangelism of Grace OPC. / Pray for **GREAT COMMISSION PUBLICATIONS**, an OPC publishing venture with the PCA.
- 
- 15** **MARK & CARLA VAN ESSEDELFT**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the Uganda Mission families will have spiritually fruitful times of rest. / **JOHN FIKKERT**, director for the Committee on Ministerial Care.

APRIL



The Ansell family

**16** **HEERO & ANYA HACQUEBORD**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for them and their daughter Juliette as she makes college decisions. / **MILLER & STEPHANIE ANSELL**, Waco, TX. Pray for the formal outreach events at Trinity Presbyterian.

**17** Pray for **MARK (PEGGY) SUMPTER**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southwest. / **MARK STUMPF**, manager of the OPC Loan Fund, which helps congregations with capital acquisition and expansion projects.

**18** **MARK & JENI RICHLINE**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray that the church's diaconal food ministry would create a hunger for the gospel. / Active duty military chaplain **JOHN (LINDA) CARTER**, US Navy.

**19** Home Missions general secretary **JOHN SHAW** and administrative assistant **Katharine Olinger**. / Pray for stated clerk **HANK BELFIELD** and others preparing for the 87<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Sioux Center, IA, July 7-14.

**20** Pray for affiliated missionaries **DR. MARK & LAURA AMBROSE**, Cambodia, that the Lord would sustain them through health difficulties. / **JOEL PEARCE**, director of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* joint venture with the URCNA.

**21** **PAUL & SARAH MOURREALE**, West Plains, MO. Pray that the Lord would raise up men to serve as officers. / Affiliated missionaries **JERRY & MARILYN FARNIK**, Czech Republic. Pray for the reopening of in-person worship services.

**22** **CARL & STACEY MILLER**, New Braunfels, TX. Pray for wisdom about facility expansion as the congregation grows. / Yearlong intern **SILAS (ANASTASIA) SCHREY-ACK** at Merrimack Valley in North Andover, MA.

**23** Pray for the **COMMITTEE ON DIACONAL MINISTRIES**, meeting today, as it seeks open doors for mercy ministry to refugees. / Pray for **BRUCE (SUE) HOLLISTER**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Midwest.

**24** Missionary associates **DR. JIM & JENNY KNOX**, Mbale, Uganda. Praise the Lord for time in the US introducing family to baby Sachairi. / Pray for **ROBERT JONES**, interim administrator for the Committee on Coordination.

**25** **CHARLES & CONNIE JACKSON**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for a missionary evangelist to join them in Mbale. / Yearlong interns **SETH (EVA) DORMAN** at Limington OPC in ME and **DAVID (LEBO) BONNER** at Tyler Presbyterian in TX.

**26** Pray for **RETIRED MISSIONARIES** Cal & Edie Cummings, Brian & Dorothy Wingard, Greet Rietkerk, and Young & Mary Lou Son. / Pray for **SHORT-TERM MISSIONS** opportunities in the US.



The Robbins family

**27** Pray for **DAVID & RASHEL ROBBINS**, Nakaale, Uganda (on furlough). / **JUDITH DINSMORE**, managing editor of *New Horizons* and **GREGORY REYNOLDS**, editor of *Ordained Servant*.

**28** **JEREMY & GWEN BAKER**, Yuma, AZ. Pray for Yuma OPC's everyday outreach efforts. / **MR. AND MRS. M.**, Asia. Pray for the ongoing visa process and the children's schooling.

**29** **ETHAN & CATHERINE BOLYARD**, Wilmington, NC. Pray for the congregation of Heritage OPC as it begins steps toward particularization. / Yearlong intern **BEN PETERSEN** at Covenant Presbyterian in Abilene, TX.

**30** **MR. AND MRS. F.**, Asia (on furlough). Pray for wise planning and traveling mercies for Mr. F. in the US. / **SHANE & RACHELLE BENNETT**, Grand Rapids, MI. Pray that visitors at Reformation OPC would become regular visitors, and regular visitors would become members.

# NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS

## BRANDENBURG INSTALLED AT CARLISLE

On February 12, 2021, Jeremy Brandenburg was ordained by the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania and installed as pastor of Redeemer OPC in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Pastor Mark Sallade preached from Philippians 1:1–6 on “The Joy of Working Together in the Gospel.” Dr. Jonathan Gibson, a minister in the International Presbyterian Church, gave the charge to the minister, Pastor Wendell Stoltzfus gave the charge to the congregation, and Pastor Al Tricarico led in prayer.

## LIVING HOPE RECEIVED INTO OPC

On January 9, the congregation of Living Hope—previously Cornerstone Community Church (PCA)—in Cerritos, California, was officially recognized as a congregation of the OPC. Four elders and two deacons were installed. Roger Wagner (pastor of Bayview OPC in Chula Vista) moderated. Alan Pontier (minister in the Presbytery of Southern California), who has been serving as regular pulpit supply for the past several years, gave the sermon.



Installing officers at Living Hope

## UPDATE

### MINISTERS

• On January 15, the Presbytery of the Southwest dissolved the pastoral relationship between **John R. Hunt Jr.** and Albuquerque Reformed Church in



Praying over newly ordained Jeremy Brandenburg

Albuquerque, NM, upon Hunt’s retirement and with the concurrence of the congregation.

- On February 6, the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania granted the request of **Angelo O. Valle** to be transferred to the PCA. Valle remains the pastor of Christ Reformed Church in Alexandria, PA.
- On February 12, **Jeremy A. Brandenburg** was ordained as a minister and installed as pastor of Redeemer OPC in Carlisle, PA.
- On February 19, **Anthony J. Myles** was installed as pastor of New City Fel-

lowship in Grand Rapids, MI. Myles was previously senior pastor at the University City campus of New City Fellowship in St. Louis, MO.

- On February 19, **Christopher B. Cashen** was installed as pastor of Trinity Reformed in Lanham, MD. Cashen previously served as an evangelist of Redeemer OPC in Atlanta (Doraville), GA.
- On February 19, **Michael P. Preciado** was installed as a teacher of the Word at Faith Presbyterian in Garland, TX. Preciado previously served at Christ Church (PCA) in Irvine, CA.



At Christopher Cashen’s February 19 installation as pastor of Trinity Reformed in Lanham, MD: Jim Van Dam, Gerald Taylor, Clark Brooking, Stephen Brown, Chris Cashen, Francis VanDelden, Zecharias Weldeyesus, Alejandro Calderon, and Melaku Tamirat

## REVIEWS

***The Trinity: An Introduction*, by Scott R. Swain. Crossway, 2020. Paperback, 160 pages, \$15.99. Reviewed by professor Ryan M. McGraw.**

The doctrine of the Trinity is the center point of Christian faith and practice. The reason for this is that God is the center of the Christian message. Yet many believers, and perhaps even ministers, can struggle to express the doctrine adequately, let alone know what to do with it. Swain's *The Trinity* is a sound and satisfying treatment that should appeal both to a general audience and to theological students and ministers.

Swain develops Trinitarian doctrine in eight brief chapters. The first two root the doctrine in Scripture, both in terms of the “grammar” of the Trinity and “three types of texts” needed to develop it, showing that we must learn to identify biblical texts that are common to the whole Trinity and proper to the divine persons (34–35). Chapter 3 addresses the issue of

divine simplicity and the Trinity, which has become a thorny issue in contemporary discussions. He devotes chapters 4–6 to the Father, Son, and Spirit, in turn. Finally, chapters 7 and 8 conclude with the work of the triune God and the end of his work. Swain includes useful sections on how the “appropriate” works of the divine persons single out one person of the Godhead in ways that reflect their eternal order of procession, and on the “missions” of the divine persons in our salvation. The final chapter ends on the high note of the glory of God, particularly respecting the intra-Trinitarian fellowship among the divine persons, concluding that God reveals and glorifies himself for our salvation, joy, and doxology.

Several features of this book stand out. Swain begins wisely by appealing to ways that the church already praises the triune God for his “being, beauty, and beatitude” (15), as well as for his works (16). This has the advantage of taking readers from

where they are into a deeper understanding of and love for their God. Christian baptism also serves as a useful starting point (20, 27–30), both because baptism often does not occupy the role that it should in the Christian life and because baptism conveniently sets the triune God before us as the object of faith and devotion. Addressing contemporary debates over the eternal subordination of the Son, Swain notes helpfully that proponents of this view unintentionally redefine personhood in terms of authority and submission

instead of relations of origin (85–86). He expands this idea with exceptional clarity and brevity, without turning a positive treatment of the Trinity into a polemical one. Swain's exploration of the work of the triune God is noteworthy as well, since it will teach readers what to look for as they read their Bibles and see the persons of the Trinity in their united work jump from the pages of the New Testament at every turn.

Simple yet not superficial, it is one of the best books of its kind, and it should be the first book that many turn to.

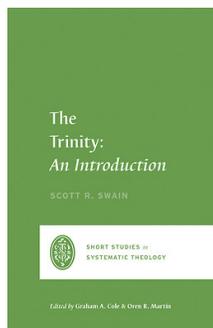
***“Here Are Your Gods:” Faithful Discipleship in Idolatrous Times*, by Christopher J. H. Wright. IVP Academic, 2020. Paperback, 176 pages, \$16.20. Reviewed by professor David VanDrunen.**

Christopher Wright's newest book is both a study of idolatry and a lament over the sorry state of Western civilization. Wright believes that idolatry is the fundamental cause of our cultural decline. Part 1 addresses how Scripture speaks of idolatry and the relationship of idolatry to “Christian mission.” In part 2, Wright contemplates recent British and American political events in light of Scripture's teaching about idolatry. Part 3 concludes by exploring how to live faithfully as God's people in our present world.

There are several things to appreciate about this book. For example, the opening two chapters comment insightfully on how the Old Testament portrays idolatry. Wright also helpfully critiques as blasphemous the common American and British practice of invoking God's name to sanctify national pride and military adventures. Finally, Wright provides good spiritual encouragement when emphasizing that God himself wins the victory in the battle against idolatry described in Scripture. We Christians are simply called to witness, struggle, resist, suffer, and serve.

In the midst of these helpful discussions, Wright's book also raises issues that deserve critical reflection. I mention four.

First, the book utilizes some big, but highly debatable, theological claims that



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## Women's Spring Forum

April 24 • 11:00 a.m. ET • Zoom

- With All Your Heart: What Does It Mean to Orient Your Mind, Desires, and Will Toward Christ?
- Speaker: Dr. Craig Troxel
- There is no charge. To register, visit [forms.gle/ekFxc5Fq5ZUirfMA](https://forms.gle/ekFxc5Fq5ZUirfMA)
- Questions? Contact: [OPCwomensforum@gmail.com](mailto:OPCwomensforum@gmail.com)

Wright has defended in previous works. One pertains to the mission of the church, which, according to Wright, includes not only evangelism and teaching but also working for justice, compassion, and environmental stewardship. Wright also claims that God intended Israel under the Mosaic law to be a model or paradigm of a godly society for all nations and cultures. I cannot engage these claims in a short review, but readers of this book should be prepared to think critically about them.



Second, in addition to his consideration of (literal) idolatry in the Old Testament, Wright also offers an expansive understanding of idolatry, particularly when turning to the New Testament. He believes idolatry involves both actual religious worship of false gods and all sorts of sinful desires (such as greed, pride, and lust), which take social form in the guise of nationalism, consumerism, militarism, etc. Wright is not alone in making idolatry a sort of all-embracing category, but I wonder if this conflates sins that deserve more careful distinction. To be sure, actual idolatry and the desires of the flesh are closely related (cf. Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). But how helpful is it to say: “The worship of Baal is alive and well in Western

culture—with our idolizing of sex and money” (96)? The person whose greed leads him to offer sacrifices to Baal and the person whose greed leads her into a gambling addiction will probably need very different sorts of pastoral care.

Third, this is a culturally pessimistic book. Wright just about predicts the imminent end of Western civilization. Such books can helpfully remind us of the failings of our societies and warn us against complacency, but they can also easily fall into one-sided analyses of contemporary culture and do a better job provoking anger and despair than instilling gratitude and joy. Wright succumbs to these dangers, I fear, although he tries to pull back from them on occasion.

Finally, there's the issue of what makes Wright so pessimistic. Wright views the 2016 Brexit vote as the great symbol of cultural decadence. He's also distressed about Trump, cuts to the British welfare system, American gun ownership, and “capitalism.” Needless to say, not all Christian books announcing the collapse of Western civilization agree that those are the biggest worries. Readers inclined to be pessimistic will have to decide what to be pessimistic about. For my part, I wonder whether charity and unity among Christians might be better served if disagreements about the European Union or the Second Amendment weren't viewed through the lens of idolatry.

***None Else: 31 Meditations on God's Character and Attributes*, by Joel R. Beeke and Brian Cosby. Reformation Heritage, 2020. Paperback, 218 pages, \$5.00. Reviewed by OP pastor D. Christian Khanda.**

God calls his people to “know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him” (Deut. 4:35). Therefore, the highest pursuit of every Christian is to meditate on the triune God whom he loves. *None Else* focuses on the Lord's manifold perfections, as revealed in the Bible, to encour-

age God's people to commune with him and delight in his character. The authors provide thirty-one brief meditations on the character and attributes of God so that “you will grow in both knowledge of and love for the Rock of your salvation by the Spirit's grace” (2).

Each meditation (after the introduction) has five sections: The first begins with a full Scripture passage used to focus on a particular aspect of God's character. The second section has a written prayer to ask God for his help and blessing as we engage in this joyful pursuit of knowing him. The third, “Biblical Perspective,” explains in a simple and helpful way the particular attribute of God under study in light of

the Scriptures. This section also shows how each attribute is related to the gospel and points us to Christ. The fourth has reflection questions that encourage us to linger over the truth of God's character and how it trans-

forms our lives. The final section, “Digging Deeper,” provides further Scriptures passages and recommends helpful resources on each characteristic of God.

*None Else* offers a worshipful call to meditate on God in his Word. The devotional expositions in the book faithfully teach biblical truths about him. The more we know him from his Word, the more we love and delight in him. *None Else* is thoroughly Trinitarian and gospel-centered and teaches the exclusivity of the Lord Jesus Christ through whom alone



## Position Available

**Pastor:** Calvary OPC in Volga, South Dakota, is located in a semi-rural, growing community that is ripe for evangelism. Our small but stable congregation is searching for a pastor to lead us both in biblical preaching and in outreach. If interested, please contact ruling elder Jere Hieb at (605) 690-7315 or by email at [jerehomeinspection@hotmail.com](mailto:jerehomeinspection@hotmail.com).

## NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS *Continued*

we can know and enjoy God as our God. Each chapter contains a treasure trove of Scripture verses and references that provides opportunities for in-depth Bible study. Additionally, biblical and theological terms are explained and applied in a simple and clear manner.

This would be a wonderful resource in private or family worship or in a Sunday school setting. The brief meditations could easily be read aloud to children.

Luther once exposed the problem of Erasmus by saying, “Your thoughts concerning God are too human” (5). This book challenges us to depart from such thoughts and pursue God, by the Spirit’s help, in his holy Word.

***Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, edited by Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether. Crossway, 2020. Hardcover, 608 pages, \$39.09 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP ruling elder Joshua A. Downs.**

With brevity and power, Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 7 describes the Lord’s condescension to bless his creatures. In summary form it is this: God makes covenant. When we seek to learn about who God is, to a great degree our theological energy is spent learning what he has done *in covenant* with us. Specifically Reformed theology has capitalized on Scripture’s covenant structure to understand the Lord’s work of redemption in time, from the covenant of works with Adam in the garden to the covenant of grace whose substance is Christ.

Here in thirty-one essays, twenty-six pastors and theologians unfold God’s ways of relating to creation by covenant. The

authors (all past or present professors at the Reformed Theological Seminary campuses) survey the biblical covenants, examine how those covenants are discussed in other parts of Scripture, study how the church has understood covenant language over the centuries, and finally interact with the various ways covenant theology comes into contact with the wider academic world in contemporary theology, ancient Near East studies, dispensationalism, and new covenant theology, among others.

But surveys of covenant theology abound, and so one may ask whether we need another work like this for a general audience. To begin, the volume has significant strengths, especially for confessional folk. Its size, for one, allows the authors to explore thoroughly the biblical foundations of the covenant of redemption, for example, while also devoting space to Dutch theology, the sacraments, and Karl Barth in addition to the standard topics of the covenants with Abraham, Moses, David, etc. Additionally, John Muether’s annotated bibliography and Ligon Duncan’s masterful foreword justify the volume.

But perhaps the greatest strength when compared with classic works on covenant theology (which typically exposit the author’s own views in relation to would-be interlocutors) is this volume’s general approach: the authors survey the major literature up to the present, summarize influential views, assess them, and defend their own views, all in a relatively accessible package (Greek and Hebrew are used, but not to the point of distraction). This means

that instead of getting covenant theology as digested by so-and-so, the reader surveys a broader picture of how the biblical passages and historical debates have been understood within the church, which then situates how each confessional writer articulates his view. Creedal boundaries, personal opinion, and practical application share a healthy relationship throughout.

And there are explorations of topics especially relevant for OP readers. In two essays devoted to the covenant of works, the authors use scriptural passages, such as Hosea 6, 1 Corinthians 15, Galatians 3, and Romans 5 and 10, to defend the doctrine and its pivotal function in covenant theology as a whole. John Murray’s view, Federal Vision, the role of grace, and the implications for the Christian life feature as well. Then in the historical section of the book, the covenant of works appears again. This section explains how covenant, or federal, theology developed in the Reformation and post-Reformation periods largely based on the “representation principle” present in Romans 5:12–21. This can be seen in the writings of Zwingli, Calvin, Bullinger, Fenner, Rollock, Perkins, and others.

In sum, this volume is worth a place alongside classics of the genre. Since covenant theology outlines every phase of redemptive history and touches on so many biblical passages, private devotion as well as virtually any Christian education class will be deepened for including our confession’s rich teaching as expressed in this book on God’s condescension to bless his creatures.

