



# Harvest Call

October 14, 2018

## OPC Ecumenicity

### Steps toward church unity

In seeking unity with faithful Presbyterian and Reformed church the actual steps toward uniting must include:

- The recognition of each other as true churches of Christ, more or less pure (Confession of Faith XXV.4), in which the marks of the church are found.
- Reconciliation between the bodies (the sin that is involved in the separate existence must be faced and resolved: this may be only the sin of separate existence; or a sin which has historical roots; or doctrinal error; or error in the life of the church).
- Self-examination on the part of each church. Agreement that the confession of the united church must be apparent in the life of the church.
- The offering of each church to the other for examination; willingness to give, receive and respond to reproof (2 Timothy 3:16-17); speaking and acting the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
- Agreement on the same ecclesiology and government of the church.
- Maintaining the peace, purity, and unity of the churches.

There is also responsibility to call all churches, including our own, to faithfulness in order to seek the unity of the whole church.

### OPC Sister Church of the Week

#### The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCI)

The Reformed Presbyterian Church emerged from the crucible of persecution in 17th Century Scotland. The

Covenanters of that time, though struggling as a minority against a ruthlessly tyrannical government, nevertheless did not lose their vision of a national, united and reformed church in the British Isles, under the authority of Christ the head and king of the church. The '*National Covenant of Scotland*' and the '*Solemn League and Covenant of England, Ireland and Scotland*' were intended to bring about this uniformity, but persecution and division ended any practical implementation of this dream.

However the successors of those Covenanters never gave up their aspirations. Today the Reformed Presbyterian Church can be found worshipping and witnessing in Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Australia, Canada, France, Japan, Sudan and the United States of America. These bodies still hold to the headship of Christ over the nations and over Church. There are other denominations and fellowships in Ireland, Scotland, North America and even Cyprus, which in a large part also owe their origins to Reformed Presbyterianism.

#### The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland

The Irish Church today still holds to the descending obligation of those 17th Century Covenants, as well as adhering to the Westminster Standards, the denomination's summary of Biblical doctrine and practice. The Reformed Presbyterian Church is Calvinistic in its theology, Presbyterian in its government and follows the simplicity of the synagogue in its worship rather than the complexity of the Temple which has been fulfilled in Christ. In that sense she is possibly more aware of the Christian Church's indebtedness to its Hebrew heritage than many contemporary Christians and she still highly values the '*Older Testament*' of God's self-revelation, recognising that the idea of Christ's covenant is the glue that cements both Testaments in an unbreakable bond.

None of this should be taken to imply that the Reformed Presbyterian Church lives in the past. She honours the past and learns from it, but she is aware of the need for ongoing witness and reformation in line with the biblical principles referred to above. To mention but three examples:

1. The Church engages in various kinds of missionary, evangelistic and social work.
2. As with the Reformers, she encourages the use of Bibles and Psalters in contemporary English – the ‘*vulgar language*’ (Westminster Confession of Faith 1:8) - that is the language commonly spoken by the people.
3. The Church also takes a keen interest in all matters which affect the spiritual and moral life of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church is a small family of like-minded believers – but it still has the big vision of its founders. The 17th Century Covenanters had an influence on the Reformed branch of Christianity which exceeded what might be expected considering their comparatively small numbers, (their contribution to the Westminster Assembly is a case in point). Their modern successors, must have no less an influence.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church does not claim to be perfect. We do not have all the truth and we can learn from others, but surely the modern Christian Church still needs the principles she espouses. She still needs to acknowledge her Saviour and Lord in all His Kingly fullness.

## The Denomination today

There are at present 37 congregations, 5 in counties Monaghan and Donegal and the remainder in Northern Ireland. These total approximately 2,500 communicant members, with up to 1,500 covenant children and adherents in addition. This is a stronger community than bare numbers might suggest, as most of those belonging to the church show a high level of commitment. In contrast to some larger bodies, there are few nominal members.

The distribution of Reformed Presbyterians (still often called Covenanters) has generally followed the pattern of the original Scots settlement, with most congregations in counties Antrim, Londonderry and Down. For much of her history, therefore, the church has been rural in membership and orientation. This

has been changing in recent years, with significant numerical growth in the Greater Belfast area resulting in the formation of several new congregations. A recovery of confidence in the relevance of the church’s message is leading to a more active and fruitful church expansion programme.

Church buildings are typically simple in design, with a central pulpit, under which is a communion table, symbolising the supreme importance of the Word of God. A widespread building programme has done a great deal to improve the range of classroom, hall and kitchen facilities.

*With acknowledgements to Rev. Barry J. Galbraith. (Moderator of Synod 2010) in “The Covenanters in Ireland - A history of the Congregations”*

## PRAYERS:

- For unity in Reformed and Presbyterian faith and practice, through the ordinary means of grace.
- For the work of the Holy Spirit among God’s people in Ireland, and even to the outermost regions where the RPCI has her influence.
- For love for the saints, vitality and zeal in witness for Christ and His gospel.

## OPC Congregation of the Week

**Knox OPC, Landowne, PA** - is one of the original congregations or a portion thereof that came out of the northern mainline Presbyterian denomination with Dr. J. Gresham Machen during the Fundamentalist / Modernist controversy in the early 20th century.

The congregation has thrived under different names and different locations. Knox settled into its current location in 1976. Knox is unique among OPC congregations in holding to exclusive psalm singing and non-instrumentation in its worship.

Worship attendance hovers around 35 in the morning and evening services on the Lord's day. Pastor Waddington had the privilege of serving as stated supply for over six years.

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Knox OPC have the usual challenges and joys that most congregations face. They have members with serious medical conditions and a few who are seasoned saints with all the aches and pains that go with the aging process. The brothers and sisters at Knox struggle with all the cares and concerns of this life like family strife, finances, job and school concerns. They are learning to daily cast all their cares upon the Lord, thankful to our great and glorious triune God who has created us, provided for us, and redeemed us from the empty way of life of the world.

Jesus Christ is king over all things for the church. Knox OPC seeks to worship the Lord according to his Word with sincere hearts and seeks to walk in newness of life as a gathered body and as dispersed out in the world.

## PRAYERS:

- For the well-being and vitality of the saints at Knox OPC.
- For growth in numbers and in unity of the faith and its practices.

## OPC Mission Work of the Week

### Anaheim Hills Presbyterian Church (AHPC), CA

#### Building a Culture of Evangelism in Anaheim Hills

The AHPC is flourishing with multiple unbelievers attending regularly and new believers getting ready to join. When asked, *“What do you attribute this to?”* Pastor Chris Hartshorn’s response was multi-faceted and full of insights for us.

#### Evangelism as part of everyday life

To begin, Hartshorn responds: *“This comes from people in our congregation being faithful to invite unbelievers to worship and reaching out to people wherever they go- stores, sporting events- you name it.”* Recently Hartshorn’s wife Megan was at a store seeking to buy some patio furniture. A young man named Luis was helping her, and the two struck up a conversation. At

one point, Luis gave Megan a business card for his side financial business. She accepted it and then proceeded to hand him a business card for the church. *“Well, here’s my business card,”* she said. She would later learn that Luis had never been in a church before. He was 22, from the D.C. area, and had just moved to California to start over. His mom had recently come to faith and said, *“It’d be nice if you’d come to church sometime.”* Luis thought about this and prayed, *“God, if you’re real, give me a sign.”* Days later, Megan walked into the store and handed him an invitation to church.

Clearly God had been working behind the scenes. Hartshorn adds, *“the situation with the patio furniture was actually taking a long time. There was a lot of waiting around. Megan could have gotten frustrated, but instead she saw an opportunity and took the time to engage Luis. That’s the kind of person she is. She is always ready to engage others, whether it be with a friendly smile or a meaningful interaction.”* Because of Megan’s willingness to be used of God, Luis came to church for the first time. And once there, he kept coming. Hartshorn has been meeting with Luis on a regular basis and he is in membership classes right now. Luis even brought a friend who hadn’t been to church since she was a little girl. They are going through the Confessing Christ book together, and Hartshorn expects that both Luis and his friend will make public professions of faith and be baptized soon.

Another story is that of Scott, a Mormon raised in Utah who moved in next door to the Hartshorns a few months back. Scott always had a nagging sense that he wasn’t good enough, and that he could never do enough good works to be saved. Church each week was a heaping on of condemnation, and Scott got to the place where he said, *“if I’m going to go to hell, just let me go there in peace.”*

*“But,”* Scott shares, *“when I moved next door to the Hartshorns, I saw something real being lived out- something that I wanted. I saw what it looks like to be Christ-like, and I saw love. It was what I had been looking for my whole life. And then when they invited me to church, I heard the glorious gospel message, and I*

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came to realize that I don't have to be good enough, because Christ has done it all."

Scott was recently baptized at AHPC, and is zealous in sharing his faith with others and inviting them to church. "My faith was once a burdensome thing, and an unwelcome obligation, but now that I have the true Christ, it is a wonderful privilege and opportunity to worship and to serve and to share." Scott admits that he is far from perfect, but he says, "at least I sleep well at night now."



**Pastor Chris Hartshorn baptizing Scott**

The stories of church members inviting unbelievers to worship don't stop there. One of the women in the church has invited a friend who comes to worship 3 out of every 4 weeks. Hartshorn shares that the friend "doesn't buy it yet, but he is captivated and intrigued by the message of the Bible and preaching. He used to think he was a Christian, but now he understands that there's more to it than he thought." Another brother of a family in the church has been attending. He's had

some rough things in his past, including jail time, but he seems to desire a positive change. Hartshorn shares that he also knows of two unbelievers watching their worship services online. They are fellow dads that he knows from his son's baseball team. One of them has shared with Chris, "I want to believe, I just don't know how to do it."

## Creating a church culture that welcomes unbelievers

Sort of like the well-known phrase, "If you aim at nothing you will hit it every time," Hartshorn states, "If you're not aiming for something, you're never going to get anywhere." He emphasizes that a congregation with both believers and unbelievers present does not just happen by accident. "We are actively working toward making that our reality. That is our aim." God is the one who gives the increase, but he also commands us to be planting and watering seeds (1 Cor. 3:6-8).



**The Anaheim Hills congregation**

"We are trying to work into the culture of our church intentional thoughts about how an unbeliever thinks. We're asking ourselves, 'how do we meet unbelievers where they are, and engage them both compassionately and winsomely? When they come to worship, how can we best be patient, loving, and accepting?' We know most of them have no reformed background whatsoever. We won't water down our theology or remove any piece of our reformed confession, so then, how can we better explain liturgy or terminology? How do we engage with unbelievers' false conceptions or assumptions about the church? These are all things we're constantly working on doing better."

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Fundamentally, we're trying to reach people that aren't like us. And in order to do so, we need to think differently."

## Having the (difficult, but honest) conversation

"There is a neat thing we are seeing right now," says Chris. In addition to striving to understand the thinking of unbelievers, the congregation at Anaheim Hills is asking the simple yet pointed question: "are we looking to invite others?" This past Sunday a group of five guys were talking for a half hour after evening worship about this very thing. "The conversation centered around the struggle and fear to evangelize- to cross the 'pain threshold' of personal comfort," Hartshorn states. At one point, one of the guys said, "Sometimes I just don't care about other people at all. I don't care, and that really needs to change." Another guy chimed in and said, "Yeah, sometimes I don't care like I should either." Hartshorn was very encouraged by this conversation, because, "having these conversations is a great place to start... We weren't just talking about the weather or sports. We were sharing our faith struggles and concerns- things that relate to the Spirit. What followed was more discussion on how to evangelize, how to invite others to worship, how to talk about our faith..."

Hartshorn is also leading a Sunday School class on evangelism to further knit this important practice into the hearts and minds of the flock. He tells of some pushback he has received for this persistent focus, but the neat way it has gradually been overcome. One instance was with a man who was upset after Sunday School class one day. He went home, re-read the passages they discussed and prayed about it. Eventually he realized that the things shared were true. Particularly, what was discussed that day was the necessity of discipleship and evangelism in the life of a believer.

Perhaps these words will come as a challenge to us as well. With an air of urgency, Hartshorn emphasizes, "Being willing to talk to people about our faith and how it affects our lives is not an optional part of discipleship. It is indispensable. We need to be willing to wrestle with the truth that we are called to share our faith. In our age

today, I believe that people see coming to Christ as just another choice we make, like buying a car. Instead, we need to see our relationship with him as the foundational element of all our life and all our choices. And if our Christianity is not just another choice, then in all of our relationships, people ought to see evidence of this. Our faith is the center of who we are and so many of us are hiding it. That is the essence of worldliness. The world says 'don't share faith or politics', but the Bible doesn't say that. The Bible says, 'always be ready to give an answer...'. If Christ is central in our lives, then that should come flowing out in all our interactions."

## Saturating all things in prayer

"In all this, prayer needs to remain consistent," says Hartshorn. Going back to the aiming analogy, Hartshorn expresses that at Anaheim Hills, one primary aim is conversions and adult baptisms. To attain to that, they must first of all pray and consistently plead to the Lord toward that direction, and they do. The church prays together every Sunday evening and **Hartshorn regularly encourages his people to pray every day for people they know who don't know Christ: "Pray for them until they do know Christ."** Some churches may hear what AHPC is doing and wonder what God would have them do to work in their church in the same way. "**What's most important,**" says Hartshorn, "**is that people pray. Prayer is central. We are all totally inadequate and insufficient in ourselves. We need to lead and saturate all we do in prayer.**"

## PRAYERS:

- For the continued work of the Spirit at Anaheim Presbyterian Church, for the congregation to grow in grace and peace in Christ.

## SouthWest Presbytery News

### Covenant Presbyterian Church, Abilene, TX -

Founding member of CPC, the first OPC work in Texas, Dr. Larry Hardwicke, clearly remembers the early days of the church in Abilene, where he served on the

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session, voted to unite with the only other Presbyterian church in Abilene, a PCUSA congregation.

After much turmoil regarding the liberal teaching by which the latter would influence the church, he and his wife, Linda, found the address of the OPC in the Presbyterian Journal and wrote them about their concerns on May 1, 1970. On Wednesday, May 6, Rev. Le Roy Oliver, OPC general secretary, sent the Hardwicks a letter assuring them of the OPC's prayers for the group in Abilene. The same day Rev. John Thompson called from Florida, flew in two days later, spent the night with the Hardwicks, leaving the next day after answering many questions regarding the OPC.

The Hardwicks started placing ads in the well-read Abilene Reporter News and before long a group of ten adults, including Larry, Linda, and son Alan, petitioned the Presbytery of the Dakotas for membership as a particular congregation. Rev. Jack Peterson, stated clerk of the Presbytery, responded in July, and soon the interested families were interviewed, and on September 7, the new OP church met in the YMCA auditorium in Abilene for the first time with Rev. John Thompson preaching on "*Christian Watchwords*" and "*Confessing Christ*."

Various men came to preach over the next months, including Rev. Bruce Coie, Rev. Jonathan Male, Rev. Le Roy Oliver, Rev. Harold Baurer, Rev. Roger Greenway (on leave as missionary to Mexico), Rev. Bruce Brawdy, and Dr. A. S. Ungvary. Per the ads, the new reformed church in Abilene would be "*using the ageless Bible as cornerstone*"; "*built on a centuries old Westminster Confession of Faith*"; "*free from National and World Councils of Churches*"; and would "*bring Christ to you and you to Christ*." Within a few months, the Presbytery examined the interested members, and at the fall meeting, the congregation was accepted into the Presbytery.

The church called Rev. Jonathan Male to be its first pastor soon after. He was installed in February of 1971. The church purchased two acres of land, a building committee was set up, and on March 25, 1973, a groundbreaking was held for the new building. It

was dedicated on September 25, 1973, the first Sunday the church worshiped the LORD in the new building. The building is still the church home, and has been expanded four times. Rev. Jonathan Male pastored the church for eight years until August of 1981, when Rev. Neil Lodge was called, and installed in November of that year. He served the church for 17 years, until November of 1998. Rev. Rick Shaw came to serve as interim pastor for about a half year, and then Rev. Ralph English for about nine months after that. In the spring of 2000, the church called Rev. Robert Lotzer to be her pastor. He served the Lord as pastor of Covenant OPC for 18 years until April 2018. In August 2018, the church submitted a call for Rev. Todd Dole as the new pastor. The church currently has three ruling elders and three deacons.

It's almost 50 years since Dr. Larry Hardwicke determined that the Truth of Christ was more important than liberal unity. He has helped shepherd the church by serving as an elder until last year, when he was designated "*Elder emeritus*." Larry continues to worship weekly with the Covenant congregation which he loves so dearly. He says the best thing about Covenant Church is that it has the best sermons, and he loves to sing the rich theology in the hymns of the church, "*And Can It Be*," "*Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus*," and "*How Sweet and Awesome is the Place*."

## PRAYERS:

- For Pastor Todd Dole as he settles into his labors at Covenant Presbyterian Church, Abilene, TX.
- For the continued growth of the saints in grace and for the witness of the church.
- Thanks to God for the faithful service of the Hardwicks family.

**Harvest Call is published by South Austin  
Presbyterian Church (OPC), Austin, TX**

Email: [clerk@southaustinpres.org](mailto:clerk@southaustinpres.org)  
Phone: +1 (512) 900-1654