

NEW HORIZONS

JANUARY 2026

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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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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WHAT EXACTLY DOES INFANT BAPTISM MEAN?

DAVID VANDRUNEN



The Reformed doctrine of infant baptism is a stumbling block for many evangelical Christians who are otherwise attracted to joining a Reformed church. But the Reformed face not only the doctrinal challenge of defending the biblical rationale for our practice but also a *communication* challenge. Many people from other backgrounds don't understand exactly what we mean by the language of *infant baptism*.

For the Reformed, “infant baptism” generally refers to the baptism of underage or minor children. Longtime members of Reformed churches are accustomed to seeing a husband and wife join the church and having several of their young children, of various ages, baptized. But in colloquial English the word “infant” refers to babies. Some Christians, understandably, assume that the Reformed baptize only babies and not other children. Several times in my ministry puzzled people have asked me about this: What do the Reformed think about children too old to be baptized but too young to make a profession of faith?

There's nothing wrong with Reformed Christians referring to “infant” baptism, terminology deeply rooted in our tradition. But we should be aware of the potential for misunderstanding and be prepared to explain why we baptize our older underage children as well as our babies, as occasion demands.

INFANTS AND CHILDREN

Most Reformed writings on baptism don't address this issue directly. Such works often use the term “infant baptism” and intersperse references to the baptism of “children” or “little children” in their discussions. But they usually don't explain this alteration in vocabulary. The Westminster Standards speak uniformly of “infants.” The Confession of Faith (28.4), Larger Catechism (Q. 166), and Shorter Catechism (Q. 95) teach that the “infants” of those who profess faith in Christ ought to be baptized, without explaining who is included in this category.

When addressing baptism, chapter 3 of the OPC's Directory for the Public Worship of God identifies only two categories, the “Baptism of Infants” and the “Baptism of Adults.” If “infants” only means babies, it would leave out underage children unable to profess their faith, which is required for adult baptism (III.A.2; III.B.2.a). When the Directory explains infant baptism in III.B.1, however, it refers many times to the “child,” “children,” or “young children” being baptized. This suggests that children of various ages might be baptized based on their parents' profession. This indeed is the practice of the OPC and other Reformed churches, but the Directory doesn't explain this directly.

THE MEANING OF “INFANT”

The terminology of *infant baptism* is ingrained in Reformed history. Since the Westminster Standards use only “infants” to describe those baptized because of their parents' profession of faith, English-speaking Reformed people naturally gravitate to this language despite the contemporary risk of misunderstanding. But this language would likely have been far less susceptible to misunderstanding to English speakers in the seventeenth century, when the Westminster Standards were written. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* reports, one definition of “infant” in use at this time was a “person under (legal) age; a minor. In common law, one who has not completed his or her twenty-first year.” I don't suggest that we should import every aspect of this definition into our doctrine of infant baptism, but it's worth noting that the authors of the Westminster Standards would *not* have assumed that “infants” refers only to babies. And in fact “under (legal) age” and “a minor” captures actual Reformed practice quite well.

It's interesting to compare English vocabulary to French. The French words *enfant* and *bébé* have obvious etymological relation to the English words *infant* and *baby*. But while *bébé* does mean “baby,” *enfant* doesn't mean “infant” but a child generally. The English “infant” formerly had a range of meaning closer to its French counterpart. Thus, when we read in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian*

Religion about “infant baptism” (as some English translations have it), it may be helpful to note that Calvin, when composing the *Institutes* in his native French, wrote of the baptism of *enfants*, which didn’t carry identical connotations as “infants” does in contemporary English.

THE BAPTISM OF CHILDREN IN SCRIPTURE

More important than clarifying terminology is asking whether Scripture teaches that believers’ underage children generally, and not only their babies, should be baptized when their parents join the church. This isn’t the occasion to offer a defense of Reformed paedobaptism itself. In this section, I simply wish to show that many of the texts and arguments Reformed Christians use to defend “infant baptism” imply that all their underage children should be baptized.

One of the central planks of the Reformed defense of paedobaptism is that God welcomes *households* and not simply individuals into the covenant community. That is, when parents are professing members of the church, their children are also members of the covenant community and thus rightly receive the sign of entry into the covenant. This was true in the Old Testament. When God established his covenant with Abraham, he instituted circumcision as the covenant sign (Gen. 17:9–14). Abraham had believed God’s promises (15:6) and thus received circumcision as a man of faith (see Rom. 4:10–11). But God also made his covenant with his offspring after him (Gen. 17:10), and thus Abraham was to circumcise all the males of his “house” (17:12–13, 23, 27). The coming of the new covenant didn’t alter the importance of households. When Zacchaeus believed in Jesus, Jesus proclaimed him a son of Abraham and said salvation had come to his “house” (Luke 19:9). And when people believed the apostles’ preaching, the apostles baptized not only them but their houses too (see Acts 16:14–15, 30–34; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16; cf. Acts 10:22; 11:12, 14).

A simple conclusion follows: Since underage children generally, and not babies alone, are members of their parents’ households, they properly receive the sign of the covenant. This is why Abraham not only circumcised Isaac when he was eight days old, according to God’s command (Gen. 17:12; 21:4), but also his son Ishmael, who was thirteen when God gave the sign of circumcision (17:25).

Reformed Christians appeal to other texts as well to support infant baptism. Among them are the accounts of Jesus welcoming little children as those to whom “the kingdom” belongs (Matt. 19:13–14; Mark 10:13–14; Luke 18:15–16) and Paul’s statement that the children of believers are “holy” (1 Cor. 7:14). These texts do not identify only babies as members of Christ’s kingdom and as holy before

the Lord. These four texts, in fact, use three different words in the original Greek to describe the children. Luke uses the term *brephe*, which refers to very young children in the New Testament. Matthew and Mark use *paidia*, which can refer to a newborn (e.g., Matt. 2:8; John 16:21) but also to older children (e.g., Mark 9:24; 1 John 2:13). First Corinthians 7 uses *tekna*. The New Testament often uses this term in a metaphorical way—for example, “children of the promise” (Rom. 9:8) or “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3)—but when used of actual children it can refer to those old enough for the apostles to address them in their letters (e.g., Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20; 1 John 2:12). These observations suggest a simple point: The New Testament doesn’t use any technical term communicating that babies alone are members of the covenant community. Its use of a variety of terms with somewhat different connotations indicates that underage children generally enjoy this privilege.

ADULT CHILDREN?

Readers might wonder, however, whether these considerations prove too much. Reformed churches don’t baptize adult children based on their parents’ profession (with exceptions for the mentally handicapped), yet sometimes adult children live in their parents’ home. If we baptize younger children based on the household principle, why not adult children?

On occasion, Scripture uses “house” in an extended sense to refer to a multi-generational family (such as the “house of Jacob” in Gen. 46:27) or to a class of people (such as the “house of Aaron” in Ps. 118:3). But with respect to the household principle discussed above, Scripture’s expectation is that when children become adults they establish their own houses. Reformed churches, therefore, don’t baptize believers’ children who have reached an age of accountability and are able to form houses of their own.

The New Testament doesn’t provide a precise age at which children reach this point, and thus it’s unwarranted for Reformed churches to be dogmatic about this. In most American states and in many other countries, eighteen is the age of majority. This is close to the age of twenty that God reckoned as the age of accountability when dealing with the Israelites in the wilderness (see Num. 14:29). These facts provide guidance for the church’s elders, but they will have to make wise judgments for particular cases. **NH**

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PAEDO-COMMUNION AND PROPER SACRAMENTAL DISTINCTION

ALAN D. STRANGE



Paedocommunion advocates believe that infant baptism brings a child of an adult church member into the church in every respect, not only solemnly admitting the baby to the visible church (as all Reformed and Presbyterians believe about infant baptism), but, by virtue of his baptism, admitting him also to the Lord's Supper. According to the partisans of paedocommunion, no sessional examination for a credible profession of faith is necessary to admit a baptized child to the Table. His baptism gives him everything he needs, and he does not need to be further examined for personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ before having a right to the sign and seal of Holy Communion. For the paedocommunion advocate, the requirement of a credible profession of faith to come to the Table is repugnant, equivalent to starving our children by a failure and refusal to give them what is rightfully theirs, unduly withholding from those who ought to receive the body and blood of the Lord in a spiritual communion with our Savior.¹

Such an insistence, however, that baptism alone qualifies the infant to receive communion, without the need for a profession of faith, fails to reckon with what the sacraments mean in distinction from each other: baptism is the sacrament symbolizing and sealing initiation/regeneration, and the Lord's Supper, continuation/sanctification. We will see how this proper sacramental distinction is missed by paedocommunion advocates. In this essay, my remarks will be largely restricted to our church's interpretation of God's Word about these matters as they occur in our doctrinal standards (and, to a lesser degree, in our church order), reflecting the dogma of the Presbyterian Church. Others treat biblical and theological arguments here.²

WHEREIN DO THE SACRAMENTS DIFFER?

The Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) 176 notes that the sacraments agree in that God acts in both, that they are seals of the covenant, and that none but a minister is to dispense them, until the return of Christ. The question that follows and wraps up the WLC's entire discussion of the Supper and the sacraments is one that proves fatal to those who assert and promote paedocommunion:

Q. 177. Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper differ?

A. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper differ, in that baptism is to be administered but once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ, and that even to infants; whereas the Lord's supper is to be administered often, in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him, and that only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves.

The last sentence here clearly teaches the requirement for "years and ability to examine themselves" for those who come to the Table, a position that flatly refutes paedocommunion. To get at this properly, we need to go behind WLC 177 to unpack what baptism and the Lord's Supper each mean and who is qualified to partake thereof. Note that WLC 177 begins by teaching that the sacrament of baptism is to be administered but once and serves as a sign and seal of our regeneration and our ingrafting (entering faith-union with Christ), and that even to infants. This stands in contrast to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which is to be administered "often," as ongoing nourishment in the Christian life.

Let's focus first on baptism: It does not cause regeneration and the faith that follows, but it speaks of the need for

both in the elect; whenever God is pleased to renew them and grant faith and repentance to them, what we call conversion, there one sees the proper fruition of that which was signed and sealed in their baptism. Baptism, in other words, is the sacrament of initiation into the Christian faith, demonstrating what must happen for one truly to be a Christian (the washing in the water symbolizing that we must be washed in Christ's blood) and mysteriously connected to the same for all those who are elect.

WLC 165 begins the baptism discussion and notes that the baptized are in their baptism "solemnly admitted into the visible church." This is important in connection with the next question (166) about the proper subjects of baptism. Certainly, those who profess faith and have never been baptized are to be baptized, as are "infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized."

We may say, then, that when that which is signified and sealed in baptism is at some point made evident in the life of a child who has been baptized, the child appropriately prepares to profess his faith in Christ. In other words, baptism points to that entrance into the Christian life in which we are, as to our regeneration, particularly passive (and thus especially appropriate for helpless infants to have it administered to them). The figure of speech that our Lord chose here, the new birth (John 3), is quite evocative. We must be born again, Christ tells Nicodemus, surely selecting a metaphor here that is quite purposeful. We are utterly passive in our natural birth—the act of being born is in every language what the grammarians call a "forced passive." One never speaks of the act of one's being born in anything but the passive voice. So too with the second, spiritual birth that we experience in regeneration. We are as passive in the new birth, whatever our age, as we were in our first, biological, birth. This is one reason that infant baptism presents such an appropriate picture of the new birth: We are all as helpless in the new birth as infants were in their first birth.

Not so, however, in all that follows regeneration, leading to a profession of faith for those baptized as infants. We baptize infants of church members without requiring anything from them but that they show up (and even there, they must be brought to the font by another). When covenant youth are duly prepared and wish to profess their faith in Christ, however, we require something more than what was passively signed and sealed in their baptisms. We require that those who have had placed upon them the sign and seal of the covenant whereby they are distinguished from the world in the sacrament of baptism,

testify to their taking up in their lives that which was earlier placed upon them in baptism. Those whom Christ earlier owned must now come and own him in turn to be qualified to partake of the sacrament of Holy Communion.

"WORTHILY COMMUNICATE"

Notice how fully the WLC addresses this, that is, what it expects of those who are properly to be admitted and regularly to partake of the Table of our Lord. It's certainly not infants in arms who can come to the Table, but those who can testify that they've truly received God's grace and are committed to living a Christian life. WLC 168 defines for us the nature of the Lord's Supper, and the questions and answers that follow (169–175) all assume that those coming to the Table can examine themselves and will come or refrain accordingly. WLC 169 says that Christ has appointed ministers of his Word (not ruling elders or dads or others) to administer the sacraments, and celebrants are "to take and eat the bread, and to drink the wine, in thankful remembrance that the body of Christ was broken and given, and his blood shed, for them." Infants cannot engage in these actions, and it takes some ability to remember and perceive that the elements symbolize Christ's sacrifice for them.

WLC 170 makes it clear that those who "worthily communicate" in the Lord's Supper need to understand that they do not feed on Christ "corporally or carnally" but "truly and really," and do so "in a spiritual manner." Again, this is not something that an infant or even a young child can properly do. Those who come to the Table, further, are to "prepare themselves before they come unto it" (WLC 171). The description of the spiritual preparation that follows is extensive and would not apply to those whose development precluded such preparation. WLC 172 encourages those who doubt their being in Christ, or of not being prepared, to come anyway, as such a one may have true interest in Christ, though lacking assurance. If the one so coming truly desires to be found in Christ, lamenting his unbelief and otherwise mourning over his sin, he should come to the Supper to receive the strength and grace it offers.

WLC 173 describes those living in a way who, though professors of religion, should not come to the Table because they are ignorant or scandalous. Clearly, this refers to a youth upward, not an infant. The age, of course, is left to the discretion of sessions, but in no case should it be infants or children unable to reason in any of the ways that the WLC sets forth in these questions. WLC 174 describes what is required of those who receive the Supper at the time of its administration. They must, among other

things, wait upon God in it, “with all holy reverence and attention.” They must “diligently observe the sacramental elements and actions, heedfully discern the Lord’s body, and affectionately meditate on his death and sufferings,” and be able to perform all the actions that follow, to which I commend readers. One may demur in all this that adults miserably fail in all this regularly. Indeed. But they have, by God’s empowerment, the ability to do these things, though often done poorly and inconsistently. The infant and young child does not have the capacity for such and does not, according to the paedocommunion promoter, even need to have any such ability.

Finally, WLC 175 addresses what the duty of Christians is after they receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Here it is in full, as it makes doubly clear that infants cannot perform these actions or possess these sentiments:

Q. 175. What is the duty of Christians, after they have received the sacrament of the Lord’s supper?

A. The duty of Christians, after they have received the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, is seriously to consider how they have behaved themselves therein, and with what success; if they find quickening and comfort, to bless God for it, beg the continuance of it, watch against relapses, fulfill their vows, and encourage themselves to a frequent attendance on that ordinance: but if they find no present benefit, more exactly to review their preparation to, and carriage at, the sacrament; in both which, if they can approve themselves to God and their own consciences, they are to wait for the fruit of it in due time: but, if they see they have failed in either, they are to be humbled, and to attend upon it afterwards with more care and diligence.

This inarguably applies only to those with such abilities, whether they make any proper use of such abilities and attend to these duties. To bring those to the Table who are incapable of using their natural and spiritual gifts to engage in this holy work of preparation, of due attendance thereon, and of reflection afterwards, is to lay intolerable burdens on families and churches that none of them can bear. Advocates of paedocommunion do not differ in a minor way from our doctrinal standards but in the whole understanding that we have of the Supper of our Lord as the sacrament of further strengthening and encouraging those who have already manifested that they have a credible profession of faith and who seek to come to the Table that they may be thereby further strengthened.

HONORING WORD AND SACRAMENT MINISTRY

Those who advocate paedocommunion come from a variety of perspectives, some of them being champions of

patriarchy. Patriarchy itself differs in expression, some of it arising from various home-church movements that have a low view of the church, its authority, and its proper offices, especially the ministerial office. In these movements, the dad is also the minister of the family and decides who gets communion and who doesn’t. He can give it to children as small as he chooses (and perhaps withholds it from a teenage child, otherwise qualified to take it, with whom he remains angry). Some of these movements are in churches that permit the dad to decide who in the family can partake on any given Sunday when the sacrament of communion is being distributed by the elders.

This is all inimical not only to our church order (both the Form of Government and the Directory for Public Worship) but also to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms that make it clear that both sacraments are ordinances that only a minister of the Word and Sacrament can administer. Note in all the questions cited from the WLC that it is a minister of Word and Sacrament, not even a ruling elder, who gives the bread and the wine to the people of God, showing the unbreakable link between the Word preached and the visible Word of the sacraments.³

What we need to return to is a proper understanding of Word and Sacrament ministry, with the sign of initiation given to our children as infants, who then, we pray, will own the covenant for themselves as they profess their faith to the session that regards such as credible and thus qualifying them to join the Lord’s people at the Table of the Lord. This is what we need in our churches, not the nominalism that paedocommunion engenders and the disorder that accompanies the rejection of the place of ministerial office, in conjunction with the office of ruling elder, in the church. Rightly observing the means of grace appointed by God remains the path of blessing as we go forward in this challenging time before the consummation that we will enjoy only when Christ returns. **NH**

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Notes:

1. This is the assumption everywhere stated in volumes like those by Tim Gallant, *Feed My Lambs: Why the Lord’s Table Should be Restored to Covenant Children* (Pactum Reformanda Pub., 2002), and Gregg Strawbridge, ed., *The Case for Covenant Communion* (Athanasius Press, 2006).
2. See Cornelis P. Venema, *Children at the Lord’s Table? Assessing the Case for Paedocommunion* (RHB, 2009), and Stuart R. Jones, “The Lord’s Supper and Covenant Children,” https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=103.
3. See Mark. R. Brown, ed. *Order in the Offices, Second Edition* (Reformed Forum, 2024), esp. my essay, 245–256, as well as my *Commentary on the Book of Church Order* (CCE, 2025), at the relevant places in which I discuss the office of Minister of Word and Sacrament.

WHY DO WE PRESBYTERIANS BAPTIZE INFANTS?

GREGORY E. REYNOLDS



Thoughtful Christians often have questions about the baptism of infants and young children prior to their profession of faith. What the Bible teaches about this important subject is beautifully summarized in Westminster Larger Catechism:

To whom is baptism to be administered? . . . Infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized. (Q. 166)

THE BIBLICAL BAPTISM OF INFANTS

Some insist that because there is no command to baptize infants and young children in the New Testament, they must first believe. However, the application of the sacrament of covenant initiation (circumcision in the Old Testament; baptism in the New) to the children of believers is commanded explicitly to Abraham:

I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. . . . Every male among you shall be circumcised. (Gen. 17:7, 10)

This command is relevant to the New Testament believer because the covenant of grace unites the old and new covenants. Paul refers frequently to the covenant with Abraham as prefiguring the promise fulfilled in Christ. In Galatians Paul explicitly connects the Abrahamic covenant of promise to the new covenant of faith: “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. . . . And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:7, 29).

God’s covenant blessing was promised to Abraham and to his “offspring” for an “everlasting covenant” to “a multitude of nations” (Gen. 17:1–14). This promise, restated by the prophet Joel, is referred to by Peter as the reason God poured out the Spirit of the risen Lord on his people at Pentecost: “for the promise is for you and for your children” (Acts 2:39). For over two millennia the expectation of God’s people for Messianic blessing on the nations was rooted in the pattern of God’s dealing with families, including the children of believers in his promise of salvation.

At the historical moment of fulfillment at Pentecost a radical change in God’s way of dealing with the children of his people would be required to exclude children from the sacramental blessings of the visible church. It is inconceivable that, were such a change in view, the New Testament would not deal explicitly with the subject. The silence of the New Testament is an argument for the clear commandment in the Old Testament Scriptures to include the children of believers in the visible community of God’s people. When Peter called “Repent and be baptized every one of you” (Acts 2:38) to over three thousand people at Pentecost, it is inconceivable that there were no infants and young children present in a covenant community in which having many children was considered a great blessing.

The newness of the new covenant church is not undermined by appreciating the essential unity of God’s purposes (Eph. 2:11–22; Gal. 3:7, 29; Rom. 11). There is continuity in having a sign and seal of inclusion in the covenant but also change from a bloody sign to a non-bloody sign.

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Col. 2:11–12)

The accomplishment of the crucified and risen Christ is central to the newness of the new covenant. Old covenant bloody rites are replaced with two sacraments celebrating Christ's accomplishment without further shedding of blood (Heb. 9:12; 10:10). But the need for visible sacramental signs and seals remains. A sign is a visible picture of a spiritual reality. The water of baptism signifies cleansing from sin through the sacrifice of Christ. A seal is the guarantee of a promise. Baptism is an assurance of God's promise to save sinners by the sacrifice of Christ.

The distinction between the visible and invisible aspects of the church must necessarily remain until sin is no longer present in the church. The membership of the new covenant community is made up of those who profess faith in Christ, not those who are regenerate—something only God can know.

Faith is essential to new covenant salvation. Peter is clearly addressing adults when he commands, "Repent and be baptized." But because only adults can repent and believe, does this necessarily mean that only adults may be baptized? Paul in Romans 4 stresses the centrality of faith in connection with the sacrament of circumcision. Abraham first believed and only then was he circumcised. But then God commanded Abraham to circumcise all his children without their exercise of faith. What God commanded Abraham is as proper in the new covenant as it was in the old. We would expect, then, to see evidence of the inclusion of baptized infants or young children in the New Testament church, remembering that such evidence will not be by way of explicit command, but rather by way of practices that assume the command already given in the old covenant economy.

CHILDREN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

What is God's attitude toward the children of believers? In Luke 18:15–17, Jesus blesses the covenant children. It was not mere sentiment that moved these mothers to desire the blessings of the Messiah upon their children. In verse 15, the Greek word *brephos* means "infant." Jesus reminds the offended disciples that "to such belongs the kingdom of God." Jesus is not saying that their childlike trust should be imitated. (That this application is secondary is proved by its absence in Matthew's account.) He simply asserts that they are part of God's kingdom and that the disciples' offense is not God's way of viewing these helpless babies.

There is no better picture of God's sovereign grace than the blessing of Christ on helpless infants, or the sprinkling of the water of baptism on an infant in the arms of a minister of the gospel. Is there anyone more helpless than a sinner dead in sin?

Paul addresses the children of believers as part of the visible church in Colossians 3:20 and Ephesians 6:1–3. In 1 Corinthians 7:14 Paul encourages the believing mothers in mixed marriages that their children are "holy." This does not mean that they are morally pure, but that they are "set apart" by God as members of the visible church.

The five household baptisms recorded in the New Testament are strong presumptive evidence for the baptism of infants. In a culture where birth control did not exist, and extended families were in view, it is stretching credulity to believe that there were no infants present in the households of Cornelius (Acts 10:47–48; 11:14); Lydia (Acts 16:14–15); the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33–34); Crispus (Acts 18:8); and Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16). Here the Lord was blessing "all the *families* of the earth" as he had promised Abraham. The cultural assumption of radical individualism often prevents us from thinking in terms of families.

Early church history confirms the apostolic practice of infant baptism. As early as 180 AD, Origen matter-of-factly reported that he was baptized as an infant. In the fourth century Augustine asserted that infant baptism was "always retained" as the practice of the apostolic church and that no church council had instituted the practice.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS

Infant baptism is a beautiful blessing meant to encourage parents and children alike. Far from mitigating parental responsibility, infant baptism mandates it. Parental baptismal vows are taken because God uses the means of parental nurture and training, along with the means of grace in the church, to bring his children to repentance and faith. God's Word commands parents to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Treating them as outsiders to God's grace, by denying them baptism, undermines that nurture. Parents teach their children to pray "Our Father . . ." Thus, every believing parent is bound by God's covenant commandment to have their children baptized. This is God's way of dedicating covenant children to the Lord.

Essential to parental nurture is the exhibition of grace in parents' lives, not leaving the impression that being a Christian simply means obeying God's commands. Parents should correct their children when they sin and pray with them to trust the forgiveness that is theirs in Jesus. Praying for and with them is a powerful means of moving them to follow their Savior. **NH**

The author is pastor emeritus of Amoskeag Presbyterian in Manchester, New Hampshire.

COGNITIVE CHALLENGES AND COMMUNION



STEPHEN J. TRACEY

A few years ago, I stumbled across an online forum discussing the following question: “Friends of mine have a preteen child who has always been nonverbal and has the cognition of about a two-year-old. Should communion be offered to people with that type of disability?”

If the church has done well nurturing its covenant youth, this preteen’s abilities and disabilities are well known to the whole congregation, including the ruling elders. We shall not treat her as a two-year-old, because she is not. She is now reaching the age when her peers will probably take a communicant’s class, and people are rightly wondering if she may take communion. The answer on the online forum was a resounding no. This refusal is another milestone in her life at which her parents will grieve, and she may be further isolated from the body of Christ.

People with cognitive challenges may be people with low IQ or developmental disabilities, Alzheimer’s disease or other forms of dementia, or people on the Autism Spectrum (not all, because it is a spectrum), or any number of other things. Each case is different. In this case, let us assume the preteen in question was baptized as an infant and so is a member of the church—a non-communicant member, but still a member of the body of Christ.

While some Presbyterians desire to practice some form of paedocommunion, the OPC does not favor this practice (“Report of the Committee on Paedocommunion,”

Fifty-Fourth [1987] General Assembly). So, how shall we recognize the spiritual life of someone not able to communicate well?

SERIOUS WARNINGS

Scripture and our confessional standards contain serious warnings about partaking of the Lord’s Supper:

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Cor. 11:27–29)

Wherefore, all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so are they unworthy of the Lord’s table; and cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto. (Westminster Confession of Faith 29.8)

May any who profess the faith, and desire to come to the Lord’s supper, be kept from it? Such as are found to be ignorant or scandalous, notwithstanding their profession of the faith, and desire to come to the Lord’s supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament, by the power which Christ hath left in his church, until they receive instruction, and manifest their reformation. (Larger Catechism Q. 173)

These words are strong. On the surface, they seem forbidding and unaccommodating. It is as if the Westminster divines answer our question about cognitive challenges and communion with a loud and resounding *no!* Nevertheless, what did the Westminster Assembly mean by “ignorant”?

Given that the English Parliament had to receive the assembly’s documents, the House of Commons requested the assembled theologians be more specific in defining “ignorance” (and “scandal”) that would keep one from participating in the sacrament. The Assembly reluctantly answered but asserted the discretion of local elders.

THE WISDOM OF THE ELDERSHIP

Commenting on this discussion, Chad Van Dixhoorn notes, “The assembly . . . held that a capable eldership should be able to determine someone’s fitness without a published doctrinal standard” (*Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly*, vol. 5, 188). Here are their own words:

Yet still we desire it may be remembered, that much must be necessarily left (as we humbly conceive) to the wisdom of the Eldership, who, as they are to use all diligence with meekness to instruct the people in the knowledge of these

principles, before they exact an account of them, so are they to by all manner of ways to find out, whether they do understand these necessary things or not: Because we find by experience, on the one hand, that some can give answeres and speake words expressing all the above mentioned particulars, yet have no more understanding of the things themselves then very children, who are as well able to repeat the words; And, on the other hand, that some do understand more in these particulars then they are able readily to set words to expresse. (Ibid., 189)

In some circumstances ignorance is not a vice or a blamable defect. In the case of children, we expect that they will grow in their knowledge, hence we wait. People are not all gifted in the same ways. Some simply do not have a natural aptitude to know, and it is not in their power to overcome that nescience by study. This differing ability is not the same thing as ignorance that willfully chooses not to learn.

Faithful elders will know their sheep. This pastoral backbone runs through the Westminster Assembly's work. Elders will know, when someone is able to give all the answers to a catechism, whether they do also comprehend the meaning of these words. Someone on the Autism Spectrum around the age of two years old may be able to announce the whole periodic table, with names and numbers, abbreviations, without any comprehension of the meaning of those words—I heard a two-year-old do it often. The catechism may be recited poll-parrot, without any logic (understanding) or rhetoric (wisdom). The simple reciting of knowledge is no proof of knowing.

On the other hand, some who struggle to repeat catechism answers may well be spiritually alive. They may often be lost in wonder, love, and praise of our great and glorious and good God. Their cheerful desire to be present, to sing, to greet, to serve, speaks louder than the answering of doctrinal queries. Think of John the Baptist leaping in his mother's womb! (See Luke 1:41.)

This wisdom is reflected in our own Book of Church Order. In interviewing someone for membership (and thus admission to the Lord's Supper), the session is "to assure itself so far as possible that [the candidate] possesses the knowledge requisite for active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, relies for salvation on the work of Christ, is trusting Christ for salvation, and is determined by the grace of God to lead a Christian life" (BD II.B.2.d). The phrase "so far as possible" applies both to the session and the candidate. There is clear room for discretion.

A credible profession of faith may be a very simple statement of faith in Jesus. As Alan Strange says, people "are not required to subscribe to the doctrinal standards or approve of OPC polity. They are called upon, in order to be

a member of the OPC, to give a credible (believable) profession of faith (one not manifestly contradicted by their lives)" (*What Is the OPC?*, 12).

NOT CAPABLE OF BEING OUTWARDLY CALLED

The Westminster Confession of Faith recognizes that there will be people present in a congregation who are not capable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word: "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who works when, and where, and how he pleases: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word" (WCF 10.3).

It is a deeply comforting pastoral statement on the heartbreakingly painful death of an infant. It is also a recognition that some are cognitively challenged. Here is no labeling, or name-calling, but rather a simple acknowledgment: Some people cannot respond to the ordinary way that God calls sinners to himself. They may be elect, regenerated, and saved by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is free to work, when, where, and how he pleases. We are more than our brains, and not all people are gifted with rationality in the same degree.

Perhaps the biblical principle that helps us most is Luke 12:48, "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more." The typical question is how much knowledge is necessary for active faith. Since the gift of rationality is not given to all, perhaps the question should be—What do you do with the gifts given you? We are looking for active faith, that is, a profession of faith "not manifestly contradicted by their lives."

We know that a sacrament has two parts: "an outward and sensible sign, used according to Christ's own appointment; the other an inward and spiritual grace thereby signified" (LC 163). For those who are not capable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word, the sensible, sensory, gifts of the sacrament are also designed for their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. This means of grace may be all the spiritual nourishment they receive since they cannot respond to the Word as others.

We should not offer communion simply because someone is cognitively challenged. Neither should we withhold the elements simply because someone is cognitively challenged. The Westminster divines had a good rule of thumb: "Some do understand more in these particulars than they are able readily to set words to expresse." **NH**

The author is a pastor of Lakeview OPC in Rockport, Maine. A fuller treatment of this subject will appear in Ordained Servant.

THE ANSWERED PRAYERS OF A YOUNG COUPLE IN MALDONADO

STEPHEN S. PAYSON

In April 2023, a young couple in their mid-twenties visited the OPC's mission church in Montevideo, Uruguay—*Iglesia Presbiteriana Salvos por Gracia* [Salvation by Grace Presbyterian Church]. Their names were Andrés and Andrea Muela, and they had great hope of finding a faithful Reformed church. For some time, the Muelas had been praying about moving to the Dominican Republic to join a well known Reformed Baptist church. However, while searching a directory of Reformed churches in Latin America, the Muelas came across *Salvos por Gracia*. Even though the church was two hours away from their home in San Carlos in the province of Maldonado, Uruguay, Andrés and Andrea were determined to visit.

They were not disappointed. The couple quickly recognized that the Christ-centered preaching, ordered worship, and joyful fellowship of *Salvos por Gracia* were what they had been longing for in a church but had not found at the Baptist church they had been attending in San Carlos. Still, there was the distance and the cost of bus tickets to regularly travel from San Carlos to Montevideo. In God's providence, Andrés's father, a believer, had suddenly passed away only a few months earlier, leaving enough funds from a life insurance policy for Andrés and Andrea to regularly visit his grieving mother and family in Montevideo. For two months they visited their family most weekends and also attended *Salvos por Gracia* until the modest sum was fully spent.

WAITING ON THE LORD FOR A CHURCH CLOSER TO HOME

In July 2023, my wife, Catalina, and I began visiting the Muelas in their home on Friday evenings to conduct membership classes. Andrea's close friend, Carla Baretto, who had been part of their previous church, also began attending. She too had become more convinced of the doctrines of grace through the influence of Andrés and Andrea and



Stephen and Catalina Payson with founding *Soli Deo Gloria* church members Andrés and Andrea Muela in San Carlos, Maldonado

her own diligent study of the Scriptures. With great joy, all three became members of *Salvos por Gracia* in November 2023.

However, their joining *Salvos por Gracia* was by no means an end to their praying: Andrés, Andrea, and Carla had expressed all along their hope that one day a new Reformed and Presbyterian church would be planted somewhere closer to their homes. They waited on the Lord and, over the course of the next two years, the Lord would answer this prayer as well.

First, the Lord connected Julia González with Andrea through a mutual friend. Julia had recently come to faith by reading her late mother's Bible. By the time she reached the book of Proverbs, she saw her need to repent and call on Christ in faith as her Savior and Lord. After a year of unsuccessfully searching for a church of like-minded believers, she was providentially introduced to Andrea just as a weekly Bible study on the gospel of John began at the Muelas' home. Julia never looked back, and in October 2024, she was baptized into Christ, becoming another member of *Salvos por Gracia* from San Carlos. Her prayers were thus joined to those of Andrés, Andrea, and Carla for a local Reformed church in Maldonado.



The Iglesia Reformada Soli Deo Gloria congregation with the Paysons at a fellowship event in October

A NEW CHURCH IS PLANTED

In the goodness of the Lord, on July 13, 2025, the group that first began meeting in the Muelas' home as a membership class, and then eventually as a regular Bible study, began having worship services as Iglesia

Reformada Soli Deo Gloria [Glory to God Alone Reformed Church]. This marked a glorious answer to the prayers of a young couple longing to have a Reformed and Presbyterian church in the province of Maldonado!

And yet it was not just the prayers of the Muelas. Years before, the OPC Uruguay Mission had started a Bible study in Maldonado with a handful of people interested in the Reformed faith. However, in God's providence, that group never took root as a church plant. But that does not mean that the prayers of the OPC, our missionaries, and of the Uruguayan believers, were in vain! Rather, the answer came in God's own time, according to his sovereign and gracious will, when Salvos por Gracia was better equipped with ruling elders and a growing membership to assist with the new church plant.

From the moment that the Salvos por Gracia congregation met Andrés and Andrea, they were eager to participate in the formation of a church plant in San Carlos, including when the group was just a Bible study. Church members have regularly accompanied us by bus and by car to encourage their brothers and sisters in San Carlos. Elders Rubén Velis and Matías Blanco take turns visiting to assist with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Matías Blanco, a student of the Mission's pastoral training at Salvos por Gracia, also exhorts monthly at Soli Deo Gloria. The members of Soli Deo Gloria remain under the spiritual care of Salvos por Gracia until the new congregation has its own elders, Lord willing.

Please join your brothers and sisters in Uruguay in praying that both churches will continue to flourish in the gospel and encourage one another in the love of Christ. And to God alone give all the glory—*soli Deo gloria!*

Stephen Payson (right) praying with Salvos por Gracia elder Rubén Velis before the first Soli Deo Gloria worship service on July 13, 2025, in the home of Andrés and Andrea Muela



The author is an OP missionary in Uruguay.

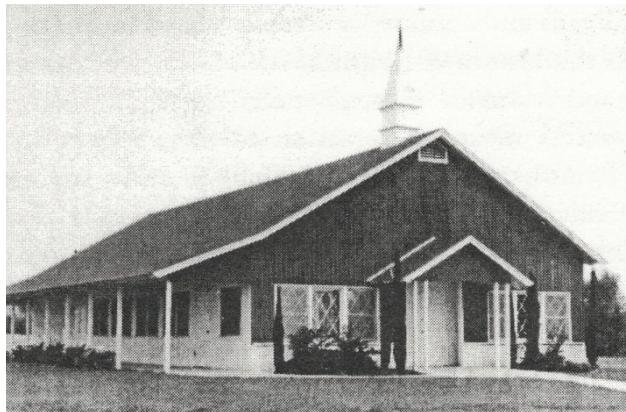
CONTRASTING CHURCH STORIES

DAVID WINSLOW JR.

In 1955, in Garden Grove, California, two very different kinds of “Reformed” churches were just beginning. Robert H. Schuller arrived in Orange County in January of that year and started open-air, drive-in services using a rented drive-in theater to the east of Garden Grove. Mr. Schuller was strongly connected to the Reformed Church in America and to Dutch Calvinism when he moved west, but those connections grew looser and more superficial as he initiated and developed a seeker-sensitive “possibility thinking” philosophy of ministry and preaching.

That same year, on the west side of Garden Grove, a new OPC congregation was organized that was strongly committed to the Reformed faith and the Westminster standards. By the fall of 1956, Edwards E. Elliott was installed as the pastor of Garden Grove OPC. On the surface there was one similarity in their approach to building a church: They both walked the streets of their respective neighborhoods knocking on doors. Yet even that apparent similarity was actually very different. As recorded in the recent book, *The Church Must Grow or Perish* by Mark T. Mulder and Gerardo Marti, Schuller

Westminster OPC in its early years

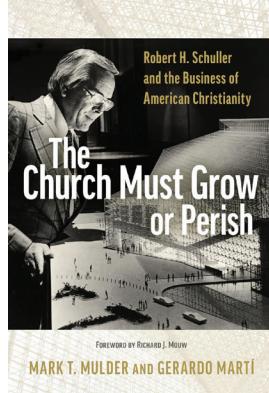


was canvassing to find out what kind of message people wanted to hear on a Sunday morning. He concluded that “quotes from the Bible would leave many people cold” and that they wanted “inspiration” rather than talk about sin. So, like a “market researcher Schuller framed a service to suit his desired clients.”

The authors credit Schuller with being at the forefront of both the “seeker sensitive” approach and “church growth movements.” Indeed, Mr. Schuller opened his own Institute for Successful Church Leadership to teach others how to build megachurches. An Orthodox Presbyterian can read with amazement, dismay, and a measure of disgust at Mr. Schuller’s building a business-like empire, a large congregation, a large glass cathedral, a television program that earned millions, and pageants that cost millions to produce, and all at the cost of sacrificing the simple truth that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. The authors record the complete fall of Schuller’s empire into bankruptcy due to a mountain of debt and old age. Schuller’s famous building is now owned by the Roman Catholic Church.

Meanwhile, down the road, Mr. Elliott was quietly building the church through faithful preaching and knocking on doors for over twenty-four years, inviting people to worship the Lord and hear the whole counsel of God’s Word. Garden Grove OPC is no longer there because it eventually outgrew its humble “stucco cathedral” and moved to nearby Westminster and a larger campus. The OPC has had its brief flirtations with church growth ideas, and this well-written book is a cautionary tale for all “visionary” leaders who feel hamstrung by their sessions or presbyteries.

The author is an elder at Westminster OPC in Westminster, California.



Eerdman's, 2025.
Paperback, 344 pages,
\$32.99.

LEARNING FROM THE SAINTS

Judith M. Dinsmore

One weekend when I was a junior at Geneva College, I received a call from a friend in my home church in Carson, North Dakota. Her name was Barbara VandenBurg. She was dying, she told me, and wanted to say goodbye.

Barb was eighty-four. She had been a member of the OPC in both Thornton, Colorado, where she worked as a schoolteacher and raised four daughters with her husband, Gerrit, and in Carson. By the time I was a toddler falling asleep in her lap during evening service, she and Gerrit were retired and living in a small brown and yellow house on the edge of town with a large garden for Gerrit out back and a porch where Barb served iced tea and fudge bars from Schwann's.

Barb hired my sister and me to houseclean for her when we were in middle school. We tried to work hard but dawdled while dusting what seemed to us to be rather dust-free shelves of knickknacks and photos. She was a few steps ahead—by the time the housecleaning was more necessary, we knew our way around her house as well as our own.

We took ourselves seriously; she did not. While washing the china, I lifted a piece out of the sink and cracked it on the kitchen tap. Horrified, what I heard next was her chuckling. Some time later Barb was hospitalized after a surgery. Eager to visit, I pushed open the door to her room and gasped to see her so vulnerable. She laughed again, and told me not to worry.

When she called, my mind was occupied with friends and homework. Afterward, there came a sense of helplessness—from so many miles away, there was nothing I could do for her. Barb was, of course, a few steps ahead; it was she who, not turning away in her suffering, meant to do something for me by giving the goodbye that I would later sorely need.

Maybe you have similar memories from a similar saint. Reformed books, podcasts, and media proliferate. And they have a place. But so too does the personal example of believers' ongoing involvement in the suffering of the present time, the "time of comprehensive subjection of the entire creation to futility and frustration," in which "there is participation in the life and power of [our] Savior" (Richard Gaffin, "The Usefulness of the Cross," 1979).

To that end, a new sidebar series on this page will feature excerpts from the *New Horizons* archives on the theme of Orthodox Presbyterian believers suffering unto glory.

SUFFERING UNTO GLORY

Excerpt from *New Horizons* vol. 2, no. 1 (Jan. 1981)
by Carla DeMaster

We received a state license to have up to four foster children at a time, but we've always had just one at a time. Any time during the day or night (for a while it always seemed midnight or later), we may receive a call asking if we are willing to take in a teenager. Usually we say "yes" if possible. The time period varies anywhere from a night to two weeks...

Who are some of these kids, and what was our response to them? [Names have been changed.] Diane (15) and Lynn (17) obtained jobs and located bus routes to them. They made efforts to fit in and helped our home run smoothly. They made friends among the church kids and responded to the gospel. . . . Darlene (12) was a habitual liar and seemed very hungry for love and acceptance. That was a frustrating combination for all of us. She ended up destroying property and stealing money, clothes, and makeup. A letter to her of forgiveness, counsel, and the love of Christ was helpful to us—and hopefully to her too. Amy (14) was a brand new Christian and spent some time with Jonathan in Bible study and just talking. She enjoyed Omegans, our church high school group, and church. Tom (15) was a member of the Latin Kings, a Chicago gang, and made Latin Kings symbols in the bookcase headboard of his bed with a permanent marker. He tried his limits and kept us on our toes.

People ask us why we do this? Can we really make a difference in two weeks? We find this to be an opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ and to respond to a real need in our community. . . . We trust the Lord can use even this short time along with other experiences and individuals to accomplish his purposes in the lives of these teenagers.



Carla and Ivan DeMaster and family in 1981

TRAINING FOR THE HARVEST AT CPTC

ALBERT J. TRICARICO JR.

The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (CHMCE) is tasked by General Assembly with supporting church planting efforts of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in North America and Puerto Rico. In addition to regular funding, the committee provides guidance, training, assessments, accountability, resources, and prayer for the harvest. One way the committee supports church planting efforts is through the annual Church Planter Training Conference (CPTC).

In 2025, the conference took place on August 4–8 at Bethel OPC in Oostburg, Wisconsin. The provisions made by our host church were generous, delicious, and perfectly suited for the needs of the week. Every person who attended expressed their appreciation for the hospitality they enjoyed.

Participants were also served by nearby congregations. Grace OPC in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, welcomed the team with a scrumptious meal on Tuesday evening. Calvary OPC in Cedar Grove, Wisconsin, did the same on Thursday with a cookout on the sands of Lake Michigan. (Breakwater Church in South Sheboygan treated us to a “brat fry” during last year’s CPTC.) Keith and Lauren LeMahieu welcomed conference staff and speakers for a meal on Wednesday. The ministry of these congregations provided well for our needs as they demonstrated their corporate interest supporting OPC home missions.

LEARNING FROM PASTORS AND MINISTERS

The schedule included lectures and discussion on relevant topics, set times for prayer, fellowship around meals, and interactions with fellow church planters. Free time is built into the schedule as opportunities to explore the area or just relax.

I had the privilege of opening the conference with the message “Good News for Church Planters,” drawn from Luke 2. CHMCE General Secretary Jeremiah Montgomery delivered two presentations under the titles “Sustainable Ministry Rhythms” and “Connecting with People”—a robust list of tips on personal evangelism. Pastor Brian De Jong (Sheboygan) gave some lessons from OPC history in



At the 2025 Church Planter Training Conference at Grace OPC in Sheboygan, Wisconsin

his talk “Church-planting in Wisconsin.” Seasoned pastor Dale Van Dyke provided “Lessons Learned from Ministry” in two lectures.

Talks by General Secretaries Danny Olinger and Douglas Clawson were informative and encouraging, reviewing of the work of the Committees on Christian Education and Foreign Missions. David Nakhla reported on the work of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries and John Fikkert gave a talk on the Committee on Ministerial Care. John also encouraged men and their wives with the presentation “Caring for Self and Family.”

WHAT THE CONFERENCE MEANS TO US

This conference has undergone some development over the years. CHMCE now requires every church planter to attend twice during their four years of receiving support. The week has been expanded to include an extra day to allow more free time in the schedule. Wives are now invited and encouraged to attend.

The conference has become a high point in the ministry year for CHMCE’s general secretaries—not only for

the bountiful hospitality and quality instruction, but also (and especially) as a time to enjoy the company of those serving on home missions fields. Church planters and their wives pray together, learn together, and swap stories of their experiences with each other. Church planting comes with unique challenges and blessings. CPTC gives opportunities to share both with those who face similar ministry dynamics.

Women join their husbands for some of the conference meetings. They also have times dedicated to them. Anneke Fesko, a regular participant in CPTC, serves the Committee on Ministerial Care as the Care Coordinator for Ministers' Wives. She was joined by Beth Montgomery and Laurie Tricarico as discussion leaders for the women's meetings.

WHAT THE CONFERENCE MEANS TO-CHURCH-PLANTING COUPLES

Participants were sent evaluation questions after the conference and invited to help make the event better by sending in their feedback. Responses were helpful and encouraging. Here are some.

“You don't need to feel brave to be brave.’ Good stuff. Lots of helpful suggestions throughout the talk.” (Connecting with People)

“Practical—especially in terms of vision, mission, and measurable goals for ministry.” (Lessons Learned in Ministry)

“I appreciated Danny's enthusiasm and his desire to show us how Christian Education has always played a big role in OPC home missions.” (Report on Christian Education)

“I really appreciated the time we had at the conference. The women's breakouts are probably what I remember the



Relaxing by Lake Michigan

most; I enjoyed the fellowship and encouragement. I also appreciated the free time and general feeling that we were being encouraged to fellowship with one another and also to get a bit of a rest and reset with our family.” (Women's meetings)

“Helpful: their personal stories on how they were involved in their husbands' ministry and also their feelings on their unexpected life experiences.” (Women's meetings)

In addition to these kinds of comments came helpful suggestions on how to make the conference better. The CHMCE staff will consider all feedback and use it to shape the conference in future years.

Do pray for our church planters and their families. They are doing good work. The challenges they face are unique and many. With your gifts to Worldwide Outreach and regular prayers for the harvest, they will have the support they need to carry on their work for the glory of Jesus Christ.

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



Church planter training conference participants listen to Dale Van Dyke.

BUILDING A BEAUTIFUL HOUSE

BENEDICT R. CIAVOLELLA

God is beautiful, and he makes beautiful things. As his “sub-creators,” we also try to bring out beauty wherever we can. We beautify, taking what we consider drab or deficient and transforming it into something dazzling.

But we all know that person—perhaps you are that person—who never knows when to leave well enough alone. Painting and repainting. Arranging the furniture yet again. Adding more ginger to the mulled cider. “Stop it!” you say (or they say to you). “It’s beautiful the way it is!”

If I can say this reverently, I think our Lord may be a bit like that person who keeps going when others would have stopped. Being infinitely wise and powerful, he always knows what and how much to do. God never tinkers. And yet, he makes this promise: “I will beautify my beautiful house” (Isa. 60:7).

Isaiah was speaking of God’s radiant glory flooding Israel. “And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising” (60:3). These kings will bring in “the wealth of the nations,” including “gold and frankincense” as well as “the praises of the LORD” (vv. 5–6). Our minds turn to Matthew 2:2 and the magi’s devotion to “the king of the Jews.” Paradoxically, the One who “wast rich beyond all splendour” received riches from his own creation. There, in the little town of Bethlehem, men brought beauty to the ever-beautiful God.

GOOD STEWARDS OF GOD’S VARIED GRACE

That is not the end of the story, since it involves God’s whole house, his church in every age. Though the Son was beautiful by nature, he willingly owned our impoverished ugliness so that we, too, would be rich in splendor. That is a present reality; the church, in union with Christ, is beautiful now in the sight of our God. “And yet,” he says, “I will beautify.”

How does he do this? As Richard Sibbes once said, by giving what he requires. All the gold and riches of the magi belonged to Christ already (Hag. 2:8). But he was happy to give it to them, that they might give it back to beautify his house. They were “good stewards of God’s

varied grace” (1 Pet. 4:10), using what little in comparison they had to glorify God.

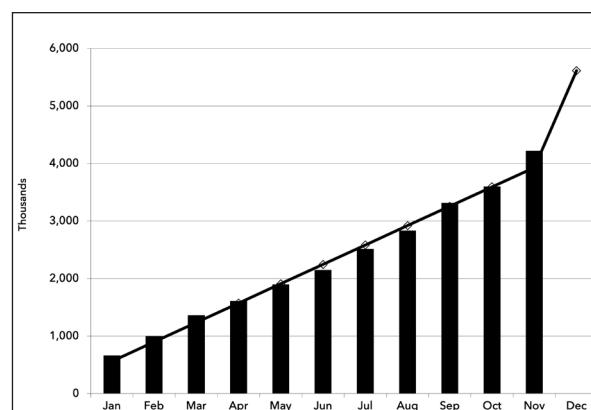
God has likewise given us grace for the same end. This certainly means more than financial giving, but it does not mean less. Each of us has been given earthly treasure, and we are coming to a King who not only deserves that treasure, but who promises to pay it out for his glory and our good, including the gathering-in and growing-up of all the saints.

The glimmering things of this world cannot, by themselves, beautify this house. But with God’s Spirit and blessing, our small gifts will serve his grand design. After all, it was never really about the material wealth of the nations; it was about nations themselves, the people whom God would draw into devotion and praise. And that is truly beautiful.

The author is pastor of Delta Oaks Presbyterian in Pittsburg, California.

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

Christian Education surplus:	\$23,494
Home Missions surplus:	\$39,102
Foreign Missions surplus:	\$229,910
Total YTD budget surplus:	\$292,506



JAN 2026

PRAYER CALENDAR



The Diercks (day 7)



The Fosters (day 14)

1. Pray for fruitful ministry for retired missionaries **Cal & Edie Cummings, Mary Lou Son, and Brian & Dorothy Wingard.** / Pray for Home Missions associate general secretary **Al (Laurie) Tricarico.**

2. **Chris (Megan) Hartshorn**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / Pray that God would provide a **short-term missionary deacon** to serve in Uganda during the Emmett family's medical leave.

3. **Mr. and Mrs. M.**, Asia. Praise the Lord for many new contacts in the U.S. Pray they come to Bible studies and to the Lord. / Pray for Stated Clerk **Hank L. Belfield** as he works on invitation letters to fraternal churches/denominations to send a delegate to the 92nd GA.

4. **Charles (Margaret) Biggs**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic. / Pray for **Mr. and Mrs. F.**, Asia, as they return to the States for a short furlough and seek new avenues of service in Asia.

5. Home Missions general secretary **Jeremiah (Beth) Montgomery.** / Pray for the work of the OPC's **Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel.**

6. Pray for the Lord to raise up a **regional foreign missionary** for South America and for Asia. / Pray for **Gregory Reynolds**, editor of *Ordained Servant*.

7. Pray for **Danny Olinger** as he visits seminaries to interview potential interns. / **Mike (Elizabeth) Diercks**, regional home missions coordinator for the Presbytery of Ohio.

8. **Samuelis & Milda Lukosius**, Springfield, OH. Pray for more students to join Living Water OPC's weekly college Bible study. / Foreign Missions administrative

9. coordinator **Joanna Grove.**

10. Pray that the support of the **Mobile Theological Mentoring Corps** will encourage the Sudanese Reformed Church as that denomination ministers to vulnerable populations. / Pray that the **Ruling Elder Podcast** would be edifying and encouraging to elders and the congregations they serve.

11. **Micah & Eileen Bickford**, Farmington, ME. Pray for God to bless the evangelism and outreach efforts of Grace Reformed OPC. / Associate missionaries **Octavius & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Pray for the preaching of God's Word to encourage suffering church members and visitors.

12. **Andrew (Rebekah) Miller**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania. / Pray for yearlong intern **Daniel (Anna) Karlson** at Calvary OPC in Cedar Grove, WI.

13. **Heero & Anya Hacquebord**, Ukraine. Pray for Anya's multi-faceted ministry, especially in discipling women, and for her to get the rest she needs. / Pray for yearlong intern **Jooho Lee** at Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA.

14. Pray for the spiritual strengthening of **pastors in East Africa** who are in prison and lack encouraging resources and fellowship. / **Brian (Nicole) Tsui**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Northern California & Nevada.

15. regional evangelist for New Jersey. / Pray for yearlong intern **Cliff (Bre) Foster** at Central Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Irvine, CA.

16. Pray for Foreign Missions administrative coordinator **Tin Ling Lee.** / Pray that the Lord would prepare individuals to serve through **OPC Short-Term**

Missions opportunities this year.

16. **Christian & Hanna Repp**, Doylestown, PA. Pray for the Lord's providence and clarity as they consider a new church building opportunity. / **Ben & Heather Hopp**, Africa & Haiti. Pray for Ben as he travels to develop relationships between the OPC and churches in Africa.

17. **Mark (Peggy) Sumpter**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Northwest. / Pray for yearlong intern **Zac (Caroline) Reeves** at Community Presbyterian in Kalamazoo, MI.

18. **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Uruguay. Pray for outreach opportunities for both Mission churches over their summer months of January and February. / Pray for yearlong intern **Joshua (Kami) Smith** at Covenant Presbyterian in Mansfield, OH.

19. **Jim & Lydia Jordan**, Uruguay. Pray for the Lord's blessing as they say farewells and finalize preparations to depart for Uruguay. / Home Missions administrative coordinator **Lauren LaRocca**.

20. Pray for **Joseph & Christina Wan**, Madison, WI, and the ministry of Madison Chinese Christian Church. / Pray for yearlong intern **Juhan (Jessie) Song** at Trinity OPC in Easton, PA.

21. Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Douglas Clawson** as he teaches MTMC classes in Peru. / **Charlene Tipton**, database administrator.

22. **Eric (Heather) Watkins**, evangelist for Chicago, IL, and Dayton, FL. / **Mike & Jenn Kearney**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for God's common grace and peace to prevail through the elections in Uganda this month.

23. **Lacy (Debbie) Andrews**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast. / *New Horizons* managing editor **Judith Dinsmore**.

24. Pray for encouragement for **Travis & Bonnie Emmett**, Nakaale, Uganda, as they labor in an environment of death, sin, and brokenness. / Pray for *New Horizons* and *Ordained Servant* editorial assistant **Ayrian Yasar**.

25. Associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for her team of community health instructors to look to Christ in faith. / **Paul & Rachel Johnson**, Laveen, AZ. Pray for Laveen Presbyterian Church as they seek to reach as many people as possible in their community with the gospel.

26. **Phil & Melanie Hollstein**, Madisonville, LA. Pray for the congregation of Prince of Peace Presbyterian Church to grow in Christlikeness. / Pray for **local deacons** in their faithful labors, often behind the scenes, and that the Committee on Diaconal Ministries would be a support to them.

27. **Fred & Kaling Lo**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for their safe travels during the often-tumultuous season of elections in Uganda. / **Melisa McGinnis**, OPC financial controller.



Leah Hopp (day 25)

28. **Bruce (Sue) Hollister**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Midwest. / Pray for associate missionaries **Christopher & Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Uganda, as they mentor Ugandan professionals in working excellently for the Lord.

29. **Brad (Cinnamon) Peppo**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Pray for **Judy Alexander**, CCE administrative coordinator.

30. Pray for tentmaking missionary **Tina DeJong**, Nakaale, Uganda, to be encouraged, persevere, and progress in language learning. / Pray for **Anna Hall**, CMC administrator.

31. Praise God for the Kenyan graduates of **Knox School of Theology** in Mbale, Uganda, who have returned to serve their churches. / **Jim (Bonnie) Hoekstra**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Wisconsin & Minnesota.



The Hollsteins (day 26)



Garry and Marlene Hoogerhyde at GA in 2013



NEWS

IN MEMORIAM: GARRET HOOGERHYDE SR.

Roy Hoogerhyde

On Sunday morning, October 19, after having witnessed ninety-five years of God's unfailing goodness throughout his life, Garret Hoogerhyde Sr. had the privilege and joy of seeing "heaven's morning break, and earth's vain shadows flee."

Those who knew him can testify that he was a man who loved the church of Jesus Christ, and in particular the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He had been a member of the OPC since 1956 and served as an elder in four churches in the New Jersey presbytery, for over sixty-three years. He served willingly and skillfully on denominational committees (Pensions for fifty-eight years; Home Missions for fifty-six; Loan Fund Board president for thirty-six years), administered the Pensions and Hospitalization plans, and served the presbytery in many capacities. In his early years, he taught the Westminster Shorter Catechism to high-school-age covenant children, and later "graduated" to teaching adult Sunday School, which he loved and continued to do through his eighties, more often than not from the Old Testament.

Garry, along with Marlene, his wife of seventy years who went to glory in 2024, raised eight children, and their heritage includes twenty grandchildren and twenty-three great-grandchildren. Along with his love for the church, Garry's love for her hymnody was also passed on and thrives to the fourth generation. Truly, his descendants can affirm that "[we] have a beautiful inheritance" (Ps. 16:6).

HUNT INSTALLED AT SHEFFIELD, ON

Jonathan Hunt, formerly pastor of Armor Bible Church (OPC) in Orchard Park, New York, was installed as pastor of Grace Covenant Church (OPC) in Sheffield, Ontario, on November 21. Rev. Doug Bylsma preached; Rev. John Nyman gave the charge to the congregation; and Rev. John Ferguson gave the charge to the minister.

PROTECTING THE FLOCK SEMINAR

New Life OPC in Montoursville, Pennsylvania, hosted a Nov. 8 conference addressing domestic abuse in the church. Entitled "Protecting the Flock," the day-long seminar was led by Rev. Danny Patterson, pastor of Second Parish OPC in Portland, Maine. In a series of three talks including Q&A and split by a complimentary lunch, Rev. Patterson addressed the nature of domestic abuse, along with the sufficiency of Scripture and the Westminster Standards for approaching this issue. He focused especially on WLC 124, 129–30, and 135–36, presenting additional material in adult Sunday school and a sermon at New Life the next morning. The conference was coordinated by New Life Crisis Care Team Leader Laurie Tricarico.

WOMEN'S PRESBYTERIAL

Marlene Flood

On October 4, my daughter and I had the privilege of attending the Women's Presbyterial Conference, this year at Bethel OPC in Oostburg, Wisconsin, for the first time. Sixty-eight women came, ranging in age from 17–91! They represented eleven OPC churches in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Members of the presbytery and NAPARC friends at Hunt's installation (back row, red tie)



At the installation of Marc Scaturro (center, purple tie) at Spencer Mills OPC in Gowen, MI, on October 24



At the Presbytery of WI and MI's Women's Presbyterial

This event turned out to be a wonderful surprise for both my daughter and I.

We heard from seven OP foreign missionaries, some via letter and some via recorded video messages, on the importance of hospitality in missions. We also heard from several home missionaries who encouraged us to use our gifts and talents to bless those in our own circles, both believers and unbelievers.

Each missionary sent in a favorite recipe that they use in their own hospitality efforts. A wonderful group of ladies from Bethel OPC prepared these recipes for the attendees to try and enjoy. We closed with prayer for each of the missionaries.

UPDATE

CHURCHES

- On November 20, Good Shepherd OPC in Sugar Land, TX, was dissolved.

MINISTERS

- On April 30, the pastoral relationship between **Frank J. Marsh** and Covenant Church in New Berlin, WI, was dissolved

At the October 10 installation of Eddie Mercado (center, maroon tie) as a pastor at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, MI



upon his retirement.

- On June 30, the pastoral relationship between **Lawrence B. Oldaker** and Firelands Grace OPC in Sandusky, OH, was dissolved upon his retirement.
- On October 24, the pastoral relationship between **Darren S. Thole** and Providence Presbyterian in Huntsville, AL, was dissolved.
- On October 31, **Dr. Vincent Lam** was ordained and installed as the pastor of First OPC in San Francisco, CA.
- On November 21, **Jonathan Hunt** was installed as the pastor of Grace Covenant Church in Sheffield, ON.
- On December 31, the pastoral relationship between **Dr. James La Belle** and Cape Cod OPC in West Barnstable, MA, was dissolved.

MILESTONES

- Marjorie Louise Norton Dortzbach**, 103, died on November 17. She was the widow of OP pastor Elmer Dortzbach and mother of former OP pastor Karl Dortzbach.
- Bryce Craig**, president of P&R Publishing, died on November 23. Grandson of its founder, Samuel Craig, Bryce Craig led the company from 1982–2025.

LETTERS

HART ON IMPERIAL INFLUENCE

Editor:

I welcome the short essay by Dr. Hart on “Imperial Christianity” (December). It is an excellent summary and assessment of the topic, and I would highly commend it to the readership of *New Horizons*. In these tumultuous times (as they all are “between the ages”), such a level-headed, fair treatment is needed and heartening.

Alan D. Strange
South Holland, IL

Editor:

Thank you for publishing “Imperial Christianity.” It was a helpful summary

of our church’s history. The author cites some of the “imperial” language that was removed from our confession but did not mention two strong expressions that yet remain. WCF 23:3 identifies magistrates as “nursing fathers” (see Isa. 49:23), which intimates the responsibility of the state to protect and nourish the church. WLC 191 directs us to pray that the church would be “countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate” as part of Christ’s mediatorial reign (Matt. 6:10). These two “fingerprints of imperial Christianity” should fill our hearts with eschatological, and even governmental, hope.

Christian McShaffrey
Reedsburg, WI

REVIEWS

The Death of the Deadly Sins: Embracing the Virtues That Transform Lives, Daniel M. Doriani, ed. P&R, 2025. Paperback, 208 pages, \$18.99. Reviewed by OP pastor James M. Stafford.

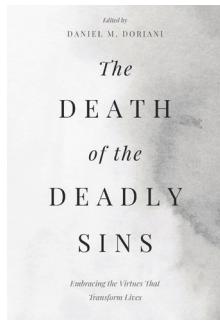
The Death of the Deadly Sins is a slim volume that gives a theoretical (chs. 1–2, 11) and historical (ch. 3) account of virtue, but the bulk of its pages (chs. 4–10) provides a practical and experiential approach to growing in virtue through mortification of the deadly sins (pride, greed, anger, envy, sloth, gluttony, and lust). Nine coauthors contributed to the book, but it retains a coherent style as each of the vice-to-virtue chapters follows the same general pattern: a biblical exposition of a deadly sin, guidance for identifying that sin in our lives, disciplines that cultivate that vice’s corresponding virtue, and finally a set of discussion questions.

While the book’s preface identifies church leaders and teachers as the chiefly intended audience, others need not shy away from the book. My impression from the middle chapters was that the authors were actually writing with congregants primarily in mind. In fact, the chapter on sloth states that “the average reader

of this book is . . . a man or woman, single or married, working a vocation or rearing children, and active in a local church." So, a broad audience will benefit from this book, especially if readers take time to discuss the end-of-chapter questions as a family or with a friend, mentor, or small group.

But the book's opening chapters are valuable especially for church leaders in that they provide a defense of virtue as a biblically warranted concept, framing the discussion within a Protestant understanding of justification. Chapter 3 is a concise survey, but fairly academic, for anyone looking for an entry point into the expansive history of virtue and the seven deadly sins in Christian thought.

The book often mentions the necessity of community for cultivating virtue and the converse reality that there is a communal dimension to vice. There are places where the authors could have expanded on this by suggesting corporate disciplines that could be adopted by congregations regarded in their organic unity. Individuals are nurtured toward virtue by virtuous communities, and the latter will have certain practices that create a "scaffolding" conducive to each individual's pursuit of virtue. For example, if consistent cheerful (and therefore conscious) giving is a discipline that cultivates generosity (68), should churches be wary of a potential for automated tithing to inhibit spiritual growth in this area? The section "Gluttony and Culture" recognizes the influence of the economy and, purportedly, the social habits of certain ecclesial traditions on obesity; yet all the remedies offered are



individualistic in scope.

While one may wish for a more complex analysis of the social dimensions of vice and virtue, the authors can hardly be faulted for leaving these thoughts underdeveloped. Indeed, reading the book has generated them in the first place. Whatever communal

changes may be needful, they will be preceded by individual sanctification. To that end, the authors have written quite helpfully.

One Lost Soul: Richard Nixon's Search for Salvation, by Daniel Silliman. Eerdmans, 2024. Hardcover, 336 pages, \$36.99. Reviewed by *New Horizons* editor Danny Olinger.

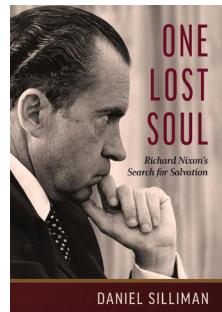
In his religious biography of Richard Nixon, *One Lost Soul*, Daniel Silliman maintains that Nixon was a lost soul searching for the love of God. According to Silliman, this quest to be loved by God influenced everything that Nixon did, but it was accompanied by Nixon's belief that he could never figure out how.

Raised in a Quaker home, Nixon attended multiple services a week in his youth. However, he was not baptized nor partook of the Lord's Supper as the local Quaker congregation in Whittier, California, did not believe in practicing either. At Whittier College, Nixon was exposed to the teaching of liberal theology and embraced it. He dispensed with the infallibility and literal correctness of the Bible and with miracles. Jesus was the greatest man ever known, an example for all to follow. This Jesus would not save you from your sins but would inspire you to work harder.

Silliman follows Nixon's political career from Cold Warrior Christian in the 1940s to the Checker's prayer in the 1950s and the religious issue of the 1960 presidential election. Perhaps the most interest-

ing chapter is "The Church in the White House." Unlike Dwight Eisenhower, who took up a pew in National Presbyterian Church and was baptized after his inauguration, Nixon determined to hold worship services in the East Room off the first floor of the White House. At the first service in 1969, Billy Graham preached and George Beverly Shea led the singing. From that point forward, Nixon planned the services, always making sure to tell the preachers in advance that he couldn't stomach sermons that singled him out. Among those who preached in addition to Graham were Westminster Seminary graduate Harold Ockenga, Leighton Ford, L. Nelson Bell, Harold Lindsell, and Norman Vincent Peale. Invitations to the service became a political tool, Nixon even informing his staff to select the Sunday congregation based on their views on an issue. Other times in order to counter political perspective on an issue, individuals such as Oregon Republican Mark Hatfield (who addressed the 1965 OPC General Assembly in Portland), were invited.

In the aftermath of the Watergate scandal and Nixon's resignation, Silliman writes that Nixon thought of himself like Job, an innocent man being tested. But, of course, Nixon wasn't like Job who confesses, "I know that my redeemer lives."



In retirement, Nixon confessed that the only time he was ever in church was for weddings and funerals. For his memoir, *In the Arena*, he re-examined his religious beliefs from his college days. As a student, he believed in Jesus with all the miracles shaved off. He also stated that he believed in the resurrection, but only symbolically. But most importantly, he declared his belief that those who achieve the highest values in this life are those who may gain immortality. He wrote, "I adhere to these same beliefs today" (289). Silliman notes that it was Nixon's final public statement on Christianity.

CORRECTION

In the photo caption on page 3 of the December issue, Dan and Colleen Boon's last name incorrectly appeared as Brown.

A Renewed Focus

on OPC Short-Term Missions for 2026 & Beyond



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Colombia

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