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*In worship
heaven
and earth
touch
spiritually*

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Are You Excited?

The LORD has arranged our lives so we can have a weekly date day!

Meeting with God

"Are you excited?" That is the question someone may ask of a bride or groom as their wedding day is coming closer. It may be asked of someone who will be going to the airport to pick up his or her spouse who has been away on a trip or a dear relative or friend they have not seen for some time. Sometimes you don't have to ask the question because the excitement is so obvious. Children, eagerly anticipating a birthday party, will show their excitement in their actions. A sports team, about to play a big game, will be filled with excitement too. At times the excitement may not be obvious to others but we may feel it as a knot in our stomach.

But now I ask you this: Would you include going to church in the list of things that get you excited? Do you go to church with eager anticipation? Is there ever a knot in your stomach as you wait for the worship service to begin? There is good reason to have a heightened sense of excitement, for worship is the most exciting event in the world. In worship we meet with our God.

Now the thought might arise that this is overstating the case a little. Is it not one of the blessings of New Testament believers that we have access to God in heaven any place, any time? Is it not simply a matter of folding our hands in prayer and instantly we are at the throne of grace?

All this is very true. However, this does not take away that something special happens in a worship service. We can even compare it to a family situation. In our age we have many ways to stay in touch with one another. You can phone or text, or, there are computer programs that allow you to see each other while you talk. All such contact will not take away the excitement of hearing a loved one is coming for an

actual visit, or having a family get-together. This is also true when it comes to meeting with God in worship.

Proof from the Scriptures

In worship we meet with God in a special way. This can be seen in the way God turned his creation pattern into a pattern for our lives. He declared the Sabbath day holy and called his children to keep it holy. One way of showing that it is holy is by resting from our daily work. The purpose of this rest was that we might spend it with him. Sometimes people speak of having a date night. The LORD has arranged our lives so we can have a weekly date day!

The LORD also has indicated the proper activity for that day. We learn in Leviticus 23:3 that it was to be a day of sacred assembly. The life of Israel would have been filled with all sorts of assemblies. Most certainly there would have been family get-togethers or they would have the equivalent of town meetings to decide on all sorts of practical matters or to judge disputes. By speaking of a sacred assembly, the LORD indicated this was to be a meeting with him.

We are not told how faithfully Israel followed this command. What we do know is that during the life of our Lord Jesus, weekly worship in the synagogue was a regular pattern of life. Our Lord himself faithfully attended these sacred assemblies. We see the early New Testament church simply continue this practice. The book of Acts shows us that the key difference was that the believers gathered around the apostles (Acts 2:42-47). The author of the letter to the Hebrews saw the need to admonish some who had become negligent in meeting together (Heb 10:25).

This contact with heaven in worship can also be sensed in the letter to the Hebrews when the author wrote, "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have



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come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven” (Heb 12:22, 23).

The special character of a worship service also comes out in the way it begins and ends. It begins with a divine greeting. It ends with a divine blessing.

A worship service, therefore, is a special meeting between God and his people. There is a particular closeness in that event that cannot be found anywhere else. It is important to see this over against those who think you can have a closer experience of God in nature. I recall talking with a person one time while holidaying on the west coast of Vancouver Island who thought that when you visited a place like that, you were a little closer to God. That is not true. God comes close to his worshipping people. That is where his Word is proclaimed. That is where he reaches out with the sacraments. In worship heaven and earth touch spiritually.

Some implications

When we understand what is happening in the weekly sacred assembly, we can also see a number of implications. Without trying to be exhaustive, I mention a few things that come to mind.

First, an awareness of what is happening should fill us with holy excitement. After all, we are coming together to meet our gracious God! He is about to speak to us and we may speak to him in return in our songs and prayer. If we get a little emotional when going to pick up a loved one from the airport, we have all the more reason to get a little emotional when we go to meet the God who loves us in Christ. There is reason to draw near with a degree of fear and trembling.

What’s Inside

In our third issue of this year, Rev. Eric Kampen has written an editorial on the excitement that should come with attending a worship service. He outlines a number of ways in which this excitement should impact the way we worship the LORD on Sunday.

Dr. John Smith explores Old Testament slavery laws and the significance of these laws for our lives as redeemed people of God.

Issue 3 brings readers regular columns Treasures New and Old, Education Matters, and Ray of Sunshine. In addition, you will also find a CD review and three press releases. Finally, there is also a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

Church News

Called by the American Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI, USA:

Rev. K. Kok

of Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, USA

New Worship Times for Fergus North CanRC

As of January 1, 2012, the Canadian Reformed Church of Fergus North will be worshipping at 9:30 am and 2:00 pm in the gymnasium of Maranatha Christian School
8037 Wellington Road 19, Fergus, ON.

New Worship Times for Maranatha Church, Fergus, Ontario

As of January 1, 2012 the worship service times of Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church of Fergus will be changed to 10:00 am and 2:30 pm.

Closely related to this is how we appear before our God. When we go to meet a loved one, we dress for the occasion. In our way of dressing we show our excitement. How much more does this apply to meeting our holy God? Rather than all this talk about God just accepting us as we are, we should take the attitude of showing that we care.

In worship heaven and earth touch spiritually

Third, again thinking of meeting a loved one, you want to be there on time. That way you can give a welcome the moment they appear. In our meeting with God, we do well to be there on time. In this case, we do need time to get our mind and heart ready. After a busy week, some quiet time is no luxury. In connection with this, it may even be a good idea to let the final minutes before worship starts be a time of silence. Somehow the pattern has developed to fill all empty space with music, also in church. Silence has a way of impressing on us the importance of what is about to happen.

Fourth, there are also implications for how exactly the worship service starts. The liturgies listed in the *Book of Praise* indicate the common practice is to start with a confession of faith (votum) and a greeting (salutation). That is what you would expect when two eager parties meet each other. I always find it a mood spoiler to have to start a worship service with a number of announcements. Can you imagine a husband going

to meet his wife at the airport but then, when he sees her walking through the door, the first thing he says, "I have some announcements about the bills that need to be paid and about the dishes that need to be cleaned when we get home." What his wife expects and needs is a hug. Yet, somehow in the sacred assembly, when God is just about to meet with his people, the pattern in many churches has become to break the excitement of the moment with a variety of announcements.

Sinners in the presence of a gracious God: if that is not reason for being excited, nothing is

Fifth, when we realize what is going on in a worship service, and we do justice to our emphasis on God's covenant, we should realize it is not a social event but a time when families join together to worship God. Note that I mention the families. As there are six days to work so there are six days to socialize. This emphasis on family is good to keep in mind for the whole day, not just the times for worship.

Reflect and discuss

Perhaps more implications will come to mind. Implications, of course are always risky, but, I am willing to take the risk for the sake of stimulating reflection on how in worship we go to meet our God. When you go to church next Sunday, when you sit waiting for the service to begin, think about what is about to happen. The more the awareness grows of what is going on in worship, the more a holy excitement should grow, for, it is quite something that we may appear before God and confess, "Our help is in the name of the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth," and hear the response, "Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Sinners in the presence of a gracious God, if that is not reason for being excited, nothing is.





MATTHEW 13:52

Broken Ground and Circumcised Hearts



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"Break up your unplowed ground and do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, circumcise your hearts." (Jeremiah 4:3-4)

Some time ago I spoke with a young person who'd become disillusioned, withdrawn himself, and joined an evangelical church. From our conversation it became clear that most of his doubts hadn't come out of what we confess, but out of a disappointment in the lifestyle of some in the Canadian Reformed churches. He described how his disillusionment started at a graduation after-party where there had been drunkenness and sexually explicit language, and where some sincere church members had been mocked. Now, I'm pretty sure this fellow was guilty of only focusing on the negative and painting all with the same brush. However, I don't discount that there was some truth in his criticism.

That was the problem in Judah and Jerusalem in the days of good King Josiah and Jeremiah the prophet. All the outward formalities of Israel's religion were in place after Josiah's reformation. But apparently there wasn't the inner reformation that leads to new life. Jeremiah mentions idolatry, adultery, drunkenness, and deceitfulness among the covenant people.

So the Lord sent Jeremiah to call his people to break up their unplowed ground and not to sow among thorns. Unplowed ground is ground that's left fallow for a season. Before it's going to be sown,

it has to be well-plowed because it's no use sowing among weeds and thorns. Similar imagery is used later by the Lord Jesus in the parable of the sower. When the seed of God's Word is sown, it sometimes ends up among thorns where it is choked and unfruitful. The fields of the people's lives can be full of thorns. The Lord calls his people to plow under those weeds that grow out of the sinful nature and to prepare the soil of our lives, to let the new nature grow and bear fruit in us.

But that's not so easily done, is it? It's like Jeremiah says in 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil." But our merciful covenant God never demands anything of his people unless he's also promised what they need for doing it.

He says in verse 4, "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem." He reminds his people of the sacrament of circumcision. When a male child was circumcised eight days after birth, that circumcision was a sign and seal of the Lord's promise to his covenant people that he would not only save them from their sins, but also renew them by his Holy Spirit so they could cut away

their sinful behaviour and live a new life. However, that promise was only effectual if his people also made an effort to renew their hearts and lives.

How much richer and more glorious all this is for us today! We have that radical call to renewal of life today, too. But how much more powerful are the sign and seal of God's promises today – namely, baptism. Baptism looks back on the fulfilled work of Christ, signifying and sealing not only that he promises to wash us from our sins, but also that his Holy Spirit will renew us. Think of what Paul writes in Romans 6, "We were therefore buried with [Christ] through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life" (v 4). Because we have been baptized, we have no reason to give up our fight against sin! And we have no reason to give anyone grounds to be critical and to leave the church because of blatant sinful behaviour.

I'm afraid that those critics expose a weakness among us, namely that we may be more accepting of what is not born out of Christ and his righteousness. That can happen quietly, in many ways, when we ask: "What's wrong with this? Do we need to get worked up about that?" And then there's

no breaking up the unplowed ground. We need to make use of our baptism, and not relax in our fight against the sin in us and around us.

After all, consider how verse 4 ends with a threat: "Or my wrath will break out and burn like fire

because of the evil you have done – burn with no one to quench it." The LORD emphasizes that there's no salvation without renewal of life. But the LORD wouldn't threaten like that unless he also gave everything needed to be renewed. And if

you believe that, you realize this passage doesn't end on a negative note for those who believe in their covenant God. You know that if he threatens, it's only out of love. It's because he gave everything for you: his one and only Son. 

Out of the House of Bondage: The Old Testament Slavery Laws and our Redemption in Christ

John Smith



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Slavery is illegal in North America and has been for almost 150 years. On January 1, 1863, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln issued a famous document called The Emancipation Proclamation. And this is what it said: "All persons held as slaves within any State. . . in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free." This proclamation officially put an end to black slavery in the United States of America.

We cannot imagine living in a society that has slaves. Yet we hear slavery mentioned every Sunday morning in church. We're told that our servants shall not do any work on the seventh day. We're told not to covet our neighbour's servants. Both the fourth and the tenth commandments presuppose a society with slaves. Perhaps the eighth commandment does as well: according to some scholars, the eighth commandment was originally intended to forbid stealing people for the sake of enslaving them. Not just "You shall not steal *from* your neighbour," but, "You shall not steal your *neighbour*." Indeed, in Exodus 21:16 we read that kidnapping was punishable by death.

Be that as it may, especially the fourth commandment is relevant for the institution of slavery: it ensured that slaves received rest from their labour: "The seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant." God told his people to share the blessing of rest with their slaves, remembering that they had once been slaves themselves. Think of the wording of the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy 5: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. *Therefore* the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day."

In a little while I'll mention some of the slavery laws in the books of Moses. It's important to keep in mind that the background for these laws is the fact that God had rescued his people from the house of slavery. Old Testament scholars typically compare the OT slavery laws with the legislation of the surrounding nations, and that's only natural: it helps us to understand Israel's context. Yet it is important to realize

that these laws were given in a unique setting: God gave his laws to a people whom he had just redeemed from slavery. This setting gives them a redemptive focus. They point forward to the redemption which we enjoy in Jesus Christ.

This article will explore the OT slavery laws by addressing four questions: Where did Israelites get their slaves from? What status did slaves have in society? How were they protected? How were they released? Then I'd like to draw out the significance of these laws for our lives as redeemed people of God.

Where did Israelites get their slaves from?

Slaves came from several different sources. Some people were born as slaves. When female slaves gave birth, their children began life with the status of a slave. For example, Abram had 318 trained men "born in his household" (Gen 14:14). Slaves could also be bought with money (Gen 17:23). Joseph, for example, was bought by Midianite traders and sold to Potiphar. The Israelites too were allowed to buy slaves. Now if the slave was a Hebrew, the purchase was only temporary: after six years he could go free (Exod 21:2, Deut 15:12), though he could choose to remain a slave for life. In that case, his master would pierce his ear with an awl as a visible token of lifelong slavery (Exod 21:6).

God gave his laws to a people whom he had just redeemed from slavery

Then there were also debt slaves. If an Israelite could not pay off a debt, say due to repeated bad harvests or heavy taxes, or the death of the provider, then he or members of his family could be sold as slaves (Deut 15:12; cf. Matt 18:25). In 2 Kings 4, we read how the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as slaves." Then Elisha performed that miracle with the oil, so that it kept flowing till she had more than enough to pay off her debts. The point of the story is not so much the miracle itself but the fact that Elisha saved the woman's family from slavery.

Conquering armies would turn their prisoners of war into slaves (1 Sam 17:9, 1 Macc 3:41, 2 Macc 8:10f). During the reign of Ahab, Mesha king of Moab boasted that he carried out his building projects with the help of Israelite captives. Furthermore, the Israelites under King Pekah took 200,000 captives from Judah, intending

to turn them into slaves, but the Lord was angry that they should enslave their brothers, and he sent the prophet Oded who told the Israelites to let the captives go (2 Chron 28). Sometimes captives were also used as concubines (Num 13:18, Judg 5:30).

Another source of slavery was forced labour. The Egyptians used the Israelites that way (Exod 1:11), and later the Israelites turned the Gibeonites into hewers of wood and drawers of water (Josh 9). David and Solomon also used forced labour, three groups of workers on a three-month cycle (1 Kgs 9:20, 5:13, 11:28).

The Lord was reminding his people of their own past

The Lord seldom legislated slavery as a punishment. Yet one example is found in Exodus 22:2-3: if a thief was caught after breaking in but could not make restitution, he had to be sold to pay for his theft. As mentioned earlier, kidnapping was strictly forbidden. As we read in Deuteronomy 24:7, "If a man is caught kidnapping one of his brother Israelites and treats him as a slave or sells him, the kidnapper must die. You must purge the evil from among you."

In summary, slaves in OT Israel came from a variety of sources: they could be born in the house, or bought with money, or indentured to pay off a debt, or captured in war, or forced into service for a building project. They could not, however, be obtained by kidnapping.

How many slaves were there in Israel? It's difficult to say, because slaves were normally not counted when a census was held. We only have numbers for the exiles that returned from Babylon. In Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 we read that there were 7337 slaves and 42,360 free citizens (Ezra 2:64, Neh 7:66), so slaves made up about fifteen percent of the population at that time.

What status did slaves have in society?

Slaves became part of their master's household and lost their independence. They had a market value (Exod 21:32); they could be bought or sold (Lev 25:44) or passed on as part of an inheritance. They could also be physically beaten, though not to death (Exod 21:20f). If a man captured a woman in war, he could marry her without her consent or the consent of her family (Deut 21:10, Judg 21:22). He could also divorce her again, though if he did so, he could not sell her as a slave but had to let her go free.

The Bible often compares slavery to a yoke (Gen 27:40). At times the yoke was very heavy, for the Israelites often ignored the laws which God had given them. The rich would exploit the poor; creditors would come down hard on debtors and force them into slavery, and they did not necessarily release them when they ought to have done so. Slaves were at the mercy of their masters; they could only cry to the Lord: he would send prophets to rebuke the people (Jer 34:8ff, 2 Kgs 4:1, Amos 2:6f, 8:4ff, Isa 58). In that sense they had a very low status.

The flip side is that household slaves could be integrated into the covenant community. The males were circumcised and they were included in festival meals such as the Passover, while foreigners and hired servants were kept out. Already then it could be said that in the Lord there is neither slave nor free (cf. Gal 3:28). God was generous with his covenant grace.

How were slaves protected?

Virtually all of the OT laws concerning slaves have to do with their protection and release. The law was designed for their wellbeing. For example, a master who beat his slave to death had to be punished (Exod 21:20). If he injured him permanently, he had to release him (21:26), which, incidentally, was a very generous provision for the time: other law codes of the Ancient Near East only offered some financial compensation to the injured slave.

Another interesting law concerns runaway slaves. If a slave ran away from a foreign owner and sought asylum in Israel, the Israelites were not to return him to his owner. The Promised Land became a safe haven where former slaves could begin a new life (Deut 23:15). Again the Lord was reminding his people of their own past. He had set them free from slavery and now they were to let other slaves enjoy their freedom too.

Hebrew slaves had extra protections which foreign slaves did not enjoy. They were not to be treated harshly and could only be held for six years, and when they were released the master had to send them on their way with a generous gift of animals, grain, and wine so that they could make a new start (Deut 15:13-15). Furthermore, if a master took a Hebrew slave girl as wife he was obligated to give her three things – food, clothing, and intimacy, and if he failed to do so he had to let her go free of charge (Exod 21:10f).

These are the sorts of protections that the Lord put in place for the benefit and wellbeing of slaves so that their service would not be too heavy. God wanted to make their yokes lighter and more bearable.

How were slaves released?

A slave could gain his freedom in a number of different ways. Firstly, if a man married a female captive of war, he could divorce her, but if he did, he had to let her go free; he could not sell her.

The OT slavery laws help us to understand our relationship with God

Secondly, a Hebrew slave had to be released after six years of service. If his master had given him a wife during that time, the man could not take his wife or children with him, for although the wife belonged to her husband as wife, she (and her children) still belonged to his master as property. Yet if he loved his master and his wife and children, he had the option of remaining a slave for life. So in this case it seems that the master-slave relationship took precedence over the husband-wife relationship (Exod 21:4-6). To us this may sound troubling. One should not understand this law as detracting from the sanctity of marriage, however, but as a means of upholding order and stability in the society of that time.

Thirdly, a member of a slave's clan could act as a redeemer and buy him out of slavery (Exod 21:8, Lev 25:48f). This practice reflected the way the Lord redeemed his people from Egypt and later from Babylon (Exod 6:6, 15:13, Isa 43:14, Jer 31:11, Mic 4:10, etc).

Fourthly, during the Sabbath year debts were cancelled and during the Year of Jubilee, every fifty years, all Israelite slaves were released. The Jubilee was a once in a lifetime opportunity. We do not know whether the Israelites ever observed it, but the law of the Jubilee does show that God wanted his people to be free.

Redemptive-historical significance

So what significance do these laws have for us as Christians living in the New Testament age? I'd like to suggest that they form the very identity which we have in Christ. Note the following seven points.

1. The OT slavery laws help us to understand our relationship with God. We are both his children and his servants. That was already true of Israel in the OT. In Exodus 4:22 God told Moses to say to Pharaoh, "Israel is my firstborn son. . . let my son go." Yet in Leviticus 25:42 the Lord said, "Because the Israelites

are my servants, they must not be sold as slaves." As children we call God our Father, and as servants we call him our Lord.

2. During his earthly ministry Christ used the Sabbath day to relieve burdens. He said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28). When he healed a crippled woman in the synagogue, he said, "Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" (Luke 13:16). Jesus also referred to his ministry as the fulfillment of the Jubilee. In Luke 4, when he was in the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath day, Jesus read a passage about the Jubilee from Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And then he said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." The coming of Christ means that slaves are released. The enduring message of the fourth commandment is the message of redemption from slavery. That's why, when the catechism explains the fourth commandment in Lord's Day 38, it puts so much emphasis on the preaching. On the Lord's Day we have to hear the gospel of redemption. Christ came to set slaves free from bondage to sin and to give them rest for their souls.

The enduring message of the fourth commandment is the message of redemption from slavery

3. Jesus fulfilled the OT slavery laws when he said, "The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45) – Christ came to his own people as their Redeemer, to buy them out of slavery at the cost of his own life. As we confess in Lord's Day 1, "I am not my own, but belong with body and soul. . . to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ." That is the language of OT slavery.
4. In the OT the Lord taught his redeemed people to share the blessing of redemption with their slaves

by forgiving their debts and setting them free. Jesus used this language when he taught us to pray the fifth petition: "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." Christians who refuse to forgive their fellow believers want to shackle them to debts from which Christ has set them free.

5. God gave his laws for a theocratic society under the old covenant. These laws could only operate as long as Israel remained a free nation under God. In the NT, however, the apostles preached the gospel to Jews who lived under Roman law and to Gentiles who had never lived under Israelite law. The apostles did not seek to introduce the slavery legislation of the OT into the Christian church. They did not try to turn the church into a new Israel under the old law. They did, however, maintain the redemptive focus of the law, in three ways:
 - a. They told slaves to show exemplary obedience to their masters *as serving the Lord* (Eph 6:5, Col 3:22-25). In the New Testament just as much as in the Old, redemption does not imply absolute freedom, but obedience to a new master, the Lord in heaven (Rom 6:22, 14:4, Gal 5, Col 4:1).
 - b. They taught the church that the blessings of salvation are meant for all levels of society. In Christ there is neither slave nor free (Gal 3:28). This teaching reflects the OT laws which allowed slaves full participation in covenant worship: if they were circumcised, they could eat the Passover, and participate in all the great feasts, and they rested on the Sabbath.
 - c. They encouraged slaves to take their freedom if they received the opportunity to do so (1 Cor 7:21).
6. Twenty-first century Canadian society is much different from OT Israel. Slavery has disappeared and the shadows of the law have been fulfilled. Yet the redemptive focus of the slavery laws can still give wise guidance today. I'll mention four applications.
 - a. *Debt Management.* In Israel it could happen that a man became a slave because he could not repay his debts. Today something similar happens when people overextend themselves and make unwise financial decisions. As Christians we are to avoid unnecessary debt so that we do not lose our financial freedom and find ourselves at the mercy of creditors. On the other hand, poverty is also an affliction from the Lord. Institutions such as the Sabbath year and the Year of Jubilee teach us that God allowed debtors to start over. Therefore Christians should

be careful not to attach a negative stigma to bankruptcy and they should be eager to support the work of the deaconry.

- b. *Compensation.* If OT masters were held responsible for injuring or killing slaves, who were their property, then surely employers today should be expected to provide generous compensation in case of injury or death in the workplace, and Christian employers should set an example in this regard.

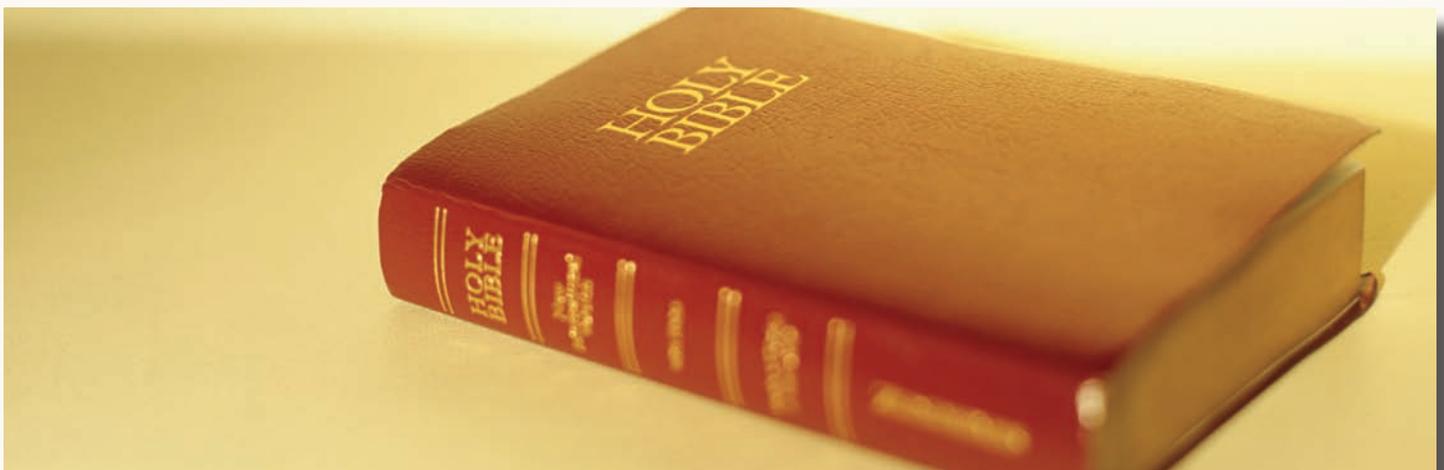
*Christians who refuse to forgive
their fellow believers want to shackle
them to debts from which Christ
has set them free*

- c. *Prostitution.* I hesitate to mention this one, and yet it's an ugly reality of western society. Girls are lured into the sex trade at a very young age with promises of easy money. Not only do they lose their innocence; they also lose their freedom and virtually become slaves of their managers or pimps. The gospel of redemption is also for prostitutes. In fact, the language of the gospel can be very touching for them because it speaks of escape from bondage, removal of guilt, cleansing from impurity, receiving a new identity, a holy environment, a promising future, and a place in the communion of saints. As church, as people redeemed from slavery to sin ourselves,

we have a responsibility to give hope to those who are without hope. Much the same could be said about addicts, which brings me to the fourth application.

- d. *Addictions.* Perhaps this is a topic that comes closer to home. Christians often struggle with addictions, whether to cigarettes, alcohol, or other drugs, or to gambling, gaming, or pornography. And if not these addictions, then there are other sins that try to master us. The Apostle Peter wrote that people are slaves to whatever has mastered them (2 Pet 2:19). Yes, we confess with Lord's Day 1 that Christ has set us free from all the power of the devil. Yet it is a constant struggle for us to live in the freedom of Christ, isn't it? (Gal 5:1) In his mercy the Lord gives us the Spirit of sonship to remind us that we are not slaves of sin but heirs of God's promises. He gives us brothers and sisters to walk side by side with us. He gives us office bearers who are called servants of Christ.
- 7. One final point. As Christians we live our whole lives in service to Christ. As servants we cannot expect rewards or praise from our master, for we are only doing our duty. Yet the day will come when the Master will say, "Well done good and faithful servant. Come and share your Master's happiness!" (Matt 25:21, 23). Then we will be allowed to rest from our labours and sit at table with him (Luke 12:37). The picture of servants being allowed to recline at the table with their master is inconceivable in the biblical world (Luke 17:7-10), but that is the beautiful picture of redemption from slavery which our Lord promises to us.

C





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Peregrine Survey, Fall/Winter 2011

As the seasons and years progress with their joys and challenges, so does education. One slightly melancholic board chairman noted that the children's increasing independence may lead some mothers to shedding a few tears, as they turn from her embrace and run toward the school for the first time. There is a yet higher level of personal responsibility as they move on to high school, which stretches further into college, university, and employment as well. These are signposts on the way to maturity and adulthood, "steps towards being productive servants in God's kingdom work." This school's mission statement, he continued,

Extends beyond teaching academic disciplines within a context of a Reformed worldview towards a more holistic child development. In partnership with home and church, the school exists to inspire students to strive for excellence, and to encourage them to put Godly virtues and attitudes into practice in a complex social environment.

This is no small challenge, and we pray that the staff, students, volunteers – and parents – will be supplied with discernment, strength and wisdom.

Interestingly, this was written *before* the September 2011 National Principal's Conference (NPC), where "beyond Christian worldview to Christian character" was a key topic.

Joys and challenges

After the NPC, a Continental Symposium on the *Present and Future Joys and Challenges in Reformed Education* was organized at Covenant Teachers College in Hamilton. Panel members heralded from Australia, The Netherlands, and Canada. The symposium connected to the Four Markers of Reformed Education (Confessional, Covenantal, Antithetical, and Unity of purpose among church, home and school), and to the summary statement of the First International Conference for Reformed Education (ICRE-I), 2004:

The school has been established to assist the parents to fulfill their baptismal promises regarding the nurture of their covenant children. Reformed education aims to equip the students to employ their talents in the service of God and his kingdom. The entire curriculum will be taught in obedience to the Holy Scriptures as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity.

The panellists described how these foundational statements remain relevant and how they are implemented in their respective countries. Each also described country's specific privileges and blessings as well as challenges and opportunities in reformed education. There are significant differences in areas of government regulation and ecclesiastical context, but Reformed education is alive and well and not without challenges in all three continents.

The same theme was used by Ontario's League of Canadian Reformed School Societies for its League Day a few weeks later. Looking at both internal and cooperative school operations, some twenty-five guests (half of them board members and half of them principals and teachers) discussed six sub-topics: leadership; day-to-day operations; benefits of Reformed education; shared resources; connections to external organizations; and financial realities. While this brainstorm session had an Ontario focus, others will recognize the relevance of these topics for their own situation. Among the many gratefully acknowledged blessings shared were items like ongoing dedication of families, teachers and communities; increased sharing of resources; a new generation that is eager to maintain the schools and to live out the Reformed faith; increased professionalism; Reformed vision and a strong foundation; and freedom to keep our schools. Among the challenges, the group noted such items as finding people to serve on boards and committees; competition for human and material resources; a

me-first attitude; the need to promote inter-school collaboration rather than an insular just-local approach to operations; different views about the school's role in our communities; finding sufficient new teachers and principals; increasing interference from the Ministry of Education; the need to keep promoting reformed education and garnering support from all. Suggestions were given towards addressing these challenges as well, and were to be reviewed and processed by the League as early as its November 2011 meeting.

Strategic action

Our schools' sense of community may need a refresher course from time to time. This might concern cash flow, general interest in the school, being available for board positions, or other aspects – but the fact that events such as described above actually happen are an indication that Reformed education does not want to stagnate or get mired in apathy or complacency. Rather, action is taken to address issues. One board chairman observes, for instance, that

The Maintenance Committee has been working on the school, doing some renovations, and general upkeep work. . . The board has instructed [it] to take a more organizational role in the school's maintenance. Rather than to be the committee of free labour, they will work to get more of the routine school maintenance done by the membership. . . I firmly believe that the more membership involvement we have in our school, the better our school will be.

Another board president, somewhere in this great land, noted with joy that every person approached to stand as a candidate for the Board was willing to run, and that there remain lots of opportunities for school improvement. CCES (Langley) has a Strategic Development Committee, which has to find the best way forward as school community towards "our vision for the best possible Christian day school in the twenty-first century context." The committee will look at such things as the school building and programming, and seeks the community's prayer support as "an essential contributing factor to a well-crafted final recommendation." The refrain around the country seems to be that we neither want to nor need to retire to the dumps, but with good confidence in the Lord's ongoing presence, nearness and guidance, we can take on the challenges he places before us. Thankful for what we have received, we can rally our local brothers and sisters to take up their trowels and swords for the education of the next generation of the church.

Growing and reflecting together

In view of the NPC's focus on moving from worldview education to character education, one principal referred to a pre-conference survey and reported that

It was encouraging to see the heavy emphasis that respondents placed on Christian service work, and for our students to articulate their faith. In an increasingly secular world it is good as school to be reminded that we have a calling to both grow in our understanding of our God, and also to reflect on whether or not our faith is evident in our actions.

"The school exists to inspire students to strive for excellence and to encourage them to put Godly virtues and attitudes into practice in a complex social environment"

The biennial NPC and the annual *Canadian Reformed Teachers Associations* (CRTA) conferences allow teachers to meet and reflect together. As one principal observes,

These conventions serve as great opportunities for learning and more importantly provide networking opportunities. Our schools tend to like to reinvent the wheel, which is very labour intensive and not generally necessary. Establishing contacts in other schools creates opportunities to "borrow" resources and also find out what works and what does not work. This working together in the long run saves both time and effort, and more importantly helps us build a better curriculum. . . .

One example of moving ahead locally is in the area of Information Technology (IT). While some may long back to the safe days of spirit duplicators (considered hazardous technology today) and to a teacher's hand-written materials (personal, but time-consuming productions), times have changed and reality includes IT everywhere. IT committees everywhere are drafting protocols for use of computer labs (with or without borrowing from others' efforts), and schools offer increasing opportunities for students to develop essential computer skills. One elementary school installed *Safesearch* on all its "Computers on Wheels," as well as *Smartboards* in some classrooms; its staff members "are considering whether they should enrol in

global education training courses" via Skype. Another elementary school obtained a "Mobile Computer Lab" for its students. One school installed (free) *Open Office* on their computers – but another would much prefer to avoid this open source software (because of labour intensive ramifications). Yet another school upgraded its internet speed and server operating system to enhance security (using the *Barracuda Web Filter*, options, and the overall technology experience. One principal recommended *SynchronEyes*, which allows the teacher to centrally observe and control every computer in the lab. He also recommended *Deep Freeze* to prevent student tinkering with configurations, and *K-9* as sufficient filtering for an elementary computer lab. What may be perceived as ideal will often have to be tempered because of cost or available expertise – and each school still seeks its own solutions.

Yet, there remains a drive for collaboration. Principals have already coordinated joint school events for decades. More recently, Ontario's *CARE Committee* together with *Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College* have begun drafting a Conceptual Framework for Information Technology. CARE also placed Math, Music, and Social Studies on its long-term list of joint projects. In Ontario, as expressed at the League Day mentioned above, there is a definite interest in exploring the options for and benefits of a curriculum coordinator and an executive director to better coordinate and develop efforts schools now address individually (or not at all). The Canadian Reformed Teachers Association (CRTA) in Ontario wishes to coordinate some efforts with those of CARE – and is finding a positive response.

*Thankful for what we have received,
we can rally our local brothers and
sisters to take up their trowels
and swords for the education of the
next generation of the church*

Collaboration may also have a local flavour. The population of Timothy (Hamilton) continues to grow by leaps and bounds, and it is making grateful use of additional classroom space. Meanwhile, an initiative is underway to investigate the possibility for a new school in the Glanbrook-Ancaster area. This initiative is viewed as one way in which future needs may be met. There is excellent cooperation between the Timothy

Board and the "Committee for the new school initiative," with a view to a mutually beneficial planning and decision-making process.

As growing up progresses like the seasons, so does education in our schools. The developments around our schools are many; however, there is no reason to weep or be afraid. Under the continually loving hand of our faithful God and Father, we carry on towards Christ's return. We express gratitude for the many joys and blessings that God provides, and we face our schools' challenges in hope. Let us indeed bring them all to him in prayer, and let us do so together.

Finally

Since Fall 2000, forty-some Peregrine Surveys have tried to relay what was happening in our schools. I wrote them as a peregrine, a fellow pilgrim, making observations and offering some opinions and perspectives along the way. I thank all those who sent their school bulletins (my main source of information) and all those I quoted for treating me very well. It has been a pleasure to craft them, and it still is; but one wonders whether another person might fill a similar role, and see different, yet equally valid, newsy morsels. As the Education Matters editors were seeing some changes anyway, this was a good time to make the switch. Chris DeBoer and John Jagersma recently joined us. Chris is vice-principal at Providence Reformed Collegiate in Komoka, Ontario, and he will present the news from now on in his own way and under his own title. John is principal at Parkland Immanuel Christian School in Edmonton, and the recent report on the NPC was his first contribution. Otto Bouwman, who was with us from the beginning, has decided to leave our team after eleven years of service, and Arthur Kingma, vice-principal at Emmanuel Christian High School in Fergus, Ontario, has taken his role as copy editor. Derek Stoffels, principal at Eben Ezer Canadian Reformed School in Smithers B.C., stays on board, and so we maintain representation from across the country. I hope to continue with contributions from time to time. May the Lord bless your and our efforts as we all continue to work with the joys and challenges of Reformed education.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma abkingma@kwic.com.



Ray of Sunshine

by Corinne Gelms and
Patricia Gelms



Fred Ludwig

Fred was born on February 24, 1952, in Haulerwijk, The Netherlands. The Lord willing, Fred hopes to celebrate his sixtieth birthday this year (a day he shares with his triplet sisters). Fred's family immigrated to Canada in 1957, residing in Hamilton until 1964, when the

family moved to Smithville. Fred attended John Calvin School in Smithville and Hamilton District Christian High School.

Fred resides in the Beacon home in Dunnville where he has lived for the past eight years, and is a member of the Dunnville Canadian Reformed Church. Fred enjoys going to Men's Society and every church concert (he loves the coffee and the snacks afterwards).

Fred enjoys sports and loves to watch the Detroit Red Wings and Hamilton Tiger Cat games. Fred looks forward to spending time with his family and keeps up to date on things happening in his family. Fred loves to go to Tim's for coffee and donuts (if you visit he'll talk you into taking him there). Fred helps with the various chores in the Beacon Home. He delivers flyers twice a week and spends a morning a week helping at the Strykkes farm and Trinity Acres.

The Lord has provided a wonderful home for Fred at the Beacon, with a dedicated and caring staff. Thanks be to him!



This month we celebrate a number of birthdays again and we give thanks to the Lord for that gift. Birthdays are a great time to reflect on God's goodness in our lives and from this corner of the *Clarion* we express our thankfulness to the Lord for each of you and pray that God will continue to give to you all that you need to live in his service. We wish you a wonderful day celebrating with friends and family.

Birthdays in February

- 12 **CONNIE VANAMERONGEN** will be 47
361 Thirty Road, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
conniev1965@gmail.com
- 18 **CORA SCHOONHOVEN** will be 61
93 Oxford Street, Richmond Hill, ON L4C 4L6
- 24 **FRED LUDWIG** will be 60
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON NIA IT8

A note to all parents and caregivers

If there are any address or other changes that we need to be aware of please let us know as soon as possible.

You can contact us by the following means:

Mail: Corinne Gelms

8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON LOR 2A0

Phone: 905-957-0380; Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



reviewed by Peter H. Holtvlüwer

Oracles by The Parable Mosaic(\$15 digital download or \$20 for CD) www.theparablemosaic.bandcamp.com/album/oracles[theparablemosaic.bandcamp.com/album/oracles](http://www.theparablemosaic.bandcamp.com/album/oracles)

Band members are: Brian Bosch, Darren Bosch, Mike Bosma, Leanne DeGraaf, Anthony Ouwersloot, Craig Ouwersloot, and Michelle Schulenberg



Rev. Peter H. Holtvlüwer is minister of the Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church at Tintern, Ontario
holtvlüwer@bell.net

It's the kind of music that grows on you and stays with you. That's a thought that keeps returning to me as I reflect on *Oracles*, a new CD by a relatively new band of Reformed Christian musicians known as *The Parable Mosaic*. Their songs are deep and reflective and their music is both haunting and beautiful as called for by the lyrics.

I describe the band deliberately not as a "Christian music band" which suggests a genre of musicians and brings to mind the whole contemporary Christian music scene. They don't really fit into that scene. Instead, they are better described as a "band of Christian musicians," for it is with a deep conviction of faith that they have set out to make music. Having spoken with band members and seen them in concert, I can say that they are singularly focused on directing all glory to the Lord. They have produced a laudable work which, as they say on their website, is intended "to put impacting biblical riches to music which will move the skeptic to believe and the believer to dig deeper."

Led by brothers Brian and Darren Bosch, each band member is a committed and communicant member of various Canadian or United Reformed Churches – and their commitment shows. It shows first in the subject matter of the ten songs on this disc, for each song is a penetrating meditation on a passage of the prophecies of Isaiah. Isaiah is not the easiest book of the Bible to grasp and – though I am no musician – I can only imagine the challenge of writing poetry based on Isaiah. The songs show and present a clear understanding of each passage yet remain poetic, calling the listener in for greater reflection – exactly as the musicians hoped. My own children have been moved to pick up the Bible and delve into Isaiah to figure out further what is being sung about!

The majority of the songs focus on passages in the first ten chapters of Isaiah though the last two songs take us much further toward the end of the book. Mature themes of sin and rebellion, judgement and punishment are dealt with head-on but, just as in Isaiah, what comes out on top is the dominant note of God's grace toward his undeserving people. Although Isaiah's words can be traced in each song, the lyrics do more than repeat the prophet – they expound on them in a poetical way. Each song is a message in itself almost like a mini-sermon, and that, I suppose, is why

the words continue to stick in my mind. They are rich with God's revelation and message of salvation.

Musically, *The Parable Mosaic* does not fit a particular genre. It's fair to say that you need to like the guitar in order to appreciate their music but you can also hear the melodic sounds of the mandolin and cello along with regular percussion and keyboard. The music is layered and intriguing. Some songs feature guitar riffs but others are more acoustic-sounding. The style of music varies in a fitting way according to the message. For example, you can almost see the ladies of Jerusalem prancing through the streets in *Daughter of Luxury*, a jumpy tune that well captures the end of Isaiah 3.

Brian Bosch shares the lead vocals with Michelle Schulenberg and each has an impressive range and quality to offer. Their combined voices on *Let's Reason* are a stand-out. The band brings its all into every song and the passion, the pathos of both lyric and music is alive throughout. They effectively bring the meaning of God's Word to the fore through poetry and melody so that it resonates in the soul and lingers in the heart. *Feast of Beggars* is another gospel cry which cannot help but touch the broken-hearted sinner with God's wondrous love. Because the band is tightly focussed on bringing out the text of Isaiah, their songs have meaningful substance and a quality that will draw the listener back time and again.

The Parable Mosaic has done the church and our families a needed service. They've shown us that writing songs with music that resonates in today's culture and yet fully honours the Lord can be done with integrity and great skill. I hope many other musicians among our young people follow in this line! Although the songs can be downloaded via the website above, I would encourage the purchase of the CD not only for its handsome cover and professional design and layout but also because the ten songs tell a unified story from beginning to end, just as Isaiah itself does. In this way, too, the band can recoup some of their costs as producing a CD independently as they have done is a sacrifice on their part.

This is the kind of CD parents could happily purchase for themselves or their teen-age children (or vice versa!) and listen to it together – say, in a longer drive in the van. With lyrics open and Bible in hand, it will prove to be not only an enjoyable listen but also very edifying. Recommended!



Press Release of Regional Synod East, November 9, 2011

On behalf of the convening church, the church at Fergus-North, Rev. W. Geurts called the meeting to order. He read Philippians 2:1-18 and the delegates sang Hymn 61. He led in prayer.

Rev. D.G.J. Agema was elected as chairman, Rev. W. den Hollander as vice-chairman, and Rev. J.E. Ludwig as clerk. Regional Synod was declared constituted and the officers took their place. The agenda was adopted.

Regional Synod dealt with an appeal.

Reports were received from the Deputies according to Art 48 C.O., from the treasurer, from the church to audit the books of the treasurer. There was no report of the inspection of the archives. Appointments were made to fill these positions till the next synod.

The church at Glanbrook was appointed to convene the next Regional Synod on November 14, 2012.

Question Period was held. The chairman judged that censure according to Art 34 C.O. was not necessary. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved.

The brothers sang Hymn 77 and Rev. Ludwig led in prayer. Regional Synod was closed.

*On behalf of Regional Synod East November 9, 2011,
Rev. W. den Hollander,
Vice-Chairman at that time*

Press Release Combined meeting of the Board and the Administration Committee, Inter-League Publication Board, November 24, 2011, Guelph, Ontario



The vice chairman of the Board, Dick Nijenhuis opened the meeting with Scripture reading and prayer, and welcomed everyone present.

In attendance for the Board, representing the League of Men's Societies in Ontario, Dick Nijenhuis, and representing the League of Women's Societies in Ontario in Ontario, Michelle Helder and Dianne Westrik. Absent with notification is chairman, Dan VanDelden. In attendance for the CoA: Paul Deboer (chairman), Debbie Swaving (sales), Nelly Hoeksema (treasurer), and Ingrid VanderGaag (marketing). Absent with notice from Committee of Administration Cathy Jonker (administrator). Secretary Felicia Bijlsma has resigned.

The agenda was established. The minutes of the last meeting held April 26, 2011 were reviewed and adopted, and matters arising from the minutes were dealt with. Each committee reported on activity during the past year.

Updates were made on the books being reviewed. The website is being redesigned. The Finance report indicated that finances are in good order there is sufficient resources for our upcoming publications. Sales are down from previous years but many new books are in progress.

The Board updated the CoA on several books soon to be forwarded to the CoA for publication.

Administrative matters were discussed. General question period was held. Press release was approved. Paul Deboer closed the meeting with prayer. Next meeting will be held DV in April, 2012.

Press Release of Classis Manitoba Convened on Friday, December 2, 2011 at 9:00 AM Canadian Reformed Church at Carman East

1. Rev. den Hollander opened the meeting on behalf of the convening church (Winnipeg Grace), welcoming all present, especially Rev. R. J. Kampen of Denver, the Deputies of Regional Synod, and the fraternal delegates from the URCNA. He invited all present to sing Hymn 76:2, 4, read from Matthew 9:35-10:7, and led in prayer.
2. Report on the examination of the credentials (Art. 32, C.O.) by the delegates of the convening church. The credentials were declared to be in order and all the primary delegates were present.
3. Rev. den Hollander declared Classis constituted. President was Rev. J. Poppe; Vice-President: Dr. A.J. Pol; clerk: Rev. R.J. Kampen.
4. The agenda was adopted.
5. The fraternal delegates were invited to come forward, together with the deputies of Regional Synod and Br. W. Gortemaker as the deputy for contact with neighbouring classes and presbyteries.
6. Examination of the documentation pertaining to candidate Steve Vandavelde. The following documents were received: Letter of call; letter of acceptance; letter from Classis declaring Cand. Vandavelde eligible for call; an attestation from the consistory of Glanbrook; a signed copy of the minutes of the meeting of the council of the Carman East church indicating that the call was approved by the congregation. A letter from council indicating that the necessary announcements were made and concerning the approbation of the call will still be submitted by council for the archives.
7. Peremptory Examination of candidate Steve Vandavelde. Candidate Vandavelde received the opportunity to present his sermon proposal on Luke 17:1-10. The meeting was then continued in closed session. Classis decided to proceed

with the examination in open session. After the candidate was examined in various subjects for the peremptory examination, Classis went into closed session for evaluation. The president announced in open session that Candidate Vandeveld sustained his exam and then read 2 Timothy 3:10-4:8. After all present sang Psalm 111:1 and 5, the president led in a prayer of thanks. Candidate Vandeveld then signed the Form of Subscription after it was read.

9. Rev. R. Anjema spoke on behalf of the Providence Reformed Church (URC) as well as on behalf of Classis Western Canada of the URCNA. He highlighted the blessings of fellowship experienced at the recent Western Ministerial, at classis, and locally. He mentioned that the URCNA is gradually developing. This includes developments in regard to the URC songbook. Other areas of growing pains include learning how to deal with matters at their ecclesiastical assemblies, mission work, and interaction with other church federations. He expressed thankfulness for the closeness of fraternal relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches and encouraged all that although there is not full unity now, to enjoy what we have. A letter from Classis Central U.S. of the URCNA by the Rev. Talman Wagenmaker was also read.

Rev. R.J. Kampen responded with appropriate words and led Classis in prayer for the URCNA. The president then thanked the Deputies of Regional Synod for coming and participating in the

Classis and also thanked the delegates from the Providence URC for attending.

The president gave the opportunity for all present to congratulate Cand. Vandeveld with the positive outcome of the examination.

10. Question Period as per Art. 44, C.O. took place.
11. There was no correspondence to deal with.
12. Appointments.
 - a) Convening Church for the next classis: Winnipeg-Redeemer.
 - b) Dates for the next two classes: March 23, 2012, 3 p.m.; June 22, 2012, 3 p.m.
 - c) Suggested executive officer for next classis. President: Rev. R. den Hollander.
 - d) Appointments in regard to examiners were revised to reflect the fact that Rev. Kampen has been ordained to the ministry.

Rev. Kampen was appointed to represent Classis at the ordination of Candidate Vandeveld.

13. Personal Question Period. This was not made use of.
14. Brotherly Censure (Art. 34, C.O.). The president deemed that no censure was needed.
15. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved.
16. Closing. The president thanked the convening church for its work and also the Carman East church for hosting Classis. Dr. A.J. Pol then led in a prayer of thanksgiving.



**Clarion
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Advertisements:

Announcements of Weddings, Anniversaries (with Open House) should be submitted six weeks in advance.

BIRTHS

*The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy.
Psalm 126:3*

With thankfulness to the Lord, we announce the birth of our son

ASHER JOEL

Born on December 14, 2011 to

Darryl and Karina Pelleboer

and big brother *Treyson*

3rd grandchild for Wilf and Yvonne van Laar

7th grandchild for Harry and Jennie Pelleboer

34760 Mila Street, Abbotsford, BC V2S 4Z5

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise.

Psalm 96:3-4a.

With much joy and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father, we

Carl and Lisa Van Dam

announce the birth of our daughter

HEATHER ELIZABETH

Born January 9, 2012

A sister for *Rachel, Martin and Carrie*

59 Gage Street, Grimsby, Ontario L3M 3Y7