

NEW HORIZONS

MARCH 2026

IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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editor may be condensed for publication.



Jimmy Laughridge from Landis OPC hugs Clyde Huffman (top), who received a new home in part through OP efforts and who now hosts a Bible study in his home (right).



STORIES OF GOSPEL ENGAGEMENT

OP CHURCH PLANTERS AND EVANGELISTS

We in the OPC, as fellow believers, are knit together in Christ's Spirit, and the labors of one of us in his name are united to the whole. While you are reading this article—or at work, or caring for loved ones, or serving your church, or chatting with new acquaintances—at that same moment Christ's servants ordained in the OPC and called to serve as church planters and evangelists are bringing the gospel in all its fullness to a perishing world.

To unite us more closely with these church planters and evangelists in prayer, and to encourage us in God's faithfulness, we asked five to share with us their stories of engaging others with the gospel.

MERCY AFTER HELENE

Johnny Serafini, Marion, North Carolina

Church plant Landis OPC had many opportunities to speak of Christ during our ministry to displaced people

after Hurricane Helene hit North Carolina in September 2024. A local senior center was used as temporary housing, and in the days following the hurricane, members of the congregation were at the senior center every day to pray with victims of the hurricane, to have gospel conversations, and to distribute tracts and Bibles. One couple at the center hiked for hours to seek help. Some were displaced twice when damage to a homeless shelter led them to temporary housing. They all heard the gospel invitation through the congregation's witness and prayer.

At one point, some of the hurricane victims at the center formed a ring of lawn chairs and told their stories, each in turn. Some of our church's members were there as well, and offered prayer and loving invitations to consider Jesus, which were accepted. We also visited a trailer park where contacts developed into enduring friendships.

In the weeks and months following the hurricane, through the generosity of God's people, we were also able to build homes for several hurricane victims. This work done in Christ's name had positive effects that remain to this day. One of the new homes became a Bible study venue. Some of those who received help have visited the church and continue to express their gratitude for gifts of love provided for them.



Praying for friends, neighbors, and family at an Acacia Reformed gathering in Manassas, VA

PRAYING AND WITNESSING

John Paul Holloway, Manassas, Virginia

I met “Demir” at a coffee shop I frequent. He said to me, “Man, Ramadan always creeps up on me, and then after it’s over I feel guilty about eating food in the day again!” This prompted me to ask my favorite question: “Oh, are you religious?” He responded, “Not really.”

We discussed the reason for his guilt. The Lord was gracious to bring to mind Jesus’s teaching that it is not what goes into our body, but what comes out of the heart that makes us unclean (Matt. 15:11). We had a fruitful gospel discussion about how, in Christianity, it is Jesus who cleanses us from sin and guilt. I gave Demir a Bible and still see him regularly. When I ask if he is reading his Bible, he usually replies, “A little.”

Evangelism sometimes looks so ordinary that I miss that we are doing it. At our church, it can take the form of persistent prayer for unbelievers the Lord has brought into our lives: a member’s brother who has wandered from the faith; a son-in-law visiting at Thanksgiving and Christmas; a widow and mother of a member who recently moved to the area. We also pray directly for our own evangelistic efforts. One member regularly speaks of his faith when he talks to people at the grocery store, gym, and other locations. He asks that the congregation pray for fruitful outcomes. The most regular prayer request comes from a five-year-old girl who wants her friend to know Jesus. One member reported the conversion of a coworker after years of gospel witness. These kinds of reports and requests come regularly when we gather together to pray.

BOARDWALK CONVERSATIONS

Chris Byrd, Wildwood, New Jersey

On a crowded boardwalk this past September, I approached a couple who had paused near the Boardwalk Chapel. I offered them a tract and said, “This is for you. It’s the most amazing news in the world!” Bonnie took the tract. “It’s about Jesus. Do you know him?” I asked.

“I believe in God,” she replied. “But I know I’m not right with him. There are things in my life I know are wrong, but I can’t stop doing them, and I don’t know what to do about it.”

Bonnie and her husband, Bill, grew up Roman Catholic but had never attended church as adults and didn’t own a Bible. Bill, a barbershop owner, called himself agnostic; Bonnie had recently experienced a desire for God she’d never had before. Earlier that day she had taken a tract from a young boy, and what she read pricked her conscience, prompting her to wander over to the Chapel with her husband.

For the next half hour I talked with them about why Jesus came and what he accomplished for sinners. I read Ezekiel 36:25–27 and shared the promises of the Father that were fulfilled in the Son. Jesus removed all the sins of his people on the cross, gives them a new heart as they call on him, and puts his Spirit in them to walk in newness of life.

The promise of a “new heart” touched Bonnie deeply. I gave them a Bible and invited them to church. The next day, as I got up to preach, I saw them in the second row! After the service Bonnie told me she couldn’t get the things I shared out of her mind, and that the sermon had continued speaking to her. They faithfully attend our

Two volunteers at the Boardwalk Chapel, where Chris Byrd serves as regional home evangelist



worship services, and I now meet with them for Bible study.

It is beautiful to see the Holy Spirit's work. What a privilege to live in the harvest fields of our Lord and to witness the Spirit's work!

DISCUSSING ORIGINS IN WI

Nate Strom, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Sheboygan county is often called the Bible Belt of the Midwest. There is a certain plausibility to the name given the number of churches that are there, including many Presbyterian and Reformed congregations. However, things have shifted considerably over the decades. While professed Christianity and interest in the church remain, understanding of the faith is very weak. The late Tim Keller noted that past evangelistic strategies connected pre-existing dots—the existence of a personal God, an afterlife, a standard for moral truth, and a sense of sin or evil. Engage in gospel witness in our county, and you quickly realize how many people no longer affirm cultural Christianity's "dots." A recent evangelistic experience showed us this.

Each August, law enforcement and community organizations gather to promote public safety and neighborhood awareness on "National Night Out." This year, our church set up a table and announced a simple offer: "Answer three questions and enjoy a free beverage." The first question: "Where did the world and life come from?" The remaining questions invited respondents to progressively explain their religious beliefs.

Most hadn't planned to answer fundamental questions

Nate Strom (left) and other Breakwater members at a neighborhood festival



about life, so I followed up with: "Do you think it is more likely that life came from a creator like God, or that aliens from another planet brought life to earth?" Of the twenty or more conversations I enjoyed, only one person opted for a divine creator over nameless aliens on a cosmic road trip. No one offered their own alternative.

Our supposed Christian enclaves are more compromised than we might think, which means even the most plowed-over fields are still white for harvest. It seems that the present aversion to Christianity stems more from its imagined implausibility than from thoughtful reasons for unbelief. The best conversations, I believe, begin with thoughtful, revealing questions.



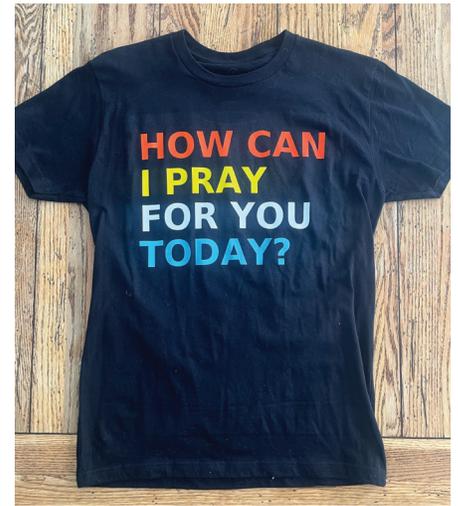
THE GOSPEL AT CHICAGO'S BIGGEST FOOD FESTIVAL

Jeremy Chong, Chicago, Illinois

Over a hundred thousand people funnel through three entrances to attend the "Taste of Chicago" food festival each year. More than a dozen of us positioned ourselves at these strategic bottlenecks and gave witness to the grace of Christ through conversations, preaching, and the distribution of tracts. Three women had notably different responses to what we shared.

A New Age practitioner appreciated me sharing "my truth" in order to share "her truth," which was that the universe is god. "Who created the universe?" I asked. She replied with another question: "How do you know that the universe hasn't always existed?" Astrophysicist Dan Fabrycky stood next to me and reasoned with her in a compelling way. Despite our best efforts, she respectfully concluded, "Well, this is my truth."

An invitation to engage in downtown Chicago used by Jeremy Chong; a t-shirt for evangelism designed by Acacia Reformed church



We displayed a sign inviting passersby to ask us Christians any question. A runner saw the sign and stopped dead in her tracks—hands shaking in excitement as she considered what question to ask. We began by discussing Roman Catholicism, as her mother worked for the Archdiocese. We explained the gospel to her, and throughout the conversation it became clear that her conscience was burdened by thoughts of her impenitent pattern of drunkenness and sexual sin. After reading 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, she concluded that she was not saved, and we pointed her to the hope of verse 11: “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” She asked more questions and left in gratitude.

As we were getting ready to go, an anti-ICE protester approached us. She was a fellow Wheaton College graduate and married to a woman. “We have heard the arguments against homosexuality a thousand times,” she said. “We’re strong Christians, and we believe the Bible! Look, we’ve spent our lives fighting for the least of these; Jesus is able to look past our sexual orientation.” I shared Isaiah 66:1–2, which tells us that God looks toward those who are humble, contrite, and tremble before his Word, and asked gently, “Is it possible to tremble before God’s Word and arrive at such a conclusion and practice?”

I never feel totally eager to evangelize, not knowing whom God will send my way or whether I’ll be received or rejected. But afterward I never regret having shared Christ. While some encounters are more encouraging than others, I know that it is worthwhile *every single time*.

Please pray for the men and women who are hearing the gospel through these OP efforts. Pray for those who serve in Home Missions and for a growing harvest of righteousness in our world. Rejoice as you do that those laboring

as evangelists in our presbyteries are exalting Christ through faithful gospel witness. As you pray, remember the promise that Jesus left us in the Great Commission: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). **NH**

Former church planters Johnny Serafini, John Paul Holloway, and Nate Strom now serve as pastors in Marion, North Carolina; Manassas, Virginia; and Sheboygan, Wisconsin, respectively. Chris Byrd is regional home evangelist serving the Presbytery of New Jersey and Puerto Rico. Jeremy Chong is a licentiate of the Presbytery of the Midwest, serving it in an evangelistic project called “Reformation Chicago.” His ministry is laying the groundwork for a future mission work of the presbytery.

A FAITH STILL WORTH SHARING



JEREMIAH W. MONTGOMERY

In the last weeks of his life on earth, Rev. C. John “Jack” Miller dictated a short book entitled *A Faith Worth Sharing*. This book contains nine stories of personal evangelism—a memoir of his personal evangelism efforts. These stories offer encouragement to believers as we seek to bring good news to a lost world. With the hope of encouraging readers like Jack’s stories have encouraged me, I share the following two accounts from my ministry.

AN UNEXPECTED OPPORTUNITY: MR. SMITH WHO WENT TO WASHINGTON

I met “Mr. Smith” in 2011. By all human accounts, he had enjoyed a full life. During World War II, he had worked for Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commander-in-chief of the Pacific Fleet. After the war, he practiced law—first with the federal government, and then in private practice. The apex of his legal career was a successful case tried before the

United States Supreme Court in 1968. He was ninety-four years old when we first met.

I met Smith through his wife, who had visited our church plant. Mrs. Smith had brought her husband to worship, but by this point his mobility was limited. After a few visits, Mrs. Smith asked me to come and meet with her husband one-on-one. Not knowing either very well, I did not know what to expect when I arrived at their apartment on October 25, 2011. I never guessed what would happen.

After making me a cup of coffee, Mrs. Smith sat me in the living room with her husband and disappeared. At first, the conversation was biographical—the sort of things people share when first getting acquainted. But then Mr. Smith’s words began hinting at his own mortality—that fewer days lay ahead than lay behind. Picking up on this, I tried to offer some comfort: “This is one of the benefits of knowing the Lord.” He did not seem to be comforted, and I sensed a need to press further.

I am not a naturally outgoing person, so these moments when we have to decide whether or not to press beyond our comfort zone have never been easy for me. Sometimes I am too afraid. But on that day I asked, “Are you ready to meet the Lord?”

“Well, apparently not!” exclaimed Mr. Smith with surprising energy. His wife had told him that he was unprepared, and that he needed to talk to me. So here we were. His next question was straightforward: “What can you do for me?”

Though startled by the suddenness of this turn in the conversation, I managed to share the gospel with Mr. Smith that day—using the five membership vows of the OPC as my framework. He listened attentively. When I asked him whether he had ever confessed his sins to Jesus, he said, “You know, I don’t believe that I have.” When I asked him if he wanted to do that now, he said yes—and together we prayed, he repeating after me.

On my next visit, I brought Mr. Smith a Bible and we began to read John’s Gospel. Again we prayed together, he again repeating after me. But on my third visit, he was happy to share with me that he had offered his first “solo” prayer.

December 25, 2011, was a Sunday. Immediately following the conclusion of morning worship, I saw a voicemail on my phone. It was Mrs. Smith. A few weeks prior, her husband had celebrated his ninety-fifth birthday. But that Christmas morning, exactly two months to the day from when he first put his trust in Jesus, he had died—peaceably, but suddenly. The Mr. Smith who had gone to Washington had gone to heaven.



Jeremiah with Clark
on their last visit in
December 2019

A LONG-AWAITED CONCLUSION: MY FORMER SUPERVISOR

I began working for “Clark” in 2006. Clark was one of those rare supervisors who got the best out of his employees professionally without sacrificing his or their humanity. He set ambitious goals for our team, but also recognized the importance of work-life balance. He required excellence and focus, yet his empathy and kindness were authentic. He was not a Christian, but common grace had made him a good human.

When I approached Clark to tell him that I was leaving to pursue full-time seminary, he surprised me. As it turns out, his own maternal great-grandfather had been a Presbyterian minister—a man named Robert Ames Montgomery! So although Clark did not share my faith, he supported me pursuing its development. When I left the company at the end of May 2008, I gave Clark a copy of a book I had just finished, *The Reason for God*.

Over the following years, Clark and I kept in occasional touch. In 2018, while my family was serving overseas in Asia, I received a distressing letter via email. Clark told me that he was facing an aggressive cancer, and that he was losing the battle.

Reflecting on this news, I decided to be direct in my response: “When somebody who believes as I do hears that a dear friend is possibly dying, it raises for us a heart-wrenching question,” I wrote. “I don’t believe that

there is any ambiguity about what will happen to us when we die. We will come face-to-face with Jesus Christ. By his resurrection he has proven himself to be the Son of God, and the New Testament tells us he will be the judge of all people. My concern, Clark, is whether you are ready for this interview.”

After laying out the gospel, I ended with these words: “There is no heaven except the one where Jesus is King. Consequently, there is only one way to get in: to surrender to him . . . I don’t know if you and I will ever see each other again in this world. But I hope that someday we will stand together in heaven—not because either one of us is good enough, but because Jesus is good enough for us both.”

Clark’s response expressed appreciation without commitment. But living on the far side of the world, what more could I do?

The next year, medical realities brought my family back from Asia. In November 2019, just weeks before we moved to Dayton, Ohio, Clark asked if we could talk. When I called him a few days later, it was his turn to be direct. “I’m in trouble.” The cancer was consuming him, with no hope of recovery. “I need help,” he said.

I again laid out the gospel. I encouraged him to read *Encounters with Jesus* by Tim Keller. But I didn’t want to leave him simply with a book. So I talked to my wife about the possibility of me making a trip to California as soon as possible after our move. She agreed.

I saw Clark for the last time in early December 2019. The first evening we were together, we shared drinks and reminisced about old times. It was a joy, and I did not try to hijack the direction of the conversation. But I was concerned. Would we speak of Christ?

The next afternoon, while his wife was running errands, Clark and I had a very focused conversation. He had been reading the Keller book, and he did not argue with me about the reality of our sin or our need for Jesus. But when pressed about whether he had actually trusted Christ, he told me that he had not—and he wasn’t sure why not. “I can’t make you believe,” I replied. “But when you are ready, you can pray the same words to Jesus that he prayed to his Father on the cross: ‘Into your hands I commit my spirit.’”

I left California the next day, unsure of what would happen with my friend and former supervisor. Clark affirmed the resurrection of Jesus as history, but he had not yet surrendered to him as Savior. In parting, I reasserted this need. “You gave me the words,” he said. But that was all.

Four days later, Clark texted me: “I have grabbed the branch, given my spirit, accepted the gift . . . I thought I had made my peace before, but this is totally different for sure. I thought I was unafraid to face it, but now I know I am not afraid.”

Clark’s life in this world ended twenty-three days later. Between the day we first met and the day he met Jesus, more than fifteen years had elapsed. For all but the last three weeks of his life, he was unprepared to die. Yet when he informed me of his new faith, I said, “We will meet on the other side in a world without goodbyes.”

“Yes, we will,” he replied.

A FAITH (STILL) WORTH SHARING

In the years since ordination, only three times have I had the privilege of leading an adult “across the line” to faith in Jesus. I have had many disappointments. But the stories of Mr. Smith and Clark remind us that Jesus is still saving sinners, even in a secular age—sometimes quite abruptly, sometimes over a long period. Our faith is still worth sharing. **NH**

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

2025 THANK OFFERING TOTALS

A JOY TO REPORT GENEROUS GIVING

Dear Members and Friends of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,

Praise be to Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the giving to the 2025 Thank Offering. It is a joy to report that gifts to the Thank Offering totaled \$1,885,164. The strong Thank Offering has resulted in a total of \$6,179,058 for Worldwide Outreach in 2025. The distribution to the program committees is as follows:

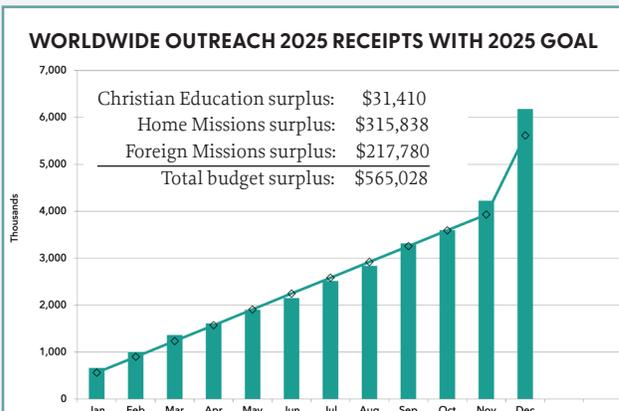
Foreign Missions	\$2,457,080
Home Missions	\$2,390,068
Christian Education	\$731,910

The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension received 115.2% of its Worldwide Outreach budget request, the Committee on Foreign Missions received 109.7% of its request, and the Committee on Christian Education received 104.5% of its request. The Committee on Coordination and *New Horizons* also received their full WWO funding.

Thank you so much for promoting the Thank Offering in the church. Thank you for your prayers and upholding of the ministries of Christian Education, Home Missions, and Foreign Missions. Thank you for proclaiming the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Savior of sinners.

Please share this good news with the members and friends of your congregation.

Yours in Christ,
 Danny E. Olinger
 General secretary of the CCE



PARACHUTE CHURCH PLANTING: A BIBLICAL MODEL



ERIC B. WATKINS

Historically speaking, there are three models of church planting that have been practiced in the OPC. The first, and arguably most common, is the mother-daughter model. This happens when an established congregation plants a daughter congregation on the other side of the city or in a nearby area from which people drive to the mother church. Planting a daughter congregation can help address the need for more room as a church grows or help those commuting a long distance to have a shorter drive, enabling a stronger sense of community and outreach. This model of church planting is the most familiar, is likely the most promising—as it is the safest—and is widely practiced in the OPC and among like-minded denominations as well.

The second model could be referred to as the “core group” or presbytery model. This is when a group of believers contacts a presbytery’s home missions committee, requesting to become a mission work of the OPC. The members of this group may or may not already be part of the OPC, but have begun to meet for Bible studies and

possibly even worship. When these groups come to and are approved by the presbytery, the presbytery then helps them with the first steps of church planting and assists them with finding a church planter (often called the “organizing pastor”) when the group is ready. This paradigm of church planting became especially prevalent in the ’80s and ’90s in the OPC when groups were leaving other denominations in search of a new home.

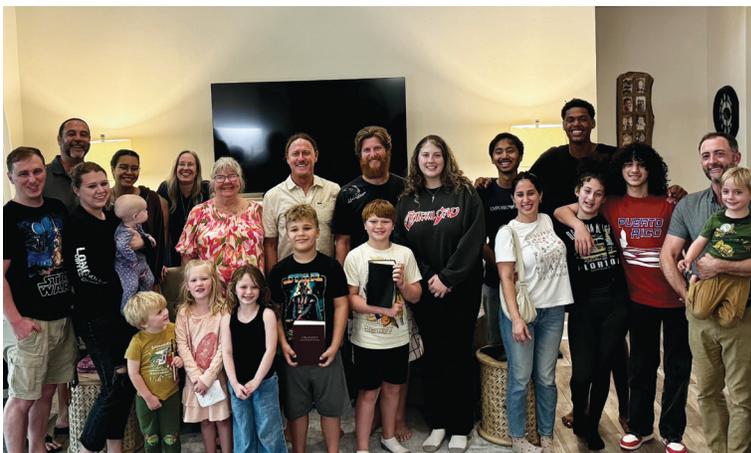
The last model, which may be called “parachute church planting,” is the most challenging but has a meaningful history in the OPC. What exactly is parachute church planting? This paradigm is distinguishable from the first two in one main way. Unlike having a daughter congregation or a core group come to the presbytery asking for help, a parachute church plant begins not with a group but with an individual. Parachute church planting is sending an evangelist to a new area with the prayerful desire that he will focus on evangelism and eventually gather a group of people together that will become a church plant and eventually an organized congregation. Before arguing for this model, we should consider some of the challenges to parachute planting.

RISKY AND EXPENSIVE

The first challenge is the most obvious: finances. Sending an evangelist to parachute plant is like sending a missionary. Either he will need to be bi-vocational, or he will need to be supported externally in one fashion or another until a group is formed that can help carry the costs of the work. Second, there understandably may not be many men who feel gifted and called to such a work. There is much more safety in working with an established work than attempting to rake the concrete, hoping that something will grow. It is tempting to think of church planting primarily as responding to the Macedonian call to “Come over and help us.” There are currently many vacant pulpits and groups



Parachute church plant Salt and Light Reformed Church in Daytona Beach, FL



Fellowship at Salt and Light Reformed Church

looking for pastors—so why send a man to an area where there’s not already a gathered group? Last of all—but very importantly—it takes healthy churches to plant healthy churches. Presbyteries with smaller, struggling congregations may lack the financial and oversight resources needed to do parachute church planting well. Bottom line: parachute planting is risky and expensive. So why should we do it?

BIBLICAL, TRUE TO OPC IDENTITY, AND PRACTICAL

There are at least three reasons why we ought to desire to see more parachute church plants around the OPC—and why it would be healthy for us.

First, parachute planting is biblical. In Acts 13, the Holy Spirit set Paul and Barnabas apart for something like parachute church planting. The church in Antioch prayed and fasted and then sent Paul and Barnabas off to evangelize and establish new churches in Seleucia, Cyprus, and Salamis. This dynamic—the church sending evangelists to new cities—is seen throughout the book of Acts and is the foundation of most of the churches that we come to know in the New Testament. In a manner of speaking, most of the churches in the New Testament were parachute plants at some point. Evangelists often came first, and then came pastors who would stay, preach, and shepherd the flock after the evangelist moved on. Sometimes churches were established in reaction to a “Macedonian call,” but many churches were planted through men being sent as parachute planters.

The second reason we should desire more parachute church planting is that it is very much a part of our historical identity. Many churches in the OPC around the country were successfully planted by this model. From coast to coast, stories could be told of men in the OPC who

were called by presbyteries to do evangelism in an area. Eventually, where these efforts succeeded, a group would be gathered into a Bible study; that Bible study would turn into a church; and a pastor would be called to shepherd the flock after the evangelist moved on to try to start another church in another location. Sometimes, of course, the evangelist would stay with the church and become its pastor. The model being described here is in many ways the origin of the regional home missionary position. That position eventually flexed, especially in the decades that saw many established groups coming to presbytery home missions committees for help finding pastors and becoming organized congregations. The simple point here is that parachute planting is very much a part of our cherished history and identity in the OPC, alongside other models of church planting. We plant daughter churches; we work with groups that come to us; and we sometimes send evangelists to new areas where groups do not already exist.

The last reason offered is a very practical one. Parachute church planting focuses heavily upon evangelism. The OPC was founded upon a desire to see people reached for Christ on the foreign mission field and to see the church remain faithful to confessional orthodoxy. Parachute church planting seeks to do both, in that order. It focuses on evangelism—but always with the goal of establishing new churches that are Reformed, confessional, and committed to the means of grace. The reality is that much of our numeric growth in the OPC is really transfer growth from other churches or denominations. That is not wrong in and of itself, but we should desire to see people won to Christ through our churches and church plants. We should long for more adult baptisms and for the privilege of being the first to disciple new believers as we proclaim the gospel and establish new churches.

Parachute church planting should never be exalted over other faithful models of church planting in the OPC, but it should exist fruitfully alongside them. As we engage in the work of parachute church planting together, we also get to share in the joy of seeing God’s Spirit at work among us. These stories can invigorate us and help create a culture of evangelistic health in our churches. In short, parachute planting can be a blessing to the whole church. It is biblical, it is consistent with our history and identity, and our God is glorified as we fervently proclaim the gospel in new places. **NH**

The author is planting Salt and Light Reformed Church in Daytona Beach, Florida, and directs the Center for Evangelism at Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

KEEPING CHRIST CENTRAL IN CENTRAL ORANGE COUNTY

CHRISTOPHER D. HARTSHORN

Central Presbyterian Church in Irvine is a young congregation with an old conviction: Christ builds his church. Our story began in ordinary ways—prayer meetings, conversations, and a shared desire to see the gospel planted in a strategic place—but behind it all we have sensed the Lord’s steady hand and kindness guiding us forward.

SPIRITUAL HUNGER BENEATH THE SUCCESS IN SOUTHERN CA

My work as regional home missionary places me in frequent conversations about church planting across our presbytery. Arizona is growing rapidly and remains wide open to church planting, and in Hawaii our work—now called Covenant Kapolei—is advancing with real hope and encouragement.

But one question kept coming up: How will we reach Southern California?

Planting in Southern California right now is not an obvious choice. The cost of living continues to skyrocket, and many people are leaving the state for understandable reasons. But the spiritual needs have not declined simply because the challenges have grown.

Irvine sits in Central Orange County, a densely populated corridor that nearly stitches Los Angeles and San Diego together. Neighborhoods, apartments, schools, and corporate campuses keep appearing, bringing the nations to our doorstep. Beneath the polish and success usually associated with this area, there is deep spiritual hunger and quiet pain. In many ways, this is exactly the kind of place where solid churches must be planted.

SUPPORT AND LEADERSHIP

Our first step came in fall 2024 with a simple interest meeting. Several Bible studies followed, and it quickly became clear that the Lord was opening a door. We soon began evening worship. From the beginning the Lord provided wise help in two borrowed elders—Skip MacLean



Fellowship on Sunday morning at Central Presbyterian Church

and Andres Czerwiak—each with decades of experience and prior church-planting work. With the kind support of a Reformed Baptist congregation, we began meeting each Lord’s Day evening, gathering first for prayer and then for worship.

Another key provision was our intern, Cliff Foster. Cliff graduated from Westminster Seminary California in May 2025 and moved to Irvine with his wife, Bre, and their daughter, Amaya, to begin a yearlong church-planting internship. (They have since welcomed a second daughter, Aliyah, whom we recently baptized.) As summer ended, we sensed the time had come to add morning worship. We held a soft launch on August 24 and our first regular morning service the following Lord’s Day.

We meet for both morning and evening services at Deerfield Elementary School. That decision is both practical and pastoral. Facilities are extremely expensive in Orange County, and schools are both affordable and placed directly within neighborhoods. Several people have wandered in simply after seeing our signs. One dear couple, who had not attended church anywhere since COVID, noticed our sign, visited once, and now worships with us both morning and evening.

The Lord has already blessed the ministry with conversions, with previously unchurched people preparing to

join the church, and with children hearing about Jesus for the first time and listening with bright-eyed interest. These mercies keep us both encouraged and humbled before God.

REACH EVERY HOME

The name Central Presbyterian Church carries three layers of meaning. First, Irvine really is central within Orange County. Second, we believe Christ must remain central in all that we do as a church. Last, but certainly not least, we long to become a central hub for future church plants. Our hope and goal is to plant multiple churches out from Central over the next few years.

We also like to summarize our identity in four words: rooted, reverent, relational, and relentless. We are rooted in Scripture, because God's Word governs our doctrine, directs our worship, and shapes our lives. We are reverent in our worship, gathering before a holy God with joy and seriousness rather than casual entertainment. We are relational in community, seeking a church where people are truly known, prayed for, and cared for. Finally, we are relentless in mission. We do not merely want to gather Christians; we want to reach the lost with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are especially committed to going out into our community. Simply opening the doors on Sunday is not enough. We have taken to heart a striking line in the OPC's report on evangelism, which reminds us that a church cannot say it has fully evangelized its community until a deliberate effort has been made to reach its homes.

In dependence on Christ, our aim is simple and concrete: intentionally reach every home around our church and, in time, every home in Irvine with a clear, gracious, personal gospel witness.

So we go to the university campuses. We go to the coffee shops and hold open Bible studies, in hopes of seeing more people drawn to Christ.

Intern Cliff Foster at Central Presbyterian Church



Central Presbyterian's young adults group

We are also learning to steward seasons when people are especially open to spiritual things. Christmas and Easter remain such times. This past Christmas, volunteers from across the presbytery joined our congregation to distribute two thousand invitations for our Christmas sing-along. Many visitors came, relationships began, and the gospel story was clearly proclaimed.

That reflects our philosophy of evangelism more broadly. Getting someone to attend immediately is wonderful, but it is not our only goal. We want our neighbors to know we are here, to sense that we genuinely love this city, and to regard our presence as a blessing rather than an irritation. When life unravels and someone thinks, "I need a pastor," our prayer is that they will already know our name. We are playing the long game.

Alongside these efforts, we are also seeking to meet people where they already are—online. Through sermon audio, social media, and a growing digital presence, we aim to place faithful preaching and clear gospel witness before people who have not yet walked through our doors. For many, this first contact becomes a bridge to personal conversation, embodied community, and gathered worship.

Before every evening service, we gather for prayer. We plead for conversions, for wandering sheep to return, and for courage to speak of Christ openly and lovingly. We believe God hears our prayers, and we know that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

God is not finished with his mission in the world—and by his mercy, neither are we. In fact, we are just getting started.

The author is regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California.

REVIEW: *EVANGELISM: FOR THE CARE OF SOULS* BY SEAN MCGEVER

ANDREW J. MILLER

The prospect of sharing the gospel with an unbeliever can be intimidating. One side-effect of the rise of street preaching and apologists is that evangelism appears more and more to be only within the ability of the extra gifted, not “everyday Christians.” When sharing the gospel is considered primarily as a one-time encounter, it’s not surprising that Christians feel that evangelism is not something they can do, even though they feel bad about not doing more of it. Thankfully, Sean McGeever’s new primer on evangelism demystifies it and shows how it can be done well by normal Christians.

An installment in the Lexham Ministry Guide series, *Evangelism: For the Care of Souls* is a small book that can and should be taken up by all stripes of Christians. McGeever balances doctrinal exposition and application with personal stories of evangelism—stories not of wild successes, but of his own learning process. This makes the book relatable and reinforces one of the messages of the book: Evangelism doesn’t have to be as complex and difficult as we think.

EVANGELISM IS CONNECTED TO DISCIPLESHIP

McGeever hooked me from the start with this statement: “I argue one of the greatest tricks the devil ever pulled was convincing Christians they only need to hear the gospel once” (1). As he will say later, we really shouldn’t divorce evangelism from discipleship; if separated, the result is what he calls “hit-and-run evangelism.” Rather, “Evangelism is at the heart of the ongoing work of pastoral care, inviting outsiders into the flock of the church and reminding insiders of the heart of the ongoing life of faith” (3).

McGeever, director of Young Life in Phoenix, clearly has rich experience in evangelism and his deep contemplation of it comes through on the pages of the book. He points

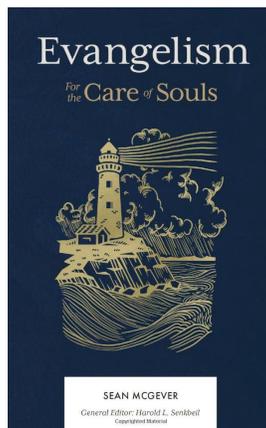
out, for example, that just because a person came to faith at a particular event does not mean that it was because of the event. Typically, God has already been at work planting seeds before conversion. While what we say and do matters, we must remember that we are only the messengers and that “God’s the savior. Evangelism fails when we confuse the two” (18). In a discussion of Matthew 22:1–14, where the messengers, despite having a great message, fail to bring the wedding guests, McGeever explains that there is freedom in resting on the Lord: “Our motivation is one of grateful obedience, of which we have no control over

how the invitees respond. We announce and reannounce the message of the good news of King Jesus” (25).

Evangelism: For the Care of Souls has eight chapters, each bringing out important principles of evangelism. At the conclusion of the first chapter, McGeever notes from the Matthew 22 parable that “the king did not blindly repeat his tactics. Instead, the king adjusted his approach” (26). This leads into chapter 2’s principle: Listening is a key skill to evangelism. Just as a doctor listens to patients describe their symptoms, “evangelistic care of souls begins with *listening*” (48). The third chapter reminds us not to credit or blame ourselves too much. McGeever’s illustration is helpful: When you receive a great

gift in the mail, you credit the sender, not the mail carrier! “In modern evangelism we celebrate, study, and idolize far too many *messengers* while minimizing the sender” (59).

McGeever’s fourth chapter focuses on the communication of the Word of God as being central to evangelism and the care of souls. Ephesians 4 presents evangelists “as a part of a team in a church” that fights against the church being “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching” (91). Evangelists are not just going door to door with tracts; “Paul . . . expects



Lexham Press, 2023.
Hardcover, 240 pages,
\$19.99.

Timothy's evangelistic duties in the Ephesian church to center around authentic content and doctrine in the midst of what people erroneously *want* to hear" (92).

Another point that McGeever makes in this chapter is that summarizing the gospel will feel incomplete (101). There is always more to be said about Christ, which again reinforces that the line between discipleship and evangelism is thin. McGeever concludes that if you want to do better at evangelism, learn the Bible (109).

CATECHESIS AND HOSPITALITY AS EVANGELISM

In chapter 6, McGeever reminds evangelists that their labor is long-term. While mass-delivered messages are certainly worthwhile, "the gospel is best delivered personally and intimately" (116). Here McGeever notes studies of conversion and evangelism that show that most conversions are not overnight, but over periods of time (123; cf. 157). This challenges common assumptions about evangelism that we have inherited from, among others, George Whitefield and Charles Finney (129). We need to educate people about the Christian faith as much as motivate—we need to catechize. This doesn't downplay urgency: "I believe a commitment to a patient approach to evangelism shows the urgency and importance of the task" (134).

A church wanting to increase its evangelistic efforts can, in fact, do so relatively easily through hospitality. The evangelistic task is primarily "a missionary function of . . . [the] local church" (137). Instead of badgering people with blasts of impersonal invitations or tracts,

the best way to help a nonbeliever feel like they belong in the kingdom of God is to build relationships with people inside the church. In a day and age when the most dynamic sermons and worship songs exist online and not at your church, the necessity for personal connection and belonging are more important than ever.

In the final chapter, McGeever tackles the passages in the Gospels where encounters with Jesus bring immediate results, noting that one might erroneously conclude that "the gospel message works . . . like an ultimatum" (150). But for each of those episodes, there are also biblical examples of people being told the same truths repeatedly.

No book is perfect, and the quibbles I have with this book are minor. McGeever brought too much of his ecclesiastical background into it. The responsive reading between a bishop and congregation on pages 165–166, for example, seems unnecessarily parochial. And there was some repetition for a small book that can be read in two afternoons. For example, the comparison of evangelism to officiating a wedding was featured not only on page 5

SUFFERING UNTO GLORY

Excerpt from *New Horizons* vol. 2, no. 5
(April 1982)

by Bobbie Olinger, OP member

One prayer that was offered on my behalf before surgery is that the Lord would heal me and that this would be a testimony to others. He has granted that testimony. Surgery is a dreaded word. Friends would say, "You poor thing! Another surgery!" or something similar. That's what I thought, too; so I tried to give my Heavenly Father all the reasons why not to have the surgery. He in his patience heard me out and then proceeded—like my human father in the past—to do what was necessary. Once I saw it was no use to plead, the words "Your will, not mine be done" came easier. . . .

Next I prayed for help in problems. Lord, you know how dry my throat is from radiation; now the anesthetic will make it worse. The night before surgery, a Dr. Perkins came in and had a long assuring talk. He was sympathetic to my problem, and promised to decrease the medication which gave dryness. What a difference that made!

Another concern was the possibility of television all hours of the night—so wearying with all my discomfort. But my roommate turned out to be an 85 year old lady who had had a slight heart attack and needed quiet. . . . I felt so rested! She was the best roommate—so thoughtful and with a sense of humor. I loved her!

When the pain came, I called on Jesus. (He suffered more than I ever would.) He understood and allowed no more than he enabled me to bear. He was always there as he promised. The Great Physician is not limited to office hours, to one hospital, one room or one patient. My Heavenly Father took care of all the above complaints.

but also on 112, and the post office analogy comes on page 59 and again on 115. These aside, I highly recommend *Evangelism: For the Care of Souls*. McGeever's brief but robust book will spur many on to evangelism by giving practical steps and reminding us of important principles—such as the profound reality that salvation is of the Lord.

The author is regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania.

LOKIRU TIMOTHY, OUR FIRST FULL-TIME CLINIC CHAPLAIN

LEAH J. HOPP

Lokiru Timothy—known locally as Timo—started working as the chaplain of Akisyona Yesu Presbyterian Clinic in July 2025 after graduating from Knox School of Theology in Mbale with a bachelors of theology in May. Praise God for seeing him through his education! Praise God that he could return to serve in Nakaale, Karamoja, with his wife, Scovia, and young daughter!

Timo is a Karimojong in his late twenties who loves the Lord and has grown a lot spiritually since members of the Mission first met him. The Mission sponsored him as a student through parts of secondary school and through Knox School of Theology in Mbale. When I took over managing the Mission’s student sponsorship program in 2023, I came into regular contact with him. He came to work with the Nakaale church plant’s ministry team during his school breaks and grew in his faith. This contact with the Mission over the years has assisted in the good working relationship that we now have with Timo as he labors as the clinic’s chaplain.

PRAYING, MENTORING, TEACHING, ENCOURAGING

Even just since July, the Akisyona Yesu Presbyterian Clinic has already benefited from Timo’s consistency in serving the patients and staff as its first full-time chaplain. Through watching previous missionary evangelists lead devotions for clinic staff every weekday morning and then their mid-morning work with patients, Timo already had a good idea of what to expect for that portion of his work. The rest of his job description is still open to development as he takes the initiative to find ways to pray with patients as they wait for their test results, to encourage the staff, and to follow up with the spiritual health of patients by doing home visits.

The clinic’s registration process asks each patient whether they would like to have someone pray with them during that day’s visit. Most are agreeable—ninety percent of Ugandans are at least culturally Christian. For those patients who need to be referred to higher levels of care—in situations like a complicated delivery or an overnight

Timo leading devotions at the clinic



hospital stay—Timo can also pray with them to let them know that God sees them and is watching over them. Because Timo is from Karamoja, he can share with patients in their local language and thus in a more direct way than clinic chaplains ever have before. I have been encouraged by Timo as he settles into this work.

Timo has also offered to accompany the Community Health Team (CHT), which I oversee, to the villages on Tuesday morning each week. I did not suggest this idea to him. He likely saw when he was a student how beneficial the partnership could be—on his school breaks at home in Nakaale, he would walk out with the CHT and the ministry team to the surrounding villages where they combined teaching about physical health with teaching about spiritual health. Now, as he shares in neighbors’ homes alongside the CHT each week, he is able to get to know each member of the team better. This allows him to encourage them in their faith with a view to also enabling the CHT members to share with their neighbors and families. Not only do the team members hear him teach on the Bible in the villages, but Timo can also review memory verses with them in Karimojong. Please pray for Timo as he continues to develop his role as mentor to the clinic staff, including the CHT.

Timo spends some of his time following up with patients in their homes after they are finished at the clinic. Sometimes it's by phone. More of our neighbors have mobile phones now that an NGO distributed them to the area. If patients want a follow-up, Timo can take their number to call them later. The clinic staff finishes seeing patients around the middle of the afternoon each day. This gives Timo the time to go out to the villages to follow up with former patients, which he has begun doing one afternoon a week. Not all the patients live nearby, but the ones who do are invited to worship at our local church plant. Timo advises them on how to respond to cultural challenges with grace and on where the source of their strength really lies.



Timo visiting villages with Community Health Team members Nakut and Kosho

PRAY FOR TIMO AND SCOVIA

There is a lot of potential in welcoming Timo back to work in Nakaale with the Mission clinic and the local church plant. He also faces many challenges in his first official work experience, such as responding to jealous neighbors; showing care to non-Christian family members; navigating the local culture after living in the city for more than three years; being a good role model and following the Bible's teaching where it diverges from the local culture; and balancing his time between work, church, and family.

Counseling a patient at the clinic



Although preaching at the church plant is not part of his official work, he has been volunteering at the church by preaching at least once per month, translating, and helping to run the Sunday services.

We do not want to put too much pressure on Timo, but we are praying that he could be a leader in the church here in Nakaale one day. Please pray that God will continue to protect Timo from any who wish him harm and that Timo will grow in faith, with a desire to serve his neighbors, whether in Nakaale or elsewhere in Karamoja. His time in Nakaale will give him a lot of experience to help him learn the ropes of ministry work, but he is still in the beginning stages. The harvest is ripe, but the workers are few. Praise God that Timo has answered the call to serve the church in Nakaale! We hope others will soon join him!

The author is an associate missionary in Uganda.

WHAT'S NEW

In early February, the **Rev. and Mrs. James J. (Lydia) Jordan** (Presbytery of New Jersey and Puerto Rico) and their three children, Jameson (5), Miles (3), and Scarlett (1), arrived in Montevideo, Uruguay, where James will serve as a missionary evangelist.

THE 2025 PRESBYTERY DIACONAL SUMMIT

LANETTE HARRIS

At the Presbytery Diaconal Summit held last fall in Chicago, Adrian Crum opened the event with a devotion focused on the need to reform the diaconate according to Scripture. Crum, associate pastor of youth and evangelism at Harvest OPC in Wyoming, Michigan, and member of the Committee of Diaconal Ministries, noted that while the medieval church viewed deacons as “the bottom rung of an ascending level,” 1 Timothy 3 presents a different picture: The office of deacon is both distinct and perpetual. Reforming our understanding of the diaconate, he emphasized, begins with Scripture.

Hosted by the OPC’s Committee on Diaconal Ministries (CDM) and the Committee on Ministerial Care, the summit gathered men from each presbytery who serve on that presbytery’s diaconal committee. Thirty-seven representatives from fourteen of the seventeen Presbytery Diaconal Committees (PDCs) participated. The theme of the summit was “Reforming Your PDC.”

Why are these presbytery committees so important? David Nakhla, CDM administrator, quoted Lendall Smith: Presbytery diaconal committees are the “linchpin of the diaconal network.” The work of the denominational-level committee is largely dependent on the participation and expertise of the presbytery-level committees. In his talk, Nakhla emphasized the usefulness of clear mandates, which guide a committee’s work by shaping agendas, setting priorities, and establishing guardrails that keep the committee focused and disciplined.



Thirty-seven men who serve on presbytery diaconal committees attended last year’s summit, the sixth hosted by the CDM.

Chris Cashen, pastor of Trinity Reformed in Lanham, Maryland, urged attendees in his talk to think biblically about anticipating and responding to diaconal needs.

Several brainstorming sessions followed with real-life scenarios such as: How should a PDC respond to a financial need faced by a minister? How should it handle an emergency? David Askey, a deacon and chair of the Presbytery of Philadelphia’s diaconal committee, pointed out that the goal isn’t simply to fit requests into a budget, but to begin by investigating the actual need—then determine what resources are required to meet it.

THE VALUE OF COLLABORATION

Attendees enjoyed the personal interaction. Zach Siggins, pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian in Ambler, Pennsylvania, said, “The value of collaboration at every level—and collaborating to prepare for mercy ministry—was what I found most beneficial about this year’s summit.”

“The entire summit has been very encouraging,” Chris Cashen concluded. “More than any other summit, I’ve seen increased interaction and deeper collaboration.”

Reforming the PDC is not just about structure—it’s about aligning diaconal ministry with God’s Word, refining the work of mercy, and ultimately experiencing the joy of serving the Lord through the church’s compassionate outreach.

The author writes for the CDM.

Deacons, do you

- face situations you don’t feel prepared for?
- wonder if you are handling things wisely?
- wish you could ask an experienced deacon, “What would you do here?”

78

episodes of help and encouragement are waiting for you.




thereformeddeacon.org

This prayer calendar has two entries per day of those individuals and families supported by the OPC's Worldwide Outreach, to the end that we might support them not only financially but also in prayer.

1 Pray for **Jim & Lydia Jordan**, Uruguay, and their children as they navigate a new culture, environment, and church in Uruguay. / Home Missions associate general secretary **Al (Laurie) Tricarico**.

2 **Charles (Margaret) Biggs**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic. / Pray for **Hank L. Belfield**, stated clerk, as he continues administrative work for the 92nd General Assembly.

3 **Stephen & Catalina Payson**, Uruguay. Pray for the evangelism and outreach of the Soli Deo Gloria church plant in San Carlos. / Pray for those coordinating and leading the **2026 OPC Short-Term Missions** trips.

4 **Jim (Bonnie) Hoekstra**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Wisconsin & Minnesota. / Associate missionaries **Octavius & Marie Delfils**, Haiti. Pray for God's protection as kidnappings, armed attacks, and thefts continue to threaten daily life in their neighborhood.

5 **A. J. & Chelsea Millsaps**, Athens, TN. Pray that the Lord would help Zion OPC to reach young families in the community. / Pray for active-duty US Army chaplains **Cornelius (Deidre) Johnson** and **Kenneth A. (Mandy) Kruckow**.

6 Pray for **Travis & Bonnie Emmett**, Nakaale, Uganda, on medical leave as they prepare for the birth of their fifth child. / Pray for **Judy Alexander**, administrative coordinator for the Committee on Christian Education.

7 **Paul & Rachel Johnson**, Laveen, AZ. Pray for the Lord's blessing on the evangelism efforts of Laveen Presbyterian. / **Mike & Jenn Kearney**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for third-year students at Knox School of Theology as they study with hopes of graduating in May.

8 Pray for Home Missions general secretary **Jeremiah (Beth) Montgomery**. / Pray that the *Ruling Elder Podcast* would be edifying and encouraging to elders and the congregations they serve.

9 Pray for missionary associates **Ben Gifford** and **Jeff & Gloria Davis**, Nakaale, Uganda, who will help maintain the compound in Travis Emmett's absence. / Yearlong intern **Daniel (Anna) Karlson** at Calvary OPC in Cedar Grove, WI.

10 **Phil & Melanie Hollstein**, Madisonville, LA. Pray that the Lord would bring new members to join Prince of Peace. / Tentmaking missionary **Tina DeJong**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray that the planting season in Karamoja would produce enough to feed the local communities.

11 **Andrew (Rebekah) Miller**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania. / Yearlong intern **Jooho Lee** at Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA.

12 **Eli & Esmé Hirtzel**, Kapolei, HI. Pray that God would bless the outreach efforts of Covenant Kapolei in their new community. / Pray for OPC.org technical associate **Stephen Pribble**.

13 Associate missionaries **Christopher & Chloe Verdick**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for wisdom for Christopher as he deals with the increase in patients and interacts with government agencies on behalf of the clinic. / **Brad (Cinnamon) Peppo**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio.

MAR 2026
PRAYER CALENDAR



The Delfils (day 4)



The Sumpters (day 14)

.....
14 **Mark (Peggy) Sumpter**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Northwest. / Yearlong intern **Cliff (Bre) Foster** at Central Presbyterian in Irvine, CA.

.....
15 **Fred & Kaling Lo**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray for Fred as he teaches classes and welcomes visiting lecturers at Knox School of Theology this month. / Pray for yearlong intern **Zac (Caroline) Reeves** at Community Presbyterian Church in Kalamazoo, MI.

.....
16 **Heero & Anya Hacquebord**, Ukraine. Praise the Lord for the thirteen new members and for the many babies born in our congregation. / Pray for **Danny Olinger**, general secretary of the Committee on Christian Education, and for the committee as it meets March 16–18.

.....
17 Pray for **Eric (Heather) Watkins**, evangelist for Chicago, IL, and Daytona, FL. / Pray for yearlong intern **Joshua (Kami) Smith** at Covenant Presbyterian in Mansfield, OH.

.....
18 Pray for the **Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ)** as they consider how to recruit pastoral students who can be trained to pastor their congregations. / Pray for yearlong intern **Juhan (Jessie) Song** at Trinity OPC in Easton, PA.

.....
19 Pray for retired missionaries **Cal & Edie Cummings**, **Mary Lou Son**, and **Brian & Dorothy Wingard**. /



The Songs (day 18)

Mike (Elizabeth) Diercks, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio.

.....
20 **Lacy (Debbie) Andrews**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southeast. / Thank the Lord for the growing number of individuals registering to serve as **OPC Disaster Response** volunteers.

.....
21 Pray for Foreign Missions administrative coordinators **Joanna Grove** and **Tin Ling Lee**. / Pray for **Greg Reynolds**, editor of *Ordained Servant*.

.....
22 **Chris Byrd**, regional evangelist for Presbytery of New Jersey. / **Ben & Heather Hopp**, Africa & Haiti. Pray for Ben as he finishes his regional foreign missionary work and is installed as general secretary of the Committee on Foreign Missions.

.....
23 **Mike (Elizabeth) Diercks**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Ohio. / Pray for **Charlene Tipton**, database administrator.

.....
24 Pray that the Lord would use the **Mobile Theological Mentoring Corps** to encourage and train officers in many Reformed churches abroad. / Pray for *New Horizons* managing editor **Judith Dinsmore**.

.....
25 Pray that the persecuted believers in **East Africa** would be kept strong in their faith and that they would know the Lord's love for them. / **Brian (Nicole) Tsui**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Northern California & Nevada.

.....
26 Associate missionary **Leah Hopp**, Nakaale, Uganda. Give thanks for nurse Melda and her connection with and management of the Community Health Team this past year. / Pray for wisdom for the **Committee on Diaconal Ministries** in their deliberations in Willow Grove, March 26–27.



The Hartshorns (day 29)

.....
27 **Mr. and Mrs. F.**, Asia. Pray for the ongoing training of elder candidates for the presbytery in northeast Asia. / Pray for **Rachel Kinney**, video and social media coordinator.

.....
28 Pray for Home Missions administrative coordinator **Lauren LaRocca**. / **Mr. and Mrs. M.**, Asia. Pray for churches in Asia as they continue to work on a book of church order.

.....
29 **Chris (Megan) Hartshorn**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / Pray for **Anneke Fesko**, care coordinator for OP ministers' wives.

.....
30 Pray for the **Ethiopian Mercy Reformed Church (EMRC)** and their construction needs for a church building in Addis Ababa; pray also that the Committee on Diaconal Ministries would have wisdom as they consider these needs. / Pray for **Anna Hall**, CMC administrator.

.....
31 Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **Douglas Clawson** as he and Ben Hopp prepare to visit several OP mission fields together. / Pray for **Bruce (Sue) Hollister**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Midwest.



At Breakwater's October particularization with pastor Nate Strom far left

NEWS

BREAKWATER PARTICULARIZED AND STROM INSTALLED IN WI

Breakwater Church, a mission work of the Presbytery of Wisconsin & Minnesota, was organized as a new, separate OPC congregation on October 17. The Rev. Bob Holda led the service with Revs. Jim Hoekstra delivering the message, John Hartley charging the new officers, and Dave Veldhorst charging the congregation. Messrs. Jacob DeMaster, Chris Hendrikse, and Michael Kanz were installed as elders, and Jon Burgard, Justin Kaat, and Paul Ratajczak as deacons. After serving as an evangelist and organizing pastor for Breakwater, Rev. Nathan Strom accepted the call to be its pastor.

Breakwater OPC is a result of God's lavish grace. The core group was sent and supported by Bethel OPC in Oostburg, Wisconsin, and greatly encouraged by the presbytery, especially the nearby OPC churches in Sheboygan and Cedar Grove.

IN MEMORIAM: JIM BOSGRAF

Keith A. LeMahieu

Rev. Jim Bosgraf, beloved OP minister, received his "unfading crown of glory" early on December 23, 2025. He was born May 24, 1941, in Wheaton, Illinois. Jim attended Wheaton College where he met his wife Judy (nee Anderson) and was married in 1964. Jim attended Gordon-Conwell Seminary and was ordained to the gospel ministry in May 1967. Jim and Judy served churches in Hanover Park, Illinois; Denver, Colorado; and Oostburg, Wisconsin. In 1992 Jim accepted a call

from the Presbytery of the Midwest to become the OPC's first full-time regional home missionary (RHM). He served as RHM for twenty years and was involved in as many as fifty church plants.

Jim was always an optimist. His presbytery reports as RHM are legendary for the use of adjectives like "fabulous," "wonderful," "amazing," and "marvelous." Prior to his report at one meeting a presbyter rose in jest to move that the presbytery ban such words from his report, but Jim did not know any other way to describe what the Lord was doing in church planting.

Jim was a mentor to many ministers and ruling elders. He was a "church entrepreneur" but always within the bounds of God's Word and our confessions and tertiary standards. He did not believe in a "one size fits all" approach to building Christ's church and always looked for the most effective way to reach people with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Jim loved to spend time with his Savior in prayer. He had a long list of people he prayed for daily. Even as his health declined significantly, he was never interested in talking about himself but rather in pointing people to Christ. That was Jim Bosgraf.

LAM ORDAINED AND INSTALLED AT SAN FRANCISCO

The Presbytery of Northern California and Nevada ordained and installed First OPC of San Francisco's new pastor, Vince Lam, on October 31, 2025. Rev. Calvin Goligher, presbytery moderator, led the service.

Jim Bosgraf (1941–2025)



Michael Grasso, Jim Cassidy, Vincent Lam, Rev. Calvin Goligher, and Wayne Forkner

Pastor Jim Cassidy gave the message, “To the One Who Does Not Work,” on Romans 4:1–12. Rev. Wayne Forkner gave the charge to the new pastor and Rev. Michael Grasso gave the charge to the congregation.

The church was blessed with a full house of friends and family, church members, and presbyters and their families. We give praise to the Lord for his continual faithfulness to his covenant people.

UPDATE

CHURCHES

- On November 30, **New Life Fellowship** in Holland, MI, withdrew from the OPC and was received into the PCA.
- On December 7, **New Hope** in Hanford, CA, withdrew from the OPC.

MINISTERS

- On November 1, **Stephen P. Byrd** was ordained and installed as an evangelist of the Presbytery of Southern California.
- On November 7, **Brian E. Belh** was installed as pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Cedar Falls, IA.
- On November 14, **Joseph R. Boehler** was installed as a pastor at Blanchard Reformed OPC in Finley, OH.
- On December 31, **Bruce H. Hollister** retired, concluding his service as regional home missionary.

2026 NEW HOPE WOMEN’S CONFERENCE APRIL 17–18

Speaker: Courtney Reissig

Topic: “Anchor in the Storm: Our Trustworthy Savior”

Location:

New Hope Presbyterian Church
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- On January 9, **Mark R. Wheat** was installed as pastor of Providence OPC in Bryan, TX.
- On January 9, **Thomas A. Peterson** was installed as pastor of Reformation Faith OPC in Lake City, FL.
- On January 31, **P. Shaun Bryant** retired as pastor of Grace OPC in Modesto, CA.

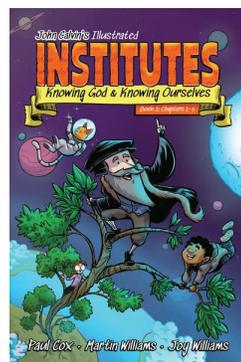
REVIEWS

John Calvin’s Illustrated Institutes, Book 1: Knowing God and Knowing Ourselves, Chapters 1–5, by John Calvin, edited by Martin and Joy Williams, illustrated by Paul Cox. P&R, 2025. Paperback, 80 pages, \$11.99. Reviewed by OP member Katharine Olinger.

Of all the books the editor of this magazine could have asked me to review, why did he choose *John Calvin’s Illustrated Institutes*, the graphic novel? Somewhere, weighty tomes were shipped to more serious readers. Here in Glenside, I was greeted by Calvin in outer space, climbing a tree with a floating astronaut-cat companion. You know what they say: Know thyself.

The editing team of Martin and Joy Williams, together with illustrator (and creator of RefToons) Paul Cox, have crafted something both reverent and playful in the *Illustrated Institutes*.

Their primary source is Book 1 of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Chapters 1–5. In an adventure through time and space, John Calvin, the sixteenth-century Protestant reformer, leads adolescents Theo and Geneva (along with orange tabby Luther) to see that “true and sound wisdom consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.” This adaptation is faithful to Calvin’s message, but it uses modern language and extensive summarizing so that the finished product is no more than eighty pages.



Have you ever wished that John Calvin could lead *you* on a journey to the bottom of the ocean? Can you picture Calvin as a globe-trotter with Indiana Jones energy? As Leonardo’s anatomical model, or a scuba diver? In the *Illustrated Institutes*, Calvin serves as a friendly and multi-talented guide, answering questions posed by Theo and Geneva that help to recreate Calvin’s rhetorical style. As Calvin expounds, his companions are prompted to ask, “What do you mean by true knowledge?” And, “What is the purpose of God’s work in creation and providence?” There are even biblical and historical cameos that bring Calvin’s references to life—the Israelites quaking at Mount Sinai, Paul writing to the New Testament churches, and Plato and Plutarch each popping in for a quick quote.

I teach Middle School Bible classes at a private Christian school. In my classroom, the most popular books during free time are 1) yearbooks, 2) a battered *Where’s*

Waldo, and 3) graphic novels like *New Kid* and *Invisible Emmie*. The images make them attractive and easily accessible. That accessibility is part of what makes the *Illustrated Institutes* a clever project—but it’s also a tightrope walk. There’s a risk that adapting Calvin into a comic could feel like too much of a gimmick. After all, if a student’s skills are strong

enough to read this adaptation, he or she might be capable of working through the actual text, which would be admirable.

And frustratingly, neither version—original or illustrated—is likely to compete with a phone. John Calvin can roller skate, somersault, and parachute (using his scholar’s gown, no less) while spouting beautiful doctrine, and young readers may still be tempted to put the book down. This graphic novel won’t do the work of discipleship for you—but in the context of conversation, shared

curiosity, and time spent living alongside others, it could be a beneficial resource.

Each chapter of the *Illustrated Institutes* includes a summary and a set of ten discussion questions for review. This thin volume ends on a delicious cliffhanger. Having established who God is (glorious, holy, just) and who we are (sinful and accountable), a somber Calvin tells his young students: “People are fully responsible for their sin. It’s their fault alone that they don’t know, love, and worship God as they should. That’s why the Apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20: ‘They are without excuse!’ But don’t despair. Hope is on the horizon.” Fortunately, the team is already working on the next installment.

Track: A Student’s Guide to Church, by Jonathan Landry Cruse. Christian Focus, 2025. Paperback, 96 pages, \$6.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Christopher Allen.

In *A Student’s Guide to Church*, Jonathan Landry Cruse sets forth on a mission to draw his readers to gather around and participate in “the greatest place on earth” (11). In a time where the next generation looks upon the church with suspicion, indifference, or even confusion, Cruse provides a compelling case for why the church matters and why every believer ought to belong to a church.

Cruse, an OPC minister, writes with theological clarity and pastoral warmth. Drawing from the depth of God’s Word and the rich tradition of the Reformed faith, his language is accessible to the unchurched, while still delivering theological precision and depth. Each chapter addresses a core aspect of ecclesiology: What is the church? Why does it exist? What happens when we gather for worship? Why does church membership matter? What is biblical leadership? What

is an individual’s role in church? He also answers many objections that students wrestle with regarding the church, including hypocrisy, physical and emotional hurt, and the allure of consumeristic individualism.

Even though the book is short, it strikes a balance between doctrinal teaching and practical application. Two of my favorite chapters come in his discussion on worship, where Cruse wonderfully develops our understanding of the dialogical principle and the reality that worship within church is the special place where God dwells and communicates with his people through the ordinary means of grace. He goes on to state, “[God] is enough to make church relevant. He is enough to make church thrilling. He is enough to make church awesome” (34). The reason that the church is “the greatest place on earth” is because it is the place we meet the creator of the heavens and the earth. How wonderful is that?

One of the book’s greatest strengths is at the end of each chapter, where Cruse gives a summarizing main point, along with a list of questions for discussion. These questions give the reader an opportunity to slow down, take a much-needed pause, and digest and reflect on

the material that they just read. While written for students and young adults, this book is a great resource for church membership, family discipleship, or youth group.

If the book has a limitation, it is brevity. Cruse writes in such a way that you don’t want to put the book down. Even though he could have added more to the vast topic of ecclesiology, he did an excellent job summarizing the major points within the topic of the church. *A Student’s Guide to Church* accomplishes what it set out to do: introduce young believers to the vision of the church and call them to join,

love, and serve God through the church. I highly recommend it to all of you.

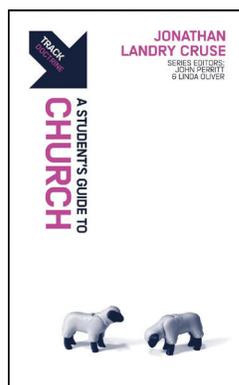
***The Art of Disagreeing: How to Keep Calm and Stay Friends in Hard Conversations*, by Gavin Ortlund. The Good Book Company, 2025. Paperback, 96 pages, \$12.99. Reviewed by OP member Cheyenne Farr.**

In *The Art of Disagreeing* Gavin Ortlund states that we have lost the ability to disagree well. Christians often do not pursue an understanding of each other in their disagreements, but rather tend toward extremes: on the one hand, rushing in without first contemplating the matter, or, on the other hand, avoiding the situation and any potential hurt. In pointing out that disagreement itself is not the problem, Ortlund refers to C. S. Lewis’s love of disagreeing and how much he valued it. Disagreements are a necessary part of our lives, yet it is possible to disagree well.

While much of what Ortlund says seems like common knowledge, his insights are something we should reflect on. It is easy to read through the book and think, “Oh, I know that,” and “Yes, I know that too.” But when we are in the midst of an argument, do we really take the time to step back and think through the way in which we are disagreeing? Do we think about our heart attitudes?

Ortlund asks questions that require reflection and prayer. What builds up the other person? What can I learn through this disagreement? Our desire should be to win the person more than to win the argument. Simply put, we too often put ourselves and our desires above the people to whom we talk. As Christ followers, we should model the gospel toward those we may (continue to) disagree with.

Ortlund’s encouragement and insights center around five things: kindness, courage, listening, persuasion, and love. Speaking wisely, listening well, and, through it all, honoring God are what we are called to do even when disagreeing.



Praying for those with whom we disagree helps our own hearts. Both choosing to speak and choosing not to speak require gospel courage, for only through the gospel can we be kind and discerning in our disagreements without being disagreeable.

This book, short enough to be read in one sitting, is practical and necessary in an age in which social media makes disagreements more public and prevalent. Ortlund delivers powerful and wise applications to assert that it is not disagreeing that is the problem, it is how we do so. In his conclusion, he argues that we must treat one another with love, for “when we love other Christians, we make the gospel more credible in the eyes of the world” (91).

***Reformed Confessionalism*, by D. Blair Smith. P&R, 2025. Hardcover, 144 pages, \$15.99. Reviewed by OP pastor David J. Koenig.**

I was once in leadership at a large non-denominational church, sitting in a meeting in which we were discussing how best to teach the teenagers of the congregation the basics of the faith. I suggested that we use one of the great Protestant catechisms. Instantly the others in the

meeting looked at me as if I had three heads. “We don’t want to use something other than the Bible!” one said. “Aren’t catechisms a Catholic thing?” another said. Finally, I was informed, “We want them to know it in their heart, not by rote memorization.”

In the friendly confines of the OPC, we may not be familiar with some of the prevailing views of confessions and catechisms within the larger evangelical world, but I would characterize the reactions I got at that meeting as typical. Back in the days when I was moving toward Reformed doctrine, I remember struggling with questions surrounding creeds and confessions. I wish I’d had Blair Smith’s little book on Reformed confessions then; it is a true one-stop introduction and apology for confessionalism.

This book is in P&R’s Blessings of the Faith series of one-volume introductions on the basics of Reformed and Presbyterian theology and worship. For my money, this is the best series of its kind, and I have used these volumes several times in the church that I serve. In the body of the book, Smith builds a positive argument for the use of confessions in the church in just five chapters. Chapter 1 traces the roots of confessional-

ism in the New Testament. Chapter 2 deals with faith’s need to express itself. Chapter 3 speaks about the rise of heresy and the need to combat it. In these historical sections, Smith does his best to stick to the concept without getting lost in the weeds of centuries of nuanced historical debate. The nature of this series requires this, but it does leave Smith open to the charge of being simplistic.

Chapter 4 delves into church life and how confessions serve to strengthen our faith. Chapter 5 deals with confessions and the health of the church. After this, there is a final section—the longest part of the book—in which Smith deals with potential objections to confessionalism (the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, abuses of confessions) in a question-and-answer format. Once again, Smith does an admirable job in dealing with these within the confines of the format.

It is helpful to bear in mind that this book is an introduction; if you are looking for more involved discussions of things like subscription, or a detailed look at the history of confessions, this is not the book for you. However, if you are looking for answers to basic questions or something to put in the hands of someone who argues against confessions, I cannot think of a better book.

