



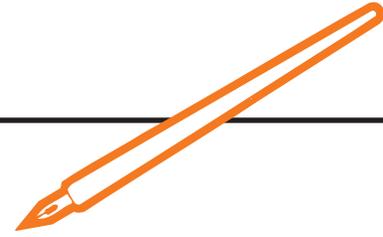
# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE  
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*On alliances of  
Reformed Churches*

By J. De Jong



## The Alliance of Reformed Churches: Where From Here?

As one of the Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity, I was able to visit the meeting of the Alliance of Reformed Churches held on November 12 and 13 in Holland, MI. A report about this meeting should be present in this issue along with the text of the short speech which I held at the meeting. Not only was I able to pass on the greetings of the Canadian Reformed Churches; I was also invited to express my opinion and provide input related to the concerns of a federation and the need to organize a federation of churches. I was impressed with the brotherly tone of the discussions, and with the sincere desire to seek the truth in love.

### The future?

The main concern of this meeting was to chart a course of action for the future of the Alliance. Since many of the churches which were formally a part of the Alliance have now left to form the United Reformed Churches, those remaining sought to ensure the credibility and integrity of the Alliance by redrafting its statement of purpose. And the proposals in this regard were successful, for the Assembly agreed that the Alliance of Reformed Churches should continue as a bona fide body of Reformed Churches seeking to give a united Reformed witness in the North American context.

Why did these churches not join the new federation? From my observations, I sense that the younger ministers were hesitant to join, and found that the move to the new federation had gone too quickly. It appeared from their comments that these ministers were not ready to accept all the terms of a full-fledged federation as found in the Church Order of Dort and more or less maintained in the Reformed Churches on this continent. They seemed to be fearful of a return to the kind of hierarchical abuses that exist in the CRC, and they seemed to be inclined to move away from what they saw as the rigorous and restrictive organizational structures of this body of churches. They wanted more Scriptural principles, and generally leaned towards a much simpler, in their view less restrictive organizational structure, one less complicated than that found in the normal Reformed church order.

### Presbyterian influences

Another factor in the discussions concerned the Presbyterian order and government so common in the orthodox churches of the North American continent. Some delegates wondered if it was necessary to retain a specifically Dutch influenced identity, with a church order finding its roots in the history of the Reformed Churches in Holland. One dele-

gate intimated that perhaps the Presbyterian structure would be more suitable for a new federation, and that it might be closer to Scripture. The mood of the younger ministers at the Alliance was that the United Reformed Churches did not go far enough in this direction. There was also a genuine fear that the United Reformed Churches would end up being another CRC, without the women in the pulpit or on the elder's bench.

As one can glean from our reports concerning the first synod of the United Reformed Churches, there may be something to these concerns of the younger ministers.<sup>1</sup> As Rev. den Hollander pointed out, the URCNA moved rather quickly to adopt some more traditional forms of organization, (e.g. a stated clerk) even when some churches proposed looking at forms of organization closer to other Reformed churches, including our own. Some of the churches holding out on federating are clearly coloured with an independentistic stripe; others, however, are not certain at this point on exactly what form of organization they feel they should be striving to implement. And while there are several churches that want a closer look at the Presbyterian standards, others simply wish to see if some of the Presbyterian procedures might be more workable in a new federation.

Personally I was able to use the opportunity to encourage the churches to give some more attention to the history of the Reformed churches in Holland, and to the principles behind the Church Order of Dort. Given the presence of a fraternal delegate from the ERQ, I also mentioned that the church order of Dort is not specifically a "Dutch" church order. The Dutch churches derived many of the principles from the French Reformed Churches. In matters of church government France was the mother, Holland the daughter. We in North America are then granddaughters, and we should examine the heritage carefully before abandoning even the smallest part of it! Too often we tend to think that – as one of my teachers phrased it, "the fathers were sleeping." But the truth of the matter is that we are all too often too drowsy in determining what they really said and why they said it!

### Other Reformed Churches?

Considerable time was spent on the question what role the Alliance could play with regard to promoting unity among like-minded Reformed and Presbyterian churches. The member churches certainly have no desire to replace existing organizations like NAPARC, ICRC, and so on. I was asked whether the Canadian Reformed Churches would also be willing to participate in an organization of like minded

churches designed to further ecclesiastical unity. Another delegate asked whether the Alliance of Reformed Churches could not function in a way similar to the ARCH recently formed in the west.

To these questions I replied that our official position is such that we could not indefinitely be a part of such an organization. The deputies feel that the element of an agreed upon time frame is an essential prerequisite to more formalized vehicles and arrangements for pursuing ecclesiastical unity. Here too it is important that we act together as a federation, rather than developing all kinds of loose regional affiliations on our own.

The matter is complicated by the nature of the Alliance churches as such. Some are now federated, some are not. Some prefer to remain independent, others prefer the looser organization that they presently maintain in regional fellowships. This makes the proposal concerning an organization to promote federative unity somewhat problematic. For we normally deal with other federated churches through delegates appointed by general synods, that is, delegates appointed by the body representing *all* the churches. But we do not normally deal with local independent churches in this way. Discussions with a non-federated church can best be pursued on a local level. It is one thing to help bring an unfederated church to the point of federation; it is quite another to bring federations of different histories and backgrounds together.

The Alliance needs to clarify its frame of reference before we as churches can be fully committed to participate in developing ideas on federation and church unity. Will the Alliance be an alliance of federated or non-federated churches? Some delegates maintained that the entire purpose of the Alliance was to come to the kind of federation as has now been realized in the United Reformed Churches; others suggested that while forming a federation was one of the goals of the Alliance, the federative model to be adopted was something that required more time and discussion. Another point requiring further clarification is the approach to the churches of Presbyterian background. One can sense that among the churches that have recently seceded from the CRC there is an increased willingness to look to the Presbyterian system of church government as a possible alternative to the

structures of the past. Indeed, one can observe certain Presbyterian elements surfacing in the new church order of the United Reformed Churches. Other non-federated Alliance churches are ready to go further in this direction. Correspondingly, they are more prepared to use the Alliance as a vehicle to discuss matters of church government with Presbyterian structured churches as well as Reformed churches.

Here once again I could only express a word of caution. It seems to me to be easier to gain unanimity among churches of a common background than to forge a new unanimity among churches with diverging backgrounds. The Presbyterian order of government, despite some good elements, is markedly different than the Reformed one. Besides, one deals here with years of history, with deeply rooted customs and conceptions, which in the main will never be easily dislodged. It seems advantageous for Reformed churches to first set their own house in order, and then engage in a dialogue with the churches of a Presbyterian background. This dialogue will then have a frame of reference quite distinct from the one seeking to forge a unity among like minded Reformed churches.

## United witness

Some delegates also promoted the idea of an Alliance of Churches which would give a united witness to leaders and politicians in government and social policy at various levels in order to call these officials to uphold Judeo-Christian principles in public and societal life. Peter Yonker of Messiah's congregation hinted that one of the reasons of the growing decline in morality in America was the silence of the Reformed Christian churches. And he suggested that an organization is needed in order for these like minded churches to bring a united witness to the world on various issues of social and public life and morality, e.g. abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, and so on.

It seems to me that if this was the route churches wish to follow – apart from the question whether this is desirable or not – it would require an organization of churches drawn along national lines. This would be the most suitable for this purpose, since the moral and social issues are different in the respective countries, and the officials addressed also differ. In fact, the whole idea of forming federations along national lines ought to be given more consideration. Kuyper maintained: the



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churches should be organized as national federations, and from this position draw up links of support and fellowship with other like-minded *foreign* churches. An international “trans - border” federational body is difficult to maintain; it also remains difficult to have it work effectively.

### Personal discussions

A visit to such a meeting also gives one the opportunity to meet people from various backgrounds and walks of life. I had especially interesting conversations with brothers who were part of the so-called “1953 split,” that is, they were originally Protestant Reformed, but then returned to the CRC with the Revs. Cammenga, De Jong, Kok, and others in 1953, after the Protestant Reformed Churches adopted the binding mission statement known as *The Declaration of Principles*. These brothers know the Canadian Reformed Churches, and know what we preach also with regard to the covenant. They had heard about the “conditional” covenant, that is, that the covenant always comes to us in a conditional way. So one senses an immediate affinity with these brothers.

Why did these people go back to the CRC? Why were there no discussions with our churches after the schism of 1953? I do not know. Perhaps the *national* lines referred to above had something to do with it. Notwithstanding all similarities, I can see that the American context is still different from ours in Canada, and that direct contact with our Canadian Reformed churches did not appear at that time to be a viable organizational option.

However, we do have a strong affinity with these people. Some have ended up in the United Reformed Churches, and a number of brothers of this group with whom I spoke indicated that they would like to see a growing relationship develop between our churches and the United Reformed Churches. They also suggested that the Canadian Reformed input into the Alliance be sustained.

### The Alliance and the ICRC

The United Reformed Churches have made the decision to send observers to the next meeting of the ICRC. The Alliance also considered its relationship to the ICRC. Some have suggested that as the ICRC begins to “regionalize” its activities, especially in the area of missions, there is no need for an organization like the Alliance for the promotion of ecclesiastical unity. However, to this one must respond that the ICRC, although a vehicle for the promotion of cooperation among member churches, is not a substitute for developing contacts and promoting ecclesiastical unity among

churches within one country. The ICRC is precisely this: an *international* body of like minded Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Even if there are different churches from one country participating as members in the ICRC, this does not mean that those member churches now have resolved all their differences among themselves. And a cooperative effort in the ICRC should not be construed as an indication that talks on the federative level are no longer necessary or desirable. Here, too, relations in an *international* frame of reference are different than those within the same national boundaries.

We must be careful that in the developments of all kinds of cooperative associations, whether it be the ICRC or ARC or ARCH, we do not allow a build up of overgrowth to short-circuit the real duty to grapple with issues that separate us on a federative and local level. A multiplicity of organizations and an equal multiplicity of churches functioning in various organizations can give the impression of unity – but is it a real unity? And will this promote a lasting ecumenicity?

### Conclusion

I came away from the meeting in Holland impressed in many ways: impressed by the leadership, the brotherly tone of the discussions, the genuine concern to learn from God’s Word, especially among the younger ministers who seek Biblical grounds for federative relationships. Not for a moment did I doubt the integrity and genuine willingness of the brothers honourably to seek the truth in the call given to them. However, I could not and cannot hide my concern and misgivings. The splintering of the CRC is proceeding at an alarming rate. Coupled with the adoption of a more Scriptural stand re the office (woman in office, and so on) one finds at the same time an open door to Presbyterian influences in the Reformed camp, and a searching and floundering spirit regarding the implementation of a proper, Scriptural order of church government. This is not the mark of true reformation! All this is an indication – as others have correctly pointed out – that the CRC, having torn itself away from its moorings, is now drifting as a church without roots.

May the Lord so work that we in the Canadian and American Reformed Churches can also be of service in the gathering and preservation of His church – also in the gathering and preservation of many of His children in the USA.

<sup>1</sup>See *Clarion*, Vol 45, no. 23.



## What’s inside?

In November, Dr. J. De Jong visited the meeting of the Alliance of Reformed Churches as one of our Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity. Dr. De Jong writes about this in his editorial and a report. We have also included the text of his speech.

There are several discussions about the unity of the church happening at the moment. The Rev. D.G.J. Agema responds to Dr. J. Visscher’s article published last September; Mr. Ed Tams responds to an article of the Rev. K. Jonker also published in September.

You will also find some of the regular columns, letters, reviews, and press releases.

GvP



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# Report on the visit to the Alliance of Reformed Churches

By J. De Jong

**Meeting held on Tuesday and Wednesday, November 12 and 13 in Messiah's Independent Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan.**

## 1. Opening

The meeting was opened at 1:30 p.m. by the *pastor loci*, Rev. Kenneth J. Anema. Rev. Anema held a short discourse on Psalm 133 in which he highlighted the unity of the brotherhood in Jesus Christ. Four elements were treated as they are introduced in the psalm, depicting the unity of the Israelite confessors around the service of their covenant God: first, the beauty of this unity, second the holiness in this unity; third the fruitfulness of this unity and fourth, the blessing with this unity. Drawing on the words of Article 28, Belgic Confession, Rev. Anema encouraged all the delegates to labour for the unity and the well-being of the church of Christ.

## 2. Election of Officers

Mr. Peter Elzinga, chairman of the Interim Committee thanked Rev. Anema for his word of exhortation, and then proceeded to the roll call. Seventeen churches were represented at the meeting, with a total of 37 delegates. Fraternal delegates were present from the Reformation Christian Ministries in Pompana Beach, Florida, and from the Saigon Reformed Presbyterian Church in Garden Grove, California. Also present as a fraternal delegate was Rev. Jean Guy De Blois from the Église Réformée de la Rivé Sud, in Charny, PQ, representing the federation of Reformed churches in Québec. Several churches represented were members of the new federation of United Reformed Churches.

The officers were elected as follows: Mr. Peter Elzinga, chairman; Mr. Peter Yonker, Vice Chairman, Rev. Kenneth Anema, clerk. The order of the day was established, and opportunity was given for the fraternal delegates to extend their greetings to the assembly.

## 3. Reports

The opportunity was given for the presentation of reports. The stated clerk, Rev. Jerome Julien reported on correspondence of the assembly over the last year, and at the same time gave notice that he would not be able to seek reelection, since he with the Lynwood congregation has joined the United Reformed Churches of North America.

Rev. Jerry Van Dyk of the United Reformed Church in Wyoming, Ont. presented the report of the ARC Mission Committee. Member churches currently maintain several growing mission projects: Rev. Tony Zekveld is working at Toronto missions for the Wyoming church, Rev. Ernie Langendoen is missionary of the Niagara peninsula churches working in Honduras. Rev. Poelman has been sent out by the church of Hudsonville, Michigan; Rev. Bill De Jong is working on a church planting project in Grand Prairie, Alberta, and Rev. Harry Bout is being sent to work in Mexico. Opportunity was also given to Dr. N. Kloosterman of Mid-America Reformed Seminary to introduce Mr. Jeff Pols, the new director of public relations and financial services, who brought out the work and the needs of the seminary to the churches. The member churches were encouraged to support the work of the seminary in prayer and contributions.

Rev. Geoff Donnan also received the opportunity to introduce the work of Reformation Christian Ministries, an organization dedicated to providing Reformed instruction on an advanced level via video and tapes in many points throughout the world. Rev. Donnan first served as an OPC missionary in Curaçao, and also developed close contacts with the missionaries of our sister churches in Holland while serving at this post.

## 4. Overtures

The overtures as present really concerned the future of the Alliance. Now

that the federation of the United Reformed Churches of North America has been formed, what direction must the Alliance take? Three overtures were present on the table:

### a. *Reformed Heritage Community Church, Holland, MI*

This church asked for a discussion re principles of federation in order that the will of the assembly and the concerns living in the churches might be ascertained. The assembly decided to proceed with the discussion.

The chairman proposed that before the other overtures were treated this matter would be discussed first. Opportunity was given to set forth the pros and cons of federation. Fraternal delegates were also given the opportunity to provide input, and most delegates, including myself, made use of this opportunity. Many criteria were set forth stressing the need for a cooperative and federative relationship between the churches; potential dangers and negative elements were also voiced by various speakers in the assembly. Most speakers maintained that the potential dangers in federating do not lie in the organization itself, but in the abuses of the organizational forms by those who do not put the call to service and sacrifice first.

### b. *Messiah's Independent Reformed Church, Holland, MI*

This church proposed that the Alliance further define her constitutional existence. The church proposed 1. that the ARC reaffirm her purpose statement, and 2. that the Alliance work towards assisting the member churches in promoting ecclesiastical unity and biblical obedience among the people of God. This church wanted the ARC churches "to unite loosely on the basis of a minimal constitution," to cooperate in presenting a united witness to the nation on social issues, and to organize confessional conferences dealing with current

issues. The church proposed that the ARC "provide an arena in which other confessionally like-minded Reformed/Presbyterian churches who assent to the ARC purpose statement and who consider that the Belgic Confession's articles 27-32 are a starting point from which to begin, may work towards potentially effecting a united Reformed witness by means of discussing commonalities and differences in the light of Scripture." This overture eventually passed after much debate.

### c. *Reformed Heritage Community Church of Holland, MI*

This church proposed that the committee to study the differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Confessions be reactivated. The assembly also agreed to receive and distribute information regarding Reformed principles of church polity through the newly elected stated clerk, elder Peter Yonker of the Reformed Heritage Community Church of Holland.

In some additional matters of business, Rev. Geoff Donnan was appointed to function as an observer for the Alliance at the next meeting of the ICRC, provided his church, the King's Presbyterian Church in Pompana Beach, FL, becomes a member of the Alliance. The next meeting of the Alliance will be held in Kalamzoo, DV October 16 and 17, 1997.

## 5. Conclusion

This observer can report that the alliance meeting proceeded well, and that generally there was a genuine desire and interest to seek the will of the Lord regarding church federation. How this had to be done remained a point of debate. Some delegates of churches which had joined the new federation used the opportunity to make an urgent plea to the member churches to also join the new federation. In general, the younger ministers of independent churches expressed more hesitancy in this regard, and wanted more Scriptural data regarding federation.

As fraternal delegate, I took the opportunity to stress that where talks concerning federation are still going on, we would be prepared to offer input and assistance. However, this could not go on indefinitely, but would need to be placed within certain time limitations. On this note I left the meeting, thankful for the hospitality and fellowship which I could meet among these churches. 

## Speech held at the Meeting of the Alliance of Reformed Churches, Nov. 12 and 13, 1996

Brothers!

It is a privilege and a pleasure to be able to meet with you today, and to bring the fraternal greetings of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. We are a small federation of Reformed churches scattered throughout the US and Canada, mostly in Canada, living together on the same basis that is so central among you: the Word of God as confessed in the *Three Forms of Unity*. Our delegates have been observers at your assemblies since 1991, and so we are glad to have been invited to this meeting, and to have the opportunity to extend our greetings to you.

I must say that we were also present at the founding Synod of the United Reformed Churches in Lynwood last October 1, that we are very supportive of the move to federation, and that we wish to strengthen our contacts with this federation. Does not the Lord require churches that have the same confession to be bound under a common order, and to help and assist each other in maintaining the purity of doctrine, and in reaching out to others? The New Testament gives us many examples of cooperative efforts that highlight the obligation facing Reformed churches today. Let me mention the most well known! Paul takes a collection of gifts for the care of the poor in Jerusalem from Achaia and Macedonia to Jerusalem, 2 Corinthians 8:1. He speaks about a rule implemented in all the churches, (1 Corinthians 7:17) and wishes to have his letters read in all the churches, Colossians 4: 16. Certainly the lines of an obligatory fellowship of churches are plain to see in the New Testament!

And I would add: what other answer can really be given to the critics of the seceded churches today? You know that there are voices in the CRC that are strongly critical of the whole idea of secession, and even tie it to the spirit of individualism that they say has helped shape the CRC to this very day. Some attribute the current splintering of the CRC to the predominance of an individualistic spirit. Others attribute it to a new form of ecclesiastical perfectionism.

A secessionist movement too must be tried by fire. The secessions of 1834 and 1857 were catholic secessions, returns to the faithful preaching and discipline of the word of God. But what about the later secessions? What about the Protestant Reformed in 1924? Was that a faithful secession? Or the so-called reformation of 1953, which they have recently "commemorated?" Was that a *real* reformation? Or the liberation of 1944? Every secession, and we include ourselves – must be tested critically under the light of the ever searching and revealing Word of God.

Of course we defend the integrity of our 1944 secession in Holland. Rather than elaborate on that in the few moments I am speaking, let me simply propose to you that the one fundamental litmus test of secession is: does it seek the unity of the church and the catholicity of the church? Rev. H. De Cock and his congregation in Ulrum separated from the state church, but they sought true fellowship with all those who in every place wanted to serve the Lord according to His word. That is the rule of true reformation!

That is why I am here today as well. I am a member of the deputies for the promotion of ecclesiastical unity especially among the recently seceded brothers in the CRC. We acknowledge your struggle and we applaud the stand against the new hermeneutic and synodical hierarchy. Yet what does our time require? What is the best witness of the church in this age of splintering, division and even outright individualism? The unity of the catholic church! We need a united witness in these last days! That is the real answer to those who accuse the seceded churches of simply serving their own interests.

Therefore our hope and prayer is that you will be a federation – promoting body – a body endorsing the need of like minded orthodox Reformed churches to work together on the same basis. We do not need to be Schilderians, Kuypersians or followers of Hoeksema to be Reformed. Let us be followers of Christ, heeding His norms and standing on the basis of His word as we confess it in the Three Forms of Unity, and uniting around a common order. Then and only then will the spirit of secession be truly tested and approved before the divine tribunal.

May the Lord bless your meeting, and guide your efforts so that you are led to pursue His will for the people of God in these momentous times!

J. De Jong

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# On Church Unity

By D. G. J. Agema

*Response to the article by Dr. J. Visscher "That They May All Be One: A modest proposal for the unity of the church" Clarion, September 5, 1996, pp. 393-396.*

Dr. Visscher has offered a substantial contribution to the recent discussion within our churches about church unity. I believe he is too modest in calling this "a modest proposal."

The matter of unity with other churches is on the mind of many members and on the agenda of quite a few consistories/councils. It is a topic of discussion which has the attention of many and can lead to lively discussions. It is apparent from what we can read about this matters and from what we hear in discussions that the desire for unity among true believers is genuine. It is the manner in which this unity could come about that leads to many discussions even disagreements. For this reason it may be good that Dr. Visscher has published his proposal. He addresses an important matter. In order for us to move ahead we need to address the points of difference, in listening and speaking to each other. On certain points I have a different approach and conclusion from Dr. Visscher. I believe it is good to formulate these differences so that we can evaluate them. My response will concentrate on the points I have questions about or with which I disagree. This does not diminish in any way that we have a fundamental agreement in the desire to heed the call of our Lord to be united with all who call upon the LORD in truth. It is exactly because we have this in common that we should be able to discuss openly and honestly where we differ.

In the first place my response deals with the reasoning used by the author to present and defend his proposal. In the second place I would like to deal with the proposal itself.

I have several concerns with regard to the reasons used to present and defend this proposal.

1. The author begins his article in referring to the background of this pro-

posal. Over the past years he has been involved in a great many discussions with colleagues and consistories of the FRC, FURC and ORC. These discussions have helped to dispel some wrong perceptions. They also showed that there is a lot of diversity among us. It should be noted, however, that this diversity is within the bonds of unity. I quote: "We may have different views or emphases on different matters, but they are all still within the limits set down by our confessional documents."

I do not know all that has been discussed in the meetings to which the author refers. I speak from my own experience and the discussions in which I have been involved on this side of the country. But I wonder whether you can make a statement as broad as the author does, namely, that all the different views are within the limits set down by our confessional standards. This is quite a judgment. This is a judgment which will determine what the rest of the article will say. For if this is so, if these differences are indeed within the limits set down by our confessional documents then there is no reason anymore that we are allowed to be separate. In fact, then, we would be disobedient in not being united. For differences that are within the limits set down by the confession may never keep us apart. Then this whole proposal does not apply anymore. I believe a statement as made by the author needs to be proven first. Isn't that what is happening in our local contacts? Are these differences indeed within the limits: Yes or No? That is the question we need to address and answer properly before we proceed further.

2. In the same paragraph the author writes: "True, every church federation has its extremists, and sometimes the loud, exaggerated statements of a few have managed to put a whole church federation in a bad light. " I have difficulties with the use of the word 'extremists' in this context. For who are these extremists? They must be there, for every church has them. Is one who is in favour of pulpit exchange, intercommunion, and accepting attestations an

extremist? Or is he who opposes this at this point an extremist? If there are extremists in our churches, they ought to be admonished. You see how the use of the word "extremists" blurs the discussion? It gives a judgment on what people say, before the reasons or arguments are heard. It could even be used conveniently to brush aside a valid argument. If what I say is outside the limit of Scripture and Confession then show it and so convince me. But please do not use terms as "extremists."

Note: I have the same problem with the easy use of labels like "conservative," "formalistic," "liberal," or "progressive" within our discussions. We stand together on one basis; let's address each other on that basis and require faithfulness from each other. Then our discussions will bear fruit.

3. Two paragraphs later the author refers to the way some Canadian Reformed Churches have been known to announce the withdrawal of a member. Some announce that this person has withdrawn from the church of Jesus Christ. The author objects to this, because it leaves the impression that by leaving the Canadian Reformed Church you are leaving the Church of Jesus Christ altogether and joining a false church or sect.

First of all, is the Canadian Reformed congregation to which I belong not the church of Jesus Christ? If that were not the case I would have to leave her. Secondly, do we not confess that one is not allowed to withdraw from this congregation because outside of it is no salvation (Art. 28 B. C. )? The conclusion must follow that when one withdraws, this is disobedience to the Lord. Thirdly, does the fact that this person goes to one of the churches mentioned in this proposal change this? Or, are we indeed implying that because this person withdraws, the church where he or she goes to is a sect or a false church? I don't think so. If someone walks away from his wife and goes to another woman, do you then imply that this other woman must be a prostitute? Or must we not be too harsh on

him, because at least he went to a decent woman? Of course not.

I do not believe that only the members of the Canadian Reformed Churches go to heaven. There can indeed be hypocrites within and believers outside. But when someone breaks with the church where Christ is gathering His people, then I have to say this person is disobedient.

You will understand, I would not agree therefore with what the author writes in the next lines, that there is a growing attempt to be more sensitive and civil to each other. Was and is it insensitive and uncivil when a consistory announces that someone has withdrawn from the communion of the church contrary to the command of Christ? Putting it this way takes the attention away from what the person does to the Lord, and directs it to how we are perceived by others. I believe it to be correct that when a person, even when that person goes to join an independent church, withdraws from the communion of the church, it is announced that he or she is disobedient to the Lord. I also believe that the independent church which receives such a person without pointing him or her back to where the person comes from does not promote unity but hinders it.

4. I move on to the end of the article. The author urges us to make serious efforts in coming to unity. I can agree with him. I have questions, however, about the reasoning. He sees an urgent need because the real enemy is not each other as churches, but the evil that is in the world and the devil who is still prowling around like a roaring lion. Then a few lines further he writes: "We need to make common cause against the real enemy." I wonder whether this is not a wrong dilemma. The evil of the devil which we all face, should cause us to be united. Who determines what the real enemy is? And when does an enemy become real? I realize that the answer depends on how one evaluates the differences. In my opinion the differences go deeper than just outward form and historical tradition, I hear in these words the call to brush aside important issues, for the sake of the real enemy. The Bible says that the enemy can also come disguised as an angel of light. We need to be on our guard to all sides. We may not forge alliances because the enemy is so real. It is well possible that such alliances cause more damage than strength.

5. The author ends his article with what I would call a warning. If we do not act there will be tensions within. "Already some local churches are frustrated in their own federation because of what they see as lack of vision.... [T]he danger is there that local churches will go it alone." I have no problem with the warning that we should not stall unnecessarily. And if a congregation feels that this refusal to unite is indeed against the will of the Lord, they should re-evaluate their place and commitment within this federation. However, I do not think that the possibility that some local churches will go it alone should be used as a reason for action. It could also mean that a local church in this way blocks the proper process and takes the whole federation hostage. Such "threatening" does not promote a proper discussion.

I would like to address the proposal itself.

The proposal is that representatives from several churches come together and form an association. I question whether this is the task of churches? Several years ago I raised this in connection with the ICRC. The Church Order does not regulate an official representation of the churches to an association. It only knows of ecclesiastical assemblies constituted by delegates from minor to major assemblies. (See Acts General Synod 1983, Art. 121 – Minority Report p. 86.)

My main concern with regard to this proposal is the combination of items b) and c) of the proposal. Item b) says

"that the purpose of this Association is

- i) to promote good relations between the member churches;
- ii) to promote the unity of the member churches, and, should the Lord bless it, federative unity.

Item c) reads:

"that the member churches of the Association go on record as recognizing in principle the preaching, sacraments and discipline in each others churches;"

From what follows it becomes evident that "in principle" here means that you have pulpit exchanges and admit each other's members at the Lord's Supper. I would think this also implies accepting each other's attestations.

The impression I receive from this is that we admit we are not one in a federative sense, but since we are one in faith we can accept each other already at this stage. This raises the question:

Are we one – Yes or No? I feel this proposal does not answer that question clearly. If we are one, then we should not come with these types of proposals, but accept each other as we are. If we are not one, then wait with things like pulpit exchange and intercommunion.

The author is correct when he says that in our discussions with the FRC, FURC and ORC it becomes clear that as Canadian Reformed Churches we have different practices, when it comes to whom we allow on the pulpit, whom we admit to the Lord's Supper, and issuing attestations. The pressure from the other side is to let go of our own "distinctives," or to accept them with their "distinctives." Though it is always nice to be willing to cooperate and accommodate, the question is, can we do this in these matters. If one feels that these differences come from different historical traditions and in that sense are minor, then why not accept each other with these differences? If one is of the opinion that these differences involve Scripture and confession then you will ask the others to do as you do. That is not a matter of making your tradition normative, or of arrogance, but of wanting to be obedient to the Word of God.

I would like to go the second direction. I have great difficulties to compromise on these matters, because I see them as confessional matters. It is true that no where in the confession do we read a statement about pulpit exchange, or whether we should use attestations or tokens when it comes to the Lord's Supper. But we do say in the confession that the church of Jesus Christ can be known by the pure preaching of the gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, the correct exercise of church discipline. This is the basis for several articles in the Church Order about preaching, sacraments and discipline. Because our confession values these matters so highly, we must be careful not to compromise them. The least we can ask for is a proper evaluation of whether these suggestions are within the limits set down by the Reformed Confession. The fact that our practices have a long and respected history must play a role too. I would like to believe that we stand in the historical tradition, whereas the others have deviated from it. Pulpit exchange, intercommunion, and accepting attestations are rights and privileges that come with federative unity. This proposal wants to promote such unity on the

one hand, and already practices it on the other hand.

I have one more question about the manner in which the author proposes to deal with the fencing of the table. He suggests that "[t]his could be done in the form of a written attest. It could also be done by having visitors from member churches answer some commonly agreed upon questions put to them by the elders of the celebrating church. It could even be done by a phone call being made to their local elders or pastor." Do the second and third suggestion not

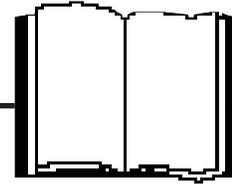
contradict the first? Why do we have at-tests? So that the elders who supervise can go by the judgment of the body that is able to judge the life and doctrine of this person. The fencing of the Lord's Table is the responsibility of the local elders. In order to do their duty when it comes to guests from sister churches, the local elders who cannot judge the life and doctrine of a visitor, must rely on the proper documentation.

I repeat what I said in the beginning. I appreciate that Dr. Visscher published this article. It deals with an important

calling. I agree with him, and I think we all do, that there is an urgent call to work toward unity with faithful churches. I have difficulties with this proposal. It is my hope that in stating my concerns I have helped the discussion. May the LORD give us wisdom and insight as we seek to do His will and follow the Lamb wherever He goes.

*Rev. D.G.J. Agema is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church of Attercliffe, ON.*

## READER'S FORUM



# The confessions: No lack of clarity on the matter

By E. Tams

In "The Validity of Denver's Place Within the Federation" (45:19, p. 422ff), Rev. Jonker has exposed the reasons why Denver's admittance into the federation has caused so much difficulty within Classis AB/MB. He writes: "From the outset I have always been of the opinion that the initial refusal to admit Denver on the mere grounds that the Canadian Reformed Churches have recognized the OPC [Orthodox Presbyterian Church] as true church was illegitimate." Because Rev. Jonker felt the original decision of Classis AB/MB was illegitimate, it did not matter what it took to overturn the decision. The ends clearly justified the means.

When the decisions of our major assemblies are guided by our opinions rather than by the agreed upon standards of Scripture and Confessions, we should not be too surprised at the resulting divisions that will occur. The original decision not to admit Denver (March 1992) was based on exactly that: Scripture and Confessions, and not, as Rev. Jonker implies, on the mere grounds that we recognize the OPC as a true church.

Unless all the readers of *Clarion* have access to all the material available on this issue it will not be edifying to again recount all the various decisions. However, Rev. Jonker's contention that **"the confessions do not stipulate how such recognition can be put into practice"** must be addressed.

In the first place, Rev. Jonker's contention completely ignores the fact that the American Reformed Church of Denver (hereafter: ARCD) was already admitted into the Presbytery of the Dakotas (hereafter: POD) of the OPC. Classis AB/MB acknowledged this fact in its decision when it wrote: "...which Presbytery received Denver's initial request for membership in the OPC regional church (Classis AB/MB March '92). The point in March '92 was not our relationship with the OPC but, rather, the ARCD's relationship with the OPC. In providing grounds for this decision classis merely points out that as Canadian Reformed Churches we have recognized the OPC as a true church. It then proceeded to give advice according to Scripture and Confession on what the ARCD's responsibilities were. Here follows ground 2 and 3 of the decision.

Ground 2: The Reformed confession states that those who draw away from the church or fail to join it wherever God has established it act contrary to the ordinance of God (B.C. art. 28).

Ground 3: The recognized divergencies between the Reformed and Presbyterian Confession and Church Government have been judged by the Canadian Reformed Churches to be no impediment to the recognition of the OPC as a True Church and

therefore are not allowed to undermine and nullify the confessed ordinance of God concerning maintaining the unity of the church.

It is these grounds that Rev. Jonker, and a later Classis AB/MB by its actions, declared illegitimate.

Rev. Jonker takes refuge in the fact that General Synods have declared our relationship as being in a "interim situation." However General Synod Lincoln (in Art.72, cons. iv, A, 2, c, ii) simply pointed out that these requests may come to our assemblies in the interim situation between ecclesiastical contact and ecclesiastical fellowship. This is clear from the consideration itself which reads: "... such situations may arise until substantial agreement has been reached on the outstanding issues and the temporary contact relationship has led to ecclesiastical fellowship." However, this consideration does not provide a recipe for admitting churches from federations which are recognized as true churches as – Rev. Jonker would have us believe. The recipe comes just four considerations later where we read the following:

It is to be recognized that the Canadian Reformed Churches, given their recognition of the OPC as a true church, must exercise greater caution in considering admission of congregations which have separated

themselves from the OPC, and first engage in open consultation with the ecclesiastical assemblies involved. Where this was not done the assemblies of the Canadian Reformed Churches have lacked in following proper procedure. During this temporary relationship individual departures should not be encouraged.

In the second place, Rev. Jonker's contention ignores the fact that the original Classis (March '92) decision was overturned by Regional Synod '93 even though this Regional Synod admitted that classis had no new grounds to reintroduce the whole matter – contrary to Article 33 of the church order.

How this can be is a mystery. Yet according to Rev. Jonker, Blue Bell pro-

vides the answer. He writes: “. . . therefore on the basis of all previous Synodical decisions [concerning Blue Bell] we must conclude that Denver has a valid place with us.” Never mind the specific confessional decisions we had made concerning the ARCD! They are irrelevant; look at the decisions we have made concerning Blue Bell! Unbelievable.

We have agreed as churches living together in one Federation not to change decisions which are not proven to be in conflict with the Word of God or the church order. Only objections firmly rooted in the Word of God as it is summarized in the confessions are good enough. Rev. VanOene reinforces this in his book, *With Common Consent*, when he writes on page 159f: “These good

grounds are not to be serious objections, profound misgivings, or uneasiness with the conclusions reached, or even the considerations on which these conclusions rest.”

Classis AB/MB failed to prove that the original decision not to admit Denver was against Scripture or church order. Using Rev. Jonker's logic it didn't have to either. All the more incredible that the three appealing churches, who clearly desire to maintain the decisions of our major assemblies based on Scripture and Confessions, are called “dissenting Churches” and are told to “tow the line” by someone who admits that in his opinion the confessions are unclear on the whole matter.



## NURTURE & INSTRUCTION

By T.M.P. Vanderven



# What makes reformed education reformed?

Reformed people are very much involved with the education of their children. That is not surprising, since the Bible has much to say about parents educating their children. At the baptism of their children, reformed parents vow to provide their children with a reformed education (*Form for Baptism*, Question #3; *Book of Praise*, p. 578). Reformed education also turns up in the Church Order: Article 58 makes it the responsibility of the consistory to ensure that parents, to the best of their ability, have their children attend a school where the instruction is in harmony with the Word of God as the Church has summarized it in her Confessions. This concern with the education of the children of the church has led to the establishment of parent-controlled, reformed schools. In this article I wish to consider the question: What makes reformed education *reformed*?

The word “reformed” is, alas, at times contrasted with the word “Christian.” Common usage appears to have given the word “Christian” a rather “greyer” meaning than what we learn in

the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 12:32). And in our own circles, we tend to make a distinction between “reformed” schools when parents, teachers, and students all belong to the same reformed church, and “Christian” schools when parents, teachers, and students may belong to different churches. This distinction is rather unfortunate; if the words are rightly understood, they are synonymous.

The term “reformed (or Christian) education” usually stands in contrast with the term “secular education” (secular = relating to the world or the temporal). Using this contrast, we could describe reformed education as focusing on religious knowledge and eternal values. But of course we can say much more. The term implies a commitment to the Word of God as the rule for all of our life, no area or aspect excepted or exempted. Reformed, or Christian, education means an education which in all its aspects wants to submit itself to the Word of God. Therefore we reject the idea that some elements of education – for example the teaching of skills

– could be considered neutral ground where our beliefs and convictions would matter little. We believe that all things are the Lord's (Rom. 11:36 – in Christ all things hold together (Col. 1:17). This is what the Great Reformation of the sixteenth century was all about, and it is significant that all reformers immediately concerned themselves with the establishment of schools for the children of the church – a good reason to maintain the word *reformed* when speaking of our schools.

Reformed education also relates directly to the four characteristics of an educated person: willing and able to act independently, having developed his or her abilities, committed to serving others, and willing and able to carefully examine his or her own actions. Claiming that educated persons are independent does not mean that they do not need to submit themselves to the Bible as the rule for all of life. That would be claiming autonomy, that is, recognizing no authority higher than oneself. We want to say with the term ‘independent’ that we have actively

chosen to submit ourselves to the rule of God's Word, as we did when we made profession of our faith. At that moment we acted independently in full submission to the demands of God's Word. As we do this, we acknowledge that our talents and abilities are not our own property, for us to use as we see fit. We acknowledge that God has made us with a particular set of talents and abilities (Psalm 139), and

***In most of our schools it has been a long-standing custom that board or education committee members make visits. In this manner the board exercises its mandate to ensure that the education in the school is reformed. It would be helpful when teachers and visitors discuss beforehand a question such as: What would you list as the first four or five major characteristics vital to the reformed character of your school?***

that it is our responsibility to develop and use these appropriately.

Further, we don't do these things because we are forced to (by our parents, by the church) but because we want to do them as God's children. We are committed to do them since that is what the Word of God requires of us (Rom. 6:17). We learned to act and we now want to act as is expected of us by our Father. Throughout all this, we acknowledge that such acting is never automatic (human beings are not automatons). To be obedient to the demands of God's Word requires our constant and prayerful effort: being a Christian does not guarantee of itself that we will also act as a Christian. Similarly, being educated does not guarantee that we will always act in an educated manner (Rom. 7:18).

All too often, secular educators explain wrong actions by suggesting a lack of education. Think of examples such as the fight against AIDS: this is not considered a moral problem but an educational problem (and we ought to admit it, at times we fall in the same trap of thinking that a good education will solve all problems). Unfortunately, it is a hard lesson to learn – as the Apostle Paul knew so well – that all too often we do not do what we know to be right! Therefore it is necessary that we spend much time and effort reflecting on our actions in order to evaluate whether we are acting appropriately, that is, in accordance with the precepts of God's Word (Ps. 25). Self-examination is a critically important characteristic of a Christian, of a truly educated person. Reformed education seeks to help young individuals to become such educated persons, committed to living according to God's commands, and willing to be reformed constantly – *semper reformanda!*

From this we can see that the term *reformed education* itself shows a program. It suggests the goal towards which all efforts are directed. And it does this in a manner that leaves no room for alternatives: Christians know of only one basis, of only one comfort, and therefore of only one direction in their lives: serve God and your neighbour. Consequently, reformed education will often find itself in conflict of conscience with secular education. If there is no opportunity to study within a reformed environment, many Christian stu-

dents have struggled to resolve the conflict between the express goals of secular education and those of their Christian faith. Obviously, such conflict is not limited to students at a secular institution; also in the workplace there is all too often tension and conflict between opposing beliefs and values (read about this in John 17).

How might we, then, define reformed education? It is an educational enterprise which submits itself willingly and fully to the norms of God's Word as the rule for all of life. This determines the goal for education, its content, as well as its methods. Although it is not possible to identify the peculiarly reformed nature of every particular educational action or decision – some of these are more closely related to the identity of the enterprise than others; compare, e.g., the employment of teachers and the use of a particular brand of pen – there is no aspect that escapes (or should be allowed to escape) the impact of the normative principles of reformed education. In other words, the reformed nature of education is all-pervasive; you find it everywhere. It is like the air we breathe, or the water the fish need. We will not always notice its presence, but we will surely notice its absence.

Please address questions directly to:  
Mr. T.M.P. Vanderven  
Covenant College  
856 Upper James St., Box 20179  
Hamilton, ON, L9C 7M5.



## Contentment

*Behold the ravens on the trees,  
They neither sow nor reap,  
Nor do they gather into barns  
Store for their winter's keep.  
Yet every one thy Father feeds,  
And should He pass thee by?  
Does He not know His children's needs,  
Nor heed them When they cry?*

*Behold the lilies as they grow,  
They neither toil nor spin,  
Yet human ne'er wore robes as fine  
As God hath clothed them in.  
Could He, who clothes the fragile flow'r,  
Forget to clothe His own?  
In faith lay hold upon His pow'r,  
To Him thy cares make known!*

*Seek not what ye shall drink or eat,  
Nor be of "doubtful mind,"  
Such is a hopeless world's conceit,  
Ye have a Father kind!  
Seek ye the Kingdom of the Lord  
And seek His righteousness:  
With all good things, so says His Word,  
Will He His children bless.*

- Benjamin Schlipf





## Anniversary Dr. C. Van Dam

At the time I write this the exam is the only thing that is left of the first semester. We had a good season without major interruptions or illnesses and we thank our heavenly Father for this.

The highlight of this semester was the celebration of the 25th anniversary of Dr. and Mrs. C. Van Dam in the ministry of the Word. On the afternoon of October 12, 1996 there was a reception where many came to congratulate them. In the evening, the College community celebrated this anniversary with a joyous meeting.

As was remarked on that occasion, Dr. Van Dam has been able to do several things at the same time. When serving as a minister in several congregations he began to study for a Master's degree in Old Testament. Synod Smithville, 1980 appointed him as professor in Old Testament and he began teaching in 1981. In the early years he had to combine teaching the courses with working on his doctoral dissertation. He earned his doctor's degree with a study on the Urim and Thummim, in 1986.

After the completion of his studies, Dr. Van Dam served the churches as an editor of *Clarion*, as member of several committees appointed by Synod, and as editor of books. He published as editor *The Challenge of Church Unity* (1993) and *The Liberation: Causes and Consequences* (1995). He also published a study on Divorce and Remarriage (1996). In all this, he was supported by Mrs. Van Dam, who also did much editorial work. We thank the Lord that He gave the strength and concentration to both of them to do all this work for the benefit of the churches.

It is a coincidence that in the fall of this year Dr. Van Dam was granted a sabbatical for further study. During this semester, the Old Testament courses were taught by Drs. G. Hagens, minister of the Reformed Church of De Bilt-Bilthoven, the Netherlands. Rev. Hagens has specialized in the Old Testament and is part time teacher in Old Testament in the Netherlands. Actually, he and Dr. Van Dam knew each other well during their studies in Kampen.

We are grateful that Rev. Hagens was able to take over the courses. He

helped the students with their Hebrew, and in return the students were willing to help him with the occasional English word or Canadian pronunciation. From this place we want to express our gratitude to Rev. Hagens, his wife and their family, and the consistory and congregation of De Bilt-Bilthoven. In the new year, Dr. Van Dam hopes to teach the Old Testament courses again.

## Foreign students

We have noticed for some years that the College becomes known outside of Canada. When I was secretary of the Senate, I received letters from students all over the world, who inquired whether there was an opportunity for them to study theology with us. Often we have no idea how they heard about us or knew our address. All these letters receive a response but they do not all lead to new students.

Yet, we now have a number of foreign students. The first who came was Yonson Dethan, from Timor in Indonesia. He followed the theological training established by our Dutch sister churches on Sumba. One of his teachers there was Rev. A. Pol, presently minister in Guelph. Yonson, who is now in his final year, follows the courses at the College to upgrade his theological training.

The second was Frank Dong. He was born in China, and studied business. While continuing his study in Australia he came into contact with our sister churches there. They supported him and his family to come to Hamilton to study theology at the College. The third foreign student is Edwer Dethan, younger brother of Yonson. Moreover, there are two other young men preparing themselves to meet the admission requirements for study.

Having foreign students presents us with new challenges. To give an example, in their first year the students have to learn the Heidelberg Catechism by heart. What should we do for Edwer? There is a provisional translation of the Heidelberg Catechism in the Indonesian language. The problem was how I, as the responsible professor, can judge whether he knows his catechism well enough. We found a solution in letting Rev. Pol listen in on the catechism test by speaker phone!

Another problem we are faced with is what the College can do financially for these students. They come from countries which cannot support them financially. If we accept them, is there a way to lighten the burden for them? This issue is under investigation.

## Upcoming

After the Christmas break, the second semester begins with the Ministers' Workshop on Monday, January 6, 1997, the Lord willing. Prof. J. Geertsema will speak on the remarkable topic *Women in Ephesus: Power hungry Amazons or humble daughters of Eve* and Rev. B. Berends will speak on a revival of ARPA.

Each year one of the professors goes on a trip to a part of the country to give a public lecture to the churches. Next year, it is my turn to go to the churches of Alberta and Manitoba. I am looking forward to going there at the end of January, wondering how cold it is going to be. It provides us with a wonderful opportunity to strengthen the bond between the College and the supporting churches.

May the Lord continue to bless the college community in the new year.

N.H. Gootjes 

## CHURCH NEWS



DECLINED to Fergus, ON  
**Rev. J. De Gelder**  
 of Smithville, ON

\* \* \*

CALLED to Carman, MB  
**Rev. P.G. Feenstra**  
 of Chatsworth, ON

\* \* \*

CALLED to Fergus, ON  
**Rev. J.E. Ludwig**  
 of London, ON



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

“. . . they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.” Rev. 22:4,5

## Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Another year has passed and we are now in the year 1997. I wish you all a happy new year!

Do you think you can happily look forward to this new year? Or are you afraid and anxious, not knowing what to expect of every new day. Or do you think, “What is so special about a new year, whether it is 1956 or 1997, what difference does it make?”

Well, maybe there is some truth in that. Other than the change in the number, there was not a whole lot of difference between the last day of 1996 and the first one of 1997. And yet there was. . . ! For we have come a year closer to the Day of Christ’s return!

The numbering of the years started approximately after the birth of Christ. Before the birth of Christ there were also about 2000 years. All those years God’s children waited and prayed for the coming of the promised Saviour, year after year. Probably sometimes the people thought that God had forgotten His promise.

Now *we* are waiting. Yet for us it is not as hard as it was for the people who lived in the time of the Old Testament. For we can find our reassurance in the Bible. From the Bible we know that all the prophecies from the O.T. have been fulfilled. We also know that Jesus Christ has died for our sins, and that He is preparing a place for us in heaven. We do not have to fear the day that we will be called to our heavenly Father, for the Lord Jesus has freed us from our sins. All we have to do is to wait and to make sure to be ready when the Lord will reveal Himself to us. And so *we* are counting years.

Why do we number the years? Because the eternal God created us. In His creation the Lord included time, because without time the whole earth would be a chaos. Can you imagine what would happen without a clock or a calendar? In order for everything to function properly the Lord created “time.” With the light and the dark, there was daytime and nighttime. There were the six days during which the Lord created, and the seventh day in which He showed us to rest from our daily activities. There were also the seasons that follow each other in the right order year after year. It was all included in the way the Lord made the world for us, so we could live orderly lives.

Only the eternal God does not need time. He was and He is and He will be forever. The Lord is there always and everywhere. He is not limited to space and time. Whenever we are we can pray to Him any time of the night or day. And that is what we can do when we think that the waiting is long. He knows it when we have pain or are lonely, or when the days are long because we have nothing to do. The Lord is working out His plan of salvation for all those who find their hope and trust in Him, and

who come to Him in prayer. All those who accept the Lord Jesus as their Saviour do not have to come to a point of despair, for there is hope, and there is a future. Maybe there will be many more years to come. Maybe there will be another thousand years! We do not know anything about that. The Lord, Who is also our Father, He knows, and that is all that counts.

So let us keep counting, the hours, the days, the months, the years. Until one day we will be with the Lord, forever. Then we will be with Him, and then we will also experience Eternity. We will be with the Lord, it will be perfect, and it will be forever, so there will be no need anymore for numbering the days and the years.

Also in the year 1997 we will be allowed to look forward to that. It is a gift from the Lord that nobody can take away from us. The later it becomes, the closer we get to it. So 1997 is an important year, in which we will continue to pray for the last day with a number, that is the Day of Christ’s return.

*Like a cloak, Thy whole creation,  
From the skies to earth’s foundation,  
Thou dost change; it fades away,  
But Thou art the same for aye.  
Lord, the children of Thy servants,  
All the line of their descendants,  
Shall in safety dwell before Thee,  
For Thy steadfast love adore Thee.*

*Psalm 102:11*

## Birthdays in February:

### 12: Conny Van Amerongen

35 Bredin Pky #102, Orangeville, ON L9X 3X1

### 18: Cora Schoonhoven

24 James Speight, Markham, ON L3P 3G4

Happy Birthday to both of you!

Mary VandeBurgt sends us the following thank you note:

“Dear Brothers and Sisters

Would like to thank everyone from Abbotsford Church for the cards and gifts. Say thank you to everyone. Also like to thank everybody sending me many cards for my birthday. Enjoy that. Got over 65 cards. Thanks a lot. Love from Mary VandeBurgt.”

Thank you, Mary! We appreciate hearing from you!  
Until next month,

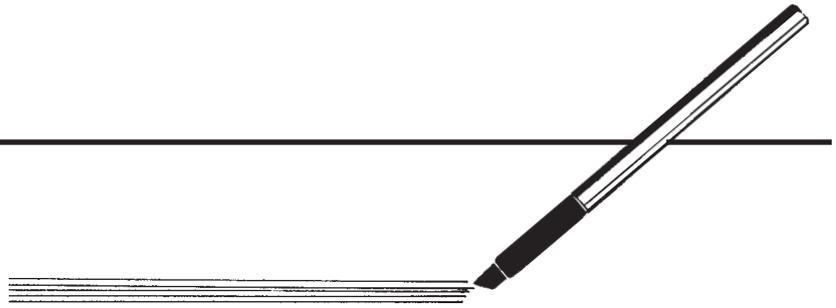
Mrs. R. Ravensbergen  
7462 Hwy. 20, RR 1, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

# THE HI-LITER

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## News from Here and There

By C. Van Spronsen



Rev. P.K.A. DeBoer and family received their visa for Australia. His farewell in Carman was planned for Sunday, November 24th and by now they have probably left the snowstorms behind and are basking in the Australian sun.

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The Council of the Providence Church in Edmonton decided "after considerable discussion" to issue tax receipts for donations made to the deaconry. The regular way of collecting for the needy is maintained. The only change being that those who put in a cheque for the deacons will receive a tax receipt at the end of the year.

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In Taber the Youth/Fellowship Committee requested that the Consistory appoint a leader for the Youth Group. "Decided that rather than the consistory *appoint* the leader (and so create a quasi-office of Youth Leader), the consistory would facilitate a meeting of parents to arrange for a leader, if and when needed."

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From the "Valley Herald" of Grand Valley we quote some interesting comments about the NIV from the hand of Rev. P. Aasman, who is also a member of the "Committee on Bible Translations." Council had decided to use the NIV in the worship services. However, "until now we have been held back from implementing this decision by rumours about a new philosophy in translation that could seriously change the next revision of the NIV, namely the philosophy of *inclusive language*." After an explanation of this term he continues: "The Committee of Bible Translation appointed by Synod 1995 has confirmed the rumour, and an inclusive language edition is already being published in England, and will be marketed in North America in 2002". . . . "There are good indications that both forms of the NIV will be available beyond the year 2002 but we as Consistory wish to wait until we have greater assurance that this will be the case. We have reason to believe that our Committee on Bible Translation will be able to provide us such an assurance before too long."

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You may know that the Churches in Australia are not organized into Classes but only meet together as Synod. However, this may undergo a change. "The Churches of Launceston and Legana, charged by Synod 1996 to study the formation of *classes*, have appointed a committee to undertake a study into this matter." Some tentative proposals are being sent to the Australian Churches.

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In the "Church News" of Coaldale and Taber a special tribute was paid in recognition of a unique service provided by Coaldale's organist and his wife: Mr. and Mrs. Jan VanDyk. Ever since the beginning of the Canadian Reformed Church in Southern Alberta he has accompanied the singing with an array of instruments. "Br. VanDyk must have accompanied the congregational singing for at least 60 years. (the beginnings must go back to the Netherlands -C.V.) To be an organist is a difficult job, you are either too slow or too fast, too loud or too soft, too young or too old. Jan endured it all." His wife was his faithful substitute. He not only played the various organs but also did much of the maintenance. A tribute from this place as well!

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Beware! In London a van was stolen from the church parking lot. "Apparently the thief came right into the church building, searched the overcoats for keys, found the one he was looking for and drove off. . . . Everyone is urged to lock their vehicles and to take their keys (or any valuables they might leave in their coats) with them into the pew." Probably good advice for all of us. (Since then the van was found).

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Rev. J. DeGelder left his congregation struggling with the exegesis of a sentence under "Congregational News" and thereby proved that one must understand the background of an author in order to be able to exegete his writings. He wrote: "Elders in the bulletin you'll find a very interesting and enlightening article." It was a "Dutch slip-of-the-pen" since the word *elders* can also be the Dutch word for *elsewhere*. This clarified the exegetical puzzle!

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In Attercliffe, ON the deacons have decided to visit all the families of the congregation on a regular basis, namely, once in the three years. "In this way the deacons hope to instruct the congregation about the ministry of mercy within the congregation, exhort the members to show mercy to the other members and acquaint themselves with the needs in the congregation."

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address.  
They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length.

## Dear Editors,

Re: Rev. Kampen's article, "The Max Factor."

I agree with the author (if that's what he is saying) that we should have a well-balanced spiritual diet. If we only snack and leave the Living Bread, our spiritual life will suffer. Indeed I have experienced this, when teaching at a general Christian school. At all devotions there, stories were read from men like Lucado, while the Bible remained closed. In the same school, knowledge of Scripture, in particular the Old Testament, was poor among staff and students. We should watch out for that! Nevertheless, there are a couple of issues I would like to raise.

1. The use of metaphorical stories always was and still is, an effective tool to communicate. C.S. Lewis used it in his Srewtape letters to warn the Church for the work of Satan. It was also Jesus' favorite method in addressing the covenantal laity. His stories were taken from real life – to communicate important messages and morals. It's cheap, therefore to quickly discard this as pure fantasy.
2. Christ has connected himself as-in-marriage to Christian believers so that He can live and work in them by His Spirit. This unity is stressed throughout the New Testament; Christ lives and works in and through His people. When we keep claiming that we are sinners and totally depraved, we effectively divorce Christ from Christians. When Rev. Kampen writes: "By paying attention to what man is doing in the story, it fails to pay attention to what God is doing in the story . . ." he uses such divorce language. God's true people are not separate from God and their work should never be contrasted with God's work (John 3:10).
3. Kampen's response to Lucado is also a typical response of the theological establishment to evangelicalism and renewal. Reinhold Niebuhr put down Billy Graham's

early work by writing: "This man has wedded considerable dramatic and demagogic gifts with a rather obscurist version of the Christian faith. His message is not completely irrelevant to the broader social issues of the day, but it approaches irrelevance. . . ." Fact is that Billy Graham reached the people and their hearts and was a much more effective tool of the Spirit than Reinhold Niebuhr. Jealousy and a perceived threat of the (only acceptable) ministry of the Gospel can easily flare up in times of renewal.

- 4 There is one more consideration. Perhaps Rev. Kampen is too optimistic. A lot of those who are snacking spiritually, may not have replaced the Living Bread but garbage on TV. Let's not cut out the snacks – it could be worse!

Isaac Smit,  
Mount Hope

## To the Editor:

The response of br. Bredenhof to my letter of concern (see *Clarion* Volume 45, No. 22) justifies my initial concerns to the extreme. The contradiction in terms such as "I am not arguing that fasting be compulsory of the church" flies in the face of "then by the same reasoning tithing also may be done away with, as may prayer."

If prayer is conditional to fasting there is a compulsive implication. If tithing by the elimination of fasting is put overboard, so be it, that is where it belongs. Tithing in the New Testament church is not an institution by God's Word. The reformers have done well to interpret the sacrifice of the widow's penny (Mark 12:42) by practising the concept of voluntary contributions. Our being belongs totally to our Father, and not just in the spiritual sense. Our offerings are a mature responsible act of thanksgiving. We may read a proper explanation on this in "The Deacon's Handbook" by Gerhard Berghof and Lester De Koster, a manual of stewardship (starting on page 46).

Is prayer subject to fasting? Calvin, in his writings to which I am referred to by br. Bredenhof, expresses the direct opposite: "fasting in itself is nothing, fasting should only be a tool to come to a frame of mind for concentrational purposes." Where does he recommend its use? For the church under calamitous situations. He specifically avoids it in the use of daily prayers. Calvin expresses extreme caution of the use of fasting as it is not a biblical institution. It has been abused by tyrannical forces in the Romanist church.

With this I wish to express my concern to the intimidating reference of the translation discussion. It is difficult for the average individual to discuss this matter due to ignorance of linguistics. When, however, I read Calvin saying there is not biblical reference for the institution of fasting, I take this can be accepted as parallel to the work of translation done or recommended by our reformed spiritual leaders. I feel that their work is trustworthy, basing it in part on this comment.

Br. Bredenhof is afraid of confusion by my reference of New Testament conversion of fasting to abstaining from the works of sin in the study of God's Word and the communion of saints. I am not surprised. Has the custom of the one week preparation before the participation at the Lord's Table ever dawned on him as a parallel to the fasting God instituted in Ex. 13:3-10?

May it not be taken as severe, but in love for the mature church of Christ: He will not have His people taught by books for the laity, Lord's Day 35. The preconception of concepts and the validity thereof by references to scripture passages out of context and quotations from writings of historical leaders is dangerous. Let us be on guard against this trap. I also recommend that we read the commentary of the Westminster Confession (By G.I. Williamson), page 169.

Yours in Christ  
Adrian L. Hamoen  
Vega, AB 



## Regional Synod West, December 3, 1996, Neerlandia, Alberta

On behalf of the convening church, the church at Neerlandia, Rev. W.B. Slomp welcomed the brothers and called the meeting to order. We sang Psalm 86:1,4, after which Rev. Slomp read 2 Cor. 4 and led in prayer. All delegates were present with proper credentials. After the constitution of Regional Synod, the following brothers were elected as officers:

Chairman: Rev. C. Van Spronsen  
 Vice-chairman: Rev. R. Aasman  
 Clerk: Rev. G. Ph. van Popta

The chairman, Rev. C. Van Spronsen thanked the church at Neerlandia for the preparatory work. He remembered that Rev. P.K.A. DeBoer and his family were in the process of moving to Australia, and that the church at Calgary has received a new minister, Rev. R.J. Eikelboom; he mentioned the vacancies of the churches at Carman and Coaldale. The chairman also remembered the passing away of Rev. J.D. Wielenga earlier this year.

### Appeals

Three appeals against decisions of Classis Alberta/Manitoba of Oct. 17,18/Dec. 18,19, 1995 were dealt with in closed session.

### Reports

- a. Report of the Deputies of Regional Synod. Rev. C. Van Spronsen and Rev. J. Visscher have submitted a report on the peremptory examination of candidate Richard Eikelboom at Classis Alberta/Manitoba of Oct. 15,16, 1996. They reported that they gave concurring advice and endorsed the decision to admit candidate Eikelboom to the ministry of the Word in the Canadian Reformed Churches.
- b. Report on Inspection of Archives. The church at Edmonton-Immanuel reported that the archives of Regional Synod West are in good order as of Dec. 5, 1995.
- c. Report re Auditing Books of the Treasurer. An audited report showed that the books of the treasurer of Regional Synod are in good order.

### Appointments

Treasurer: H. Lubbers  
 Church for Archives: Edmonton-Providence  
 Inspection of Archives: Edmonton-Immanuel  
 Deputies ad art. 48 CO:  
 For Alberta/Manitoba: R. Aasman, E.J. Tiggelaar, W.B. Slomp, G. Ph. van Popta (in that order)  
 For Pacific: C. Van Spronsen, J. Visscher, E. Kampen, J. Moesker (in that order)  
 Arrangements for Next Regional Synod  
 Convening church: Lynden, Washington  
 Suggested date: Dec. 2, 1997

### Closing

Rev. C. Van Spronsen thanked the brothers for their cooperation and also the ladies who supplied us with excellent meals and refreshments. He asked that Psalm 122:1,3 be sung and led in prayer. He closed the meeting.

For Regional Synod  
*R. Aasman*

## Press Release, Classis Pacific, December 10th-11th, 1996

1. On behalf of the convening church at Abbotsford, br. R. Schouten opens the meeting. After the delegates sing Hymn 64, he reads Eph. 5:15-33 and leads in prayer and thanksgiving. The delegates are welcomed. After the church at Yarrow finds the credentials in good order, the executive suggested by the previous classis takes its place and classis is constituted. The agenda is adopted. In order to deal more expeditiously with the abundance of correspondence received, Classis decides to form four committees.
2. Classis deals with the report of Advisory Committee one concerning two submissions of the church at Aldergrove. In its first submission, Aldergrove informs and solicits the response of classis to its decision in principle to offer the Emmanuel Free Reformed church of Abbotsford a relationship reflecting the unity which has been found with that

church. The Aldergrove council has decided in principle to offer the Emmanuel Free Reformed church a relationship including i) pulpit exchange ii) admission to one another's Lord's Supper celebrations iii) recognition of each other's discipline and iv) encouragement of the members of the respective congregations to get to know each other more and to work together in God's church. In its second submission, Aldergrove requests Classis to approach Regional Synod with the request to overture General Synod 1998 with a request to appoint deputies for contact with the Free Reformed Churches of North America. A letter is also received from the church at Langley supporting these two submissions of Aldergrove. In response to the submissions of Aldergrove, Classis decides as follows:

### Observations:

- a) The Can. Reformed church at Aldergrove has on Feb. 20th, 1995, recognized the Emmanuel Free Reformed church at Abbotsford as a true church of our Lord.
- b) The church at Aldergrove gives a detailed description of past contacts and discussions with the Emmanuel church.
- c) The church at Aldergrove has decided in principle to offer the Emmanuel church a relationship which includes pulpit exchanged, Lord's Supper admission, recognition of each other's discipline and encouraging members to get to know each other more.
- d) The church at Aldergrove has approached Classis Pacific on the matter of pulpit exchange with the Emmanuel church in its meetings of April 1995, April 1996 and Dec. 1996.
- e) The church at Aldergrove overtures Classis Pacific to overture the next general synod via the regional synod to appoint a committee to take up contact with the Free Ref. churches of North America. In a letter to Classis Pacific of Dec. 10th, 1996, the church at Langley expresses its support of this overture.
- f) Classis Pacific of Dec. 10th, 1996, in its discussion of this matter heard many expressions of gratitude from

the churches in Classis Pacific that the church at Aldergrove and the Emmanuel church at Abbotsford could come to a mutual recognition of each other as true churches of our Lord and that they desire to promote this recognition in their respective federations.

- g) Acts of General Synod 1995 include:
  - i) Article 52 in which the General Synod declares the overtures of the churches at Aldergrove and Langley regarding the Free Reformed churches to be inadmissible because these matters should first have been dealt with by the minor assemblies.
  - ii) Article 86, Consideration G, that "while respecting the initiative of the local church to pursue contacts with churches in their area, it is desirable that as much as possible the churches follow a common approach and make use of the advice of the deputies."
- h) Classis Pacific April 16th 1996 has observed in Article 11 of the Acts, Observations and Considerations F, that "although it is not specifically against the Church Order to have pulpit exchange, admission to each other's Lord's Supper or recognition of each other's discipline, the federative commitment would require consideration and comment at a federative level. The other churches in the federation must not unduly frustrate unity initiatives at the local level."

#### Considerations:

- a) The church at Aldergrove has sufficiently informed Classis Pacific about their contacts with the Emmanuel church and substantiated their decision that it is a true church of our Lord (cf. Article 29, Belgic Confession).
- b) In light of the fact that the Emmanuel church at Abbotsford is a member of the Free Reformed churches of North America and the church at Aldergrove is a member of the Can. Reformed churches, the cause of unity would require that discussions between these churches in these federations also take place on a federative level.
- c) Although the church at Aldergrove has "in principle" decided to offer the Emmanuel church a relationship which includes pulpit exchange, Lord's Supper admission, church discipline and encouraging members, this church has not yet imple-

mented its decision and has asked classis several times to respond to its decision.

- d) Seeing that both General Synod 1995 and Classis Pacific April 16th, 1996 urge the churches "to follow a common approach" and to give due consideration to the "federative commitment," the church at Aldergrove should take into account not only its relationship with the Emmanuel church at Abbotsford, but also its relationship with the churches in Classis Pacific, some of whom have expressed serious disagreement with the implementation of this relationship at this time.

#### Recommendations:

- a) Classis Pacific notes with joy and thanksgiving the confessional unity which the Can. Ref. church at Aldergrove and the Emmanuel Free Reformed church at Abbotsford have observed in each other and which has led to a mutual recognition as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - b) Classis Pacific urges the Regional Synod of the Can. Ref. churches in Western Canada to support this unity endeavour by overturing General Synod 1998 at Fergus, ON, to establish a committee for contact with the Free Ref. churches of N.A. with the intent of reaching full federative unity.
  - c) Classis Pacific advises the Can. Ref. church at Aldergrove to refrain from implementing its relationship with the Emm. Free Reformed church at Abbotsford, pending the decision of Gen. Synod 1998.
  - d) Classis Pacific encourages the church at Aldergrove to keep alive this matter of promoting unity both locally and federatively.
3. The report of Advisory Committee four regarding agenda item 6c is put into discussion. This item concerns a letter from the church at Yarrow in which it requests Classis to judge that previous classes erred in allowing requests for advice from the churches to conclude with various opinions or responses from the members of Classis instead of with one advice from Classis as a body. Classis declares the request of the church at Yarrow inadmissible because Yarrow appeals the actions of a Classis to another Classis. As one should appeal actions of a minor assembly to a major assembly (C.O.

Art. 31), the proper address for this letter would be a Regional Synod.

4. In closed session, the report of Advisory Committee two regarding agenda item 6d is put into discussion. This letter is a grievance of a family about certain matters in a local congregation of which they are members. This letter is declared inadmissible on the grounds that i)the br. and sr. do not substantiate their accusations ii)they do not ask for a specific judgment and iii)they give no evidence that the matters of concern have been specifically and fully addressed with their local consistory.
5. In closed session, Classis receives and deals with a report from Advisory Committee two regarding an appeal from a brother and sister of one of the churches. A response is drafted.
6. In closed session, Classis receives and deals with a report from Advisory Committee three also regarding an appeal from a brother and sister of one of the churches. A response is drafted.
7. A letter from one of the churches is declared inadmissible because it concerns an appeal on the agenda of Classis while such appeals do not call for individual responses and are to be judged on their own merits.
8. A request for financial assistance is received from the church at Vernon along with a recommendation from the Committee for Needy Churches. Classis decides to grant the church at Vernon \$12,000 for the year 1997.
9. The church at Cloverdale requests Classis to appoint a Committee to investigate the possibility of Classis Pacific being split into two classes of six churches each. Cloverdale believes the present number of delegates from twelve churches makes effective work too difficult. According to Cloverdale, smaller Classis meetings would reduce the work of each assembly and would also encourage greater participation by elder delegates. Classis agrees with this request and decides to appoint a committee consisting of brothers B. Lodder, J. Moesker and D. Moes.
10. Question Period according to Article 44 of the Church Order is held. The church at Smithers requests and receives input from Classis regarding the future direction of the mission work among the aboriginal people in the Smithers area.

11. Closing Matters: The church at Aldergrove is appointed as convening church for the next Classis. Time: April 08th, 9:00 a.m. (alternate date: June 10th, 1996). Place: Langley. Suggested officers: Chairman: R. Schouten; Vice-chairman: J. Huigen; Clerk: J. Visscher. Question Period is held. Censure according to Article 34, Church Order, is deemed unnecessary by the chairman. The Acts are read and adopted. The Press Release is read and approved. A song of praise is sung to God and Rev. R. Schouten leads the delegates in thanksgiving and prayer for the churches. The meeting is closed.

*R. Schouten,*  
vice-chairman at the time.

### Press Release, Classis Ontario North of Dec. 13, 1996

Rev. C. Bosch, of the convening church of Burlington South called the meeting to order. We sang Hymn 11:1,3 read Isa. 61 and joined in opening prayer. The delegates were welcomed, their credentials were checked and

were found to be in order. The church of Orangeville had an instruction.

Classis was constituted and the officers took their places, Rev. P.G Feenstra serving as Chairman, Rev. W. den Hollander as Clerk and Rev. C. Bosch as Vice Chairman. In his opening words Rev. Feenstra mentioned some matters of memorabilia. The Church of Chatsworth hopes to have a worship service in its new premises on Dec. 25, 1996. The agenda was adopted.

A report of a special church visitation to the church of Elora was read. A report of the church of Fergus re. the Fund for Needy Students was read also.

In a report, the Committee for Needy Churches provided classis with statistical information re. the needy churches in classical district On North. After thorough discussion classis decides to approve the committee's recommendations and sets the assessment for 1997 at \$32.50/communicant member.

Classis approves the Church of Orangeville's request (art.10 C.O - proper support) and sets the assessment for 1997 at \$4.80 /communicant member.

Question period ( art. 44 C.O ) is held. The church of Ottawa asks for,

and receives advice in re. to the supervision of those who are living outside of its geographical boundaries. ( Trenton area) It was reported that the church of Toronto is looking into the possibility of establishing a house congregation in the Trenton area.

The next Classis is scheduled to be convened by the church of Burlington West on Mar. 7, 1997. Proposed officers for this classis are: Chairman - Rev. G. Nederveen; Vice Chairman - Rev. W. den Hollander; Clerk- Rev. P.G Feenstra.

One of the members makes use of personal question period. The chairman judged that no censure ( ad art.34) was necessary.

The Acts were read and approved. The Press release was read and approved.

Classis joined in singing Hymn 15: 1,3,4 and Rev. Feenstra led in thanksgiving prayer. The chairman closed classis.

For Classis Ontario North  
(Dec. 13, 1996)  
*Rev. C. Bosch,*  
Vice-Chairman

## CLARION

### ADVERTISEMENTS

#### *Births*

With thankfulness to our heavenly Father for His precious gift of life, we joyfully announce the birth of our daughter and sister

#### **MARIETTA ROSE**

Born: November 6, 1996

A sister for *Casey* and *Ryan*

**Case and Rita Biesbroek** (nee Bosscher)

19836 43<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Langley, BC V3A 3C4

*For Thou, O LORD, hast made me glad by Thy work; at the works of Thy hands I sing for joy. Psalm 92:4*

With thankfulness to the Lord who made all things well, we joyfully announce the birth of our fifth child, a son

#### **QUENTIN SCOTT**

Born December 2, 1996

A brother for *Blaine, Keith, Mark* and *Evan*

**Ben and Willie Vandermeulen** (nee Jelsma)

Box 1098, Carman, MB R0G 0J0

The Lord has again richly blessed our family. With joyful hearts we announce the birth of

#### **MATTHEW ADRIAN**

Born November 8, 1996

A brother for *Allison, Jessica, Kaitlyn*

**Andy and Sandra VanderVeen** (nee Veenema)

RR 5, Thamesville, ON N0P 2K0

With thanks and praise to God, we announce the birth of our daughter

#### **LUCIA JOANNA**

Born November 14, 1996

A sister for *Diane, Teresa, Ralph, Steven, Liz-Ann, Nicky*

**Gerald and Jean Terpstra** (nee VanLuik)

4644 John Street, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B1

*O LORD, our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Psalm 8:1*

We thank our Father in heaven for entrusting to our care another one of His children, a son, whom we have named

#### **REUBEN**

He was born on December 1, 1996 to

**Paul and Evelyn Aasman** (nee Hordyk)

A 'little' brother for *Joshua, Mark, Amber* and *Leah*

RR 2, Grand Valley, ON L0N 1G0; e-mail: paasman@headwaters.com

With thankfulness to the Lord for blessing us with one of His covenant children, we joyfully announce the birth of our second son

#### **TRISTAN ANTHONY**

November 25, 1996

**Anthony and Julie Groenewold**

A brother for *Cameron*

5th Grandchild for Mr. and Mrs. B. Douma

42nd Grandchild for Mr. and Mrs. W. Groenewold

28 Townsend Street, Armadale, 6112 Western Australia