



GOSPEL TRAINING CENTER

Investing in Tomorrow's Church Leaders

“. . . though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers.” (1 Corinthians 4:15)

Overview

Our seminaries and Bible colleges do an excellent job of training young men in the classic disciplines from world class scholars. They deserve our full support and solidarity. But there are some things that are better learned in the local church—what a gospel culture can look like, how to confess sin to a brother, how to build a social environment of honor and encouragement, what it is to foster a culture of discipling, and what actual pastoral ministry looks like day in and day out.

The Gospel Training Center is an enterprise being launched at Naperville Presbyterian Church in fall 2024 to give men a local church in which to incubate for a year, either before or after more formal accredited study, or for men later in life who are in between ministry calls. We are counting on our seminaries to teach Greek and Hebrew, systematic theology, and other glorious courses of study. We do not wish to compete with that, though we will have readings in Bible and history. Rather we long to come alongside the seminaries in a complementary way with a particular focus on training young men in:

- Encouraging
- Praying
- Discipling
- Confessing
- Honoring
- Growing
- Rejoicing
- Repenting
- Befriending

We will do a significant amount of reading at GTC, but it will be reading aimed centrally at the heart and character formation. In short, we want to stamp young men with gospel culture.

It is not imperative that the residents are certain that they are headed into fulltime pastoral ministry. Some residents will become lay elders in their churches, or will be involved in other kinds of non-profits or parachurch ministries. Some will ultimately work in secular vocations. But the program is centrally designed for those exploring and pursuing a call into pastoral ministry.

In short, we recognize that young men today have many teachers and “guides” (1 Cor. 4:15)—more than ever, in fact, through books and podcasts and internet resources. But young men exploring a call to ministry do not have many true “fathers” and older brothers. GTC is a safe environment in which spiritual fathers and brothers can open their hearts to young men and seek to help them flourish in Christ alongside each other as men prepare for ministry leadership.

Distinctives

The GTC learns from and celebrates other training enterprises operating out of the local church, though it is distinct in a few particular ways:

- *Gospel Culture.* The central conviction animating both NPC and the GTC is that the doctrines of grace are meant to foster a culture of grace. The matchless beauty of our theology and of our God necessarily creates beauty of community—honoring one another, rejoicing over one another, dignifying one another, confessing to one another.
- *Historical Orientation.* The GTC believes deeply in the need for recovering and learning from the best of historic pastoral ministry. This 9-month project is largely an immersion in Luther, Owen, Edwards, Newton, Bonar, Spurgeon, and others.

- *Unapologetically Reformed.* As a confessional PCA church, Naperville Presbyterian Church and the GTC operate out of a joyous Calvinism that celebrates a big God with big grace for big sinners. Cohort members need not be PCA, but they are expected to gladly embrace one of the four great reformed confessions (Westminster, London Baptist 1689, Belgic Confession, or 39 Articles).
- *Pastoral Immersion.* The GTC will immerse its members in elder meetings, hospital visiting, service planning, praying, staff meetings, reading together, and so on.

Structure

The GTC is a nine-month project running annually from September 1 through May 31.

Each spring, following a fall/winter application process, a cohort of four men will be admitted to the program to begin that September. (See “Annual Application Cycle” below.)

In addition, there will be monthly and weekly rhythms including cohort meetings, one-on-one meetings with the pastors and elders of NPC, and time with the congregation.

Cohort members will be expected to embrace the full range of service in the life of the church at various points throughout the year, including:

- Monthly Saturday preaching labs
- Staffing children’s Sunday School of various ages
- Spending time at middle school and high school ministries events
- Investing in college students
- Preparing elements for communion
- Serving alongside the deacons
- Observing multiple elder meetings
- Observing staff meetings of various kinds
- Hospital visitation
- Helping the preaching pastors prepare sermons
- Ushering
- Participating in men’s ministry
- Driving vans to college campuses to bring students to and from Sunday worship
- Many non-glamorous forms of service

An operating principle in all this is: No man is prepared to preach and teach who is not prepared to mop and vacuum. It is expected of every man that he is all in. Lackluster participation will not be acceptable. It is also expected of every man that he will fail at numerous points. That is good. Failure is healthy.

Once a week, the cohort will come together with at least one NPC pastor to discuss what they have read that week and how it is leading them into deeper joy and fruitfulness.

Roundtables with Church Leaders

Either through video conferencing or in-person visits, each cohort will spend time interacting with fruitful and established church leaders such as professors of Christian colleges and seminaries, pastors of other churches, and leaders of ministries.

Preaching Labs

One day per month, the cohort will come together for two hours in order to preach short sermons to one another, followed by critical interaction, moderated and overseen by an NPC pastor.

Mid-Year Retreat

Halfway through the year, the men will get away together for two days to process together what they are learning, rejoice in one another, and honor one another.

Cost and Financial Assistance

GTC is tuition-free. Moreover, every man admitted is provided with a stipend of \$1,000/month to help with living expenses. All books will be provided by the church. Men may work outside the church to provide further support, though they should not work more than 20 hrs/week for pay.

FAQs

Is there any help from the church with regard to housing?

Yes. NPC leadership is committed to doing all we can to help facilitate the securing of housing close to the church. Single residents are encouraged to live together to foster depth of communal life and NPC is committed to helping with housing costs. In rare cases it may be preferable for men who are single to live in the home of an NPC family. The church will cover much of the cost of housing.

Who is this for?

The GTC is created to be a one-year gap period either immediately before or (less often) immediately after seminary. It can be a strategic year of development for any man of any age, however, including men involved in non-ministry vocations but wishing to serve more effectively in their local churches. It also works well as a year of healing for pastors who for any reason are in between ministries. Beyond the staff pastors, NPC currently has several former pastors who have recently become members of the church, who provide a further resource for cohorts.

How intense is this?

Very. Every man admitted will be stretched in ways that will be deeply challenging. He will be squeezed spiritually, theologically, and practically.

Is it possible to fail?

Yes and no. The GTC Director retains the right to de-admit any man at any time. Reasons for such an action could include inconsistent participation, dishonesty, or breaking confidentiality. No man will be excused from the program for any sin he confesses unless it is a criminal offense; the whole point of the program is honesty about our sins and a brotherhood that provides safe ground to fight sin openly and in the light rather than in the dark where it festers and grows.

Can it be done virtually or by distance to any degree?

No. This is an experience in the foxhole of life and ministry alongside other brothers, and must be done with physical, on-site presence. The GTC is run out of the conviction that hearts are formed and character is cultivated only with physical presence.

How much time can this be expected to take per week?

Residents should expect to devote approximately 30 hours per week to this program. During some weeks, this may be slightly more or slightly less, depending on various circumstances and ministry commitments.

Leaders of GTC

Dr. Dane Ortlund serves as senior pastor of Naperville Presbyterian Church and founder of GTC. He earned an MDiv and ThM from Covenant Theological Seminary and a PhD in New Testament from Wheaton College. He is the author of several books and articles. He and his wife, Stacey, have five children.

Rev. Davy Chu serves as an associate pastor of Naperville Presbyterian Church. Davy has extensive ministry experience including many years of local church ministry in diverse contexts. After graduating from the University of North Carolina he earned an MDiv from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and then served for several years with Cru in Asia. His wife, Pey, is a CCEF-trained counselor. Together they have four children.

Wade Urig serves as director of discipleship at Naperville Presbyterian Church and director of GTC. He served for several years in college ministry in a major university town in Iowa. Wade is a graduate of Wheaton College (BA) and Covenant Theological Seminary (MDiv). He and his wife, Claire, have two young sons.

Reading List for the Year

Every man will read through the whole Bible during the course of the 9-month program. In addition, each man is required to read a set of books. These books will be provided by the church. Beyond this, each man will pursue a particular biblical or doctrinal study unique to him, reporting at the end of the year (April/May) on what he has learned and how he has been changed by it. Resources for personal study will be provided by the church.

The books every man will read* are:

Biblical

- Alexander, T. D. *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*
- Beale, G. K. “*The Eschatological Conception of New Testament Theology*”
- Goldsworthy, Graeme. *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*
- Roberts, Vaughan. *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*

Historical

- Bonar, Horatius. *Words to Winners of Souls*
- Bunyan, John. Any treatise from Volume 1 of his Works
- Chalmers, Thomas. “*The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*”
- Edwards, Jonathan. *Charity and Its Fruits*
- Fisher, Edward. *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*
- Goodwin, Thomas. *The Heart of Christ, and Christ Set Forth*
- Luther, Martin. Any single volume from his Works
- Owen, John. *Communion with God*
- Sibbes, Richard. *The Bruised Reed*
- Spurgeon, C. H. *Lectures to My Students*
- One of the following biographies: *Peter Brown on Augustine, Roland Bainton on Martin Luther, Iain Murray on Jonathan Edwards, or Arnold Dallimore on George Whitefield (concise version)*

Christian Life and Ministry

- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*
- Ferguson, Sinclair. *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance*
- Lewis, C. S. *The Great Divorce*
- Lewis, C. S. “*The Weight of Glory*”
- Lewis, C. S. “*Three Kinds of Men*”
- Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*
- Lovelace, Richard. *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*
- Miller, Paul. *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*
- Newton, John. *Letters of John Newton*
- Ortlund, Dane. *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*
- Ortlund, Ray. *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ*
- Reeves, Michael. *Authentic Ministry: Serving from the Heart*
- Schaffer, Francis. “*No Little People*” and “*The Lord’s Work in the Lord’s Way*”

Creeds and Confessions

- *Westminster Confession of Faith (or London Baptist Confession of 1689)*
- *Belgic Confession*
- *Heidelberg Catechism*
- *39 Articles*

Biblical or theological topics for individual pursuit could be:

- A book of the Bible

* Reading list subject to change.

- A doctrine, such as regeneration or justification or inaugurated eschatology or presuppositional apologetics or covenant or Christ-centered hermeneutics (obscure doctrines will not be approved)
- A period of church history, such as the Reformation or the Age of the Puritans or the Great Awakening or the Princeton School
- A figure in church history
- Cultural issues or political matters will not be approved
- The GTC director will sign off on every man's subject of study

Flow of Study

The first three weeks of each month are given to the study of one topic per week, with readings flowing into a Thursday morning discussion. The fourth week of every month is open for the residents to use as they wish, with no formal Thursday gathering.

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gospel Doctrine, Gospel Culture • Walking in the Light • Encouragement and Honor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lord's Work in the Lord's Way • Reality with Christ • Rejoicing in Christ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authentic Gospel Ministry • Gospel Power for Change • The Affectionate Heart of a Pastor
DECEMBER	JANUARY	FEBRUARY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing Christ • The Heart of Christ • Communion with God 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heidelberg Catechism • Belgic Confession • Westminster Confession / London Baptist 1689 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer • Preaching I • Preaching II
MARCH	APRIL	MAY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Gospel • Justification • Sanctification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reformation • Luther • Calvin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biblical Theology • Inaugurated Eschatology • Christ-Centered Hermeneutics

Annual Application Cycle

October-March - Public communication welcoming applications for following fall

April 1 - Applications due for those applying for that coming fall

May 1 - Applicants notified of admission decisions

July-August - Residents arrive in Naperville

September 1 - Program begins

May 31 - Program ends