

# NEW HORIZONS

— *in the* ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH —

6 A Few of Our Favorite Things  
*// by Emily Van Dixhoorn*

FEBRUARY 2022

8 The Westminster Standards  
and the “Ordinary Means”  
*// by Jonathan L. Master*



## THE THEOLOGY OF THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

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## New Horizons

in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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On Sunday, November 28, Rev. Zach Siggins was installed as pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian in Ambler, Pennsylvania, in a standing-room-only service. Mr. Mark Bube opened the service and installed Siggins after the sermon preached by Rev. Al Tricarico. Rev. Mark Sallade gave the charge to the pastor, and Rev. Dr. Chad Van Dixhoorn, Cornerstone’s ministerial advisor, gave the charge to the congregation. Rev. Dr. Dave Holmlund closed in prayer, and Siggins gave the benediction. Rev. David Jacques, pastor of New Beginnings, which hosts Cornerstone, welcomed the Siggins family.



# THE THEOLOGY OF THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS



CHAD B. VAN DIXHOORN // **The Westminster Standards were penned at the end of England’s second reformation, in the years 1646–1648. As rich summaries of the Bible’s teaching, with helpful footnotes to key biblical passages, the Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms represent the high-water**

mark of Protestant creed-making.

The Catechisms and Confession, as three distinct parts of the Westminster Standards, together teach a system of doctrine. They have been celebrated by Presbyterians, imitated by Congregationalists and Baptists, and, in the case of the Shorter Catechism, even reissued for publication by no less than John Wesley, the spiritual father of the Arminian branch of the Methodist family tree. What is of interest to me is that John Wesley had to edit the Shorter Catechism before it could be safe for the high-church, Episcopally-minded, predestination-denying communion that he was trying to form. His systematic revision is testimony to the fact that Wesley understood even the Catechism contained a system of doctrine.

The starting point in the Shorter Catechism is God himself, and Wesley was happy to hand his followers a teaching text that began with a focus on God. The Shorter Catechism, like the Larger before it, and the Confession of Faith before that, informs readers that man’s chief end is entirely about glorifying

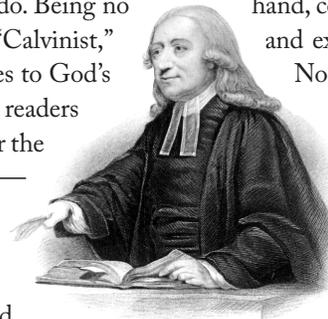
God and enjoying God. That is to say, we exist for God’s honor and praise, and to benefit from the one who made us for relationship with himself—what the Confession calls, having a “fruition of him as their blessedness and reward” (7.1). But the Westminster Standards, in each of the three documents, speak next of the will of God expressed in his decrees. This would not do. Being no Augustinian, let alone a “Calvinist,” Wesley deleted references to God’s divine decrees—as if readers would not also encounter the doctrine in their Bibles!—and he edited many other doctrines as well. Wesley was an intelligent and honest man, and he was well aware of the difference between a generic evangelicalism and a system of doctrine that was truly Reformed.

There are theological emphases unique to each of the three documents. The Shorter Catechism not only offers the most memorable doctrinal summaries of the seventeenth century, it also is

the most consistent in emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit and the importance of Spirit-worked faith. Put the Confession and Catechisms beside each other, and you’ll see how the Shorter is not simply a summary of the Larger. It introduces nuances that are genuinely helpful.

The Larger Catechism, on the other hand, contains a masterful summary and exposition of the law of God.

No fewer than eleven committees were formed to think through the Ten Commandments, one of the biggest expenditures of time and talent in the many years that the Westminster Assembly met. And the Larger Catechism also reflects deeply on the fact that Christ did not come to save individuals only, but his whole church. The churchly focus of the Larger Catechism—seen, for example, in its focus on the worship that we do together as the body of Christ—is one of the things that sets this much-neglected document



John Wesley

apart from the other two.

But the most theologically focused partner in the triad of texts designed to reform the English-speaking church is, of course, the Confession of Faith.

### First Principles

The chapters of the Westminster Confession of Faith are arranged in a manner similar to the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Church of England document that they were intended to replace, and the order is also generally similar to other Protestant systems of doctrine. It begins with first principles, moves to an explanation of the way of salvation, and concludes with doctrines related to the church and the end times. All these are a part of the system of doctrine of the Westminster Standards, for if the first twenty chapters explain the theology of the Standards, the next thirteen show how that theology is lived out and the end to which we live.

The first of these chapters, “Of the Holy Scripture,” is the longest. It opens with a statement about what can be known from general revelation. It then turns to those subjects known only through special revelation, which is now restricted to the Holy Spirit speaking through the Scriptures.

The second chapter offers a classic treatment of the Godhead, ordered according to a rough biblical theological development of the doctrine: the oneness and independence of our immutable God and a balanced and doxological list of his perfections—from his love, to his justice, and finally to his triune nature as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The latter statement carefully echoes the classic Trinitarian creeds.

The third chapter, on God’s eternal decree, proved significant in subsequent Reformed theology. The emphasis of the chapter is on predestination as it relates to salvation, but it also makes important points about the knowledge of God and the caution we need to take in discussing such a complex subject.

### Creation and Providence

The thinking behind the next

steps taken by the Confession is actually clarified by the assembly later in the Catechisms, which ask, “How doth God execute his decrees? God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence” (Shorter Catechism Q/A 8). Thus the Confession enters its discussion of human history and treats the subjects of creation (chapter 4) and providence (chapter 5), followed by all that belongs to the providence of God: the impenetrable permission and purpose of providence behind the plunge of humanity into sin (chapter 6); the history of redemption seen in God’s gracious covenant (chapter 7); and an introduction to the mediator of that covenant (chapter 8). What is clear from these chapters is that the way in which God has planned and accomplished our redemption is in fact covenantal. Imbedded in the narrative of the fall is an understanding of Adam as a representative. It is evident that Adam’s actions affected the lot of his spouse and all his descendants. Whatever the nuances of the headship of our first parent(s) in chapter 6, a robust covenant theology is established when chapters 6, 7, and 8 are read as a unit.

### Redemption Accomplished

The treatment of covenants in the Westminster Standards presents all humanity in relationship either to the first or to the last Adam. “Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant” first made with Adam, the Standards explain that God made a second covenant, a “covenant of grace” (Confession of Faith 7.3). The covenant of grace is discussed in historical terms, noting the contrasts in the way in which the covenant of grace was administered in the Old Testament and in the New. Nonetheless, as understood by the Westminster Assembly, the covenant of grace bridges both the Old Covenant and the New, and the “substance” of the covenant of grace is the same in all administrations of that covenant: it is Christ himself. Jesus Christ is the way to receive the promise and the promise itself, and he is called in the Standards

the “surety” of the covenant (8.3). A surety is one who stands as a guarantee for another, no matter what the cost. The cost for the surety of God’s elect was his humiliation, summed up in his incarnation, obedience, suffering, death, and burial. All this was necessary for us to share in his subsequent resurrection, ascension, reign, and glory.

### Redemption Applied

If the sixth chapter (the fall) sets up the need for two chapters on the accomplishment of redemption, the ninth chapter (free will) tees up a series of chapters on the application of redemption: the sovereign work of God in calling, justification, adoption, and sanctification (chapters 10–13).

The final four paragraphs of chapter 9 need to be read in light of the first, which attempts to describe what is true of the will of mankind in any state and offers a surprisingly robust statement of human responsibility: “God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good, or evil.” Neither a fall into the fullness of sin nor salvation by sovereign grace destroys the will or obliterates its liberty. This statement is then nuanced and applied as the Confession of Faith considers four possible states of historic human existence: in innocence, in sin, in grace, and in glory.

Chapter 10 describes the process of effectual calling, an umbrella term for the sovereign call and regenerating work of God, on the one hand, and our answering God’s call with his help, on the other hand. Thus effectual calling is described in the Catechisms as a “work” of God’s grace. We are “passive . . . until” God has called us (10.2); but we are no longer passive after he has called us! The burden of the chapter is to argue for a Holy Spirit-worked presentation of God’s redeeming work, through his Word. The Catechisms imbed within this discussion of God’s effective calling the necessity of our union with Christ.

The eleventh chapter explains that the divine act of justification is an

umbrella term for two free gifts of God—the imputation of the righteousness of Christ and the forgiveness of sins—and is received by faith alone. Unlike the treatment of justification in the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Confession not only provides a statement of what justification is (and is not) for the believer, but also adds a statement of the foundation of justification in the person and work of Christ.

God's gracious act of adoption is granted its own brief chapter (in fact, one long sentence!) filled with consolation for believers and penned with an eye to the end times and the inheritance awaiting all "heirs of everlasting salvation" (12.1). The Confession's treatment of God's work of sanctification is pastoral in tone, rooting this grace in "Christ's death and resurrection" effected "by his Word and Spirit" (13.1). The opening statement is followed by the helpful caution that a growth in holiness will progress but remain "imperfect in this life" (13.2, 3). The Larger Catechism specifies the ways in which justification and sanctification differ in their nature and in their effects (Q/A 77).

In discussing the doctrines of calling, justification, adoption, and sanctification first, the Confession presents the work of God prior to the Spirit-worked response of man. Nonetheless the three chapters on faith, repentance, and good works (chapters 14–16) are longer than the preceding four. The Standards labor to show how these graces are essential in the Christian life and for Christian preaching, but with an appropriate emphasis on the helplessness of man and the sovereign grace of God: faith can be weak but true; repentance is an evangelical grace; good works "are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith" and any "ability" of men and women "to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ" (14.3; 15.1; 16.2, 3).

Understandably, the chapter on good works, in turn, prompts a discussion of the possibility of perseverance of the saints (17) and raises questions regarding the assurance of salvation (18).

In continuity with the conclusions of the Synod of Dort and its tight tethering of justification to the graces of sanctification, the assembly insisted on the active perseverance (and not merely the passive preservation) of the saints. And in keeping with its recognition that true faith is not always a strong faith, the assembly spelled out reasons why Christians should be assured of their salvation, even if it is sometimes "shaken, diminished, and intermitted" (18.4).

### Law and Liberty

Having insisted that "good works are only such as God hath commanded in his holy Word" (16.1), the assembly found it necessary to follow the subjectively focused chapters on perseverance and assurance with objectively declarative chapters on the law and Christian liberty (19 and 20). The chapter on liberty is often flagged as a favorite amongst Protestants. Its statement on the liberties purchased by Christ, both historic and existential, are among the richest lines penned by the assembly.

The assembly's discussion of the law was straightforward in its main outlines. Historically, the law in the Old Testament was of three kinds—moral, civil, and ceremonial—with only the first of these, and aspects of the second, enduring into the New Testament. The moral law, in turn, had three uses: as a rule of life, as a guide to Christ, and as a restraint to sin.

### Corporate Christian Life

What follows the discussion of law and liberty are treatments of the corporate life of Christians: worship and the Sabbath (chapter 21), then a discussion of lawful oaths and vows (22), which are at once acts of worship and acts of civic responsibility, and thus a bridge, in the third place, to a chapter on the civil magistrate (23), a subject so evidently important in our own day. Marriage and divorce (24) are appropriately set between the chapter on the magistrate and that of the church (25), and another on the communion of saints with each other and with Christ (26).

Following the pattern of the Apostles' Creed, the sacraments are next discussed. The assembly dedicated three chapters to sacramental symbols in general, to baptism, and to the Lord's Supper (chapters 27–29) before turning to its ecclesiastical chapters on church censures (or discipline) and synods (chapters 30–31). The assembly's understanding of the Lord's Supper as intended for our spiritual nourishment, and its insistence that Christ is present spiritually in the Supper, will only make sense in churches that occasionally read 1 Corinthians 10 before administering the Lord's Supper, rather than 11 only.

The Confession's treatment of baptism and the Lord's Supper is given practical enrichment in the Larger Catechism, which reflects on the practice and impact of the sacraments in and on the Christian life (Q/A 167, 169–175). Indeed, it also contains extended reflections on the effective reception of the reading and preaching of the Scriptures (Q/A 156–160).

While the voice of the Standards is, for the most part, in the third person, declaring what God's Word says, instead of the first person, sharing what Christians believe, passages are often doxological, grateful, and hortatory in tone. This is deliberately the case at the conclusion of the Catechisms, and even the Confession of Faith. In its closing paragraphs, readers are called to praise, to give thanks, and, above all, to pay attention!

As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin; and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity; so will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say [whether Wesleyan or Calvinist!], Come Lord Jesus, come quickly, Amen. (33.3) □

*The author is an OP minister and professor at Westminster Theological Seminary.*

# A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE THINGS



EMILY VAN DIXHOORN // “Count your blessings,” we have been told. For a Christian, this is no easy task—not because we have so few, but because we have so many! And they are so amazing, we struggle to find words to describe them fully. We need help. And we have that help in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The Confession provides an inventory of our spiritual blessings in Christ. With the assistance of a hundred seventeenth-century pastors, we can begin to describe our greatest blessings in depth and detail. We can read the table of contents of the Confession as a list of reasons to give thanks to God: Holy Scripture, creation, providence, effectual calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, saving faith, repentance unto life, and good works—just to name a few. Are these realities not all blessings to the Christian?

Studying the Confession chapter by chapter gives us the help we need to count our spiritual blessings with clarity, so that in both the hard times and the good times, we can heartily praise God.

## Blessed in the Hard Times and in the Good

Consider the hard times—“when the dog bites, when the bee stings, when I’m feeling sad,” as Julie Andrews famously sang. How can Christians

heartily praise God when our health fails, a loved one leaves, or we are weighed down by the sin that so easily entangles (Heb. 12:1)? Like Julie Andrews, Christians can remember “a few of our favorite things.” For thoughtful Christians, this means our spiritual blessings in Christ. The Confession jogs our memory and focuses our attention on our blessings in Christ, so that even in extreme suffering, we can take hold of the glory that one day will be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18). When we study the Confession, even in the worst of times, we can count ourselves blessed with tangible reasons to praise God and rejoice in Christ.

And what about the good times—why do we need the Confession then? Whereas bad times can lead us to doubt that we have blessings, good times can distract us from the ones that most matter. We can get so caught up in the blessings of our immediate circumstances that we fail to focus on our eternal blessings. Certainly, it is good to thank God for good health, harmo-

nious relationships, a check coming in, and simple joys like “brown paper packages tied up with strings.” Yet we have so many more blessings in Christ, blessings of enduring value. The Confession helps us to identify our spiritual blessings as the true root of our rejoicing, adding depth, purity, and power to our praise, even in the best of circumstances.

But, you might wonder, would not our regular Bible reading reveal these blessings to us sufficiently? Why study a manmade document like the Westminster Confession of Faith when we can count our blessings as we come across them organically in our regular study of God’s Word?

Certainly, book-by-book study is the bread and butter of Bible study and should be our first and favorite way to learn the truths of the Christian faith. That said, however, studying the Westminster Confession of Faith, especially in a group setting, richly enhances our regular Bible reading by adding clarity, correction, complexity, coherence, and

communion with other Christians.

## Clarity

Because of the way the Bible was written, our blessings are not always obvious. Sometimes truths are buried deeper in the text and harder to find. Often, we need to compare one passage with another to recognize its meaning and the blessing it contains. As we walk through our ordinary Bible reading, we might be standing right on top of a blessing and miss it! Like a treasure map, the Westminster Confession can point out our blessings and let us know specifically where to dig further. The more noticeable blessings we may certainly find out on our own. But how many more treasures might there be to discover? Having studied the Confession, we find ourselves having more “aha” moments as we discover the hidden treasure in our regular Bible reading.

## Correction

Studying the Confession also corrects us when we are digging up “trash” of our own making rather than true treasure from the Word. Sometimes in our regular Bible reading, we can misinterpret a passage, not comparing it with the whole of Scripture. That’s a hard task, challenging for any one person to do. The Westminster Confession helps us by summarizing the meaning of the whole of Scripture. As we hold our interpretations of a particular passage in the light of what the Confession teaches, we have an efficient way to compare our thoughts with the teaching of all Scripture. In this way, the Confession can alert us when we are drawing conclusions that aren’t really there to be found and direct us to the truths that are.

## Complexity

As the Confession directs us toward true treasure, it educates us to

have an appreciation for the complex and valuable. Sometimes when we receive a special gift, we don’t immediately appreciate exactly what it is or what it does. The same can be true for our blessings. Many are of profound value. Consider, for example, chapter 8 in the Confession, “Of Christ the Mediator.” There the Confession explains how Christ is the head of the new covenant, fulfilling all roles as our prophet, priest, and king. The Westminster Confession is helping us to understand the comparatively complex details of our blessings so that we can appreciate them more fully.

## Coherence

The Confession also adds coherence to our Bible study. Frankly, Bible reading alone can remind me a little bit of my closet: I know there is a lot of good in there, but it is not in order. The Westminster Confession helps us by ordering the truth we find in the Bible in a logical way such that one chapter sets the foundation for the next. The Confession opens with the chapter “Of Holy Scripture” because God’s revelation is the basis of what follows. Chapter 6 on the fall sets up chapter 7, “Of God’s Covenant with Man” which then sets up chapter 8, “Of Christ the Mediator.” Indeed, the Confession follows a structure that enables us to develop our theology to great heights while securing it on the solid foundation of God’s Word. Only through a careful ordering can we express our knowledge in a coherent whole.

## Communion

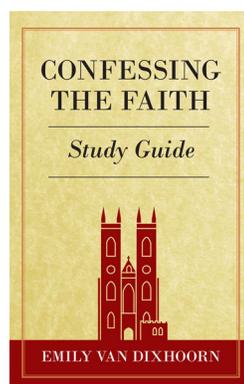
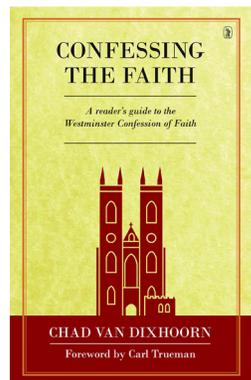
Given the usefulness of the Westminster Confession, it is not surprising that churches through the past four

centuries have used it as their standard for the faith. Many Protestant denominations today base their standards on the Westminster Confession, even if altering a chapter here or there to suit their particular perspective on the sacraments or church government. While Christians have doctrinal differences, the Westminster Confession shows how believers hold the bulk of the greater matters in common. As individuals, we can draw strength and stability from knowing that we hold to the same faith as that expressed by believers around the world and through time. We can be encouraged as we experience a communion with so many of God’s people through our shared use of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Furthermore, the Westminster Confession provides a common vocabulary for our theology, enabling us to discuss our faith together and learn from previous generations. We need this common vocabulary to navigate our differences and, as iron sharpens iron, refine one another as the body of believers.

The blessings we find in the Bible, as summarized and organized by the Westminster Confession of Faith, aren’t just to be counted: they are to be celebrated. We can study the Westminster Confession of Faith on our own, but how much better to study it with others! I encourage you to bring food, add singing, and make a party of it as you count your blessings together. Yes, some study requires effort. But many hands make light work. Studying the Westminster Confession in a group helps us as a church to glorify God and to enjoy him—together. □

*The author is a member of Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA, and has written [Confessing the Faith Study Guide](#), a companion to [Confessing the Faith](#) by her husband, Chad B. Van Dixhoorn.*



# THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS AND THE “ORDINARY MEANS”



JONATHAN L. MASTER // On July 7, 1643, Oliver Bowles preached for the convocation of what would become known as the Westminster Assembly. He was nearly seventy when the assembly convened, and he wrote in the preface to the sermon that he was chosen for the honor in order “that dayes and multitudes of years

should speak” (quoted in Philip Ryken, “The Puritan Pastorate”). His sermon, later published as *Zeale for God’s House Quickened; or, a Sermon . . . expressing the Eminency of Zeale required in Church-Reformers*, in many ways framed the deliberations to follow. Bowles’s choice of topic was no coincidence. Ministerial concerns were at the heart of the assembly’s work. This concern for zeal in the pursuit of the aims of gospel ministry is on display in a number of ways, both in the discussions recorded in the minutes, and in the actual text of the Standards themselves.

In two chapters of the Westminster Confession, zeal for biblically regulated ministry led to the use of what attorneys might call a term of art—*ordinary means*. This is a term that many in Reformed ministry use today to describe a ministry centered on the Word of God preached and read and the sacraments of baptism and communion practiced under the authority of the Word. These

ordinances are the means God blesses to the salvation of his people under a zealous ministry. But is this current understanding of the ordinary means what the pastors who formulated our confessional documents had in mind?

## “Ordinary Means” in the Shorter Catechism

The clearest expression of what the divines meant by the term ordinary means is found in Question 88 of the Shorter Catechism:

What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption? The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

The Catechism’s use of the phrase fits with the Great Commission re-

corded in Matthew 28:19–20. There, the promise of the presence of Christ by the Spirit is given to those ordained to baptize and teach men and women. This pattern is worked out in the book of Acts and is the model of pastoral ministry in the pastoral epistles as well. The Catechism’s clear definition of ordinary means points directly to a role that only the church can play, since only the church can lawfully administer the ordinances of baptism and communion. The Confession provides further background. Chapter 27.1 begins: “Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ, and his benefits; and to confirm our interest in him.” In 28.1, baptism is, to the believing recipient, “to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life.” Similarly, the Lord’s

Supper, is cited as a “seal” and a “bond” between believers and God, acting as a pledge of their communion with him and with each other.

### “Ordinary Means” in the Confession

In the Confession, the term ordinary means is employed on two occasions, both of which seem to connect with the clearer (and later) definition given in the Shorter Catechism.

The first use comes in chapter 1, a chapter that addresses the clarity of the Bible and the proper means of interpreting Scripture. Paragraph 7 begins with an acknowledgment that not all passages of Scripture are equally clear. This is obvious to any reader of it, and a reminder of our need for humility and for careful study. But the paragraph goes on to assert that the things necessary for salvation are so clear that even the uneducated and untrained can understand them:

Those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

What a glorious truth! God has spoken so clearly in his Word about the matters of eternal life and the work of Christ that no special education is required. These are not arcane teachings for a special class of initiates.

But while holding out the prospect, and even the assurance, that things pertaining to salvation are accessible to the mind and heart of both uneducated readers and hearers, there is nonetheless a connection drawn between their understanding and the employment of “the ordinary means”—the same phrase used in Shorter Catechism Q/A 88.

How is this phrase to be understood in this context? The paragraph that follows is not an especially helpful guide. While it establishes the impor-

tance of reading and studying the original languages of Scripture—Hebrew and Greek—the study of these languages can hardly have been assumed to be a part of the equipment possessed by the “unlearned.” Knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, important as they are, surely were not part of ordinary means.

What other possibilities are there for understanding “ordinary means” in this paragraph? The Scripture references attached to 1.7 may provide a clue. Two are taken from Psalm 119, verses 105 and 130. Both point to the way in which Scripture itself is a light. Scripture itself illumines the path to all (119:105), and it gives understanding to the simple (119:130). In other words, the Bible provides understanding to those who read and hear it.

This fits well with the later definition of this phrase in the Shorter Catechism. After all, the outward and ordinary means that God uses by his Spirit to convert and change include, at their center, the reading and preaching of the Word of God. And the reading and hearing of God’s Word, according to WCF 1.7, is what makes clear the primary truths of salvation—even to the unlearned.

The second place in which the term ordinary means appears in the Confession is chapter 18.3, the chapter on assurance. In this chapter, “ordinary means” are contrasted with “extraordinary revelation.” This contrast is highly significant; no extraordinary revelation is necessary to come to assurance of salvation (a fact which the Council of Trent explicitly denied). But the Confession is saying more than that.

Indeed, another use of these key words comes in the chapter on saving faith. In chapter 14.1, we read that the grace of faith “is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.” One of the divines uses the same language in arguing that the ministry of the Word is, “the sure and ordinary way for conversion of men from their evil ways” (Anthony Bur-

gess, *Spiritual Refining*, 500).

The Shorter Catechism and the Larger Catechism include the element of prayer in the description of the ordinary means. We find this in the Confession as well. In the Confession, the focus is on public prayer led by a man ordained for such a work. This ministry—connected directly with preaching and administering the sacraments—was considered a vital element of God’s work in converting sinners and strengthening the faith of God’s children. In the Shorter and Larger Catechism, we can see this reference to prayer broadened to include family and private prayer, but all of this begins with the ministry of the Word lawfully exercised in a local church.

This is entirely consistent with what we see in chapter 1, and it gives us the key to unlocking the intent behind the use of the phrase “ordinary means” in chapter 18, the chapter on assurance. Just as the Bible was understood as it was read and preached—shedding light on itself—so the soul is meant to be assured through the ordinary means of grace, as a believer submits to the preached Word, prays in public and private worship, and observes the right employment of the sacraments of baptism and communion. These are the ordinary means of growing in assurance and of increasing in the confidence of personal salvation.

Our Confession of Faith was written in a pastoral context by ordained ministers of Word and sacrament. They understood and confessed that the ordinary means given by God—the Word, sacraments, and prayer—were provided so that men and women could learn from the Bible about the saving plan of God in Christ, and, having believed, could be confident in their right standing with God their Creator. These means, so profoundly articulated in our Confession, are of enduring importance for those who serve in Christ’s church today. □

*The author is president of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.*

# LIGHTING A LAMP FOR THE STRANGER

// CHRISTOPHER B. CASHEN



*The Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, and Ukraine were the three top countries of origin of refugees resettled in the US in 2020.*

As Jesus opened his first sermon to his disciples, he told them:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 5:14–16)

That was the imagery given by our Savior: a light on a lampstand. Those who follow Christ are to shine before others.

How can the church today set up such a radical light on a stand that it cannot be hidden?

There are likely many possibilities and many answers to that question. Certainly, the first is being faithful in worship. But that might not be what Jesus meant when he likened his followers to a lamp on a stand for all to see “your good works.”

## Light of the World

How can your local church be a collective light in your community, so bright that many are drawn to gaze upon the work of Christ and give glory to the Father? What is the most complete, well-rounded, full-orbed ministry of works and Word for your local church? What ministry can any church, regardless of size or gifts or talents, pursue that responds to the call of the Lord Jesus Christ to be light and, at the same time, builds up the people of God and their love for their Savior?

This article is going to ask you to consider a ministry to refugees. Taking it a step further, this article will challenge you to consider whether any other ministry of outreach can accomplish what a ministry to refugees can accomplish.

## Lighting the Lamp

What is refugee ministry? Or better yet, who is a refugee? Here care needs to be exercised: casual definitions of refugees in news or social media can often be misleading. A refugee is a person who has been invited by the federal government to come and live in this country. As defined by the laws of this nation, a refugee is a person who has fled his or her native land in fear for his or her life. Each refugee, accurately defined, arrives in the United States with permission to stay—*legally*. Many times, refugees spend years in camps outside of their home country waiting to be resettled. And because refugees have fled—usually quickly—from some kind of persecution, they often have little to no personal property or wealth when they arrive on US soil.

Think about this from the perspective of a refugee. You have run for your life, crossed the border out of your beloved home, and lived in a tent with your family for months or even years on end. Finally, your status as a refugee is recognized and approved by the United Nations, and you arrive in a foreign land with a very different culture where almost no one speaks your native tongue. Now you need to find an apartment, find beds, find the bus stop, find work, find schools, find grocery stores, find doctors and dentists, and, in your spare time, learn English. That is the plight of the true refugee.

Given that description of great suffering and need, surely the lamp of compassion and mercy should be lit for these new neighbors.

## Putting the Lamp on the Stand

Yet this lamp of compassion is often quickly covered with a basket. Many think that ministry to refugees requires special gifts and talents, such as being a linguist or a cross-cultural expert. Certainly, those gifts are helpful, but they are not necessary. Remember, Jesus said, “You are the light of the world”—not just of Virginians, or Californians. No, once this lamp is lit, it needs to be put on a stand for *all* to see. There is

one gift needed for refugee ministry in the church of Christ: a love for the Lord Jesus. That's it. If you are seeking to follow Jesus, if you love Jesus, then you qualify.

Some churches might work toward sponsoring a refugee family—a higher level of commitment. Or, individual believers might volunteer with a local organization that works with refugees. Perhaps a Bible study group or a prayer group could volunteer together.

The important thing to note, however, is that putting the lamp on the lampstand is relatively simple and straightforward. If you can drive a car, you are qualified to take a refugee to the grocery store, to a medical appointment, or to an English lesson. If you enjoy drinking tea, you have the talent required to sit in a refugee's apartment and receive their hospitality. (Even if you can't understand everything they say, you will be encouraging them with your presence and friendship!) If you have free afternoons, refugee children usually need help with homework since mom and dad don't understand English and are not of much help in answering US geography questions. If you are mechanically inclined, older apartments, where refugees usually begin their lives in the United States, almost always have those four-pronged electric dryer cords that need to be exchanged for three-pronged cords.

Putting the lamp on the stand, then, is doing for others that which you do for your own family.

What a joy when a local congregation engages in this kind of ministry together—demonstrating the powerful love of Christ as a community to those in need! This kind of ministry to an individual or family brings together the body of Christ in unity and oneness in a way that few other ministries do. When we share together the love and joy of Jesus, something happens to those who are serving.

### Lighting the House

Once the basket has been removed and cast aside, the lamp is able to be seen by all. Indeed, it will light the house. But which house is lit? I was told many years ago, if one aims at nothing, it will be hit every time. So what are we trying to hit—what is the goal of a ministry to refugees?

When Jesus fed the five thousand, what was he aiming to hit? Was his goal to fill some stomachs? He certainly did feed

the hungry, even as he fed their malnourished souls with the words of life. But in the end, it seemed that Jesus's target that day was a bit more focused: He was preparing his disciples for future ministry. Christ was changing their hearts from ones that snapped "send the crowds away" (Matt. 14:15), to ones that professed, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Through the supernatural event of feeding five thousand with bread from heaven, the disciples were being made more Christlike.



Author Christopher Cashen

Similarly, the goal of any refugee ministry is to light the house—and the house is the church. As we approach a ministry to aliens and strangers, we might hope to fill the pews of the local church—that is, to generate conversions. And certainly, as good deeds are done in and among new neighbors who fled from Afghanistan, Syria, or the Congo, they are to

be coupled with the Word and prayer that these souls would be saved. But, interestingly, Scripture does not reveal what number of souls were converted from the feeding of the five thousand. So let the light be that which shines brightly first within the walls of the local church. Watch as the ministry gets going and see how it draws in others within the body, and then take note of how you and others are changed. How infectious is the joy that comes from serving others as Christ served you?

Refugee ministry is not unique in this aspect, but it does powerfully change the hearts of the local congregants as they love those who have experienced great hardship.

There, then, is the challenge. Refugee ministry is that lampstand upon which the light of the church can be set—a great blessing to the community, and even more so to the church.

*The author is pastor of Trinity Reformed Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Lanham, Maryland, and member of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries.*

## Further Resources

To learn more about what the OPC's Committee on Diaconal Ministries is doing to minister to refugees, or to read in more detail about becoming a light for refugees, find a four-part series of articles by Christopher Cashen on [opcddm.org](http://opcddm.org). Listen to the CDM's podcast episode on refugee ministry at [thereformeddeacon.org](http://thereformeddeacon.org) or by searching for "The Reformed Deacon" wherever you listen to podcasts.



# GOD'S PROVIDENCE AT GREAT COMMISSION PUBLICATIONS

// MARK LOWREY

COVID-19 changed our lives and the world in March 2020. Many times since then, we have not known what the day-to-day rhythm of our lives was going to be. One of the things we have learned in a new way is that the “days are the Lord’s.” In him we find not only our hope but also the Rock that gives us stability each and every day.

Over the decades, I have referred to God’s providence and providential care—not only for us individually but also corporately. For years, I have seen God’s providence as a foundational “guiding star.” But over the last two years, I have come to a more significant and deeper understanding and appreciation of God’s works of providence in my life, at GCP, and in Christ’s church.

We did not know what the implications of COVID-19 would be for our and our families’ health. We did not know what its impact would be on our churches, as worship services were streamed online and most educational ministries of churches stopped. This was especially true of children’s minis-

**Q** What are God’s works of providence?

**A** God’s works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions.

—Westminster Shorter Catechism 11

## GCP Family of Products



Coming Fall 2022!

try. Our prayers were for parents struggling to balance work, school, and Christian education at home, as well as for our pastors, elders, and children’s ministry leaders working to lead God’s people through these challenging times.

Through it all, we kept seeing God’s providential care in all aspects of our lives—physical, emotional, financial, relational, and more. “The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works” (Psalm 145:17). God has taken care of GCP in countless ways. He’s enabled us to continue to serve, equip, and disciple God’s people, and we are thankful!

We continue to provide Christ-centered Show Me Jesus curriculum for every age group, Pilgrim’s Progress curriculum that teaches the gospel in an adventure story, and Kids’ Quest catechism curriculum, among many other resources. We are also excited to launch our new Shorter Catechism curriculum for youth, available in fall 2022. More, including a free lesson sample, will be available on our [website](#) in the coming months.

We are thankful to God for our partnership with you as we teach the next generation the mighty deeds of the Lord.

*The author is executive director of GCP.*

## ● Out of the Mouth . . .

During family worship, I mentioned in passing that I was baptized when I was twenty years old. Our young daughter began to laugh. Puzzled, my wife and I asked her why she thought that was funny. “Weren’t you embarrassed to do something that babies do?” she replied.

—James Dorman Sparks, NV

*Note: If you have an example of the humorous “wisdom” that can come from children, please send it to the editor.*

# COVID-19 AND THE TRINITY PSALTER HYMNAL

David Winslow Jr. and Joel Pearce

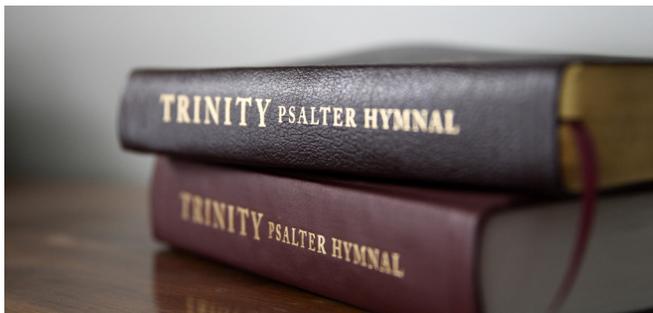
During the last half of 2020 and into 2021, individuals became the number one purchasers of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnals* as church members kept singing at home. The Joint Venture Board authorized a fifth printing of 5,000 copies and then doubled that to 10,000 when it became clear that there were still plenty of churches wanting to put this wonderful songbook into their pews.

We then discovered the havoc that the pandemic has wreaked in the supply chain. A paper mill in Canada discontinued the paper we had been using. With the help of an expert with decades of experience in printing, we selected another suitable paper. However, since May 2021, we have been waiting for the cloth cover material, which is produced in India or Pakistan on looms that were shut down due to COVID-19 personnel shortages.

Then overseas travel opened up. What could that possibly have to do with our hymnals? The US government ordered millions of travel passports from the same supplier that made the imported covers, and which happen to use the very same material as our psalter hymnal, though in a different color. Passports took production priority over hymnals. Rather than change color for this print run, the board determined on the course of patience so that the distinctive cover color that fits within the range of hymnals already found in both the URC and OPC can be preserved. And so we have waited, and pleaded, and waited, and prayed.

Finally, in the third week of December, the supplier promised to produce our cover material in January, which means that sometime in February, shortly after you read this article, Great Commission Publications should be able to ship the fifth printing. Thank you for your patience!

In the meantime, our director of digital development, OP elder Joel Pearce, managed the development and release of the [Trinity Psalter Hymnal mobile app](#) for both iOS and Android platforms. Thanks to the digital world, the *TPH* app is in no danger of going out of print. Used at home or on the go, this very useful tool can help us all become better singers when holding the psalter hymnal in our hands during corporate worship.



## Favorite Psalms and Hymns *Trinity Psalter Hymnal no. 241* “O God beyond All Praising”

Jonathan L. Cruse

Michael A. Perry’s hymn “O God beyond All Praising” is a modern classic, penned in 1982. It is well paired with Gustav Holst’s “Thaxted” theme from *The Planets*, a robust tune that brings out the grand motifs of praise and wonder in the text. In my opinion, this is perhaps the greatest sample of modern poetry in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*. It is rich in biblical content, uses vivid imagery, and is near perfect in terms of scansion and rhyme—and in a lengthy hymn of eighteen couplets, that’s impressive!

“O God beyond All Praising” has become well-known in our congregations due to its inclusion in the *Trinity Hymnal*, rev. ed. But I wanted to highlight it in this series because it comes to the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* improved in two ways. First, a middle stanza that was omitted previously is now included. This verse captures the fragility of human life by comparing it to the “flow’r of earthly splendor,” where Perry clearly alludes to Isaiah: “All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field” (Isa. 40:6). This is then contrasted with the spiritual life that Christ gifts to those who have faith in him:

But hidden from all nature the eternal seed is sown—  
Though small in mortal stature, to heaven’s garden  
grown.

This verse adds a wonderful gospel texture to the hymn, which better leads us to sing the final verse:

Then hear, O gracious Savior, accept the love we bring,  
That we who know your favor may serve you as our  
King;  
And whether our tomorrows be filled with good or ill,  
We’ll triumph through our sorrows and rise to bless  
you still:  
To marvel at your beauty and glory in your ways,  
And make a joyful duty our sacrifice of praise.

The second improvement to this song compared to its previous publication is that the unison score has now been adapted into four-part harmony, thanks to the musicians at work behind the scenes on the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* committee. This makes the tune more singable, and the rich blending of God’s people in song a delight to your ears. For these reasons, the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* setting invites you and your congregation to revisit this beloved hymn.

## HOME MISSIONS

# GOOD BEGINNINGS AT GOOD SHEPHERD OPC

// MARK R. WHEAT



Fellowship dinner at Good Shepherd OPC

“Good morning, Richmond!” (*What am I doing, I was saying to myself, as I was standing on the grounds of the Old Richmond Courthouse in Richmond, Texas.*)

“We are Good Shepherd OPC, and this is National Bible Reading Week, which was established by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt eighty years ago. Today we will begin reading from the Gospel of John, chapter 1 and verse 1.”

As I read, one of our regular attenders at Good Shepherd asked passersby if they would like a cup of coffee, a cookie, or some chocolate. People stopped, looked at the literature table, said hello, and listened to the Bible as it was read. One took a Bible, some gave us their cards, some wanted follow-up, and a few asked us if we would come back at Christmas and read again. On November 19 and 23, we did this for three hours. It was awkward, it was strange, but it was great, too!

One of the administrators of a nearby facility stood by listening to the Bible as it was being read. I went over to him, and when he found out that I had an exercise background he took me into his building and gave me a special tour. As he showed me how he emphasized health and wellness at work, he was introducing me to one person after the next saying, “This is Mark Wheat, a new pastor in the area who is starting Good Shepherd Church.” I was ready to introduce myself, but when someone is doing it for you, that’s even better! I was off and running.

### Saying Goodbye to California

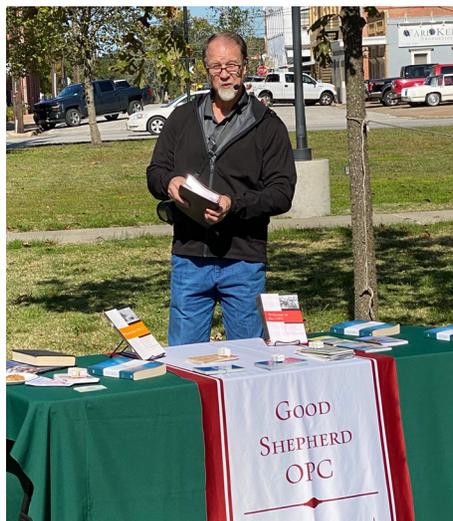
Before I hit the road running, I first hit the road driving.

After being the pastor of Sovereign Grace Community Church in Hughson, California, for ten years and ministering to a wonderful group of people in California’s central valley, I received a phone call from Phil Hodson. He serves as chairman of the Home Missions Committee of the Presbytery of the Southwest. He asked if I had ever thought about planting an OPC church. I told him that no, I hadn’t. He asked me if I would think about it, and I told him that I would pray.

At certain times in my life, I have found the Lord challenging me to do something for a period of time, only to then take all that I have learned and go somewhere and do something different than I imagined. *Lord, I love Hughson, I love the session and the congregation here, I love the pastorate, but do you want me to be an organizing pastor?* I prayed.

After months of prayer and interviews with the pulpit search committee, the presbytery, and the CHMCE, eventually the presbytery and the CHMCE supported my call to be an evangelist in southwest Houston. So, in September 2021, my family and I packed up and began to drive from California to Texas.

We were told that our California house would sell within four or five days and that we could be in a new home in Texas very quickly. However, the market slowed down, and it took three weeks for our house to sell. In the meantime, my family and I lived with my mother-in-law, in Cleburne, Texas. The driving continued as I drove to Sugar Land every Friday and then back on Sunday nights—five hundred miles round trip. During these days of driving, much sickness passed through the congregation and the installation service was postponed. But that gave me



Mark Wheat reading the Bible outdoors at an outreach event

the opportunity to spend time with Steve and Betty Jean Larson, who had first dreamed of an OP church in Sugar Land.

### The Beginning of Good Shepherd

Steve and Betty Jean had been longtime members of the OPC, and in 2014 they wanted to explore the idea of planting a church, having recently moved to the area. They were about one hour away from the nearest OP church. They spoke to Pastor Robert Arendale, then pastor of Cornerstone OPC in Houston, Texas, where they attended. Pastor Robert put them into contact with new regional home missionary Mark Sumpter and his wife, Peggy. The Sumpters began moving the idea forward by starting a Bible study in the Larson's home. The work began to build slowly as the Bible study grew and outreach and evangelistic efforts took place. Ministers from the presbytery assisted, and they began evening worship services in March 2018.



In 2014, Steve and Betty Jean Larson contacted the OPC about a church in Sugar Land

In May 2018, Houston OPC officers petitioned the Presbytery of the Southwest for the group to be accepted as a mission work of the presbytery, and it was approved. Morning worship services began in April 2019. Though COVID-19 came along the next year, the work did not stop. During this time, the place of worship changed and the numbers of those attending worship began to average around thirty-six. In August 2020, Good Shepherd formed its pastor search committee to look for an organizing pastor. That is when Phil Hodson called me with the question: "Would you consider being a church planter in Southwest Houston?"

After all the interviews, the questions and the answers, the prayer and the planning, I was called to serve this great group of people at Good Shepherd. None of this could have happened without those local churches and the presbytery, who have given of their time, prayer, and financial support. Finally, we acknowledge the wonderful support of our denomination as you contribute to the work of home missions.

### Remember Your Word to Your Servants

Today, I find myself glad not to be driving so much, though I am running, praying, preaching, doing outreach, and seeking the Lord to use us to build his church. *Surely, O Lord, you have many people in this place. Remember, O Lord,*

### 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 will be released on February 2 & 16.

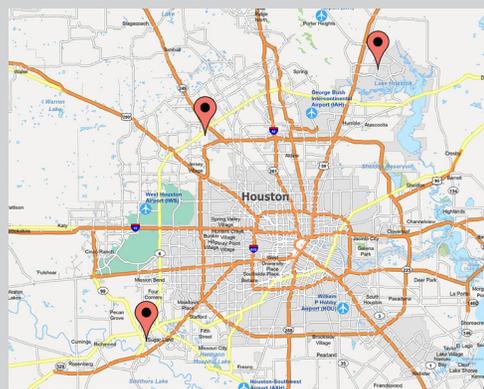
*your Word to your servants, in which you have caused us to hope (Psalm 119:49).* Here in Sugar Land, we are hoping in the Word of the Lord and looking to him to bring his people to worship him.

The Larsons and the Sumpters were putting their hope in the Word of the Lord, and many joined with them. Now I

find my life joining with them in their hope of being used by the Lord Jesus Christ to build his church in southwest Houston. As I am hoping, I am seeing the Lord change people right in front of my eyes. That regular attender who passed out the goodies by the literature table is busy inviting men to Good Shepherd, and they are coming. A new member told me earlier that he was scared to death to read the Bible in public. But there he was on that last day at the outreach table, read-

ing from John 15. God is at work! Please continue to pray that the Lord Jesus will grow this church and that the bright light of the gospel might shine in this area.

*The author is organizing pastor for Good Shepherd OPC in Houston, Texas.*



### THE GREATER HOUSTON AREA AND THE OPC

Sugar Land, Texas, is about twenty miles southwest of downtown Houston. Its population is 118,000, and it is part of the Greater Houston area, the fifth most populous metropolitan area in the United States and one of the fastest growing. Good Shepherd OPC mission work is the third OP body in the Houston area; Cornerstone Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Todd Bordow, pastor) is located in Jersey Village in the northwest part of Houston, and Providence Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Aaron Mize, pastor) is located in Kingwood in the north.

# WHAT YOU HAVE IS NOT WHAT YOU ARE

// KEN B. MONTGOMERY

In fall 2011, hundreds gathered at Zuccotti Park in New York City with signs and shirts that read, “We are the 99%.” So began the Occupy Wall Street movement, which objected to the dynamics of the growing income inequality of late-stage capitalism. From this vantage point, looking “up” at the lifestyles of the rich and famous supplies little consolation; on the contrary, it leads to resentment.

James has a striking answer to the issue of wealth disparity, and it’s one that will not be found in any economics class. The brother of our Lord writes in James 1:9–10, “Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.” James teaches, in effect, that “in Christ, the poor get richer, and the rich get poorer” (in a sage reversal of a well-known saying).

How can James write this? Because the primary reference point for each and every one of us is God. James is telling the saints: whether you find yourself on the Fortune 500 or barely have two nickels to rub together, see yourselves always in relationship to God your Father. “The rich and poor meet together; the LORD is the Maker of them all” (Prov. 22:2).

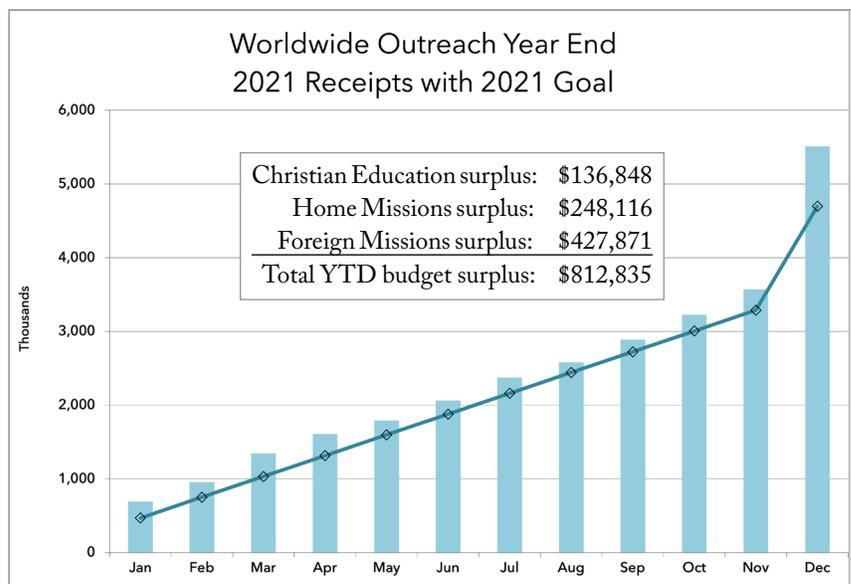
James gives this wisdom-exhortation because of the Last Day. In the end, one’s wealth will be scorched like the grass in the noonday sun (James 1:11). The purple and silken robes will be eaten by the moths (5:2). Given this reality of the final day, the rich man is to boast in his lowliness; that is, he is to recognize that in his position before the Lord, the value of material wealth is like dust on the scales (see Isa. 40:15). The rich one is to take the lowest seat in the house, for it is the house of the heavenly King.

For the poor believer, James teaches that he is to reckon himself not a pauper but part of the royal family in the kingdom of God. “He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people” (Ps. 113:7–8). The (materially) impoverished one has his life hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3) and has the true wealth that gazillions in gold cannot purchase: “assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end” (Shorter Catechism Q/A 36).

It may be that in the same lifetime, or even within the span of a few years, one might find himself on either side of James’s command. That is, in one season a Christian may be in a place of earthly plenitude, and thus need to flee from taking pride in his possessions and instead to “boast in his humiliation.” At a different time, the same believer may be in a position of a lack of resources, but rather than fall into despair, he can know that he is seated with Christ and so “boast in his exaltation.” Here we can follow in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul, who “learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need” (Phil. 4:12).

In light of this, the poor and rich can both exercise generosity with a true kingdom perspective. The poor gladly gives of what he has, knowing that the Lord does not look upon the quantity of gifts but the measure of faith with which the gift is given (Luke 6:38). The wealthy can give to the work of the church realizing their contributions in no way tip the scales of righteousness in their favor, for they, like all, possess the kingdom as those who are “poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3).

*The author is pastor of Christ OPC in Marietta, Georgia.*



# FEBRUARY



Chris Byrd (day 5)

- 
- 1** **HEERO & ANYA HACQUEBORD**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for wisdom in integrating members and attenders into weekly groups. / Home Missions associate general secretary **AL TRICARICO**.
- 
- 2** **RYAN & ROCHELLE CAVANAUGH**, Merrillville, IN. Pray for God's blessing as Mission Church completes CHMCE support in March. / Pray for **SHORT-TERM MISSIONS** staff as they continue to prepare for summer teams.
- 
- 3** Pray for **RETIRED MISSIONARIES** Cal & Edie Cummings, Brian & Dorothy Wingard, Greet Rietkerk, and Young & Mary Lou Son. / Intern **PAUL (JOY) WOO** at Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA. / **MELISA MCGINNIS**, financial controller.
- 
- 4** **JOHN PAUL & CORINNE HOLLOWAY**, Manassas, VA. Praise God for Acacia Reformed, a daughter church plant. / Pray for stated clerk **HANK BELFIELD** and others preparing for the 88th General Assembly to be held June 8-14.
- 
- 5** **CHRIS BYRD**, Westfield, NJ. Pray God would raise up more officers to serve Grace OPC. / Associate missionaries **OCTAVIUS & MARIE DELFILS**, Haiti. Pray that the Lord would grant economic and political stability to Haiti.

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**6** **BEN & HEATHER HOPP**, Haiti (on furlough). Thank God for the continued faithfulness of Pastor Lexene on La Gonâve as he guides his congregation each Sunday. / **JOHN FIKKERT**, director for the Committee on Ministerial Care.

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**7** **CHARLES & CONNIE JACKSON**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray that the Lord would raise up two new missionary evangelists for Uganda. / Pray for **LACY (DEBBIE) ANDREWS**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast.

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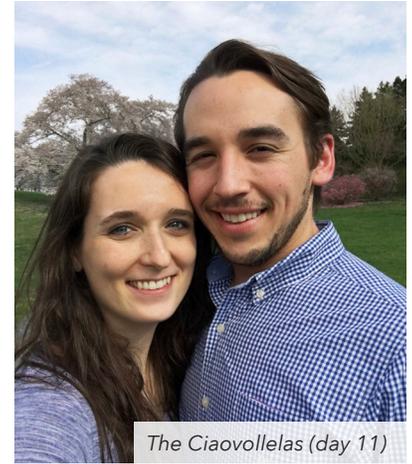
**8** **NATE (KATIE) PASCHALL**, church-planting intern at Christ the King, Naples, FL. / Pray for **DANNY OLINGER**, general secretary of Christian Education, and others preparing for the **TIMOTHY CONFERENCE**, April 20-23, in Escondido, CA.

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**9** Pray for **BEN & MELANIE WESTERVELD**, Quebec, Canada. Pray for wisdom and encouragement for the session at St-Marc Reformed Church. / **MARK STUMPPF**, loan fund manager, and **CHARLENE TIPTON**, database administrator.

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**10** **ANDREW & REBEKAH CANAVAN**, Corona, CA. Pray that the ministry of the Word would bear fruit in Corona. / **MARK & JENI RICHLINE**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Give thanks for church members as they seek to encourage one another in the Word. / Pray for OPC trustees of **GREAT COMMISSION PUBLICATIONS**.



The Ciaovollelas (day 11)

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**11** Home Missions administrative assistant **KATHARINE OLINGER**. / Yearlong interns **BEN (VICTORIA) CIAVOLELLA** at Delta Oaks Presbyterian, Pittsburg, CA, and **GRANT (STORMIE) ALLARD** at Christ Covenant, Amarillo, TX.

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**12** **MR. AND MRS. F.**, Asia. Pray for the start of a new ministry in South Korea among resettlers who have fled there. / Yearlong intern **JEREMIAH (ANNA) MOONEY** at Covenant Community, Taylors, SC.

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**13** **MR. AND MRS. M.**, Asia. Pray for outreach efforts among the Chinese-speaking community in the US. / **TYLER & NATALIE DETRICK**, Dayton, OH. Pray Light of the Nations would be a loving witness in its new neighborhood.

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**14** **CALVIN & CONNIE KELLER**, Winston-Salem, NC. Pray for leadership training at Harvest OPC. / **DAVID NAKHLA**, Diaconal Ministries administrator. Pray for those planning the National Diaconal Summit, June 2-4.

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**15** Pray for the persecuted church in **EAST AFRICA** as they worship faithfully even under threat of imprisonment and death. / Pray that **OPC.ORG** would edify the church and help it communicate its message to others.

# FEBRUARY



*The Vartanians (day 16)*

**16** **JASON (CAITLIN) VARTANIAN**, church-planting intern at Harvest OPC, San Marcos, CA. / Pray for missionary associates **DR. JIM & JENNY KNOX**, Nakaale, Uganda, as they seek to bless the AYP clinic staff and the community.

**17** **CHARLES (MARGARET) BIGGS**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic. / **ETHAN & CATHERINE BOLYARD**, Wilmington, NC. Pray for Heritage OPC's officer training this winter.

**18** Associate missionaries **CHRISTOPHER & CHLOE VERDICK**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for construction on a new clinic staff housing project. / Yearlong intern **MATTHEW (HYOJUNG) WALKER** at Westminster OPC, Hollidaysburg, PA.

**19** Pray for Foreign Missions administrative assistant **TIN LING LEE** and office secretary **STEPHANIE ZERBE** as they prepare for committee meetings next week. / Home Missions general secretary **JOHN SHAW**.

**20** **JAY & ANDREA BENNETT**, Neon, KY. Pray for evangelistic faithfulness and growth at Neon Reformed. / Pray for active duty military chaplain **JOSHUA (STEPHANIE) JACKSON**, US Army.

**21** Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **MARK BUBE** and associate general secretary **DOUGLAS CLAWSON** as they report to the committee this week. / Yearlong intern **MARC (RUTHIE) SCATURRO** at Harvest, Wyoming, MI.

**22** **BRAD (CINNAMON) PEPP**, regional home missionary of the Miami Valley for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Assoc. missionary **LEAH HOPP**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for her witness and relationships with the Community Health Team.

**23** **BILL & MARGARET SHISHKO**, Deer Park, NY, The Haven, OPC. / Pray for teachers and students in **MTIOPC** courses, Westminster Standards (Van Dixhoorn), Reformed Worship (Clary), and Disability and the Church (Tracey).

**24** Pray for missionary associate **JOANNA GROVE**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the gospel to bring unity especially among communities of new believers. / **KERRI ANN CRUSE**, video and social media coordinator.

**25** Tentmaking missionary **TINA DEJONG**, and associate missionary **ANGELA VOSKUIL**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the Lord would grant rain. / Staff of **NEW HORIZONS** and **ORDAINED SERVANT**.



*The Hartshorns (day 28)*

**26** **GREGORY & GINGER O'BRIEN**, Downingtown, PA. Pray Christ Church Downingtown would find a suitable and affordable worship facility. / Yearlong interns **A. J. (CHELSEA) MILLSAPS** at Sandy Springs Presbyterian, Maryville, TN, and **TAYLOR (SOPHIA) SEXTON** at Heritage Presbyterian, Royston, GA.

**27** Associate missionaries **JAMES & ESTHER FOLKERTS**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for James as he builds a group of young men for church ministry. / Yearlong intern **KELLE (ALEX) CRAFT** at Redeemer OPC, Beavercreek, OH.

**28** Pray for **CHRIS (MEGAN) HARTSHORN**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / **MARK & CARLA VAN ESSENDELFT**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the church mercy committee would grow in making good decisions with their resources.

# NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS

## A SHORT HISTORY OF FIRST OPC OF SOUTH HOLLAND, ILLINOIS

*Alan D. Strange with Daniel Svendsen*

On a Sunday afternoon in early December, First OPC of South Holland, Illinois, a suburb just south of Chicago, was packed. Pastor Dan Svendsen welcomed the crowd to the customary annual performance of Handel's *Messiah* by a local oratorio society, directed by First's music director, Bill DeYoung. Tears came into my eyes as I heard the pastor welcome everyone, for the first time, not to "First CRC of South Holland," as I had heard many times before, but to "First OPC of South Holland." I thrilled at the sound of those lovely words. Just weeks before, on November 19, 2021, First had enjoyed a service of recognition as a congregation entering the OPC, with the installation of seven elders and deacons along with Pastor Svendsen, who is in his fourth year as pastor.

First CRC began in the 1860s when the area that was to become South Holland was known as "low prairie." Those seeking to establish a Christian Reformed Church in the area were mostly new immigrants who had belonged to the Church of the Secession of 1834 in the Netherlands. Teunis DeJong (grandfather of the Illinois Supreme court Justice Frederick R. DeJong) and Antonie VanDrunen were leaders of the folks who wrote to the classis in Grand Rapids, requesting assistance in organizing and establishing a church. Teunis DeJong had arrived at low prairie in 1859, Antonie VanDrunen in 1856, and they would become the church's first elders. The first deacons of the church were Peter De Young and Arie VanDrunen, Antonie's brother. Arie provided the home in which the church first worshipped, and he donated the farmland



*First OPC, built in 1896*



*On November 19, First OPC in South Holland, Illinois, held a service of recognition as it joined the OPC, installing seven elders and deacons.*

for the church's first building.

Arie and Antonie VanDrunen, two of the pioneers of the church, are the beginning of the historical connections to the OPC, because they are the brothers of Johannes VanDrunen, the great-great-grandfather of David VanDrunen, an OPC minister and professor at Westminster Seminary California. After a painful split of the congregation in the 1880s, Arie and Antonie VanDrunen laid the cornerstone for the second church building, which was dedicated in 1896.

John De Waard was raised in First South Holland; he stood against modernism in the 1930s in the face of serious opposition in Cedar Grove, Wisconsin, and thereafter became the first pastor of Calvary OPC there. John's daughter Mary Miller from Grace OPC in Hanover Park was able to attend the service of recognition. Over the years, First CRC of South Holland remained sound and can now, as an OPC congregation, be part, once again, of a sound denomination.

## DE JONG ORDAINED AND INSTALLED IN CONCHO VALLEY, AZ

*David Winslow Jr.*

On December 11 in far eastern Arizona, Elijah De Jong was ordained and installed as co-pastor of Concho Valley OPC by the Presbytery of Southern California. Elijah is now a third generation OP minister. His father Brian preached the sermon, and he quite likely has the distinction of being the only OP



*Elijah and Greta De Jong with daughter Beatrix*

minister to preach at both his father's (Norman De Jong) and his son's ordination services. The wintry 22 degrees felt quite cold to the one California presbyter able to attend, but it is actually spring time in the Lord's Arizona vineyard. There is so much growth in the presbytery's Arizona churches that a name change for the presbytery is being considered. Concho Valley is very much a part of that growth as a vibrant congregation with four ruling elders and hopes to help other Arizonan churches be planted. De Jong came to love the area and the people when he served a summer internship in Concho Valley two years ago under pastor Steve Larson.

## UPDATE

### MINISTERS

- **James W. Campbell** retired on November 20. He was previously teacher of the Word at Westminster OPC in Hamden, CT.
- December 11, **Elijah K. De Jong** was ordained as a minister and installed as a pastor of Concho Valley OPC in Concho, AZ.
- On December 17, **Clayton P. Hutchins**, previously a PCA minister, was installed as pastor of Immanuel OPC in Coraopolis, PA.

### MILESTONES

- **Mark W. Rogers**, 67, a ruling elder at Sterling OPC in Sterling, VA, died on December 25. He served in the US Marine Corps and was a member of the Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel.

## REVIEWS

*Charitable Writing: Cultivating Virtue Through Our Words*, by Richard Hughes Gibson and James Edward Beitler III. IVP Academic, 2020. Paperback, 248 pages, \$15.27 (Amazon). Reviewed by managing editor Judith Dinsmore.

The central claim of this book is “that charitable writers listen humbly, argue lovingly, and keep the time of writing hopefully” (13). The authors, professors at

Wheaton College, reimagine the writing process as flowing directly from Christian virtue. Building explicitly on James K. A. Smith’s understanding of virtue—that it is developed by imitation and practice—the authors provide examples of how these virtues have undergirded Christians’ approaches to writing before then suggesting ways to practice them.

Their threefold vision has a slow start, as the authors present not only a host of sources from the field of writing and the annals of church tradition, but also a gallery of images from altarpieces, cathedrals, mosaics, and more. As the book progresses, however, it dishes out insights with a free hand, and those insights are sometimes as applicable to pastors, teachers, professional communicators, and even social media users as they are to the authors’ primary audience: writing students. (Questions for classroom use are included.)

Listening humbly, for the authors, includes not just verbal conversation but the written conversation between specialists in any given field. Listening includes “reading with great care” (58). They point out that humility is not a bonus but a necessity if one would receive and learn from criticism. Reading or listening to others’ creations with humility in turn allows the import to settle fully before one responds. The application to the proper posture of a church congregant is an easy jump.

The final section, on keeping time hopefully, advocates slowing down the writing process to beget carefulness, and explains that researching, drafting, and revising can all be expressions of hope. This section seems to be responding to the problems of a digital age, but without space to develop those problems, the recommendations appear scattershot.

It is the book’s second section, on loving argument, that is by far the most compelling. The authors claim that our culture’s very concept of argument is misbegotten: “many people understand ‘argument’ in terms of winning and losing, victory and defeat” (84). They challenge writers to

develop a new metaphor for argument to replace victory/defeat—a metaphor that flows from a distinctly Christian love, and they offer for consideration the metaphor of feasting. “The cooking that most of us do is not part of a contest. Rather, we labor to nourish our bodies and those of others. Dinner is not won. It is served” (92). Are our words weapons? Or gracious, seasoned with salt? (Col. 4:6).

Few Reformed Christians would question the important role of argument in coming to a better understanding of what is true. But the authors are surely right that demolishing a rhetorical opponent in order to emerge victorious from the word-fight, especially before onlookers, hardly smacks of charity. It looks more like pride.

*Walking Toward the Dawn: Finding Certainty in Our Christian Experience*, by Jeremiah W. Montgomery. Banner of Truth, 2021. Paperback, 40 pages, \$2.70. Reviewed by OP minister Doug Felch.

In this pamphlet, OPC pastor Jeremiah Montgomery addresses the often vexing issue of assurance of salvation. Having walked the “valley of the shadow of doubt” for more than twenty-five years, his purpose is to share the “light of dawn” (Prov. 4:18).

Citing WCF 18.1–4, Montgomery affirms that while assurance is not of the essence of faith, it is still possible to attain it through the ordinary means of grace. Those who truly believe in the Lord, sincerely love him, and who seek to walk in good conscience (that is, exhibit faith, love, and life) can have certainty they are in the state of grace. This is reinforced by the promises of salvation, inward evidences of grace, and the testimony of the Spirit that we are God’s children. Since the ground of our assurance is both theological and experiential, Montgomery organizes his discussion around five theological truths and then three practical steps.

The five theological truths are:

1. *The Faithfulness of God.* The suspicion that God cannot be trusted lies at the root of all human problems. However, God is not a tyrant who must be appeased in order for him to love us. All God is, says, and does can be trusted now and forever.

2. *The Triumph of Jesus.* Jesus’s



## Spring Conference: The Christian Family

March 4-6 • Virginia Beach, VA

- Speaker: Ian Hamilton
- Location: Reformation Presbyterian  
1977 Cedar Road  
Chesapeake, VA

obedience has two sides: In his active obedience he completely obeyed God's law. In his passive obedience he endured the full penalty for our sin. Consequently, our sins are placed on him, and his righteousness is placed on us. Understanding this dual obedience undergirds assurance. "The gospel is not just that Jesus paid for me, but that he also obeyed for me" (14).

3. *The Promise of Life*. While the gospel does not promise universal salvation, it is a universal promise to all. Even when refused, the gift is real. The free offer of the gospel, by its very nature, is promise to me.

4. *Believing God*. To believe a promise is to take hold of the person who made it. Though we cannot presently take hold of Christ's physical person, we can take hold of his word of promise. "Christian faith receives Christ as God's gift to me" (20). This gives us access not only to his salvation, but his smile.

5. *Our Strong Branch*. Faith is not a work, and believing is not achieving. Faith is not my persuading Jesus to keep his promises. "Faith is believing Jesus will keep his promises to me" (22). Faith finds all its hope in its object. It is not how well you believe but whom you trust that saves.

The three practical steps are:

1. *Proving Faith Lives*. Since God commands us to believe right now, the first practical step is to prove faith's reality by its exercise. Instead of endlessly examining our faith, we should practice it. Begin with prayer, whose sincere exercise demonstrates the presence of true faith.

2. *Proving Your Heart*. Romans 8:10 tells us that though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of

righteousness. This means that if we truly desire God, we are clearly not hostile to God and Christ is in us. We are no longer natural but supernatural. The second step to overcoming doubt is to prove our sincerity by examining our desires.

3. *Proving the Reality by the Remedy*. Since Christ died to rescue us even from unbelief we should "use doubt . . . to destroy doubt" (30). We are not to obsess

about doubt or fear, we are to confess it. This draws us to Christ. To call on Jesus is to believe in him, to believe in him is to come to him, and to come to him is to belong to him forever.

In his conclusion, "In the Hands of Jesus," Montgomery admits that despite these steps doubt may persist, and he directs us to Jesus. His active obedience and perfect faith are imputed to us. Therefore, just as Jesus commended his spirit into the hands of the Father, so also, we can commend our spirit and imperfect faith into the hands of Jesus. "With these words, I take his promises as my resting place, put my heart in his hands, and walk toward the dawn of spiritual certainty" (35).

This brief overview does not do justice to this thoughtful and comforting booklet. It is an excellent contribution to those who lack assurance of faith. Its concise treatment of the subject, coupled with its modest price, make it a useful and affordable resource for any individual, library, or church book table.

***The Pastor: His Call, Character, and Work, by Old Princeton faculty and friends. Banner of Truth, 2021. Hardcover, 272 pages, \$18.00. Reviewed by OP pastor Mike Myers.***

The Lord Jesus once said, "every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Matt. 13:52). The treasures from "the friends of Old Princeton" contained in this short collection of lectures display afresh the timeless truths related to—and desperately needed in—the Christian ministry. While

the biographical sketches at the conclusion of the book are worth the purchase price alone, there is great usefulness in the entire volume.

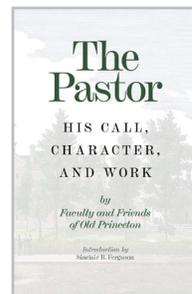
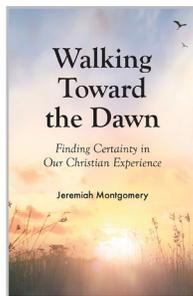
For a man wrestling with a call to ministry, the opening address from William Plumer serves as an exceedingly helpful catalog of considerations. In this writer's mind, J. W. Alexander's profound, eleven-part explication of the excellencies of Christ's character stands above all the entries. Having read that chapter, one will learn more experientially why the hearts of the saints on the road to Emmaus burned so hotly (Luke 24:32).

Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge both outline the various and necessary virtues of ministers. These chapters will prove refreshing, convicting, or both, either for the young minister or for one well advanced in years and experience. In our age of doctrinal decline and compromise, both Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller speak with prophetic relevance in their stirring calls to fidelity to the Holy Scriptures and sound doctrine.

Ashbel Green reminds the reader that the Lord of grace still uses the foolish message of the cross to save the lost and edify the saints. With great eloquence, he explains that to preach Christ crucified is not to restrict proclamation to

a naked or narrow fact of history, but rather to announce the whole counsel of God as it relates to and terminates upon the person and work of Jesus. Green said, "the doctrine of Christ crucified, was the *sum* of the apostle's theological system, which imparted lustre to every other truth" (187). The final address by Nicholas Murray is a rousing and needful call to piety among those given the privilege of serving as ministers in Christ's church.

*The Pastor* is not merely "a word spoken in due season" (Prov. 15:23), but a compendium of words that honor the King and Head of the church and call his ministers to steadfastness and holiness in their eternally significant work. While especially poignant for pastors, this volume will be of great help to all Christians.





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# NATIONAL DIACONAL SUMMIT 2022

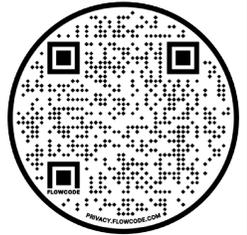
June 2-4, 2022

IN WHEATON, IL

## “DEACONS *Well-Equipped*”

This two-day event for deacons and deacons-in-training has proven to be a rich time of instruction, encouragement, and fellowship. Nearly one thousand deacons serve in the OPC, and the summit allows these men to connect as brothers, sharing their burdens and joys. The summit only comes along once every four to five years, and every summit is different, so you don't want to miss this one. Scan the QR code to register. If you have any questions, please contact David Nakhla, administrator of the CDM, at [diaconalministries@opc.org](mailto:diaconalministries@opc.org). All registration fees for OPC deacons and deacons-in-training will be waived if you register by April 1, 2022.

REGISTER NOW!  
SCAN THE CODE.



### Plenary Speakers



**Rev. Bill Shishko**

“Diaconal Leadership Today”



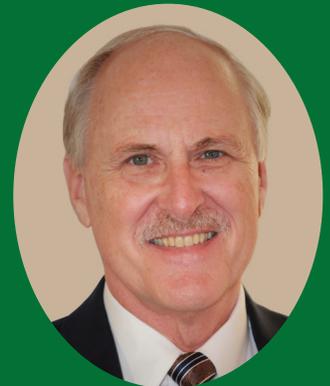
**Rev. Craig Troxel**

“The Deacon and His Congregation”



**Rev. Al Tricarico**

“The Deacon and His Community”



**Rev. Ron Pearce**

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Hosted by the OPC Committee on Diaconal Ministries. Find out more at: [opccdm.org](http://opccdm.org).