Celebrating Holidays
Like Thanksgiving and Christmas

Ending One Year and Starting Another

Celebrating Holidays Like Thanksgiving and Christmas
As 2016 approaches, the RTS family experiences the joy of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the seminary. Such an occasion naturally leads to a renewed measure of reflection on God’s faithfulness in the past, His presence in the present, and His promises for the future.

In reflecting on the past, God has certainly been faithful to RTS. What began with a handful of students in 1966 has grown into a seminary with multiple locations and thousands of graduates preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and building His kingdom across the globe.

When we perceive God’s presence in our present, we see the influence He has given us in the church at large. RTS has played a pivotal role in the growth and development of the Presbyterian and Reformed church over the past half-century, and continues to do so.

And as we look to God’s promises for the future, given the growing cultural headwinds that resist biblical truth, an institution like RTS will become that much more important in the years to come. We need to prepare an increasing number of people for a lifetime of ministry, and their preparation will need to be much more extensive, given the growing marginalization of the church and the hostility against it.

That’s why we’re so excited about new initiatives such as the launch of RTS-New York City, which is being done in partnership with my friend Tim Keller and Redeemer Presbyterian Church (see “A Partnership Takes Flight” on page 12). The Redeemer City to City church planting ministry is having a strategic impact on the world’s greatest cities.

As the world population becomes increasingly urbanized, the process of helping prepare church planters to preach the gospel in these cities becomes more urgent.

RTS has its feet on the pavement in this setting, providing the theological underpinning for the Redeemer City to City Ministry program. Students like Michael Smith (see “Modeling the Truth” on page 14) are receiving the preparation they need to carry out fruitful gospel ministry “in the city and for the city,” as Redeemer likes to say, and with “A mind for truth, a heart for God,” as we at RTS like to say.

In the first 50 years of RTS, we have seen many great highlights in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. If programs like RTS-New York City are any indication, the Lord is preparing us for an untold number of years of more such highlights. May we in the RTS family and the church at large eagerly anticipate what He will accomplish in and through us for His glory. M.
Several RTS faculty participated in the Evangelical Theological Society and the Society of Biblical Literature meetings in Atlanta this November. Dr. Chad Van Dixhoorn presented a paper at ETS titled “Post-Reformation Trinitarian Debate.” Dr. Michael Allen and Dr. Scott Swain were part of a panel discussion at ETS on their book Reframed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation. Dr. Michael McKelvey served as moderator of the Psalms and Hebrew poetry session at ETS, and spoke on a panel on Messianic Psalms at SBL. Dr. Guy Waters presented a paper at ETS titled “What Does the Liar Deny? A Fresh Look at John 2:22.” Dr. Scott Reed presented a paper at SBL titled “Subject-Postponement and Information Structure in Biblical Hebrew Verse.” Dr. William Fullilove spoke at SBL on the “Definiteness in Qumran Aramaic: Unsolving the Son of Man Problem.” Dr. Chuck Hill delivered a paper at SBL titled “Textual Division in Early Gospel Manuscripts Part II Matthew, Mark, and Luke, with Some Further Reflections on the Numenising System in Vaticanus.”

Dr. James Anderson will have a youth seminar at the 2016 Ligonier Conference in Orlando and teach an apologetics course at the Sovereign Grace Pastors College, Louisville, Ky., March 1-4.

Dr. Jim Coffield will speak at the Pastors, Missionaries and Christian Workers Conference at First Presbyterian Church, Augusta, Ga., Feb. 26, on “Depression in the Pastor’s Life, Family and Ministry.”

Dr. Ligon Duncan spoke at the two-day Magnify Conference at University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Mich., Nov. 20-21. He will teach “Intra to Pastoral and Theological Studies” at RTS-New York City along with Tim Keller, Jan. 25-29, and speak at Together for the Gospel, April 12-14, Louisville, Ky.

Rev. Michael Glodo will speak on media ecology for the fellows program at Holy Trinity Church, Tampa, Fla., Jan 23.

Dr. Michael Kruger will speak at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology at Proclamation Presbyterian Church, Bryn Mawr, Pa., April 28-29.

Dr. Don Sweeting will speak at Moody Bible Institute’s Founder’s Week Conference, Feb. 2.

Dr. Derek Thomas was a plenary speaker at the 2015 Quakertown Regional Conference on Reformed Theology, November, Quakertown, Pa.

Dr. Chad Van Dixhoorn spoke at the fall lecture series at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, November, on “The Westminster Assembly and a Re-formed Ministry.”

TRAVEL (INTERNATIONAL)

Dr. Ligon Duncan will be in Indonesia in December teaching covenant theology at a Reformed seminary in Jakarta, in addition to making public lectures there and in Singapore. He will also preach at two large Reformed churches in Jakarta and Lippo Karawaci. The seminary is led by RTS alumnus Benyamin Intan, and the church in Lippo Karawaci was established and is led by Dr. Ric Cannada, RTS chancellor emeritus.

Dr. Michael Allen and Dr. Scott Swain’s book Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic (Baker Academic) will be released in April. They are the editors of the New Studies in Dogmatics Series.

Dr. Donald Fortson has co-authored a book with Rollin Grams titled Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition (B&H Academic, due January). He is also authoring the book Liberty in Non-Essentials: The Story of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (due summer).


A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised” by the RTS faculty is due in May. The volume was edited by Dr. Miles Van Pelt, with a foreword by Dr. Ligon Duncan and contributions by various RTS professors.

Gregory R. Lanier has been appointed as the new assistant professor of New Testament at RTS-Orlando beginning Jan. 1. He has earned a B.S. in computer science, an M.Div. from RTS-Charlotte, and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in New Testament at the University of Cambridge. He is married to Kate, an optometrist, and they have two daughters, Caroline and Amelia.

Dr. Chad Van Dixhoorn was promoted to chancellor’s professor of historical theology on June 1 and will also continue to have the title of associate professor of church history at RTS-Washington D.C.

REV. DAVID CHARNEY has been named the new admissions coordinator at RTS-Atlanta. He is a current RTS-Atlanta D.Min. student and received an M.Div from there in 2011. David is ordained in the Anglican Church of North America and most recently served at Christ Church of Atlanta. David is originally from the Chicago area and received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Purdue University. He is married to Dr. Reagan Charney and they have two children, Selene and Colton.

Kevin DeYoung has been appointed as chancellor’s professor of systematic and historical theology as of Jan. 1. He will teach at RTS while continuing as senior pastor of University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Mich.

Dr. Conrad Mbewe, senior minister of Kabwata Reformed Baptist Church in Lusaka, Zambia, delivered the 2015 John Reed Miller Lectures, Nov 10-12. The conference theme was “Pastoral Preaching: Building a People for God.”

Orlando

The 2015-16 academic year is witnessing the delivery of four inaugural lectures at...
How does your year end? For many of us, the year closes with a rush of holidays in rapid succession — Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s Day. They come with extra travel, extra traditions and, well, extra stress! Many of us hold on for dear life as we try to get to the end of one year and begin another.

Thanksgiving is dominated by food, family and football. On its heels comes Black Friday, the busiest shopping day of the year, when the Christmas season begins in earnest. December is stuffed with year-end events, too many parties, overspending and two months worth of calories. Then comes New Year’s Eve, and it’s back to work.

Most of us don’t have a plan to navigate the hectic holidays. There is no real connection that ties all these special days together. They are simply Hallmark holidays that happen rather haphazardly and leave us spent.

I’ll admit that for much of my life I approached November and December with a kind of dread. Especially if you are in ministry, the season can leave you exhausted. But I’ve learned from experience that there is a better way to end one year and start another.

**Jesus and Time**

My approach is based on the conviction that if Jesus is Lord of all, this means He is the Lord over time. After all, Jesus identifies himself in Revelation 1 as “the Alpha and the Omega,” “the first and the last.” And if He is the Lord over time, then shouldn’t we count time differently? Shouldn’t we think of all time, including these holidays, in reference to Him?

Look at the Old Testament. God instituted sacred festivals that Israel was to celebrate annually. They commemorated both redemptive acts (such as Passover, the Exodus and atonement) as well as the yearly harvest (first fruits and the completion of the fall in-gathering).

These feasts are ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah. So it’s no surprise that in the early centuries of the church, Christians took this Old Testament time-keeping pattern and tied it to Christ’s coming. That is, they started counting time in a new way, with reference to Jesus.

Gradually, there appeared a liturgical calendar, a Christian year, that began with Advent, then Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost — the principal moments in Christ’s life and the principal seasons of the Christian year. This was an attempt to live life in reference to Jesus, and to measure our days by His days.

Granted, the Christian calendar was adopted some time after the close of the New Testament. But this time-keeping, time-counting pattern was learned from Scripture itself. It helped early Christians recall the ultimate redemptive drama and helped shape them spiritually.

**Advent, Christmas and the Beginning of the Year**

Thinking of time in a Christ-centered way caused me to see the value of Advent, as it begins the liturgical year. The Christian year starts with an infusion of hope. The word “advent” means “coming.” During this season, Christians reflect on the first coming of Christ, while longing for His second coming.

Advent is also a season of spiritual preparation or heart work. This four-week period not only helps us prepare to celebrate Christ’s birth, but to ready ourselves for His return.

As a pastor, I’ve seen the immense spiritual benefits this season can bring to a congregation. Advent helps us get our
bearings — to ponder, fast, even repent, and focus on the glorious work of Christ.

Of course, in the Christian calendar, Christmas is not just a day, but a season of celebration. It lasts for almost two weeks, up until Epiphany (January 6). January 1, our secular New Year’s Day, is simply part of that season. This is not to say it’s wrong to celebrate New Year’s. Our family usually has a party on New Year’s Eve. But it’s just a coda, a blip on our holiday screen, because the real celebration of a new year has already begun — with Advent!

**Thanksgiving: A Fitting End to the Year**

What can we say about Thanksgiving? By a happy providence this holiday comes just before the beginning of Advent. Thanksgiving is our nation’s only official religious holiday. Its immediate origins go back to presidential thanksgiving proclamations and pilgrim celebrations. However, the celebration of harvest festivals has deep biblical roots as well.

The original point of Thanksgiving is not food, family and football — wonderful as those things are. Thanksgiving is about giving thanks. As a pastor, I would remind my congregation to “make Thanksgiving thanks giving!”

And the timing of all this is perfect if you think about it, because Thanksgiving comes at the very end of the Christian year. What better way to end the year than by counting our blessings!

As a pastor, I held an annual Thanksgiving morning or Thanksgiving eve testimony service. We devoted the entire service to the congregation giving public thanks to God for all the blessings given to us in the past year.

In preparation for our family Thanksgiving meal, I still have my kids reflect on the year and then write out what they are thankful for. At the table we put five kernels of corn by each place setting, signifying five blessings we will give thanks for during the meal.

This exercise of reflection and giving thanks is a wonderful way to sum up the year. And how wonderful, then, to jump from Thanksgiving to the first Sunday of Advent, which comes almost immediately after!

**Advent and Giving**

By the way, this tight connection between Thanksgiving and Advent reminds us to take time and consider what gifts we will give in December. The spiritual focus of Advent is helpful in checking our impulses as to what we will do with our money. The season can have a sanctifying effect on our spending plans.

We need this because before we even digest our last bit of turkey, Black Friday arrives. The pressure comes fast to spend our money on all kinds of things. But Advent helps us check our desires and consider what meaningful gifts we should give at Christmas, not just to family and friends, but also to our church and special ministries we feel led to support.

Approached in the right way, the Advent season, coming after a season of thanksgiving, provides a fitting framework for prayerfully considering what gifts to give. My hope is that you will approach your year-end differently — not haphazardly, not in a rush, or in a frantic spending binge, but rather that you would move beyond Hallmark and connect the holiday dots.

Thanksgiving speaks of the Lord’s generosity to us this past year. Advent speaks of the hope we have in Christ. We not only have hope, but we can share this hope with others.

In other words, by connecting the dots, we can make the year end on a glorious, Christ-centered note. We end with thanks; we begin with hope. This not only helps us navigate the demands of a busy calendar, but it’s also a much better way to end one year and begin another.

Dr. Sweeting is president and James Woodrow Hassell professor of church history at RTS-Orlando. Visit his blog at donsweeting.com and follow him on Twitter @DSweeting.
Reformed Theological Seminary was founded in a time of crisis. In the early 1960s, throughout the Deep South of the United States, historically Reformed churches were in decline. Theological modernism and worldly nominalism had corrupted what was then known as the Southern Presbyterian Church, a once faithful and robust family of vital, conservative, confessional, mission-minded churches. Southern Presbyterianism was departing from its rock-solid commitment to the inspiration and authority of Scripture and the Christ-exalting Calvinism embodied in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

This departure reached critical mass with a December 24, 1962, cover article in the Presbyterian Outlook journal titled “Do We Need an Infallible Bible?” Professors from four Southern Presbyterian seminaries provided four negative answers. The very question was “absurd,” according to one professor. Another suggested that biblical infallibility was bound to a system of theology that ultimately denied the authority of the Bible.

If there was any doubt that the problems in the Southern church found their origins in its seminaries, this article dispelled them. Clearly, renewal of the church required an alternative to the theological education of its ministers. Only then could the church recover its confidence in the Word of God.

In the midst of tremendous opposition and great obstacles, a handful of committed laymen, led by a man who claimed to be a mere “country preacher,” banded together with the audacious plan to prepare ministers for the church who would once again lift high the banner of the gospel, joyously and unapologetically embracing the Reformed faith. God was pleased to bless their labors, and over the course of 50 years, RTS has grown to become one of the largest and most recognized theological institutions in the world.

By God’s grace, RTS has been used to revitalize historic but flagging denominations and to spawn new movements, all the while preparing more than 11,000 alumni who have proclaimed the riches of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth, in every continent and over 60 denominations. The remarkable story of this growth gives a little window into some of the significant moments in the history of RTS.

That story originates in the summer of 1963 in the law office of Erskine Wells, who became one of the founding board members of RTS. In a story that Mr. Wells loved to retell, he was at work in his office in Jackson, Mississippi, one day that summer when his receptionist buzzed him to announce, “Sam Patterson is here to see you.”

The Rev. Samuel C. Patterson, the aforementioned “country preacher” who was then pastor of French Camp Presbyterian Church in Mississippi, entered the office and began describing his dream for a new seminary. Mr. Wells quickly dismissed the idea: “Sam, you are a preacher. You live in an ivory tower, and you are not in touch with reality. I’m a layman, and I can tell you that it’s just not practical.”

The response Mr. Wells received resonates through the decades. “Sam leaned back in his chair,” Mr. Wells
recalled, “and asked, ‘Erskine, how big is your God?’ The question troubled me. ‘Well, Sam,’ I responded, ‘when do we start?’” For Erskine Wells and those who came alongside him to help bring Sam Patterson’s dream to reality, that moment was the beginning of RTS.

What began in 1966 in Jackson with 14 students on one campus has grown to encompass eight campuses teaching 2,000 students each year. Dr. Luder Whitlock, who served as president of RTS for 23 years after the death of Sam Patterson, cultivated a vision for expanding the geographical footprint of the seminary over its second 25 years, beginning with the founding of RTS-Orlando in 1989 and followed by the formation of RTS-Charlotte in 1992.

The multi-campus model was refined over the years with the establishment of campuses first in Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, and then in Memphis, Houston and most recently New York City. These most recent campuses have been at some point hosted by local churches, underscoring the spirit of partnership between RTS and the church. When you add to that the pioneering work of our Global Campus, a distance education program now offering three degrees earned entirely online, the growth of RTS over its second 25 years is phenomenal.

More than any numerical or physical growth, though, 50 years after its founding, RTS stands at the center of providing the theological ballast for the continued advancement of the kingdom of God. We do so because we remain committed to what this institution has always been committed to. We have been absolutely certain of who we are theologically. We are Reformed, evangelical and confessional, and we are not apologetic about that. At the same time, though, we’re happy — we are not mad at anybody. We have taken an attitude of appreciative but critical engagement with other evangelical traditions. We know who we are, being firm in our theology but wanting to serve the whole Christian community.

The ecclesiastical landscape has altered since the days of the seminary’s founding in 1966, but RTS continues to serve in a time of crisis. We breathe the toxic air of a culture increasingly hostile to the foundations of the faith. All it takes is one look at the news headlines to confirm this trend, and those who seek to remain faithful to the church’s historic confession will find it increasingly difficult to do so.

Even still, in this increasingly challenging cultural environment, the world needs the Word of God and the hope and comfort of the Reformed faith. May the celebration of RTS’ 50th anniversary in 2016 not only encourage you to reflect on God’s faithfulness to His people in the past, but also remind you to consider what He continues to do through each of us as we remain faithful to Him and to His Word. We must work while it is day, for the night is coming when no man can work (John 9:4).

At RTS we want to form people for the gospel ministry who will truly believe and cordially love the biblical truth of Reformed theology, and who will therefore endeavor to preach, propagate and defend it in all its genuineness and simplicity and fullness, and thus extend the influence of true evangelical piety and gospel order. We pray for the opportunity to serve the church for the next 50 years, seeking to continue preparing key leaders, especially pastors, who will win people to Christ and who the Lord will use to build strong and growing churches.

A book originally released in 2006 to chronicle the first 40 years of RTS is being updated by the author, RTS dean of libraries John Muether. The First Fifty Years will be released in 2016.
When Rob Allen first started taking classes at RTS in the fall of 1981, he had no calling to pastoral ministry. The Jackson, Mississippi, attorney simply had what he describes as “a desire to be a biblically and theologically educated Christian.”

As He often does, God had a different plan for Rob. By the time he graduated in 1986, he had opened his heart and mind to a pastoral calling. That calling came the next year, when the Allens moved to Memphis so that Rob could become the executive pastor at Second Presbyterian Church, whose senior pastor at the time was Dr. Richard DeWitt, whom Rob first met when he was an RTS professor. This set Rob on a pastoral career that has brought him back to Jackson, where his wife, Carrye, is the admissions coordinator at RTS-Jackson.

The Allens met in junior high in Jackson, when Carrye was 13 and Rob was 14. “I saw this girl with long, blond hair, but I was too shy to go introduce myself,” remembers Rob, who was born in Ohio and moved to Jackson with his Christian family at age 10. Their parents knew each other, though, and conspired to throw a pool party for the sole purpose of introducing them to one another. Rob and Carrye have been together ever since, marrying in college (one of their three children, Dr. Michael Allen, is now a professor at RTS-Orlando).

Rob’s faith in Christ, which began shortly after his family’s move to Mississippi, flourished during he and Carrye’s time attending Trinity Presbyterian Church in Jackson. There they met Dr. DeWitt and other RTS professors, particularly Dr. Knox Chamblin, whom Rob remembers as “the most humble man I’ve ever known” and as someone who influenced both him and his son Michael. “That was also the beginning of God’s process of leading me to RTS,” Rob continues. “I developed close relationships with those professors.”

After graduating from law school, Rob entered private practice at what is now the Butler Snow law firm in Jackson. Even there, the Lord steered Rob’s path toward seminary, as two of the partners in that firm were Robert Cannada Sr., a founding board member of RTS, and John Crawford, another former RTS board member. “They were wonderful men, excellent churchmen who always showed a personal interest in me,” observes Rob, who credits the two men and the entire firm for its support of his pursuit of an RTS education.

When Rob completed his RTS degree, “I could not have painted a better picture for my life,” he admits. “I was living in my hometown, I loved my work at the law firm, I had ministry opportunities in the community, and my kids knew all four grandparents.” But when asked during seminary to help with pulpit supply at two small churches in rural Mississippi, Rob began to reconsider his calling. “I had never preached before,” he says, “but as I did, I began sensing that God might be calling me to pastoral ministry.”

That call came when he and Carrye drafted a ministry description to send to churches, though they didn’t know any churches with positions that fit the description. Then while Rob and Carrye were visiting Memphis on other business, Dr. DeWitt, who had become pastor at Second Presbyterian, asked them about the possibility of Rob joining the staff as executive pastor.

“As he described the position,” Rob recalls, “Carrye and I looked at each other and smiled, because what he was saying was virtually identical to the job description we had drafted. When the call came, it was very clear what the Lord wanted us to do.”

Rob served at Second Presbyterian for several years before accepting a

— Rob Allen

Continued on Page 19
Rob Allen exchanged legal volumes for Bible commentaries upon leaving the legal profession for pastoral ministry.

Standing Firm But Not Standing Still

Rob Allen’s legacy at RTS has been passed from one generation to the next, as his son Dr. Michael Allen is now an RTS-Orlando professor. As such, Rob has a unique perspective on the seminary’s faithfulness to its now-50-year-old vision. Here’s what he has to say on the subject:

I was an RTS student from 1981 to 1986, so I’ve had a relationship with the seminary for almost 35 years. From my perspective, RTS has maintained the same purpose not only in word but also in practice. When observing how other organizations have drifted from their founding purpose, it’s quite an accomplishment to see the fidelity of RTS to its original mission.

RTS has always focused on providing a rigorous academic education for those preparing to serve the church as pastors and in other vocations. Whereas some seminaries no longer require ministerial students to learn biblical Hebrew and Greek, RTS has continued to emphasize and require it, and with good reason. In fact, the Summer Institute of Bibli-
Jerry Young thought he had a deal with God. The young man had always had what he describes as “a tremendous sense that I was called to be a preacher,” but on one condition. “I told God, ‘If You wait until I’m 35, I will be a preacher,’” recalls the president of one of the United States’ largest church denominations.

God, being God, had different plans for Dr. Young. Today, the RTS-Jackson alumnus has marked nearly 40 years in pastoral ministry, the last 34 of them as the pastor of New Hope Baptist Church, a prominent historically African-American congregation in Jackson. This past year, Dr. Young’s ministry has expanded in scope, upon his election to the presidency of the National Baptist Convention, a historically African-American denomination with more than 30,000 member churches, making it the second-largest such denomination in the world.

Dr. Young’s journey to pastoral ministry, and eventually to receiving both Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from RTS, reached a tipping point when he arrived at Coahoma Junior College in Mississippi as the first member of his family ever to attend college. As the preacher’s son tells it, he received the last remaining dormitory bed on campus — in a room with a young preacher: “I said, ‘Come on, man — this can’t be! You mean to tell me I have to room with a preacher? I just left home to get away from preachers!’ I was introduced to the providence of God early in my life.”

Before his freshman year had ended, Dr. Young had yielded to the calling to preach the gospel. He recalls preaching his first sermon at 1 a.m. one night in the dorm. “They thought I had lost my mind,” he admits with a laugh.

After graduating from college, Dr. Young pastored two small churches in rural Mississippi while also teaching school to make ends meet. One of his students happened to be the daughter of a Presbyterian church planter who invited him to visit RTS. Dr. Young had his eye on attending a Baptist seminary, but agreed to the RTS visit. “The people there were very kind and sensitive to me and my family,” the Mississippi Delta native recalls. “They made such a tremendous impression on me.”

The most lasting impression came when he began taking classes at RTS, still thinking he’d eventually end up someplace else. Dr. Young and his wife, Helen, had, according to him, “spent every dime they had to purchase a home, but we’d forgotten we didn’t have money to turn on the utilities.” Upon entering the house, though, “someone turned on the light switch, and the light came on. We turned on the air conditioning, and that worked, and the stove worked too. I told my wife that somebody must have made a mistake.”

It was no mistake. “On Monday I went to my campus mailbox,” Dr. Young continues, “and pulled out a note from a faculty member that said they had been in a faculty meeting praying about me coming and about a gift they could give. One of the faculty had said, ‘Why don’t we turn their utilities on?’ So the seminary paid for my utilities for the next two months. I came home and told my wife, ‘We’ve got to be here — this is the place.”
Likewise, the pulpit at New Hope Baptist has been the place for Dr. Young since 1981. “It is an integral part of the community,” he says about the church, which under his watch has started a Christian school and grown to encompass a staff of 14 as well as nearly 50 deacons.

Dr. Young points to the quality of the leadership team around him as the reason he is able to balance local church ministry leadership with national denominational leadership. “It would be impossible,” he clarifies, continuing on to explain that the greatest lesson he has learned in 40 years of ministry is that “you can’t be a leader by yourself.”

Before becoming president of the National Baptist Convention, Dr. Young carried out his own service to other leaders through being a vice president for 15 years. When the previous president decided not to seek another five-year term, many pastors from across the country asked Dr. Young to run. “I wasn’t sure,” he admits. “I prayed, ‘God, if I’m going to do this, I need a compelling vision as to why I should.’” The answer came in his perception of the NBC’s need to become a more strongly unified denomination: “I want to help empower local churches to be more effective in what they do.”

Dr. Young’s position as a national church leader has also given him a broader platform to speak on racial issues, noting that the NBC is working to address racism in the church and in society. To him, this starts internally: “We in the church need to confess and acknowledge our own thoughts; the church is the place where racism has too often been practiced.”

He is quick to point out that racism doesn’t equate with wanting to worship with people like one’s self, but rather that “it’s treating someone of a different ethnicity as inferior.” In taking a “biblical approach” to racism, Dr. Young observes that “every human being on the face of the earth is made in the image of God. Human dignity is inextricably linked with that fact. There is but one race: the human race, with many ethnicities. The wall has been torn down through the blood of Christ — there is no favoritism.”

These days Dr. Young may know better than to make deals with God, but that’s one promise he has learned to build his life upon.

For more information about New Hope Baptist and the National Baptist Convention, visit www.newhope-baptist.org and www.nationalbaptist.com, respectively.

“"I told God, ‘If You wait until I’m 35, I will be a preacher.’"”

Dr. Jerry Young
A Partnership Takes Flight

September 10 marked a historic day for RTS in New York City.

BY PAUL SCHWARZ

PHOTO BY STEVE WALLACE

MINISTRY & LEADERSHIP
Deepest in the heart of Midtown Manhattan, imposing towers scrape the sky, almost Babel-style. On the 16th floor of one of those buildings, across the street from Rupert Murdoch’s NewsCorp empire and a short walk from NBC’s “30 Rock” complex, one finds what appears at first glance to be a much less impressive enterprise. But upon closer inspection, what’s going on there is helping deliver the world a message of much more eternal significance.

These offices serve as the nerve center of the gospel partnership between RTS and Redeemer City to City, the church planting ministry of the influential Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. Several years in the making, the partnership has officially launched with the beginning of the first RTS-New York City classes.

On September 10, just one day before the city marked the 14th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, RTS and Redeemer representatives gathered in that 16th-floor office overlooking Midtown for the inaugural convocation for the partnership, called the Redeemer City Ministry program. The convocation featured a welcome and introduction by RTS-New York City acting director Steve Wallace, a call to worship by Redeemer City to City president Dr. John Hutchinson, a recounting of the story of how the partnership came to fruition by Redeemer City to City vice president Dr. Mark Reynolds, messages by RTS chancellor and CEO Dr. Ligon Duncan and Redeemer founding pastor Dr. Tim Keller, and a prayer by RTS Board of Trustees chairman Richard Ridgway.

“As Tim likes to say, today’s ministers don’t need to know less; they need to know more,” Dr. Duncan said. “While other seminaries are cutting back on degree requirements for economic reasons, RTS is bolstering pastoral preparation in light of the growing cultural headwinds future ministers will encounter.”

In his message, Dr. Keller turned to Mark 3:13-15 as a biblical framework for highlighting four things that make the RTS-Redeemer City to City partnership unique:

- **It will be the only Reformed, evangelical education with a classical theological curriculum offered in New York City.**
- **It will be a unique blend of online education with a residential learning community. We think we can merge these to get the best of both worlds.**
- **We are training people in the city for ministry to the city. This is extraordinarily rare, not to say unique, among evangelical seminaries today.**
- **We are recognizing the distinction between theological training and ministry training, but we are not pitting them against each other. We are doing them in tandem, with each side having an eye for the other.**

“To the students gathered here this afternoon, remember that you are here to be with each other, to be with your instructors, to be with Jesus. We are here to say, ‘This is not what we are, but this is what we want to be.’ Thank you for being willing to be the first through our doors,” Dr. Keller said in closing. Dr. Duncan and Dr. Keller concluded the convocation with a few minutes of interactive commentary.

Afterward, the very same room that hosted the convocation was quickly converted into a classroom. The convocation guests gradually departed, and the 17 students forming the first RTS-New York City class met for nearly two hours of orientation with Dr. James Anderson, an RTS-Charlotte professor who has served as academic dean for the RTS-Redeemer City to City partnership. Dr. Anderson reviewed logistics and imparted biblical perspectives, turning the students to Acts 20:28-30 while reminding them that the three roles of shepherds are “leading, feeding and guarding,” and that “a pastor is a physician of the soul.”

Befitting the technology-dependent nature of the RTS-
New York City course offerings, the centerpiece of the orientation was a videoconference that introduced library resources. The videoconference utilized the same platform by which RTS-Orlando professor Dr. Michael Allen had begun the History of Christianity I class two evenings before.

With the sun beginning to set behind the Midtown skyscrapers at the end of the orientation, less-hardy souls may have called it a day, but the night was still young in “the city that doesn’t sleep.” The students took a few minutes to eat a make-your-own-burritos dinner that had been provided especially for the proceedings, then most of them stayed to continue on for the nightcap: the opening class in the Genesis to Joshua course being taught this fall by RTS-Atlanta professor Dr. William Fullilove.

One could say that living and working in New York City is like living in a fishbowl, but in the case of RTS-New York City students, that can be taken somewhat literally at times. A glassed-in meeting room

Continued from Page 13

Modeling the Truth

A professional model is part of the first RTS-New York City student class.

Michael Smith knows beauty. He has worked in the modeling industry and rubbed shoulders with the “super-gorgeous” long enough to recognize it, as well as recognize the emptiness that comes with the single-minded pursuit of beauty, fame and ambition.

The Florida native and RTS-New York City student only works part time as a model these days, having also served in pastoral ministry and as a high school science teacher. The newest phase in Michael’s eclectic life involves the pursuit of a seminary degree, with an eye on returning to the pastorate.

Michael’s journey to the Big Apple first took him to Europe as a full-time professional model, and then to southern California on the pastoral staff of a prominent evangelical church, followed by a stint as a church planter in northern California. Eventually, though, he and his wife, Kristyn, had what he calls “a paradigm shift in how we viewed the gospel and ministry. It seemed like everything coming out of Tim Keller’s ministry [at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City] resonated with us.”

This led to a desire to go to seminary, and when Michael heard from a friend in New York City that Redeemer was working on forming a seminary partnership (see “A Partnership Takes Flight” on page 12), “that piqued my ears.” He, Kristyn and their two sons moved to New York City more than two years ago in anticipation, with Michael participating in a church plant with a friend, teaching high school science and modeling part time.

While waiting for the Redeemer-RTS partnership to materialize, Michael thought they might move back to California, “but we felt God wasn’t done with us here,” he explains. Now that RTS-New York City classes have started, Michael’s seminary dream has come to fruition. “I spent 14 years in church ministry, but I really wanted to bolster that with an academic environment,” he says.

Michael’s ministry experience encompasses his years in the fickle world of modeling, including leading Bible stud-
ies and doing one-on-one discipleship with fellow models through a ministry called Models for Christ. Another role with that ministry involved being what he calls a “heresy detective concerning what churches were weird and what ones were gospel-centered.”

Beyond theological discernment, “What we do with Models for Christ is minister to people who have had an easy ticket in life because of their looks,” says Michael, who became a model after being recruited by a talent scout during his senior year at Florida State University. “But when you’re in New York, where there’s hundreds of people just as good-looking as you, it gets humbling pretty quick, and they’re not always prepared to deal with that.”

Having worked in four of the world’s major modeling hubs — New York, London, Paris and Milan — Michael has seen the darkness behind the glitzy façade. “These are some of the saddest people,” he observes, noting that he knows of six models who committed suicide this past year. “When you’ve ‘arrived’ and you’re still empty without Christ, it’s difficult. I enjoy speaking into that. I’ve met a lot of people, and God has intervened — people didn’t expect to meet Christians in the industry. There’s a lot of darkness, but whenever you’re light in darkness, it shines bright.”

At this point Michael tells a story about when he lived and worked in Paris, and he met husband-and-wife models who had just become believers in Christ. “I moved in with them for four months and discipled them,” he recalls. “They were so hungry.” Today the couple serves as the international directors of Models for Christ.

In the process, the modeling business and life in New York have humbled Michael. Whereas he once worked on glamorous accounts such as Donna Karan, now he’s what he laughingly calls a “dad model,” having recently worked on a magazine spread in London that called for an “old model and young model.” The “old model” admits that the last two years in New York have been “really hard. A lot of my identity was in being a pastor on the West Coast, where I was known and had a voice, and being put here, where I’m a nobody, was humbling in a good way. It’s a new chapter for me, fusing deeper things with years of seasoning in practical ministry. I’m looking forward to getting better, because I feel called to pastoral ministry full time.”

His sense of calling is another step in the clarification of his true passion. “I really wasn’t sure what I was passionate about,” reflects Michael on his time in college, where he originally came to faith in Christ through the ministry of The Navigators. “The guys discipling me said I only looked content when I was leading a Bible study and involved with people. I love teaching the Bible, and I love discipling people.”

Whatever becomes his career on the world’s fashion scene, one thing appears clear: Michael will continue to be a model — of gospel ministry.

More information about Models for Christ can be found at www.modelsforchrist.com.
How did Living Out come to be?
It came about through a set of friendships. I knew the other two editors already, but when we first became friends, we didn’t know each other struggled with same-sex attraction. We soon realized there were quite a few of us who had experience with this issue, and we felt the Lord had given us a friendship with one another in order that we could do ministry together.

What’s the scope of Living Out, and what is it not?
Living Out is a resource for three groups of people. One is Christians who battle with same-sex attraction, to encourage them in godliness and faithfulness through testimonies, articles, reviews, Q&As and those sorts of things. We also want the church in general to know more about what the Bible says on this issue, and to respond in truth and kindness. The third audience is the wider world — we wanted something where someone outside the church could get an authentic sense of what should be the real Christian response to this issue.

What we’re not is an ongoing pastoral resource for individuals. All of us have full-time jobs doing other things, so we don’t have the time or capacity to follow up with all the people who write in with their questions and stories. Our main concern is that they be pastored by their local congregations.

What kind of responses are you receiving?
The vast majority of them are from Christians expressing gratitude for the site, the stories, the articles and other resources. A significant number of people battle with this issue — we were thinking primarily of our own context in the UK when we started this, but we’ve had e-mail from all corners of the globe. Some of them have been pretty heartbreaking, from Christians who have battled with this issue but have been in contexts where it’s not been safe to share that battle with anybody else, with no means of particular support. Others have shared encouragement as they’ve sought to follow Christ in this context. Occasionally people call us names or tell us we’re deluded, but the vast majority have been encouraging.

What does your particular journey with same-sex attraction look like?
My story is that I was really becoming aware of my same-sex attraction around the same time I came to faith, just as I was finishing high school. I’m grateful to God for the timing, because I never really had much opportunity to express my homosexual feelings in any way prior to coming to Christ. So I’ve never lived in a practicing homosexual way. The feelings and temptations have been there my entire adult life, but I’ve always had a Christian framework within which to understand and respond to them. My story is different from others who have been converted from a practicing homosexual lifestyle. It is about coming to terms with my own feelings, and seeking to grow in understanding and responding to them in a manner that honors Christ.

What are the most common misconceptions about same-sex attraction?
One is that any kind of same-sex attraction must inevitably have come from some childhood trauma or unhealthy relationship with a parent. That has been a feature of a good number of cases of homosexuality, but it is certainly not the case for all. I had a very happy, stable childhood and always had a good relationship with both parents, and for many others with same-sex attraction, that is also the case. One of the most frustrating things about that misconception is that often Christians are fishing for the “real reason” why you struggle with this, as if the fact that we’re all fallen and broken isn’t enough. I’ve known Christian friends who have
been hesitant to share their struggles with same-sex attraction because they’re nervous of people saying things that would hurt their parents.

Another common misconception is that if, for example, a Christian man is attracted to other men, then he’s attracted to every man. Someone who thinks this might believe that someone who’s same-sex-attracted shouldn’t have any male friends, or that we’re going to be strongly sexually attracted to any male we encounter. Actually, one of the most important ways to respond to this in a healthy manner is to have good, God-honoring friendships with people of the same sex.

A third misconception would be that people make very quick assumptions about what this will mean long term. Some would assume that because you’re same-sex attracted now, you will be forevermore, with no possibility of change. Other people make the opposite assumption and say it’s just a phase and that if you pray hard enough, it will definitely go away. I remember thinking very early on in my journey on this issue that I mustn’t presume I will change, and I mustn’t presume I will not — I’ll leave that in God’s hands. My main concern is to grow in godliness.

Another is the growing misconception that the Bible doesn’t speak clearly on this issue. I’ve seen people purporting to be evangelical taking a different line, that certain Bible passages can be interpreted in different ways. That’s led a lot of Christians to believe it’s one of those issues we need to put aside and agree to differ over. I want to say strongly that this is not the case. First it’s because this issue doesn’t come down to six particular passages — it has to do with the whole grain of the Bible, what God says about marriage being a picture of Christ and the church. I don’t buy the argument that the Bible can be taken in more than one direction on this issue — this can only be if you loosen your relationship to the authority of Scripture.

**Q** What’s the basic thrust of your counsel to someone who confesses to being same-sex attracted?

First, I want to thank them for saying that. The people who most worry me are those who are thinking it but aren’t saying it. If someone’s been open and honest, that’s commendable, because it means we can get counsel and help.

I also want to say to them that it comes down to our confidence in the goodness of God, and therefore the goodness of what He says to us. We learn from Scripture that discipleship is costly for anyone. There are particular ways it is costly for those with same-sex attraction, particularly if lifelong celibacy is involved. I don’t want a person with same-sex attraction to think this is unfair, because Jesus calls all of us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. But at the same time there are wonderful blessings for us even in this age that Jesus makes many promises about. Yes, it’s difficult, but it’s always worth it, even in this life. God’s Word is always good, and therefore if we don’t like what His Word is saying, we’re effectively saying we don’t like Him, and therefore we’re not trusting Him.

**Q** What should someone do if they think they are same-sex attracted?

It’s a good thing to pray about it. Also, we’re not designed to face these battles alone, so it’s good to have another Chris-
tian who can give us counsel — someone who knows something of what we’re facing and how they can pray for us.

If someone is starting to experience same-sex attraction, I wouldn’t want them to think this is the issue they’re going to deal with forevermore. I know many people who have gone through seasons of dealing with this temptation, only for it to eventually sort of go. I wouldn’t want anyone to read too much into it at the early stage, which is one reason it’s so destructive when our culture insists to young teenagers that the instant they experience any kind of feelings of homosexuality, they own it and “come out” and define themselves. It might be a passing phase or it might not be, but it’s the worst time in life to decide that’s going to be who you are.

Also, they need to know what the Scriptures say, and they need the input, accountability, encouragement and fellowship of other believers. Another thing is this may be a battle for you, but it may not be the biggest battle for you. This goes back to the earlier question — a misconception may be that if someone struggles with same-sex attraction, it must mean this is the biggest battle they face. For many of us, it’s one of many.

I was talking to someone who’s also same-sex-attracted and asking how things were going on that front, and he said, “Actually, the biggest sin I’m dealing with at the moment is anger. I’m a really aggressive boss at work.” So it’s good to not define ourselves and our Christian struggle by this one issue.

**Q.** How do we minister to those who do identify themselves as homosexual?

First, we need to prove we are genuine friends. A lot of non-Christian people who self-identify as gay find Christians hard to talk to on the issue because of the perception that we’ll hate them. I want to encourage Christians, and this would be the case in any kind of evangelism, to make genuine friendships with people, and when people know we’re genuinely for them and care about them, they’re far more likely to be interested to hear what we believe.

In terms of how we do that, I always want to start with the biblical doctrine of marriage, because the Bible says what it says about homosexuality because of what it says about marriage. Uncapping the biblical vision of marriage and what it means as an illustration of the gospel is a good place to start because it gets at the center of the Christian faith and then provides a rationale for why it says that certain forms of sexual practice are forbidden.

**Q.** How can our churches support those struggling with same-sex attraction?

Our conviction at Living Out is that God’s strategy for winning and growing people in faith is the local church. We don’t want this issue separated from the local church, to be an outsourced means of pastoral care — we want people to work this issue through in their churches. Churches can best facilitate this by making sure they have a culture where this issue is one they know they can share, where people aren’t looking down on them or treating them as the worst of sinners.

Some churches have a particular ministry for those with same-sex attraction, and that can be helpful, provided it doesn’t take the place of regular fellowship. In our church we have a little group for those with same-sex attraction, and we deliberately only meet three or four times a year because we don’t want that group to become a substitute for normal small-group and pastoral care. Otherwise you give people the impression that only same-sex-attracted Christians can understand and help same-sex-attracted Christians.

**Q.** How can pastors respond to the issue of same-sex attraction?

A key thing is to make sure they don’t duck the issue. It’s hugely tempting for pastors in the Western world to say, “If I teach on homosexuality, there may be all kinds of controversy” — it’s one of the most provocative issues in our culture. Sadly, a number of pastors say, “I’m not going to touch that issue because it’s too volatile.” Actually, our people need to hear from us, because if they aren’t taught by their pastors, they’ll be taught by the world. So the key thing for pastors is to be clear on this issue — not to avoid it, be frightened by it or outsource it, but to teach on it in a manner that models clarity and compassion, showing biblical insight and tenderness. The tone the pastor sets will shape how the church responds. 

Living Out can be found at www.livingout.org.
RTS Orlando to mark the appointment of Dr. Charles E. Hill as John R. Richardson Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity and the promotions of Dr. James Coffield, Dr. Scott Coupland and Dr. Scott Swain to the rank of professor:

Dr. Swain lectured on “B. B. Warfield and the Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity” in October.


Dr. Coupland will lecture on “Advances in Neurobiology: A New Horizon for Christian Counselors,” March 16.

Dr. Diane Langberg will deliver the 2016 Kistemaker Academic Lecture Series, March 1-2. An adjunct professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia and author of numerous books, Dr. Langberg has devoted 35 years as a practicing psychologist to working with clergy and trauma survivors. The series title is “Culture, Christendom and Christ.”

Dr. Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, will deliver the Harold O.J. Brown Lecture Series, March 8, on “Pro-Life and Adoption Ministries in the Local Church.”

Dr. David Powlison, director of CCEF, will be the speaker for the EQUIP workshop series, Jan. 11, on “Suffering and Depression: Finding Hope and Healing for Ourselves and Others.”

Dr. James White, director of Alpha and Omega Ministries, will be the speaker for the EQUIP workshop series, Jan. 18, on “Homoerosexuality and the Bible: Does the Bible Allow for Same-Sex Relationships?” and “Homoerosexuality and Culture: Do the Popular Arguments for Same-Sex Marriage Work?”

Melissa Kruger will speak on women’s ministry at the Faculty Forum on Feb. 9 at noon in the dinning room.

Rob and Carrye minister to schoolchildren during a mission trip to the Philippines.

call to be a senior pastor at Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in Miami, later returning to executive pastorates at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church (where he served with the famed preacher Dr. D. James Kennedy) and Park Cities Presbyterian Church in Dallas. Three years ago Rob and Carrye returned to Jackson, where Carrye works at RTS, and Rob is interim pastor at a small Presbyterian church in Carthage, a small town near Jackson.

One critical lesson Rob has learned in more than a quarter-century of pastoral ministry involves his and Carrye’s shared sense of calling. “When Carrye and I were married, being a pastor wasn’t part of the contract,” Rob observes. “She had to be on board with me attending RTS, and when I received the call to Second Presbyterian, she had to be just as much a part of that as I did. If you’re married, your spouse needs to be called just like you do. She may not be called to pastor a congregation, but you’re going to be in ministry together. She has to be your strongest supporter from a human standpoint.”

Twenty-seven years after he first started, Rob has all the support he needs in his calling to pastoral ministry. For that he has many influences from the extended RTS family to thank along the way.

I have been delighted by the growth of RTS — geographically, academically, in the diversity of the student body, and in its influence within the worldwide church — over the past three decades. It behooves all of us who love and care for RTS to continue praying that, by God’s grace, the leadership will keep the seminary faithful to its original mission and to maintain its fidelity to biblical inerrancy and its confessional standards. It seems evident that God’s hand has been on RTS since its inception 50 years ago, and we pray that it will be God’s desire to increase his blessings upon RTS in the future as we obediently serve our Savior and Lord.
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