

# Pastor's 2023 Congregational Report

By the Rev. Dr. Richard E. 'Dick' Knodel, Jr. (February 5, 2023) **Annual Meeting**

**Broad Overview:** If anyone thought that God couldn't ring civilization's bell, we now know God paid no attention. For three years the whole world convulsed with either COVID or their governments' reactions to it. By 2023 it had become pretty plain how paltry both men's plans and remedies had become. While we all talked, God acted, and did "Whatsoever He willed – among both the inhabitants of the earth and the host of heaven." A.D. 2022 was taken up with people's slow admissions that the world had been humbled. By its end, both world leaders and humble folk like those in southwest Ohio had to admit that their destiny had very little to do with their own power --to effect drastic change. Especially for good.

As Christians, we've enjoyed our prayers, devotions, and both family and church. The simple things and our learned routines have gained significance – despite their lack of fanfare. Cultural dynamos like the NFL and popular music concerts had all been stilled; now they had been restarted. But as things fell back into line, people were generally more appreciative. Whether or not people recognized God as the author of our epidemic – they sure enjoyed restarting their lives.

**Southwest Ohio R.P.'s (SWORP's) Experience:** Post COVID the national church has not come roaring back, and SWORP saw itself in that wider shadow. The best part of our experience has been our Lord's Day and Worship. Everything we've done and experienced can be seen through that lens. Our worship attendance averaged twenty-four. I began the year preaching some miscellaneous messages, but on February 13 started a series that continues thru to today: 'Scriptural Lessons from Genesis 12 ff. on the Family.' Starting with Abraham's call by God to his family, we've progressed until Jacob and Joseph's families where we are today. As your pastor, I hope you've enjoyed this series as much as I have. Out of the things I've learned I've been able to share with you. Out of the difficulties of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I've been inspired by the idea that's man incapacities cannot limit the Lord. Time after time, Genesis has revealed both man's foolishness and God's superior mercy – lifting both biblical family and ours unto more blessing than we had any right!

**Momentous Stuff that's happened:** •On March 20<sup>th</sup>, Emmett McMullen and Joseph Jordan were baptized. Now they're beyond mobile, and out-and-about. •SWORP's first child, Kaiya Knodel, professed faith in Christ early in September, and did so gladly and sincerely. Since then she's enthusiastically helped each Sunday getting snacks out after service, and tried to encourage the other children during our social-times with her friendship. She's a great discipler and pattern-maker for the rest of our growing children. •Robby Rufener's mom, Linda Jones, successfully moved here from Oregon and has fit into our fellowship. She and Susan joined in the last Cincinnati Snooty-Fox tour, and had great fun. •In the Spring Tim Vincze's mom Nancy went to be with the Lord. Pastor K, Scott Damerow and Steven & Jeannie Work attended her funeral in western PA. Since then, our Elder & Precenter Tim has split his time between Western PA and Southwest Ohio as he and his brothers have tried to help his dad move into his life's next stage. •Our 2022 Presbytery has traversed through a series of disturbances & discouragements which has taken your Session's time, starting with the attempted Ecclesiastical trial of Jared Olivetti, and then our Synod's dealing with the Immanuel R.P. Elders and their discipline. In October, Michael Lefebvre's Christ's Church in Indianapolis was desolved after his 2021 withdrawal (before he could be brought to trial). As the year ended, the pastor of 2<sup>nd</sup> RP in Indianapolis, James Faris withdrew and joined an independent church there. *These men where all leaders in our Presbytery. All*

had taken vows to support our RP doctrine and church order. But in the end, all of this ‘crashed and burned,’ and other men have had to step up and do the work of Presbytery. Yet subsequent to this, the Presbytery has been more peaceful. •Our Atlanta Church, pastored by the Rev. Frank Smith, made a great contribution to the year’s business by loaning Frank to GLG. Frank’s Moderatorship was really inspired. He steered us through many difficult times. •In addition, Presbytery was forced to close our Grand Rapids church as Craig Scott moved on to take a new church-plant in Texas – sponsored by the Free Church of Scotland – Continuing (the FCC). •Our Durham Church also moved-in to the boundary of Pennsylvania’s Allegany Presbytery. •Phil Pockras’ Ohio church in Belle Center has stabilized and manifested some encouraging growth. They obtained two new Elders of their own, and gained a number of new families. •SWORP interfaced with Belle Center by helping the Soma family come through their crisis. We just found this week that the Judge in their case is finally moving toward reunion of the family by its February counseled meetings between Dana and all the kids. Another hearing in March will review February and make its newest proposals. Let us pray for their total reunification. •Despite the Clauson’s successful move to Ohio, our Christendom Bible College project got scuttled by circumstances. We just didn’t have the strength to start in September. Dr. Clauson has received a tentative offer on our New Richmond building, and if the new purchasers come through, we will probably sell. Ongoing efforts at promoting the Reformed Faith will be taken over by the Patrick Henry Institute that Kevin runs. It remains to be seen where it will relocate and what its future projects will be.

**The Look Forward:** As we think about our future, •I wanted to share the great encouragement that our Bi-Weekly ‘Roundabouts’ have been with the Rufener family. When any one of us suffers, in a sense – we all suffer; and when we see victories – we all rejoice. The Roundabouts are a Butler County Social Service effort to help families with autistic children. It’s turned out to be a real help for Robby and Lis. It’s led to Louie’s mainstreaming into his local school system, and Louie has been making some amazing progress. Recently he won the ‘Student of the Week’ Award, and his teachers have consistently raved about his progress – both academic and social. Pastor Knodel and Jeannie Work are both on the team which generally meets bi-weekly to brainstorm. SWORP has consistently been praying for progress here, and so Louie’s achievement should be an encouragement to all of us! Of course, not all goals have been met. Progress at home has not kept us with school progress! So we need to keep praying. But as just one participant, I’m encouraged with see our team working constructively to overcome any-and-all problems. I have learned so much about Autism, and the tremendous problem this presents to modern families. So keep praying and hoping.

•Pastor K wants people to start thinking about possible Fellowships (Bible Studies) that we might consider, in our neighborhoods – where we live. Can we not imagine gathering another family or two around the Bible – to share our lives? Do we not have a lot to offer today’s confusion? Is God’s Word not dynamic? I would like us to brainstorm on this and see if we can begin to see some progress on this from within our church.

•Pastor K’s writing and ministering nationally. Via the Internet, and now a national conference in Arizona in two weeks, Pastor K continues to try to both encourage and challenge our Reformed Churches to think more in terms of the Kingdom of God (faith’s effect on our modern lives and enterprises). If we focus on both church and kingdom, I see the way forward – for more progress.