

OPC Ministerial Information Form

Written by Tim Black

Monday, 12 March 2007 13:45 - Last Updated Saturday, 09 October 2010 12:38

As part of the process of seeking to be called as a pastor, in the OPC you are encouraged to fill out a "Ministerial Information Form" which the denomination can send out to congregations interested in calling a pastor, providing the congregation with information about you as a potential candidate. The section I consider suitable for posting here asks questions about my Christian faith and views on some key theological issues. Interested? Read on.

10. PERSONAL FAITH AND LIFE

A. Conversion and Call – Provide a statement of your faith in Christ and walk with the Lord, your call to the ministry and your devotional life. *(Try to keep this under one page.)*

God used the ordinary means of His church and my Christian family to bring me to saving faith in Jesus Christ. My parents were raised in the OPC and joined a CRC in Kennewick, WA before I was born. We had family devotions regularly and participated in all activities of the church. There through soundly biblical and reformed preaching and teaching I grew to know and understand the truth of the gospel—that salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is fully and freely offered to me—and through God's call to repent and believe He graciously granted me faith in Christ as my Savior and Lord. In my early teen years, after taking the inquirer's class, I made a sincere profession of faith and became a communicant member of the church.

The Lord caused me to grow in maturity through my continued and increasing study of His word and involvement in the life of the church. Sunday school classes increased my understanding of and commitment to Reformed theology. The youth group taught me to love my peers rather than ridicule them. An out of town service project and a month-long workshop in church ministry increased my desire to do Christian ministry. I decided the most important thing to which I could devote my life would be to help people come to salvation and resolve their personal and relational problems in accord with the gospel. I wanted to become a pastor or Christian counselor and so chose to major in Biblical Studies and Sociology at Covenant College, and to go to seminary following that.

The summer after my first year of college (1995) my family and I rejoined the OPC by helping found the mission work which is now Covenant OPC in Kennewick, WA. During college I attended Cornerstone OPC in Chattanooga, TN. I came under care of the Presbytery of the

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Northwest in 1996 and began to occasionally provide pulpit supply and teach Sunday School. I led a CRC Summer Workshop In Ministries (SWIM) team and went on a mission trip to Uganda in 1997, and was nominated for the eldership at Cornerstone soon before I was to leave for seminary in Philadelphia.

At Covenant College I grew to love the liberal arts in general—especially philosophy, theology, and Biblical studies—and my interest in Sociology waned. I learned to think, to study, to solve problems and provide answers in a distinctly Christian and Reformed way, which was the greatest of blessings to me. It strengthened my faith, and showed me a Christian way to use my academic gifts. I gained the greatest joy from studying God's word and coming to understand it, and having opportunities to share that understanding with others for their spiritual edification. God also blessed me with godly, mature Christian friends at Covenant and immeasurable growth as a result. I came to see that the counseling I had wanted to do should be done primarily by pastors, and that my interest in the pastoral ministry was confirmed in my studies and ministry involvement. I also developed an interest in systematic theology which has led me to believe I should eventually pursue a Ph.D. in systematic theology in order to better serve the church as a pastor, presbyter, or theological professor.

Through these means the Lord led me to study in the M.Div. program at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia from 2000-2004. He used the coursework to greatly increase my ability to study and communicate God's word, and to give me resources for carrying out the pastoral ministry. He used the expense of seminary to give me growth in diligence, patience, and humble trust in Him to provide. He has used my further opportunities to provide pulpit supply, teach Sunday School, and fulfill two pastoral internships to confirm my calling to the pastorate.

B. Caring for Yourself and Your Family – Briefly respond to the following questions:

- Describe your prayer life.

As evident above, I pray regularly in public, family, and private worship. When I pray I express adoration for the Lord, confess my sins, express thanksgiving for His forgiveness and other blessings, and supplication for Him to bless the church, myself, my family, and others in authority, in my community, and throughout the world in matters both practical and spiritual. I pray in Jesus' name, for God's glory, and in accord with His revealed will.

- If you have young children in your household, what are you doing to bring them up in

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the training and admonition of the Lord?

- C. Personal Views – Briefly respond to the following questions:

1. What is your view of the authority of the Bible in the church.

The Bible is the supreme authority in the church in all matters of faith and practice (2 Pet. 1:3-4; Rev. 22:18; Is. 8:20; WCF 1.2; 1.10; WLC 3). The Bible's authority depends not on the testimony of any man or church, but wholly on God its author (1 Thess. 2:12; WCF 1.4); it is God's word, necessary, sufficient, authoritative and clear, in all it teaches and touches, inspired as a whole and in all its parts, in every word it contains (Deut. 8:3; 2 Tim. 3:16). For this reason the church must proclaim and follow "the whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life." (WCF 1.6)

2. How do you describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the church today?

In the New Testament the Spirit is given to God's people in fuller abundance and power than in the OT (John 7:38-39; Acts 2:17-18; 2 Cor. 3:13-18 WCF 20.1), yet for individual believers performs the same essential work which He performed in the OT of revealing Christ and His word, and applying salvation to His elect.

In His revelatory work the Spirit works not apart from but with and by the word (Is. 59:21; John 16:13-14; 17:17; Rom. 10:14, 17; 1 Cor. 2:10-12; Gal. 3:2, 5; James 1:18; WCF 1.5), which was written down in the books of the New Testament by the apostles and prophets who have since died (John 20:30-31; Eph. 2:20; 3:5), so we should not expect new revelations beyond what is written in the Bible (1 Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Thess. 2:2; Rev. 22:18-19).

In His saving work it is by the Spirit that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:16-17). The Spirit unites us to Christ in our effectual calling, grants us faith (2 Cor. 4:13; WCF 14.1; WSC 29; 30) and thereby all other benefits of union with Christ; especially, repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification (Rom. 8:11, 14; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Cor. 3:6; Tit. 3:5). The Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8), assures us of our salvation (Rom. 8:15-16; Eph. 1:13-14; 1 John 4:13) and the truth

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of God's word, and illumines our minds to understand it (1 Cor. 2:10-12; Eph. 1:17-18; WCF 1.5; 1.6). The Spirit enables us to worship and pray as we ought (John 4:23-24; Rom. 8:15-16, 26-27; Gal. 4:6; Jude 1:20). The most prominent work of the Holy Spirit is to make us holy in our sanctification. He causes us to obey God's laws (Ezek. 36:27) and to bear the fruit of the Spirit in our character and actions (Gal. 5:22). The Spirit gives one or more gifts to every believer for the edification of the church (1 Cor. 12:7), but no longer gives the miraculous gifts of miracles and healing, as these have served their purpose of attesting to Christ (John 10:38; 12:37; 20:30-31; Acts 2:22; 4:30), His apostles (Acts 2:43; 5:12; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:12), and His gospel (Acts 6:8; 8:6; 14:3; 15:12; Heb. 2:4), and in the present would distract our attention from observing the practical outworkings of the fruit of the Spirit as the proper evidence of His inward sanctifying work (Luke 17:20; cf. Matt. 24:24 & Mark 13:22; Gal. 5:21).

3. What is your personal approach to leadership as a pastor of a church?

I desire to carry out the work of a pastor as detailed in FOG 8 and DPW 6.2 in accord with the doctrine of the Westminster Standards and the practice of our BCO—to feed and tend God's flock and with the other elders to lead them in the service of Christ. This involves:

A primary focus on leading the church's public worship & teaching ministry by doing the following:

-

conduct public worship

-

pray for and with God's people

-

publicly read and preach God's word, and so teach, convince, reprove, exhort, comfort, evangelize, expound and apply scripture

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administer the sacraments

-

bless the people from God

And a secondary focus on ministering God's word according to the needs of groups, families, and individuals in the congregation by doing the following:

-

catechize youth and new believers

-

visit in homes

-

instruct and counsel individuals, and train members for service

-

minister to the poor, sick, afflicted, and dying

-

make known the gospel to the lost

The primary tasks above cannot be delegated or shared by a minister with other elders or members as much as can the secondary tasks above. I desire to keep those primary tasks my first priority.

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The ministerial roles for which God gifts men in the church are those of evangelists, pastors, and teachers. My gifts are more in the area of pastoring and teaching than in the area of evangelism. I will evangelize, but as needed will seek for others' gifts to supplement my own.

I love fellowship activities but prefer to delegate their planning to others.

Beyond these things I intend to be quite flexible as to the shape and details of my and the church's ministry.

4. What are your goals in the ministry?

My goals are to minister God's word to God's people in a way that glorifies God, exalts Christ, edifies every member, and saves the lost. I desire thereby to promote "the work of the church," which "is divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness." (FOG 2.4) To best use my teaching gifts for the sake of the church I hope to pursue a Ph.D. in systematic theology in the future.

5. What is your personal approach to preaching and the types of sermons you usually prepare?

In accord with DPW 3.3 I am committed to the method of expository preaching, which means I read a passage clearly, explain the sense so that the people can understand, and explain its application, as Ezra did in Neh. 8:8ff. I believe the text's original meaning is the message I must preach, and that its contemporary application flows from that original meaning. For that reason I carefully study the passage's historical context, and its grammar and syntax in its original language, in order to discover its meaning. I seek to convey the meaning of the whole passage, and of each of its parts, and to relate the passage to its context within the paragraph, chapter, and book, and to the whole Bible. To that end I prefer to preach a series of sermons through a whole book at a time. In every sermon I seek to preach the gospel of Christ, by showing the doctrinal and historical connection of the passage at hand to the whole Bible's presentation of the gospel. Because the Westminster Standards are a faithful summary of scripture's teaching, I intentionally preach in accord with the traditionally Reformed doctrine expressed in the

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Standards.