

# BEESON

A CHURCHLY FAITH

2018



# 30<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY

## In This Issue

This year marks Beeson Divinity School's 30th anniversary. As an alumna, what made Beeson such a special place for me was the bringing together of different Protestant denominations under the umbrella of biblical orthodoxy. I felt blessed to study alongside other evangelical Christians from other traditions, with whom I otherwise would not have likely engaged. I vividly remember my first year at Beeson sitting in a class taught by Professor Lyle Dorsett, who looked me in the eyes, pointed his finger, and said, "We are different regiments in the same army!" That analogy of the church has stuck with me.

As I looked around the divinity school then, as I still do today, I am graciously reminded of what the church is supposed to look like: redeemed people coming together in worship of and prayer to the Triune God side-by-side—*Soli Deo Gloria!* Under the leadership of Founding Dean Timothy George, Beeson is a unique place where Anglicans and Baptists, Presbyterians and Methodists, Calvinists and Arminians, egalitarians and complementarians, black and white, Americans and non-Americans, old and young, rich and poor, and men and women are brought together united in our shared life in Jesus Christ and our common confession of the apostolic faith.

This bringing together in unity and diversity is also reflected in John's visions in Revelation, such as the one in 7:8-10:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing

before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

In this issue of *Beeson* magazine, we are asking the question, "What is the church?" In his article, "A Churchly Faith," Timothy George retrieves Martin Luther's answer to this question about the church and what it means for us today. Next, Frank Thielman offers an in-depth examination of what Paul's letter to the Romans has to say about the church. Then, Stefana Dan Laing, our new Beeson faculty colleague, looks at what the early church has to teach us about the church.

We will then turn our attention to how our understanding of ecclesiology affects church trends and practices today, namely nondenominational churches and church planting. Mark DeVine addresses the importance of church heritage in his article, "What's In A Name?" Finally, four Beeson alumni involved in church planting discuss their church planting journeys and what they've learned about the church through those experiences.

May this issue deepen your appreciation and love for the church—the bride of Jesus Christ.



Kristen Padilla, Editor

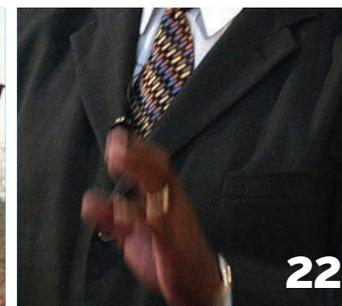
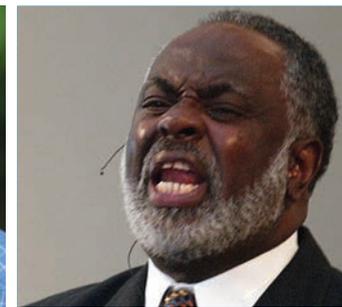
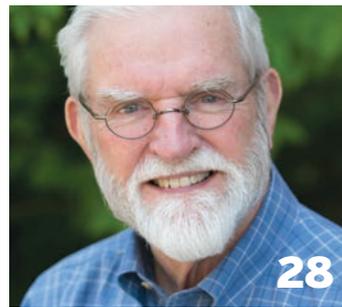
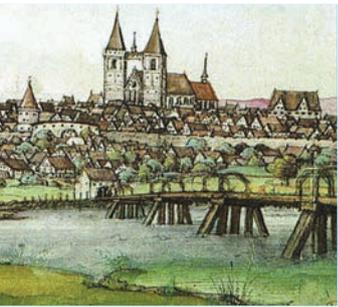
**ON THE COVER:** When we hear the word "church" we often think of a building, but here I wanted to demonstrate the reality that the church is not just a material structure, but rather it is the people of God. At first glance, the subject of this photo appears to be a beautiful church building, but the eye is quickly drawn to the true subject—a follower of Jesus, holding the Word of God close to her heart. This is the church: God's people clinging tightly to him and his Word, not just a meeting place. Cover photo by Kyle Thompson features Beeson student Jules Huff in front of Independent Presbyterian Church in Birmingham.

# BEESON

**Dean**  
Timothy George  
**Editor**  
Kristen Padilla

**Designer**  
Scott Camp  
**Creative Services**  
Laine Williams

**Photography**  
Kyle Thompson,  
Bre Conley, Caroline  
Summers, Nathan  
Troost



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**Beeson Divinity School**  
**Samford University**  
800 Lakeshore Drive  
Birmingham, AL 35229  
205-726-2991  
[beesondivinity.com](http://beesondivinity.com)

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# A Churchly *faith*

by Timothy George

**Several years ago**, Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom published an important book with an engaging title, *Is the Reformation Over?* Well, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation is over. The Reformation of the 16th century, especially Martin Luther's posting of his *95 Theses* on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, has been remembered and celebrated in numerous books, lectures and services of worship. The Reformation, however, was not a one-off event, and the coming years will bring new anniversaries to remember. Two thousand eighteen is the 500th anniversary of the Heidelberg Disputation, where Luther's theology of the cross came to the fore. Two thousand nineteen will bring new discussions of the Leipzig Debate where the principle of *sola Scriptura* was prominent. Two thousand twenty will focus fresh attention on Luther's three great

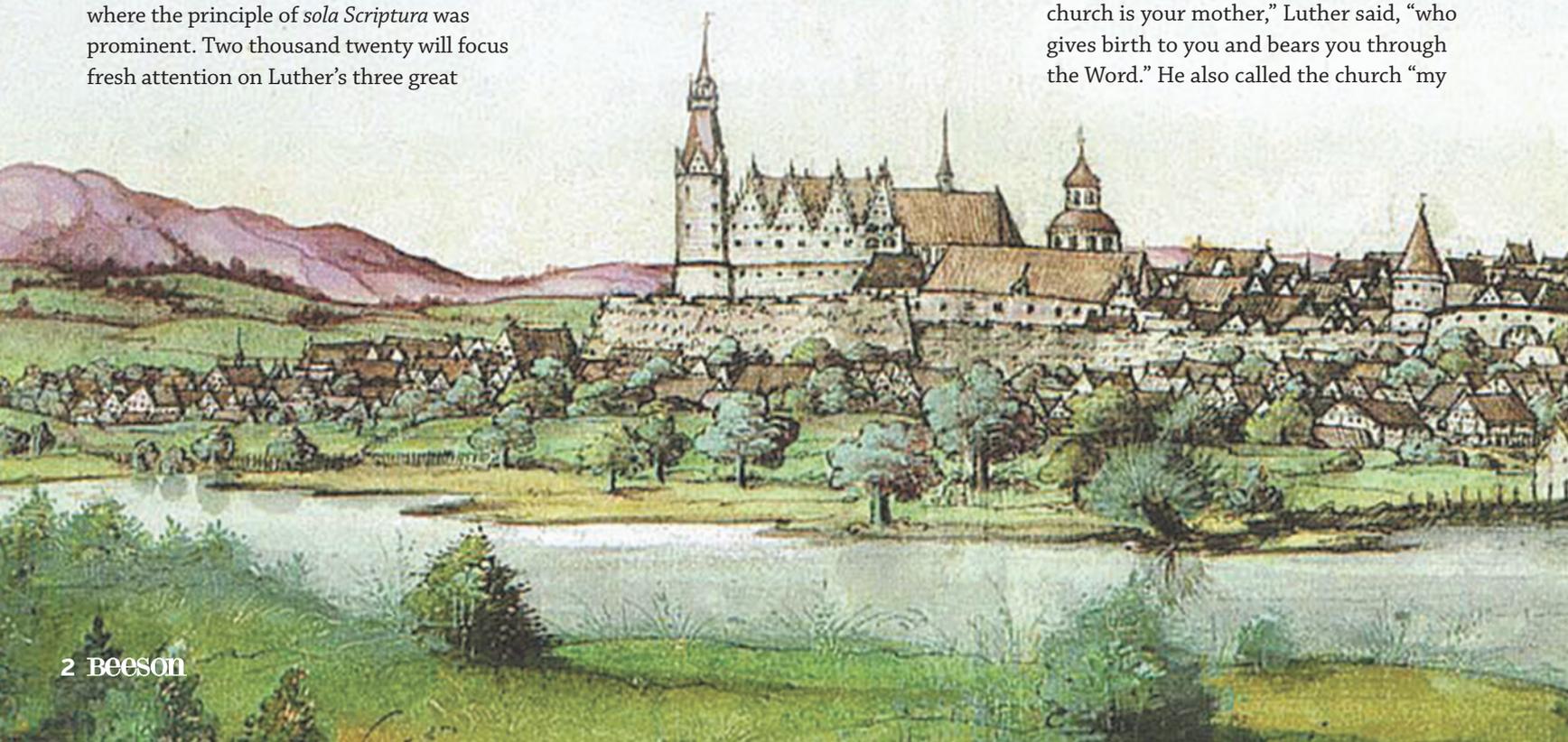
Reformation manifestos, especially *The Freedom of the Christian*. Some Baptist and Mennonite Christians are waiting for 2025 to recall the half-millennial anniversary of the first stirrings of the Anabaptist movement in Zurich.

So, is the Reformation over? My answer to that question is this: The Reformation is over only to the extent that, in some measure, it has succeeded. And, in some measure, of course, it has succeeded—and succeeded even more within the Catholic world than in certain sectors of mainline Protestantism. What would Martin Luther think about Pope Francis's commendation of his doctrine of justification by faith, or Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's call for a grace-based biblical theology? Even so,

important differences remain among the most intractable is the doctrine of the church.

The Reformers of the sixteenth century had no desire to start a brand new church. They were not innovators but reformers. They wanted to be nothing more than true and faithful members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church. And yet schism did come. Luther revolted *against the church* for the *sake of the church*, against what he thought was a corrupt church, for the sake of the "true, ancient church, one body and one communion of saints with the holy, universal, Christian church."

Far from being a champion of rugged individualism—every tub sitting on its own bottom—Luther stressed the communal character of Christianity. "The Christian church is your mother," Luther said, "who gives birth to you and bears you through the Word." He also called the church "my



fortress, my castle, my chamber.”

But what exactly is the church? Luther once responded impatiently to this question: “Why, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of the Shepherd.” For Luther and the other reformers, the true church was the people of God, the fellowship of believers, or, as the Apostles’ Creed has it, the communion of saints.

In defining the church, Luther stressed the priority of the gospel. The gospel is constitutive for the church, not the church for the gospel. In one of the most important of the *95 Theses*, Luther wrote, “The true treasure of the church is the holy gospel of the glory and the grace of God” (Thesis 62). As there can be no theology of glory, so neither can there be any ecclesiology of glory. Among the seven “holy possessions” of the church, Luther included the “sacred cross.”

Luther was sure that the true church had never ceased to exist, even though at times its numbers may have been meager—“only two or three, or children.” The continuity of the church he located not in a succession of bishops, but in a succession of true believers (*successio fidelium*) reaching all the way back to Adam: “There is always a holy Christian people on earth in whom Christ lives, works and rules.” Luther stressed the “hidden” church, a church not definable exclusively in

external terms, but rather “an assembly of hearts in one faith.” It would be a mistake, however, to think that the reformers were not concerned with the church as a concrete, visible and particular company of God’s people, the congregation—the local church. In this sense, the church is a “creature of the divine Word” and can be found wherever the Word of God is rightly preached and the sacraments duly administered. In this world, the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church founded by Jesus Christ is always *ecclesia in via*, the church in the state of becoming, buffeted by struggles, beset by the eschatological “groanings” which mark those “upon whom the ends of the world have come” (Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 10:11).

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To the eyes of faith, the church is a “worthy maid,” the Bride of Christ, but by the standards of the world she is a poor Cinderella surrounded by numerous dangerous foes.

Vulnerability marks the church of Jesus Christ in the world today. In God’s sight, the church is pure, holy, unspotted, the dove of God; but in the eyes of the world, it bears the form of a servant. It is like its Bridegroom, Christ. All those who belong to Jesus Christ stand in solidarity with their brothers and sisters in the Lord, with all those who live under the shadow of the cross and whose faithful witness is even now leading many of them to the shedding of their blood. We give thanks to God for them, and for countless others like them, who share a *koinonia* in the sufferings of Jesus, for today, as in ages past, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church—the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church. ♦

In 1525, Luther wrote a lyrical hymn praising the church:

*To me she’s dear,  
the worthy maid,*

*And I cannot forget her;*

*Praise, honor, virtue of  
her are said,*

*Then all I love her better.*

*On earth, all mad with murder,*

*The mother now alone is she,*

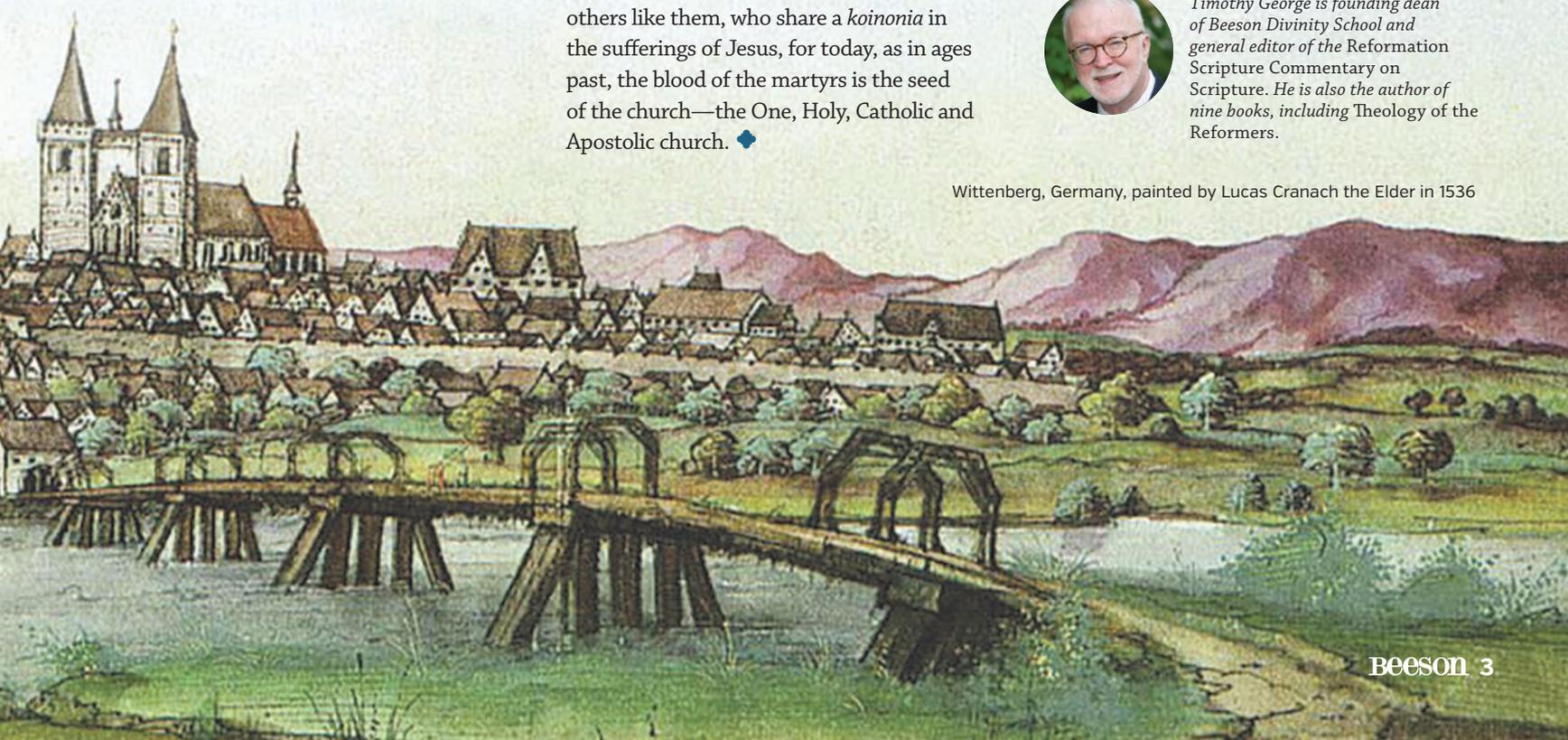
*But God will watchful  
guard her,*

*And the right Father be.*



Timothy George is founding dean of Beeson Divinity School and general editor of the Reformation Scripture Commentary on Scripture. He is also the author of nine books, including *Theology of the Reformers*.

Wittenberg, Germany, painted by Lucas Cranach the Elder in 1536



# The Church in Paul's Letter to the Romans

By Frank Thielman

At first, Romans might seem like an odd place to turn for an apostolic understanding of the church. The letter says nothing about the offices of the church, unless its brief mention of teaching and exhorting refers to official church roles (12:7–8). Similarly, it never mentions the Lord's Supper, and, although it refers to baptism (6:3–4), the topic is not the ritual of water baptism but metaphorical union with Christ. The term “church” (*ekklēsia*) does not even show up in the letter until the closing commendations and greetings of chapter 16.

**Despite all this, Romans is a profoundly ecclesiological document.** The gospel is the creative Word by which God calls the church into existence, and there is no more complete explanation of the gospel in the Scriptures than Paul's letter to the Romans. The way in which Paul envisions the gospel shaping the church is clear from the unusual address Paul affixes to his letter. Rather than sending it to “the church in Rome” (cf. 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Philemon 2), he sends it “to all those in Rome, dearly loved by God, called to be holy” (1:7). Rather than calling Christians in Rome “the church,” he substitutes for this term a description of what the church is. It is the group of people whom God has called into existence through his love, a love that entailed the sacrificial death of his Son and that expresses itself in the sustaining, strengthening gift of the Holy Spirit (5:5, 8). It is also the group of people God has

made “holy,” or set apart from the rest of humanity, to be a prototype of what all human beings will become one day in God's new, restored creation (8:16, 18–25).

The way Paul describes the gospel throughout the rest of the letter emphasizes these two themes: God's gracious, loving initiative in calling the church into existence and the church's response of living as God's restored people. Throughout chapters 1–15, for example, the theme of glorifying and worshiping God plays an important role both in Paul's description of the human plight that the gospel of God's grace addresses and in his description of the response that believers should have to this gracious gospel. The basic sin from which all other sins spring, Paul argues, is a failure to “glorify” the Creator and “give him thanks” (1:21). It is a desire to worship “the creature rather than the Creator” (1:25) or a refusal “to acknowledge” him (1:28). That is why, on the other side of the gospel, once people

have been justified by faith and reconciled to God, they give “glory to God,” as Abraham did (4:20), and “present” their “bodies” to God “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable” to him as their “reasonable worship” (12:1).

According to Romans, then, the most basic task of the church in every age is to call God's people away from the idolatry *du jour*—almost always a variation on comfort, pleasure, power, and security—and into the worship of the one true God. That worship is not a matter of coming to God with a sacrifice that we hope will win his favor. It is rather handing our whole lives over to God as a grateful response to what he has done for us. He has created us (1:25), reconciled us to himself through Christ (3:25; 5:1, 10–11), and given us the Holy Spirit to sustain us in life's hardships as God transforms us into the human beings he created us to be (8:4–27).

Giving ourselves wholly to him as living sacrifices is “reasonable” worship



Photo by Kyle Thompson

## The walls that sinful society erects between people groups must come crashing down within the church just as they have tumbled before God's grace in the gospel.

because it makes sense to respond to such lavish grace with a total commitment of ourselves to the person who is so gracious to us. It is also reasonable because, as Paul's Greek (*logikos*) hints, it is worship that arises from within, from a mind and will that God has started to transform. That is why in the next sentence Paul instructs the Roman Christians to "be transformed by the renewal of your mind so that you might approve what the will of God is" (12:2).

The church, then, is the place to which people can come when their failure to

acknowledge God has left their lives in tatters. Here they find a community of people who have experienced God's love in the gift of his Spirit (5:5) and the sacrificial death of his Son on their behalf to reconcile them to himself (5:8). These experiences have so transformed their understanding of God and his relationship to the world, that their whole lives are devoted to his service. Since he is their loving Creator, their lives, lived in this way, are destined to flourish (8:15–30).

Another way in which Romans links the love of God in Jesus Christ with the distinctiveness of God's people is by pairing the impartiality of God's grace with the impartiality that believers should show to one another. Paul repeatedly emphasizes the irrelevance of social boundaries to the flood of God's powerful, saving grace in Romans. The social boundaries that human beings have erected to divide and dominate one another do not limit God. The gospel goes

to Greeks and barbarians, to wise and foolish, to Jew and Greek. It powerfully reconciles "everyone who believes" to God (1:14–16). The impartiality of God in revealing his wrath against "all impiety and injustice of human beings who have suppressed the truth in wickedness," whatever their ethnic origin (1:18–20), is matched by the impartiality with which God applies the gracious, reconciling death of Christ to Jews as well as Gentiles. "Or is God the God of the Jews alone? Is he not also God of the Gentiles? Yes, also of the Gentiles!" (3:21–30). As Paul says closer to the letter's end, ". . . There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all and richly generous toward all who call upon him" (10:12).

If that is true of the character of God and the nature of his lavish grace, then, Paul insists, it must also be true of the church that God's gracious gospel calls into existence. The walls that sinful society



erects between people groups must come crashing down within the church just as they have tumbled before God's grace in the gospel. This is why in the second half of Romans Paul forbids the Gentile Christians in his audience from priding themselves on outnumbering Jewish Christians within the church. They must not "boast over the branches" who were broken from the tree of God's people so that Gentiles might be grafted in. Everyone within the church, no matter who they are, is there only by faith in the gospel (11:19–20). Presenting one's self to God "as a living sacrifice" in gratitude for his grace involves not thinking of one's self "more highly than" one "ought to think" (12:3a), but using one's gifts in the church to express genuine love toward each other regardless of the differences that might otherwise separate Christians from each other (12:3b–9a; cf. 13:8–10).

It means that Gentile believers, who find Jewish dietary customs and Sabbath observance unnecessary, should not "hold in contempt" their fellow Jewish believers who continue to keep these ethnic customs (14:3). Nor should Jewish believers, who continue to observe these parts of the Mosaic law "judge" Gentiles who find them unnecessary to observe (14:4). Rather,

believers in a position of strength should use their strength to show love to those in positions of weakness (14:15). They should seek to please their neighbors in order to accomplish what is good for the whole community and to build other people up (15:1–2).

As Paul moves into the final phase of the letter, where he discusses his upcoming travels and sends greetings to and from fellow believers, we might at first think that he has finished the letter's substance and has nothing more to say to us. By the middle of the second century, a form of Romans was circulating that ended at 14:23, an attempt, according to the great scholar J. B. Lightfoot, to make the text more applicable to the church everywhere.<sup>1</sup> Apparently, those who sliced out chapters 15 and 16 saw no point in reading them aloud to the gathered church. Who could benefit from such personalia, anchored so firmly in the apostle's own time and place? As always with attempts to meddle with the Word of God, however, this was an unwise move. These chapters actually have much to say about the practical implications of the gospel for the church. Paul's backward glance at his travels in the service of the gospel (15:17–22) and his forward-looking survey of what he hopes

to do next (15:23–33) show that authentic commitment to the church's gospel-based unity results in practical, costly expressions of that unity.

Paul has traveled from Jerusalem to Illyricum with the gospel, proclaiming it to the Gentiles (15:16, 19–21), but always with one eye on his own Jewish people, whose positive response to the gospel, he hopes, will grow with time (11:13–16). Even as he wrote Romans, Paul was about to embark on the final phase of his relief mission to the poverty-stricken Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, bringing them a collection of funds he had made among the predominantly Gentile Christians in regions to the west of Judaea (15:26–27). He wrote Romans in part so that the ethnically mixed Christian community in Rome might struggle alongside him in prayer for the success of this venture—linking arms with Paul, an apostle many of them had never seen, to help a group of needy believers of a largely different ethnic group in a city hundreds of miles distant (15:30–33).

Paul calls this practical outlay of funds for impoverished Christians a *koinōnia*, a "fellowship, partnership, contribution" that the Gentiles have given to the Jews (15:26). It is not an



Photo by Nathan Troost

expression of fellowship. It is fellowship, and this fellowship is an expression of the unity believers from all sorts of social categories and ethnic backgrounds have with each other because of their common commitment to Christ in the terms Paul lays out in Romans 1:16–11:33.

This same practical expression of unity among believers also appears, unexpectedly, in the long list of greetings with which Paul closes the letter (16:3–16). From the names Paul uses, modern scholars have determined much about the social standing of people in the list.<sup>2</sup> Paul greets slaves, freedmen and people with no slavery in their heritage. He greets Jews and Gentiles. He praises women alongside men for their role in advancing the gospel. He greets a woman so oppressed that she has no name of her own, but only a family name (Julia), a slave with a name sometimes given to dogs (Phlegon=“Blazer”), and another slave named only for the “incomparable” service that his master hoped to squeeze out of him (Asyncritus). All these people

<sup>1</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1893), 315-320.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 164–83.

It is fellowship, and this fellowship is an expression of the unity believers from all sorts of social categories and ethnic backgrounds have with each other because of their common commitment to Christ.

receive a greeting both from the apostle Paul and “from all the churches of Christ.” Perhaps most significant, everyone receives instructions to “greet one another with a holy kiss” (16:16). In Paul’s culture, kisses of greeting outside the family were typically reserved for upper class men (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 26.3.3), but Paul sees every believer in Rome as equally privileged and as part of the same, new family.

The church as Romans envisions it,

then, is a church that puts no social limitations on the love that it shows to those both inside and outside its boundaries. It works in peace to build everyone up (14:19). This work of edification, furthermore, is more than taking a position, casting a vote, or buying a bumper sticker. It involves sweat and money, travel and trouble, and a warm welcome in the name of Jesus to people who are not like us, just as it did for Paul, Julia, Phlegon, and Asyncritus.

The church of Paul’s letter to the Romans is an assembly of people who have experienced the love of God through his costly forgiveness of their sins and who stand apart from the world around them by the way they live. Their response to God’s gracious love is to glorify him by devoting their lives to his service, and that service entails actively loving others within the community whatever their social standing in the wider world. It is a community “dearly loved by God” and “called to be saints.” ♦



Frank Thielman, professor of New Testament at Beeson Divinity School, has written a new commentary on Romans releasing in August 2018 called, *Romans: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan)*. He is the author of six additional books, including commentaries on *Ephesians* and *Philippians*, and is an ordained Presbyterian (PCA) minister.



Photo by Kyle Thompson

# Retrieving the Early Church

by Stefana Dan Laing

**Antiquity is Trending.** A look back into ancient Christianity is a fascinating journey. The early church produced colorful personalities, foundational theology and varieties of devotional practice. The richness of its catechetical instruction, liturgical practice and iconography can stir us to desire an encounter with God using ancient modes of study and worship. Some see that period as a kind of Golden Age of strong, stalwart martyrs, fiery apologists, extraordinary (meaning “eccentric”) ascetics and eloquent preachers, perhaps wanting to appropriate aspects of the early church uncritically. Others believe that the early church is too far removed historically and culturally for retrieval, and perhaps some of the early church’s practices and teachings even conflict with Protestant commitments. Nonetheless, it is possible to retrieve something valuable from the early Christians. A movement gaining popularity among evangelicals is the “retrieval and renewal” movement, pioneered by Baylor professor Daniel H. Williams, who sees the sources available from the church fathers as *resources* for the renewal of the contemporary church.<sup>1</sup> ***So what can the contemporary church learn from the ancient church of the Lord Jesus Christ?***



# 1 Love Jesus supremely.

In Phil. 3:10-11, Paul writes of his desire to know Jesus and the fellowship of his sufferings, to become like Him in His death, but also to know the power of the resurrection. A basic tenet of discipleship for early Christians was the “imitation of Christ” (*imitatio Christi*), a distinctive feature of all the church’s generations, from the first disciples and martyrs to the second- and third-century suffering church, including figures like the teacher Origen, the bishops Polycarp of Smyrna and Ignatius of Antioch, the youthful and intrepid visionary Perpetua and her equally brave servant Felicitas, Phileas the Egyptian bishop and many others. This trait continued into the centuries after the toleration of Christianity, reflected among the desert ascetics (a term that means something like “athletes in training”) like Antony the Egyptian hermit, among the stable domestic ascetics like Macrina and Peter (sister and brother of the great Cappadocians Gregory of Nyssa and Basil of Caesarea), and among the ascetic-minded pilgrims, theologians and non-cloistered believers like Melania of Rome, who were driven to serve and sacrifice, by the “wound of love” for Jesus and by their desire for union with the beautiful Heavenly Bridegroom.<sup>2</sup> Antony, for example, taught his disciples that at the core of their monastic endeavors there should exist a powerful love for Jesus and that they should not “prefer anything in the world to the love of Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Theodoret,

bishop of Cyrus in Syria composed in the fifth century a *History of the Monks of Syria*, ending with an epilogue entitled “On Divine Love.” He explains that, inspired by the Bride in the Song of Songs, ascetics read Jesus’s words, but also longed to hear His voice and see His face; that is, to receive a vision of Him.<sup>4</sup> Theodoret’s extended conclusion clarifies the impulse of the ascetic, monastic, and contemplative vocation: love for Jesus.

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**Divine love for Jesus is a “wound,” a “goad,” a “spark” that bursts into a flame fueling the life of discipleship.**

Divine love for Jesus is a “wound,” a “goad” and a “spark” that bursts into flame fueling the life of discipleship longer the more time a believer engages the Lord through the Scriptures and holy contemplation. “Let us too conceive this longing,” Theodoret writes, “let us become bewitched by the beauty of the Bridegroom, . . . and so in our love be maintainers of his laws.”<sup>5</sup> Love for Jesus was not only the driving impulse but also the goal of the ascetic life. Let us at the core of our discipleship love Jesus fervently—let us love the Master and be driven to service and self-sacrifice by this love.

# 2 Know the Scriptures and the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

We have a great advantage today over the early believers. In our country there are Bibles aplenty, and we can own multiple copies in different formats, with a specialized focus and various study aids. In the first few centuries, however, “bibles” as we know them now, were unavailable. The church did place a strong emphasis on the apostolic preaching and the Rule of Faith, which summarized the basic tenets of the Christian faith before the production and promulgation of the Nicene Creed (AD 325). The use of the Creed as a baseline enabled believers to engage outsiders evangelistically, and to protect their church fellowship in love and truth. For example, in his work *Against Heresies*, the bishop Irenaeus roundly criticized Gnostics of all

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**“Timothy, guard what God has entrusted to you. Avoid godless, foolish discussions with those who oppose you with their so-called knowledge.”**

**1 Tim. 6:20**

stripes for misinterpreting the Scriptures to suit their own theological myth. Indeed, in earlier centuries, the young pastor, Timothy, had received encouragement from his mentor, the apostle Paul, to “guard the deposit” in the context of warning

<sup>1</sup>See Daniel H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition, Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). This work subsequently spurred several more monographs in a series entitled *Evangelical Ressourcement: Ancient Sources for the Church’s Future*, edited by Williams and published by Baker Academic.

<sup>2</sup>Gerontius, *Life of Melania 1*, in *Vie de sainte Mélanie*, (ed. and trans. D. Gorce; Paris: Cerf, 1962); English translation in Joan M. Petersen, *Handmaids of the Lord: Holy Women in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1996), 313.

<sup>3</sup>Athanasius, *Life of Saint Antony*, in *Saint Antony of the Desert*, (trans. J.B. McLaughlin; Rockford, IL: TAN, 1995), 19.

<sup>4</sup>Theodoret of Cyrus, *A History of the Monks of Syria by Theodoret of Cyrrhus*. (trans. R. M. Price; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1985), 193.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., *A History of the Monks of Syria* 21.

against false teachers who have “swerved from the faith” (1 Tim. 6:20-21) and who have misled other believers (2 Tim. 2:16-18). Paul emphasized that Timothy was to know and teach “sound doctrine” to protect other believers within the fellowship and to also correct opponents hoping that they will return to a sound faith (2 Tim. 2:25-26).

Sometimes arguing with detractors took on an urgent or even polemical tone, and in the periods of persecution, accusations often meant that lives were

at stake. Even in the New Testament, portions of Galatians, 2 John and Jude speak harshly against false teachers. Bishop Irenaeus nonetheless indicates that out of love, these corrective arguments constitute a desire for false teachers to come around to sound doctrine, and so we “hold out our hand to them,” hoping they will be turned back by God.<sup>6</sup> The apologists’ ministry was important both inside and outside the church, and the foundation of their work was sound doctrine, along with knowing and

understanding their culture and engaging it willingly. Knowledge of the faith came through rehearsing and memorizing the Rule of Faith and later the Creed, reinforced by strong biblical and doctrinal preaching and through catechesis of baptismal candidates, a catechesis that was mainly an exposition of the Creed. Even today, teaching the Nicene Creed as an expression of our biblical faith is essential for discipleship inside the church, as well as for evangelistic engagement outside our walls.

### 3 Live in a heavenly mindset.

Often we hear the saying that someone is so heavenly minded as to be no earthly good. Actually the spiritual directors of the early church encouraged a heavenly cast of mind, which could produce quite a lot of earthly good. For example, if one dwells on God, His Word and the ideals of the kingdom, one is more likely to live out these ideals in daily life. This mindset impacts our understanding of (among other things) family, no longer defined as just our own parents and siblings, but we also see “apostles, prophets and martyrs” and believers of all ages in the church’s history as our family members. Jesus’s view of “family” certainly extended beyond Mary and His siblings, to include “whoever does the will of God” (Mk. 3:33-35), continuing, “he is my brother and sister and mother.” Our definition of family expands to include others who uphold the values of our Father’s household. When Phileas of Thmuis was on trial (AD 305), the court authorities tried to coerce him to deny his faith by having his family attend court to distress him emotionally. However, the account of his trial indicates that he was like a rock, “claiming that the apostles and martyrs were his kin.”<sup>7</sup>

Living in a heavenly mindset is a choice, and it admits the conclusion

that the believer lives in two realms, the earthly and heavenly, simultaneously. That realization of earthly residence with heavenly citizenship (as in Augustine’s magisterial apology) impacts our view of life as we know it. Our view of earthly pleasures, possessions, government, the church and a future we anticipate are all impacted. Earthly pleasures and goods

**“Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”**

*Mark 3:33-35*

are to be held lightly; they are temporary and not to be loved as 1 John 2:15-17 admonishes us. Many early Christians took this admonition to heart and were also convicted by Jesus’s words to the rich young man in Mark 10:21, and His exclamation in 10:23, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” For example, Melania the Younger and her husband, Pinian, teach us to be insanely generous. Seriously. Their wealth (mostly in real estate) was so great that it spread out over several provinces. When they tried to sell it off and give the money to various church ministries, their family got the government involved to prevent them from doing so. Their attempt to give away such a huge inheritance was considered an act of sheer insanity. The couple’s

mindset, that all their goods belonged to the Lord, was spurring them to amazing acts of philanthropy. They had become detached from earthly goods so they could be generous. This couple gave away enormous sums to churches, monastic houses and impoverished communities, including—among others—the church and community of Augustine’s friend Alypius, who later was consecrated bishop of a church in Thagaste, Augustine’s hometown.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, the New Testament gives the injunction not to “love the world” because it is “passing away” (1 Cor. 7, 1 Jn. 2) and is under the sway of “the ruler of this world” (Jn. 12:31, 14:30). In this view, the world is fallen, broken, imperfect and often constitutes the nexus of spiritual warfare when earthly and heavenly priorities clash. This was the Christians’ view as they faced government-sponsored persecution for refusing to worship Caesar, calling Christ Lord instead. As the apologists explained, Christians understood persecution as stemming from the devil and his demons; demonic powers were behind idol worship, and they deceived earthly rulers into warring against the church.<sup>9</sup> Christians also held a view of time and power in which Caesar’s reign was limited and temporal, by contrast to the true Sovereign, Christ, who reigned eternally in heaven. This concept emerges like a “tagline” in a number of martyrdom accounts, conveying

<sup>6</sup>Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.25.7.

<sup>7</sup>*Acts of Phileas* 6.4 in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, vol. 2, (ed. and trans. H. Musurillo; Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 350-51.

<sup>8</sup>Gerontius, *Life of Melania* 20-22.

<sup>9</sup>Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, (ANF 1:57). Justin offers the same explanation during his trial.

something like Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days who rules sovereignly and unopposed by the earthly kings who come and go (Dn. 7:13-14, 26-27).<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, this concept emerged powerfully during and after the 2016 national election.<sup>11</sup>

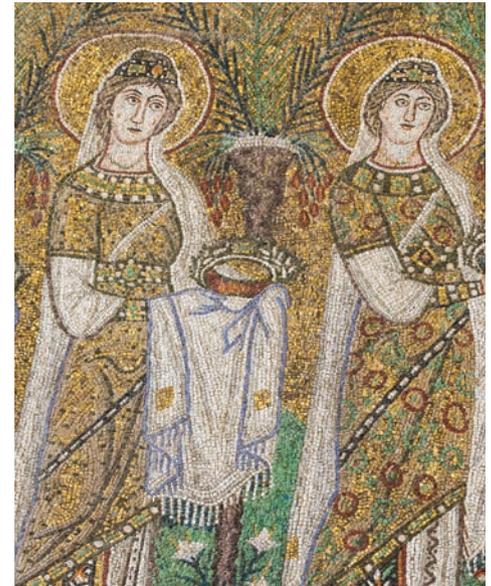
Because this world is under the devil's sway, no earthly institution can provide

**“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!”**

*1 John 3:1*

perfect justice, harmony and peace. In the face of contentious elections and critical Supreme Court rulings, we should pray for justice and righteousness but should not expect it; it is fully certain only in God's kingdom in the Heavenly City, when every citizen has been transformed by the Holy Spirit from the inside out. This future and

eternal state of righteousness constitutes the consummation of the Christian life and human history, and it is our destiny.<sup>12</sup> In the meantime, between creation, re-creation, and final telos, operating within an early Christian metaphysical framework, we get a sense of what disciples of Jesus can realistically expect in this life: houses, lands, brothers, sisters, children, mothers, “with persecutions” (Mk. 10:29-30), and the latter is mentioned in other New Testament contexts as well. However, we can also expect the comforting presence of Jesus, the heavenly Bridegroom with us; the love of God “in Christ” to be inseparable from us; the knowledge of God's sovereign rule over all, guiding history to its ordained telos; and the ever-present Holy Spirit who teaches, guides and sanctifies us, and convicts the world through our witness (our “*martyria*”)—whether we live or die. These aspects of a realistic discipleship were fully embraced by ancient believers.



Felicitas and Perpetua in procession in a line of women martyrs on the wall of a cathedral in Ravenna, Italy [5-6th century]

## 4 Remember the saints.

If there is one thing the Bible makes abundantly clear, it is that remembrance is not optional. The Lord consistently admonished Israel to remember Him and His covenant, the ancient paths of wisdom, and His mighty deeds of redemption on Israel's behalf. Jesus commanded His disciples whenever they come together at table and in worship to remember Him and the new covenant He established by His blood. The New Testament witness reinforces this command (1 Cor. 11), and the later church prioritized the Lord's Table, calling it the Great *Eucharistia* or Thanksgiving. Whenever the church celebrates the Lord's Supper, it remembers Jesus in the way He commanded, proclaiming His death and return, as well as the eschatological feast He will one day share with His church. During feasts of the church year like Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, the great Lenten fast, Easter and Pentecost, we

remember Christ by commemorating the events of His life. By remembering saints and martyrs, either on the anniversary of their martyrdom or at All Saints' Day, we honor their lives as Christ's followers

**“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”**

*1 Cor. 11:1*

who walked the path of self-denying discipleship before us and testified by their lives and deaths to their Lord. These ancient disciples, drawn from all walks of life, following and serving the Lord of the church in every era—these women and men constitute the “great cloud of witnesses” before whom we live out our own witness; and they also constitute—in the Nicene phrase—the “communion of the saints” with whom we will one day enjoy “life everlasting.”

In the meantime, we can retrieve these

several aspects of the ancient church: love the Lord of the church supremely and imitate His example; know the Scripture and the sound faith passed down through the church's creeds; live faithfully and courageously between earthly and heavenly realities; and remember the Lord and the communion of all His saints, together with whom we also are being built up as a holy temple and a dwelling place for God through the Spirit, founded on the work and witness of apostles and prophets, and held fast by the chief cornerstone, the living Lord of the church Himself (Eph. 2:20-22).



*Stefana Dan Laing is the author of Retrieving History: Memory and Identity Formation in the Early Church (Baker) and will join Beeson Divinity School in fall 2018 as its newest assistant professor of spiritual formation and theological librarian. Read more about her new appointment on page 26.*

<sup>10</sup>Stefana Dan Laing, *Retrieving History: Memory and Identity Formation in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 101-104.

<sup>11</sup>For example, in October 2016, Max Lucado posted a piece entitled, “My prediction for November 9” at <https://maxlucado.com/prediction-november-9/>, stating that the day after the election “will bring another day of God's perfect sovereignty.”

<sup>12</sup>Augustine, *City of God* 19.13.

# BAPTIST nondenominational

## What's in a Name? by Mark DeVine

### A seemingly newish church-option

concoction is being brewed up these days, and many of you have already imbibed. Those yet to sample it have likely inhaled its wafting vapors either up close or from a distance. Some goodly percentage of the uninitiated have either parented or grandparented regular partakers. These partakers belong to the largest of the fastest growing streams of Christianity in North America.

The smart researchers tell us that at least one of these churchy “stills” is up and running and supplying a growing market in 80 percent of the counties in the lower 48 states.<sup>1</sup> So, does this burgeoning movement have a name? Well sort of. I guess. You tell me. It's called “nondenominationalism.”

If this is a name, we must surely pity it as an embarrassingly weak one. Like “post-modern,” it trumpets its own failure to offer positive signification and settles for negative differentiation. Like those accused or fearful of being accused of crimes, their first instinct is to issue denials. “Say what you want about us, but we have **NOT** committed and do not intend to commit denominationalism!” This instinct vaguely recalls the first line of the first Baptist confession published in London in 1644—“The Confession of Faith, of those churches which are commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptist.” The denial both defends itself and seeks to comfort would-be samplers of their way of doing church—“If you want to steer clear of them, you're safe with us.”

Yet, increasingly, the “nondenominational” signature is being found inadequate by the nondenoms themselves, not least because they care much for identity, authenticity and transparency, as their sometimes longish

and tortuous “Who We Are” website links demonstrate.

Take one such congregation in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Following an eighteen-page confession, itself undergirded by (I am not kidding) two-hundred and ninety-nine endnotes, one finds two appendices, the first entitled “Denials.” In this four-page section, the elders want all to know that they are not liberals, fundamentalists, isolationists, hyper-

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### If an American church calls itself “nondenominational,” nine times out of ten what that means is Baptist.

Parish Priest in the Episcopal Church

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Calvinists, universalists, moralists, religious relativists, open theists, egalitarians, classic dispensationalists, theologians, naturalists, evangelical feminists or polemicists.<sup>2</sup> GOOD HEAVENS! Is it possible to successfully avoid being so many things? It seems doubtful but the attempt is impressive.

Within this stunningly laborious exercise of identity-affirming, denying, and circumscribing, one word remains conspicuously absent, ostensibly unneeded and uniquely unwelcome—“Baptist.” Yet that word, though absent from the little mountains of identity-articulating verbiage, hovers like a ghost above the whole “this-is-who-we-are” and “this-is-who-we-aren't” enterprise. Its absence evidences a strain of tension and ambiguity snaking through many of these nondenominational churches—communities of faith bearing unmistakable

distinguishing marks of the 400-year-old Baptist movement: regenerate church membership, believer baptism, local church autonomy, orthodox theology, reformed and reformed-ish doctrines of salvation and a touch of Great Awakening zeal for conversion and heart religion.

Uniquely conspicuous in its power to “out” these folks as swimmers in the Baptist stream is their deployment of local church covenants. Through these ethical counterparts to confessions of faith, members promise to behave and treat each other in ways fit for followers of Jesus Christ. While acknowledging indebtedness to English Congregationalism, such “covenanting” is about as patently “Baptist” a communal act as one could imagine.

Ironically, even flight from the name Baptist tracks along with certain denominational Baptist sensibilities. Recently, The Southern Baptist Convention itself considered adopting a new name with the word “Baptist” excised. Had the measure gained approval, what sort of Christians would members of the 40,000 plus denominationally affiliating churches have been?

Scratch just below the surface of many Baptist-by-other-names churches, and you often catch them all mired up in denominational affiliation after all. Their nondenominationalism turns out to be more posture than position. Query pastors and elders of unaffiliated congregations about their spiritual formation and ministerial training and you catch them entangled with Baptist and baptistic congregations and educational institutions.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/september/how-many-churches-in-america-us-nones-nondenominational.html?share>

<sup>2</sup><https://static1.squarespace.com/static/518d802ae4b05913b69c534f/t/51bf59a2e4b03b777468233a/1371494818018/Pastoral+Statement+of+Faith.pdf>

Why such a wide spectrum of denominational and nondenominational diversity? Because in the Baptist tradition, the irreducible unit of the thing called church is the local body of believers, plus nothing else. Every extra-local church partnership remains formally and fundamentally voluntary, utilitarian, ontologically *ad hoc* and so, ultimately, dispensable and severable. Denominational affiliation is a nonessential option within the Baptist tradition. Thus the Prince of Preachers and quintessential Baptist, Charles Haddon Spurgeon could and did declare as a *Baptist*, “I care not for denominations.”

## So what?

Let’s say we successfully “out” these nondenominational and nondenominationally postured congregations as Baptists. Does that matter? When Jesus prayed for unity among his followers in John 17 and promised to build his church at Caesarea Philippi, did he envision one big generic CHURCH uncomplicated by the ostensibly scandalous subtraditions that have actually emerged over the centuries? Should ecumenical efforts in pursuit of unity try to forget history and opt only for attempted fresh shared readings of the Bible? Or might the subtraditions, whether Baptist or Methodist or Presbyterian, belong to the wise, loving, providential and meticulous fulfillment of our Lord’s promise to build his church? Might then ecumenical wisdom recognize in the subtraditions and their histories our Lord’s ongoing fitting together of body parts in mutual interdependence to form the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12)?

When the all but irrepressible urge of adopted children to find their birth parents erupts, it is usually driven by a hunger for self-discovery and belonging of a sort biological parents and definite ancestral lineage alone can provide. Jaroslav Pelikan offers this advice to Christians either neglectful or wary of their “parenting” traditions in the faith:

***Maturity in relation to our parents consists in going beyond both a belief in their omniscience and a disdain for their weakness, to an understanding and a gratitude for their decisive part in that ongoing process in which now we, too, must take our place, as heirs and yet free. So it must be in our relation to our spiritual and intellectual parentage, our tradition. An abstract concept or parenthood is no substitute for real parents, an abstract cosmopolitanism no substitute for our real traditions.***<sup>3</sup>

A layperson at a nondenominationally-postured church interrupted my discussion with staff about “Baptisness”—“I grew up Southern Baptist and dropped out of church eight years ago. Eventually, I made two decisions—(1) I would find a church and (2) it would definitely NOT be a Baptist church. So I ended up here. Later I discovered that this is not only a Baptist church, it’s a Southern Baptist Church. But it’s too late now. I love it

## What you have as heritage, Take now as a task; For thus you will make it your own!

Goethe, *Faust*

here, and I feel completely at home.”

Effective medicine for many a dissatisfied, disgruntled or wounded Baptist and many unchurched seekers and new converts, turns out to be some concoction of Baptist ecclesial elixir after all, often mixed and served up by some variety of Baptists-by-other-names. Why might this be? Perhaps Pelikan is right: “tradition does not have to be understood,” much less self-consciously embraced, “in order to be dominant.”<sup>4</sup>

Recognition of the power and value of parenting traditions need not careen into a shaming of good folks who were minding their own business into admitting that they are Baptist and to take on the name whether they like it or not. The first questions raised by “baptistic” nondenominationalism address

not praxis or nomenclature but identity. Ecclesial traditions spawn and bequeath heritages, and those heritages, according to God’s secret wisdom and providence, shape our very beings. Illumination of this reality serves both authenticity and service within the wider body of Christ.

Again Pelikan:

***Coming to terms with the traditions from which we are derived is, or should be, a fundamental process of growing up. Obviously, that ought to include knowledge of the contents of those traditions . . . we do not have a choice between being shaped by our intellectual and spiritual DNA and not being shaped by it, as though we had sprung into being by some kind of cultural spontaneous generation . . . We do, nevertheless, have some choices to make. One . . . is whether to understand our origins in our tradition or merely let that tradition work on us without our understanding it, in short, whether to be conscious participants or unconscious victims.***<sup>5</sup>

The options confronting the ecclesially amnesiac are not to either surrender and succumb to one’s tradition or imagine that one can opt out of tradition all together since “tradition demands to be served even when it is not observed.”<sup>6</sup> Yet, according to Goethe, only as we receive tradition as our heritage and make it our task does it become possible to then “make it our own.” Our aim should be to learn to walk down the only truly authentic and promising path open to us “as heirs yet free.” For it is only along this path, with the melody of our spiritual parents and grandparents ringing in our ears as a sort of “counterpoint,” we may go on “to compose melodies of our own.”<sup>7</sup> ♦



Mark DeVine, associate professor of history and doctrine at Beeson Divinity School, is the director of the divinity school’s Faith and Work Initiative, author of *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today: Following Jesus at All Costs (B&H)* and *RePlant: How a Dying Church Can Grow Again (David Cook Publishers)*, and an ordained Southern Baptist pastor.

<sup>3</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 54.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 54.

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# Interviews

## Church Planting by Kristen Padilla

**How does our understanding of ecclesiology** affect the way we plant churches? Why should we plant churches? What are some challenges to church planting?

In order to help answer these questions and more, I interviewed four Beeson alumni involved in church planting. I began with Bernard and Betsy (M.A.T.S. 2015) Howard, who have recently planted an Anglican church in Manhattan. Then I talked to Matt Owens (M.Div. 2013), who, after serving on staff at a Presbyterian church plant in the Boston area, is being sent out this year to plant

a new Presbyterian church in another area of Boston. Last, I sat down with Joel Brooks (M.Div. 1999) and Joel Busby (M.Div. 2011), who both pastor nondenominational church plants in Birmingham, Busby being sent out by Brooks's church.

My hope is that their stories of church planting will further the discussion of ecclesiology, provide resources to those interested in church planting and encourage others to engage in the work of Christ's church.

*Interviews have been edited for length.*

### Bernard and Betsy Howard

[M.A.T.S. 2015] planted Good Shepherd Anglican Church on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, New York, in March 2017.

**K** Why did you plant a church in Manhattan?

**BB** Bernard is a Jewish believer in Jesus, and so he has a strategic advantage in sharing the gospel with other Jews.

Two hundred forty thousand Jewish people live on the island of Manhattan, and we believe it's important for there to be some Jewish pastors among them. We were also motivated by our observation that despite good progress in recent decades, Manhattan is still chronically undersupplied with gospel-preaching churches.

**K** What does planting a church in Manhattan look like?



**BB** Many of our members have come to us looking for a church where they can be known personally in a city of isolation. At a large church, one can stay on the fringes, but at a church plant, everyone is needed and expected to pitch in. We are building close community by working side by side.

We've tried to put God's Word at the center of the life of our church. On Sunday mornings Bernard preaches exegetically through books of the Bible. We have a community group with a Bible study in our home on Wednesday evenings.

**K** What have been the greatest challenges to church planting where you are?

**BB** The stakes are high for church plants in Manhattan because it's so expensive to live here and rent a meeting place. In other parts of the country, a church can be incubated inexpensively in a big living room, but Manhattan apartments are too small for that. As a result, we needed a large sum of money to plant before we had evidence that our church would take root and thrive. We had to walk by faith and not by sight—and so

did our donors! Nine months after planting, through God's grace, we have a small but well-established congregation. However, we still face the challenge of growing the church so that it can be financially self-sustaining. People are constantly moving into the city, but church members also move away. One church planter compared church planting in Manhattan to filling a bathtub without a plug in the drain!

**K** What have you learned about God's character through this process?

**BB** Our belief that God wants us to walk in daily dependence on him has been reinforced. While the lack of financial security can be frightening, it has driven us to our knees, which is the posture we were created for.

**K** In light of planting a church, what have you learned about what the church is?

**BB** Theologically speaking, a church is a community gathered around Jesus by his Word (see Matthew 20:18 and John 20:29–31). Our experience bears that out. As a result of the weekly preaching of the Word a community has been established. The existence of this community inevitably gives rise to many tasks and responsibilities in addition to preaching, but we're determined to maintain the priority of preaching the Word. Just as the Word brings a church into being, it also sustains its spiritual life.

*To learn more about Good Shepherd Anglican Church and how to partner with Bernard and Betsy in their ministry, go to [goodshepnyc.org](http://goodshepnyc.org).*

## Matt Owens (M.Div. 2013) is planting a new church in Quincy, Massachusetts, this year. From 2014-17, Matt was the assistant pastor of Christ the King Presbyterian Church, a church plant in Somerville, Massachusetts.

**K** Please tell me about your call to church planting.

**M** Church planting was something that I was not really pursuing early on during my time at Beeson, but the Lord

providentially placed me in church plant settings time and time again. When I went to Ireland to serve in a church plant (prior to Beeson), I was not going for the sake of church planting; I just really wanted to go to Ireland. Then, in Birmingham, the Lord led me to Cahaba Park Church, which at the time was a church plant about three years old. Then, in summer 2012, the Lord, once again, providentially led me to a church planting internship with Christ the King Presbyterian Church (CTK) in Boston. So, at a certain point, nearing the end of my time at Beeson, I looked at the experiences the Lord had providentially provided, and I began to prayerfully discern whether the Lord was preparing me for church planting. During this time, I was encouraged to pursue church planting by pastors and elders overseeing my ministries at both Cahaba Park Church in Birmingham and CTK in Boston.

Years later, when Naomi joined up with me in marriage, we had to prayerfully discern whether the Lord was leading us to further church planting. What we discerned was not only a call to church planting in general, but a call to a particular place: greater Boston. The Lord has given us a heart for this city and its people and a



wealth of relationships here, which will not only serve a church planting endeavor well, but will serve us well through many difficult times. The Lord has opened up the doors for us to plant a new church in Quincy, Massachusetts, beginning in 2018.

**K** Tell me about Christ the King Presbyterian Church in Boston and its church planting structure.

**M** CTK is a multicongregational PCA church which started as a church plant in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1994. Between 1994 and 2006, CTK helped plant four churches in the Boston area, three of which were Portuguese-language churches serving Brazilian immigrants. In 2006, CTK began to plant other congregations in the Boston area as part of its current multicongregational strategy. It is committed to the idea that to reach the various diverse neighborhoods and communities in and around Boston, the church needs to go out into these various communities and become a part of them. So, today, there are nine congregations of CTK, all of which have their own pastors and staff. Each congregation seeks to contextualize and apply the gospel to their particular community. Thus, CTK has multiple congregations but is still one church with one leadership body consisting of pastors and elders from across the various congregations. The church has shared central administration, a shared church planting center and some shared ministry resources.

CTK Somerville was the eighth



congregation of Christ the King. I moved to Somerville in September 2013 to assist in the work that had already begun under the leadership of Pastor David Richter. We started meeting weekly for worship in September 2014, and I was ordained in the PCA as assistant pastor in October 2014. It's often said that CTK's structure is an attempt to combine the advantages of a small, neighborhood church with the advantages of a larger church into one.

The multicongregational structure is helpful to me as I prepare to plant a new congregation in Quincy (the tenth congregation of CTK). As I pray and learn the best ways to love and serve that particular community, I have the necessary autonomy to adapt and make decisions based on my context. But Naomi and I also have the support, prayer, accountability and practical help of a much larger church, one with a great deal of experience working with church plants and planters.

**K** What have you learned about church planting?

**M** It can look many different ways. But I think it's always a call to follow God into something unknown and yet unseen (in this way, not unlike God's call to Abram in Genesis 12:1). As untrusting human beings, we usually prefer safety and control, but these are illusions in church planting. The reality is that when you plant a church, you never know what's going to happen. Yet nothing is gained without the possibility of loss. When God calls one to follow him in this way, it is a call to more deeply depend on him in prayer.

Church planting is exciting, and I'm convinced it is the best long-term approach to reaching underserved communities with the gospel. It's also necessary for the Church at large, as church plants are generally better equipped to adapt to changing communities in innovative and contextually thoughtful ways.

*To learn more about Matt's new church plant in Quincy and how to partner with him, contact Matt at [mattowens@ctksomerville.org](mailto:mattowens@ctksomerville.org) or go to [mattandnaomiowens.com/partner-with-me](http://mattandnaomiowens.com/partner-with-me).*

**Joel Brooks**  
[M.Div. 1999] planted Redeemer Community Church in East Birmingham in 2007. The church meets in Avondale.

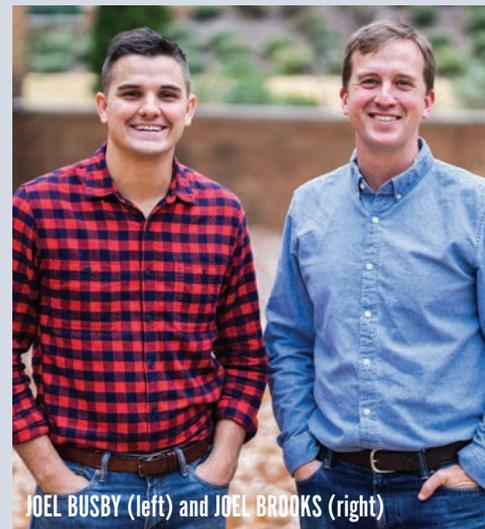
**Joel Busby**  
[M.Div. 2011] planted Grace Fellowship Community Church in West Homewood on Jan. 1, 2017, which is a church plant of Redeemer Community Church.

**K** What led you to plant a church in Birmingham?

**BRO** My wife and I have lived in the area of Crestwood, which is in the city of Birmingham, for 18 years, moving there after finishing Beeson Divinity School. That area was largely unchurched. After doing college ministry at University Christian Fellowship (UCF) for eight or nine years, I noticed that often I was leaving the office earlier and earlier every day, and I was coming home and making the rounds in our community.

When I say "unchurched," probably a better word would be "anti-churched." One of my neighbors was actually a vampire with surgically implanted fangs—and that was my good neighbor! Then my other neighbor had a shaved head with the number 243 tattooed on it because he believed he was one of 243 truly evil people on the planet. He actually was an idol-worshiper—not like a "Tim Keller-idols-of-the-heart worshiper," but like "had-idols-in-his-home" kind of worshiper.

So those were my neighbors, and they were kind of representative of the greater community that we were in, people who maybe were exposed to church as a child and just thought of it as legalistic, irrelevant and archaic so they got out long ago. Others had been burned by the church in some way. Over the course of a number of years, Lauren and I gradually got to have many of these people into our home and share the gospel with most of them. Then we began doing more intentional, structured outreaches.



JOEL BUSBY (left) and JOEL BROOKS (right)

We finally decided, "We probably should just start a church," and so I handed off UCF to Mountain Brook Community Church. Then my wife and I started Redeemer.

**BUS** I think the more time that I've spent in ministry, doing associate work at local churches, the more I think the Lord has just given me a heart and a passion for the church. In seminary, ecclesiology was always my favorite area of study. Having such a deep desire and such a love for the church I think in some ways naturally leads you to at least consider church planting because you just start thinking to yourself, "Gosh, what if the Lord could make another one of these?" Redeemer had just experienced a lot of growth, and a lot of Redeemer's growth was really coming from the area of town where I have lived for four years, the western side of Homewood generally speaking.

What I started realizing, which is a little bit of a distinction between a suburban context and where Joel was, is that there are still just as many unchurched people, but they're what I call "functionally unchurched" people. Meaning, if you were to ask my neighbors where they go to church, they'd tell you a place they go, but they haven't been there in several years. They're not being shepherded by someone looking after their spiritual health. They're not equipped to be able to share their faith. For all intents and purposes, they're unchurched.



There's also a lot of internationals that live in the area. So with the combination of all those factors, and Redeemer seeing a lot of their growth coming from the area where I was already located, it just made sense. When people ask me about my call to plant a church, I say I've always had an interest in church planting and thought about it and dreamed about it, but my call to church planting was literally a phone call from Joel (Brooks) in January 2016 to say, "Hey, we're praying and thinking about doing this. What do you think?" The call to plant was an actual call on the phone.

**K** Would you say that planting a church is like having a baby? Are there similarities to birthing a new congregation?

**BRO** Yes. Lauren was eight months pregnant with our third child, so I thought it would be a good time to leave a nice, stable job, go without an income and have a bunch of people meet in our home! But now I look at my daughter, Georgia, who's nine, and she's a great visual representation of where we are as a church. It's helped me understand where we are as a church plant. So when Georgia was two and three and acting like a typical two and three year old, I could look at our church and think, "Oh, that explains it. That's where we are. We think we know it all, but we're actually really wasteful with our resources, and we make a mess of things. But I also know the direction we're heading because we will mature out of this. We're learning wisdom and obedience." That's one of the things I told Busby he needed to do—have a child at



the start of a church plant!

**BUS** We had our little girl five months in, and she can kind of crawl around right now, she can sit up without toppling over, but that's about it. And that's where we are as a church.

**K** What challenges have you faced in church planting?

**BRO** Well, we felt very alone. We weren't underneath an umbrella of another church. It was my wife and I who started the church, so it meant losing a stable income. It was 2008, which was a really bad year to start anything. We both had health issues. I had another surgery. We had our third daughter. There were severe complications with her birth, and we nearly lost her.

Then, a freak storm hit Birmingham, and it did \$100,000 worth of damage to our house, which was also my office and where we were meeting as a church. It literally ripped off the entire front of our house. Our house looked like a dollhouse, where you could see everything inside, which besides leaving us homeless, also left the church without a place to meet. The same tree that ripped through my house also demolished my truck. Now, I no longer had transportation, an income, and office, etc. I really just felt this "Oh my gosh," but with it all, this incredible joy. There was never a doubt that we weren't supposed to be doing what we were doing.

**BUS** I would add that some of the feeling of spiritual warfare has definitely intensified with planting a church. Just to give you one example: Fairly recently we officially

ordained and installed our first group of elders, which is a big step for a church. That week leading up to ordination, literally, those four men and I had strange illnesses within our families or just clouds of unusual depression or anxiety.

We've seen spiritual warfare at really critical moments for us as a church. I was more sick than I've ever been last month (November 2017), and my kids have had more sickness than they've ever had.

**K** Is there a tendency to glorify church planting?

**BUS** Oh definitely. But God has so designed church planting to where the only glory in it is His, and that's on purpose. Jesus is the one who gets the glory for that, and he makes church planting so difficult to where he's the only one who can possibly gain the glory from it.

**BRO** The first thing I said when we had our first gathering as a church was, "I thank everybody for coming. I just want to say at the start, no one here gets the church they want." I said, "I'm planting this church, and I'm not going to get the church I want, so let's start praying that the Lord gives us the church we need, and we confess we don't know what that is yet."

**BUS** The church planter doesn't say, "Hey, here's our strategy. Here's our vision statement. Here's our this and that, so now let's recruit people to execute that." We believe if you preach the gospel, the Lord draws people. He begins building His church under the Word and the Spirit.

*To learn more about Redeemer Community Church, go to [rccbirmingham.org](http://rccbirmingham.org). To learn more about Grace Fellowship Community Church, go to [gracebham.org](http://gracebham.org). ♦*



# Beeson Divinity School

An evangelical interdenominational divinity school  
committed to the principles of the Reformation.

Beeson is a living community of faith and learning, committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the authority of Scripture and the mission of the church in the world. In light of these commitments we teach a classical theological curriculum rooted in exegesis, church history and doctrine, and pastoral ministry. We practice incarnational theological education as we study, worship and pray for one another in person, face-to-face. The Reformation is alive and well at Beeson Divinity School!

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Beeson Divinity School Commemorates  
the Reformation's 500th Anniversary on

# Finkenwalde Day

On Oct. 31, Samford University's Beeson Divinity School joined Protestants around the world celebrating the 500th anniversary of the symbolic beginning of the Protestant faith, when Martin Luther nailed his *95 Theses* to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. The divinity school marked this momentous occasion by holding its third annual Finkenwalde Day.



**“I often say the Reformation** was a ‘back to the future’ movement,” said Timothy George, founding dean of the divinity school. “Our Beeson students study our Christian heritage, including the Reformation, in order to become more faithful shapers of the future under the lordship of Jesus Christ.”

Not only is Luther an important figure to the divinity school, but so is 20th-century theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who led an underground seminary during Nazi Germany for five years. Bonhoeffer’s book, *Life Together*, which he wrote one year before the Gestapo shut down the seminary, is a record of Bonhoeffer’s experiment to prepare faithful ministers of the gospel to serve the church. It also presents an incarnational model of pastoral and theological formation, one that Beeson has tried to emulate.

“Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one of Luther’s most fervent disciples in the 20th century. He quotes him more than anyone else except the Bible,” George said. “He was aware of Luther’s flaws, but despite these Bonhoeffer found the heart of the gospel in the recovery of the Bible and the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

“From the beginning of Beeson Divinity School, we have read, honored and learned much from both of these great figures, and so it was appropriate and exciting for Finkenwalde Day and Reformation Day to come together in this way,” he added.

Finkenwalde Day began in fall 2015 during the semester’s emphasis on Bonhoeffer and his underground seminary at Finkenwalde. This day was set aside as a spiritual, academic and recreational retreat patterned after a day in the life of Bonhoeffer’s seminary. The day was such a success that Finkenwalde Day II was held in fall 2016.

For Finkenwalde Day III, the divinity school invited alumni and friends back to campus to take part in the retreat. Guests as far away as Arkansas, South Carolina and

Washington, D.C., as well as many local alumni, came for the day.

As in previous Finkenwalde days, the schedule included prayer, meditation, worship, celebration of communion, lectures, singing, recreation and fellowship at the table.

This year’s special morning lecture was given by the Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, president of the North American Lutheran Seminary. She lectured on “Singing the Reformation,” which included congregational hymn singing. The 11 a.m. community worship service uniquely brought Finkenwalde and Reformation Day together by featuring the start of the 29th annual Reformation Heritage Lectures given by George, a leading Reformation scholar, on “Preaching Up a Storm.”

“The blending of these two events on this day of retreat became particularly poignant through the recognition of how the Reformers represented the ongoing continuity of *Life Together* in the body of Christ in their articulation of the gift of the love of God through the Solas,” said Victoria J. Gaston, curator of Hodges Chapel and coordinator of Finkenwalde Day.

As the divinity community remembered and gave thanks for the Reformation, it also wrestled with the question: where is the impact of the Reformation still felt today? For George, real reformation is found every time the Word of God is faithfully preached and ministered in love to people.

“Our Beeson graduates are serving the cause of Christ in every continent on Earth, preaching, healing, serving,” he said. “This is real Reformation.” ♦

*To watch lectures by Amy Schifrin or Timothy George, go to [youtube.com/beesondivinity](https://youtube.com/beesondivinity).*

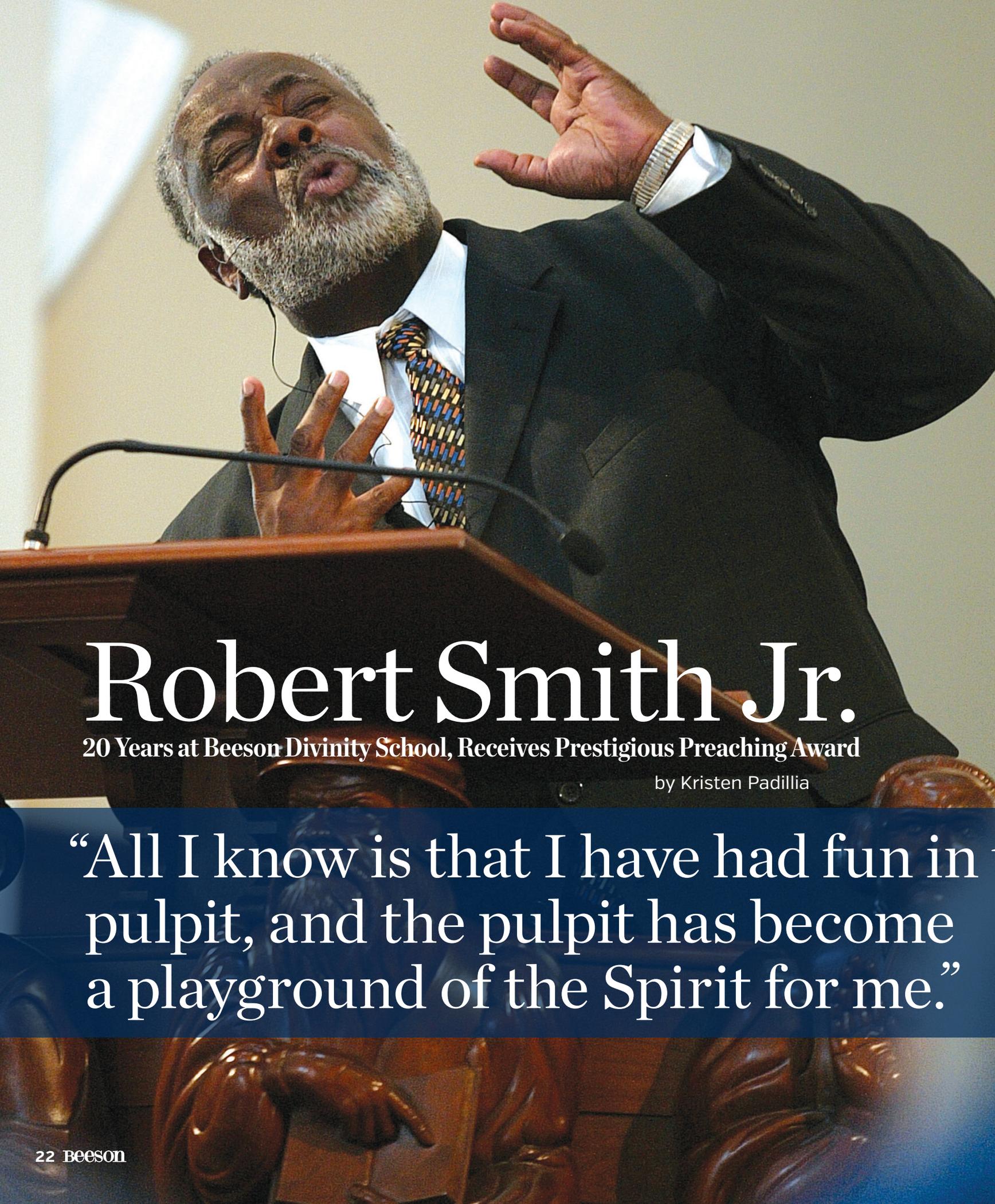
*To purchase a Reformation anchor, go to [beesondivinity.com/store](https://beesondivinity.com/store).*



Amy Schifrin



Timothy George



# Robert Smith Jr.

20 Years at Beeson Divinity School, Receives Prestigious Preaching Award

by Kristen Padillia

“All I know is that I have had fun in pulpit, and the pulpit has become a playground of the Spirit for me.”

**“Preaching is harder for me today** than it has ever been for me in my life,” said Robert Smith Jr., Beeson Divinity School’s Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity. Because with each passing year, he realizes “the weight of the responsibility of representing God and speaking on his behalf.”

Smith was 17 years old when he accepted the call to preach during a visit to New Mission Missionary Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. Ten years later, he was called to pastor the same church where he had first received his call, serving for almost 20 years. His first sermon was titled, “Lord, I shall preach the gospel,” based on Luke 4:18, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”

This text and sermon title would prophetically describe the kind of ministry Smith was to have over the next five decades.

While serving as pastor of New Mission, Smith felt called to go back to school. He received a Bachelor of Science in 1984, followed by a Master of Divinity in 1988, and finally a Doctor of Philosophy in 1993. Smith eventually left the pastorate in 1995 to teach

full time at his alma mater, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, but he never left the pulpit. In 1997, Smith accepted a teaching post at Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School, where he celebrated 20 years of service in 2017.

During his more than 20 years teaching at a seminary level, Smith has filled pulpits on Sunday mornings around the nation and world. He has lectured and taught on the subject of preaching at conferences such as The Gospel Coalition, the E.K. Bailey Preaching Conference and Morling College Preaching Conference in Sydney, Australia. He wrote *Doctrine that Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* and is what Beeson Divinity School Dean Timothy George describes as “the real thing.”

“For two decades, Robert Smith Jr. has taught at Beeson Divinity School with brilliance and compassion. He is not only a professor who can preach, but also a preacher who pastors our entire community,” said George. “God continues to use this beloved scholar to advance his kingdom and to enrich the whole body of Christ.”

Last July, Smith was recognized for his many years of service and contributions to

preaching as the recipient of the 2017 E.K. and V.M. Bailey Living Legend Award. This award has been given annually during the E.K. Bailey Preaching Conference in Dallas, Texas, since 1996, the inaugural year of the conference.

The award given to Smith reads, “We salute you on being one of the most compelling, creative, prophetic and prolific biblical preachers of our time. Your life witness, voice and literary contributions have awakened American preaching and pulpits.”

Oftentimes, people are recognized for their achievements after they have died, which is partly why this award was so meaningful to Smith. “It means that God has blessed me to be alive to receive the award,” he said. “I feel unworthy, but I am not ungrateful.”

“It also means I’ve been placed in a line of preachers that are legendary, like Gardner C. Taylor, C.A.W. Clark, James Earl Massey, Stephen Olford, Willie Richardson and E.K. Bailey. I’ve been cast into that kind of light in which I feel like, at best, I should be placed in their shadows and not stand alongside them, but even in their shadows I feel dwarfed and unworthy and out of place. It’s not an award that I put on my shelf, but it’s an award that reminds me that God has made a great investment in my life. Therefore, with all that I have and all that I am, I need to give back to our Lord and to the church.”

What’s next for Smith? To continue doing what he has done for 51 years—preach the gospel.

“All I know is that I have had fun in the pulpit, and the pulpit has become a playground of the Spirit for me,” said Smith. “Preaching is not just something I have to do. Preaching is something I can’t keep from doing. That’s who I am. I am a preacher, by God’s grace.” ♦

the

Robert Smith Jr.





Beeson Divinity School to celebrate 30 years this fall



# Eucharistically

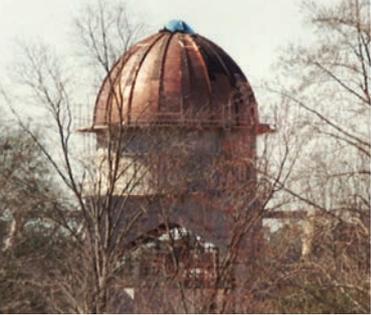
**On June 1, 1988**, I arrived in Birmingham charged with the task of organizing and opening a new divinity school at Samford University by the end of that summer. By God's grace—indeed, *sola gratia*—it happened. The Good Ship Beeson was launched with an entering class of 31 students.

I think back over these past thirty years *eucharistically*. Eucharist is one word for the holy meal Jesus gave to his disciples, but it also means thanksgiving. Grace and gratitude are closely related. God's blessing on Beeson Divinity School for the past three decades calls us to reflect on both. I am grateful to God for calling Beeson Divinity School into being in 1988; for the vision and resources of Ralph Waldo Beeson, our founding benefactor; for wise and supportive university administrators; for a superb faculty and faithful staff; and for a host of students who have been formed for a lifetime of ministry in this good community of faith and learning. I am grateful for donors, advisers and friends who love us and support our work. I am grateful for churches and mission movements who partner with us to advance the Lord's work. Thinking eucharistically about Beeson Divinity School leads me to Psalm 100:4-5.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and bless his name. For the Lord is good, and his faithful love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Timothy George  
Dean, Beeson Divinity School





## Timothy George's words of acceptance after being installed as the founding dean of Beeson Divinity School on February 21, 1989.

I come to this moment of consecration and commitment with a profound sense of the providence of God which has brought me, and all of us, to this hour. As we entered this service we sang of all the saints in ages past, the apostles and martyrs, the missionaries and monks, the reformers and evangelists, all the saints both known and unknown to us, those who, like Abraham and Sarah, set out not knowing exactly where they were going but sure of the call of God which had impelled them to launch forth into the unknown, destined for that city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. Today, on this historic occasion, we come to take our place in this noble company of witnesses and saints. Aware of our own weakness and depravity, we are nonetheless confident that God's overcoming grace and sustaining love is strong enough to see us through whatever obstacles or challenges may lie before us.

I also bring to this service what an old Puritan divine once called "a mixture of terror and joy, of awful reverence and holy pleasure." I am deeply grateful for the many ties which bind my life with so many of you on this platform and in this service. On this day I give thanks to God for a Christian grandmother, now among the blessed departed, who first told me that Jesus loves me; for a faithful wife and loving children; for a wonderful church which suffered the ministrations of a very green and inexperienced pastor; for teachers and professors who introduced me to new ideas and taught me not to be afraid of them; for pastors who believed in me and prayed for me; for students and colleagues and friends, for all of you I give thanks to God.

We would be less than honest if we did not acknowledge that the Beeson Divinity School is born in a time of great controversy and strife. In times such as these, we desire to relate with integrity and openness to all of God's children and to be, in so far as God may allow us to do so, agents of reconciliation and peace. In an age of secularism and relativism, we do not declare theological neutrality. Let it be said for all posterity to hear that we stand without reservation for the total truthfulness of Holy Scripture and the great principles of historic Christian orthodoxy. On these essential values we cannot and we will not compromise. But we also know that godly teaching



must be complemented by holy living, and so we commit ourselves to the disciplines of the Christian faith, to a life of prayer and worship, to witness and discipleship, and social compassion with justice and peace for every person made in the image of God. In the lingo of contemporary labels, we will be neither a haven for disaffected liberalism nor a bastion of raucous fundamentalism. We will be evangelical but also ecumenical, conservative but not irresponsible, confessional yet interdenominational. Above all, I pray that we might be a school where heart and head go hand in hand, where the love of God and pursuit of truth join forces in the formation of men and women, called by God, empowered by His Holy Spirit, equipped for the ministry of His church, sent forth into the world to bear witness to the grace of God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal.

From all of you I beseech your prayers, support and even, as you are prompted to give it, your advice, so that, when all of us here present shall lie in the dust, the work of God's kingdom might still be advanced through the Beeson Divinity School of Samford University. To this end, I offer my gifts and I pledge my life, through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God forevermore. Amen. ✦



# News and Events

## 1 Beeson welcomes two new faculty members in 2017-18

In August 2017, **Ronald Sterling**, M.Div., D.Min., became director of student services and part-time lecturer in pastoral studies. In his new roles, Sterling teaches courses in spiritual formation and pastoral ministry and focuses on racial reconciliation and student retention. An ordained minister and respected leader in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, he also helps Beeson Divinity maintain and forge stronger ties with this important constituency as well as assist in recruiting prospective students.



Sterling, who holds a Master of Divinity and a Doctor of Ministry from Beeson Divinity School, is also a full-time pastor of St. John's AME Church in Birmingham. He is married to Kim, and they have three children and eight grandchildren.

## On Aug. 1, 2018, **Stefana Dan Laing**, M.Div., Ph.D., will

join the divinity school as assistant professor of divinity and theological librarian. In this new role, Laing will teach in the area of spiritual formation and will coordinate Beeson's Women's Theological Colloquium. As theological librarian, she will work with the faculty to collect the best biblical, historical, theological, and pastoral resources available for ministry training as well as instruct divinity students in the effective use of library resources for their



studies at Beeson.

Laing comes to Beeson from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's J. Dalton Havard School for Theological Studies in Houston, where she served as theological librarian. She also has taught Christian spirituality and historical studies at Houston Graduate School of Theology, and Christian doctrine at Houston Baptist University.

Author of *Retrieving History: Memory and Identity Formation in the Early Church* (Baker, 2017), Laing's primary area of research is in Patristics. She is actively involved in the North American Patristics Society and the Evangelical Theological Society, and served as an editor for *The Study Bible for Women* (Holman, 2014). She is married to John, and they have three children.

## 2 Beeson revises M.Div., M.A.T.S. and adds new January term

Beginning in fall 2018, Beeson will feature revised M.Div. and M.A.T.S. curriculum. The M.Div. now requires 87 credit hours in biblical languages, history and doctrine, spiritual and pastoral formation, missions and evangelism, and preaching. The M.A.T.S. now requires 37 hours in biblical studies, history and doctrine, vocation, and an increased number of elective options. Students can now follow a Greek, biblical studies, history and doctrine or general studies track in the M.A.T.S. For both degrees, the level for full-time status was adjusted to 9–12 credit hours.

In addition to revising the curriculum the faculty approved a three-week January term with increased course offerings, including several required courses. Students now pay for January term as part of their semester tuition. As a result, more than 80 students took a course in January 2018.

"With these revisions the Beeson faculty has strengthened its focus on preparing Scripturally formed, historically

and theologically astute, and pastorally thoughtful Christian ministers," said Grant Taylor, Beeson's associate dean for academic affairs. "We are continually working to enhance the quality of theological education at Beeson because we believe the gospel demands it and the church needs it. We also really enjoy teaching our students in community."

## 3 Beeson's Doctor of Ministry focuses on Christian preaching exclusively

In 1993, Beeson Divinity School established the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) program and admitted the first class of students. In the years since, God has used the Beeson D.Min. program to strengthen and invigorate the ministries of 179 graduates serving around the world. Now in its 25th year, the professional doctoral degree has undergone a major revision.

"While we have offered a high-quality degree and have many fine graduates who can attest to its value, we saw the opportunity to strengthen and focus the D.Min. for the next several years to come," said Tom Fuller, who is serving as interim director of the D.Min. program.

After several months of study and discussions by a faculty task force, the Beeson faculty received and approved a recommendation to narrow the focus of the D.Min. program to Christian preaching exclusively. Christian preaching was one of three specializations students could choose in the program's previous design; and it was the specialization most commonly chosen by students. That fact, coupled with Beeson's strong emphasis on preparing "pastors who can preach," made the decision an easy one for the faculty. "It [preaching] is what the Lord has uniquely gifted and equipped our faculty to do and to teach most effectively," Fuller said.

Many things about the Beeson D.Min. program will remain the same. Students will

attend on-campus seminars in January and June or July; seminars are five to six days in duration. Each seminar will be led by a team of world-class scholars and highly qualified ministry practitioners, such as Beeson's own Robert Smith Jr. and Douglas Webster. Seminar topics include: preaching and the pastoral identity, preaching the whole counsel of God, preaching and culture, and moving from text to sermon. The program will conclude with the development and completion of a summative ministry research project.

For more information about Beeson's Doctor of Ministry in Christian preaching, go to [beesondivinity.com/doctor-of-ministry](http://beesondivinity.com/doctor-of-ministry) or call 205-726-2374.

#### **4 Beeson's Faith and Work Initiative receives its 3rd Kern grant**

On May 2, 2017, the divinity school received its third grant from the Kern Family Foundation for the extension of the school's Faith and Work Initiative. The grant is for \$78,520 and will expire on Nov. 2, 2018.

Directed by Associate Professor Mark DeVine, this initiative received its first Kern grant in 2013. In the last four years, the monies from these grants have brought in scholars and experts in the field of faith, work and economics to speak in chapel services, workshops and symposia. These guests have included Tim Keller, Russell Moore, Wayne Grudem and Scott Rae. On April 25, 2017, the Faith and Work program brought in renowned evangelical Christian author, apologist and social analyst Os Guinness.

With this grant extension, DeVine is deploying six of the symposium pastors to train others on the intersection of faith, work and economics and guiding four professors as they integrate faith, work and economics into syllabi for courses in four disciplines: history and doctrine, pastoral

leadership, Old Testament and New Testament.

For more information on this initiative, contact DeVine at [mdevine@samford.edu](mailto:mdevine@samford.edu).

#### **5 First annual Anglican Theology Conference to take place Fall 2018**

On September 25-26, the Institute of Anglican Studies at Beeson will host its first annual Anglican Theology Conference. The 2018 conference "What is Anglicanism?" will bring together global leaders and scholars, all of whom will present their conception of what it means to be Anglican. The conference will feature short papers, panel discussions with opportunity for audience participation, and time for fellowship. Eleven presenters, including Archbishop Eliud Wabukala from Kenya, Archbishop Mouneer Anis from Egypt, Archbishop Foley Beach of the Anglican Church in North America, and Ephraim Radner of Wycliffe College in Toronto, will attend (see ad on page 14).

Learn more and register at [beesondivinity.com/go/AnglicanConference](http://beesondivinity.com/go/AnglicanConference). The cost to attend is \$100. Register by June 1, 2018, for a \$25 discount.

#### **6 Beeson's Initiative to Strengthen the Quality of Preaching receives new sustainability Lilly grant**

The divinity school has received a \$250,000 grant by Lilly Endowment Inc. to sustain and expand the work of its Initiative to Strengthen the Quality of Preaching.

The Initiative to Strengthen the Quality of Preaching began in 2013 with a \$500,000 Lilly grant. Over the last four years, this initiative has sought to strengthen the quality of preaching for current students and working pastors by developing peer groups of working pastors, hosting both conferences and workshops, offering new preaching elective courses to current divinity students and providing other resources.

This new four-year sustainability grant (2018-21) will focus on the initiative's efforts to equip working pastors through peer groups and divinity students through the teaching of biblical, Christian preaching. These monies will allow the creation of more peer groups and increase the amount of financial resources available to pastors for preaching development.

Read the full release at [beesondivinity.com/news](http://beesondivinity.com/news). To learn more about the initiative, view upcoming events and access media resources, go to [beesondivinity.com/initiative-to-strengthen-preaching](http://beesondivinity.com/initiative-to-strengthen-preaching).

#### **7 30th Annual Reformation Heritage Lectures announced**

World-renowned evangelical theologian Dr. Kevin Vanhoozer will give Beeson's 30th annual Reformation Heritage Lectures, Oct. 30-31.

Vanhoozer is the research professor of systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and author of *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* and *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*.

Lectures take place at 11 a.m. in Hodges Chapel and are free and open to the public.

#### **8 Gerald Bray marks 25 years**

Gerald Bray celebrated 25 years of faithful service at Beeson Divinity School on Feb. 1. Bray came to Beeson as its first Anglican Chair of Divinity. He is now research professor of divinity, teaching a course during January term as well as a Lay Academy class. ♦



## Beeson Portrait by Kristen Padilla

# Lyle Dorsett

**It was in the early 1950s** when a teenage Lyle Dorsett and his family first moved to Birmingham from Kansas City, Missouri. They were outsiders, often labeled Yankees by peers. Birmingham was not *home*.

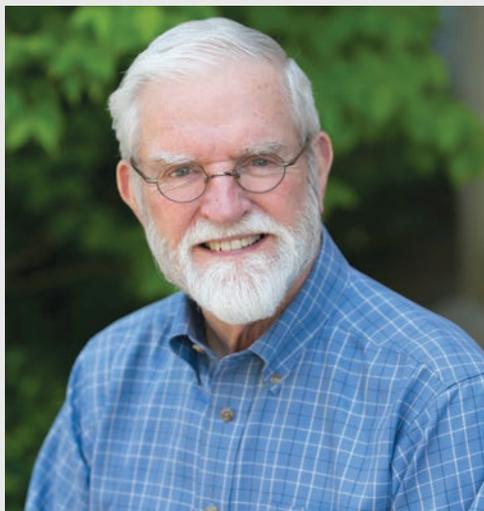
But something happened one summer evening in 1953. Dorsett was walking to his house after work and decided to take a shortcut through the campus of then-Howard College (now Samford University).

He was immediately intrigued by the sight he saw: a large tent on the football field featuring a dynamic preacher on an elevated platform. Later he would learn that it was a Baptist revival meeting. As Dorsett drew near, he could hear evangelist Eddie Martin preaching on Luke 15:11-31, known as the parable of the prodigal son, calling other prodigals to come home. Dorsett wasn't a bad person, he said, but that night, "I knew I was the prodigal . . . and I knew I was lost and . . . needed to come home."

Martin asked those in attendance to return the next evening. Dorsett came early, and this time was seated inside the tent. When the call came, "the evangelist led me through a sinner's prayer. I confessed my need for forgiveness. While being led in prayer, I strongly felt the presence of Jesus Christ. I sensed his love and forgiveness as well as his call to preach the gospel." Dorsett was 15 years old.

Shortly thereafter, Dorsett and his parents joined a local Baptist church. He also met two Howard students who took him under their wings involving him in their preaching ministry. However, 18 months later, Dorsett's family moved back to Kansas City. On his return, the Kansas City he had left was not the same. He didn't feel like he fit there anymore; he didn't feel at *home*.

Although Dorsett never sought to turn from the Lord, gradually he drifted. During his time in college, he embraced a materialistic worldview and sought academic



achievements. He received a Ph.D. in history. His new life goals were to become the best historian and to write history books. Despite professional success, he began to drink heavily and became an alcoholic. His wife, Mary, who became a Christian after their marriage, began to pray.

One evening, he stormed out of the house after Mary asked him not to drink around the children. He found a bar and drank until closing. While driving up a winding mountain road, he stopped at an overlook and blacked out. The next morning, he woke up on a dirt road at the bottom of a mountain next to a cemetery not having any memory of the drive.

Dorsett cried out to God, "Lord, if you are there, please help me." At that moment, he recognized that the same presence he had met at Howard College was with him in the car and loved him. The prodigal son had finally, truly come *home*.

Eventually, Dorsett was called to full-time ministry and was ordained in the Anglican Church. In 1983, Dorsett became the second director of Wheaton College's Marion E. Wade Center and joined the college's graduate school faculty, where he directed the Master of Arts in evangelism program and taught courses in history, evangelism and Christian formation for 15 years. Also during his time at

Wheaton, he and Mary led a team that planted the Church of the Great Shepherd (Anglican Church in North America) in the western suburbs of Chicago.

In 2005, 52 years after that tent meeting, Dorsett returned to the university where an evangelist had introduced him to Jesus to teach evangelism at Samford as Beeson Divinity School's Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism. The city where he had once felt like an outsider he has now called *home* these last 12 years.

In his role at Beeson, Dorsett has taught courses on C.S. Lewis, evangelism and spiritual warfare, and pastoral theology, to name a few. In 2007, Dorsett and Mary planted Christ the King Anglican Church on the campus of Samford, which meets in Beeson Divinity's Andrew Gerow Hodges Chapel. Actively serving in pastoral ministry has been important for Dorsett in helping prepare future ministers. Over the last 10 years, he has mentored many divinity students, who have served as interns at Christ the King.

In May 2016, Mary was diagnosed with stage 4 metastatic breast cancer. Now, in this next chapter, Dorsett wants to spend most of his time with his wife. At the end of the 2018 spring semester, Dorsett will retire from Beeson Divinity School. He and Mary hope to travel to some of their favorite places.

Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity, said Dorsett is one of the most remarkable Christians he has known. "Scholar, pastor, teacher, historian, evangelist, activist, prayer warrior, yes, but at his core is a heart on fire for Jesus Christ. Since coming to Beeson, he has had a transformative influence on our entire community. We love him and Mary dearly and thank God for the gift of their presence and ministry in our midst."

As Dorsett reflected on his return to Birmingham and Samford, he said, "The years I have had the privilege to teach at Beeson have been the most fulfilling of my 53-year teaching career. My memories of Beeson are like one long and beautiful dream."

*Learn more about Dorsett's story by reading a story he wrote for Christianity Today in 2014 called, "A Sobering Mercy," and by listening to a sermon he gave in Hodges Chapel in 2014 called, "Back Home at Last" at [youtube.com/beesondivinity](https://www.youtube.com/beesondivinity).* ♦

# Beeson Divinity Award Winners

**Thomas Beavers** (M.Div. 2007, D.Min. 2013) is the 2018 Master of Divinity Distinguished Alumnus award winner. He was presented his award during community worship on February 27.

Beavers has been the pastor of New Rising Star Church in Birmingham since May 2010, following his grandfather Tommy Chappell's retirement as its pastor that same year.

New Rising Star, which is located in a low-income section of Birmingham, is focused on developing communities in six ways: education, financial literacy, workforce development, housing, recreation and the church. Beavers has been featured on AL.com, ABC 33/40, and WVTM 13.

Prior to earning the D. Min. and the M.Div. from Beeson Divinity School, he graduated from Kentucky State University (B.S.). He and his wife, Candice, have seven children and three grandchildren.

Robert Smith Jr., the Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity, remembers having Beavers as a student more than ten years ago. He said that Beavers had the “can’t-help-its” when it came to preaching.

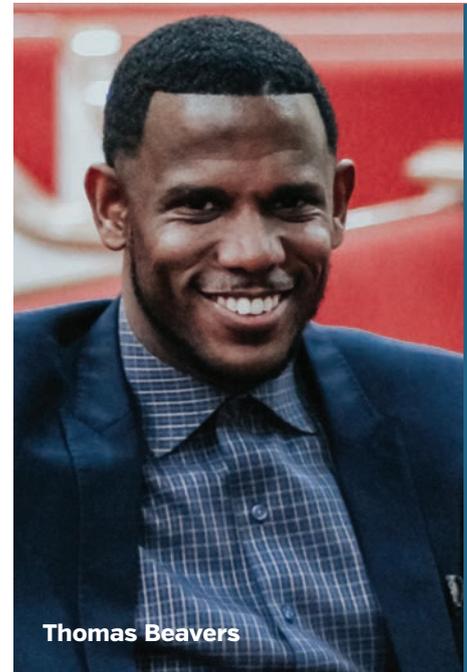
“He completed a biographical sketch for the class which asked, ‘Something about me that will help you understand me.’ He wrote, ‘Preaching is my passion. I can’t see myself doing anything else,’” recalled Smith. “Thomas’ preaching is biblical, relevant and refreshingly radical. When he preaches he leaves his hearers with the decision they must make—What shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?” ♦

**David Mauldin** (D.Min. 2012) is the 2018 D.Min. Distinguished Alumnus award winner. He will be presented his award on Tuesday, April 17 during community worship in Hodges Chapel.

Mauldin is the senior pastor of Palm City Presbyterian Church in Palm City, Florida, where he began serving in August 2017. Before earning the Doctor of Ministry from Beeson Divinity School, he graduated from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Kentucky (M.Div.) and Milligan College in Tennessee (B.A.). Prior to coming to Palm City, Mauldin served as pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Mobile, Alabama (2003-17), where he led the congregation’s membership from the Presbyterian Church (USA) to the ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. During his time as pastor of Westminster, he also was the chaplain for Hargrove Constructors + Engineers in Mobile (2012-17).

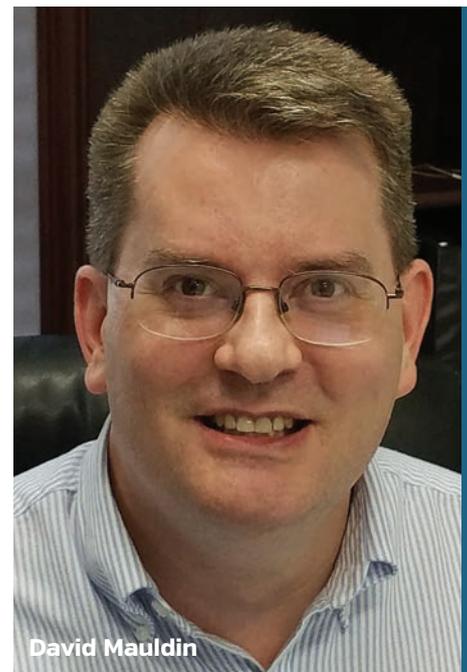
Mauldin also has served as pastor of Jackson Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Georgia, and as youth director of then-Brentwood (now Brenthaven) Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Brentwood, Tennessee. Mauldin currently serves on the board of directors for Presbyterians Pro-Life, and he has a heart for the suffering church. Mauldin and his wife, Rosalyn, have two sons.

Doug Webster, professor of pastoral theology and Christian preaching, remembers Mauldin’s D.Min. dissertation on the Lord’s Supper as “exceptional.” “David Mauldin is a pastor-theologian with a heart for the church. David has consistently sought to create theology tailored to the church’s needs and he has done this faithfully with humility and grace.” ♦



Thomas Beavers

M.DIV. DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS



David Mauldin

D.MIN. DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS



In August 2017, **Anna Moseley Gissing** (M.T.S. 2003) took a new position at InterVarsity Press (IVP) Academic as associate editor. In this new role, Gissing works with authors from initial proposal all the way through book release, which involves talking to professors about their early book ideas, reviewing and evaluating proposals, contracting books, and then working with authors through the development phase—reading drafts, suggesting revisions, lining up external readers and more.

While at Beeson Divinity School, Gissing took as much Greek as she could, including an advanced readings class with Frank Thielman. Her Greek course work influenced her later studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, where she received a Master of Arts in New Testament. In her role at IVP, Gissing is especially thrilled to work with current New Testament research, an interest that she says began at Beeson.

“Many of my friends at Beeson are now professors both here and abroad,” said Gissing. “Now, I have the opportunity to partner with them as well as with Beeson professors and other alums to develop books that will serve future Beeson students, pastors and scholars.”

Prior to this new role, Gissing worked with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship as a campus minister in North Carolina, serving graduate students and faculty by helping them to develop community, grow spiritually and integrate their faith with their disciplines. Along the way, she also served as a writing instructor for entering seminary students, and later worked for several years with InterVarsity’s Women in the Academy and Professions, helping women follow Jesus in the academy and beyond. Most recently, Gissing was

**“Now, I have the opportunity to partner with . . . Beeson professors and other alums to develop books that will serve future Beeson students, pastors and scholars.”**

the editor of *The Well*, a website to help women flourish in their multiple callings.

“My new role brings together many threads of my calling—editing, studying the New Testament and helping women flourish,” Gissing said. “Over the years I’ve focused on each of these in turn, but at IVP I’ll be able to lean into all three at once. The Lord is using my experiences and interests in my new role, and I trust that he will be present with me as I work to produce excellent resources for the church and the academy.”

Gissing and her husband, Jeff (M.Div. 2002), met while they were both students at Beeson and fell in love over study dates. Jeff is a Presbyterian pastor, and they have worked together off and on through the years, now serving together at IVP. They have two children, Nathan and Eliza. ♦

**Philip Nation** (M.Div. 1994) is the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Bradenton, Florida. In 2016, he authored *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us Out*. He is married to Angie, and they have two sons, Andrew and Chris.

**Todd Bates** (M.Div. 1995) has been appointed dean of the School of Christian Thought at Houston Baptist University. He has taught for many years at California Baptist University as professor of philosophy. Todd is married to Cathy, and they have three children.



**Stephen Cloud** (D.Min. 1996) is the director of counseling at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Previously he served as pastor of Lillian Fellowship, a church plant of the Gulf Coast Presbytery (PCA). Stephen is married to Laura.

**Joel Brooks** (M.Div. 1999) was named Alumnus of the Year for 2017 by Samford University. He was recognized during the university’s homecoming weekend on November 10 and is the first Beeson graduate to receive this award. Joel continues to pastor Redeemer Community Church in Birmingham, Alabama. He and Lauren are the proud parents of their daughters: Caroline, Natalie and Georgia.

**Steve Singletary** (M.Div. 1999) is a partner at the Center for Executive Leadership in Birmingham, Alabama. He and his wife, Beth, have two grown children and one grandchild.

**Chad Norris** (M.Div. 2000) is the lead pastor of Bridgeway Church in Greenville, South Carolina. He and his wife, Wendy, have two children.

**Chris Reese** (M.Div. 2000) was on the editorial team of Zondervan’s *Dictionary of Christianity and Science*, which was published this past April. He is the associate publisher

for marketing and publicity for Lexham Press, and continues to freelance as a writer and editor. Chris is married to **Naomi** (M.Div. 2000), and they live in the greater Nashville, Tennessee, area.



In early 2017, **Dave Rhodes** (M.Div. 2000) cofounded Younique, a ministry focused on helping individuals and churches define their personal callings. He is the pastor of discipleship and movement initiatives of Grace Fellowship Church in Snellville, Georgia. He is married to Kim, and they have two children.



**Andy Byers** (M.Div. 2001) is the director of the free church track in missional leadership at Cranmer Hall, St John's College of Durham University, where he also serves as lecturer in New Testament. His Ph.D. dissertation was recently published with the Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series by Cambridge University Press, entitled *Ecclesiology and Theosis in the Gospel of John*. Andy is married to Miranda, and they have four children.

**Brad Sartor** (M.Div. 2001) is the pastor of Christ United Methodist Church in Long Beach, Missouri. Brad is married to Mandy, and they have two children, Anne and Eli. As a family, the Sartors are involved in a local homeschooling community that is part of the classical Christian homeschooling movement.

In August 2017, **David Eldridge** (M.Div. 2004) was called as the senior pastor of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Homewood, Alabama. Previously he had pastored several churches throughout Mississippi before accepting this new ministry role. David is married to Danielle, and they have three sons: Hayden, Luke and Jonathan.



In summer 2017, **Dave Nelson** (M.Div. 2004) and **Chad Raith** (M.Div. 2004) co-authored *Ecumenism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. The book provides a history of the modern ecumenical movement, highlighting both advancements and challenges as the Church advances into the 21st century.

**Chad Raith** (M.Div. 2004) is vice president of mission and ethics for Mercy Health in northwest Arkansas. Before this new role, Chad taught theology and directed the Paradosis Center at John Brown University. He is married to Ansley, and they have four children.



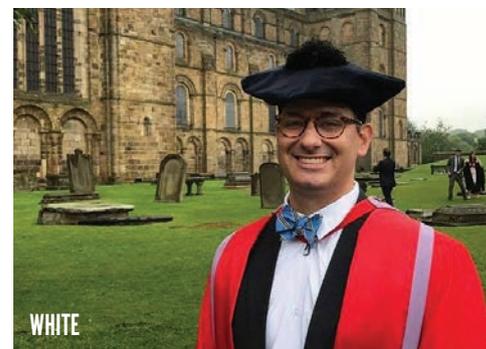
**Alan McBride** (D.Min. 2006) is the senior pastor of Navarre United Methodist Church in Navarre, Florida. Previously he served as the senior minister of Orange Beach United Methodist Church. Alan is married to Karen.

**Jim Tate** (M.Div. 2006) is the pastor of Memphis Baptist Church in Dothan, Alabama. He is married to Judith, and they are the parents of Trey and Emily.

In January 2017, **Nathan Parker** (M.Div. 2007) assumed the role of senior pastor of Woodmont Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee. Previously he served at Forest Hills Baptist Church. Nathan is married to Morgan, and they have three children.

**David** (M.Div. 2008) and **Laura** (M.T.S. 2007) **Faulkner** moved to Terrell, Texas, where David serves as rector of The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd. Previously they served at Trinity Episcopal Church in Pass Christian, Mississippi.

In spring 2017, **Nathan White** (M.Div. 2008) received his Ph.D. in theology from Durham University. He is married to Caroline, and they have two children.



In October 2017, **Eric Linton** (M.Div. 2009) became the pastor of Shady Grove Baptist Church in Live Oak, Florida. Eric and Stephanie have three children: Parker, Amelia and Reid.

**Mary Whitley Moss** (D.Min. 2009) is the director of Southeast Regional Biblical Institute, a ministry training organization that partners with Samford University's Ministry Training Institute. She is also the pastor of St. Alma Baptist Church in Lakeland, Louisiana. Mary is married to Carl, and they have three children.

In June 2017, **Ashley Chesnut** (M.Div. 2011) published her first works in collaboration with illustrator Abby Little. *Down in the Ham: A Child's Guide to Downtown Birmingham* and *Color the Ham* engages and teaches children about the history and culture of Birmingham. Ashley continues to minister at the Church at Brook Hills as the associate singles minister.



**Scott Hohn** (D.Min. 2012) is the senior pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in Fort Walton Beach, Florida. Previously he served at First United Methodist Church in Eufaula, Alabama. Scott is married to Elizabeth, and they are the parents of Jacob, Amanda and Benjamin.

# alumni

## Andrew Johnson

(M.Div. 2012) is the minister to students at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. He previously served at Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama, as the high school pastor. Andrew is married to Samford University alumnus MarcheLe, and they have two daughters, Landri and Adelaide.



In August 2017, **David Mauldin** (D.Min. 2012) assumed the role of senior pastor at Palm City Presbyterian Church (ECO) in Palm City, Florida. Previously he served as the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Mobile, Alabama. David is married to Rosalyn, and they have two sons, Joseph and Daniel.

In March 2017, **Jason Odom** (M.Div. 2012) accepted the call to serve as pastor of First Baptist Church in Rockmart, Georgia. Jason previously served as the research associate in the office of the dean at Beeson Divinity School, where **Michaela** (M.Div. 2007) also served for many years as program assistant in the Global Center. They have two children, James and Lucy.



**Joseph Rhea** (M.Div. 2012) is the director of downtown ministries for Soma Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. He is married to Allison, and they have three children: Gwyn, Max and Vale.



In May 2017, **Kyle Clark** (M.Div. 2013) was ordained to the priesthood in the Anglican Church in North American (ACNA). He also serves as a licensed hospital chaplain at UAB. Kyle and his wife, Melissa, have three children.

**Nathan Daniels** (M.Div. 2013) assumed the role of senior pastor at Bethany Baptist Church in Andalusia, Alabama, in spring 2017. Previously he served as senior pastor of Westmont Baptist Church in Birmingham. Nathan is married to Jessica, and they have two sons, Micah and Luke.

**Immanuel Marsh** (M.Div. 2013) is the chair of the Christian studies department at Heritage Christian Academy in Birmingham, Alabama. He is married to Kenya, and they have a daughter, Juel.

**Michael Novotny** (M.Div. 2013) is the rector of Christ the King Anglican Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Previously he served as the dean of students and spiritual life at Shades Mountain Christian School. Michael is married to Jennifer, who works at Samford University as the university services manager, and they have two children.

**Peter Smith** (M.Div. 2013) is the rector of Living Faith Anglican Church (ACNA) in Tempe, Arizona. Previously he served as the associate pastor of St. Peter's Anglican Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Peter is married to Kristie, and they are the proud parents of Cohen and Hannah.

In September 2017, **Rick Stawarz** (M.Div. 2013) was ordained to the priesthood of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). He and his wife, Molly, are planting a new church, Restoration Anglican, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Rick and Molly have three girls: Maren, Lena and Karis.



**Joseph Fowler** (M.Div. 2014) is the student pastor of CrossPointe Church in Madison, Alabama. Previously he served at Ridgecrest Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, as student pastor. Joseph is married to Kinsley, and they are the parents of Camden.

In May 2017, **Daniel Logan** (M.Div. 2014) was ordained to the diaconate in the Anglican Church in North America. He is married to Laura, and they have two children, Jack and Charlotte.

**Clay Henderson** (M.Div. 2015) serves at Oklahoma Bible Academy in Enid, Oklahoma, where he teaches middle school Bible courses. He is married to Hannah.

**Mallie** (Drew) **Taylor** (M.A.T.S. 2015) is the community life coordinator for Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. Previously she worked for The Gospel Coalition as the coordinator for women's initiatives. Mallie is married to Gifford.



**Trenton Bell** (M.Div. 2016) married Michele Kaylor in May 2017 in Birmingham, Alabama. They now reside in Tampa, Florida, where Trenton serves as the director of worship and creative arts at Centerpoint Church.



In November 2017, **Landon Byrd** (M.Div. 2016) assumed the pastorate at Westmont Baptist Church in Minor, Alabama. Previously he served the Samford University campus as a residence life coordinator. Landon is married to Lindsey, and they have two young children.



**Colton** (M.Div. 2016) and **Meredith** (M.Div. 2016) **Conrad** minister in Kamloops, British Columbia, where Colton serves as the youth minister of Summit Drive Church. They are passionate about serving their church community and reaching others in the city with the gospel.



**Jacob Freeman** (M.Div. 2016) is the college minister for the Baptist Campus Ministries at the University of Montevallo in Alabama. He is married to Brittany, and they have two twin boys, Nash and Owen, and are expecting a baby girl in March.



In April 2017, **Steven Lanclous** (M.Div. 2016) was ordained to the priesthood in the Anglican Church in North American (ACNA). He was ordained by fellow Beeson alumnus **Bishop Derek Jones** (M.T.S. 2003). Steven serves as vicar of Anglican Church of the Good Shepherd in Pelham, Alabama. He is married to Sarah, and they are the proud parents of their son, James.

**Christopher Campbell** (M.Div. 2017) is the new associate pastor and administrator of Immanuel Baptist Church in El Dorado, Arkansas. He and his wife, Marianne, are the proud parents of Addison and Caden.

**Jeremiah Wilson** (M.Div. 2017) is the pastor of Woodstock United Methodist Church in Woodstock, Alabama. He also continues to serve as the outreach coordinator for Family Connection in Alabaster, Alabama. Jeremiah is married to Kaitlyn.

## In Memoriam

On September 8, 2017, **Jonathan Bean** (M.Div. 2003) passed away after a long journey of living with a brain tumor, a diagnosis he received in 2011. He and **Karla** (M.T.S. 2003) came to Beeson with the desire to take the gospel to the nations and encourage those in the church to be faithful ambassadors of the gospel. As the pastor for global disciple making at the Church of Brook Hills, Jonathan's life and passion for Christ impacted people from all walks of life and throughout the world. We grieve his passing, while also rejoicing that our brother is well and whole in the presence of Christ.



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HELP US TRAIN THE

NEXT GENERATION OF

PASTORS WHO CAN PREACH



“We talk a great deal around here among the faculty and in the classes about spiritual formation. Our educational goal is the training and the formation of whole persons for gospel ministry. This goal of formation, the addressing of the mind and the heart or the intellect and the affections, is not sequestered to one facet of our curriculum. The formation of the whole person fuels what we do in every department and every facet of our curriculum. We’re committed to this here, because one day these students will become our pastors.” - Mark Gignilliat, professor of divinity

Every gift matters  
and is a gift for the  
future of the church.

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