

# First Press

First Reformed Presbyterian Church

— A congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America. —

12900 Frankstown Road • Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15235

## Talking Points for the Church

Pastor Phillip Hardin

Recently I had opportunity to attend a conference in Jackson, Mississippi called *Twin Lakes Fellowship*. TLF is a ministerial fraternal devoted to the encouragement of Gospel ministry and ministers, and to the promotion of healthy biblical church planting. A ministry of the Session of the historic First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS (in conjunction with several other PCA sessions and ministers in Mississippi, Georgia, Tennessee, and South Carolina), this fellowship is designed to pursue a twofold purpose: (1) to encourage ministers and churches to promote the work of church planting through their local congregations and (2) to encourage ministers in their personal growth in grace, so as to maximize their effectiveness in promoting the work of the Gospel.

In the working out of these purposes, an inevitable wrestling to describe and devote ourselves to a biblical vision for the Church occurs. Out of this wrestling, a number of different "Talking Points" arise—right out of the Bible and right out of historic Presbyterianism. I want to share them with you this month. My hope is that these will help us in our desire as a church to be most effective in carrying out our chief end—the *glory of God in the gathering and perfecting of the saints*. We are considering preaching through some or all of these points in our Sunday evening worship services in the coming months. While these "talking points" are typical of historic Presbyterianism, the following list relies heavily upon the work of Ligon Duncan, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Jackson, MS.

**1. Expository Preaching**—it is a controlling principle of preaching that particular passages of the Bible ought to be explained and applied to the congregation. The commitment to preach and to hear the Word of God is central to our worship.

**2. Biblical Worship**—it is in the Bible itself that we find direction for our corporate and family worship. We should follow a very simple formula: "Sing the Bible, Pray the Bible, Read the Bible, Preach the Bible." Much that is wrong with the modern Church lies in its lack of confidence in the Bible to give us such guidance.

**3. Inclusive Psalmody**—we must deliberately re-include in our worship the singing of songs from "God's Hymnbook." By singing psalms, not only can we be confident that God is pleased with what we're singing, but we will also train ourselves to think and feel biblically. The heart of our worship should be in God's heart—there is no better place to discover God's heart than to sing the songs God himself gave us.

**4. Morning and Evening Worship**—the vast majority of Christians in all ages believed that the Old Testament Sabbath command has its fulfillment in the Christian Lord's Day. If that is the case, then we believe that *the whole day* is to be spent in worship, deeds of mercy, necessity, witness and rest. The testimony of history and of prudence indicates that the best

- continued on page 3

## COMING EVENTS

**MAY 6**

10:00 a.m.

WIC Spring Outing

**MAY 13**

8:00 a.m.

Church Work Day

**MAY 20**

2:00 p.m.

Youth Group

Putt-Putt Golf

**MAY 21**

5:30 p.m.

Great Commission

Prayer Meeting

6:30 p.m.

Promises Musical

## LOOKING AHEAD

**JULY 10 - 14**

Vacation Bible School

**AUGUST 26**

Church Picnic



## Shoring Up the Foundations—a Survey of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*

### *Grace Applied to the Elect*

The Westminster Confession of Faith (Chapter 7.4-6); The Larger Catechism (30-35); The Shorter Catechism (20)

We have a tendency in the modern Church to neglect the OT. I remember being given a Gideon NT in school one time, and the question came to me even then, “Where’s the rest of the Bible? Why do we think its okay just to give people a third of the Bible?” After all, Augustine was right when he said, “The New is in the Old concealed; and the Old is in the New revealed.” What Augustine was getting at was that there is *continuity* between the Old and New Testaments. Obviously, there are some points of discontinuity between them; otherwise the distinction between the two would be meaningless. At the same time, while we understand that there is a certain newness to the NT that the NT grows out of the OT and remains forever linked to it so that there is always an element of continuity that we dare not overlook.

*We believe that the OT is revelation.* In that period of revelation that we call the OT, God discloses His character and His nature. Before we ever had a canon that was clearly defined in terms of the number of books that were included in the NT the Church was forced by controversy to define the books that are to be included in the canon of the NT. The chief heretic responsible for this was a man by the name of Marcion (*Marcionism*). Marcion’s NT was an abridged version where any reference to the God of the OT was stricken because he believed that the God at the center of the OT was not the God Almighty but was a *demiurge* who was a nasty and mean sub-deity – this Yahweh who was bloodthirsty and wrathful – and that the Christ of the NT comes to reveal the true God. Obviously, any reference in the NT that provided a link between Christ and the God of the OT had to go. So the *Gospel of Matthew* was out, *Hebrews* was out. Marcion had a very short and abbreviated list of books that he included in his canon of sacred Scripture.

It was against that heretical canon that the Church was awakened to give careful definition to all the books that are to be included in the canon. The Church in every generation has to deal with this subtle undermining of the importance of the OT. If we look at the history of redemption, it doesn’t start with the birth of Jesus. In fact, the birth of Jesus is in a real sense the culmination of all those promises God had made over centuries and centuries of time.

In section 4, the framers use the word “testament.” Sometimes we speak of the Old Covenant but more frequently we speak of the Old Testament; and sometimes we speak of the New Covenant, but more frequently we speak of the New Testament. The writers of the Confession are really answering the question here why we call the New Testament a “testament.”

When Jesus was in the Upper Room having His last discourse with His disciples, we see in that conversation that our Lord had with His disciples quite an emphasis placed on His legacy, his last will and testament. In the midst of this discourse Jesus doesn’t bequeath to His disciples so many donkeys and so many seamless robes or a gold watch – but what does He say? “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled” (John 14.27). When Jesus summarizes the content of His will, His testament – He focuses on this transcendent, supernatural, singular peace that He is leaving as an inheritance for His followers. The legacy of Christ in the NT is a permanent peace, a peace that passes understanding, and a peace that can never ever again be disturbed. That is His legacy. The legacy of the NT is that we have been reconciled to God, justified in His sight, pardoned and forgiven. He has adopted us now into His family, never again to rise up in warfare against us. It’s an everlasting peace (Romans 5.1-2).

- *Talking Points continued from page 1*

way to keep the Lord's Day is to frame the first day of the week with corporate worship: *morning and evening*.

**5. A Theology of Lord's Day Experience**—we need to recapture a high view of the Lord's Day. Given the differences in our specific practices, the big picture needs to be preached and practiced. J.C. Ryle put it bluntly: "As a rule there is a general flight of steps down from 'no sabbath' to 'no God.'" M'Cheyne writes that, "A well-spent Sabbath we feel to be a day of heaven upon earth...we love to rise early on that morning, and to sit up late, that we may have a long day with God." Richard Baxter concluded, "What fitter day to ascend to heaven, than that on which He arose from earth, and fully triumphed over death and hell. Use your Sabbaths as steps to glory, till you have passed them all, and are there arrived."

**6. Family Worship**—public worship will be enriched by private worship. The lost tools of a former generation need to be recovered in the context of the family: singing, Scripture reading, prayer and the catechism. Christian parents play a strategic role in the nurture of their children. The family then is the main focus—not the program of the church.

**7. Biblical Theology**—we need to embrace good old Calvinism as it is described in the *Westminster Confession*. Ours needs to be a warm-hearted, hearty embrace of Reformed Theology. Why? Because it is the best summary of biblical truth—it will serve to strengthen us against a destructive diversity that is pressed upon us on all sides.

**8. Shared Vision for Outreach**—we need to be people who love God's Word, who embrace Reformed Theology and who have a zeal for the souls of men. We need heat and light in the work of evangelism and church planting—here and around the world. As Bonar says it, "We take for granted that the object of Christian ministry is to convert sinners and edify the body of Christ." "This is the design of all preaching, to bring them within the covenant who are without, and to make those who are within the covenant to walk suitably to it. And as these are never separated on the Lord's side, so should they never be separated on our side" (Durham).

**9. Piety in Leadership**—Scougal wrote that piety is "the life of God in the soul of man." At the same time, piety is not simply "spiritual" or "inward" (cp. James 1-2 and Romans 12.1-2). True religion however does have its source in a changed heart. We need personal piety in our elders (teaching and ruling) and ministry leaders. We need to recognize our own spiritual poverty and challenge one another to strive for devotion in love to God and experience of the love of Christ.

**10. A Biblical Understanding of the Gospel and Evangelism**—the Gospel is the heart of Christianity. And yet, many today are confused about just what the Gospel is. The Biblical Gospel is simply this: *God loves sinners at the cost of His own Son*. We want people to be excited about that message. As the Church embraces the Gospel wholeheartedly, we believe God will use us to convert people to Christ.

**11. A Biblical Understanding of the Law and Sanctification**—it is crucial for healthy discipleship for the Christian to understand something of the ongoing role of the law in the Christian life (the third use of the law) and the grace of the Holy Spirit which unites us to Christ by faith. Neither of these should be overlooked. We need to avoid the extremes of legalism and passivism. Sanctification is both active and passive—we are ever responsible to follow biblical imperatives and ever reliant upon the grace of the Holy Spirit to perform the will of God.

**12. A Biblical Understanding of Conversion and Discipleship**—a pervasive concern for us is *not simply growing numbers, but growing members*. There ought to be observable growth in our lives that can be seen in increasing holiness rooted in self-denial.

**13. A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership and Discipline**—church membership must reflect a living commitment to a local church in attendance, giving, prayer and service or it is worthless. When we are united to Christ by faith, we are united to each other as well. Mutual accountability is presupposed in the life of godliness.

**14. A Biblical Understanding of Church Government**—three times in the book of Acts, Luke connects biblical church government and discipline with church growth and health. Jesus gave officers (church government) to the church as a gift necessary for our edification. We cannot therefore be indifferent to polity.

**15. A Reformed Worldview**—we need elders and members who think christianly about all of life. The following are essential to a Reformed worldview: the authority of Scripture, the sovereignty of God, the historical reality of the fall and sinfulness of man, the sovereign grace of God in redemption, the nature of the Church (its unity and diversity, its visibility and invisibility).

## Missions Focus: Rich and Ramona Wagner, Mexico

The Wagners joined Mission to the World (MTW) in 1981. After working under a cooperative agreement with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Colombia, they joined the Bogota church-planting team in 1993. Due to political turmoil and a threat on his life, they left Columbia in 1995. Since 1996, Rich has been assigned to Monterrey, Mexico as MTW's Coordinator for Northern Mexico. He is responsible for maintaining a healthy relationship with partnering Mexican National Presbyterian churches in five presbyteries and two Synods. He coordinates MTW's efforts with theirs in terms of church-planting projects, IMPACT groups, medical brigades, and identification of potential Mexican leadership. Ramona teaches evangelistic Bible studies and works with women's groups and retreats. She also hosts 20 - 30 home outreach buffets each year.

In July 2005, their area was hit by Hurricane Emily. Rich didn't sleep for 2 1/2 days until he was sure the IMPACT (short-term missions) teams and MTW staff were safe. He also supervised rescue efforts for devastated areas with Mexican church planters. Rich supervised a record number of summer interns that came to help with the summer IMPACT teams. They continued medical and rebuilding help until the end of the year. During this time, one of their church plants became a self governing church and started its own church plant. In November, they had their first Missions Conference for the Metro Monterrey Churches. In January 2006, the Wagners returned to the US because of a deficit in their support account which was due to increased ministry activity coupled with a loss of giving from churches hit by the two hurricanes last year.

**Pray for:** the Mexican leadership and missionaries to move forward in Rich's absence; for their support account to be replenished so that they may return to Mexico.

## May Birthdays

|    |  |    |  |
|----|--|----|--|
| 2  | Rich Gardner<br>Shelah Renda                         | 17 | Bob Knox<br>Scott Magnuson<br>Robin Turner               |
| 4  | Elijah Masick  | 18 | John Faber   |
| 5  | Ralph Master<br>Pauline Olshefski                    | 19 | Katie Agate  |
| 6  | Amy Frost<br>John Hicks<br>Nathan McGuire            | 21 | Philip Patterson   |
|    |  | 22 | Catherine Harke  |
| 7  | Rebekkah Hargraves<br>Harry McGuigan<br>Audrey Nemit | 23 | Eric Kahle<br>Art Kercher                                |
|    |  | 24 | John Nemit   |
| 8  | Maria Taylor<br>Mark Taylor                          | 25 | Shawna Crawford<br>Anna Jane Sneddon<br>Matthew Sullivan |
| 10 | Christopher Dietz                                    |    |  |
| 11 | Skip Masick<br>Keith Nelson                          | 26 | Mitchell McGuire<br>Micah Oh                             |
| 14 | Patty Frost<br>Paul West                             | 27 | Gene Malek<br>Jay Scharfenberg                           |
| 15 | Debbie Faber<br>Carol McGuigan<br>Paul Musser        | 31 | Briana Boyer   |

## Financial Summary January 1 - March 31

### Operating Account:

|                           |            |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Receipts                  | \$ 91,677  |
| Disbursements             | \$ 117,199 |
| <i>Account Balances -</i> |            |
| Operating Checking        | \$ 1,666   |
| Operating Saving          | \$ 124,644 |

### Benevolence Account:

|               |           |
|---------------|-----------|
| Income        | \$ 19,544 |
| Disbursements | \$ 15,491 |

### Deacons' Fund:

|                           |          |
|---------------------------|----------|
| Income                    | \$ 5,553 |
| Disbursements             | \$ 4,453 |
| <i>Account Balances -</i> |          |
| Deacons' Checking         | \$ 7,091 |
| Deacons' Money Mkt.       | \$ 2,667 |

We welcome the following who were received into membership at First Reformed:

*Chris and Annie Malamisuro  
Tiffany Powell  
Rick Stiffler*

*Stephen Christopher Malamisuro,  
son of Chris and Annie Malamisuro  
and  
Tiffany Powell  
were baptized on April 9, 2006*

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# May



2006

*Sunday      Monday      Tuesday      Wednesday      Thursday      Friday      Saturday*

|  |   |   |  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|---|
|  | <b>1</b>  | <b>2</b><br><br>7:00 p.m.<br>Plum Covenant<br>Group   | <b>3</b><br><br>7:15 p.m.<br>Master<br>Covenant Group<br><br>7:30 p.m.<br>Crawford<br>Covenant Group | <b>4</b><br><br>9:30 a.m.<br>WIC Bible Study<br><br>7:00 p.m.<br>WIC Bible Study  | <b>5</b>  | <b>6</b><br><br>10:00 a.m.<br>WIC Spring<br>Outing                          |
| <b>7</b><br><br>10:45 a.m.<br>Lord's Supper<br><br>4:45 p.m.<br>Joint Youth Group  | <b>8</b>  | <b>9</b><br><br>7:00 p.m.<br>McLane<br>Covenant Group<br><br>7:30 p.m.<br>Murrysville<br>Covenant Group                                 | <b>10</b><br><br>6:45 p.m.<br>College & Career<br>Bible Study  | <b>11</b><br><br>9:30 a.m.<br>MOPS Brunch   | <b>12</b>   | <b>13</b><br><br>8:00 a.m.<br>Church<br>Work Day                            |
| <b>14</b><br><br><i>Mother's Day</i><br><br><br>4:45 p.m.<br>Joint Youth Group | <b>15</b>   | <b>16</b><br><br>7:00 p.m.<br>Session Meeting<br><br>7:30 p.m.<br>Deacon's Meeting  | <b>17</b><br><br>7:30 p.m.<br>Crawford<br>Covenant Group   | <b>18</b><br><br>9:30 a.m.<br>WIC Bible Study<br><br>7:00 p.m.<br>WIC Bible Study   | <b>19</b><br><br>7:00 p.m.<br>Clymer<br>Bible Study | <b>20</b><br><br>2:00 p.m.<br>Jr./Sr. High<br>Youth Group<br>Putt-Putt Golf |
| <b>21</b><br><br>4:45 p.m.<br>Joint Youth Group<br><br>5:30 p.m.<br>Great Commission<br>Prayer Meeting<br><br>6:30 p.m.<br>Promises Musical                      | <b>22</b>   | <b>23</b><br><br>7:00 p.m.<br>McLane Cov. Group<br><br>7:15 p.m.<br>Master Cov. Group<br><br>7:30 p.m.<br>Murrysville<br>Covenant Group | <b>24</b><br><br>6:45 p.m.<br>College & Career<br>Bible Study  | <b>25</b>   | <b>26</b>   | <b>27</b>   |
| <b>28</b><br><br>4:45 p.m.<br>Joint Youth Group  | <b>29</b><br><br><b>Memorial Day</b><br> | <b>30</b><br><br>7:30 p.m.<br>WIC Prayer<br>Meeting   | <b>31</b>  | <b>Each Sunday:</b><br>9:30 a.m. Sunday School for all ages<br>10:45 a.m. Morning Worship<br>(Fellowship Time following Worship)<br>6:30 p.m. Evening Worship |   |   |

*Thank You!*

Dear Friends at First Reformed:

Thank you all for your lovely notes and phone calls. I wish that I could respond to you individually. God is blessing me in Maryland. I see my family often and am a member of a PCA church here. I miss you all.

Love and prayers,  
Carmella Veltri

To the Congregation of First Reformed:

I am so blessed by God to be a member of this congregation. My ankle injury had helped show me the meaning of the phrase "church family". Thank you for your prayers and words of encouragement over the past three months. God has been listening to your prayers. I am walking and climbing stairs only because of God strengthening and healing me day by day.

Love in Christ,  
Ruth Turner



## Church Work Day

May 13

8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Join us for an hour or two, or the whole day! All ages are welcome, there will be projects for all skill levels. Babysitting is available from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. - Contact the church office if you will need babysitting.