

NEW HORIZONS

JUNE 2025

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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Editorial Board: The Committee on
Christian Education's
Subcommittee on Serial Publications

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Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian
Church. All rights reserved. ISSN: 0199-3518

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quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The
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Subscriptions: Free to OPC members.
Nonmembers suggested donation: \$20.00
annually; \$30.00 for addresses in Canada;
\$40.00 elsewhere abroad. A free email PDF
subscription is available. Contact: 215-830-
0900; or 607 Easton Road, Bldg. E, Willow
Grove, PA 19090; or ccesecretary@opc.org.

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 Easton Road, Bldg. E, Willow
Grove, PA 19090-2539.

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

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editor may be condensed for publication.

The author
reviewing
curriculum
with Mary
Ellen Godfrey
in 1977



FIFTY YEARS OF GREAT COMMISSION PUBLICATIONS IN RETROSPECT



ALLEN D. CURRY

When I began to work for the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as associate general secretary, Great Commission Publications (GCP) existed in name only. In fact, the name was a registered alias so that the publications of the committee could carry the name of Great Commission Publications. It was not until 1975 that GCP as a corporation came into existence. At that time the OPC and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) engaged in a joint venture to establish a corporation to publish educational materials for churches.

The idea of a joint venture was a new idea for both denominations. The corporation was made up of the OPC and the PCA; the Christian Education Committees of each denomination elected trustees who would oversee the operation of the corporation. I found it almost comical that no one knew exactly how a joint venture was to carry out its business. In fact, the attorney who drew up the papers

for incorporation would send minutes with blanks to fill in dates and names so that all the legal requirements for the corporation could be followed. After all the corporate matters indicated in the attorney's minutes were completed, the trustees appointed by each denomination directed the work of GCP similar to the way the respective committees operated.

In my opinion two circumstances played a significant role in bringing about this project. A number of years earlier, the OPC through its Christian Education Committee had started an ambitious publications endeavor. By 1975, the OPC had already produced the *Trinity Hymnal*, *Bible Doctrine*, and materials for Vacation Bible School and Sunday school. The first Sunday school publication was for high school students. Then followed materials for primary-aged students (grades 1–3) and junior high (grades 7–9). At the time the joint venture commenced, junior materials (grades 4–6) were in development.

To pay for this program, the OPC had established a Sunday school loan fund. The amount of the loan was growing, and there was concern that it would prove too overwhelming for the denomination. One of the ways to alleviate the growing debt was to increase the circulation of the entire curriculum.

In the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern Presbyterian), there was growing discontent with an overwhelming move toward theological liberalism. At this time the PCUS and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (Northern Presbyterian) were in talks to merge. In the midst of the merger negotiations, conservative congregations in the PCUS were given the option to leave the denomination and still retain their church property.

The churches that withdrew formed the PCA. As all this was happening, the OPC Committee on Christian Education was in close contact with the leadership of a group who saw themselves as continuing historic southern Presbyterian theology and practice. The executive of this group, Rev. Paul Settle, helped GCP with planning for its curricular program. GCP published his memory work

notebook, into which Paul integrated the GCP's Sunday school curriculum.

When the PCA formed as a separate denomination, one of its early actions was to join with the OPC to form GCP. This enabled both denominations to move forward with a more vigorous publications agenda.

THE STAFF AT GCP

Two essential ingredients in the joint venture were agreed upon at the beginning. The first was that all the employees of the OP committee would become employees of GCP. The other provision was that GCP would commit to paying off the loan incurred by the OPC.

The staff at the start consisted of Rev. Robley Johnson, Dorothy Anderson, Rev. Herbert Bird, Dorothy Cilley, Kathy Newcomb, Betty Oliver, Penny Pappas, Leah Staley, John Tolsma, and me. Since the OP committee focused primarily on publications, all of us continued our work.

The early writers and editors of GCP taught me much, as I was the youngest of the group. Robley had been the longtime general secretary of the committee, and he carried on his work supervising the staff of GCP.

The OPC Committee on Christian Education employed Dorothy Anderson in different roles for years. She worked on VBS publications, authored *Bible Doctrine*, a study of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and served as the principal writer of the junior high material. Dorothy had been a Christian school teacher and a protégé of Dr. Edmund Clowney, himself a major contributor to the VBS program. Dorothy later took on editorial work for preschool material and for the revision of different departments in the curriculum.

I treasured my interactions with Dorothy. She would ask me searching theological questions, and then together we would puzzle over how to communicate our conclu-



Penny Pappas with Robley Johnson (far right) at a staff meeting

sions in age-appropriate ways to Sunday school students. Through the years, we became close friends.

Penny Pappas came to our publications program from teaching and serving as a principal of a Christian school. She played a central role in writing the primary material and was working on the development of materials for juniors. Years later she would write materials for a revised senior high curriculum.

Penny was perhaps the most creative person I ever encountered. She wrote with a flair, composed her own poems, and in addition was a superb cook and welcoming hostess. Later when I helped develop a program of regional trainers, Penny came on as the seventy-year-old grandma who amazed Sunday school teachers throughout the northeastern part of the United States. As “granny” she also taught my high-school-age son in Sunday school.

Herb Bird started working for the Christian Education Committee after his return from Eritrea as a missionary of the OPC. He was a published author and brought a special awareness of theological matters to the work of GCP. His meticulous attention to detail made him an ideal editor. Herb sought to move me from a complete musical ignoramus to one who appreciated classical music. He played his fine collection of classical records as background music to our suite of offices.

Dottie Cilley functioned as a copy editor. She seemed to be able to intuit misspelled words and grammatical infelicities. She was also our resident encourager. Anyone who was struggling would get a listening ear and helpful advice from Dottie. She and I developed a special relationship. She was my mother's age. Nevertheless, we related fabulously. Even after I left GCP, every Christmas she would send me a package of her homemade shortbread.

Betty Oliver functioned as a secretary, shipping clerk, manuscript typist, and general office manager. She also organized all the meals and hospitality for visiting trustees

John Tolsma and Kathy Newcomb at the drawing board



and other guests of the organization. As far as I know, she was the only living person who could unfailingly understand my handwriting. Leah Staley served at Betty's right hand and kept all the records of customers in order and answered the phone for orders and complaints.

I will always treasure Betty for her willingness to type my dissertation. She labored in evenings to put my dissertation into what was called a Mag Card typewriter. I still can't figure out how she was able to interpret my chicken scratch handwriting of highly technical academic wording.

In some ways John Tolsma, the art director, was the hero of GCP. He was able to put together writers' words and their suggestions for illustrations in an attractive way. He did all this after everyone else had used up time with missed deadlines. He and Kathy Newcomb somehow made up for all the rest of us so that materials were delivered on time.

John was the resident jokester at GCP. He loved to play practical jokes, and this added to the affection all the staff members had for John. Once, however, it led to a disaster. One of our illustrators thought it would be good to play a joke on John. The illustrator submitted a picture of the wise men but with headdresses pasted on. He made it so that the headdresses could be peeled off easily. John was so amused he showed it to everyone, but then he forgot to peel the headdresses off and sent it like that to the printer.

Through the years the three program committees of the OPC had shared an accountant/business manager. With the growth of GCP, we determined that we needed our own accountant. Lee Benner joined us and served for years not only as our accountant but also as the manager of all our shipping. As we moved to computerize customer and business records, he was able to lead GCP into this new phase with a minimum of disruption for our customers.

We were also well served by Harmony Press. Rev. Lewis Grotenhuis started the printing company in order to print the early VBS material. The Grotenhuis sons, especially Fred, continued the company and served us well in typesetting and printing.

Fred Grotenhuis had served as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam. He remained in the reserves after the war, and, to maintain his flying credentials, he needed to make a certain number of takeoffs and landings each year. Fred did this by flying from his base to the Willow Grove Naval Air Station, which was near the GCP offices. On his flights he would carry typescript from his typesetting department, and someone from GCP would meet him. I don't know of any other publisher of Christian education materials that had helicopter delivery of typescript.

After Robley Johnson retired, Rev. Thomas Patete

*Betty Oliver
and Tom Patete
at GCP's tenth
anniversary in 1985*



succeeded him as executive director. Tom made the move from a member of the board of trustees of GCP to leader of the publications program. Tom was able to function comfortably in both constituent denominations. He maintained his ministerial credentials in the PCA while being an active participant in the life of Trinity OPC in Hatboro, Pennsylvania. He played the piano regularly in the evening service of the congregation. His quiet manner and winsome ways provided a good bridge between the two denominations.

The offices of GCP were close to Westminster Theological Seminary and that brought people with writing talents into close proximity. Joseph Pipa, a doctoral student at WTS, served as a writer when the senior high curriculum went through its first revision. Mary Ellen Godfrey and Kathy Keller, both married to WTS professors, served as writers and editors.

There were many others who played important roles in the early days of GCP. I hope I don't offend, but space does not allow me to mention all of them.

BIBLE-IN-PERSPECTIVE

GCP carried on the work of the OPC in publishing educational materials for the church. It did so with a particular point of view. GCP took the position that the Bible was the inerrant, infallible Word of God. In addition, we determined to interpret the Scriptures in accord with the standards of both the OPC and the PCA. That meant that the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms provided guidance and were referred to regularly.

GCP paired biblical fidelity and doctrinal clarity with a distinct way of dealing with the Bible. What we called the Bible-in-Perspective guided writers and editors. Three

distinctives were integrated into all aspects of the curriculum. The first was that the Bible was to be seen in the perspective of the wonder of God's created universe and his overarching providence in all of life. GCP held that Sunday school curriculum served the church by helping students to develop a distinctly Christian world and life view.

To this was added the perspective of the history of redemption. GCP believed that a central teaching of the Bible was the way God saves his people. All materials were to deal with the Bible story of redemption announced to Adam and Eve in the garden and glimpsed in glorious fulfillment by the Apostle John in the book of Revelation.

Third, we determined not to fill Sunday school material with dry theological themes. The GCP curriculum treated the Bible as God's instrument in changing rebellious sinners into dedicated servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Bible knowledge is necessary, yet God the Holy Spirit gives us the Scriptures and then uses them to form the people of God into genuine servants of the Savior.

TECHNOLOGICAL UPDATES

As GCP grew, we realized that the manner in which we produced material needed to go through some changes. When I took on the additional role of Coordinator of Production, we moved from hiring resident writers and editors to using freelancers. This enabled us to move much faster in producing materials.

The move to freelance writers also made it possible to use writers unable to relocate to the Philadelphia area. One of those was Susan Hunt. She was employed by the Christian Education Committee of the PCA and was able to provide not only writing services, but also much needed help in other areas.

Another major change in our way of producing materials was the arrival of desktop publishing on personal computers. We used computers in our business and distribution work. When Apple computers entered the



Susan Hunt working on GCP curriculum in the 1980s



Tom Patete (left) with CCE member Kingsley Elder

publishing world, we were looking for ways to improve our production of printed materials.

One of my jobs, as coordinator of production, was to oversee the move to the PC. I can remember visiting various publishers who used desktop computers in the production of their material. John Tolsma and I visited the offices of the *Presbyterian Journal* where they were beginning to use the Apple Macintosh. The staff of the *Journal* provided valuable insight. We decided to use Apple's Macs in our publishing work. I think I can say that it revolutionized our operation. If my memory serves me well, we projected that we would be able to recoup the cost of the move to Macs in three years. As it turned out, we recovered all our costs in about seven months.

When I began my role with CCE/GCP, I was the only one under thirty working there. Eighteen years later when I left, things had changed dramatically. When I started, everyone employed by GCP had an office at 7401 Old York Road. When I left, most employees were freelancers from all over the USA. When I began, every office at GCP had a typewriter. In fact, I did not even have an electric one on my desk. When I left, the PC was the tool for composing lessons. We no longer employed typesetters. No more helicopter delivery. The laborious process of putting together type from the typesetter with illustrations from artists was gone. Now everything was done on a computer. The transition was dramatic.

As GCP comes to celebrate fifty years, at times I have been asked what was the most rewarding aspect of my time there. I started my work with a deep desire to see the baptized members of our churches trained in the doctrines we count precious. I was filled with hope that our covenant youth would come to understand the Bible rooted in confessional Presbyterianism that we in the OPC and PCA count so precious. God blessed me with opportunity to play a role in seeing my hope come to fruition. **NH**

The author is an OP minister and was director of educational services at Great Commission Publications from 1970 to 1988.

GCP: A JOINT PARTNERSHIP CELEBRATES FIFTY YEARS



JOHN R. MUETHER

This fall marks the golden anniversary of a quiet story of Reformed ecumenicity: the partnership between the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America in Great Commission Publications. It is a milestone that not many in either denomination may be aware of and one that no one imagined celebrating when the collaboration began in 1975.

The origins of Great Commission Publications go back to the early days of both denominations. A common concern of the OPC when it separated from the northern Presbyterian Church in 1936, and the PCA when it left the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1973, was the liberalism in the Sunday school literature of those mainline churches. Christian education was a high priority for both churches from their start, if they were to persevere in faithfulness to the Word of God.



John Mitchell and John Tolsma in the 1960s

BIG DREAMS AND SMALL BUDGETS

In 1950, the OPC's Committee on Christian Education adopted "Great Commission Publications" as the trade name for its curriculum materials. It also secured two remarkable *wunderkinder* as writers: Meredith Kline and Edmund Clowney, though both tenures were short-term; each was serving as junior faculty at Westminster Seminary while pursuing graduate work. (Clowney himself remained a consultant and arguably the architect of the curriculum.)

These were no golden years for Christian education. *Life* magazine in 1957 dismissed Sunday school as "The Most Wasted Hour in the Week" and boldly pronounced the obsolescence of this former fixture in American Protestantism. Responding to *Life* in the pages of the *Presbyterian Guardian*, Westminster Seminary's Ned Stonehouse conceded that Sunday school had lost its way. "We fear that [*Life's*] analysis is far more accurate than we would like to suppose," he wrote. "It discloses a most alarming situation."

Great Commission's response was to make its Sunday school curriculum *more* challenging. It pushed churches to devote one whole hour to instruction, doubling the actual class time in Sunday schools to allow for greater mastery of material. The curriculum was Bible-based, but not at the expense of catechism, which has always been regularly incorporated in GCP materials.

The OPC's plan was bold for a small denomination: to develop a total Sunday school curriculum from preschool to twelfth grade. Although it took two decades to realize this goal, it was a remarkable accomplishment on a small budget. Still, the burden of printing, promotion, and distribution of materials and the ongoing need to revise lessons, all combined to pressure the committee beyond its resources.

From the start the OPC sought markets beyond its own churches, and it pursued partnerships with other denominations of like faith and practice. This included decades-long consultations with the Christian Reformed Church, which came to a close in 1973. By this point the Christian Education Committee's outlook became deeply discouraged. An accrued loan debt of \$138,000 prompted uncertainty of its viability. It seemed evident to many that GCP was simply not a sustainable operation.

THE FORMATION OF THE JOINT PARTNERSHIP

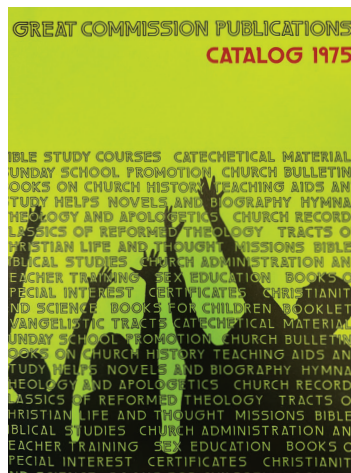
But there was one encouraging sign: It did not escape notice that among its non-OPC clients, a growing plurality were conservative congregations in the Southern Presbyterian Church. OPC desperation met PCA enthusiasm.

The prospect of a cooperative working relationship actually antedated the founding of the PCA. A year and a half before its birth, a Steering Committee was organized to lay the groundwork for a new denomination. Paul Settle, executive director of the Continuing Church Movement, was particularly passionate about Christian education, and he chaired a subcommittee on Christian education. Four months before the first general assembly, an advisory convention mandated "that a publishing partnership with OPC be studied."

In December 1973, the first general assembly went even further. It endorsed and recommended to sessions the Sunday school curriculum published by Great Commission Publications and authorized the Committee on Christian Education and Publications to cooperate fully with GCP in developing further curricula.

The foundation having been laid, the partnership was formalized two years later when, on October 20, 1975, Great Commission Publications was incorporated as a joint venture of the two denominations. The OPC and PCA each appointed six officers to the board of the nonprofit ministry, along with the coordinator or general secretary of the respective Christian Education Committees serving in *ex officio* capacities. This board structure continues to this day.

As one would expect, the start of the joint venture was marked by growing pains. It was clear to both partners that this was risky business, and trust between them had to be established. Some in the OPC feared that the collaboration might compromise the quality of the materials. PCA board members were uncertain that their churches would embrace GCP as an agency of the church. The financial relationship between the two churches was a particular concern. The partnership required denominational subsidies, and for a time the PCA had not fully paid its share of funding. This reached a resolution to the



GCP materials from the 1970s



satisfaction of both partners, and over time, sales fully funded GCP, helped particularly with the publication of the revised edition of the *Trinity Hymnal* in 1991.

All these challenges were placed in the hands of Tom Patete, the ministry's first executive director. A young minister in the PCA, Patete quickly commanded the respect of the OPC. In his thirty-four years at the helm, he built strong relationships within both denominations, employing writers, editors, and consultants, including Joey Pipa, Roger Schmurr, and G. I. Williamson. Allen Curry, who began at GCP in 1970, provided continuity in his capacity as director of curriculum until he accepted a teaching post at Reformed Theological Seminary in 1988.

Two years later, after the sale of the OPC denominational offices in 1990, GCP moved from Philadelphia to Atlanta. This rendered it better connected to the PCA, and the number of churches using GCP materials increased to the point where the percentages of churches in both denominations are now roughly equal.

The relocation also expanded the services that GCP could offer to churches, including teacher-training seminars. At first, these were conducted in cooperation with the PCA's Committee on Discipleship Ministries. Eventually, regional seminars took place throughout the country. Much of this instruction is now also offered in video format, available on the GCP website.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF THE CURRICULUM

Updating the curriculum was an unending task for GCP, from refreshing the artwork to replacing biblical references from the New International to the English Standard Version. But changes have never compromised the distinguishing features of the curriculum. GCP presents a redemptive-historical approach to Scripture with sensitivity to the process of faith formation in children.



The redemptive-historical emphasis in GCP materials owes much to the influence of Edmund Clowney, whose long-standing ministerial service in both the OPC (forty-two years) and the PCA (over two decades) spans most of the history of Great Commission. "Christian education must mean nothing less than Christian edification," he insisted, "the great saving process by which Christ builds up his people in faith and new obedience." By this he meant *all* the people of God, including the youngest. Pointing children to Christ as central to the story of *all* of Scripture guards moral formation from reducing to moralism. Clowney was the inspiration for naming the younger curriculum "Show Me Jesus." (It may seem ironic for some to discover that GCP *never shows* Jesus, at least not pictorially; this owes to a careful reading of the second commandment that guides the ministry's artwork.)

Allen Curry described the scope and sequence of the GCP curriculum by means of a "beads on a string" metaphor. He likened preschool instruction in basic concepts (such as the loving care of a heavenly Father) to a set of beads, which increases as a child's vocabulary of the faith expands. When children become more conceptual in their thinking, these beads are grouped into themes, and students learn about the law, grace, the church, and even worship (through a study of Leviticus!). By middle school, a survey of biblical history puts these beads in order and then follows the capstone of the curriculum: In a study of the coming of Christ in prophecy and history, the unfolding of the covenant of grace becomes the string that holds the beads together. High schoolers, having made profession of faith and claiming the Christ as their own, are to wear these beads, the blessing of the covenant now adorning their lives.

In this way, GCP presents covenant theology in age-appropriate ways to young people. It has also proven help-

ful to older disciples. Teachers find great benefit in this refresher in the Reformed faith. And a story has circulated at Westminster Seminary of a student who struggled to understand covenant theology until his professor encouraged him to look at GCP materials, and then it began to make sense.

The curriculum's sensitivity to childhood faith development was further developed with Mark Lowrey's appointment in 1996. In his nearly three-decade service at GCP, Lowrey was passionate about teaching with learning in mind. Lowrey stressed that coming to faith was a divinely ordered learning process where children come to embrace Christ in unique and personal ways. So, for example, the instruction is attentive to different types of learners—auditory, visual, and kinesthetic.

A UNITED EFFORT

That GCP would be celebrating fifty years of a joint OPC–PCA publishing partnership is a milestone that nobody imagined in 1975. Many regarded it as a precursor to a denominational merger that seemed imminent (and which nearly happened within a decade). Others doubted that the partnership would last. But here we are, still a partnership of two denominations producing Sunday school materials even after *Life* magazine ceased regular publication two decades after confidently predicting the demise of Sunday school.

The quiet success of the OPC–PCA partnership in bearing a Reformed witness may point to a way of rethinking ecumenicity: There are worthwhile ecumenical outcomes short of organizational unity. Westminster Seminary's Cornelius Van Til often reminded his students that the ecumenical calling for confessional Presbyterians was to steward the Reformed faith for the entire church of Christ. This stewardship is happening in the joint partnership—40 percent of the customers of Great Commission are not PCA or OPC churches. This includes clients in denominations not yet birthed in 1975, such as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the United Reformed Churches of North America.

Whether or not the PCA and the OPC become one church in the future, their joint partnership in GCP has demonstrated that in their ministry of calling little children and young people to Christ, the two churches are united. **NH**

The author is a ruling elder at Reformation OPC in Oviedo, Florida, and a member of the Board of Great Commission Publications.

FULFILLING JESUS'S GREAT COMMISSION

HEATHER COSSAR

At 9:00 am on October 20, 1975, the certificate of incorporation for Great Commission Publications was filed in the Delaware office of the Secretary of State. On that same morning in Orlando, Florida, I was likely being held in my mother's arms as a six-month-old baby eating breakfast, completely unaware that this auspicious event happened the same year of my birth.

Reflecting on the providence of God, I am celebrating my fiftieth year of life and my twenty-third year at GCP—something I never planned nor would've guessed would be my path as a little girl dreaming of becoming an astronaut while watching Space Shuttle launches. And yet, the mysteries of God's sovereign purposes—the faithfulness of my mother raising me as a covenant child, her Covenant College friend Donna Williams working at GCP when I was moving to Atlanta—have led me to this point.

Over the past twenty-three years, I was discipled and mentored at work by Donna and by Mark Lowrey, a humble servant leader and our former executive director who began editorial operations anew in 1996 and went home to glory on a Lord's Day in 2023 while still in his role at GCP. Now as we celebrate God's faithfulness to his church through the work of GCP, I see how our heavenly Father has sustained and flourished this unlikely joint venture of two denominations and look forward to where he is leading us.

“BY THE GRACE OF GOD IT WAS DONE”

The Sunday school curriculum produced by GCP to this day is rooted in the paradigm established by the OPC's Committee on Christian Education (CCE) in the early 1940s. GCP's theology, operating principles, and distinctives are based on the Bible from a Reformed perspective as taught in the Westminster Standards. Starting with senior high in 1961, a complete Sunday school curriculum was completed in twelve years' time. In *Confident of Better Things* (2011), the first executive director of GCP, Tom Patete,



At the GCP warehouse during a board meeting in 1997, with G. I. Williamson on the far left, George Miladin at the head of the table, Donna Williams, and Mark Lowery on the far right

quoted a section from *The Orthodox Presbyterian Church 1936–1986* regarding this accomplishment:

What a tremendous undertaking! No denomination of the size of the OPC could possibly accomplish what needed to be done, or support the effort according to the best advice of experts. But by the grace of God it was done!

Before the PCA was formed as a denomination, the OPC's Committee on Christian Education had laid the groundwork for not only excellent Christian education materials but also the beloved *Trinity Hymnal*.

JESUS'S GREAT COMMISSION

From the beginning, the OPC recognized the need for its materials to serve not only its own churches but also to appeal to the broader Reformed and evangelical community. Their objective was worldwide outreach through Christian education. The CCE put it this way: “If the OPC had thought that its projected curriculum would be of use only within its own congregations, it would have never undertaken the project. In the providence of God, we have initiated the program, but we have done it on behalf of all who love the Reformed faith.” In the first year after all twelve grades were in print, 78 percent of the 558 churches using GCP curriculum were non-OPC churches.

The operating name Great Commission Publications proved to be a wise choice for this global vision. The nondenominational name made it easy for the materials produced by GCP to be used in any Bible-believing church. GCP's curriculum is faithful to the Scriptures while maintaining a distinctive focus on five key areas: the sovereignty of God, the centrality of Jesus in the unfolding story of salvation, the covenantal focus, a redemptive-historical approach, and the crucial connection between church and family. Children, parents, teachers, volunteers, and ministry leaders in diverse contexts who are simply looking for biblically sound resources are exposed to Reformed and covenantal theology each time they interact with GCP's material. Praise God!

That carefully considered direction led the PCA, formed in 1973, to be able to partner with the OPC to produce doctrinally suitable curriculum in the joint venture. Over my years at GCP, I've come to see how Jesus's Great Commission to his disciples over two thousand years ago has impacted even me. I grew up in a Christian and Missionary Alliance church, went to a Baptist university, and was not even looking for a Presbyterian church or ministry job when my husband and I moved to Atlanta. But God used my love for him and editing experience to bring me to GCP, which in turn led us to join a PCA church.

Over the years, working at GCP has brought me to love and embrace Reformed theology. By God's grace, we at GCP pray that each child who is under the teaching of our materials will come to know and love God through his Word, grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and embrace the blessings of the covenant.

CHRIST-CENTERED RESOURCES FOR ALL AGES

Over my years at GCP, we've not only expanded and improved on our Sunday school curriculum, we've added catechetical curriculum, a *Pilgrim's Progress* book and curriculum, and digital versions of *Trinity Hymnal*. *First Catechism* alone has touched the lives of at least 315,000 children as young as age two since 2003. Many *New Horizons* readers will remember Dorothy Anderson's beloved *Bible Doctrine* curriculum, and since we revised it into *Digging Deeper* in 2022, thousands more young people are learning the Shorter Catechism.

GCP provides materials to 3,500 churches in the United States, 20 percent of whose congregants are children. This is an exciting time for GCP, as we focus on a three-pronged initiative over the next five years: a revised *Show Me Jesus* curriculum, a nationwide network of regional trainers to equip local churches, and new tools for parents to fuel robust family worship and discipleship.



The author at her desk at Great Commission Publications

The new *Show Me Jesus Preschool* curriculum will be available for fall 2025. This two-year program is flexible for four- and five-year-olds and will be in the ESV translation, with new illustrations and digital resources for in-class and family discipleship. You may download a sample lesson and learn more at new.gcp.org. I have the teacher manual on my desk today as we prepare to finalize the files. In the introduction, it says:

From start to finish, the children learn that the Lord our Creator is gracious and merciful to his covenant people—forgiving them, saving them, and keeping them. With God's blessing, each child who participates in these lessons will begin to develop a biblical self-image. He or she will begin to know: I am a child created in God's image. My purpose is to glorify my Creator.

Wow, that is my prayer for each of the children who will be taught from this curriculum.

As *Show Me Jesus Preschool* is published over the next two years, we will follow it with new *Younger Elementary* (grades 1–2) and new *Middle Elementary* (grades 3–4). We are prayerful that a revised *Toddler* curriculum will soon follow. We are also planning to launch new music resources to prepare children to be active worshipers. And a new digital platform for teachers and parents will help facilitate more discipleship opportunities.

I've lightheartedly dubbed this year of fiftieth celebrations as my year of jubilee. The old covenant Sabbath cycles kept alive the hope for the reign of Jesus the Messiah. We new-covenant people know that our Savior has now come. We rejoice in the work of our triune God in his church through GCP, and we anticipate with hope that many more will know the jubilee of his salvation until he comes again.

The author is director of content strategy and publishing at Great Commission Publications.

THREE STORIES FROM L'VIV

HEERO E. C. HACQUEBORD

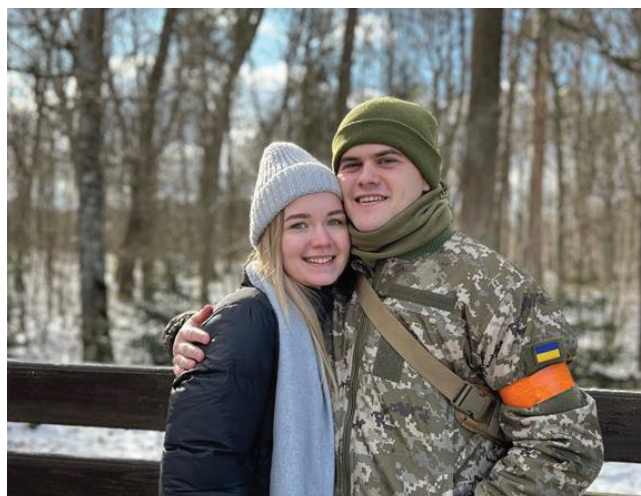
When will it end? More importantly, how will it end? How will the church in Ukraine be affected by peace terms? How much of Ukraine's territory will remain under Russian control, which severely limits the operation and freedom of any church other than the Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church? Will negotiations force any of our twelve Presbyterian churches in Ukraine to come under Russian rule? How will our church in L'viv be affected, and how many men will be left in the church when the fighting ends and the borders open?

These questions are constantly in our hearts and minds. At any time, our future is shrouded from view. Living in the context of the Russian invasion has made this reality so much more palpable. Our plans sometimes crumble into pieces. Planning ministry in the church is a continual challenge when we do not know where key people will be in a few months' time—in L'viv, on the front lines, or in another country. Nevertheless, we rejoice in the way that God has been building our L'viv congregation through new members including three men in particular whose stories I'd like to highlight.

BOHDAN'S STORY

Bohdan is an orphan who was raised by his grandmother in a town near L'viv. His name means "God's gift." As a pre-teen Bohdan was identified as being gifted in sports, so he was sent to a school in L'viv that specializes in preparing athletes, and he lived in a school dormitory alongside other boys who were, like him, training to become star wrestlers. The dormitory experience was tough, with severe hazing and other forms of teenage cruelty. In this often dark environment, God's light came to Bohdan and some of his friends, and they began to study the Bible together. After graduating from school, they became part of a house church movement but realized that this environment hindered their spiritual growth. Through a friend who had attended one of our English camps, Bohdan was introduced to our church. We were just getting to know him when Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Bohdan and another friend from school were eager to grow in their faith, so they enrolled in a Reformed



Bohdan and Anya

seminary. At the same time, the two of them and I began to meet weekly for reading, discussion, and prayer. During this time, Bohdan met Anya, a member of our Kharkiv church who had temporarily moved to L'viv for her safety. Finding much in common—especially their love for Christ and his church—the two of them became engaged in 2023. Anya moved back to Kharkiv for her residency as a pediatrician. Whenever she visited L'viv, they met with me and my wife—also named Anya—for premarital counseling. It was a huge privilege to give some scriptural guidance to this beautiful young couple. During this period Bohdan began serving as an intern in our church's well-developed college ministry. He and Anya moved their wedding date up by almost two months since he would be turning twenty-five, the age at which men can be drafted for military service. So we continued their premarital counseling after they got married. Along with many others, I have been greatly encouraged to see Bohdan grow as a believer, husband, and servant leader in the church.

OLECH'S STORY

Another terrific young man whom the Lord has added to our church is named Olech. He grew up Greek Catholic in a town on the outskirts of L'viv. (The Greek Catholic church uses the Ukrainian Orthodox liturgy but is part



*Oleh
and Sofia*

of the Roman Catholic Church.) At a friend's wedding, Oleh met Sofia who had become a member of our church through its student ministry. Oleh was his friend's best man, while Sofia was the maid of honor. Having committed a cultural faux pas by not giving the maid of honor money for the boutonniere she pinned onto his suit jacket, Oleh promised to buy Sofia coffee at a later date. Their new friendship did not end with coffee.

Oleh began attending our college ministry meetings along with Sofia, and our college minister soon realized that Oleh understood the gospel and true faith in Christ. So, after Oleh and Sofia became engaged, Anya and I gladly agreed to go through premarital counseling with them. Oleh had many questions about joining our church. He supported Sofia's desire to remain a member, but he was loyal to his own tradition. After getting married, though, Oleh and Sofia were very regular in attending our services together. They were attending weekly Bible studies and young adult meetings, quickly becoming one of the most active couples in our church. So it was not a big surprise last year when, in Sofia's words, Oleh made official what his actions had been showing for quite a while: He became a member of our church! He remains eager to use his gifts and is someone we can always count on. We look

Oleh, a volunteer with Crates for Ukraine and a new member



forward to seeing how the Lord will work through Oleh and Sofia to build his church in Ukraine.

OLEH'S STORY

Oleh is a semi-truck driver with routes all over Europe. One of our team members met his wife and young son at a playground. That led to friendship, mutual birthday celebrations, and soon Oleh was known to everyone on our church-planting team. I remember pushing strollers in the park with him in the spring of 2010, when our youngest and their youngest were still in diapers, while the older children were attending our first Vacation Bible School long before our church officially existed. Over the years, his family became very active in our congregation, but Oleh was always on the outskirts.

And then came COVID. For a season he was without work while his family was worshiping online from home. When we relaunched in-person services, Oleh began to attend with his family. With the full-scale war and our Crates for Ukraine humanitarian aid ministry came many logistic needs and challenges. Oleh has been very eager to help with that ministry and in many other ways. He loves to serve in the background—mowing the church lawn, cleaning the gutters and downspouts, and installing a bike rack, for example. So, when he decided to join our membership class this past fall, we knew that Oleh was officially committing to what he had been doing for quite a while: using his gifts to serve his Savior's church.

THE GATES OF HELL

Oleh (father of two) has not been drafted yet—for which we are very thankful. Sofia's husband, Oleh, is turning twenty-five this June. An unexpected turn of events led to Bohdan's being drafted into the military at the end of January. In March, he finished training in an assault brigade. Along with his wife, we are praying for an assignment in a relatively safe location.

Much of Ukraine is in shambles. Whole towns have been wiped off the face of the earth. Fertile fields are riddled with unexploded mines and blast craters. Some of our church members have been fighting on the front lines for years. We have so many questions about what the future will bring. Where will our men be in a few months' time? We do not know. However, we do have this assurance from Jesus Christ: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!" (Matt. 16:18). That is our hope, our prayer, and our confidence.

The author is a missionary in L'viv, Ukraine.

REACHING HEAVENWARD IN HAWAII

ELIJAH JAMES HIRTZEL

A spirit of newness pervades the OPC's church-planting efforts in Hawaii. The Lord has given us new funding, a new provisional session, and a new evangelist—myself, Eli Hirtzel. We earnestly desire a new location in a new city as we seek to serve in West Oahu, where we will be the only Reformed Presbyterian congregation. Our old work now enters a new chapter. Titus's needs and circumstances in Crete, in some respects, parallel our own: "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you" (Titus 1:5). Crete and Hawaii are both island mission fields. Moreover, Titus took up a preexisting work to "set in order the things that are lacking" and to "appoint elders." The Lord called a new session—David Francisco, Chris Hartshorn, Jesse Pirschel, Ben Rochester, and me—to continue Doug Watson and the former session's labors. With thankfulness in our hearts for the previous session's years of service, we seek the Lord's blessing upon this new chapter.

Establishing an OPC congregation on a rock almost 2,500 miles from the rest of the presbytery is daunting. Still, God's promises to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth give us hope and courage to press forward. How so? Consider Hawaii's ōhi'a lehua tree.

THE PIONEER TREE

The ōhi'a lehua tree is Hawaii's most common tree. Depending on where it grows, it takes the form of a lofty tree or humble shrub. Its flowers are unmistakable; they resemble pom-poms or sea anemones. But most incredible is where it grows—not only in Hawaii's tropical rainforests, but also in its lava flow fields.

Growing up in Los Angeles, I thought the Mojave was desolate. But now a Hawaiian lava field takes the cake for the most desolate place I've visited. Despite the apparent uninhab-

The ōhi'a lehua tree



The congregation in Hawaii at an ordination celebration for Hirtzel (wearing a lei) on March 9

itability, these moon-like, black fields of lava rock are no obstacle for the ōhi'a lehua tree. Some call it a "pioneer tree" because it is often the first plant, and one of the only, to grow on Hawaii's many lava flow fields. Likewise, Christ's church can flourish in spiritually desolate places. The ōhi'a lehua can and does turn black lava rock into great green gardens, and so can the church.

Spiritually, Hawaii is like its lava fields—dark and destitute. A close look at Hawaii will reveal many beautiful peoples, a melting pot of wonderful cultures, great art, and culinary excellence. It will also reveal souls subdued by sin and misery, resulting in much homelessness, drug addiction, drunkenness, broken family dynamics, gang violence, and ignorance of gospel truth (even in institutions claiming Christ's name). Sin started in paradise, and it continues in paradise.

Facing human need for and opposition to Christ drives home our hope that God's promises are permanent and sin impermanent. As a few ōhi'a lehua trees have built

massive forests, so church plants are God's means to establish generations of Christians spanning centuries. Our God can make an "exceedingly great army" of living saints out of dry bones (Ezek. 37:1–14), and sons of Abraham out of stones (Matt. 3:9). His Spirit translates Adam's children into Christ's everlasting family (John 3:6). Our King promised, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Our God can take spiritually dark places and fill them with his marvelous light! He has promised these great things and commanded us to "go," so we endeavor boldly, like the ōhi'a lehua, to be a pioneer plant alongside other faithful churches in spiritually desolate Hawaii. We pray that Hawaii will be a vibrant forest of Reformed churches.

ROOTS IN HEAVEN

How might our church proliferate in such an environment? We are a small congregation, currently meeting in the afternoon, in a windowless space. We do not seem mighty by any worldly measure. Again, the ōhi'a lehua is a striking illustration of Christ's church. Common sense would suggest that growing a tree on a field of rocks would seem impossible, or foolish at least. Usually, you move aside the rocks and plant in fertile soil. If you are thinking this way, consider again the ōhi'a lehua. This tree has a root system that stretches into the heavens, never touching the ground. These roots form clusters in the ōhi'a lehua's high branches to absorb water from the rain and the air. It drinks in water from above when none gathers beneath and thereby grows where other trees die.

Likewise, we stretch our roots heavenward. God provides all that his children need to accomplish the duties he gives them. When the Israelites needed water to live before God, God turned a rock into a fountain (Exod. 17:1–7). When Paul and Silas needed freedom from jail to preach

Eli and Esmé Hirtzel



Hirtzel at his March 1 ordination and installation at Branch of Hope OPC in Torrance, California

the gospel, God opened locked doors (Acts 16:25–33). When hearts need regeneration, he gives the Spirit (Titus 3:5). When churches need pastors and teachers, Christ equips men and gives them to congregations (Eph. 4:11). He gives gracious means to fulfill his gracious commandments. As Sinclair Ferguson wrote, "Grace runs like a mountain stream into the river bed that sin has dried up. God makes the desert blossom like a rose!" (*Faithful God*, 76). He does this work by watering his church with the Holy Spirit and the gospel call (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:21). God commissioned the planting of this church by the sending work of the presbytery, and we expect him to work in his timing, his way. Therefore, we stretch our roots upward to God for grace as he waters us with the Word, sacraments, and prayer; by this means we seek to grow. And as a healthy tree drops seeds to plant trees, we want to be a church that plants churches as many have done before us. We expect great things from "Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (Eph. 3:20).

HOW YOU CAN HELP

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Finally, brethren, pray for us" (2 Thess. 3:1). Your brothers and sisters in Hawaii ask the same of you. Pray for God's blessing on our small congregation. Pray that the Word would bear fruit. Pray that we might raise up leaders, evangelize our neighbors, and plant more churches.

We long to see God fulfill his promises here. May the Lord turn this spiritual lava field into a forest of grace.

The author is a church planter in Oahu, Hawaii. He quotes from the New King James Version.

ELISHA, THE WIDOW, AND THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS

MATTHEW HOLST

What can we learn concerning diaconal work from a passage of Scripture not about deacons? As we understand the redemptive-historical trajectory of Scripture, culminating in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are driven to derive diaconal lessons from the narrative of Elisha and the widow:

Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.” And Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me; what have you in the house?” And she said, “Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil.” Then he said, “Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not too few. Then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels. And when one is full, set it aside.” So she went from him and shut the door behind herself and her sons. And as she poured they brought the vessels to her. When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” And he said to her, “There is not another.” Then the oil stopped flowing. She came and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest.” (2 Kings 4:1–7)

THE CIRCUMSTANCES

The prophet Elisha is ministering in Israel at a time of spiritual declension. It is unsurprising then that we encounter a widow, indeed the “wife of one of the sons of the prophets” (v. 1), in desperate need. Having lost her husband and unable to pay her debts, she has a creditor at the door to take her sons to be his slaves. She was facing crushing need. She comes to Elisha, the prophet, pleading for help. Elisha discovers that she has nothing to her name but a jar of oil. It is from this jar of oil, and by the

*Carmelite chapel,
“Elisha multiplied oil
of a widow” by Jean-
Baptiste Despax*



power of God, that Elisha meets her need. He tells her to gather some vessels from her neighbors and “not too few” of them (v. 3), and then in the privacy of her own home, behind closed doors, pour out the oil from her own flask. The oil from the one flask fills many flasks, far more than it could possibly have held by itself. Elisha tells the woman to sell the “miraculous oil,” clear her debts, and she and her sons can live on the rest.

The widow was delivered, by the power of God, through the ministry of the prophet Elisha. In real terms, the Lord had mercy on her. The widow had clearly fallen on hard times and appears to have been neglected by those around her. Her material need was really a symptom of the dire spiritual state of the covenant people at that time. Care for widows and orphans was a mark of true religion from the oldest days of God’s people (Exod. 22:22; Deut. 26:12; Acts 6:1ff; James 1:27). And in this setting, God’s people appear to have failed.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO DEACONS?

First, a word about method: acknowledging that this passage is not principally concerned with diaconal ministries does not prohibit us from deriving lessons applicable to the ministry of deacons. Indeed, when we consider that Elisha is a servant of God, acting on behalf of God, rendering a ministry of mercy in the life of a covenant member, it is not hard to derive appropriate lessons for the administration of the ministry of mercy.

Second, understanding the ministry of mercy and the office of deacon as presented in Scripture, it is not hard to see the ministry of our Lord: Here Elisha *the prophet* is engaging in mercy ministries. Sometimes the priests would enact mercy on behalf of the afflicted (sacrifices, purification rites, etc.). Other times it was the king who would enact mercy to the oppressed (Solomon's encounter with the two women and the baby in 1 Kings 3:16–28). In other words, part of Christ's mediatorial work, as prophet, priest, and king, is the ministry of mercy. In the new covenant, this ministry was first committed to the apostles and then granted to deacons (Acts 6). To put it another way, deacons minister in Christ's name, on Christ's behalf, to Christ's brethren.

DIACONAL LESSONS

First, consider the connection between Word ministry and deed ministry. It is often supposed that elders and pastors engage in word ministry while deacons engage in mercy ministry. This is a misunderstanding. Elisha here is a prophet of God—a minister of the Word. He is the minister of mercy in this case. The fulfillment of this idea is seen in our Lord, who as the perfect Prophet ministered mercy in the lives of his followers both in Word and deed. The lesson is this: Word and deed ministries belong together. Deacons are called to a ministry of spiritual and practical instruction, encouragement, rebuke, and exhortation as part of their duties in ministering mercy. This is not to be confused with the ministry of the Word in the pastoral office, but all diaconal work is, at heart, spiritual work.

Second, diaconal work does not always simply meet a need through provision. In our narrative, Elisha calls the widow and her sons to action. They are to take some responsibility in the resolution of their need. They were called to act by fetching vessels—"and not too few." This general instruction ("not too few") leaves the ball in the widow's court somewhat: She is challenged to bring as many vessels as she can. The oil flows according to the number of vessels she brought; had she brought less, she would have had less oil. Not wishing to push the matter too far, we can at least say that she was to act according to her faith in the prophet's command. Deacons are frequently called to act in such a manner: calling people to faithfulness or greater faithfulness, to trust and greater trust—manifested in obedience—in the solving of their material needs.

Third, we learn that it is God who provides for us. The widow had oil, for sure, but not enough to save her sons from slavery. It is clearly a miracle, by the power of God, wrought through the hand of God's servant. While our deacons don't do such miracles, we still see God working through them, to his glory and for the aid of his people. Surely, for the needy, this can at times seem like the miraculous power of God.

Passages like Elisha and the widow help us to understand the high esteem and noble labors that are committed to our deacons. The deacon ministers on Christ's behalf, in Christ's name, to Christ's brethren. To serve faithfully as a deacon is to serve as Christ served in action and in manner. To be a deacon is to be called into a peculiar union with our Lord Jesus; it is to enter into his ministry of mercy. That ought to shape how deacons do their job and help non-deacons hold the office in the highest esteem.

The author is pastor of Shiloh OPC in Raleigh, North Carolina.

OPC MEMBER NEEDS LIVER TRANSPLANT

OPC member Tim Milchling, 31, urgently needs a living liver donor. He survived childhood liver cancer but now needs a transplant at Penn Medicine. Blood type A (+/-) donors may qualify. Learn more at: liverfortim.org. Please share—just one person could save Tim's life.

THE BEST POSSIBLE BARGAIN

LANE B. KEISTER

One of the prerequisites for being a good steward of our resources is to know their value. And, to know their value also requires knowing its relative value to other things. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul is defending his apostleship, as he has had to do many times in his letters (there seemed to have been quite the cottage industry of Paul-bashing!). In the context of defending his apostleship, he makes some statements about the relative value of spiritual and material things. For our purposes, let us focus on verses 11 and 12: “If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?”

Paul is telling the Corinthians that the spiritual things sown among them (surely, the preaching of the Word is here preeminently though not exclusively in view!) are of more value than any material things Paul might “reap” from the Corinthians. Why this difference in evaluation? Consider the following thought experiment: How does God use the preaching of the Word, assuming that it is accurate? He uses it to convert people and to strengthen the faith of believers. The souls thus saved and strengthened will live forever in eternal life. One cannot put a price tag on that. The souls are infinitely valuable. The material things Paul could have “reaped” from the Corinthians are all-too-finite and temporary in character.

The conclusion we come to, then, is that spending earthly resources to encourage and provide spiritual benefits for people is the best possible bargain one could imagine. One cannot but remember Jim Elliot’s famous quotation: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

RELIEF FROM WORLDLY CARES

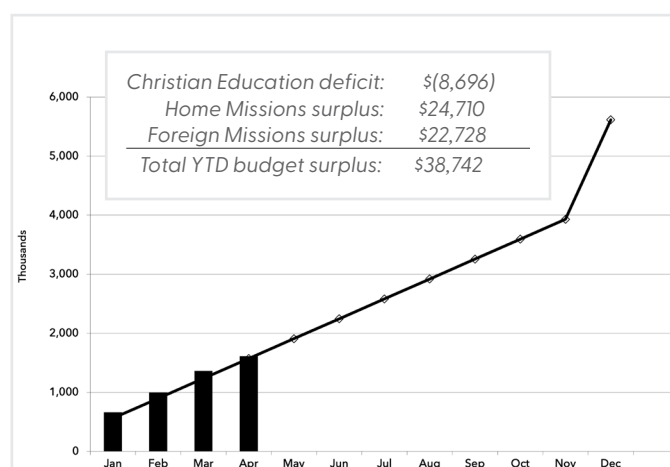
Another implication of these thoughts is that what a faithfully biblical pastor provides cannot be measured against a salary provided. It wouldn’t matter if he were being paid the entire world’s sum of money, the congregation would still be getting a bargain. Of course, I do not advocate an attempt to pay the pastor the world’s sum of money. Pastors

can be greedy. However, paying a pastor too much does not appear to be a huge problem in most OPC churches. What a congregation must resist is thinking, “Well, if he preaches forty-seven or forty-eight weeks of the year, two sermons per Sunday, then if we divide his salary by ninety-four or ninety-six, we can arrive at the monetary value of the sermons.” A congregation should not view the pastor as being paid by the hour, by the sermon, by the counseling session, by the evangelistic efforts, or by the visit. Instead, the congregation should be thinking, “What can we do to relieve him of worldly cares?”

By analogy, other forms of monetary expenditure to promote spiritual (and by this, we are assuming that they are biblical) pursuits, evangelism, teaching, Christian counseling can all be tremendously good investments.

The author is pastor of Momence OPC in Momence, Illinois.

WORLDWIDE OUTREACH YEAR-TO-DATE 2025 RECEIPTS WITH 2025 GOAL



JUN 2025 PRAYER CALENDAR



1

Mr. & Mrs. F., Asia. Ask God to bless Mr. F's more direct follow-up with students. / **Joseph & Christina Wan**, Madison, WI. Pray for the Lord to grow the congregation of Madison Chinese Church.

2

Brian (Nicole) Tsui, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Northern California & Nevada. / Pray for stated clerk, **Hank Belfield**, as he attends the General Assembly and handles administrative work during and after the Assembly.

3

Mr. & Mrs. M., Asia. Pray for their ministry to international students in the US and for their kids as they grow in the Lord. / Pray for active duty US Army chaplains **Cornelius (Deidre) Johnson** and **Kenneth A. (Mandy) Kruckow**.

4

David Myhren, Troy, OH. Pray for the members of Bread of Life OPC to grow in their love for God. / Pray for affiliated missionaries **Jerry & Marilyn Farnik**, Czech Republic, as they disciple church members. Pray for a women's group that is studying 1 Peter.

5

Home Missions general secretary **Jeremiah Montgomery**. / Pray for the OPC **Shiloh Institute** as it meets June 17–19.

6

Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Douglas Clawson** as he reports to the general assembly. / Pray that the Lord would protect **Disaster Response volunteers** in North Carolina and work powerfully in the hearts of those with whom they come in contact.

7

Pray for **Mike & Jenn Kearney**, Mbale, Uganda, as they and their daughter Joanna settle into life and ministry in Mbale. / **Matt (Christine) Ezzell**, Holly Springs, NC. Pray for the congregation of Zion OPC to be strong in the Lord.

8

Andrew (Cheyenne) Farr, Klamath Falls, OR. Pray the Lord would bless Klamath Reformed Church's monthly Saturday outreach events. / Pray for **The Boardwalk Chapel** in Wildwood, NJ, as they begin their 2025 season of training and evangelism.

9

Fred & Ka-Ling Lo, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for Fred's participation in a conference of the Theological Education Association of Southern Africa. / Pray for **Danny Olinger** as he edits *New Horizons*.

10

Mark (Peggy) Sumpter, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Northwest. / Pray for **Travis & Bonnie Emmett**, Nakaale, Uganda, to be refreshed and encouraged by visitors from the United States this month.

11

Home Missions associate general secretary **Al Tricarico**. / Pray that the **Ruling Elder Podcast** would be edifying and encouraging to elders and the congregations they serve.

12

Missionary associate **Beatrix Taverne**, Nakaale, Uganda. Praise the Lord for local church leaders already serving and growing, and pray for more! / Summer intern **Alex (Hannah) Stewart** serving at Providence OPC in Temecula, CA.

13

Pray for associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda, as she manages the night security guards; pray that they would find their security in Christ. / **Mike (Elizabeth) Diercks**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio

14

Bill (Margaret) Shishko, Commack, NY. Pray for wisdom in using the church facility to further God's kingdom. / Pray for summer intern **Tommy (Mary Grace) Garbarini** serving at Harvest OPC in San Marcos, CA.



The Kearneys (day 7)



The Garbarinis (day 14)

15 Associate missionaries **Christopher & Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Uganda. Give thanks for new church members and pray that they would take their vows seriously. / Pray for summer intern **Michael Emmanuel** at Calvary OPC in Tallahassee, FL.

16 **Mark (Lorie) Wheat**, Sugar Land, TX. Pray that the Lord would bring new members to join Good Shepherd OPC. / Pray for tentmaking missionary **Tina DeJong**, Nakaale, Uganda (on furlough), as she serves in her home church's VBS this week.

17 **Erik (Heather) Watkins**, evangelist for Chicago, IL, and Daytona, FL. / **David Nakhla**, administrator for the Committee on Diaconal Ministries. Pray for deacons as they love and serve their congregations.

18 Pray for the testimony of retired missionaries **Cal & Edie Cummings**, **Mary Lou Son**, and **Brian & Dorothy Wingard** to younger generations. / Pray for yearlong intern **Mitchell (Cali) Watson** as he finishes up his internship with Knox OPC in Silver Spring, MD.

19 Pray for the persecuted church in **East Africa** to wait for the Lord with patience and hope. / **Bruce (Sue) Hollister**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Midwest.



The Hollisters (day 19)

20 Home Missions administrative coordinator **Lauren LaRocca**. / Pray for yearlong intern **Joseph (Myranda) Scherschligt** as he finishes his internship at Emmanuel OPC in Wilmington, DE.

21 **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray for a growing understanding in Uruguay of Reformed, covenantal worship and family life. / Pray for short-term missions **Team Uganda** as they come alongside mission staff to reach local school children.

22 **Bradney (Eileen) Lopez**, Guayama, PR. Pray that the Lord would bless Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura OPC's ministry. / **Heero & Anya Hacquebord**, L'viv, Ukraine. Pray for Anya's continued efforts to connect with and disciple women in the church.

23 **David (Rebekah) Graves**, Wichita Falls, TX. Pray the Lord would grow Living Stone OPC through new members. / Pray for yearlong intern **Jon (Stacey) Jung** as he finishes up his internship at Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA.

24 **Ben & Heather Hopp**, Africa & Haiti. Ask God to continue to sustain the Haitian saints in Port-au-Prince and on La Gonâve. / **Christopher Drew**, assistant website administrator for OPC.org.

25 Pray for the training of wise, humble Reformed pastors in the **African Evangelical Presbyterian Church** in Kenya. / **Nate (Anna) Strom**, Sheboygan, WI. Pray for the Lord's blessing on the ministry of Breakwater Church.

26 **Jim (Bonnie) Hoekstra**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Wisconsin & Minnesota. / **Mark Stumpff**, Loan Fund manager.



The Verdicks (day 15)

27 Associate missionaries **Octavius & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Pray that their neighborhood will remain free from gang control. / **Char Tipton**, accounts manager.

28 **Mark (Celeste) Jenkins**, Placentia, CA. Pray that the Lord would bless the ministry of Resurrection Presbyterian Church. / Affiliated missionaries **Mark & Laura Ambrose**, Cambodia. Pray for wisdom in discipling the staff and girls with whom they work.

29 **Eli (Esmé) Hirtzel**, Waipahu, HI. Pray that the Lord would provide Redeemer Presbyterian Church with a facility for worship and fellowship. / Pray for the **English for Kids Bible Camp** taking place this week in Saint-Georges, Quebec, Canada.

30 Affiliated missionaries **Craig & Ree Coulbourne**, Japan. Pray for the gospel to go out with power. / **Ayrian Yasar**, editorial assistant for *New Horizons* and *Ordained Servant*.



Members of the presbytery and friends at Devin Gaye's ordination and installation (center)

NEWS

GAYE ORDAINED AND INSTALLED AT HENRICO, VIRGINIA

Devin Gaye was ordained and installed as organizing pastor of West Creek Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Henrico, Virginia, on April 27. The service was held at Knox Reformed Presbyterian Church in Mechanicsville, Virginia.

UPDATE

MINISTERS

- On March 1, **Elijah J. Hirtzel** was ordained and installed as an evangelist at Branch of Hope OPC in Torrance, CA, to serve as church-planting pastor in Oahu, HI.
- On March 7, **Steven K. Walton**, previously a PCA minister, was installed as pastor of Westminster OPC in Westminster, CA.
- On April 25, **Devin C. Gaye** was ordained and installed as organizing pastor of West Creek Presbyterian Church in Henrico, VA.

MILESTONES

- OP minister **Laurence (Larry) C. Sibley Jr.** died April 10. He served on the staff and faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary.

LETTERS

Editor:

Regarding "Bringing Singles into Church Fellowship" by Mary Van Weelden (March), is it proper to have a woman instructing churches in how they ought to minister to their members in

a denominational publication? The government of the church has been committed to biblically qualified men (ministers and elders). While much of the article is anecdotal and based on interviews, there are statements that seem to rise to the level of recommendation and instruction by the author.

Second, it is a confessional position of the OPC to be unapologetically pro-marriage. One anecdote in the article included a complaint that church events for singles overly emphasize singles meeting potential marriage candidates. A duty under the seventh commandment, articulated in WLC 138, is "marriage by those that have not the gift of continency." Our churches and the ministries and functions thereof ought to encourage all persons in all stations of life to pursue their duties under God's moral law, and this is no exception—singles who lack the gift of continency ought to be encouraged to marry, and the church can and should aid in this.

Andrew Smyth
Hamill, SD

REVIEWS

Texts that Transform: Church and Ministry, by Terry L. Johnson. **Banner of Truth**, 2024. Paperback, 220 pages, \$13.00. Reviewed by OP pastor **David J. Koenig**.

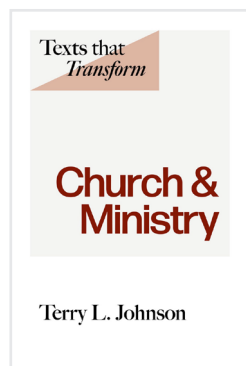
Terry Johnson's *Texts that Transform* series seeks to connect Scripture with the Christian life in single-volume introductions to the various aspects of life in



A recent family ice-skating outing for Christ the King OPC in Naples, Florida, in early May brought out three families from Haiti, two from Kenya, and one from Ghana, plus local high school students—all attendees of Christ the King. The outing was organized by Associate Pastor Jueon Kim (far right).

Christ. Each chapter aims to take a reading and apply it to the topic under discussion. These volumes are meant for a popular audience and are not difficult to read. They come in the small Banner paperback format familiar to readers of the ever-growing “Puritan Paperbacks” series. In *Church and Ministry*, Johnson provides a good introduction to the basics of Reformed ecclesiology and worship. This would be an especially useful book to put in the hands of someone who is not familiar with, or is even resistant to, the idea of Reformed worship. This seems to be Johnson’s target audience, so be warned that if you are familiar with and convinced by the basic tenets of Reformed worship, you will likely not find much new material here.

The book consists of eleven chapters. The first two deal with the doctrine of the church and the church’s mission. These chapters provide a good scriptural introduction to what the church is and what it should be about. Chapters 3 and 4 consist of a two-part look at the church’s public ministry: the first dealing with reading and preaching, the second with praying, singing, and partaking. I found these chapters to be the strength of the book. Johnson was very clear about linking song, prayer, and sacrament to the ministry of the Word, which I have found to be a neglected idea in many similar books. Following this are chapters on baptism and the Lord’s Supper. I especially appreciated how Johnson is explicit about the covenantal background of baptism in the inevitable discussion of infant baptism. The chapter dealing with the Lord’s Supper is the longest in the book, and Johnson does an effective job unpacking the practical riches of the Reformed doctrine. Initially I thought the chapter was a little long for a basic introduction, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that it was something that the purpose of the book required.



The next two chapters deal with vocation and the minister. The chapter on vocation seems out of place, and I do not believe that the point he was trying to make (serving Christ does not require full-time Christian ministry) requires a full chapter in a book on the church and ministry. The chapter on the ministry covers internal and external call as well as requirements for ministers, a fine overview.

The book concludes with three chapters on the Christian Sabbath. Johnson structures these three chapters around Mark 2:28–3:5. He begins with an introduction to the Sabbath, continues with a consideration of the Sabbath as it is made for man, then concludes by looking at Christ as the Lord of the Sabbath. Johnson does a good job of explaining a Reformed view of the Christian Sabbath and the fourth commandment. These chapters were helpful in delineating man’s need for rest and the goal of the Sabbath.

***Church Membership*, by Jonathan Landry Cruse. P&R, 2024. Hardcover, 136 pages, \$15.99. Reviewed by OP minister G. Mark Sumpter.**

I understand the series Blessings of the Faith forecasts multiple volumes—this book is the sixth one. With noticeable frequency, the author, OPC minister Jonathan Landry Cruse, acknowledges the crazy twists and turns and ups and downs of one’s journey along the path of involvement in the local church. He knows that his readers have varied backgrounds and experiences. But Cruse aims to have us take our eyes off the path of our personal and private journey and look up to see the big picture: “Membership in a Christian church is not about the relation-

ships we forge with others or the benefits we may accrue from belonging to such a society. *Church membership is fundamentally about how we relate to God and how he relates to us.*”

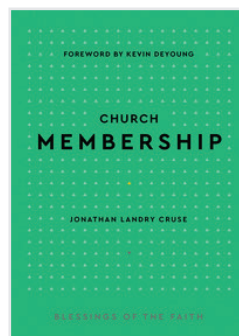
And to the fundamentals Cruse turns. What is the church? What does the Westminster Confession of Faith mean by the invisible and visible church? What about the children of believers—how do they fit in? How do some of the word pictures—metaphors—in the New Testament that describe the relationship between God and his people enhance our understanding of the church and church membership (for example, the church as a bride)? In answering these questions, Cruse reminds us that sound, faithful theology is the basis for thinking about church membership.

Cruse next builds the case for the necessity and the benefits of church membership. This presentation is well written, easy to follow, Scripture-based, full of sound application, and helpfully illustrated with stories. Cruse then focuses on responsibilities of church membership. He has memorable tags: *show up* (regular

worship, participate in service), *lean in* (use your gifts), *stand down* (put on humility, walk in submission), and *reach out* (be a faithful witness). Anchoring these responsibilities in the gospel, Cruse emphasizes the life and ministry of Jesus Christ: “‘He came not to be served, but to serve’ (Mark

10:45), humbling himself all the way to death on the cross (Phil. 2:8).”

The last section of the book, written in question-and-answer format, takes up twenty-six practical matters for church officers and members. In some cases, Cruse offers help to those facing specific circumstances. Here is one example: *I feel like the Holy Spirit is leading me to take a break from the church in order to heal from past hurts. Is that okay?* And another: *I have a close friend who claims they are a Christian*



but has no interest in joining or even attending church. What can I do?

Everyone will benefit from this book. I can readily see small groups in churches breaking down the sections of the chapters and using the discussion questions provided as a guide for learning.

***In the Power of the Spirit: Sermons on Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, by John Calvin, translated by Robert White. Banner of Truth, 2024. Hardcover, 320 pages. Reviewed by OP pastor Michael L. Babcock.**

This book contains eighteen sermons by John Calvin from the Synoptic Gospels. In fact, these were the last sermons the Reformer preached from the New Testament and reflect a matured pastoral ministry. There is much to commend in this volume. First, Robert White's translation from the French is to be praised. The modern English flows very well, making reading both easy and enjoyable. One could easily forget that these were preached over 460 years ago.

John Calvin is certainly well-known as a theologian, biblical commentator, and apologist. His academic works are invaluable in teaching and defending the historic Christian faith, but it is in his sermons where his pastoral skills are plainly and amply manifested. For that reason alone this book should be a part of everyone's library. Above all else, Calvin wanted to be thought of as a pastor bringing God's Word to God's people in the local church. On

every page of this volume, his ardor for the gospel shines forth. Moreover, you will not miss his love and concern for his congregation as he labored to bring Christ to them.

The devotional reading of this book will edify everyone. However, preachers in training will undoubtedly learn much from this collection. Of course, Calvin's voice modulations or his gestures aren't available to us, but these sermons show what good preaching looks like. Here is a good balance of biblical exposition, application, and warnings. He introduces the historical situations, explains how Christ is the center of the passage or event, relates the passage to the whole of Scripture, and then he aptly applies it all to the listeners' own situation and historical context. Calvin is a master wordsmith, using idioms, strong words, and illustrations that don't promote the preacher so much as to create an intellectual and emotional connection to the subject matter. Preaching is to be bold and sometimes like a needle prick, and Calvin demonstrated that several times in these sermons.

It should be remembered that Calvin always preached extemporaneously. Nevertheless, one definitely senses the careful study that went into his preaching. Moreover, he clearly meditated on the passage so that it deeply affected him before they were delivered. Perhaps he was

not as redemptive-historical as we might like, but his plain and straightforward dealing of the text made the gospel both clear and understandable. On page 166 Calvin states, "Jesus Christ has made it clear that he is the church's supreme

teacher; on him the law and prophets all depended, and he is the goal to which all things tend." That summarizes Calvin's ambition in preaching these sermons, and I think he hits the mark.

Some might criticize the frequent assaults on the papacy and Roman rites. But Rome's threat to historic Christianity prompted those outbreaks. Calvin's rationale for them are found in his comment

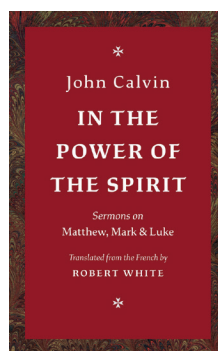
on 1 Thessalonians 5:20: "Let us understand prophesying to mean the interpretation of Scripture applied to the present need." The OPC's Directory for Worship II.A.3.b reminds preachers that they are "God-appointed watchmen on Zion's walls," whose task is also "to warn the congregation of prevalent soul-destroying teaching by

enemies of the gospel." Calvin took his role seriously.

I disagreed with an exegetical point made in a few sermons where Calvin taught that John's baptism was the same as Christian baptism. Differences aside, I found his application useful. Indeed, preachers may miss a point, but if Christ is at the center of the sermon, and if true preaching communicates God's grace, we will always encounter Christ despite the preacher's weakness. With that, this book is a gem and will not disappoint to reveal Christ's glory.

***Sin and Temptation*, volume 15 of *The Complete Works of John Owen*, edited by Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor. Crossway, 2024. Hardcover, 640 pages, \$44.99. Reviewed by OP minister and professor Ryan M. McGraw.**

John Owen's writings on sin and temptation, especially his little book on *The Mortification of Sin*, often mark the first (sometimes only) items on people's "must read" Owen books. This fact is good and unfortunate in different respects. Good because it displays an instinct in believers

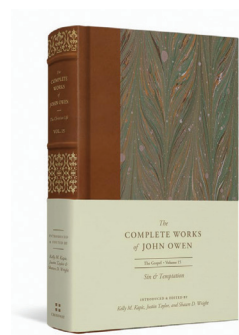


POSITION AVAILABLE

Pastor: Covenant OPC in San Jose, California, seeks a full-time pastor skilled in expository preaching and congregational care. We are a multicultural, intergenerational community valuing sincere worship, spiritual growth, and biblical fellowship. Located in the Silicon Valley, San Jose is a primarily unchurched mission field that offers opportunities to share the gospel with the world. Please contact Joe Hanna at joseph.l.hanna@gmail.com for additional information.

to take sin seriously, with a positive desire to grow in holiness. Unfortunate because Owen's writings on the Trinity, Christ, and the Spirit are among his best works. However, the Trinity, Christ, and the Spirit were never far from Owen's mind, and readers can miss them in the four books in this volume, not because Owen was imbalanced or unclear, but because readers often find only what they go looking for. Do we believe that the primary thing we need to overcome sin and temptation are lists of things to think about or do, or are we convinced, as Owen was, that God revealed in Christ and known by the Spirit is fundamental to Christian living? Following a brief assessment of Crossway's new *Complete Works of John Owen* and the contents of volume 15, I will suggest two things that can help readers benefit the most from these books.

Misunderstandings seem to abound about Crossway's John Owen project. As a volume editor, the first question I receive is whether this set is worth getting over the available Banner of Truth set of Owen. Sometimes people assume that, because advertisements say that it is easier to read, the new set must have been adapted to modern English. In reality, this project presents accurate original texts that often correct earlier editions, and that include fresh translations of Latin books and material never contained in previous versions



of Owen's *Works*. However, these books end up being *both* better scholarly texts *and* easier to read. The publisher is achieving this great feat by having editors translate all Latin, Greek, and Hebrew texts, by defining archaic terms in footnotes, by filling in Owen's often unstated scriptural references, by guiding readers through Owen's often perplexing outlines by interlacing clearly marked editor's outlines, by footnoting sources Owen cited, and by fleshing out contexts and circumstances surrounding the books via historical introductions. So, is the new set of Owen's *Works* worth investing in? Yes, both for scholars researching Owen and for lay people who need some help to benefit from his ideas.

Volume 15 includes four books addressing the problem of sin in the Christian life. Valuable in their own right, I give two suggestions to help readers benefit from them better.

First, look for the triune God. A Trinitarian Christology drove Owen's directions in these books about sin. Though our preoccupation with sin can become narcissistic and introverted, he promoted an extroverted faith, redirecting us persistently to God in Christ as the Spirit sanctifies us. *The Mortification of Sin* has chapters on union with Christ at key junctures (chapters 1, 7, and 14), *Temptation* is both filled with Christ and climaxes with faith in his promises (chapters 8 and

9), *Indwelling Sin* is grounded on the Spirit creating an invincible inclination towards Christ, and *The Dominion of Sin and Grace* emphasizes exercising faith in Christ daily (chapter 3), union with Christ (chapter 5), and the Spirit applying Christ's benefits continually (chapter 6). Owen builds habits in believers by showing us that looking for God himself through fighting indwelling sin is the best way to overcome indwelling sin.

Second, use Owen's key Scripture texts. Scripture governs the content and direction of each book. These works, respectively, flow from Romans 8:13, Matthew 26:41, Romans 7:21, and Romans 6:14. Owen's robust engagement with Romans 7 in *Indwelling Sin* builds on the standard historic interpretation that Paul there describes his experience as a believer rather than as an unbeliever. This exposition can both bolster confidence in the traditional reading of the text, which many question today, and open a path on which believers can walk when facing discouragements in light of their own sins. Memorizing these four key verses provides spiritual handholds in fighting sin and temptation, making Owen's other instructions more memorable and useful.

Owen hardly needs commendation. His books are devotionally Trinitarian, Christ-focused, Spirit-dependent, and concretely practical. Volume 15 of his *Works* will help you struggle for holiness against indwelling sin, but, more than that, it will foster personal transformation through seeing God in Christ more clearly.