

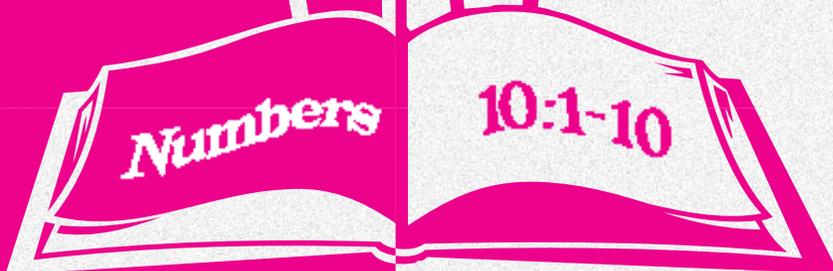
# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

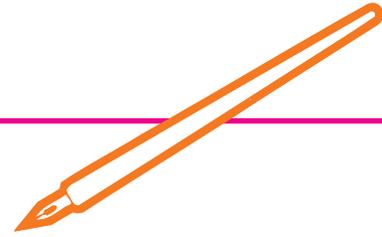
VOLUME 49, NO. 12    JUNE 9, 2000



*Rev. and Mrs. K. Wieske's  
send-off*



By J. Geertsema



## Why Canadian Reformed? Is it really so dull?

### A complaint?

Recently I heard that some of our young people at times worship in other churches or even with other groups of people. One of the reasons given is that our worship services are not very exciting but rather dull, uninteresting, and do not involve the worshippers. As young people you want to be involved, you want to be active. You want to do something, also in worshipping God. Worship is not only a matter of the head, of the intellect. It is also very much a matter of the heart and of the hand. And when you do something for the Lord with your hands, or are otherwise actively involved, you have the idea that you do something for the Lord. And that gives you a good feeling.

What should one say in reaction to this? In the first place, I would like to express appreciation. It is good when young people in the church desire to do something for the Lord. It is good when they want to be actively involved in the service of the Lord. As the older generation, we need to realize that the times are different. Half a century, or even two decades ago, young people quite readily followed the older generation and awaited their time. Typically, the community with its traditions set the stage. One's personal feelings did not strongly dominate the scene. Today the emphasis is on the individual and his or her feelings. Formerly, the emphasis was on doctrine. Now it is on spirituality – the spirituality of action and emotion.

But does God's Word not recommend action and joyful love? Should we not rather be doers than just hearers (Matt 5:24-27). James 1:22 says, "Do not merely listen to the Word. . . . Do what it says." And does the Word not say that we have to love our lost neighbour, help him and win him for Christ? Does our Lord not tell us that we as the church are the light of the world and that we must let this light shine, that is, do good works (Matt 5:14-16)? The older generation, perhaps a bit more intellectually and doctrinally minded, should not kill the younger generations enthusiasm for the Lord. We should all rejoice when we see the younger generation showing love for the Lord and the desire to be actively involved in the service of God and in letting the light of the Gospel shine in a darkening world full of needs around us.

Does this now mean that it is good for our young people to attend other churches or groups where they feel they find what they are seeking?

### The time in which we live

I would like to respond with a request to the young people who feel they do not find in the Canadian Reformed

Churches what they seek and think is biblical. My request is that you not only be critical of your church in which you were born, but that you also try to understand both the time in which you live and what God's Word teaches.

First of all, it is very important that we understand the spirit of the time in which we live. The articles in *Clarion* by Dr. F. Oosterhoff about Postmodernism are important in this respect. The Postmodern times we live in is marked by a spirit of individualism. What the individual person feels and experiences is said to be the norm to go by. Allow me to tell you what I once heard in a public lecture on feminism and the view of God. The speaker, a professor, said that she could not accept the old patriarchal order in which the man is the head and leader and in which the woman has to accept a subordinate position under man. All people are equal. Therefore she also felt it incorrect to speak about God as a "He." She said she *wanted* to experience God as "She."

The point I want to make is that not only are experience and feelings important in this regard, but so is the human will. What this professor *wanted* to feel and experience was what counted. That was the norm. That was the spirituality she was seeking. This may be somewhat extreme; however, it is characteristic of the spirit of our time. We all – older generation and youth – must examine ourselves as to what leads us in our desires and in our thinking. Is it only the old inherited tradition that leads us as older generation? Or are we truly taught by God's Word? And is it the spirit of the time that has a grip on our thinking and desires as younger generation, or does the Word of God? Is what God says the norm? Or do we make God's Word say what we want, and make that the standard to live by? Do we, perhaps, read what we want into God's Word? Are we honest to ourselves and others, but above all to our God? Or do we want to be free to do what we want to do, without asking this honest question: What does God want?

### Experience and feeling rather than faith

It is a mark of our time to build on one's own experience. People ask how they can experience God. They do not experience or feel Him in their life. This lack of experiencing God and the lack of feeling that He is there and is there with you, can cause (young) people to say they cannot believe. But then, when one is actively involved in the worship of God with much hymn singing, much singing of praise, and other actions, then these things not only help a person feel involved in worshipping God, but they also help one to believe in God and feel close to God.

This is a very important point to be aware of. Do we build our faith and closeness to God on our experiencing God? Is that what God teaches us as the proper way? On this point the LORD teaches us very clearly – and this first of all – that He wants us to base our faith on what He says in his Word and not on our experience of Him in any other way. In Deuteronomy 4:12 the LORD warns his people Israel by pointing to what happened at Mount Sinai: “Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments.”

The entire Bible speaks in exactly this same line. When Hebrews 11 speaks about the examples of faith in the history of salvation – Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, etc. – the point is constantly made that these examples of faith consistently acted in humble submission according to the words which God had spoken to

them. Their faith was a matter of hearing and doing the Word. God comes to us in his revealed and preached Word. Think of Romans 10:6-15. Where do we find Christ? In the word that is preached. That “word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith that we are proclaiming.”

It is a mark of pagan religion to build faith on experience and excitement. Look at the golden calf episode. The Israelites said to Aaron: “Make us our god who will go before us.” They wanted Aaron to make a visible image of God so that they could see, that is experience, God. Through that image, they wanted to feel God close to them and themselves close to God. And when they saw their God, the LORD, in that golden calf, they became very excited. They started to dance and sing, shout and jump (Exod 32). But God was not pleased. They refused to believe in Him on the simple basis of his Word that He had spoken to them. They had forgotten already in particular the second rule for true faith: Serve God according to his will as expressed (proclaimed) in his Word.

Now you can have your criticisms about the Canadian Reformed churches.

And there may be a reason for it. We are not perfect. We fall short. We need the daily conversion, too. And the sermons, the main point in our worshiping, may not be exciting. But we do seriously seek to abide by the Word of God. It is that Word that is the norm for faith and life for us. For in that Word God comes to us and gives himself to us. That is what He tells us in that very Word. And therefore, God wants to come to his people in that Word. And He wants his people to come to the proclamation of that Word. Therefore also do we at the College teach the students to preach that Word: “Thus says the LORD.”

Of course, this also means that the ministers must do their utmost to do nothing but preach God’s Word and do this interestingly, making it as relevant for your life as they can. But just like you have your shortcomings, so have they. They do not always succeed in doing it well. Yet we all, ministers and congregations, are bound by the Holy Spirit to the pure preaching of the Word of the Lord. It is the mark of the true church to abide by the Word of God and do all things according to it. 

### *What’s inside?*

Worship is the most important part of church life. When we gather together as God’s people to listen to his Word and sing our praises to Him, then we are involved in the greatest aspect of what it means to be church. In this issue you will find two articles related to worship. Dr. Van Dam continues his mini-series on the topic addressing the questions of *where* and *when* we worship. In the editorial, Prof. Geertsema considers some of the criticisms directed against the Reformed style of worship. He puts out a challenge to old and young, preacher and parishioner.

The Lord Jesus Christ commissioned the church to go out and preach the gospel to the nations. In obedience to that command, our western churches have sent out another missionary, the Rev. Ken Wieske. You will find a report about the farewell evening in this issue.

In the press review, Dr. De Jong writes about church-federation matters. In particular, he surveys some recent decisions and movements of our sister churches in the Netherlands.

You will also find a Hiliter, a report of MERF, a Ray of Sunshine, and a Reader’s Forum. We hope you enjoy the issue.

GvP



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

#### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: C. Van Dam  
 Managing Editor: G.Ph. van Popta  
 Coeditors: R. Aasman, J. De Jong, J. Geertsema,  
 N.H. Gootjes, G.Ph. van Popta

#### ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION  
 46 Sulphur Springs Road, Ancaster, ON L9G 1L8  
 Fax: (905) 304-4951  
 E-Mail: clarion@compuserve.com

#### ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS: (subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.  
 One Beghin Avenue  
 Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5  
 Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202  
 Email: clarion@premier.mb.ca  
 World Wide Web address: <premier.mb.ca/clarion.html>

#### SUBSCRIPTION RATES

FOR 2000	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*		
U.S.A. U.S. Funds	\$36.00*	\$60.00*
International	\$39.00	\$52.00
	\$60.00	\$90.00

\* Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT  
 Advertisements: \$11.75 per column inch

#### Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

Agreement No. 1377531  
 Publications Mail Registration No. 09907  
 ISSN 0383-0438

#### Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

### IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – Why Canadian Reformed? Is it really so dull? — J. Geertsema . . . . .	262
Treasures, New and Old – Working and Hoping — J. Slaa . . . . .	264
Reader’s Forum — Dress Rehearsal . . . . .	265
What is Worship – Some biblical principles of public worship? — C. Van Dam . . . . .	266
Ray of Sunshine – Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman . . . . .	269
The Hi-Liter — J. De Gelder . . . . .	270
News from MERF- Canada . . . . .	272
Press Review — Churches in Movement — J. De Jong . . . . .	273
Send-off Evening for Rev. and Mrs. K. Wieske . . . . .	276
Reflections — Ralph Winkel . . . . .	278
Our Little Magazine — Aunt Betty . . . . .	279

By J. Slaa

## Working and Hoping

*Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain. (Deut 25:4)*

The farmers have finished with their planting. Many others, working hard, look forward to their vacations. It is a good time to consider our daily work in the light of God's Word. The danger exists that we forget why we work. We have a tendency to work for our own pleasure. Another danger is that we pat ourselves on the back when we are prosperous. God commands us to work hard and efficiently, promising to give fruits on such work. But it is not true that prosperity is the direct result of hard work. Rather, prosperity is one of God's gracious rewards. We must remember to work hard and efficiently *while* trusting and hoping that God will bless us.

In the text above, this point is addressed. The farmer would thresh grain by having his ox trample across the threshing floor. With a muzzle, the farmer prevented his ox from eating the grain. If allowed to eat as it worked, the ox would stop on occasion, costing the farmer valuable time. Not only that, the ox would eat the valuable grain, cutting into the farmer's yield. For the sake of productivity and higher yields, the farmer muzzled his ox.

Previously, the LORD addressed the situation where some of the crops were left over in the field or orchard after the harvest. It was natural that the farmer would want to go over the field again and gather the crops that were missed. But God enjoined his people to withstand this temptation in order to provide something for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. We read in Deuteronomy 24:22, "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this." By letting the needy glean the leftovers, the people of Israel indicated that they were thankful for what they had received. The opportunity to farm their own land

was a great blessing from the LORD, who had delivered them from the bondage of Egypt. Furthermore, the people showed that they awaited the greater inheritance: life forever with their covenant God. Therefore, they should share their earthly blessings with those who were less fortunate.

Similarly, the farmer should not concern himself with the effects of an unmuzzled ox. Muzzling an ox was an act of stinginess, designed to reap the highest profits with the most minimal of losses. What was the danger in this? First, there was a possibility for oppression. Second, there was a tendency for the Israelites to give themselves the glory when all went well. By muzzling the oxen, their yields would probably be higher. But this would make the farmer think that *his* business practices were what brought about the good result. In the meantime, it was the blessing of the LORD that they were threshing grain in the first place. Keeping the ox unmuzzled was a sign of *thankfulness* and *faithfulness* and *trust* in the LORD who provides blessing on the farm. Third, there was a temptation for the farmer to give full attention to the things of this world.

Some commentators suggest that this text doesn't refer to oxen. They suggest that this truth must be applied toward *people*. That is what the context is about – how we deal with those with whom we have relationships. It is a commandment for masters to pay laborers well, and not to deprive them for their own gain. This point is addressed elsewhere (Deut 24:14, 15; Lev 19:13). The people were oppressed in the land of Egypt. They did not receive the due reward for their labours. Since the LORD had freed them, they should not oppress others. Instead, they should trust in God to bless their businesses.

The apostle Paul quotes our text on two different occasions (1 Tim 5:17, 18; 1 Cor 9). Both times, he applies this Old Testament command to the master/laborer relationship. Specifically, he cautions the churches to faithfully support those who labour in the preaching and teaching. Notice what the apostle writes: "Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely He says this for us, doesn't He? Yes, this is written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest" (1 Cor 9:9, 10). Plowing and threshing in hope – that is the point. Employers and employees should labour in the hope that God will bless them. As they fulfil their kingdom tasks, they should rejoice in their freedom and blessings by also helping those who are less fortunate. They should work towards the greater inheritance. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col 3:23,24).

Our Lord Jesus Christ served us. He gave himself fully to his kingdom task, which was to free those who were trapped in their sin. He loved us, and put our interests first, rather than his own. He suffered in our place. He sacrificed himself so that we might be blessed. Christ has given us freedom from the oppression of our sin.

We must follow in his steps. We must serve our Master in heaven. The farmers must sow their seed and feed their animals. The workers must do their jobs. Fathers and mothers should faithfully do their tasks and duties. Office-bearers, and others, must give of their time and talents. All must perform

their kingdom tasks, trusting that God will give fruit on their labours.

We show that we trust God by not muzzling the ox. That means we must do our work with generous hearts. Thankful to God, we will not hold back our blessings with tight fists. As God blesses us, we should ensure that no one is oppressed. It means we

should also spend our money for God's kingdom, and not on worthless things. We should not hoard it. We should go forward and do God's kingdom work in hope.

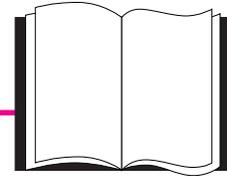
If God so cares for the birds of the air, or for the lilies of the field, or for the ox on the threshing floor, then He will certainly care for us. God gave all

of creation to us, in order to develop it, and work with it for the praise of his Name. Let us with pleasure give of ourselves, our time, our talents and blessings. Let us do our work in the hope that God will bless us.

*Rev. James Slaa is the minister of the Canadian Reformed Church of Elora, Ontario.*



## READER'S FORUM



# Dress Rehearsal

*By Jane Vandervliet*

There is a curious item on display in the poolroom of Spadina House, one of Toronto's old houses now open to the public. This stately residence sits in the shadow of Casa Loma and boasts of once having had one of the Royal Georges as a visitor. The tour guide explains that after dinner the gentlemen would retire to the poolroom. The women were strictly not welcome to join them as they puffed on their cigars, drank brandy and played their gentlemanly game. This sanctuary for men sports a magnificent, massively heavy pooltable, side tables, manly type paintings on the walls and a small, framed, black and white drawing of a girl. This pretty girl is wearing a long dress which billows slightly to reveal a lovely pair of NAKED ankles. The tour guide laughingly tells visitors that it is an example of 19th century pornography.

Why relate what appears to be merely an amusing history lesson? One is inclined to dismiss the stuffy Victorians as ridiculous prudes who were hopelessly outdated even in their own day. Times change, we say, standards of dress and civility are constantly remaking themselves. Perhaps, but something much more significant changed. In the 19th century "Toronto-the-Good," and all Canada, was Christian. Today, by the diligent preaching of godless humanists, Toronto is "No-good" and all Canada flounders pathetically without common moral standards.

The most obvious proof is in modes of dress. The Victorian mode of dress reflected their ideas of modesty, founded in Scripture. Women were well covered, constrictingly so. Today, anything goes! Even the most basic laws of decency are struck down (the crown vs Gwen Jacobs). This is only to be expected when silver-tongued evangelists of humanism like David Suzuki preach at public expense, week after week, that we are just an evolutionary step away from the behaviour of baboons who flash their colourful be-hinds to attract mates.

What has any of this to do with us? We are the church of God, defenders of the faith! Alas, we have fallen like all the rest. Many of our women and girls dress in the most skimpy skirts possible. They cannot bend down for fear of exposing private body parts. They squirm in their seats pulling endlessly at cloth that just will stretch no further. Truly, even Victorian prostitutes would slink away in shame at the sight.

How could this have happened? I contend that it is the result of a failure of leadership. Ministers will not preach on 1 Timothy 2:9, 10. Elders will not set standards of modesty. Husbands and fathers won't protect their wives and daughters from the lure of sexually inclined fashions created by the perverts of Paris. Parents don't teach their daughters **and sons** to look for godliness in a mate. Surely, how you

dress reveals your spiritual state as much as how you speak or act.

It is not necessary to dress like the Mennonites. That would not be "with propriety" (1 Tim 2:9 NKJ). We can dress fashionably, not sticking out like a sore thumb, and still be modest. Anything goes, right! So set your standards not by the fashion magazines but by what you would wear if God invited you to His throne room. And He does that each Sunday as we gather in his presence.

What in practical terms is modest dress? Due to a complete lack of standards, I have been forced to invent my own. I tell my girls: skirts below the knee, neckline near the collarbone, no see-through fabrics. This does not cover every situation, bathing suits and shorts need rules of their own, but it certainly suits Sunday finery.

I want the issue hotly debated to the end that we arrive at a common consensus of what modest dress is. Our young people will then have a standard to dress by just like we have standards of behaviour regarding politeness, cleanliness, respect for authority, etc. My sad experience elsewhere has been that when questioned on the issue the church leaders shift uneasily in their seats, seemingly out of embarrassment, wishing no doubt that I would shut up and go away. What is your response?

*Mrs. Vandervliet is a member of the Canadian Reformed Church at Guelph, Ontario.*



---

# What is worship?

## Some biblical principles of public worship<sup>1</sup>

(Second of three articles)

By C. Van Dam

### WHERE DO WE WORSHIP?

If someone asks you, “Where do you worship?” you give him the address of your church. Right? The question I am raising is, however, somewhat different and lies behind the answer we generally give: “we worship in church.” It is good to go back to the Old Testament to get some perspective on this.

#### A consecrated place

*The Old Testament tabernacle and temple*

When people in the Old Testament worshipped, it was before God, in his presence. *The* normative place of worship par excellence was the tabernacle and later the temple. It will be helpful to consider the principles and implications of the tabernacle and temple for us today.

The tabernacle, and later the temple, was to be the focal point of Israel’s worship because that is where God chose to dwell in the midst of his people. There He was enthroned on the cherubim. The tabernacle spoke of the miracle of God with man. Yes, a miracle not to be underestimated. The sovereign holy God wanted to come down from his glorious habitation in heaven to live in the midst of a people – a people that had nothing loveable about them. He came to them and redeemed them of grace alone.

It was only because of his great love for them (cf. Deut 7:7-9) that He made a place for himself where there normally would not be a place or room for the Holy One of Israel. And so God made plans for a tabernacle and passed them on to Moses and eventually the

tabernacle was built. And then the sovereign holy One, GOD, came down, down from heaven’s glory, to live in the midst of his people (Exod 40). Now public worship before the face of God was possible in an official and regulated way. God with man!

There are several things we need to note here. The desire of God to be with his people and to “walk with them,” so to speak, through the desert and through life, calls to mind the marvel of paradise. How perfect and full of bliss that paradisiacal communion of God must have been. How perfect and beautiful must worship have been there! Sin destroyed that, but God did not give up on his creation. Indeed, if

“It is an awesome thing to be in God’s presence.”

you study the tabernacle carefully you notice that God in essence created a piece of paradise there inside that tabernacle. Like paradise, God was there and this was holy ground. No sin or uncleanness was to be found here. This was the Holy of Holies. And like paradise it was guarded with the cheru-

bim (Gen 3:24) – the cherubim embroidered on the curtains, the curtains of the tabernacle walls and especially the cherubim on the curtain separating the holy of holies from the holy place. God is holy, holy, holy! Cherubim filled the tabernacle – they are also elsewhere in Scripture associated with God – and here they symbolically guard the Holy One of Israel!

This brings us to another point we need to note. It appears to be human to consistently underestimate God’s holiness. Israel had been at the Sinai, and they had heard God speaking to them with his own voice, and yet they had disobeyed that voice by making a golden calf and calling it their God (Exod 32). Israel had seen the Lord come down in glory to the tabernacle and officially occupy his dwelling place in their midst and yet, they so easily underestimated his holiness. Think of how Nadab and Abihu were struck down with death because they used strange fire to bring the incense offering (Lev 10:1-3). Or think of how much later King Uzziah was struck with leprosy for attempting to bring the incense offering against God’s command (2 Chron 26:16-20). But, God does not allow people to fool with his holiness. *Holy* is He! This is also reflected in the stringent demands of how the priests should dress in his presence. It is an awesome thing to be in God’s presence.

This brings us to a third point. God needed to protect his people from his holiness, otherwise He could not dwell in their midst. And so around the tabernacle God instituted the insulating service of the sacrifice for atonement. Blood had to be shed for atonement – all pointing to the blood of *the* lamb,

Jesus Christ. Blood had to be shed so that the fellowship of God with his people could rest on a good and just basis (cf. Lev 17:11).

The sacrifice of atonement however brought obligations to God's people. They must cleanse themselves. The camp must be clean and holy for God is in their midst. Awesome is God! But, when the people do not obey, or do not appreciate God's holiness and sin wilfully, then the Lord breaks out against his people and punishes them with death. God's presence demands holiness. Small wonder that God's Word in the Old Testament warns: "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God." (Eccl 5:1). Worship brings one into the presence of God and he is holy!

### **The present dwelling place of God**

Now the Old Testament tabernacle is only a shadow of better things to come! With the coming of God in the flesh in Jesus Christ the dwelling of God in a tabernacle and temple is fulfilled. Christ came and "he tabernacled" among his people (John 1:14). When his work on earth was finished and the atonement sacrifice had been brought (Heb 7:27; 9:11-10:25), the temple was vacated. The curtain between the holy of holies and the holy place was ripped down from top to bottom (Matt 27:51). It was no longer necessary. God had come to be with his people, and his people could go directly to God through The Way, Jesus Christ (John 14:6). The miracle of atonement had been accomplished. God with us – Immanuel.

The fuller implications of what that meant became evident on the day of Pentecost. Again God, the Holy One, came down in sovereign grace. The Spirit was poured out (Acts 2). This was a momentous event. No longer was the focal point of God's dwelling to be found in Jerusalem, in the temple holy of holies (John 4:21-24), but now the congregation is the temple and dwelling place of the living God (1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:22). God's people is now the new creation, holy ground, where God is pleased to dwell in this world. God with us (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). This is a staggering truth and has enormous implications for our communal worship.

For one thing it means that, when the church of Christ comes together in

public worship, it is in a most intimate way in the very presence of God. When we go to worship, we do not go "to the house of God" as is sometimes said. No, we are the house of God! The congregation is that consecrated and holy place where public worship takes place. And therefore a congregation saving up for a new building has nothing to be ashamed of if it worships in a gym or community centre. The critical ingredient for coming into God's presence is not the physical building, but the assembled people of God in whose midst God himself is.

**"God's people is now the new creation, holy ground, where God is pleased to dwell in this world."**

This makes worship a very joyous experience. God with us! We can sing his praises and rejoice in his presence. But it also means that there is danger involved! God is holy! God is a consuming fire who punishes iniquity (cf. Heb 12). We need to remember this for we live in a culture that disdains God and has no sensitivity for his holiness.

When we go to church, we go to meet our God. We should therefore take time in church prior to the official service to reflect on that momentous fact, to ponder the solemnity of the occasion, and to mentally continue to prepare ourselves for worship. We occupy holy ground when we are assembled for worship in church. In a real sense, the congregation is the holy of holies! O, the grace of God in coming near to us in the Spirit! But let us remember: "Guard your steps when you go to church" to paraphrase Ecclesiastes 5:1 for today. "Be careful."

When you enter a large cathedral as can be found in Europe, you are spell-bound. You cannot help but be. The stone arches soar upward, to heaven as it were, and the enormous dimensions of the building cannot but evoke awe and wonder. In this way the medieval architects forced the human spirit to look up to heaven and to remember, you come into God's presence. He is here, and how great he is! One becomes quiet and subdued, and even tourists going through speak softly.

Well, if a stone building can evoke such respect, how much more must we be in awe in our home church when gathered for worship. Then we are indeed in God's very presence.

Do we know or realize well enough what that means? When the people assembled at the Sinai, God reminded them that they had to be consecrated, and their clothes had to be washed. They had to come in their best form (Exod 19:10). The priests who were to minister to him received very specific instructions as to what to wear (e.g., Exod 28 and see above). It is no small thing to come into his presence! "Guard your steps!" Yes, also how we dress is important. In light of the greatness and holiness of the Lord of Lords and the king of kings, the trend to dressing down when going to church is not a good one. As a well-known Old Testament scholar put it: "The way in which one appears physically before God frequently betrays one's attitude of mind (cf. Matt 22:11-14)."<sup>2</sup> Let us not lose our sense of awe and wonder at being in the presence of God.

### **WHEN DO WE WORSHIP?**

When do we worship? On the Lord's Day, on Sundays. Yes, but what is involved in one day a week being set apart? What is the message from God in this? Let us once more go back to the Old Testament. It will have to be very brief in our present context.

### **The meaning of the Sabbath**

Shortly after the Lord gave the Ten Commandments from the Sinai, the Lord summarized his covenant will in the so-called Book of the Covenant (Exod 20:22-23:33) which Moses

passed on to Israel. It is striking that, when God summarized his teaching on the sabbath days and years, then the key element is that these are times of refreshing and rest for his people and even for the land. It is this point of rest that is also emphasized when a shortened form of the fourth commandment is given. As we read in Exod 23:12:

Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed.

The main point is clear: rest! Seen within the context of the ancient Near East, this is a most remarkable command. No other civilization had such a privilege. To stop work every week in order to be refreshed! And not just man but also the animals. God did not want an overworked people. His people have been redeemed and freed from all bondage, also from slavery to work.

The Sabbath, established at creation, became part of God's preliminary redemptive answer to the curse of Genesis 3:17-19, where man's labour is toil and sweat, which ultimately leads to man's returning to the dust. God provides rest. At no time must man work seven days in a row. There must be time for weekly celebration. This principle of rest is strikingly shown, for example, in the sabbatical year. Israel could then live by grace, without having to work the land.

There is a second, related point. This time of repose afforded by the sabbaths and feasts points to the future rest from all sin and misery. For Israel the first stage in that future hope was the redemption and rest that would be found in entering the promised land. Once they were in the promised land, they were to experience rest and relief from enemies and live in peace given by God. We in turn may look forward to the promised land. As Hebrews 4:1,9,10 puts it:

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. . . . There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.

The point of all this is that the gift of rest given to Christians, especially in this dispensation on Sunday, is full of redemptive overtones and therefore joy. We have so much more than Israel did. How much more do we have reason to rejoice in the Lord!

After all Christ has in principle led us out of all bondage and dominion that enslaves, and He has set us in the freedom and joy in the Lord. Sunday is a day to celebrate!

### Celebrating Sunday today

At the same time it is clear that Sunday is not just a day off. It is a holy day, sacred time, a sign of the Lord's work of renewal in our lives (Ezek 20:12,20). The Sunday is a day set aside by God himself so that we may savour his rest and the redemption that He brings to this broken world and to our stressed lives. It is a day in which to

“The gift of rest given to Christians is full of redemptive overtones and therefore joy.”

savour the renewal of life in Christ, the re-creation of oneself and one's continual rebirth, as one thinks of the rest that comes in the new creation. It is for all these reasons that the fourth commandment says “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”

“To remember” is not just an intellectual recall of information. It is in this context an act of worship in which we are mindful of, and savour, God's redemption and love. Worship in Scripture, therefore, always involves recalling the great deeds of God's redemption and judgment. That is the beauty of using the Psalms in worship. It gives one a necessary sense of continuity with the



Declined the call to Smithers, British Columbia:

**Rev. P. Aasman**

of Grand Valley, Ontario.

\* \* \*

Called to the church of Smithville, Ontario:

**Rev. R.A. Schouten**

of Abbotsford, British Columbia.

past people of God and the great deeds of God's deliverance, deeds fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ and still continuing today until the great and final perfection of his kingdom arrive.

So what should characterize our Sundays? Rejoicing that God has set us free from being dominated by our sins and misery. He has set us free from the rat race that life often is. We are not to be slaves of our work. We can step out of it once every week. More positively, the Sunday is to be a day unabashedly focussed on the Lord our God who has had mercy on us in Christ, and who has set us free from all that entangles and enslaves, especially our sinful flesh, the world, and Satan. It is a day to savour the triumph of Christ on Easter morning. A day to worship – in church and in our homes. A day not just for recreation but for the re-creation of all things, starting with ourselves.

This brings us to the next questions. Why and how do we worship?

*(To be continued)*

<sup>1</sup>This series of three articles is an abridged version of what will appear in annotated form in a forthcoming publication of my lectures given in Australia (and partly New Zealand) in June and July of 1999, viz. *Perspectives on Worship, Law and Faith: The Old Testament Speaks Today*. (Kelmscott, WA: Pro Ecclesia Publishers).

<sup>2</sup>R.K. Harrison, *Leviticus* (1980), 75. Matt 22:11-13 speaks of the king in the parable of the wedding banquet who throws out a man who was not wearing wedding clothes.



By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

*For you have been my hope, O Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth. From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother's womb. I will ever praise you. (Psalm 71:5,6)*

## Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Hope and trust in the Lord always! From the day we were born, and for as long as we will live on this earth, we may lean on the Lord. As long as we continue putting our trust in the Lord, we can also continuously praise Him for whatever burdens and crosses we must carry.

The words spoken in these verses of Psalm 71 are certainly comforting aren't they? This psalm was most likely written by David when he was old. David is praying for God's help in old age, when enemies were threatening him. These enemies knew David's strength was failing, and wanted to attack him. David confesses that the Lord has always been his hope and trust. The Lord continued to be with David and gave him strength to remain faithful to his Father in heaven.

We as God's covenant people also struggle at times. So many things, such as sickness, loneliness, and daily fighting our own sinful nature, can weigh us down, that at times it simply appears hard to keep putting our trust in the Lord.

Where can we turn, but to the Bible, to find deep words of comfort? Let us look in the book of Isaiah, in chapter 12:2, where it says "Surely God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." Also in chapter 26:4: "Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord is the Rock eternal." Indeed, our Heavenly Father helps us to cling to Him alone.

The Bible speaks to us in so many ways. Although we read the Bible, it still does not always come easy does it? At times when everything seems to be falling apart in our lives, we sometimes do not know where to turn anymore. Just remember that as children of God, we must turn our hearts toward the Lord putting our *full* trust in his sovereign grace and then we will experience his sincere love for us, his children. It is at these times in our lives that we can feel so close to our heavenly Father. Just as a mother expresses her love in a most loving and caring way when her child is ill, so also when we are in deep despair does our heavenly Father show his deep love for us. We often may ask, "Where is God when I need Him the most?" Do not be dismayed, for He knows our thoughts and our worries. Psalm 139:1,2 says, "O, Lord You have searched me and You know me, You know when I sit and when I rise. You perceive my thoughts from afar." Will the Lord, who created us and knew us before we were born, forget about us and our troubles? Never will the Lord cast out those who fear and trust Him!

When we were baptized, the Lord established an eternal covenant of grace with us. This means that we are his

and that He will never let go of us. His love does not depend on us, for He loves us regardless of our sins. This does not mean that we can just sit back and relax, No! We daily have to fight against our sins, and long to love Him the way we are commanded to, that is, with our whole heart. Sometimes it can be comforting to read your favorite piece from the Bible, or to sing a favorite psalm or hymn from the *Book of Praise*.

To trust in the Lord alone means that the Lord should see in us that we can be "trusted" to serve Him and not the idols of this world. It will come with difficulties at times, but by true humble faith and knowing our sins are forgiven, this should help us to go on. Just as the Lord took care of David years ago, so also He continues to take care of us. He promises to help us, each and every day, learn to trust in Him alone.

What a joy and a comfort we have to know we belong to such a loving Father.

*In God alone my soul finds rest  
For in His faithfulness I trust  
From Him, my God comes my salvation  
He only is my Rock, my stay  
My fortress and my help for aye  
And none shall move my place and station.  
Psalm 62:1*

## Birthdays in July:

### 4 James Buikema

c/o R. Feenstra  
1557 Silverdale Road, RR 1, St. Ann's ON LOR 1YO

### 20 Charlie Beintema

29 Wilson Avenue, Chatham, ON N7L 1K8

### 28 Jim Wanders

538 Wedgewood Drive, Burlington, ON L7L 4J2

### 29 Tom VanderZwaag

c/o Anchor Home  
361 Thirty Road, RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1BO

James will be 39, Charlie will be 25, Jim will also turn 39, and Tom will turn 47. Congratulations to you all on your birthday. We hope that you will have an enjoyable day with family and friends, and above all, the Lord's blessing throughout this new year. Till the next time,

Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

Mailing correspondence:  
548 Kemp Road East  
RR 2 Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2  
1-905-563-0380

# THE HI-LITER

---

## News from Here and There

By J. de Gelder

### Albany

We know that we ought to be missionary churches in this world, also in our own surroundings, but we don't always find it easy to put this into practice. In most of our churches there is a Home Mission Committee, but in the church of Albany (Western Australia) they call it an Evangelism Support Committee to emphasize that an important part of their task is to assist and encourage the congregation in reaching out to those around us. One of the projects this committee is busy with is organizing Prison Fellowship Meetings at Albany Prison every Saturday morning. They wrote a report on these activities in the bulletin, from which I quote a few observations.

Our meeting commences with prayer by either the P.F. (Prison Fellowship) leader or one of the prisoners. Scriptural songs and hymns are then sung for about fifteen to twenty minutes, to the electronic organ, played by one of the prisoners. The P.F. leader then introduces the topic of the day, after which a discussion pursues. The fellowship meeting is then concluded in prayer. A social chit chat, though often an extension of the discussion on a one-to-one basis, follows over a cup of tea or coffee, made all the time by the prisoners. Then a knock on the door by a prison officer indicates that our time is up.

Singing is conducted enthusiastically, even if they do not know all the tunes. Often they'll comment how beautifully appropriate or personally encouraging the words actually are.

At least a few of them have their own Bible. One of the prisoners has a well worn out NIV which is "littered" with pink and green highlighted sections and personal notes pencilled in the margins.

A couple of the prisoners have recently requested to be able to follow a Bible course on a one-to-one basis.

During one of the fellowship discussions all of the prisoners (we were discussing Romans 12) expressed their need to also teach and witness in the prison among other inmates on a larger scale than they are doing. They have spoken of some of their experiences of talking to others about the Good News. The ridicule and hatred that these prisoners have to endure can really be defined as persecution.

Is it not wonderful how the Lord works and how the Spirit also reaches within the walls of prisons?

### Rockingham

Liturgy is always good for interesting discussions. In Rockingham they decided;

The singing of the Apostles' Creed will be done more frequently. The Nicene Creed will also be read more often. Especially the second point is to be applauded. The orders of worship in our *Book of Praise* give two options when they mention the profession of faith in the afternoon service: either

the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed. but I don't think that I am way off when I assume that the Nicene Creed is almost neglected here. Perhaps we should change that!

### Surrey

We cross the Pacific and come in British Columbia. Admission to the Holy Supper is another item that has generated numerous articles and much discussion over the years. We have, of course, Article 61 of the C.O. which speaks attending the Lord's Table by your own members and by those who have an attestation of a sister church.

So far we all agree, I guess. But the differences occur when we talk about those who do not have such an attestation. Does Art. 61 C.O. provide for that? Some will say "yes," and they conclude from the silence in Art. 61 on this matter that attending the Holy Supper without such an attestation is simply never possible. Others take this silence in Art. 61 as an opening for the consistory to develop its own rule at this point. The consistory of the church in Surrey agreed to adopt the following policy:

Communicant members from churches within the Canadian Reformed federation and those from sister churches will be allowed to attend the Lord's table on the basis of an attestation from the church of which they are members. Those who do not have such an attestation can only be admitted if they have been examined and approved by the Consistory. To allow time for examination, such guests ought to make their request to participate at least one week prior to the Lord's Supper celebration.

### Winnipeg-Redeemer

By now the new worship facilities in Winnipeg must be close to completion. The text chosen for the cornerstone is part of Joshua 24:27: "This stone will be a witness." Rev. VanRaalte explains this choice in the Manitoba bulletin.

God's people pledge allegiance to the LORD, saying, "We too will serve the LORD, because He is our God." Joshua, then, took a stone and set it up near the holy place of the LORD. "See," he said to the people, "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God." The text thus speaks about a literal stone being used as a witness. Joshua chooses a stone because of its enduring qualities. From generation to generation it will continue to be a witness to the pledge of God's people to serve the LORD. Parents can point out the stone to their children and remind them to remain faithful to the LORD. Our cornerstone can function in the same way. The cornerstone will stand as a witness that this generation of Canadian Reformed Christians wanted a sign forever that they desire to be faithful to the LORD. It will remind the coming generations to remain faithful

and to use this building to the glory and honour of the LORD.

### Winnipeg – Grace

Earlier in this column I referred to our missionary task as church of the living Christ in this world. Grace Canadian Reformed Church in Winnipeg organized a so-called “Scatter the Seed - Sunday.” The Evangelism Committee wrote:

Although every Sunday is a special Sunday, on this particular day we encourage you to invite a neighbour to join you for worship in the afternoon service. We are trying to help our members to feel more comfortable approaching strangers in our midst to make them feel welcome – our sign says “everyone welcome.”

Rev. Jonker elaborates on this project in the same bulletin. For the afternoon service our members have been encouraged to help “to scatter the Seed” by making a concerted effort to invite neighbours, friends and acquaintances, who don’t belong to the church, to join us in worship. So, this worship service is not special because of the service itself. We will sing from the same *Book of Praise*; we will listen to the same Word of God; we will worship the Lord in accordance with the same Reformed liturgy. What this service makes special is that we ourselves go out of our way to welcome others to the Way of Salvation.

### Edmonton – Providence

The Providence congregation in Edmonton is one of the larger congregations in our federation.

Such a blessing always comes with various challenges, and the Council spent some time to consider the implications of this development.

Council made a decision to establish a fund with a view to a future institution of a new congregation or the splitting of the present congregation into two congregations. That is one way of doing it: first you establish a growth fund for the financial consequences of future split. It has been done the other way round too: at the time of the split you establish an expansion fund to deal with the financial impact of the split.

Anyway, it is wonderful to recognize the care of the Lord in the ongoing gathering of his church in this world.

### In general

A new minister and a new congregation need time to get to know each other. Usually the minister, often with his wife, goes around to make acquaintance visits. But I learned that you can do that in different ways. One of my colleagues wrote:

My wife and I are becoming better acquainted with the congregation (and it only makes us like you more!) [don’t overdo it now, JD]. To speed this up, we would like to use our Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings to visit various homes for supper. . . .

That’s an interesting way of doing it. I have never thought of that myself: joining people for supper in their homes. It is indeed a fascinating way of getting to know a family, including the little children. By the way: how was the food? 

## *Christ is our Corner-Stone*

Christ is our Corner-stone,  
On him alone we build;  
With his true saints alone  
The courts of heaven are filled:  
On his great love  
Our hopes we place  
Of present grace  
And joys above.

O then with hymns of praise  
These hallowed courts shall ring;  
Our voices we will raise  
The Three in One to sing;  
And thus proclaim  
In joyful song,  
Both loud and long,  
That glorious name.

Here, gracious God, do thou  
For evermore draw nigh;  
Accept each faithful vow,  
And mark each suppliant sigh;  
In copious shower  
On all who pray  
Each holy day  
Thy blessings pour.

Here may we gain from heaven  
The grace which we implore;  
And may that grace, once given,  
Be with us evermore,  
Until that day  
When all the blest  
To endless rest  
Are called away.

*Trans: By J. Chandler, Hymns of the Primitive Church, 1837, p. 119.*

# Middle East Reformed Fellowship

## NEWS from MERF-Canada

### MERF's new board, International Council and structure

During the month of December it became evident that there was a need for a more broadly based administrative structure for MERF. This need was a result of the expansion of the work of MERF, and the increasing financial support from churches in the western world. The exclusive indigenous character of the former Board and their complete control of MERF could not be maintained. The original setup also caused difficulties, for example, as to the question where and when diaconal aid should be given. All in all, it was felt that the support groups should have more input.

From January 11 to 14, MERF's new Board of Directors and an International Partner Consultation (with representatives from supporting and field countries) met in Larnaca. We are thankful that Prof. J. Geertsema was willing and able to go to Cyprus and participate in the discussions and restructuring of MERF's organization. At the same time he was able to get a first hand impression of the work in Larnaca. Prof. J. Geertsema published a report of his visit in *Clarion*, Volume 49, No. 7.

The new structure consists of a seven member Board of Directors which oversees the work. As well, there is an International Council of 30 members which consists of the Directors plus delegates from all the supporting and supported countries which is to meet annually to review and plan for the work. This reorganization allows for continued indigenous control of local ministries. At the same time, the responsibility for policy and decision making is shared between both supporters and field leaders. There will be more openness, a greater accountability and a better opportunity for the support branches to have their input. God's Word and the Reformed Confessions remain the basis; and the purpose also remains the same, namely, to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ in a hostile Muslim world and to support Christians and Christian churches who live under these difficult circumstances.

### Update on new broadcasting centres

At the beginning of December a new Broadcast Centre was opened in Cairo.

The Egyptian broadcasting team has taken on their task with enthusiasm and dedication. They have produced a series on "Christ's New Testament Sayings" written to challenge unbelievers to give serious thought to what the Lord Jesus says about the issues of life and death. The text of the series is in the conversation format used in MERF's broadcasts over the past several years.

Dr. Victor Samuel, coordinator of listener response and follow-up, reports very encouraging growth in listener's responses. One other exciting development is that a number of serious listeners have asked to exchange email with Christians who can help them to more fully understand God's Word. Three trained volunteers with access to the internet have been assigned responsibility for this new aspect of the ministry.

Here are samples of recent letters received from listeners:

J.A.H. of Yemen writes: ". . . Now I need a copy of the Holy Bible in Arabic in order to read for myself what God inspired for the good of mankind. The Lord Christ is one who deserves trust and confidence as the Saviour of the world. . . ."

A.M. of Saudi Arabia writes: ". . . Your program constantly raises questions in my mind about all that I was told to believe from childhood. I need your help to understand the "religion" of Christ. Please be very careful not to use my real name and do not send me any big books now. This would cause me serious trouble. . . ."

A very suitable place has been found for the new Broadcasting Centre in Lebanon. The Lebanon Reformed Fellowship (LRF), MERF's daughter organization in Lebanon, continues to prepare the new broadcasting studio in the flat purchased by MERF as a joint ministry center with LRF in Lebanon.

### The Lord's continued provision for the needs of the Sudanese brethren

As a result of the meetings in Larnaca in January, the three different groups through whom MERF has been ministering, MERF's South Sudan Committee (via Nairobi), the Khartoum-based Presbyterian Church of (South) Sudan (PCOS) and the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SPEC) are now working very closely together. PCOS and SPEC have decided to form one MERF com-

mittee based in Khartoum. The Lord has continued to provide for their needs.

### News from Syria

News from Syria is very encouraging. MERF is now sponsoring two new church extension projects in central Syria. Also, the Fellowship has been able to extend help in ministering to the spiritual and physical needs among Sudanese refugees in Syria.

### John Calvin Centre and regional training programs for 2000

Seven study terms and four research terms are scheduled to be held at the John Calvin Centre during 2000. In addition, there will be training conferences, seminars, workshops as well as spiritual retreats and trainee follow up gatherings in Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

### New member for MERF-Canada board

The council of Burlington-Waterdown under whose supervision MERF-Canada does its work has appointed the Rev. J. De Gelder, minister of the Flamborough Canadian Reformed Church, as an additional member for our Board. We appreciate his willingness to serve in this capacity.

The International Council is scheduled to have its annual meeting in Larnaca from June 19-23. We are happy that once again Prof. J. Geertsema has been found willing to attend. As MERF-Canada we are happy with the restructuring and pray that the Lord will bless this reorganization. There are many opportunities to be a Reformed witness in the Middle East and we are very grateful to be part of this exciting work. May the Lord continue to bless it to the praise of his glory. We thank you for your continued support and ask that you continue to remember the work of MERF in your prayers and with your gifts.

If you would like to make a personal donation please make your cheque payable to MERF-Canada and send it to:

### MERF-Canada

1225 Highway 5, RR 1  
Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

Yours in His service,  
Rev. J. Mulder, chairman  
Mrs. J. Van Dam, secretary





## Churches in movement

What's going on in our sister churches in Holland? That is a recurring question which I receive more often from readers of *Clarion*. Over the last while we have tried to keep people abreast with some developments, while at the same time expressing the warning that we need to be careful in our statements and avoid hasty judgments. From our distance it is not always easy to get a clear picture. And it is all too easy to be wrongly selective and end up with just one slant on a certain issue.

In order to give as objective a picture as possible, let me summarize a few lines from an interview appearing in *Nederlands Dagblad* with the chairman of the last synod of Leusden, Rev. H. Boiten.<sup>1</sup> In general, Rev. Boiten is positive about the decisions of synod, but he expressed obvious reservations with one decision in particular. This concerns the decision to allow occasional pulpit exchanges and table fellowship with the *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken* (NGK), the former "churches outside the confederation", in various localities. To be sure, the decision allowing the practice comes with restrictions of its own: various conditions need to be met, and the local church must receive the approbation of classis along with the deputies of Regional Synod ad Art. 49 C.O. But it is still a green light which incidentally was given in the context of a statement which in effect broke off the discussions with the NGK on a federational level. According to Rev. Boiten: "these two decisions (of the synod) cannot be harmonized with each other." And that led him to the conclusion: "The churches are in movement."

"In movement." That, I would venture to guess, is a veiled and polite way of saying that there is a sense that in a certain way the stability and solidity of the foundation is weakening, and the churches no longer are as solidly aligned in one spirit as they were in previous decades. Boiten himself explains as follows: the Synod of Berkel cannot be specifically labelled as "conserva-

tive" nor can this last Synod of Leusden be labelled as "progressive." The only thing we can say is: "The churches are in movement." It is a remarkably ambiguous phrase which leaves open the question not only which way the churches are going, but where they hope to end up.

**"A local church is not a part of a federation by accident or circumstance."**

### Local exceptions

It appears that the decision mentioned above is one receiving more reflection and critical comment. Some of these comments are also beneficial for our own circumstances, since we are involved in local discussions with both the Free Reformed Churches (FRCNA) and the United Reformed Churches (URCNA). While the federations and their character are different, the principles remain the same. Particularly helpful, in my view, are the remarks of Rev. P.L. Storm on the decision. Writing in the monthly *Nader Bekeken*, Rev. Storm indicates that he seeks to approach and weigh the decisions of Leusden carefully. He notes how much the synod of Leusden stands in the line of its predecessor, the Synod of Berkel 1996. He is also positive concerning the main line taken by the synods on the whole issue of contact with other Reformed churches in the country. But then he voices his concerns about the decision on pulpit exchange and table fellowship with the NGK. Here follow his comments:

Given this great and consistent continuity with its predecessor, for which Leusden chose with its own arguments, it is all the more surpris-

ing that on one point the continuity is broken. This is not in the decision concerning the impossibility of federational discussions with the NGK with a view to achieving ecclesiastical unity. But it does come up on the question: can you locally come to exchanging pulpits and mutual admission to tables when the church with which you are dealing belongs to a federation of which we have not yet stated that it stands or wishes to stand on the basis of God's Word and the Three Forms of Unity (and vice versa)? On this point Berkel said: No! And on this same point Leusden now said: no, but there is one exception. In incidental cases an exception can be made for an NGK church with the approbation of classis and deputies of Regional Synod ad Art 49 C.O.

I really cannot place this exception within the whole approach followed by Leusden in forming its decisions. For example, the synod stated that it is in the interests of unity with the churches to coordinate as much as possible the local and the national developments. For this reason it decided that the deputies should send available and relevant information with regard to the federational discussions to the churches in good time.

From this it is clear that as churches we are very concerned that the national and local developments are well coordinated with each other. This is also clear from a second ground of decision five: "now that the developments with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CRCN) are showing good progress, special attention should be given to take all local churches along on the road towards ecclesiastical unity."

It seems to me that special attention is also necessary when the developments with a church federation do not show good progress. When a real possibility to move

towards ecclesiastical unity is not seen at the federational level, then this cannot but have results for the contacts on the local level.

This may not hold for the question whether there are possibilities for the exercise of ecclesiastical contact, but certainly it holds with regard to the extent and content of ecclesiastical discussions. So the previous synod judged. On this basis the rules and guidelines for contact were drafted. And most of the decisions follow this pattern as well. Therefore it is all the more curious that the synod [i.e. Leusden, JD] let itself be moved to include an exception clause that actually stands in contradiction to the rest of the decisions.

### Grounds

Rev. Storm proceeds to deal with the grounds given for the decision of Leusden. Precisely here he sees a weakness since this ground speaks of possibilities for fellowship when two federations have *not yet* come to the stage of mutual discussions. But Berkel stated that at this stage, negotiations and discussions were *not possible*. And its reasons were fairly substantial: the NGK have shown too much freedom in the way they maintain the confessions and too great a toleration with deviations from the confession. All this resulted in a strong appeal handed to the next national assembly of the NGK in 1998. But this appeal fell on deaf ears, and all this was known by Leusden 1999. It is therefore all the more anomalous that this synod still opened the door to closer forms of contact with churches of a federation which has consistently turned away from the appeals made by the Reformed churches (RCN(Lib)) on a federational level.

A local church is not a part of a federation by accident or circumstance. Once in a federation, there are promises to keep. Opening doors contrary to the federational line only results in greater divergence and estrangement in the midst of the churches.

### A spiritual matter!

Rev. Storm rightly maintains that the church federation is at bottom a spiritual matter. He concludes:

Let us be sensible. All the emphasis that some people put on the local contacts that are then held to be of much more value than federational discussions (which are in turn con-

sidered to be marked by formalism) is perhaps understandable from an NGK point of view, but is surely not defensible from a Reformed standpoint, is it? The weak point in the NGK is precisely that they are structurally confused with regard to the value and functioning of Reformed federational fellowship. It would be good neither for them nor for us to join them in this regard. For it is not good that the persistent refusal to turn around their course into a more Reformed direction gets “rewarded” with the statement that locally it is possible to expect changes in far-reaching ways. The last national assembly of the NGK has explicitly rejected the turn to a more Reformed path. Therefore I do not at all understand that now our synod – having acknowledged and expressed regret about this refusal –

“From this it is clear that as churches we are very concerned that the national and local developments are well coordinated with each other.”

still says “yes” to the urgent request of precisely the same assembly which said: “We believe that it would be good to change the rules for pulpit exchange and table fellowship in the sense that on these points more responsibility goes to the local churches.” Precisely this request appears to me as symptomatic of a view of the church federation from which we would like to see them turn back.

These days I hear many sigh: the church federation may not frustrate local discussions and communal (inter-church) activities. But much less often I hear the warning for the opposite danger: that the exercise of contact on the local level should not entice us into the position that you begin to disparage the bond that you have with your own sister

churches in a Reformed federation. Too little attention has been given in my view to the balanced position that our deputies have given in their report submitted to Berkel 1996. Let me quote from it a bit in the hope that this report will again be tabled for the benefit of local discussions. The report says: “Therefore it is a good thing that in local discussions the Biblical view concerning the church federation does not come under pressure. Herewith the view must especially continue to remain central, namely that ecclesiastical unity is not only an issue of local discussions, but also includes a regional aspect. The church is catholic. It gathers locally, but it also always has a regional dimension.”

“In this regard, speaking too often about the “church federation” can even have its dangers. For the term easily gets a business-like slant through which we lose sight of the fact that in the ‘church federation’ we have to do with a fellowship of sister churches that with each other make up a part of the body of Christ.” And then, after a study of some scriptural passages, we have this conclusion: “So we see how the churches in the New Testament practice their unity in showing mutual support in the context of a mutual submission to the norm of the gospel. On this basis the conclusion also must be for us today: local ecclesiastical unity is all along at the same time taking into account the sister churches that have been given to us by Christ. The church federation is not simply an administrative ordering principle of a national ecclesiastical organization on the basis of which quota is collected; rather, it is a fruit of the same John 17 that drives the churches together in local discussions.”

### A lesson to learn!

The course charted by the deputies of Berkel is one from which we all can learn. For this synod sought to promote the unity of the churches as they reach out to other local congregations in unity discussions and growing fellowship. Berkel was not at all suggesting that this process be curtailed. However, it stressed that the obligations of the federation must be kept in mind! And one might add: also the input of the local membership.

For us in our own (somewhat different) circumstances this translates into two important guidelines:

- If two (or more) churches in discussion come to the point that they can recognize each other as true churches, the official declaration can be made as a first step towards greater unity. However, it should only be made 1) with the approbation of the local membership, (hence after a congregational meeting on the matter) and 2) after the approbation of classis.
- Let the declaration be one qualified by the stated need to bring the federational allegiance in line with the declaration made on a local level. In other words, the two (or more) churches can state that as far as they can observe in their local circumstances, they can recognize each other as true churches of Jesus Christ. However, those churches do not live in a “no-man’s land”; they live in the real world, with real federational connections and allegiances. Hence the implications of their declaration can only be fully implemented once all federational obligations have been fulfilled with

regard to such a declaration, and federational alignments are adjusted in accordance with it. And all this may be explicitly stated as well! We should know where we are at with each other!

**“Therefore it is a good thing that in local discussions the Biblical view concerning the church federation does not come under pressure.”**

#### **Fostering stability**

I began this review with a few remarks of Rev. Boiten about the Dutch federation being “churches in movement.” I think we can all appreciate

that a stifling and dead orthodoxy is not to be promoted. But the apostle Paul does enjoy stability and rootedness in the gospel of Christ (Eph 3:17, 4:14, Col 1:23). Churches in “movement” can easily start growing apart. In fact, Rev. Boiten said “You can tell now that the noses are not all pointed in the same direction.” All delegates were convinced of each other’s integrity, but the direction was more diffuse.

Are we any different? How do we preserve unity of direction and a sense of unity of purpose? By all means, let’s not stifle local contacts. But let us also honour federational commitments and obligations, and deal uprightly with the brothers and sister that Christ has given to us in one federation. That is no doubt not the easiest and fastest road for us. But it is the road of the Spirit of Christ which continually demands self-denial – also among churches – and challenges us to move forward together on a way of obedience and loyalty (also to each other!) – a path charted out and opened for us by the Master who calls.

*<sup>1</sup>The interview appeared in the issue of December 24, 1999*



---

# Send-off evening for Rev. and Mrs. K. Wieske

## April 30, 2000

What an evening it was!! The people kept coming and coming, from all over the Fraser Valley and beyond to the sending church, the Maranatha Church of Surrey, BC. That so much interest and love for this new young missionary family was evident, filled us all with joyful thanks. Even though the Maranatha Church is officially the sending church, we must add in the same breath that this endeavour is very much supported by all the churches in western Canada.

This Send-Off evening was started with over 700 voices swelling in joyful song to the words of Psalm 67:

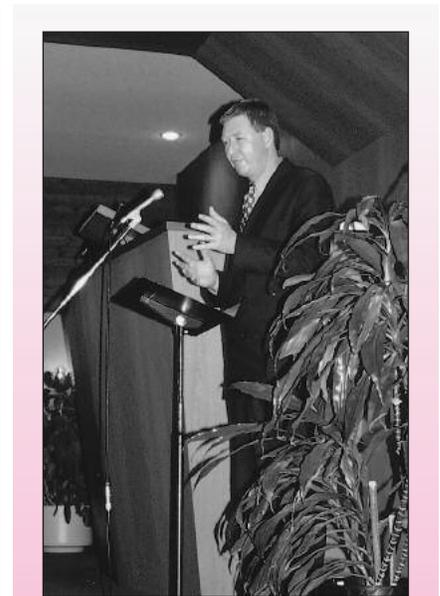
*"May God be merciful and bless us,  
illumine us with light divine; May  
He to all nations, show his revela-  
tion, and his way unfold."*

Indeed a very fitting Psalm to start the evening with.

Capable MC's for the evening were Mr. George Geurts and Ryan VanDriel. After the Christian opening and welcome, several letters of supporting

churches were read. Special mention must be made of a mysterious letter from the chairman of the "Temperance Union of Brazil", Mr. Jose Ferrari. This movement exerted their energies on keeping questionable characters out of Brazil. His big concern was that three "Whiskies" were coming to Brazil and the undesirable effects this could have on the people of Brazil. It will not surprise you that Rev. J. Moesker of Carman had something to do with this mystery. (Later on we were informed that even a small, hidden mickey Whiskey would be smuggled into the country!)

Next on the agenda was Mr. Len Stam who spoke on behalf of the Mission Board. He stated that the idea of having the missionary stay in the midst of the sending congregations for several months, and so present opportunities for making ties became a very positive experience. All would agree! We have heard him preach in various congregations, he has attended quite a few meet-



Rev. Wieske's address.



Wieske family enjoying entertainment at send-off evening.

ings, school assemblies, met us in our homes, and has treated us to his enthusiastic accompaniments on piano and organ. His deep sense of calling and commitment, and his great appreciation for the Reformed faith and confessions has endeared him and his wife to us all.

The Ladies' Society presented a lighthearted presentation about the future life in Brazil, introduced and illustrated with various anecdotes by Mrs. Joanne Van Spronsen who accompanied her husband as the first Canadian Reformed missionary to go to the mission field in Brazil.

After the audience sang Psalm 122, the William of Orange Christian School Choir, under the direction of Mrs. Michelle Faber, treated us to two recorder selections followed by a vocal selection: "We've a story to tell to the nations!" This was followed by a humorous presentation by the Young People's



Credo high school student council reps presenting results of fund drive to Rev. Wieske.



Wieske family with council of Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church.



Ladies' society presentation.

Society providing the missionary bit by bit with a survival kit. The result was that John VanSeters at the end posed as "the new Rev. Ken Wieske", a tanned, beach-clad, Brazilian version, complete with fishing net and V.W. manual.

Next we were treated to several wonderful renditions of the enthusiastic 60-member mixed choir of the Credo Christian High School, under the able leadership of Mr. Heres Snijder. Not only were these young people enthusiastic in their singing but this enthusiasm was even more displayed and endorsed when the president of the Students' Council presented a huge cheque to the amount of \$ 7,020.00 for the construction of a church building in Barreiras, Brazil. The previous week had been the annual Mission Week at Credo and these were the results of their enthusiasm! The amount raised far exceeded the targeted amount.

Dr. L. Joesse, chairman of the Reformed Theological Training in the Netherlands, who was in the area for some special meetings, also spoke a few words based on Isaiah 40, encouraging Rev. Wieske to speak "to the heart of the people." At this point Rev. K. Wieske spoke and expressed how grateful and encouraged he and his wife were by the sentiments expressed this evening, as well as by the repeated refrain "we will pray for you."

Rev. C. Van Spronsen, minister of the Maranatha Church, spoke a few words on behalf of Council, remembering also the fact that the Wieske family is looking forward to another addition. He spoke some words of encouragement, asked them to pass on the greetings to the whole brotherhood in Brazil, mission workers and Brazilian brothers and sisters, and reminded them that although they leave much behind there is a brotherhood awaiting them in Brazil who will receive them with open arms and a warm embrace!

There was opportunity for refreshments and fellowship immediately following the program. In the meantime the Wieske family has safely arrived in Recife and are making themselves familiar with their surroundings, the Portuguese language and culture of the people amongst whom they hope to proclaim the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

*This is a greatly reduced version (thank you Rev. Van Spronsen!) of a much more interesting article written by Mrs. Maarten Van Driel. Hopefully it can appear in Mission News in due time.*



# Reflections

By Ralph Winkel

In the fall of 1949 we went to church for the first time since we came to Canada. We attended the church service at the First Christian Reformed Church located on 110 Avenue and 96 Street in Edmonton, Alberta.

It was quite an experience. Upstairs in the main sanctuary there was a minister preaching in English. Downstairs in the basement were all the newcomers with an elder reading a Dutch sermon. Later on I found out that most of these sermons were printed before the Second World War, that is, from the 1930s. Somehow the service was timed in such a way that the English singing upstairs did not coincide with the Dutch singing downstairs.

After the church service we stood outside and met other recent arrivals. After a few Sundays we met people who had also belonged to the Gereformeerde Kerken (Art. 31) in the Netherlands. It did not take too long before the like-minded decided that they were better off to have church meetings on their own. They could just as well listen to a sermon of their own Dutch churches. And those sermons were of a more recent date – 1949 and on.

The first reading services were held in the Bible Presbyterian Church located on 92 Street and Jasper Avenue in Edmonton. I remember that the first service (meeting) was held at 11 a.m. and the second service began at 1 p.m. All of us brought a lunch. Rev. J. Van Popta preached in that small church building. Also Dr. R. H. Bremmer and Rev. D. Vreugdenhil, both from Zwolle, preached in that building. This little church building became a union hall and after a few years it was demolished. Whatever happened to the Bible Presbyterian Church, it disappeared.

When the membership grew, the I.O.O.F. hall was rented. We also had church services in the Alberta College Gym located on the present site of the A.G.T. (Telus) building, and in a Quonset building behind the Seventh-day Adventist church building at 149 Street and 102 Avenue. We also used the Sev-



enth-day Adventist church building on 111 Avenue and 102 Street.

The church was instituted in our home at 11247-88 Street in Edmonton on July 9, 1950. When looking at the pictures you can see we had a “full house” (and only one bathroom). Elders and deacons were chosen and installed. Some wanted to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, but time did not allow for this. Rev. J. Hettinga from the Netherlands had a very busy day. The Dutch “mother” churches were not too pleased with the institutions in Canada. They were of the opinion that a “right” church could have been found. This was tried, but none could meet the criteria. Hindsight proved the newly instituted churches to be right.

Looking at the pictures once again, I am the only one that still lives in Edmonton and belongs to the Providence Canadian Reformed Church. All the others have moved to other parts of Canada or have passed away. I can

recognize certain faces and names, but that is not of any interest to the church membership today.

Fifty years is a long stretch of living and I have seen tensions in our Edmonton church life – differences in opinions: from the only true church concept to normal Reformed, just to name a couple. Years later these differences have often been an obstacle in finding unity with other Reformed churches. Some say our church is very strict in its liturgy, but history has proven that orthodox churches keep their membership, while others, having put more emphasis on different types of music etc. than on the preaching, are losing members. Where is the right balance?

The future of our Edmonton churches is in our Father’s hand, and so is ours and that of our descendants. His love endures forever.

*Mr. Ralph Winkel is a member of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta.*



# OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



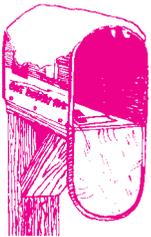
## Dear Busy Beavers

Do you know what Pentecost represents? Do you remember a few weeks ago, we celebrated Easter – the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ? Well, fifty days after Easter, almost eight weeks after Easter, God showed His great love to His people by sending the Holy Spirit to work His miracles in people's hearts. The disciples looked like they had fire on them and they began to speak in other languages – languages they did not know before that. In this way, God gave His Word to all the different nations in the world, so that they could all come to know Him and love Him, just like we know Him and love Him. Isn't that just wonderful?

Lots of love,  
Aunt Betty

## JUNE BIRTHDAYS

2 Sophia Brouwer	22 Jocelyn Schoon
2 Albert Buikema	27 Reuel Feenstra
7 Gregory Spriensma	29 Renee Kruisselbrink
16 Jason Vander Horst	29 Lindsay North
17 Melanie Spanninga	30 Lori Oosterhoff



## FROM THE MAILBOX

Thank you to *William Bouma* for your letter and puzzle. It was great to hear from you. I'm really glad you had a fun time during the Easter holidays. Is your cat okay again now? Write again, won't you, William.

Thanks also to *Rhonda Wiersma* for your letter and puzzle. Has your cat had her kittens now? How many did she have? You obviously like reading a lot – and you've even counted all your books, 137 of them. Are your Mom's new fish nice ones? Bye for now, Rhonda.

Hi to *Jolene Breukelman*. Thanks also for your letter and puzzle. I can imagine your baby sister is being very spoiled by your whole family. And you obviously had lots of fun with Oma staying with you. Do you still like school? It must have been fun having a student teacher in your class. And it must have been great fun going out to Crawford Lake. I hope you all learned lots of things. Till next time!

## PENPALS:

Rhonda Wiersma has requested me to put in her address for her pen-pal, Diane Kruizenga. She apologizes that she hasn't sent you any letters lately because she lost your address. Diane, would you please write Rhonda another letter with your address so she can write back. Her address is PO Box 687, Coaldale, AB T1M 1M6.

## Story

### Grandad's New-Old Nursery Rhymes – *continued*

One day Louise and Grandad were taking a walk through the park when they came to a high fence. "That reminds me," said Grandad. "Of what?" said Louise. "Why Humpty-Dumpty." "But that's not a wall, Grandad; Humpty-Dumpty sat on a wall." "I don't think he was very bright," said Grandad, "so in my book it's

*Humpty-Dumpty sat on a fence,  
Humpty-Dumpty hadn't much sense;  
– It's not good asking for help from a horse,  
He should have gone to a doctor, of course."*

"He couldn't do that when he was smashed to pieces," said Louise, who as we know was a very practical girl. "What he needed was a huge tube of glue." "Quite right," said Grandad; "in that case how about

*Humpty-Dumpty sat on a fence,  
Humpty-Dumpty hadn't much sense;  
If only he'd known the right thing to do  
He'd have carried around a huge tube of glue."*

Louise clapped her hands in delight. "That would have done it!" she said.

They walked on until they came to a park bench, where they sat down and shared a bag of crisps. While they were munching Grandad said, "What about that old woman who lived in a shoe? Very odd, that; I've always thought that it must have been an extremely tight squeeze. Ought to have been a boot, at the very least. And I didn't much care for the way she gave them no bread, and whipped them all soundly and sent them to bed."

"Nor me," said Louise. "Can we do better with a new-old rhyme?" Grandad started

*"There was an old woman who lived in a boot."*

Louise added,

*"She fed all her children on chocolates and fruit."*

Grandad finished,

*"What when that was gone, to feed their poor faces  
They all climbed out and ate the boot laces!"*

"Ugh," said Louise, "they must have tasted awful!" "Not at all," said Grandad, "you see, they were liquorice laces."

*More next time  
Maybe you could try making some new-old rhymes and  
send them to me. I think it would be a lot of fun.*

## AUNT BETTY

c/o Premier Printing Ltd.  
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2J 3X5