



GCS News

A Newsletter for Students and Alumni of Grace Communion Seminary

November 2015

Friends, students and alumni of GCS,

Greetings.

As we near the end of the fall semester, the GCS team thought we would put out another newsletter to keep you informed and for me to make good on my plan to continue to share with you some of my own spiritual journey and vision for GCS.

I realized a while back that many of the most important lessons I learned I learned early on. These became fundamental to my thinking and outlook – and fortunately, were also biblically based and theologically sound! Many of these lessons have stayed with me over the years. For that preparation I am grateful to God and to those who were faithful witnesses to me in those early years.

Last time I talked a bit about my coming to grasp the truth and reality that who God was in Jesus Christ calls for a response to that truth and reality. Moreover, that truth and reality is not an idea, or a concept or a system, but the Living Lord by his Spirit addressing us personally and calling us to follow, to surrender our lives to him in faith, hope and love.

This time I want to share with you another lesson, another one that you all have very likely already learned! Those who taught and mentored me in my early years, youth ministers mostly, made clear by teaching and by their example that following Jesus Christ involves lifelong growing and learning. What Christ had done for us once and for all we draw on and live in our whole lives, every day. We are to grow up into Christ, as the apostle Paul put it.

Much of the Christianity popular during my youth emphasized the moment of decision for Christ. It focused on conversion, the initial response of repentance and faith in Jesus. There is much in the New Testament about those who have an encounter with God and who turn around seemingly in a moment. But the experience of an initial moment should not cover up the fact of God's ongoing relationship and history with individuals and his select people. The start of a relationship (from our side) leads to an ongoing relationship. And in relationship to God and his Word, living and written, that relationship means we grow and change. We mature. Throughout the New Testament the Christian life is depicted as living, dynamic and transformative. The apostle Paul can describe it this way:

We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

So built in from the ground floor, so to speak, I saw that the Christian life was not just about crossing the line, about making a one-time decision, about having a momentary experience—even if such things were a part of a genuine Christian spirituality. I was rescued from the error of what some have called “conversionism.”

This meant that I saw a lifelong need for regular Bible study and even memorization. I recognized the goodness of daily (sometimes hourly!) prayer in private and with others. I appreciated the fact of being a member of the Body of Christ and the importance of gathering

together and seeking to support, encourage and learn from each other—all centered on the Word of God. I grasped the fact that God was taking me somewhere, that I was going to be changing, growing up, not standing still, not looking back to a single moment of decision. Jesus Christ accepted me where I am in order to take me to where I belong, to where he is going.

Somewhere along the way I also became sensitive to the fact that many who called themselves Christian had a superficial familiarity with the Bible. They had poor habits of how to interpret Scripture, often taking things out of context or simply using it to judge others and justify themselves. Admittedly a difficult and lifelong task, not many pursued understanding how the parts and the whole of biblical revelation fit together around the center of God's self-revelation and self-giving in Jesus Christ. Sadly, many did not grow much in their relationship with God and remained weak and vulnerable to manipulation. Often the churches they were a part of did not offer them much but sometimes seemed to perpetuate the immaturity of their members!

The result was often confusion or serious inconsistency. I saw in many how the resulting inner conflict tripped them up and sometimes grew to the breaking point. Not a few I knew left the faith who had once affirmed they had a "born again" experience. These fairly widespread characteristics earned the description of popular evangelicalism being "a mile wide and a millimeter deep." In short, I came to see that spiritual growth and maturity should be a normal, very important and helpful part of being a Christian.

This growing awareness and concern played a large part in my sense of calling to serve by teaching and training and, of course, for my own ongoing learning and growing. These elements were behind my decision to go and study with James B. Torrance. I discerned he was on the same path of spiritual journey I was—just 250 miles ahead! I went to Scotland to be mentored by him. As it turned out, in order to stretch out my time under his tutelage for longer than a year, I had to sign up for the Ph.D. program. And so I did, even though originally I had not gone to Kings College of Aberdeen University to get a degree to qualify to teach, but rather to continue in my own spiritual growth and theological understanding. On the verge of burnout in ministry, I needed serious help.

Although I have been involved over the years in many forms of ministry—church youth ministry, college and graduate student campus ministry with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, editor for academic books at InterVarsity Press, and now my various roles with GCI/GCS—they all mainly have to do with contributing to the growth and maturity of the Body of Christ, of which I am the primary beneficiary!

I'm sure it's now obvious as to why I saw fit to accept the invitation to serve as President of GCS. The responsibilities fit the pattern of my preparation and ongoing concerns. A seminary offers one important way in which followers of Jesus Christ can continue to learn and grow throughout their whole lives. It serves a place where we can discover how better to love God with our minds. It provides a space where faith can seek understanding. A seminary is where such seeking is done in a disciplined and sustained way with others and under a trusted mentor. Approached properly, it brings together head and heart, will and mind, action and reflection. It is a context in which, as the great early church father Athanasius said, theology serves doxology—the praise and worship of God.

Privileged to serve GCS,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary Deddo". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Gary Deddo
President

Spring registration begins January 4th

Registration for fall semester will begin on Monday, January 4, and will be open through January 18, when the first lectures will be posted. Susan Williams, our Registrar, will send an e-mail to all active students with details of how to register. If you do not get this e-mail and would like to register for a course, please phone us at 1-800-851-2611. Our lineup for the spring is:

BT502	Prophets	Tim Finlay
CH501*	Church History: The First Millennium	Neil Earle
CM501	Ministerial Leadership	Russell Duke
CM503	Christian Counseling	Ted Johnston
NT501*	New Testament Background	Mike Morrison
TH502	Nature of Humans and Salvation	Russell Duke
TH507	Theology of C.S. Lewis	Gary Deddo

TH519* and TM501* (capstone courses for master's degree) are offered in all semesters.

**Proctored exam*

For details on all these classes, go to www.gcs.edu/course and consult the short syllabi. Please order the textbooks early enough so that you will have them by the time the class begins. Please note that if fewer than five students register for a particular class, it may need to be delayed until another semester, at the discretion of the instructor.

Graduates are eligible for a 50% discount when auditing a course. Graduates planning to audit a course this spring for the reduced cost of \$150 must register directly through the Registrar, 626-650-2309 or registrar@gcs.edu