



Harvest Call

October 28, 2018

OPC Ecumenicity

Unity in Covenant

The church finds its unifying principle in the covenant promise *"my dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people"* (Ezekiel 37:27, Leviticus 26:12). This finds fulfillment in Jesus as Emmanuel (*"God with us,"* Matthew 1:23, John 1:14), who came as the mediator of the covenant of grace to redeem and purchase this people for his dwelling by his blood.

The ultimate consummation of the promise is the new Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ (Revelation 21:3). The church must recognize, appreciate, and confess this fundamental unity of the covenant people of God, the body of Christ; which is a God-given creation and not a human achievement.

The church, the visible organization, is described in the Bible as one church. God has given only one covenant of love (Deuteronomy 7:6–12) and has only one people of the covenant.

OPC Sister Church of the Week

The United Reformed Churches in North America (URC)

The URC began in 1996 when 36 independent Reformed churches covenanted together to form a federation under the 1914 Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC), a slight revision of the Church Order of Dort. This federation of churches was the outgrowth of a movement within the CRC that protested changes taking place in that once faithful denomination and which attempted to call it back to its confessional, Reformed roots. This movement received impetus from a series of consistorial conferences the first of which was held in October 1986 at the invitation of three CRC consistories. At that meeting representatives of twenty CRC's condemned that method of biblical interpretation which allows contemporary culture to determine the meaning of Scripture and they rejected several CRC synodical decisions that had compromised Scriptural authority.

The Consistorial Conference met four times before it changed its name to the Christian Reformed Alliance in March 1990, which then became the Alliance of Reformed Churches (ARC) two years later. The later name change reflected the fact that many participating churches had already severed their ties with the CRC. Sixty-two churches were represented at the November 1994 meeting of the ARC. The existence of this movement, along with organizations of individual members like the Association of Christian Reformed Laymen and Concerned Members of the Christian Reformed Church, were testimony to growing ferment caused by winds of change which were blowing through the CRC.

In the early 1990's several congregations seceded from the CRC, remaining independent for a time, even as they sought fellowship with one another in the Alliance of Reformed Churches. At the 1995 meeting of the ARC, the majority of the independent churches committed to joining together in federative unity. In the interim they called themselves the Federation of Uniting Reformed Churches. At their first synod, Synod Lynwood 1996, the churches adopted the name United Reformed Churches in North America.

In 1997, Synod St. Catharines adopted the church order the URC embraces today also based on the Church Order Of Dort. Ten years later, in spite of all human weaknesses the Lord has blessed the URC with ministers in almost every congregation, with several mission congregations and with growth in number. The URC 2006 directory reports 20,700 members in 96 congregations which are divided into 6 classes (presbyteries), 2 in Canada and 4 in the United States. Although several churches of the ARC chose to remain independent, they continue to have close fellowship with the URC and some subsequently joined in federation..

Even though URC history as a federation is quite brief, they have deep roots in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. The URC trace their history to the Reformation in Geneva as it spread to the Netherlands and brought about the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. In 1562, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands adopted the Belgic Confession of Faith as their confessional statement and soon thereafter required subscription to it by all office bearers before being installed. By 1566, the Heidelberg Catechism had been added to the Confession of Faith of the Reformed churches as a tool for preaching and teaching in the churches. When Jacob Arminius and his followers began to pose a serious threat to the confessions of the

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Reformed churches, the Lord in His providence allowed the churches to convene the ecumenical Synod of Dort which met from November 1618 until May 1619. The Synod of Dort upheld the Reformed confessions and added the further explanation of the Canons of Dort, together with the Formula of Subscription still required among our churches today.

While spiritual life flourished in the Dutch Reformed churches for many years, new challenges began to confront the people of God, especially Rationalism and Pietism. The churches' Reformed confessions were again being threatened by opponents of the truth and were falling into general disuse. Spiritual life was in decline, spawning the Second Reformation which included believers meeting in conventicles for nourishment and encouragement. During this time the freedom of the Reformed Churches came under direct attack when, in 1816, the Church Order of Dort was usurped by the General Rule imposed by King William I. Under this new rule office bearers were no longer required to subscribe to the three confessions of the church, referred to as the Three Forms of Unity. Congregations were forced to endure the ministries of men who had strayed far from the truth.

From this decline the Lord raised up two movements of reformation which continue to have a strong influence on our churches today. The first movement, the Afscheiding (Secession), occurred in 1834 when Rev. Hendrick De Cock and the consistory of the Reformed Church in Ulrum signed the Act of Secession and Return. This spawned a large exodus of members and congregations from the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands who wanted to return to the pure preaching of God's Word without government interference. Many of these believers immigrated to the United States where they eventually formed what was later called the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Prior to the 1880's most of the Dutch immigrants to the United States affiliated with the Dutch Reformed Church (now known as the Reformed Church in America, or RCA). But when the RCA made the decision in the 1880's to allow members of secret societies, such as the Masonic Order, to be members in good standing in their churches, the Dutch immigrants were instructed by their home consistories to join the fledgling CRC. This sparked the first real growth of the CRC which had been founded in 1857.

In 1886 another secession occurred in the Netherlands, the Doleantie, a movement of many congregations led

by the influential Dr. Abraham Kuyper. At first these churches organized to reform the state-controlled church, but when their calls to return to the Word of God fell on deaf ears they separated in 1888. In 1892 they united with many churches of the Afscheiding to form the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN). From these churches, many immigrated to the United States and Canada, swelling the membership of the Christian Reformed Church, especially during the 1940's and 1950's.

For many years the Christian Reformed Church remained faithful to the Lord and His Word. In time, however, there began to be evidences that all was not well. In 1952 the CRC synod was confronted with a seminary faculty deeply divided in theological perspective. For a number of years, some of the professors had become enamored of the neo-orthodoxy of Carl Barth, as mediated by G. C. Berkouwer at the Free University of Amsterdam. (Neo-orthodoxy was a reaction to the modernism of the 19th century which rejected the Bible as the Word of God. Neo-orthodoxy responded by saying the Bible contains the Word of God, which was hailed by many as a return to orthodoxy. However, orthodoxy is defined by saying the Bible *is* the Word of God. By saying only "*it contains the Word of God*" the authority of every word was undermined, and reader or scholar could still reject whatever he did not like, just as in the liberalism of the previous century.) This trend toward neo-orthodoxy at Calvin Seminary was resisted by some, including Dr. William Hendriksen who was at that time teaching at Calvin.

The synod chose to deal with the divided faculty by firing everyone, which was a great loss for the cause of truth and the Reformed faith. The action of the synod – a political solution – did not solve the problem, and, as the faculty was rebuilt, the majority of the new professors hired were sympathetic to neo-orthodoxy, or the progressive perspective. This has had a profound effect on all the CRC ministers trained in the last fifty years. Thankfully many resisted the harmful influences in their training and became stronger advocates of the truth because of it, but sadly over the years the majority of ministers succumbed to it.

The division that had been present in the seminary prior to 1952 was propagated in the churches by two magazines that were begun in the 1950's: The Reformed Journal, representing the progressive movement, and the Torch and Trumpet (later called the Outlook) representing the historical Reformed faith. By the mid

1980's the official magazine of the CRC, The Banner, had taken up the progressive cause as well.

The progressive movement was aided by a revision of the Church Order in 1965, which gave more authority to synodically appointed boards, placing the consistories further away from their seminary, the church publications and the church's mission efforts. Cut loose from the solid mooring of the Bible as the Word of God for all ages, the churches drifted into a general spiritual and theological malaise in which the preaching of God's Word lost its edge.

In many places, the Word, as summarized by the catechism, was no longer preached to the congregations nor was the catechism memorized by and explained to the youth. When ministers lost faith in the gospel as the power of God unto salvation, worship began to be corrupted by liturgical innovations of various kinds as leaders searched for new methods to make the church grow. In the 1960's the Arminian "love of God" controversy surrounding Prof. Harold Dekker was not clearly answered by the synod, and in the 1970's Rev. Harry Boer's rejection of the doctrine of reprobation as confessed in the Canons of Dort did not result in his deposition from office.

In 1972 the churches adopted a synodical report on the nature and extent of biblical authority which tended to reduce the inspiration and authority of Scripture to its main message of redemption. The synod of 1973 took a stand on homosexuality which stated that having homosexual desire is no different than being born with color blindness or a club foot and therefore not culpable as long as it is not openly expressed. During this time, many began to call for the ordination of women to ecclesiastical office.

Much controversy arose over this issue and by the time the dust settled in the early 1990s, the synod had approved the ordination of women to all the offices of the church. Last, but by no means least, was the refusal of the synod to censure the ideas of Professor Howard Van Til concerning the evolutionary origin of the universe and his higher-critical approach to Scripture that declared some parts of the Bible to not be the Word of God.

The primary concern of those who left the CRC (over 20,000 souls in just a few years in the mid 1990's) was the adoption by many leaders in the CRC of a new method of interpreting the Bible that contradicted the Bible and our Reformed confessions. It was called "the new hermeneutic" that is, a new way of reading the Bible

which consists of saying that the Bible is not clear in addressing contemporary problems, often leaving us in doubt about how we should proceed.

The reason the Bible is not clear, it is said, is because the Bible's message to first century Christians (or earlier to Israel) was so conditioned by their culture and local circumstances that it is not directly applicable to our modern culture and different historical situation. It was God's Word when it was written, but it is not God's will for us now, they say. This new method of interpreting the Bible contradicts what we confess about the Bible, especially in Belgic Confession, Article 7.

This new way of reading the Bible was used in official synodical decisions to defend the ordination of women, redefine homosexuality, and permit evolutionary theory.

For many years, faithful men and congregations labored within the CRC to promote the historic Reformed faith and resist the changes introduced through the new hermeneutic. Only when all efforts at reformation by admonition and discipline proved ineffectual, and the floodgates of error were opened too wide ever to be shut again by ordinary means, did the faithful avail themselves of the last resort, which was to separate and reform the church according to its original character.

The United Reformed Churches are called by God to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints; to be a pillar and buttress of the truth.

PRAYERS:

- That it may please our Lord to give the URC a continued undying love for Jesus Christ.
- That the URC may remain true to the Word and fulfill their calling so that the true religion may be preserved, and the true doctrine everywhere propagated.
- That transgressors may be punished and restrained by spiritual means; also that the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted, according to their necessities.
(*Belgic Confession, Art. 30*).
- That the mission works and churches of the URC may grow in grace and peace.

Edited from: *The History of the United Reformed Churches in North America*, by Harry Zekveld and Ralph A. Pontier, AD 2007

OPC Congregation of the Week

Redeemer OPC, Atlanta, GA (ROPCA) - On November 17, 2018, Redeemer Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, GA, will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary as an organized OP Church in great Atlanta. Since its particularization, the congregation has gone through many trials, yet the Lord has been faithful and has brought her through hardship, blessing her with uninterrupted ministry of the ordinary means of grace and growth in membership.

Currently the membership at Redeemer reaches up to 70 containing all age groups. ROPCA holds Morning and Evening Worship Services each Lord's day. Pastor Zecharias Weldeyesus is preaching through 1 Peter in the Morning and the Book of Genesis in the Evening. The Lord has been gracious in blessing the preaching of His living Word and drawing new visitors to Worship him.



Pastor Zecharias Weldeyesus

Prior to the regular Worship on Sunday, adult members attend Sunday School Class. Elder Ben Stahl is teaching a class on the Doctrine of the Church. During adult Sunday School covenant children participate in Sunday School Classes for young children, then they join the Congregation in corporate public worship.

Wednesdays there is a weekly Prayer meeting and Bible Study along with a fellowship dinner. ROPCA are working through the five Solas of the Reformation. It

has been very beneficial for ROPCA members to study the five Solas in the light of God's Word and learn Reformed and Presbyterian Church history.

In addition, ROPCA practices ministry to the Youth and Women on a monthly basis, and have started a ministry to refugees. Rev. Chris Cashen was called as an evangelist to more than 20 nations represented by these refugees in Clarkston, Georgia. Chris, his wife GraceAnn and volunteers from ROPCA offer English classes to the refugees in which Rev. Cashen incorporates bible stories to expose them to the Gospel.

By God's providence Clarkston has become an open mission field for Redeemer and Evangelist Chris Cashen, who is endeavoring to bring the good news of the Gospel to the nations in Clarkston through organizing English classes and weekly Bible Study. The church's long term plan through this unique ministry is to plant a multi ethnic Reformed Church in Clarkston.

PRAYERS:

- For preaching and teaching ministries to the glory of Christ's name and His kingdom.
- For effective pastoral visits and counseling by the Session to God's people to bear fruit for the Lord and in the spiritual walk of His Children.
- For the marriages, Covenant children, the elderly, singles, widows and widowers to be comforted and strengthened by God's Word.
- To keep and maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and obedience to the Holy Spirit in their sanctification.
- That Redeemer will grow spiritually and numerically and live out their Confession.
- For courage, boldness, and passionate outreach and evangelism among people outside of the Church.
- That God's people shall call the Sabbath a delight and continue worshipping the Lord every Lord's day morning and evening.
- For blessing upon the labors of Evangelist Chris Cashen among the refugees in Clarkston, Georgia.

OPC Mission Work of the Week

Keys Presbyterian Church, Lower Florida Keys - The work continues steadily, with members faithfully ministering in their communities and setting aside time to pray together during the week. Pastor Bill Welzien has maintained his regular schedule of preaching in the open air at Mallory Square.



Bill and Sessie Welzien

Bill shares an interaction he had recently. After finishing part of his presentation, a man came up and asked him a question. Bill handed him one of his tracts and the man attempted to hand it back. He said, *"I am not religious."* Bill responded, *"I'm not religious either. I am concerned about the truth. Are you concerned about the truth?"* The man seemed surprised as though he had never thought about such a question.

Bill told him if he was not believing the truth then he was believing a lie. They got into some more of his background, and Bill realized that he had no personal knowledge of the Bible. He urged him to at least begin to read the New Testament. Interestingly, when the man departed, he still had the tract in his hand.

PRAYERS:

- Please pray for this man and for the continued outreach ministry of Keys.

SouthWest Presbytery News

Providence OPC, Kingwood, Texas -

A reformed congregation was started during the early 90's, in Kingwood Texas, a master planned community, located just north of Houston and near Intercontinental Airport. Unfortunately, shortly after finishing the construction of a new church building, division hit within the church and the decision to close the congregation was made by the session and presbytery. Several families who were members of this church worked together, but were unsuccessful in convincing the PCA to re-establish a congregation in the area. This small remnant then decided to begin meeting on its own in the late 90's in a meeting room, located in Kingwood Medical Center, equipped with R.C Sproul video tapes as their teacher and with hymnals donated by a crosstown PCA congregation. One of their number was a jazz pianist and brought his keyboard to play every Lord's Day. The group sang hymns and psalms and continued in fellowship and study, but were not under the oversight of an organized congregation. They knew they needed to be.

As their numbers began to grow and become more convicted in their desire to become united in a formal church, mid-week studies began and Sunday studies continued. The search for a reformed denomination to assist them continued. Then, in December, 1999, one of their number, Mr. Leon Halden, spoke to a Rev. Gary Davenport, the Regional Home Missionary for the presbytery of the Southwest (OPC). Having been very interested in establishing the OPC's presence in the greater Houston area, Rev. Davenport was on the scene by January 2000. By the February 2000 Spring Meeting, of the Presbytery of the Southwest (PSW), Mr. Coleman Simpkins drove to Amarillo, Texas, in order to plead the group's case for assistance. In God's Providence, the decision was made to assist the small group of believers in Kingwood, Texas. First worship service, as a mission named, Providence OPC, began on April 7, 2000, with 15 communicant members and six covenant children. Various OPC ministers and elders provided pulpit supply, when available. Mr. Simpkins

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read Rev. Todd Bordow's sermons when pulpit supply was not available.

On June 20, 2001, Mr. Adam A York was called by the PSW to serve as evangelist of the newly formed mission. In August 2001, Adam and his wife Pamela, arrived in Kingwood from California to begin serving Providence OPC in Kingwood. By the end of that year the number of communicant members stood at 22 along with their nine covenant children. At the January 18, 2001, Presbytery Meeting Mr. Adam York was examined licensing for the ministry. He was ordained and installed on May 3, 2002. At the annual meeting of the mission on December 15, 2004, the group voted to approve Mr. Scott Elliot and Mr. Coleman Simpkins as its officers, and to extend a call to Rev York. On February 25, 2005, Providence OPC was declared a particular church by the PSW. Rev York was installed as pastor, Mr. Simpkins as a ruling elder and Mr. Elliot as deacon.

Although Providence OPC has met in a variety of buildings, the local Kids In Action has been home for the past three years. Membership currently stands at 48 and 25 for communicant members and their covenant children respectively. Several new families have recently finished the newcomer's classes and are ready to make profession of faith.

PRAYERS:

- Pray for ruling elder Coleman Simpkins' cancer treatment. On October 16 Coleman began a 1 year, bi-weekly immunotherapy treatment. Lord Willing this will be curative for his lung cancer. Coleman is encouraged that a doctor at the hospital where he is receiving this treatment will receive the Nobel Prize for its discovery this December.
- Give thanks that the Lord has answered prayers for a nine year old girl, a covenant daughter of the church, Lily Schwacofer, who recently faced an involved surgical procedure to repair her palate. So far this appear to have gone well. The final results of the surgery will not be known until December.

- Rev. Nick Lammé was called at the Fall Stated Meeting of the PSW to serve the greater Houston area as the Harvey Evangelist. The Lammés have found housing. They will be settling near Providence. Nick plans to arrive in mid-November and the rest of the family will arrive later. Pray for the move of the entire family, that they would be warmly received by their church family and for fruitful ministry opportunities for Nick.
- Earlier in the year Providence faced a significant budget shortfall. Praise the Lord that this shortfall is being eradicated. Pray that the Lord would continue to provide for the church in Kingwood and that the building fund (currently around \$45k) will grow.
- Pray for further outreach and growth - particularly that the church may come alongside Rev. Lammé's efforts when he arrives on the field in Houston.
- For the church's officer training program. Currently one man is being trained. Pray that this work may finish soon and that the Lord would continue to provide further leadership for the church.
- Praise God that there are a number of people who have gone through the membership class, are being examined by the session and Lord willing, will soon be received as members.

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