

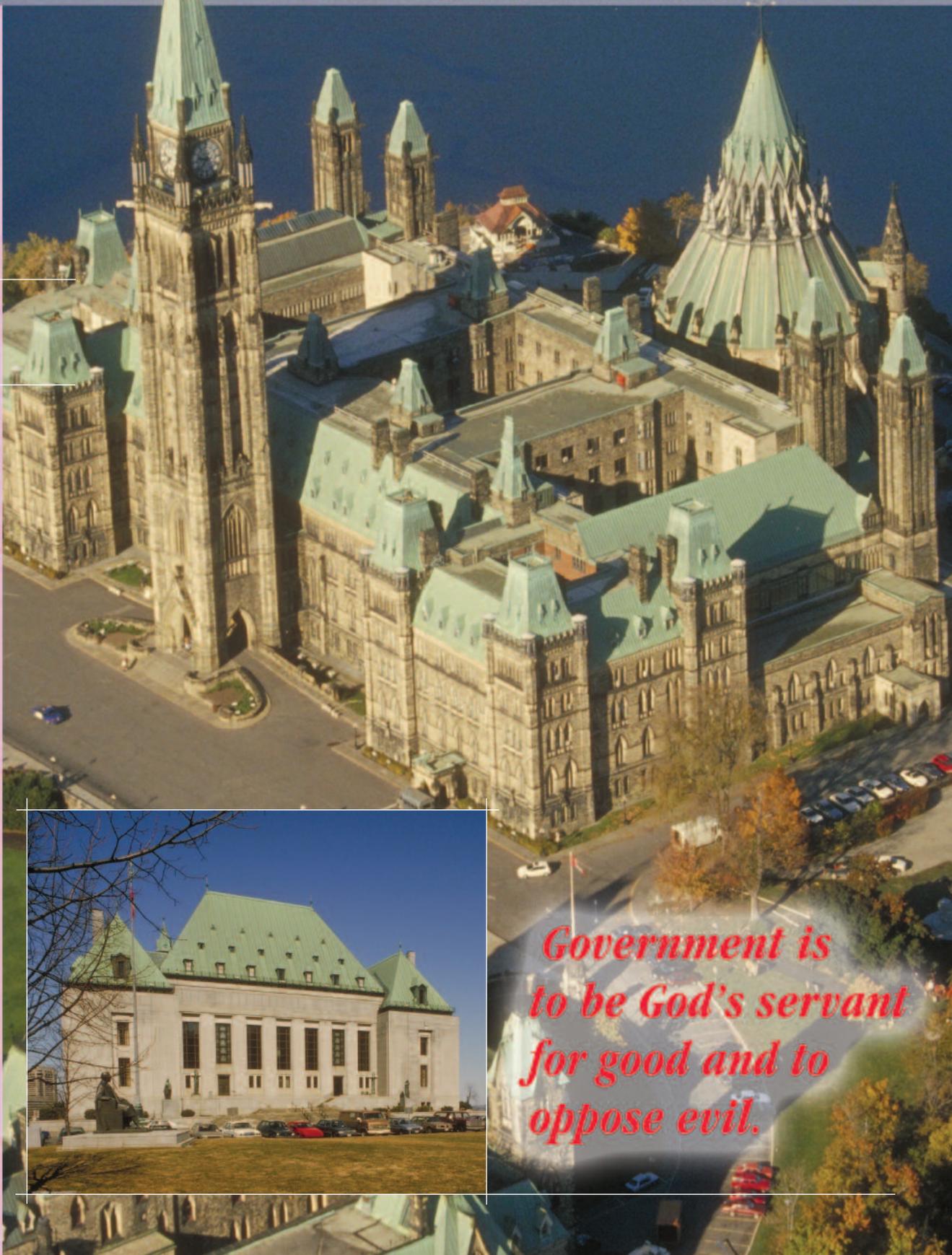
Clarion

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*An Experiential
Discriminating
Ministry*

*Jesus Christ,
Our Advocate*



*Government is
to be God's servant
for good and to
oppose evil.*



Cl. Stam

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An Experiential Discriminating Ministry

Ministers are to direct the congregation to Christ and his crucifixion.

One of the highlights at Synod Chatham was the address of Rev. L.W. Bilkes of the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA), to which I have referred earlier. Despite stating agreement with our contact committee regarding the preaching of the Word, the FRCNA deputies reported to their Synod that “we continue to sense a lack of understanding of what an experiential discriminating preaching should be” (Acts Chatham, page 153). I already mentioned in a previous editorial that these same deputies spoke a different language when they met with our committee, but this is what they reported to their Synod in Hamilton.

There is only one way to preach and that is the Biblical way.

Rev. Bilkes himself put it this way, “Our distinctiveness is in the way in which we view the congregation and in the way in which we emphasize a personal knowledge of the Lord” (Acts Chatham, page 151). It would follow, then, that the FRCNA object to the way in which we view the congregation, and the fact that we do not emphasize a personal knowledge of the Lord. All this is summarized in two words: we have no *experiential* and *discriminating* ministry.

Some consolation

There was some consolation offered to Synod Chatham by one of the delegates from The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) [RCN(Lib)]. We are apparently not the only kids on the block who suffer the constant criticism of the FRCNA. The Dutch delegate, Rev. R.C. Janssen, said the following:

Your troubles with the Free Reformed Churches remind us of the hurdles which have been or still have to be taken in

the Netherlands with respect to The Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands (CRCN). We'd like to draw your attention to a publication by the last General Synod of the CRCN in which a statement is issued on the unity of the church. There is also much material available in the Netherlands on the issues addressed in the report of the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity. We think especially of discussion papers written by professors of Kampen and Apeldoorn on topics such as the church, the covenant, and experiential preaching.

I was happy to read these words. We don't have to reinvent the wheel, after all. Perhaps the FRCNA will first study these professorial documents and then resume contact with us. Rev. Janssen's words also made me very sad. After more than *fifty* years of discussion in the Netherlands, the two federations have not come (much) closer together. This fact does not offer us much hope that it will go otherwise on this side of the great ocean. I have the feeling that the FRCNA want nothing other than to be recognized and left alone in their distinctiveness. Perhaps we can cooperate in various areas, such as education and politics, but otherwise we remain separate entities. All this, though with reference to the confessions, is encased in *Kuyperian* theology.

The FRCNA's view on the congregation

What is the proper view on the congregation? Apparently this is where we do not “discriminate” properly. The FRCNA's view goes something like this: the congregation is like a basket of apples, of which few are healthy, many are sick, and others are downright rotten. The purpose of discriminating preaching is to uncover the rotten apples and either have them repent or be removed from the basket. This is an important process, because if one apple is rotten, it will infect all the apples in the basket. Discriminating preaching has a way of purifying the congregation. The members of the congregation are classified and addressed according to class.



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The FRCNA’s viewpoint continues that we are not to assume that all the members of the congregation are saved. As a matter of fact, it would be closer to the truth to accept that none have been saved. There may be some regenerate members, but many are unregenerate or “hardly persuaded.” The various kinds of members must each be addressed in their own state or circumstance in the hope that they may come to a “personal knowledge” of the Lord. This is the ultimate experience.

What is this “personal knowledge” of the Lord? No one appears to have an exclusive handle on it. It must be a special feeling, sign, or message that comes separate from the Word. Once you get this message, you’re in; until you do, you’re out. It is little wonder that in this kind of a scheme, many members hesitate to attend the Lord’s Supper. One needs to have a special calling to take that bold step. The FRCNA’s view on the congregation is a rather low estimation. Some may feel that the above is an over-simplification, but it is accurate and correct. I got it from the horse’s mouth, so to speak.

The Biblical way of viewing the congregation

In the Bible there is quite another approach to the congregation. The gospel is a glad tidings, is it not? Ministers are to direct the congregation to Christ and his crucifixion. All salvation is to be sought and found in Him alone by faith, and this precludes any special “message” from above.

I find it quite remarkable and instructive that in the Bible God’s people are always addressed as a covenant people. This is true not only in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament. In my book *The Covenant of Love* (pp. 141-149) I have extensively dealt with this matter. There is no need to repeat myself. Perhaps the FRCNA brothers will read what is written there.

We are to watch out for two extremes. The one is *automatism*, the idea that one is automatically saved by being born into the covenant. The Bible calls all covenant children to regeneration and faith. The other is *mysticism*, the idea that special messages or experiences are required for the assurance that one is truly a child of God. Faith is always a conscious response to the Word of life.

The manner of preaching is not “distinctive.” It is the first mark of the church (Article 29, *Belgic Confession*). There is only one way to preach and that is the Biblical way. On a committee level we may agree on all this, but the *General Synods* of these respective churches need to come to a mutual understanding.

In a final editorial on this matter, I hope to focus on the experiential aspect.



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Jesus Christ, Our Advocate



MATTHEW 13:52

“ . . . We have one who speaks to the Father in our defence.”

1 John 2:1

The apostle John had a most remarkable way of encouraging his readers to walk in the way of the Lord. In his first letter he writes, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1, 2).

What a great encouragement this is. For who can keep God’s commands perfectly? Despite the best efforts, there will be stumbles, falls, and failures. Does it not happen in normal life that failure brings forth rebuke, perhaps even punishment? If you are certain of failure, why even bother to try? John indicates, however, that there is a provision for failure, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is at this point that John touches on one of the key aspects of our Lord’s work for us while He is in the heavenly sanctuary before the throne of our heavenly Father. He is there as “one who speaks to the Father in our defence.” To use a familiar term, Jesus is our advocate.

John explains why it is of such great benefit to us to have our Lord Jesus Christ as our advocate, speaking on our behalf. First, it is a great benefit because He is the Righteous One. For sinners, it is so important to remember that our advocate is sin-free. This is an absolute

qualification for the advocate in the heavenly court. This was foreshadowed in the Old Testament sacrifices: only unblemished animals qualified. The letter to the Hebrews spells this out in great detail too; our Lord is like us in every respect, sin excepted.

The picture, however, is not yet complete. What makes our Lord Jesus Christ such a suitable advocate for us when we commit sin is that He is the “atoning sacrifice.” Again, our minds go to the Old Testament. By means of animal sacrifices, offered as substitutes for sinners, sin was paid for, and the sinner was reconciled to God. The Lord’s anger was taken away because sin was punished in the substitute animal. All the sacrifices had their climax in the seventh month, on the great Day of Atonement when there was a general payment for all the sins of Israel. All this was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. John the Baptist called our Lord “the Lamb of God.” Our Lord himself stated that He had come to give his life as a ransom for many. The letter to the Hebrews is filled with references to show that Jesus paid for sins once for all. Our Lord Jesus is therefore a most suitable advocate because He was the atoning sacrifice.

What an encouragement we have. John tells us that when we sin and we stand guilty again before the throne of God, Jesus Christ stands at our side. He does not try to find loopholes in the law

to see how He can get us off the hook. Rather, He basically says to his Father: “Look at me! I have already paid for their sins. Let them go free!” If we want to think about it in terms of a courtroom, we can picture God asking us what we plead with respect to the charges against us. Our plea is always the same: “Please look to Jesus. He has paid.”

We notice that John does not leave it at that. He adds that the Lord Jesus made atonement not only for our sins, “but also for the sins of the whole world.” We should not think that John is teaching that everyone will be saved. Reading through this letter as a whole makes it clear that John knows that there are those who will perish in unbelief. One of the purposes of this letter is to warn against those who live in unbelief. What John is doing is putting penitent sinners at ease as he points to the magnitude of Jesus’ sacrifice. John teaches that the well of salvation will never run dry.

When you reflect on these words, you will realize John is not encouraging people to sin because the Lord Jesus will always cover up for them. What it comes down to is that God says, “I want you to walk according to my commands and I have already made provisions for your failures.” For the believer, this is not an invitation to carelessness, but an encouragement to keep on striving. We dare to try because we know Jesus Christ is our advocate.



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 28

Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.



This time we will think about the Lord's Supper. You will remember from last time that baptism did not always exist. You can say the same about the Lord's Supper. The Lord Jesus instituted it, when He celebrated the Passover. That was just before He suffered at Golgotha.

Passover was celebrated once a year. A lamb was slaughtered and cooked. That lamb was the most important part of the meal. When the lamb was killed at Passover, the Israelites would look forward to another lamb, the one that would take away their sins. And you know that this was the Lord Jesus.



Now the disciples were celebrating the Passover. When they ate, would they have looked at the Lord Jesus? Would they have said joyfully to each other: "There is the real lamb"? They could have known it! John the Baptist had said about Jesus: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." But no, the disciples did not realize it. That was very sad for our Saviour. Thankfully, Jesus was patient with his disciples. While they ate, He told them many things. That is how they knew this would be the last Passover.

It was on this occasion that the Passover was replaced by the Lord's Supper. The Lord took bread, gave thanks, and gave a piece to each of his disciples. Then He said: "This is my body for you." Later, He gave them a cup with wine. All twelve had to drink from it. And He said: "This is my blood."

The Lord Jesus also said that they and all believers should go on celebrating this Holy Supper until He returned. That is why you and all people in church often see the bread and the wine. Your parents and many others may eat and drink. You can only watch, but that is also important. The Lord's Supper helps you to understand the sermons better. And remembering the Lord's Supper also helps when you hear about the Lord at home or in school.

No one celebrates the Lord's Supper all by himself. These pieces of bread were one whole loaf of bread at first. Just as the pieces were one bread, so all the people who celebrate the Lord's Supper must be one big family. They should love each other, and they should help each other.

Together we are looking forward to the greatest feast. The best is yet to come: the wedding feast of Jesus, the Lamb of God. And He is waiting for us!



Same-Sex Marriage (3)¹

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Same-sex marriage advocates say that anyone who has a committed loving relationship with someone, even if of the same sex, should be allowed to have their relationship recognized as marriage.

Because God's design for marriage has been widely scorned and dismissed in our society, it is a relatively small step to cave in to demands for same-sex marriage. Same-sex marriage advocates say that anyone who has a committed loving relationship with someone, even if of the same sex, should be allowed to have their relationship recognized as marriage.

However, it is important to see that same-sex marriage is totally antithetical and hostile to what God said marriage should be. Same-sex marriage is blatantly against every design of the Almighty for wedlock. It is also completely against what society has almost universally throughout history considered marriage to be.

God said that marriage is for male and female. God designed the two genders in such a way that they complement and complete each other, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Indeed, although the unity of marriage is more than the physical, this unity cannot be separated from the sexual and the sexual cannot be separated from procreation. Marriage is where God wanted the begetting of children to take place. Marriage is the place where the father and mother each have a role to play in procreation and nurture. Marriage is where it's at. That's where society has its foundation.

However, the same-sex view of marriage could not be more different. Whereas God brought together male and female, same-sex marriage is about

two of the same gender coming together. Whereas God instituted marriage to beget children, same-sex advocates say procreation has nothing to do with marriage. Whereas God designed male and female organs so that they are meant for each other, same-sex marriage practices sex that is contrary to the Creator's design.

If we lose society's traditional understanding of marriage and it becomes whatever individuals prefer it to mean, the consequences could be enormous.

It is a small wonder that God severely condemns homosexual behaviour in his Word. For example, the apostle Paul includes in his list of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God also practicing homosexuals (1 Cor 6:9). God condemned homosexual practice to protect the creation ordinance of marriage and the integrity of the family (Lev 18:22, Lev 20:13). All this means that same-sex marriage is in open rebellion against God and his ordinances, and therefore it has disastrous consequences for society. Let us consider three such results.

Redefinition of marriage

Because same-sex marriage has nothing to do with the gift God gave humankind at the beginning of the history of this world, the implication is that if same-sex marriage becomes accepted by society, we are in danger of ultimately losing the institution of marriage as God ordained it and as we now know it. It is as simple as that.² The gay lobby's claims are untrue: that same-sex marriage is just an addition to what marriage already is. Honest homosexuals acknowledge this to be the case, and lesbians and gays admit that same-sex marriage will be subversive of marriage as we now know it. The social engineering that is inherent in the same-sex project necessitates the reconfiguring of marriage and creates many new questions. Should any two people who wish to get "married" because they love each other then not be given the privilege of a marriage relationship? Could not a loving brother and sister marry each other, or a loving father and son? It is of interest that the same-sex issue also seems to have encouraged the promotion of polygamy (more than one wife or husband) and polyamory (an open relationship with as many people in one household as you wish to love). Why should marriage be limited to two people? Why not have an open marriage, a group experience? On what ground would or could you say no to that, if love and commitment to each other is the *only* basis for marriage? If we lose

society's traditional understanding of marriage and it becomes whatever individuals prefer it to mean, the consequences could be enormous. These consequences will not be immediately apparent, but will gradually come about. Not surprisingly there are, therefore, even gays who oppose same-sex marriage because of the potential far-reaching ramifications for the way society orders itself.³

One implication of redefining marriage in accordance with the gay agenda is that a radical individualism would develop. What determines a normal household and what is permitted sexually will all be up to the individual. Everything will go. There will be few norms left for the state to enforce. Because homosexual relationships are generally very tenuous, have more violence, and fall apart very readily,⁴ same-sex marriage will tend to undermine fidelity across the board, also in normal marriages. A society that tolerates all manner of sexual promiscuity is a threat to stable families.

Radical individualism is the opposite of marriage as God designed it. On a purely secular level one can see this.⁵ Marriage is premised on the joining of a male and a female. The strong benefit of marriage is that male and female are designed with profound differences, and these differences are coordinated in marriage so that each contributes what the other lacks. Together they create something larger than themselves. Think of a violin and a bow, the wooden rod with horsehairs stretched from end to end. By themselves a violin or bow cannot do much. Two bows together cannot create music, only mirroring each other because they are the same. They don't complement each other. But together, in their differences, they create something far greater than they can alone. It is much the same with two parts of humanity: male and female. Marriage is the coming together of the two different parts to make a whole. Same-sex unions do not make a human whole. They are

missing a necessary human ingredient, either male or female.

This is not just a matter of reproduction. The interaction between male and female provides huge and irreplaceable benefits for both because the differences of gender are rooted in every part of our being. Male and female are not interchangeable human parts. They are completely different identities and they normally need each other to be complete. Love and commitment alone do not form a marriage; it requires two different genders. Indeed, we saw in the first article of this series that this is how God designed it. To redefine the marriage relationship is to court disaster, also for society at large.

Children need both a father and a mother to get a balanced and proper upbringing and an understanding of their own identity.

Part of this disaster is that the redefinition of marriage and the individualism inherent in the phenomenon of same-sex marriage will bring into jeopardy the position of children.

The place of children

It is the little ones who really pay the price. Technically, there is no room for them in same-sex marriage. Advocates of same-sex marriage say that marriage has nothing to do with babies or procreation or getting mothers and fathers for children.⁶ After all, it is all about doing what you like as adults together. It's not because of children that same sex couples are formed. Personal pleasure, not raising children, is the agenda.

Of course there are some same-sex couples that want children, but naturally cannot produce offspring on their own. So, you have situations where a child is desired and artificial means of conception are used with a sperm or egg donation from a third party. After all, if traditional marriages have children, why can't same sex ones have children if they wish? It's their right as married people.

But, is it fair for a child to be raised in an environment which by nature has nothing to do with procreation? How will that affect such a child? Already there are legal horror stories as courts try to figure out who the parents are in custody battles involving same sex relationships.⁷ Further, a child needs to know its real father and mother. Adopted children often search for their birth parents because of the need to know who they are. But a child growing up in a same-sex context may never know who



its biological parents are and such a child will never have both a father and mother care for it.

Study after study has shown that children need both a father and a mother to get a balanced and proper upbringing and an understanding of their own identity. For example, little boys who grow up in the absence of a father conclude that being a man means being as unlike a woman as possible and so become aggressive. Children raised outside a traditional marriage are at substantially greater risk for just about every negative outcome that social scientists can measure. They are more likely, for example, to fail at school, suffer physical and mental problems, become victims of child abuse, and become juvenile delinquents. Affirming a same-sex life style will also encourage pedophilic activity.⁸ But realize, same-sex marriage is not about providing a safe place for children but about having sexual freedom recognized by society.

Marriage as an institution has been the place where children are to be protected, nurtured, loved, and grow up with a clear identity and view of their place in society. That would drastically change if same-sex marriage were legally recognized. Children will be de-linked from their biological past and have no more than a shadowy connection with larger kinship groups. Blood, gender, and kinship ties will all be de-emphasized to the detriment of the child, his identity, and his place in society. Most likely the state will end up raising the children of same-sex marriages. Marriage will no longer be generational and genealogical. It will no longer bind together the past and the future.

A third result of same-sex marriage that can be mentioned is the destruction it will create.

Destructive consequences

The medical consequences of redefining marriage to include same-sex are potentially devastating. Society fights alcoholism because of the destruction it causes; it also has a duty to fight homosexual behaviour because of the even worse devastation it generates, both to the persons directly involved and to society as a whole. Studies have shown that homosexuals have a twenty-five to thirty year decrease in life expectancy compared to the population at large. Gays expose themselves to a whole array of diseases including liver disease, infectious hepatitis, AIDS, rectal cancer, as well as a higher rate of suicide and mental illness.⁹ It does not show neighbourly love to ignore such health risks in the lives of fellow citizens.

Show the world what the redeeming work of Christ means for our marriages and families.

Furthermore, and more importantly, same-sex marriages will further subject our society to God's judgment. There is no blessing on this. To the contrary, it brings a curse to society, as one can see not only on the health side of the issue, but also in the weakening of the family and the fabric that holds society together as a whole.

What should we do?

What should we, who wish to defend marriage as God ordained it, do in the present situation? The following come to mind.

1. We should start at home and show the world what the redeeming work of Christ means for our marriages and families. Our marriages should mirror the love of Christ and his church (Eph 5:21-33). Our marriages and families should be beacons of hope in a dark world so that people ask us the reason for our joy (1 Pet 3:15). Being a salt in society is an important way to influence it. As Christians we can give struggling homosexuals hope with the gospel. There is no bondage from which the Spirit of our risen Saviour cannot deliver. He is all powerful and He can do it (1 Cor 6:9-11).
2. Emphasize to others that we are not defending our pet concepts but God's design for marriage. He ordained it and to Him we should listen. God's rights always take precedence over imagined human rights! He has spoken clearly in his Word, and his Word gives us the authority to speak up on this issue. And does not the preamble to our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms explicitly recognize that "Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God"?
3. Wherever possible we should oppose the loose sexual morals of the day and support all initiatives promoting chastity. We should show why unbiblical morals are bad for society. At the same time we must honour the right of others to disagree with us and show Christian love to our opponents. We seek not to put down fellow citizens but to honour God. We must show compassion to those who struggle with sexual sin. We are all sinners needing the grace of God.



Church News

Made available for call and recommended to the churches:

Rev. W. Bredenhof

Rev. W. Bredenhof has been made available for call with the recommendation of the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church of Smithers, BC, due to family circumstances that make him unable to continue with the specific work of a missionary in Fort Babine.

4. If you know someone who is a member of a church that promotes gay marriage and advocates it in government forums, you should help that person to protest vigorously and to point their leaders to what Scripture teaches. It is a horrible thing that in our country those who say they speak for the Christian church are actually contradicting God's Word. The damage they do is catastrophic. Their testimony should be challenged.
5. We need to work on the political front, for government has a role. According to Scripture, government is to be God's servant for good and to oppose evil (Rom 13:4). Write and lobby your elected representatives. They have a responsibility. We should also be ready to recognize the political realities and work with others for realistic or attainable solutions in areas we agree.¹⁰ It would be good to organize a meeting of like-minded people in which the concerns of same-sex marriage and what to do about them are addressed. We must get more involved in the political process and agenda of our nation and let our voice be heard more forcefully.

Suggestions for further reading

Daniel Cere and Douglas Farrow, eds., *Divorcing Marriage. Unveiling the Dangers in Canada's New Social Experiment*, (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004)

Glenn T. Stanton and Bill Maier, *Marriage on Trial. The Case against Same-sex Marriage and Parenting*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004)

Useful resources can be found at: <http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/resources/index.asp>

¹A short version of this material was presented at "Ignite our Culture

Conference" in Burlington, Ontario, on November 13, 2004, sponsored by Equipping Christians for the Public Square Centre.

²For this topic and for what follows in this paragraph see Daniel Cere, *Redefining Marriage? A Case for Caution*, (2003), p. 9-10. Available at

www.marriageinstitute.ca/pages/issues.htm (search under Cere). Dr. Cere teaches at McGill and the paper referred to here is a revised version of submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. See also Maggie Gallagher "What Marriage is For", *The Weekly Standard* vol. 8, issue 45, (2003). Available at www.weeklystandard.com

³See, e.g., Katherine Young and Paul Nathanson, "Answering Advocates of Gay Marriage" *The Australian Family*, (July and November 2003), especially "Claim 20" in the November article. Available at www.family.org.au/journal/2003/j20031103.html

⁴E.g., in a 1970 survey of 1,000 homosexual in the San Francisco area, it was found that 84% of white and 77% of black homosexual males had 50 or more homosexual partners in their life time. Only 3% of white and 9% of black homosexuals had fewer than 10 homosexual partners during their lifetime. See Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), p. 453. Figures from a 1997 Australian study and 1994 Dutch study are similar. (Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p. 455-456.) On violence and stability, also see *When Two Become One: The Unique Nature and Benefits of Marriage*, 2nd ed., (Markham: Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2003), p. 19.

⁵What follows is based on G. L. Stanton and B. Maier, *Marriage on Trial. The Case Against Same-sex Marriage and Parenting* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004) p. 24-25.

⁶This position has even resulted, for example, in the high court of Vermont explicitly ruling that marriage in the state of Vermont has nothing to do with procreation. See Maggie Gallagher "What Marriage is For", *The Weekly Standard* vol. 8, issue 45 (2003) p. 3. Available at www.weeklystandard.com

⁷See, for example, Chuck Colson, "The Wisdom of Solomon", *Breakpoint with*

Charles Colson, August 11, 2004. Available at www.FamilyPart.ON.CA (go to library, news, family, "family redefinition hurts children").

⁸See Maggie Gallagher, *Testimony on the Marriage Affirmation and Protection Amendment* (H3190), (Massachusetts Statehouse, April 28, 2003), p. 1-2. Available at www.marriageinstitute.ca/pages/issues.htm.

Also, see, for example, K. D. Pruett, *Fatherhood. Why Father Care is As Essential As Mother Care for Your Child* (New York: Free Press, 2000). For sexual abuse of children or pedophilia, see Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p. 479-480.

⁹See Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p. 472-473. On mental illness, the Netherlands Mental Health Survey and Incidence Study reported in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* in 2001 that "people with same-sex sexual behavior are at greater risk for psychiatric disorders." This underlines the fact that the 1973 decision of the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders was politically motivated. This was not the result of new research. Peter Sprigg, "Homosexuality: The Threat to the Family and the Attack on Marriage" *Family Research Council Issue 99* (Oct 14, 2004). Available at

www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=PD04F01&v=PRINT

¹⁰See, for example, D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) p. 419.

The Institution of a Second Church in Fergus, Ontario

Fergus is a small town in South-Western Ontario. It is home to about 10,500 people. It is well known for its beautiful limestone buildings, for the scenic Grand River, which winds its way through the town, and for the “Highland Games,” a summer festival which promotes and celebrates the town’s Scottish heritage. This past summer, another celebration took place, the celebration of an historic moment for the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church, the institution of another church! To human eyes, this celebration was on a much smaller scale; however, the focus of this celebration was on One who transcends both time and distance: our God at work gathering and expanding his church.

Yes, Fergus has been blessed with an abundance of growth in the last number of years. When the upstairs auditorium became too full, a big-screen TV and a number of chairs were set up in the basement auditorium, and this was used regularly as overflow. In August of 2003, a second temporary solution was established: dividing the congregation into two groups, and having four services each Sunday. Catechism classes were also duplicated, and with the help of Candidate Geurts, we continued in this fashion. We are thankful that with this arrangement we could proceed, while discussions relating to another institution began in earnest.

Sunday, July 11, 2004, marked a culmination of much prayer, work, and God’s providential blessings. We could celebrate the division of Maranatha Fergus into two congregations, known for now as Fergus North and Fergus South. The Grand River forms a natural boundary between the two congregations.

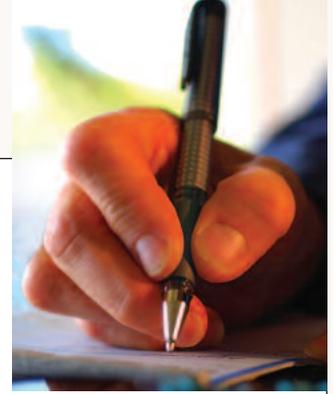
The entire day of July 11 was centred on the institution of another congregation. It is notable that in the catechism instruction, Rev. J. Louwse had arrived at Lord’s Day 21, the Lord’s Day dealing with our confession about the church, the communion of saints, and the forgiveness of sins. This was very applicable to the focus of the day.

In the morning, we were instructed about the church (LD 21, Q/A 54), purchased by the blood of Christ. He paid the penalty of death for our sins, freeing us from its bondage. He also, by his Word and Spirit, continues to gather, defend, and preserve his body. With the growth in numbers in this area, we can clearly see Christ’s gathering work. After instituting, we may go on, strengthened by the knowledge that we are, by God’s grace, part of this church gathering work and that Christ is Head also of this new Church.

In the afternoon, we gathered as one group, once again making use of our basement facilities. We were instructed from God’s Word on how we should now proceed as two distinct

churches, each functioning as a communion of believers (LD 21, Q/A 55 and 56). Rev. Louwse compared this to a construction zone, a work in progress, a work which will ultimately not be completed until the final day. We are all called to action and service, to build up this house as living stones (1 Pet 2:5), put in place by God. Like stones, we are different in size, colour, and strength. Each stone, special and unique, has been chosen by God. Work is needed to make each stone fit together. We are called to build joyfully and continuously, to share our gifts and treasures with one another. We cannot do this in our own strength, but only because we build on Christ, the foundation and the cornerstone (1 Pet 2:7), who binds us together with the cement of his Word. God reveals his great mercy towards us, the “community of the forgiven.” Christ has paid the penalty of our sins, and this knowledge directs us to show forgiveness to one another, and to walk and work humbly together. Because we have communion with Christ, we also may have communion with one another. In this knowledge we may proceed, now on separate paths.

After the service was over, Rev. Louwse presented an overview of the events leading to this day. We have gone against the trends of a number of churches around us. Some denominations struggle with decreasing memberships,



while we have been blessed with steady growth. Some have gone in the direction of “mega-churches”. For us, it became evident that having two smaller congregations would benefit the communion of the saints and would enhance the well being of all the members. We were encouraged to go forward in faith, looking to Christ our Head, and to actively pursue drawing members from the community around us; we have lots of room in our church building now!

Following this presentation, the opportunity was given for congratulatory messages. These included greetings on behalf of Classis Ontario North, and from the neighbouring churches of Elora, Guelph, Grand Valley, and Orangeville. A number of remarks alluded to the historical association of church separation and division with schism and heresy. In this case, however, we may thankfully rejoice in God’s blessings! Rather than speak of church division, we might speak of church multiplication! We were wished God’s continued blessings and guidance. Following these messages, we had an opportunity for refreshments, to mingle, and to say farewell.

We thank God for this joyful day. We pray that God’s name may be increasingly glorified, that the light of his Word may shine brightly in our community, and that we may continue faithfully in his service.

Dear Editor,

Permit me to answer Magdalene VanderLinde’s question (Letters, November 19th) about effective Christian involvement in the Conservative Party of Canada. My answer is very simple: Gary Mitchell was only one candidate for the Conservative Party. In the last election, there were scores of socially conservative candidates, including many sincere Christians. In our local riding, Reformed Christians were instrumental in selecting our candidate, David Sweet, a Presbyterian who takes his faith seriously.

Rather than turn against the party because of one candidate, Christians should get involved and help select a candidate in their own riding that reflects their values and principals. Other than investing some time and financially supporting the candidate, there is nothing to lose and everything to gain. Otherwise, Christians can sit back, do little, and then complain that the country is going to pot. I’m not convinced, however, that the Lord will bless that approach. Can Christians be effective in the Conservative Party? Absolutely!

Ron Bremer
Carlisle, ON

Dear Editor,

In the *Clarion* of November 19, 2004, Magdalene VanderLinde asked: “How effective any Christians can be in the Conservative Party if that party allows homosexual activists to run as candidates”. The answer is: by the grace of God, in a democratic society with a combined effort, Christians can be just as effective for their cause as the homosexuals are for theirs.

Although our country cannot be considered a Christian country anymore, I still like to think that we have more Christians among us than homosexual activists (25-30% still attend church services). The problem is those activists are very active, make use of every opportunity they can find, and demand their rights. Sadly enough we do not do that, and as a result in the end we will be the losers and so Christianity will be.

Let us stand up and be counted! Are we not to be the salt of the earth? Or did we lose our saltiness already (Matt 5:13)?

Arend Harke
St. Albert, AB

Dear Editor,

Are the pages of *Clarion* the proper place to be addressing the concerns Rev. Cl. Stam has with the FRCNA (editorial Nov.5/04)? Would it not be better served on the pages of their paper *The Banner of Truth*?

In respect for our Free Reformed brothers, Rev. Stam is “getting things off his chest” at the wrong address.

W. Reinink
Elora, Ontario

Response

The matter of contact with the FRCNA is a matter of General Synod and therefore concerns all the members of our churches. The magazine *Clarion* is an excellent medium to ask attention for the developments regarding contacts with these churches. The FRCNA standpoint is a matter which concerns all of us, hence my decision to write an editorial on these points.

Cl. Stam



How to elect office bearers?

The title of the article of Dr. Gootjes (*Clarion*, no. 16) did not show the question mark as the header of this letter does. Dr. Gootjes, and also Rev. W.B. Slomp, express their approval that office bearers are called by the Lord through the congregation. The congregation has the final say as Rev. Slomp writes it in his article in *Clarion*, no. 17. That this is a well established practice in our church we all know, but that it is based and rooted in the Bible is not so clear. Both editors point to Acts 6:1-6 as the place where we see a procedure similar to ours. But we have to notice that this procedure was only used once and for the election of deacons. Note that the people brought them to the Apostles for approval – not the reverse (*The Masters Plan for the Church*, J.F. MacArthur, p. 191). The Apostles, not the congregation, had the final say.

The office of deacon is not as clearly described as the office of elder. Sometimes we even see women serving in this office (*Ambten in de Apostolische Kerk*, Dr. J. van Bruggen, p. 108). For various reasons our church today does not follow the Apostolic Church and Calvin in this matter.

Can the passage of Acts 6 also be used for election of the elders? We will not find support for this in the New Testament. Following the pattern of the first century church it was the Apostles who selected and ordained the elders (Acts 14:23). Later it was done by those who were close to the Apostles and involved in their ministry (Titus 1:5) and

thereafter we see elders appointing elders. It appears as a biblical pattern that the elders have the responsibility to identify and ordain other elders. Is it as clear as Rev. Slomp states that our office bearers are chosen according biblical directives?

It is true that the Lord calls men to the office of elder and by the work of the Holy Spirit He generates the desire in their heart to serve in that capacity. A brother who does not feel this desire is probably not called by God but still can be voted in by the congregation.

If one thing is clear from the Bible in this regard, it is that most of the directly God-called great leaders, prophets, and even disciples (later Apostles) were not always popular with men. They were not likely to win a popularity contest.

Does it matter how our office bearers are called?

The first question asked in our ordination form indicates the importance of this question. “Do you feel in your heart that God himself, through his congregation, has called you to this office?” Before you wholeheartedly can say “Yes, I do” you have to be sure that God’s calling and the involvement and responsibility of the consistory and congregation reflect a biblical balance.

John de Boer
Langley, BC



Karen Dieleman

Karen Dieleman is a part-time lecturer at Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College and a member of CARE.

Mission Curriculum Day

For the third consecutive summer, teachers and colleagues of the Canadian Reformed elementary schools in Ontario met on an August day to consider the implementation of another strand in the church history curriculum, commissioned by the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies in Ontario. The topic of study for the day was mission: spreading the good news of salvation by the command of Jesus Christ. Our facilitator for the day, Mrs. Christine vanHalen-Faber, reflected briefly on the relevance of this topic for each one of us, as we are all called to support mission work, albeit in different ways. She then introduced our guest speaker, Mrs. Inge deVisser, whose presentation was soon acknowledged as the highlight of the day. Mrs. deVisser has had a lifelong interest in the work of Christ in his church. Author of a number of books which discuss this work, participant in many evangelism activities, and supporter to Reformed teachers in South Africa, where she worked alongside her husband, Dr. A. deVisser, Mrs. deVisser was eager to speak to us about mission. Her obvious passion for her topic, together with a lively manner and some humorous touches, rekindled our personal and professional enthusiasm for supporting and teaching about mission.

Teachers listen

Mrs. deVisser reminded us first to be enthusiastic about the Lord and our faith in Him. Even before we consider his work, we must know Him and depend on Him in every situation. Unless we are personally connected to Him, we will

neither seize nor create opportunities to speak to children about Him. Mission work, therefore, begins at home: in our families and classrooms. Secondly, Mrs. deVisser reminded us that what we most remember about our teachers is not the information they tell us, but their characters. In the same way, teaching about mission is not talking about facts.

We must bring mission work close to the children by showing them how the Lord works in people's lives, including our own.

We must bring mission work close to the children by showing them how the Lord works in people's lives, including our own. We must find ways to engage the children actively. Lastly, our speaker encouraged us to work together as a team. Together we are responsible, because together we are preparing for the Lord's return. Let us all have a heart for mission.

Reminded by these invigorating words about our own blessings in knowing the Lord and having opportunity to tell others about Him, we next gave our attention to a question and answer panel. Both prepared and spontaneous questions were directed toward four panellists with knowledge and/or experience in mission work: Mr. Henk Plug, former mission aid worker in Brazil, Mr. Keith Sikkema, former support

personnel to mission work in Indonesia, Miss Judy Kingma, writer of the mission units to be used in the schools, and Mrs. deVisser. Two of the questions and responses were:

1. Does a school on the mission field have a somewhat different task than "our own" schools do? In essence, they are the same: we tell children the deeds of the Lord. However, there are also differences: in Brazil, for example, the school is part of the missionary project; enrolment is not limited to the children of the church, and the school has evangelism as a focus. This is not the case in Canada, where our schools aim to assist the parents in teaching covenant children.
2. What names and task descriptions would help our churches and communities understand each other better when discussing mission, home



Mrs. Inge deVisser

mission, outreach, evangelism, etc.?

The word 'mission' derives from a root which means 'to send'. It would be best to use this word only in relation to a church's sending out a missionary to a designated place, to preach the gospel in order to establish a church there (whether in a foreign country or at home). Activities such as Vacation Bible School, summer camps, radio programs, soup kitchens, and other programs are best designated as 'outreach' or 'evangelism.' Some renaming amongst ourselves may be advisable. Further, mission aid refers to those tasks which are necessary to make possible the preaching of the gospel (building a house for the missionary, building airstrips, teaching the missionary's children). External support organizations (Mission Aviation Fellowship, Wycliffe translators) fall outside the definitions of mission and mission aid. Although important and necessary, their activities are not supervised by the sending church.

Teachers share

After the panel discussion, teachers chose their own activity to conclude the morning. Some watched videos about mission or mission aid; some investigated a kit on Papua, Indonesia (formerly Irian Jaya), extensively prepared by Mrs. R. Versteeg as an aid to teaching; some discussed the new mission units to be



The question and answer panel

implemented this year; some managed to do a bit of everything!

The break for lunch, as well as the morning coffee time, gave colleagues a chance to renew acquaintances and to chat more informally about the day's topic. Remembering Mrs. deVisser's words to "work as a team," we encouraged each other in personal ways, as well as teachers anticipating a new school year.

Let us all have a heart for mission.

Always looking for innovative ways to teach and learn, we organized ourselves in the afternoon according to "classical" divisions instead of "by teachers of the same grade," as we had done in the past. All teachers working within a church classical region grouped together to share ideas about what mission topics would be most suitable for their local schools. Our time was short and we

agreed that such particularity needs to be continued by local staffs.

Besides the spiritual rewards of thinking and talking about the Lord's goodness to us, and the collegial rewards of both serious and light-hearted conversations, we were enriched on this day by vigorous singing and by the opportunity to purchase books amply displayed by Mr. Jerry Tillema, whose labour of love is having its trickle effect in our schools as we stock up on Reformed reading materials. We were also grateful for his presence.

The near-completion of the church history curriculum and this last joint day of preparation for church history teaching came exactly ten years after a "Telling Church History" conference first sparked the desire to work collectively on a church history curriculum. Although curriculum work is never finished, we are thankful for the progress the Lord has allowed us to make in this regard. May our children and families be blessed by it, may many more come to know the LORD, and may his Name be glorified.



Press Release Regional Synod East 2004 held on November 10, 2004 in Ancaster, Ontario

Opening

On behalf of the convening church at Ancaster, Rev. G.Ph. van Popta called the meeting to order. Scripture reading was Psalm 90. Rev. van Popta connected the words of this Psalm to Remembrance Day. All present sang Hymn 42: 1, 2, 6, 7, 8. In prayer a blessing was asked over the meeting. Rev. van Popta welcomed the delegates. Rev. P.J. Wallace and Rev. J.R. Ferguson were present as fraternal delegates from the OPC. Rev. H. Zekveld represented the URCNA.

Election & Constitution

The following officers were elected:
Chairman: Rev. J. De Gelder
Vice-chairman: Rev. D.G.J. Agema
Clerk: Rev. J. Louwerse

Regional Synod was constituted. The chairman thanked the church at Ancaster for all the preparatory work. The agenda was established.

Correspondence

Regional Synod had to deal with three appeals. In closed session two were declared admissible whereas the third was declared inadmissible. Next, Regional Synod had a preliminary discussion on the two appeals and appointed two advisory committees to prepare an answer.

Fraternal Delegates

Rev. P.J. Wallace conveyed fraternal greetings from the OPC. He expressed the wish that as churches we may grow together in the unity of faith. Rev. H. Zekveld addressed Regional Synod on behalf of the URCNA and wishes Synod the blessing of the Lord. The chairman responded to both speakers with words of thankfulness and encouragement. A letter from Covenant East Classis of the RCUS conveying fraternal greetings was read.

Appeals

Regional Synod dealt with two appeals in closed session.

Reports

1. The Deputies Article 48 CO reported on the examinations of br. S.C. VanDam and br. D.M. DeBoer and the retirement of Rev. Cl. Stam. The chairman noted with thankfulness the addition of two new ministers to the federation. He also expressed thankfulness for the work of Rev. Stam and wished him strength in dealing with his disease.
2. The church at Brampton reported that the archives of Regional Synod East 2003 were found to be in good order.
3. The church at Grassie reported that the books of the treasurer were audited and found to be in good order.
4. The Treasurer reported for the period Oct. 31, 2003 - Nov. 10, 2004. Regional Synod adopted the proposed assessment of \$2.00 per communicant member.
All reports were received with thankfulness.

Appointments

1. Deputies Article 48
 - a. From Classis Central Ontario as deputy for Classis Northern Ontario and Niagara: Rev. G. Nederveen; alternate: Rev. W. den Hollander.
 - b. From Classis Northern Ontario as deputy for Classis Central Ontario and Ontario West: Rev. P.G. Feenstra; alternate: Rev. P. Aasman.
 - c. From Classis Niagara as deputy for Classis Central Ontario and Ontario West: Rev. D.G.J. Agema; alternate: Rev. C.J. VanderVelde.
 - d. From Classis Ontario West as deputy for Classis Northern Ontario and Niagara: Rev. R.E. Pot; alternate: Rev. J. Ludwig.

2. Treasurer: br. D. VanAmerongen (342 Russ Road, Grimsby, ON L3M 4E7)
3. Church for auditing the books of the Treasurer: Grassie
4. Church to maintain the Archives: Toronto
5. Church for inspecting the Archives: Brampton

Arrangements for next Regional Synod

Convening church: Dunnville/Wainfleet
Date: November 9, 2005

Closing

After Question Period and Censure ad Article 34 CO, the Acts were read and adopted. The Press Release was read and approved. The chairman requested Synod to sing Hymn 46, after which he led in prayer. Regional Synod East 2004 was closed.

*For Regional Synod East 2004,
D.G.J. Agema, Vice-chairman*

Press Release of the meeting of the combined committees of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches to propose a common church order held November 9-11, 2004 at the United Reformed Church of Dutton, MI

Present: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema, and Mr. Harry Van Gorp, representing The United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John Van Woudenberg and Dr. Art Witten of The Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC).

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on the first chapter of Joshua and prayer.

The minutes of the August 3-5, 2004 meeting were reviewed and approved, as

were the agenda and timetable for the next three days.

Correspondence from a number of Canadian and United Reformed Churches interacting with the committee's reports to the respective synods was acknowledged. Feedback from the churches is much appreciated. Comments will be taken into consideration when the committee deals with the relevant articles.

In a review of the articles thus far adopted, Foundational Principles 11, 12, and 14 were expanded and supporting Scripture passages updated. The wording of Foundational Principle 5: "Therefore, a broader assembly governs the church only..." evoked a lengthy discussion on the Scriptural understanding of authority and jurisdiction as it applies to the broader assemblies. What is the character of the authority exercised by the broader assemblies? Do broader assemblies in fact have authority over other assemblies? Is the consistory's authority over the congregation of a principally different character than the authority of the classis over the consistory? This matter is to be finalized at a future meeting.

The first sentence in the article dealing with "Church Visitors" was changed to reflect that every two years classis shall appoint a number of its more experienced and competent ministers or elders to visit all the churches of the classis once during that period.

The article regarding men with exceptional gifts (Dort art. 8) was reviewed. Upon further reflection and deliberation it was agreed to as yet include this article in the proposed church order but with significant safeguards to prevent abuse. The proposal now reads: "Only under circumstances of general tribulation or severe persecution which make the completion of regular theological education impossible, a consistory may request that an exceptionally gifted brother be presented to classis for a suitable candidacy examination. In such a situation, his consistory and the classis should also have assurance of his

godliness, humility, modesty, understanding, wisdom, discretion, and public speaking ability."

Proposed wording of an article dealing with the relationship of the church with the state was briefly discussed. Questions included whether such an article belongs in the church order, and if so, the specific task of the church vis-à-vis the state. A new proposal will be dealt with at the next meeting. A proposed article for the support of needy theological students will also be on the table.

The brothers Pols and Van Woudenberg presented a draft proposal for appendices outlining stipulations for licensure, candidacy, and ordination examinations, as well as the examination of ordained ministers (colloquium doctum). Also, proposals for a "certificate of release from consistory" and a "certificate of release from classis" were presented. Considerable time was spent on reviewing the specific requirements, procedures, and content for each of these examinations. While each examination is important, it was felt that the greatest weight must be attached to candidacy examination. We were able to complete the stipulations for the licensure examination, the candidacy examination, and the ordination examination.

A theological student who is a member of a church within the federation and is preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments must undergo the licensure examination in order to be authorized to exhort in the churches. If classis judges the student's performance to be acceptable, and he promises to teach in accordance with the Three Forms of Unity, classis shall issue him a license to exhort in the churches as long as he continues preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments, subject to annual review by the licensing classis.

A man aspiring to the office of minister who is a member of a church within the federation and has graduated from an approved seminary must undergo the candidacy examination in

order to become eligible for call within the federation. Classis shall issue a written declaration, valid for two years, that the prospective candidate is eligible for call to the churches in the federation if he sustains the examination and only with the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod and his whole-hearted promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. If after two years the candidate has not received a call he may, with the recommendation of his consistory, request an extension of his candidacy for another year. To grant this request classis may require another examination.

A candidate who has accepted a call within the federation must undergo the ordination examination to become eligible for ordination to the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the churches.

A review of the remaining examinations and certificates will be completed at a future meeting.

The last hour of the third day was used to review the agenda for the next meeting. Several items as yet to be done were listed. In the mean time the respective committees will carefully study the various church orders, and be prepared to discuss the deferred items. The next meeting will take place D.V. March 15-17, 2005 at the URC of Dutton, MI.

Appreciation was expressed to the Dutton URC for its hospitality and the exceptional help its secretary was able to give to the committee. Dr. Kloosterman, in his closing remarks, stated his thankfulness to the Lord for the brotherly manner in which the committee could proceed with its labors and the amount of work that could be accomplished. He wished that the churches of both federations would have seen and heard the fraternity and camaraderie so present in the discussions and deliberations. To God be the praise and glory.

*For the committee,
Gerard J. Nordeman*

