

What is the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?

Basic Information to Acquaint You with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

INTRODUCTION

Many people today are looking for a church that is true to the Word of God. The search is complicated, however, because of the wide variety of churches to be found in most communities. Some local churches are faithful to God's Word, but many are not. Some think they are following the Bible, but have fallen into serious error.

Other people belong to a local church that is faithful to the Bible, yet their denomination is drifting away from it. Such congregations or groups within them may be looking to unite with a denomination that remains faithful to the Scriptures.

If you are looking for a local church or a denomination that confesses the Bible to be the Word of God, and has made it her authority for faith and life, we invite you to find out more about the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC).

In the following pages, we will tell you

- [where we came from](#) (our history),
- [where we are today](#) (our doctrine and characteristics), and
- [where we are going](#) (our ministries)

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is steadfastly committed to promoting the glory of God. She has seen his hand guide, protect, and even reprove her during the short sixty-five-plus years of her existence. She was born out of persecution for the sake of the gospel, nurtured in adversity, and strengthened as she sought to fulfill her Master's call. She strives to keep her eyes fixed on Christ Jesus, her Savior and Lord. By the strength of his Spirit, she endeavors to live righteously in full obedience to his Word, her only rule for faith and life.

PART I: WHERE WE CAME FROM

1. Historical Background

The church of Jesus Christ, regrettably, is divided into many denominations. How does the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) fit into this complicated picture?

For several centuries the church struggled to clarify its understanding of the Bible in opposition to error. The church formulated basic doctrines about God and Christ in such creeds as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. We share these great ecumenical creeds with other Christians.

But after centuries of rivalry, the Western ("Catholic") church split from the Eastern ("Orthodox") church in 1054 over disagreement on the intra-Trinitarian life of God. Despite our name, the OPC is part of the Western stream.

During the Middle Ages, ritualism, superstition, ignorance, and a growing hierarchy (headed by the Pope at Rome) increasingly eclipsed the Bible and its gospel. But Christ always preserved at least a small remnant of faithful believers who held to the truth (and often suffered for it). Finally, by God's grace, the central truths of the Bible were rediscovered by Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other Reformers. The Bible was translated into the languages of the people, and this fueled the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Protestants insisted on the infallible authority of Scripture, unencumbered by church tradition (nonbiblical doctrines and practices that had developed down through the centuries). They declared, on the basis of Scripture, that salvation is a gracious gift from God, received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and not something dispensed by priestly rituals or earned by good works. These Protestant principles undergird the OPC today.

The Protestant world soon divided over such matters as church government, the nature of the sacraments, and worship. In these matters, the Lutherans did not distance themselves from the Roman Church as much as the Reformed (or Calvinistic) churches did. The Anabaptists, with misguided zeal, rejected various biblical beliefs and practices. The OPC belongs to the Reformed stream of the Reformation.

A movement called Arminianism arose within the Reformed churches. It compromised the doctrines of the sovereignty of God and salvation by grace alone. Although the Synod of Dort condemned it in 1618, Arminianism spread and became influential in many churches of Reformed parentage. It has many followers in American churches today. The OPC, however, seeks to be biblically Reformed and firmly rejects Arminianism. (For a summary of the Reformed faith, see "[Our System of Doctrine](#)" below.)

During an enormous religious and political struggle to determine the character of the English and Scottish national churches, the Westminster Assembly met in London from 1643 to 1649. It issued the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. These documents are distinctly Reformed, much like the Heidelberg Catechism and other earlier Reformed creeds. They became the basis for what we today call Presbyterian churches. With slight revisions reflecting developments in American Presbyterianism, they are the doctrinal standards of the OPC.

The Westminster Assembly set forth a "presbyterian" form of government. The Assembly rejected both the "episcopal" system (in which the church is ruled by bishops in a hierarchy), and the "congregational" system (in which each congregation is independently ruled by its members). In the presbyterian system, followed by the OPC, each congregation is governed by a session, consisting of elders ("presbyters"), including its minister(s). Each congregation chooses its own elders, who are accountable to local, regional, and national assemblies in a connectional relationship.

When people immigrated to America, they brought their religion with them. Immigrants from Scotland, Ireland, and England soon established Presbyterian churches. Presbyterianism grew up with America and had a major impact on shaping her destiny. Tragically, at the time of the Civil War, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. split along geographical lines. In 1936 the OPC came out of the Northern Presbyterian church. Today it is a national church with congregations in all sections of the country.

Reformed theology is also called covenant theology, because it teaches that God has established covenants that govern his dealings with men. In the covenant of grace, operating in both Old and New Testament times, God graciously provides salvation to his people through Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the covenant. However, in nineteenth-century England a different view arose, called dispensationalism. It distinguished sharply between Israel and the church (assigning to each a different way of salvation and a different destiny), and divided the Scriptures into portions that applied to one or the other. Dispensationalism has a considerable following, but the OPC regards it as a serious error.

The greatest struggle within the church at large in the twentieth century was that between biblical faith and theological liberalism (or modernism). Although claiming the name of Christianity, liberalism began by questioning the full authority of the Bible and ended up denying every biblical doctrine that modern secular thinking found disagreeable. The OPC was established in direct opposition to liberalism. The word *orthodox* in our name indicates that we are committed to "straight" doctrine, which "lines up" with God's Word.

Many in modern times have been affected by the "charismatic" movement. It alleges that the gifts of speaking in tongues, prophesying, and miraculous healings continue in the church today. The OPC rejects these claims, believing that these special gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased at the end of the Apostolic Age, their purpose (to lay the foundation of the apostolic church) having been achieved.

2. The Formation of the OPC

During the nineteenth century, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. was largely a strong and faithful church. But liberalism began to creep in from Europe, and little was done to check its spread. In 1924 about 1,300 (out of 10,000) Presbyterian ministers signed the liberal Auburn Affirmation, which denied that the Bible was without error and declared that belief in such essential doctrines as Christ's substitutionary atonement and his bodily resurrection should not be made "tests for ordination or for good standing in our church." Unbelief was taking over the church.

Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, remained a bastion of Presbyterian orthodoxy. But in 1929 its Board was reorganized with a mandate to put liberal professors on the faculty. Four Princeton professors resigned and (with the support of others) established Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia as an independent institution to continue teaching biblical Christianity.

The leading opponent of liberalism in those days was J. Gresham Machen, a Presbyterian minister and professor at Princeton (and later Westminster). When he exposed the modernist unbelief that permeated the foreign missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the General Assembly in 1933 refused to do anything about it. Because he and others would only support missionaries who were actually preaching the gospel, they established the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. The 1934 Assembly condemned their action, and they were soon deposed from office. In response, 34 ministers, 17 ruling elders, and 79 laymen met in Philadelphia on June 11, 1936, to constitute the Presbyterian Church of America. (Because of a lawsuit brought by the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the name of the new church was changed to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1939.) They wanted to "continue the true spiritual succession of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A." They hoped that a mass exodus of Bible-believing Christians would swell the ranks of the new denomination, but it never happened. Then, on January 1, 1937, Machen's untimely death dealt a severe blow to the new church.

3. The Development of the OPC

The first major question facing the new church was whether it would be a typically American fundamentalist and evangelical church, or whether it would follow its confession and be biblically Reformed in character. Many who favored the former left in 1937 to form a different church. That left the OPC with a more clear-cut commitment to the Reformed faith. Early leaders of the Church included men of Dutch Reformed and Scottish Presbyterian backgrounds, such as Cornelius Van Til and John Murray.

This struggle continued through the ensuing decades, but the church maintained a firmly Reformed stand. This tension between a more American evangelical and a more rigorously Reformed emphasis remains in the OPC, but our commitment is to follow the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture, wherever he leads.

From the beginning, the OPC emphasized mission work, both at home and abroad. As a result of church-planting efforts, the OPC experienced slow but steady growth (which has accelerated in recent years). Today, one may find her over 300 churches and mission works in 45 states (and one Canadian province), organized into 16 regional churches, each governed by a presbytery (see appendixes [1](#) and [3](#)). The OPC is currently growing by several churches and mission works annually. Carrying the whole truth of Scripture to the ends of the earth has also been important to Orthodox Presbyterians from the outset. Today the OPC has missions around the world.

Although the OPC is not large, she has never isolated herself from the rest of Christ's church. She has energetically promoted the Reformed faith around the world and has engaged in ecumenical discussions with other biblically Reformed churches in order to perfect the unity that Christ desires for his people.

PART II: WHERE WE ARE TODAY

1. Our Constitution

The constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church consists of its standards of doctrine, government, discipline, and worship, namely, its Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, Form of Government, Book of Discipline, and Directory for the Public Worship of God.

This constitution is not the final authority in the OPC, but is subordinate to the primary standard of the Church, namely, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Since the Scriptures are "the rule of faith and life," the Confession subordinates itself to them, declaring that "in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them" (chap. 1). The OPC, under the lordship of Jesus Christ, is guided in all matters by the Word of God, as illuminated by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Church endeavors, humbly and prayerfully, to follow the Bible's teachings, regardless of the world's current "wisdom."

Our doctrinal standards are the Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, and the Shorter Catechism. The Confession (like the Catechisms) is essentially the one prepared by the Westminster Assembly in the 1640s, but it incorporates a few modifications that have been adopted during the course of American Presbyterian history, notably statements separating the state from involvement with the church. These documents set forth the basic teachings of the Bible.

The documents regulating our government, discipline, and worship follow scriptural principles and are published together as *The Book of Church Order*. They consist of the Form of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory for the Public Worship of God.

All church officers—ministers, ruling elders, and deacons—are required to receive and adopt the Confession and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Bible, and to approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Church. Other church members are only required to acknowledge that the Bible, as the Word of God, contains the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation and to accept instruction in doctrine and life. (Appendix 4 lists the questions asked of persons when they become members and officers in the OPC.)

2. Our System of Doctrine

Our system of doctrine is the Reformed faith, also called Calvinism (because Calvin was the most important exponent of it during the Reformation). It pulls together the most significant doctrines taught in the Bible. These doctrines are set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms (with accompanying biblical references). Our system of doctrine is summarized in the following paragraphs.

- The Bible, having been inspired by God, is entirely trustworthy and without error. Therefore, we are to believe and obey its teachings. The Bible is the only source of special revelation for the church today.
- The one true God is personal, yet beyond our comprehension. He is an invisible spirit, completely self-sufficient and unbounded by space or time, perfectly holy and just, and loving and merciful. In the unity of the Godhead there are three "persons": the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- God created the heavens and the earth, and all they contain. He upholds and governs them in accordance with his eternal will. God is sovereign—in complete control—yet this does not diminish human responsibility.
- Because of the sin of the first man, Adam, all mankind is corrupt by nature, dead in sin, and subject to the wrath of God. But God determined, by a covenant of grace, that sinners may receive forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ has always been the only way of salvation, in both Old Testament and New Testament times.
- The Son of God took upon himself a human nature in the womb of the virgin Mary, so that in her son Jesus the divine and human natures were united in one person. Jesus Christ lived a sinless life and died on a cross, bearing the sins of, and receiving God's wrath for, all those who trust in him for salvation (his chosen ones). He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, where he sits as Lord and rules over his kingdom (the church). He will return to judge the living and the dead, bringing his people (with glorious, resurrected bodies) into eternal life, and consigning the wicked to eternal punishment.
- Those whom God has predestined unto life are effectually drawn to Christ by the inner working of the Spirit as they hear the gospel. When they believe in Christ, God declares them righteous (justifies them), pardoning their sins and accepting them as righteous, not because of any righteousness of their own, but by imputing Christ's merits to them. They are adopted as the children of God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies them, enabling them increasingly to stop sinning and act righteously. They repent of their sins (both at their conversion and thereafter), produce good works as the fruit of their faith, and persevere to the end in communion with Christ, with assurance of their salvation.
- Believers strive to keep God's moral law, which is summarized in the Ten Commandments, not to earn salvation, but because they love their Savior and want to obey him. God is the Lord of the conscience, so that men are not required to believe or do anything contrary to, or in addition to, the Word of God in matters of faith or worship.
- Christ has established his church, and particular churches, to gather and perfect his people, by means of the ministry of the Word, the sacraments of baptism (which is to be administered to the children of believers, as well as believers) and the Lord's Supper (in which the body and blood of Christ are spiritually present to the faith of believers), and the disciplining of members found delinquent in doctrine or life. Christians assemble on the Lord's Day to worship God by praying, hearing the Word of God read and preached, singing psalms and hymns, and receiving the sacraments.

3. Our Church Government

The church is no mere human organization or a means to an end. The church is Christ's body, of which he is the head. As a faithful branch of the true church, the OPC acknowledges Jesus Christ as her only head and his word as the final authority in all matters of faith and life.

It is our desire to be faithful to our Lord, not only in matters of doctrine, but also in matters of structure, government, and order. Accordingly, we have a Presbyterian form of government. Each congregation is governed by a session, which consists of one or more ministers (teaching elders) and a number of ruling elders (depending on the size of the congregation). Elders must meet the scriptural qualifications for the eldership. They are ordained for life and installed to office. Ministers are licensed and ordained by regional presbyteries and are called by congregations; ruling elders are elected by congregations. Deacons are elected by congregations to oversee their ministries of mercy. They are ordained, but they do not exercise spiritual rule alongside elders. As required by the Scriptures, all officers must be men, not women. Nonordained people often sit on committees that supervise important areas of congregational life, but always under the oversight of the session.

The local church focuses on worship, education, evangelism, ministries of mercy, and godly discipline. The session ensures that the Word of God is faithfully preached, that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are properly administered, and that spiritual care—including, where necessary, the discipline of erring members—is lovingly and effectively provided. Sessions meet together to direct and supervise the ministries of local congregations, to examine and receive new members, and to provide wisdom and judgment when disputes arise within the church. Because of these responsibilities, elders (and also deacons) are required to "sincerely receive and adopt" the doctrinal standards of the OPC—the Confession of Faith along with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms—"as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures."

Members are received into a local Orthodox Presbyterian congregation by the session on the basis of their credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. While members are exposed to the Reformed faith from the pulpit, from the teaching ministry of the church, and from the sincere convictions of their elders and deacons, they are not required to receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms as a standard for membership. Believers who have been baptized and who have professed their faith in Christ to the elders of the church are termed "communicant members." They are admitted to the Lord's Supper and have voting rights and responsibilities within the congregation. Their baptized children are received as "noncommunicant members" of the congregation, and as such do not partake of the Lord's Supper or exercise voting rights.

Congregations are entitled to hold and own their own property without right of reversion to the presbytery or denomination. Congregations may choose to incorporate and elect trustees. However, trustees are not ordained as such and they have no ruling authority in the congregation. Congregations may also withdraw from the OPC by the affirmative vote of two successive meetings of the congregation, provided that the presbytery has been notified and has had an opportunity to dissuade them from withdrawing.

The congregations of the OPC are organized into sixteen regional churches, each with a governing body called a presbytery. A presbytery combines the efforts of its churches in conducting youth ministries, caring for diaconal needs, establishing new churches, and helping to send missionaries to other countries. The presbytery, which meets two or more times each year, consists of all the ministers and commissioned ruling elders in the regional church. It cares for the health and well-being of its local congregations and provides help and a place for appeal in resolving conflicts in local churches. It supervises ministers and prepares ministerial candidates, and it spreads the gospel in its region through evangelism and church planting.

The General Assembly oversees the ministry of the whole OPC. It ordinarily meets once each year and is composed of ministers and ruling elders representing each presbytery. It provides training and educational materials for the churches. It arranges internship training for prospective ministers. It coordinates the planning, funding, and prayer support for the efforts of presbyteries and local congregations in establishing new churches. It helps to oversee special diaconal needs. It makes health and pension plans available to its ministers and elders. It sends missionaries to foreign lands. And it resolves matters of conflict in regional and local churches, and administers judicial discipline as a court of final appeal.

4. General Assembly Decisions

Over the years, the OPC has faced many questions relating to both doctrine and life. The decisions reached by her general assemblies, while not enjoying constitutional status, do indicate how the church has historically understood the

Scriptures and the subordinate standards to speak to these matters. These questions usually arise as overtures presented by lower judicatories or in connection with appeals of presbytery decisions.

Some of the more significant decisions of OPC general assemblies are listed below.

- **Liberty of Conscience.** The 1936 Assembly rejected a call for total abstinence from alcoholic beverages. It determined that Christians have liberty in this matter because Scripture does not prohibit their moderate use. All agree that Scripture condemns drunkenness as a serious sin. The 1942 Assembly adopted a statement that underlined the responsibility of believers, in the exercise of their liberty in Christ, not to offend weaker brothers unnecessarily.
- **Eschatology.** The second Assembly in 1936 declined to declare that historic (nondispensational) premillennialism, along with amillennialism and postmillennialism, was compatible with our church standards. Nonetheless, all three views have been welcome within the OPC.
- **Freemasonry.** The 1942 Assembly received a committee report which concluded that "Masonry is a religious institution and as such is definitely anti-Christian." The 1950 Assembly received a further report condemning Masonry and urged sessions to be guided by it.
- **Exclusive Psalmody.** Some in the OPC have held the view that the regulative principle of worship (that only those elements prescribed in the Bible are to be employed in the public worship of God—see the Confession of Faith, chap. 21, sec. 1) requires the exclusive singing of psalms in worship. However, in 1947 the Assembly received a committee report which concluded that hymns as well as psalms are appropriate for use in worship. Accordingly, the 1949 Assembly authorized the production of a hymnal containing both psalms and hymns. It was published in 1961 as *Trinity Hymnal* (revised in 1990).
- **Evangelism.** After a special Committee on Local Evangelism completed a ten-year study of the message, subjects, and methods of evangelism, the 1952 Assembly authorized the Committee on Christian Education to publish its conclusions in *Biblical Evangelism Today*, which will hopefully be back in print soon. They included:
 - "The message of evangelism is the whole counsel of God as revealed in His Word."
 - "True evangelism must ever bear in mind that it is not the mere possibility of salvation nor simply provision for salvation that is offered freely in the gospel. It is rather *salvation* full, perfect and free."
 - The gospel is offered freely to the lost. Both Arminianism and hyper-Calvinism are rejected in this connection.
- **Guidance from the Holy Spirit.** After a lengthy study of the subject of guidance, brought to it by certain complaints against the doctrines and practices of the Peniel Bible Conference and taught by certain members of the OPC, the 1961 Assembly concluded:
 - [Peniel's views] in teaching that in every decision of life the Christian may look for a sense of assurance akin to the witness of the Spirit to his sonship, in teaching that a witness of the Spirit is the decisive index constraining assurance respecting the proper course of action in daily life, and in teaching a non-exegetical conscious leading of the Holy Spirit ... constitute a deviation from the doctrine set forth in the Word of God and our subordinate standards.
- **Diaconal Ministry.** In 1964 the Assembly decided that ministries of mercy, including medical works such as operating a medical hospital, are a proper supplement to the ministry of the Word in foreign mission endeavor. In 1972 the Assembly discussed a study that asked, "What are the proper objects of diaconal ministry; are they the members of Christ's church, or additionally also the world?" In 1973 the Assembly adopted a statement that said in part, "We have an obligation to provide for the poor both within and without the Church; but the primary concern must be for those within the Church."
- **Abortion.** The 1971 Assembly—two years before the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision of the U.S. Supreme Court—denounced the practice of voluntary abortion except possibly for the purpose of saving the mother's life.
- **Race Relations.** The 1974 Assembly received a report on "Problems of Race." It surveyed relevant biblical passages and outlined steps to achieve biblical race relations.
- **Sabbath Observance.** At least two assemblies have faced questions regarding the continuing relevance of, and the obedience required by, the Fourth Commandment. The 1973 Assembly declared that, according to the Scriptures, God had appointed the first day of the week to be the Christian Sabbath or Lord's Day. The 1977 Assembly upheld the discipline of a minister who was found guilty of violating the Sabbath ordinance by participating in an organized sport on the Lord's Day.
- **Tongues Speaking.** In 1976 the Assembly upheld a presbytery's discipline of a minister who practiced the private exercise of "speaking in tongues."
- **Women in Office.** The OPC understands Scripture to limit ordained office in the church to qualified men. In 1989, for example, the Assembly upheld a complaint against a session that had allowed women to serve as adjunct elders. In 1997 the Assembly acted to end ecclesiastical fellowship with a denomination that had opened all church offices to women.
- **Christian Schools.** Numerous reports received by general assemblies from the Committee on Christian Education have supported the establishment and operation of Christian day schools by parents. The denomination's magazine, *New Horizons*, has featured articles promoting both Christian schools and homeschooling.
- **Homosexuality.** The 1993 Assembly framed a petition urging the President of the United States to stand against the sin of homosexuality and specifically not to lift the ban on homosexuals in the military. This decision is particularly

noteworthy in that Orthodox Presbyterian general assemblies have typically refrained from making sociological and political pronouncements, unlike many other churches and ecumenical organizations.

- **Admission to the Lord's Supper.** The denomination has declined to alter its subordinate standards in such a way as to permit the admission of baptized children, who have not yet made a public profession of faith in Christ, to the Lord's Supper. Also, it continues to allow local sessions discretion in admitting visitors to the Lord's Supper.
- **Human Origins.** The 1996 Assembly upheld the suspension from office of an elder who held that Adam's body probably had animal ancestors. This view was determined to be contrary to Scripture and the OPC's confessional standards, and a bar to holding the eldership.

5. Characteristics of the OPC

Reformed theology, as expressed in our Confession and Catechisms, is rich and comprehensive, encompassing the full range of biblical teaching. We endeavor to preach and teach this "whole counsel of God." Furthermore, we understand the teachings of the Bible to form a system of doctrine ([see above](#)).

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church stands or falls with the Bible. We are very serious about the Bible being the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God and thus our rule of faith and life. As a result, we are very serious about doctrinal purity. This zeal may at times spill over into contentiousness, but our overriding concern is to follow our Lord Jesus Christ as he speaks in the Scriptures. We are not monolithic in our thinking, but any divergent views are always examined in the light of Scripture.

We have always staunchly opposed theological liberalism. This heresy undermines the authority of Scripture and replaces its teachings with modern, secular ideas, eventually denying virtually every essential Christian doctrine. It attacks the church on a broad front and in many guises, such as biblical criticism, secular humanism, evolutionism, hedonism, and feminism. We do not twist the Bible's teachings in order to accommodate liberal ideas and values. We humbly acknowledge that we are not immune to such influences, but we endeavor by God's grace to remain faithful to our Lord and his Word.

Because of our concern to maintain and promote the Reformed faith, our church has a fine tradition of biblical scholarship. We have produced and attracted many scholars for our size. Thus, we have had an influence far beyond our numbers, both in this country and abroad.

We follow the Bible wherever it leads us, but we are also careful not to add to its teachings. If the Bible does not condemn a certain practice or idea, neither do we. We allow Christian liberty in matters in which the Word of God allows liberty.

Most evangelical churches are premillennial, but we have enjoyed considerable liberty regarding eschatology. Most OP ministers are amillennial, some are postmillennial, and a few are historic premillennial (but not dispensational).

Because Reformed theology is rich and comprehensive, we endeavor to promote a Reformed world-and-life view. That is, we believe that all areas of life—both personal and cultural—should be brought under the dominion of Jesus Christ. We don't restrict our faith to "getting saved," going to church, and a few "don'ts." We are concerned to be good Christian witnesses and also to influence the institutions and culture around us to be more righteous. We strive to be faithful to Reformed doctrine and apply it in our life.

We gather together on the Lord's Day principally to worship God. Our worship services are God-centered, not man-centered. They tend to be simple and dignified, focusing on praising God and hearing his Word. This reflects the "regulative principle" of worship—that we should worship God only in the ways that he specifies in the Bible.

Every member is encouraged to be active in the life and work of the congregation. The gifts of both men and women are utilized to build up Christ's spiritual body.

Many of us have been involved with Christian schools (and now homeschooling). This reflects our concern to take our faith seriously and apply it broadly to life.

We are concerned that our covenant youth be brought up in the instruction of the Lord. Thus, catechetical instruction, especially using the Catechism for Young Children and the Shorter Catechism, is vigorously promoted. Congregations as a whole encourage and assist parents in fulfilling their responsibility to instruct their children in the faith.

PART III: WHERE WE ARE GOING

Our churches are enthusiastic about spreading the good news of God's salvation locally and around the world. As a denomination, we carry out our mission for worldwide outreach through three ministry committees of the General Assembly: the Committee on Foreign Missions, the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, and the Committee on Christian Education.

The work of each committee is administered by a general secretary and a small staff, with offices located in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. (For more information, see [appendix 1.](#))

These ministries are supported by the generous gifts of God's people within and outside the OPC. Under a unified plan of giving called Worldwide Outreach, undesignated gifts are divided among the committees on a percentage basis set by the General Assembly. Gifts may also be designated for individual committees or special purposes.

Other denominational work is carried out through other committees of the General Assembly, including the Committee on Diaconal Ministries and the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations.

The work of the five major standing committees is outlined below.

1. Foreign Missions

The 1937 General Assembly established the Committee on Foreign Missions to carry on the work of foreign missions for the new church. We are committed to pursuing every opportunity our Lord presents to us to further the proclamation of the gospel to the nations, remembering that ultimately he is the one who provides the clear and focused opportunity, the necessary personnel, and the required support.

Our goal is to establish healthy, indigenous national churches that are firmly and fully committed to the Reformed standards, that are self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating, and with whom the OPC may have fraternal relations.

Presently, the Committee sends missionaries to ten different fields:

- **China.** We assist indigenous congregations in evangelism and in preparing qualified men for the gospel ministry.
- **Eritrea.** We assist the indigenous Mehrete Yesus Evangelical Presbyterian Church, established through the labors of our missionaries in 1995.
- **Ethiopia.** We assist the young indigenous Ethiopian Reformed Church, established through the labors of our missionaries in 1998.
- **Haiti.** We assist indigenous congregations in the training of their pastors and elders and in their organization into a presbyterian denomination.
- **Japan.** We work with the Tohoku Presbytery of the Reformed Church in Japan in church planting and evangelism. We also provide a professor for the Kobe Reformed Theological Seminary.
- **Kenya.** We assist the indigenous Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church in church planting and theological instruction.
- **Korea.** Our mission operates the Missionary Training Institute in Seoul, which has helped prepare more than 1,000 missionaries for cross-cultural service in more than 60 nations.
- **Québec.** We assist the indigenous Reformed Church of Quebec in evangelism and church planting among the French-speaking people of Québec.
- **Suriname.** We labor in both the capital city and among the Arawak Indians in the jungle to establish indigenous Reformed congregations.
- **Uganda.** We assist the indigenous Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Uganda in church planting and in preparing men for church office. Our Mbale Station operates Knox Theological College to train men for the gospel ministry. Our Nakaale Station in South Karamoja operates the Akisyon A Yesu ("Compassion of Jesus") Presbyterian Clinic and

carries on other ministries of mercy to extend the gospel witness into a primitive region where the doctrines of grace are largely unknown.

2. Home Missions

Fully half of our Lord's Great Commission strategy is directed toward the home front. He spoke of his disciples being witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea as well as in Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension works in partnership with the presbyteries and congregations of the OPC to help them in their efforts to establish new churches throughout North America. Here are some of the ways that the Committee serves the OPC:

- **Financial Help for New Churches.** Up to four years of financial assistance is provided at the request of the presbytery for assistance in employing an organizing pastor and keeping the whole church informed of prayer needs on the field. Approximately twelve new churches are assisted each year. About 35♦40 mission works are currently receiving denominational financial assistance.
- **Regional Home Missionaries.** These specialized church planters work to develop new churches where organizing pastors will be called to labor. The Committee helps to find, train, and support them in their work.
- **Training and Equipping.** Through staff visits and contacts, an annual training conference, and ongoing review of the manual *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, church planters are provided with the information and encouragement they need to do their work effectively.
- **Assistance to Presbyteries.** The Committee staff remains in close contact with presbytery home missions committees and works in harness with them to develop new churches. An annual gathering of home missions committee chairmen helps to coordinate the church planting efforts of the OPC's sixteen presbyteries.
- **Church Planter Recruitment and Training.** Seminars are held annually at selected Reformed seminaries to identify and encourage men with interest in church planting.
- **The OPC Loan Fund.** This fund provides loans to churches and mission works for building worship/education facilities through the investments of individuals who desire a reasonable return while having their money used to serve the Lord.

3. Christian Education

Christ commissioned his church to "make disciples ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19♦20). Accordingly, the Committee on Christian Education serves the church through such ministries as these:

- **Magazines.** *New Horizons* is a monthly magazine that propagates the Reformed faith and provides news of the OPC. It is distributed free of charge to all OPC homes and churches; others may subscribe. *Ordained Servant* is a quarterly magazine that equips ministers, elders, and deacons in their work.
- **Great Commission Publications.** GCP is a joint publications ministry of the Christian education committees of the OPC and the Presbyterian Church in America. It publishes Sunday school materials, VBS materials, *Trinity Hymnal*, and other worship aids and instructional materials (to go to the GCP website, click [here](#)).
- **The OPC Website.** Resources, articles, and information pertaining to the Scriptures, the Reformed faith, and the OPC (including a directory of churches) are available at the OPC website (opc.org).
- **Books, Booklets, and Pamphlets.** The Committee produces books (such as *The Book of Church Order*), booklets (such as this one and *What Is the Reformed Faith?*), and pamphlets (such as *We Invite You* and *Get to Know Us Better*).
- **Ministerial Training.** The Committee coordinates yearlong and summer ministerial internships and provides financial assistance to participating churches. It maintains contact with several seminaries with a view to strengthening the training of ministers for the OPC. It also supplies qualified candidates with loans and/or grants from a scholarship fund.
- **The Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC.** The MTIOPC provides instruction for men under care, licentiates, and ministers. It supplements seminary education, equipping men to serve more effectively as pastors in the OPC.
- **Seminars.** The general secretary leads seminars (at no cost) for officers, churches, and groups of churches on such topics as worship, church life, and covenant nurture.

4. Diaconal Ministries

In 1947 the Committee on Diaconal Ministries was established. It supports (but does not replace) the work of local congregations and presbyteries by bringing the resources of the whole denomination in to assist where the diaconal need is too great for those bodies to handle. The amount of money it expends on ministries of mercy varies considerably from year to year, but is around \$300,000 annually.

The Committee's ministries include assisting aged and infirm ministers and their widows and orphans, and providing some more general assistance, including emergency aid for major medical costs.

The Committee helps some inner-city families and others to provide their children with a Christian education. It provides medical coverage for some ministers who have no such coverage or whose coverage does not provide for needed help. Emergency help, as in the case of floods, is also available.

The Committee also supports worthy causes abroad, as requested by the Committee on Foreign Missions or a church court: famine and war relief, a center for the blind, a rehabilitation center, Christian school scholarships, etc. These funds are administered by or under the oversight of Orthodox Presbyterian missionaries.

5. Ecumenicity

We in the OPC have sought to maintain ecclesiastical fellowship with churches both in the U.S.A. and around the world that share our Reformed commitments. We see those churches as our partners in the work of bringing the gospel to the world. We have ties with them through our Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations. Currently these churches are:

- The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
- The Canadian Reformed Churches
- The Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands
- The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales
- The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland
- The Free Church of Scotland
- The Presbyterian Church in America
- The Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin)
- The Reformed Church in Japan
- The Reformed Church in the United States
- The Reformed Churches of New Zealand
- The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland
- The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

Corresponding relations have been established with these churches:

- The Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church
- The Bible Presbyterian Church
- The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated)
- The United Reformed Churches in North America

The OPC is a member of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council and of the International Conference of Reformed Churches.

CONCLUSION

We thank you for your interest in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and hope that as you have read our testimony to God's grace, love, and mercy in these pages, you may praise him for his wonderful goodness to his people. If you are interested in learning more about the OPC or uniting with us, the appendixes that follow will provide you with helpful information.

Although we strive, with God's help, to be faithful to his Word, both in what we teach and in what we do, we are well aware that we fall short of all that Christ, our Head and King, requires of those who bear his name. We struggle with sin and weakness in our life and our ministry as a church. Our only hope, our only confidence, our only peace is in him who, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, purchased an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all

those the Father has given to him. Our joy is in doing what pleases him in humble obedience to the whole counsel of his holy Word.

To God be the glory!