

Pastoral Care in the Pandemic

As a supplement to the long-form articles in this issue, we also wanted to hear a variety of responses from a number of ministers who led churches and other ministers through this uncharted territory of COVID and the resulting restrictions and lockdowns. Six ministers responded to our questions—David Duncan, Bradley Helgerson, Brian Lee, Jim Martin, Juan Sanchez, and Allan Stanglin—and their responses to each question are presented in alphabetical order. Their various perspectives are illuminating for all of us who have been through these times of trial. Their responses understandably reflect pain and confusion, conviction and contemplation, but also faithfulness, good news, wisdom, and hope for renewal and unity.

-Editor

JCS: What were the greatest challenges for your congregation to navigate during COVID lockdowns?

Brian Lee

The single greatest challenge was lack of visitors and growth. We are a small church located in the heart of Washington, DC, a very transitional city. A large proportion of our members are spending a few years here for military, government, or graduate school, so membership departures are built into the DNA of our church community. We therefore need a constant flow of new visitors and members just to keep up. During COVID lockdowns, fewer people were moving to town, and almost no one was visiting or seeking to join new churches. We saw few visitors and no growth as a result of streaming services, though I know that experience was different for some other churches. A few years of little growth for a church of 70 in a transitional place had a big impact on our membership.

A second challenge was keeping up with the chaotic, unpredictable, and frankly irrational lockdown policies. Whether you think lockdowns were a

necessary evil or a hysterical folly, they were exceedingly difficult to interpret and keep up with. Produced by bureaucrats, issued by executive fiat, color-coded, phased, constantly shifting, it was a full-time job keeping up with the diktats, reading them carefully, and interpreting and adhering to them faithfully. Thankfully, we have an Associate Pastor who handles administrative challenges, and he faithfully waded through all the details. My prayer is that we come up with a more deliberative, representative, and orderly solution should we embrace severe lockdowns again.

Jim Martin

Much of my experience with COVID-19 lockdowns and congregations relates to ministers attempting to help their congregations navigate during this period. My perspective has been impacted from many hours of phone and Zoom conversations with numerous ministers representing congregations during 2020–2021.

Typically, these conversations focused on their experiences as they attempted to serve the church during this very difficult time. These ministers represented churches from a variety of locations throughout the United States. In addition to participating in these conversations, I led three different coaching groups, composed of eight ministers per group. These groups met once a month for five months. Much of the conversations dealt with the resilience of the ministers and their congregations.

These congregations and their leaders were attempting to navigate life as a congregation through COVID-19 but there were additional issues as well. As the pandemic began in March 2020, churches across the country grappled with what to do. Many went to an online-only presence on Sundays. Preachers would either livestream sermons or record sermons earlier in the week for these to be played on Sunday. Some congregations offered Bible classes via Zoom.

This proved to be a very difficult time for so many congregations. Groups of elders went for months only meeting via Zoom which proved to be a very different dynamic than meeting face to face. Some church leaders reported that it was hard for them to have difficult conversations during this time when the elders only met by Zoom and not in person. Many congregations were not prepared technologically for these challenges. Quite often, particularly if the

minister was young, it was assumed the minister could figure out the various technological needs.

Many churches, after four or five months of being locked down, resumed meeting together. A number of congregations found, however, that many of the pre-COVID group of people/members did not return. In fact, several church leaders said that they were trying to figure out who was still with them. Some members went to other congregations. Others continued to watch the assemblies online. Some just had not returned and church leaders had no explanation.

What has further complicated the experience of the pandemic are the cultural/societal events that have taken place during this time. There has been conflict over COVID-19 itself—is this virus/pandemic of real concern or has it been “overblown?” Other conflicts involve the issues of masks/no-masks, vaccine/anti-vaccine. In addition, during the time of this pandemic, there has been a contentious presidential election, the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, as well as more racial injustices, such as the killing of George Floyd.

All of this has greatly affected congregations. Members have left congregations in a dispute with other church members regarding these issues. Unfortunately, ministers have frequently been in the crosshairs of these disputes.

In Churches of Christ, many ministers left their congregations, but some have left full-time ministry for other vocations. While the actual number of ministers to leave is yet to be determined. I don’t know of another time in my lifetime when this many ministers have left full time ministry during such a period of time.

Many ministers across the United States in reflecting upon their ministries in 2020 and 2021, describe themselves as tired, exhausted, discouraged, and angry.

Juan Sanchez

March 15, 2020, was our last in-person service. I was in Cordoba, Argentina, when we received word that COVID-19 had spread to the point that governments were locking down citizens, closing borders and cancelling flights. Immediately, we arranged one of the last return flights to the United States. Our first order of business was to meet as elders to assess what had

happened and answer the question how we shepherd our people during this time of confusion, questions, and fear. That was our greatest challenge: How would we care for people when we were unable to meet face to face or gather on the Lord's Day?

Allan Stanglin

At the church where I ministered for the first year and a half of the pandemic, we experienced what a lot of church leaders encountered in the polarization of our congregation over the wearing of masks and other mitigation techniques. We, like most elders and ministers, found ourselves in a lose-lose situation: some of our members refused to come to church unless we mandated masks and others vowed not to come if we did. We told our church we were making our decisions based on the science and the medical recommendations but, in reality, we were making our calls based on our own gut feelings and the current mood of the church and our community. The longer the pandemic conditions continued, the more our shepherds relied on the culture instead of the science, and the church became a place that mirrored the inconsistencies and fostered the same mistrust as people were suffering in society.

A challenge I wrestled with personally—this is still a challenge for us to navigate faithfully as church leaders—is the dilemma between telling people to stay home for the sake of their health and asking them to worship with their church family in person for the sake of their soul. We made it really convenient for Christians to “attend church” from the privacy of their own homes, so much so that church became the last place some people would go. We worked hard to purchase additional cameras, add more lights and microphones, and pre-record communion thoughts and announcements so the livestreamed version of church rivaled most any other option. We did it so well, a lot of our folks felt no need to leave their homes. I had one older gentleman, a former elder, tell me he and his wife would probably never come back into the building. “We can turn up the volume to exactly the right level,” he told me. “We can rewind the video when we miss something, we can start it from the beginning if we accidentally sleep in—it’s too easy and nice to just do church from the house!”

I began seeing people out at restaurants and grocery stores who had told me they weren't coming to church because of COVID. My wife and I attended

a Saturday night July 4th dinner and fireworks show with about 20 people from our church. We were all eating at the same tables, sharing the same food, talking loudly and laughing with each other in tight quarters. But at least half of those people told me they would be doing church from home the next morning because of COVID.

Had we turned church into something you could do just as well watching a screen from home as participating in a pew in a sanctuary? It must go much further back, to our teachings and our experiences together in church. Why do our people not view the Sunday morning assembly as uniquely transformative for their lives? Either we haven't communicated it very well or they haven't experienced much transformation in church. Probably both.

JCS: Has your understanding of ecclesiology changed or been enhanced as a result of the lockdowns?

Bradley Helgerson

The lockdowns have enhanced my appreciation for the necessity of corporate worship.

The goal of spiritual formation is not simply to gain a greater understanding of good and evil, but to be shaped by such knowledge. However, several of the means by which the Spirit performs this sanctifying work have been short-circuited by the modern church's haughty dismissal of liturgy.

Put concisely, the Spirit writes the law upon our hearts in two ways, through preaching and practice. Meaning, firstly that our souls are renewed when the good news of God's kingdom is depicted in concrete images (e.g., in myth, story, and metaphor). The power of such pictures is in their capacity to connect the immanent world to the being who transcends it, allowing the enlightened listener not only to gaze upon God's holiness, but to bask in its beauty. And the admiration produced in the divine presence stirs within us a longing to be conformed to its image (2 Cor 3:18). But it is not just through contemplation that one undergoes true conversion, but also through ceremony.

As moderns we often fail to appreciate the potency of liturgy. Our highly-rationalistic reverence scoffs at the power of practice as it looks with disdain upon previous generations who found great utility in feast days, recited prayers, and other symbolically-rich gestures—pious procedures which are not, as our Puritan predecessors believed, the vain schemings of superstitious souls, but rather effectual exercises for turning our hearts toward holy ends. And this is especially true of corporate liturgy where picture and practice are meant to converge.

Each activity we engage in as the *ecclesia* functions as both a reenactment of the partial past and a dress rehearsal for its future fulfillment. Picturing practices which provide an Einstein-Rosen bridge allowing the aspiring traveler to experience a kind of trans-temporal piety. The ritual of baptism, for instance, raptures us to the past and future reality of our resurrection (Rom 6:3–11). Similarly, the Lord's Supper supplies simultaneous nourishment of the last Passover meal and the first feast of the Lamb (Luke 22:15–16; Rev 19:7–10). And when we sing, we do so in harmony with those who departed for Gethsemane, but who will arrive at the crystal sea (Matt 26:30; Rev 4:4–6). Without such transportive rites our worship is often imprisoned in the present, producing a myopic vision which encourages us to cling to the moment, forgetting that there are greater things to fear than death (like not dying well).

Even when we *are* assembled our approach to adoration is often minimalistic, a ceremony comparable to a shotgun wedding where obligation rather than passion animates the participants. Surviving, as we have, on thimbles of grape juice and stale scraps of bread, amusing ourselves with professional praisers, it's no wonder we are convinced that not much is lost by congregating through a computer screen. The only way to stop the spread of this spiritual pandemic, however, is through widespread inoculation (not by Moderna, but by *Pneuma*). A stab of the Spirit that will produce anti-bodies able to protect us from the virus of vain worship. And any further hesitancy to this vaccine will only lead to our doors being shuttered forever.

Brian Lee

I have a renewed and enhanced conviction that the church gathered in public worship is the core and essential expression of the body of Christ on earth, and related to this, that the sacraments are the anchor of this physical

reality. As a Reformed pastor, Word and Sacrament are at the heart of what we confess about worship, and I believe both the preached word and the sacraments require and depend upon physical presence.

As a result, I have come to the conviction that virtual worship is not true worship. It is a crutch, and no sane person continues to use a crutch after their broken leg has healed. The sacraments anchor this physical presence — a congregation can't share one loaf and one cup over the internet — but I believe this is true of the preached word as well. Hearing a sermon over the internet via a screen or a podcast is not the same covenantal experience of sitting under the lively preaching of the word.

This came home to us when we started streaming and were permitted by the city to have nine individuals in our building for the purposes of streaming. Within a few weeks, our church council agreed that if nine members of our small church could gather, we would rather celebrate multiple communion services a Sunday and invite our congregation to attend. We ran two of these services per Sunday, streaming one, and the small number of members who wanted to attend could do so in small groups. This was exceedingly well received by both members and leaders. These worship services were odd, no doubt, but they anchored our congregation in physical presence, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and the lively preaching of the word.

Juan Sanchez

During that first elders' meeting, we began to write Scripture passages that came to mind that might help us shepherd our church. We then categorized those passages to try to understand how Scripture directed us to care for our congregation. To our great encouragement, we learned that our ecclesiology led us to practice what would be most necessary to care for the flock of God among us during the lockdown. As pastors, our main task is the shepherd the flock of God among us, leading by example (1 Pet 5:1–4). Thankfully, we already had a pastoral care plan in place in which we regularly worked through our church directory, contacting each member regularly. With this pastoral care plan already in place, we arranged to work through our church directory quicker so that we contacted each member in the first 30 days. To do that, the elders met every week instead of our normal twice per month.

Most encouraging, our emphasis on a culture of discipleship and membership responsibility of every member to care for one another proved fruitful. As the elders contacted each member, we repeatedly heard stories of how members were caring for one another. Some of our small groups took it upon themselves to make sure everyone was contacted and cared for. Meanwhile, our diaconal teams were functioning as expected. Our deacon of widows and shut-ins made sure his team was regularly contacting their lists. All in all, we were encouraged by how the church cared for one another.

JCS: What was the greatest success or unexpected blessing for your congregation that came out of COVID?

David Duncan

One of the great blessings we discovered during the pandemic was an online option for Wednesday night class. We have resumed classes at our building but we now have a weekly adult online class, as well. Houston is a huge city and many people work late, have long commutes or are uncomfortable driving at night. More than eighty percent of the people in the online class never, or almost never, attended Wednesday evening classes in person. We have discovered an entirely new audience that wanted Bible study but did not have an avenue for it. People start logging on about twenty minutes before the teaching begins. A community of people has emerged that study together, pray for each other and provides friendship.

Brian Lee

While there are a myriad of approaches and perspectives to navigating issues of church and state, our congregation took submission to the magistrate as taught in Romans 13 as our starting point. This was incredibly useful, for it allowed us to unite over our response to lockdown requirements as a congregation even if we had a diversity of personal views regarding the policies themselves.

For example, some of our church council were strongly in favor of masks, even double masking. Some were more skeptical of their value or usefulness.

Yet we maintained unity over the fact that when we gathered in public as a worshipping body, we would submit to the magistrate as a part of our witness to our neighbors. While this didn't remove all tensions or disagreements over our response, it did make it much easier for us to come together, as we recognized that worship on the Lord's Day is not about our individual preferences.

Jim Martin

One unexpected blessing is a heightened awareness of just how dangerous and futile it is for the church to have allegiances above Jesus. The result has been startling and has resulted in churches across the nation losing members. At the same time, some church leaders have seen very clearly what can happen when opinions, politics, nationalism, and other idols come before Jesus.

While some congregations seem to focus on returning to being the congregation they used to be, others are asking, "How are we to live out the mission of God at this point in time?"

Many congregations have recognized that while they desire to meet together in person, they also need to have a viable online presence.

Some congregations had Zoom Bible classes during this time in which Christians across the nation were invited to attend. While these churches desire in-person classes, some do not want to lose this online presence.

Many ministers have re-committed themselves to practices which lead to greater resilience and self-care.

While Christians value meeting together, many have seen that the church can continue to minister to people in its neighborhood and city even without a building.

Some congregations have begun to recommit themselves to the basics of the Christian faith and discipleship.

Many Christians have a new-found sensitivity to those who are shut-in due to illness and age. They have seen what it is like to be at home for a period of time where there might be little, if any, human contact.

Juan Sanchez

Of course, we were concerned about our membership. We didn't know how they would fare, but the Lord was gracious. We cared well for one another. Another concern was finances. We simply didn't know how not gathering would affect giving. Our elders contemplated applying for the Payment Protection Program, but in the end we decided not to. Instead, we appealed to our congregation, and the response was overwhelming and humbling. We began gathering again in early June 2020, and one of the great blessings is the number of young adults and young families that have been drawn to our church. Over the last year and a half, we have retained most of our membership and have had an influx of young people join us. It has been an unexpected blessing.

Allan Stanglin

The most immediate blessing was that we were forced to think outside the box. The situation demanded creativity and allowed a flexibility to experiment with almost anything. We held an Ash Wednesday drive-thru service, we organized prayer parades that blessed our local missions partners, we did online talent shows and hosted livestreamed ten-minute "Word and Prayer" sessions four days a week. I began hosting a weekly podcast that highlighted our local missions partners and favorite "Passages and Prayers" from our elders. Some of the ideas were brand new and some were things we had talked about before but never had the space to try them out. Some of the things we tried failed terribly and others turned into meaningful events that will continue to bless our church for years to come.

With two-thirds of our church family participating from their homes on Sunday mornings and almost all Bible classes and midweek activities canceled for a full year, we were given a wonderful opportunity to reimagine what we were doing as a congregation and why. We had the space to rethink our priorities and the freedom to reprioritize our church programming and events. As shepherds and ministers, we developed criteria for using our time and resources on only those things that synced up with our congregation's vision. We surveyed the church and put together a few focus groups to identify those things that truly transformed our members and brought them closer to God and to one another. We radically changed our Wednesday night

programming, made significant adjustments to our Bible class and small groups structures, and refused to restart any program or event just because we had been doing it for twenty years—it had to match the criteria. We made the decisions to pour our church resources and our volunteer hours into fewer things that yield the most Kingdom and Holy Spirit fruit. We made things simpler and more streamlined to match our church’s twin values of transformation and mission.

JCS: Which biblical passages or principles have taken on more importance for you—or have you seen in a new light—during and after the lockdowns?

David Duncan

One of the key passages that has come to mind numerous times during the pandemic is Hebrews 10:24–25 which reminds the audience not to give up meeting together. As a child, I understood this as a passage to be used to bonk people on the top of the head when they skipped worship service on vacation. Instead of it merely being a tool of reprimand, it has helped me appreciate the importance of meeting regularly with brothers and sisters.

Like many congregations, we were only online for a few months. Twice each Sunday, I would drive to the church building and preach a live sermon to an empty auditorium. The only other people that attended in person were two men doing the streaming. I knew hundreds of people were watching but it was incredibly difficult for me to know the pews were supposed to be filled but for the foreseeable future, they would vacate. At some point on the way home after each service, I broke down. I was spiritually feeding people huddled inside their homes, but I was missing community.

The words of the Hebrews writer stayed at the forefront of my mind throughout the pandemic. We do not meet for the purpose of checking a box or avoiding a direct lightning strike, the passage states that we meet to encourage each other and spur one another on to do good deeds. I get it!

It appears we have lost some members that have at least temporarily walked away from their faith. During the pandemic they lost community and

now appear to be on the road to losing their faith. Loving them back is our mission.

Brian Lee

Unity in the body of Christ is a precious gift from the Holy Spirit. Satan recognizes it as such, and attacks it mercilessly. COVID has provided an opportunity for division in our bodies politic and ecclesiastic. Church members and leaders should prioritize unity and earnestly strive for it continually.

Ephesians 4 is a wonderful reminder of this. When Paul pivots in this epistle to how a believer shall walk in a manner worthy of his calling, the first priority is walking “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” In our typically western obsession with doctrine, we tend to focus on doctrinal unity and purity here. But Paul is clearly concerned that spiritual gifts would be used to keep interpersonal peace in the church.

As COVID response has divided families and churches, we must strive for a response in our church bodies that is conducive to keeping the peace. We should avoid burdening consciences beyond the word of God’s explicit command, and we should structure our responses in such a fashion that we can affirm what we hold in common — one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

Juan Sanchez

Initially, James 4:13–17 was on all our minds. Our 2020 theme was Preparing for Growth. In our own wisdom, we assumed we would press on with our plans. Needless to say, it was humbling to realize that in a moment all could be shut down. Our plans were not God’s plans. We had presumed upon the Lord, so we needed to ask for forgiveness. It was a humbling but important lesson. In addition to COVID-19, though, our nation was faced with political and cultural divisions. To address the racial tensions in our country, we chose to preach through Ephesians. It was a great reminder that our union in Christ leads to our union as a church. And as for political divisions, after Ephesians, we preached through Daniel. Daniel reminded us each week that we are more like Israel in Babylon than Israel in the promised land.

Allan Stanglin

The incarnation of our Lord and that same flesh-and-blood nature of his church took a hit during COVID. As a society, we were already well down the path of increasing individuality and isolation. But the pandemic sped us along so that, somehow, church online has become a viable substitute for the physical presence of and in the Body of Christ. Our salvation is not a one-time event. Yes, we are connected to the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior when we are baptized. But our salvation continues—in fits and starts, with ups and downs, slowly but surely, in church. With people. God’s Spirit transforms us in community. Our Lord changes us and shapes us into his image with other people. When we give and receive forgiveness. When we sing each other’s songs. When we bear one another’s burdens. In the hugs and during the meals. No matter what we’ve been told or what we’ve been doing for the past year and a half, you can’t experience communion at a drive-thru or do church over the internet. We must work overtime now, more than ever, to reclaim the sacramental view of the Christian assembly. We are required now to teach and re-teach, to reassert and reaffirm the transformational purpose and effect in regularly meeting together in person. And we must work just as hard to make sure our Sunday assemblies cultivate the kind of life-changing transformative experience our God intends.

JCS: What have you learned from all this that you will carry forward in ministry?

David Duncan

We have been reminded of the importance of in-person meetings as well as have learned the importance of using technology.

First, we have learned we need to see each other in person. Worshipping through our computers sufficed for a season, but there is something powerful about taking the Lord’s Supper in the same room with our Christian family.

The people of our congregation are slowly returning as they feel comfortable. I often do not have to ask if it an individual’s first Sunday back because I see the tears in their eyes. They are home with their people anticipating worshipping their God. Being in the presence of an auditorium with other people

singing and participating with others in worship, touches the emotions in a way possibly never considered before coronavirus impeded our lives.

Technology is good, but it is not the forever answer. A grandparent loves seeing their out-of-town grandchildren on Facetime, but they cannot wait for the day when they can be with them in person. The same is true with the family of God. Some fellowship occurs in online groups, and it is beneficial for people shut in, separated by distance, or during a short-term crisis, but it is not the standard.

As we have returned, we have learned to appreciate time talking together in the foyer, trips for children to the park, in-person Bible studies, and other opportunities for people to be together in the name of Jesus. We have longed for, and finally returned, to speaking primarily to one another like humans rather than through machines.

We have also learned technology can be advantageous. Besides streaming worship services for people that may not be able to attend, we have learned every committee meeting does not need to be in person. Some issues can be settled quickly through online meetings. For years, nearly every committee meeting was packed into Sunday afternoon or Wednesday evening. Now, via Zoom and other sources, meetings can take place any day of the week and include members that are out of town. Young mothers and fathers are able to spend more time with their families and still participate in online meetings because travel time is eliminated. Online resources will be used more than during pre-pandemic life, but they will not be used exclusively as they were during the shutdown.

Bradley Helgersen

I've come to realize that resistance to governmental tyranny is a gospel issue.

For the early witnesses, the resurrection of Jesus was not a mere metaphor representing some paltry set of principles, but a cannon shot which marked the beginning of a cosmic revolution. Indeed, Peter's inaugural address in Acts 2 is a pronouncement of war as he pleads with his kinsmen to defy the tyrant of the age by pledging allegiance to King Jesus (Acts 2:36).

Many modern Evangelicals may wonder why this proto-proclamation of the church age doesn't propound the gospel (i.e., preach salvation by grace through faith), but as Peter demonstrates, the *euangelion* is much grander than the doctrine of justification. In its profoundest sense, the gospel is the good news that our king has been victorious over the principalities and powers of this world (Col 2:15). Indeed, Prince Immanuel's triumphal exodus from the tomb definitively declares the reestablishment of his dominion and marks the beginning of a slave revolt against the Prince of the Power of the Air—the primordial Jacob who not only fooled Adam into forfeiting the tree of life, but his true vocation as ruling-priest (Gen 3; Luke 4:18; Rom 1:4; Eph 4:8; cf. Gen 1:26–31; 27:36; Rev 1:6). A mantle regained, however, when man rises with Christ from his burial in baptism, and is exalted and “seated with him in the heavenly places” (Rom 6; Eph 2:6; Col 2:12–15).

The gospel, in shorthand, then is “Jesus is Lord!” This declaration means that when a government transgresses its sphere of authority, when it begins to dictate how (and even if) the church can worship, it is a usurpation not unlike that which occurred in the beginning: A satanic attempt to steal sovereignty from God by returning man to a state of sinful servitude, which makes resistance to such tyranny not only the Christian's right, but his duty (Acts 5:29). A failure to do so would be a denial of the gospel and a return to the abdication of responsibility that defined the original sin.

Brian Lee

Christian worship is counter-cultural, and developing a community habituated to worship requires going against the grain in our anti-Christian age. The world is full of competing liturgies, and a lockdown that physically impedes the gathering of God's people acts like an acid upon the worshipping community. Streaming, virtual alternatives are a stopgap finger in the dyke. I worry that those who have embraced the apparent upsides of such technologies will pay a steep price in the years to come.

Jim Martin

I have learned much, both personally, and in terms of ministry. I have been reminded that ministry can be hard—very hard. Reliance on the one who can carry me through hard times is critical. Competence is important.

Yet, there is nothing that replaces our need for absolute dependence upon the Lord for strength, stamina, and resilience. The dynamic of the Spirit at work in ministers and other believers is critical.

I have learned that there is no substitute for the church's primary allegiance to Jesus. Unity within a congregation can only be experienced when allegiance to Jesus matters more than opinions, political persuasions, etc. Far too often this is simply assumed by preachers and other church leaders. The way of Jesus forms and shapes a believer into one who is Christ-like. Far too often, church leaders know intellectually about discipleship and yet their lives may not reflect an absolute allegiance to Jesus above all else.

Juan Sanchez

Two major lessons I will take with me. First, we must never presume upon the Lord's grace. The Lord is sovereign, and we must seek him as we make plans. Only what the Lord wills happens. So we must seek his will. Secondly, ecclesiology matters. We are not a perfect church by any stretch of the imagination. We have many flaws, and our membership is filled with sinners. Nevertheless, our desire to establish a biblical ecclesiology mattered in the long run. The ascended Christ has structured his church to fulfill its mission (Eph 4:11). Jesus is building his church on the foundation of the gospel. And we must not build the church on any other foundation. As we seek to be faithful, the Lord is responsible for fruitfulness. Pursuing a biblical ecclesiology allows us to organize ourselves in a way in which we are led by faithful pastors and rooted in the gospel word. As the pastor preach and teach that word, the church speaks that word to one another in love until we all reach Christlike maturity. It's not rocket science, but it is not easy to do. Still, slow, steady, and faithful wins the race. We plant the seed. Someone else may come along and water. God causes the growth.

IN OTHER WORDS...

“However much the rich man in his avarice piles up his wealth
(Which is never enough!) with flowing streams of gold
And loads his neck with Red Sea pearls
And plows his fat fields with hundreds of oxen,
Gnawing care will not leave him while he lives,
Nor does his light wealth go with him dead.”

Boethius, *On the Consolation of Philosophy* (524)

“And this province [Essex] to wit being visited with the disaster of the foresaid mortal sickness, Sighere with the people over whom he ruled, forsaking the sacraments of the Christian faith, fell into apostasy. For both the king himself and a number of the people as well as of the nobles, loving this life and not seeking after the life to come, or even not believing in any such life at all, began to restore their temples which stood desolate and to worship idols, as though they could thereby be protected from the mortal sickness. Furthermore, Sebbi his companion and co-heir of the same kingdom with all under him kept the faith he had received with great devotion and completed his faithful life, as we shall hereafter declare, in great felicity.”

Venerable Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* (ca. 731)

“A truth, a doctrine, or a religion need no space for themselves. They are simply disembodied entities. They are heard, learnt and apprehended, and that is all. But the incarnate Son of God needs not only ears or hearts, but living men who will follow him. That is why he called his disciples into a literal, bodily following, and thus made his fellowship with them a visible reality. That

fellowship was founded and sustained by Jesus Christ, the incarnate Lord himself....

“The body of the exalted Lord is also a visible body in the shape of the Church.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (1937)

“It is not only in worship that the community is edified and edifies itself. But it is here first that this continually takes place. And if it does not take place here, it does not take place anywhere.... Here all Christians are present and not merely a few individuals.... From this centre it can and should spread out into a wider circle of the everyday life of Christians and their individual relationships.”

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (1955)

“Most Americans, including preachers, have difficulty accepting the truth, if they think about it at all, that not all forms of discourse can be converted from one medium to another. It is naïve to suppose that something that has been expressed in one form can be expressed in another without significantly changing its meaning, texture or value.”

Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (1986)

[On the woman at the well, John 4] “Jesus came to the fountain as a hunter.... He threw a grain before one pigeon that he might catch the whole flock.... At the beginning of the conversation he did not make himself known to her, but first she caught sight of a thirsty man, then a Jew, then a Rabbi, afterwards a prophet, last of all the Messiah. She tried to get the better of the thirsty man, she showed dislike for the Jew, she heckled the Rabbi, she was swept off her feet by the prophet, and she adored the Christ.”

Ephraem the Syrian, d. 373

“There is no question but that a man usually acts more intelligently, shows more strength, and to all appearances more self-control, when under the scrutiny of others than when he believes himself to be unobserved. But the question is whether this intelligence, this strength, this self-control is real, or whether through the devotion of long-continued attention to it, it does not easily slip into the lie of simulation which kindles the unsteady blush of double-mindedness in his soul. Each one who is not more ashamed before himself than before all others, if he is placed in difficulty and much tried in life, will, in one way or another, end by becoming the slave of men. For to be more ashamed in the presence of others than when alone, what else is this than to be more ashamed of seeming than of being? And turned about, should not a man be more ashamed of what he is than of what he seems?”

Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart* (1847)

“The church is not a people united by common ideas, ideas which collectively go under the name ‘Christianity.’ When the Bible speaks of a people united by faith it does not simply mean that we have the same beliefs about reality. Though the New Testament does use ‘faith’ to refer to a set of teachings (e.g., 1 Cor 16:13; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 4:7), ‘faith’ stretches out to include one’s entire ‘stance’ in life, a stance that encompasses beliefs about the world but also unarticulated or inarticulable attitudes, hopes, and habits of thought, action, or feeling. To be of ‘one mind’ (Phil 1:27) means to share projects, aspirations, and ventures, not merely to hold to the same collection of doctrines. Besides, the church is united not only by one *faith* but also by one *baptism* (Eph 4:4–6), manifests her unity in common participation in one *loaf* (1 Cor 10:17), and lives together in mutual deference, submission, and love....

Scripture does present a certain view of the world that has true propositional content. But it is an error, and a fatal one, to suggest that, once we have systematized the propositional content of Scripture, the result is a ‘worldview’ called Christianity to which we can give our assent.... [I]t is a radical distortion to think of Scripture’s teaching as an ‘ism.’”

Peter Leithart, *Against Christianity* (2003)

A new way of doing missions

- GCS offers a pathway for church leaders outside the US to study for a master's degree in Bible and ministry without leaving their home countries.
- Students stay at home, work their jobs, lead their families and congregations – while receiving some of the best theological training from professors sympathetic to Restoration ideals.
- Starting with two students in 2019, more than a dozen students – from Australia, Bolivia, Ghana, Honduras, Nigeria, Switzerland, and Ukraine – are now on the GCS pathway.



GCS

*A theological education pathway for
Churches of Christ around the world.*



GCS students speak

*"This class really impacted my ministry." **Ubong, Nigeria***

*"I definitely feel this course has helped me to teach women in a class or workshop." **Nancy, Australia***

*"Transformational. I've already used class learnings to deal with local church conflict." **Edmundo, Bolivia***

GCS partner school: Harding School of Theology

*"The majority of Christians no longer live in the West, but in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Harding School of Theology is honored to partner with Global Christian Studies to provide the highest level of ministry training for global leaders." **Dr Mark Powell, Dean, HST***



"GCS isn't a school. We have no faculty. We award no degrees. We're a pathway which brings together exceptional students, scholarships, and schooling."

Dr Harold Shank, GCS Director

GCS is jointly overseen by Belmore Road Church of Christ (Melbourne, Australia) and Eastside Church of Christ (Midwest City, Oklahoma).

GCS
Global Christian Studies

*If you're interested to know more about GCS or wish to sponsor a student, contact us:
**Harold Shank: drharoldshank@gmail.com
www.gcspathway.org***

It's affordable. It makes a difference. It's effective.

CONTRIBUTORS

David Duncan is the Preaching Minister at Memorial Church of Christ, Houston, Texas.

Ed Gallagher is Professor of Christian Scripture at Heritage Christian University, Florence, Alabama.

M. Todd Hall is Associate Director of the Center for Christian Studies, Austin, Texas, and Preaching Minister at Holland Street Church of Christ, San Marcos, Texas.

Bradley J. Helgeson is the Minister of the Word at the Church on the Square, Georgetown, Texas.

Brian Lee is the Senior Pastor at Christ Reformed Church, Washington, DC.

Jim Martin is the Vice-President at Harding School of Theology, Memphis, Tennessee.

Todd M. Rester is Associate Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, Pennsylvania.

Juan R. Sanchez is the Senior Pastor at High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, Texas.

Allan Stanglin is the Senior Minister at Golf Course Road Church of Christ, Midland, Texas.

Keith D. Stanglin is the Director of the Center for Christian Studies, Austin, Texas.