

# Cultural Clues of Christianity



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# Two clues

The last half century has witnessed a precipitous decline of the Christian faith in our country. We now live in a thoroughly secular society, where people are expected to keep their religious views private. At the same time, while the Christian faith has been in decline, other religions have become a very visible part of society.

These changes in the society, however, have not been able to remove aspects of the Christian faith deeply woven into the fabric of Western society. Two of these are the annual Christmas celebration and the changing of the calendar. We can call these cultural clues of Christianity. They give us opportunity to speak to our secular neighbour, as well as our neighbour of different religious background, about the promise and the call of the gospel.

### Christmas

First, there is Christmas. We can lament its crass materialism and sentimentalism. Further, we can lament that the person most people identify with Christmas is Santa Claus. The reality is, though, that the Christmas celebrations continue and it continues to go by the name "Christmas." Christmas Day is essentially the only day in the whole year that commercial activity stops, with perhaps the exception of some restaurants and corner stores. Anyone who is honest enough to peel through the layers of commercialism and sentimentality should be able to say that Christmas is about the birth of a person named Jesus Christ. Honesty should also lead them to at least acknowledge that Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God who took on human nature. One would hope that, even in a secular society, people know these basic religious teachings. The very fact that the end of the year holiday celebrates Jesus' birth should be an indication that, at some point in our country's history, Jesus was seen as important.

The way the birth of Christ has become culturally embedded gives reason to think of Paul's words in Romans 1 about how God did not leave himself without a witness to all humanity, for his eternal power and deity have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. We are now speaking of an historical development. We can argue as to whether Christ was born near the end of December, but the reality is that the celebration of the birth of Christ replaced the pagan practices around the winter solstice and, to this day, the birth of Christ comes out in the very name of the celebration. As long as Christmas remains a feast on the civic calendar, there is lingering testimony of the gospel promise as well as the gospel call.

In light of this, we should see Christmas both as a time to give thanks to God for the gift of his Son, as well as an opportunity to speak about the gospel to our neighbour. Since you are probably reading this article close to, on, or even after Christmas day, it may be a little too late to respond to the greeting, "Merry Christmas," by asking the person if they know what they are saying. After all, a truly merry Christmas is only for those who believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. For those who do not believe, the greeting testifies against them, for it shows they are without excuse.

Since it may not be possible to interact with the Merry Christmas greeting anymore, it may be possible to interact after Christmas when others ask, "How was your Christmas?" In our polite, default answer, we may speak of how great it was to get together as family and how we perhaps received some nice gifts. The question, however, gives a glorious opportunity to speak about the joy you had as family to remember the birth of Jesus, and how you had a great sermon on Christmas Day. Perhaps the person may keep that in mind for next year and not ask you again, but why not seize the moment? The cultural clue of Christmas becomes a cultural cue to speak about the gospel.

# New Year's Day

Second, we can think of New Year's Day. While we have agreed as Reformed churches to commemorate the birth of our Lord, along with his death, resurrection, and ascension, as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, marking the changing of the year is nowhere mentioned. Still, most Reformed congregations will have a worship service on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day, or perhaps on both. As this, however, does not seem to be a custom in the broader Christian world, it cannot be said to be a cultural clue to the Christian faith in the same sense as Christmas. The clue lies not even in the fact that the changing of the year is reason for worship and celebration, but in the dating of our years. We are currently about to begin the year 2016.

# The cultural clue of Christmas becomes a cultural cue to speak about the gospel

We see the cultural clue to the Christian faith when we remember that the years are numbered with reference to the birth of our Lord Jesus. We are familiar with the letters AD added to the year. Next year is 2016 AD, with the letters AD standing for the Latin, Anno Domini, meaning, "In the year of the Lord." For the years preceding his birth, we use the letters, BC, meaning, "Before Christ." This way of dating the years reflects a Christian worldview, which sees the birth of the Lord Jesus as the centre point of history.

It is interesting to note there is an attempt to deny the birth of the Lord Jesus its central place in history. You see it when you read history books that use the abbreviations BCE and CE. These abbreviations mean, "Before the Common Era" and the "Common Era," corresponding to the previous BC and AD. The interesting point to note, however, is that while they play with words, Jesus' birth is still the point of reference. Other cultures may have ways of dating the years, but the Western system based on the birth of Christ has come to prevail throughout the world.

Again, we can think of the words of Paul in Romans 1. In this case, we see how the Lord has guided history so that the birth of the Saviour has become acknowledged as a spiritual centre point in Western society, and this has actually shaped the way of numbering the years throughout the world. Society would need to completely redo its way of dating the years and rewrite its history books to deny

Christ his central place. Therefore, in the unfolding of history, there is a testimony to Jesus Christ and his significance. With further testimony, there is another level of responsibility. Any person growing up in this world should eventually learn why we number the years as we do and that is a reminder of the gospel promise and call.

As this changing of the years is linked to Christ's coming into the world, we can see there is another opportunity to speak about the gospel message. When you think of the way many in society keep on coming up with doomsday scenarios based on theories about global warming caused by human activity, why should we not speak about a far more serious doomsday scenario? Scripture speaks about the way the earth will be consumed by fire on the last day because of all human activity that goes against God's law. Let us not forget that the promise of the gospel is twofold, namely, salvation from the wrath of God for those who believe in Jesus, but those who do not believe will perish. We seem to have ceded the doomsday talk to the world, while we have a far more pressing message. The doomsday talk of the world, in the end, is so many millions of years in the future, it really means nothing, while the warning in the Scripture about Jesus' coming again in glory to purge the earth with fire because of sin is imminent. The turning of the calendar means that we are another year closer. The world tends to spend the change in great revelry when really it would do better to spend it in mourning. Also here, then, a cultural clue to the Christian faith is a cue to speak about the gospel.

# Take the cue from the clue

For Christians, the annual Christmas and New Year's celebrations are indeed a time for rejoicing. We are reminded of how God's Son took on our human flesh from the virgin Mary to save us from our sins. When we believe that message, we have reason for joyful worship in remembering that event and an eager looking forward to when our Lord will come in glory. The world is not in the habit of relinquishing holidays, so it is hard to imagine they will give up on the Christmas holiday, though the time may well come that they find a different name to obscure the Christian reference. Even if they do that, there remains the fact that our years are dated according to the birth of Christ. We have clues deeply embedded in our culture that give us cues to speak about Christ, our Saviour. Honest speaking means we will need to speak about the promise of salvation and the threat of punishment. Look for opportunities and take your cue from these cultural clues.

# What's Inside

Dear readers, in your hands is our final issue of the year 2015. It is something to be thankful for when we see our pages filled with material every two weeks. As we reach the Christmas season and approach the new year, it is our pleasure to put together an issue of *Clarion* that celebrates the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, looks back on the past year, and looks forward to the coming year.

With Christmas and New Year in mind, Issue 25 brings you an editorial, a Treasures New and Old meditation, and an article from Rev. Peter H. Holtvlüwer, "A Lamp for My Anointed." Also in the Clippings on Politics and Religion column, Dr. Cornelis Van Dam reflects on hardship and persecution in the world while remembering that this season is a time of celebrating the coming of the Prince of Peace. And as always, our excellent editor has taken a lot of time to write a Year End Review of the federation.

Several other regular columns and articles are found on these pages, as are news reports from various events. On these pages we also have an "In Memorium" for Rev. Marinus van Beveren.

It is a joy to bring another volume of *Clarion* to you, our readers. Also, may I wish you a wonderful season celebrating the birth of our Saviour, and a blessed new year.

Laura Veenendaal

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# Treasures New & Old

# Angels

# For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

(Psalm 91:11)



George van Popta

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As we approach the changing of the year our thoughts turn to God's care over us and I would invite you turn your thoughts toward Psalm 91, which speaks to us about how God commands his angels to guard us in all our ways.

Scripture teaches us that angels are ministering spirits sent to serve God's children (Heb 1:14). God's angels form a protective wall around us. If you seek safety and security with the Lord Most High, he will send his angels to guard you.

Scripture provides many examples of God sending angels to take care of his people. He commissioned angels to rescue Lot from Sodom. An angel appeared in king Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace to save Daniel's three friends. Angels were very active in the time of the early church delivering apostles from prisons.

These examples were very visible but, being, spiritual beings, usually the angels are invisible. Does it not sometimes happen that you experience a narrow escape, and you say: "Wow! That was a close call!"? Do we think of angels at such a time? God has promised to protect us with his angels. Let us take him at his word.

There is more going on around us than we are aware of. The Lord sends us his angels to ward off evil, to pull us out of danger, or to strengthen us for an ordeal. Just because we do not see them does not mean that they are not there!

Recall the time that Elisha's servant was afraid because of how the King of Syria and his armies had surrounded the city of Dothan, where he and Elisha were. Elisha told his servant not to be anxious because: "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." The Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of angels, horses, and chariots of fire all around them.

We can take God at his word. The angels are out there ready to lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. There are many more angels for us than there are hostile forces arrayed against us. And Jesus, their captain, Lord Sabaoth – the Lord of the hosts of heaven – is for you. Jesus, and his armies of angel, will protect you, keep you, and tend you.

And so, in this new year, do not confide in your own strength, for then your striving will be losing. The right Man, the Man of God's own choosing, is on your side. Do you ask who that may be? It is Christ Jesus, the Lord of heaven's armies. He is the same from age to age, and he will win the battle. Satan is defeated and Christ is victorious!

# For Further Study

- 1. God has promised that he will send his angels to care for us. Does this mean we will never experience any hardship?
- 2. Why do angels not function as visibly today as they apparently did in Bible times?
- 3. Does every Christian have his own guardian angel?

# A Lamp for My Anointed

# (Christmas in the Psalms)



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Did you know that we can sing about Christmas from the Psalms? Christmas is the celebration of Christ's birth and we usually turn to the gospels to read about it. But the Saviour's birth was something the saints of the Old Testament eagerly waited for. The inspired writers anticipated it, hoped for it, and often wrote of it. In the Psalms they sang of it too. Their words help to fill in the picture of who the Christ child is and what he came for. Take a stroll with me through Psalm 132 and see for yourself!

# A prayer for the anointed

A look at the whole shows that the psalm has two basic parts: a prayer to the LORD (vv.1-10) and the LORD's response (vv.11-18). The unknown author is deeply concerned about the king of Israel as he starts out in verse 1, "Remember, O LORD, in David's favor, all the hardships he endured." Why is he so concerned for the king? As an Israelite, he knew that his personal fortunes and that of the nation were tied up in the success of the king. If the king was blessed and thrived, the people would be blessed and thrive.

Clearly, something is amiss with the king and that has the psalmist worried. The prayer for God to "remember" means much more than "bring to mind." It's a call for the LORD to intervene, to act on the king's behalf. The king needs help. That comes out again in verse 10, "For the sake of your servant David, do not turn away the face of your anointed one."

All kings in Israel were anointed with God's holy oil into their office. It was God's way of signalling to everyone that this particular man was chosen by the LORD to rule over his covenant people. The anointed one would rule, judge, and protect the LORD's people in the LORD's Name, seeking to do them good. Only now it seems as if the LORD is no longer paying attention to the anointed one. The anointed king is struggling and the nation struggles with him. It may even be that the anointed is under threat and the people are alarmed.

# The anointed's determination

Whatever the specific crisis, the poet urges the LORD to remember what David had done in his service and make a move now to rescue the kingship. What could touch God's heart more than David's zealous oath to build "a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob" (v. 5)? We know from other Scriptures that this desire pleased the LORD (2 Chron 6:8). David, the first anointed one who truly was "after God's own heart," greatly desired that God would have a permanent home among his people and was moved when the ark was "rediscovered" in the "fields of Jaar" (v. 6). He even leapt and danced with joy when the LORD allowed him to bring the ark of his presence into Zion (2 Sam 6). The author recalls the pious determination of David to ask that the LORD give help to the current anointed king, one of David's sons.

# King and temple

The twin concerns of the inspired poet are the anointed one and the LORD's dwelling place, the king and the temple. The king is in trouble which means the temple is under threat too. If the anointed one cannot defend Zion, there is no security for the temple. Destroy the anointed and you've destroyed God's dwelling place. But protect the anointed and you protect the LORD's home among his people. At stake here is the heart and soul of life in the covenant: in the temple is where God met with his people and through the sacrifices on the altar offered them the forgiveness of their sins, peace, and fellowship with himself!

# The Anointed of Christmas

It's in the LORD's answer that we start to see the connection to Christmas. The first thing the LORD does in verse 11 is to remind the poet of his own oath to David. David had sworn an oath to Yahweh (v. 2), but Yahweh had sworn a better and grander oath, "One of the sons

of your body I will set on your throne. If y lamp our sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne." The LORD reassures his people that he had in no way forgotten his promise, much less abandoned his people.

# The inspired writers anticipated it, hoped for it, and often wrote of it

But why, then, was the king in trouble? Why the great concern for the future of the king, temple, and Israel? Because those sons of David had not kept the LORD's testimonies! The whole history of David's line shows anointed one after anointed one going astray from the covenant, chasing other gods, and often ruling harshly over God's people. According to the terms of the covenant, the LORD warned and punished these kings and the nation which followed their lead, but still no son of David could be found to be that faithful anointed one!

None, that is, until the special Anointed One whom the LORD sent at what we call "Christmas!" David's line showed itself incapable of faithfulness, which God knew would happen, and so in verse 17 he promised to do it himself: "There I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed." This is the announcement of the birth of Christ! In fact, the very word "anointed" is identical in Greek to the word "Christ" – Jesus, son of Joseph, son of David, is the Anointed of the LORD promised in Psalm 132!

# Jesus the "Horn to Sprout"

The angel Gabriel announces Jesus' connection to David and the kingship when he says to Mary, "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the LORD God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:31-33). Just like the LORD promised in Psalm 132:12, there will no end to this Anointed's kingdom for he will not fail to obey all the terms of God's covenant!

He will be a "horn to sprout for David," says verse 17. That's a metaphor for royal power. Bulls were

common animals in Israel – big, powerful beasts. And the strength of the bull was seen in his horn(s). Even today, a charging bull is a hundred times more feared if he has horns than if he has none. So the horn came to symbolize power, strength, ability to overcome enemies – all things the king of God's people needed! And on Christmas, the long-awaited horn sprouted and today he reigns with all the power of Almighty God from heaven, gathering and protecting his people and subduing his enemies under his feet (1 Cor 15:24-25)! This horn lives to guard and guide also your life!

# Jesus the "Lamp" to shine

The Holy Spirit uses another metaphor to describe the coming one: he will be a "lamp for my anointed" (v. 17). Since this is in parallel with "a horn to sprout for David," the Lord is promising to provide for David not only a "horn" but also a "lamp." David himself was called the "lamp of Israel" (2 Sam 22:29) and years after his death, in the time of unfaithful anointed ones, we read, "Nevertheless, for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem" (1 Kgs 15:4).

# The whole history of David's line shows anointed one after anointed one going astray from the covenant

The king of God's people was described as a lamp for David, meaning two things: he would continue the dynasty of David (its light would not flicker out) and at the same time he would be a light for the people. A king who ruled well, who obeyed God's law and led the people in faithfulness, was like a brightly lit lamp, leading the way, showing people the pathway of peace and prosperity. For many centuries, though, the lamp of David's line was very dim or even not shining at all – until Jesus was born! What does John say of him in the opening of his gospel? "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it!" (John 1:4-5)

Jesus himself later declared, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). This lamp shines with the good news

that all who believe in him will be forgiven their sins. As king, Jesus shines forth the clear teaching of his Father that there is forgiveness and life for all who put their trust in him! He is the Word and as he explains and imprints his Word on our hearts by his Spirit, our way is lighted up before us! In his light, we see how we should walk and serve in gratitude for the Father's salvation. All this began with the birth of Christ, the lamp of David!

# Yahweh's dwelling place

There's one more Christmas truth embedded in Psalm 132. The kingship of David's line is forever fixed in the person of Jesus but so is the very dwelling place or temple of the LORD! Verse 13 says, "For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place; 'This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.'" God had chosen to dwell in Zion's temple, behind the curtain, with the sacrifices bridging the gap between the holy God and his sinful people. But that temple was destroyed. True, it was rebuilt, but no longer was the ark inside of it. And the people were not free to go behind the curtain. It was an imperfect symbol of God's presence among his people.

This, too, radically changed at the birth of Jesus! Do you remember what the angel said of his name? "'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a sin, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means: God with us)" (Matt 1:23). God with us! In the very person of Jesus is not merely a man to sit on David's throne but he is God himself! The very name Jesus means

"Yahweh saves." Jesus is Yahweh in the flesh and with his birth he has made his permanent dwelling place in the human race, among the people he loves! His disciples could go right up to him in person to listen, to converse, to worship and fellowship – and one day we will do the same!

# King Immanuel

At Christmas, the LORD fulfills the promises and expectations of Psalm 132. David's desire to have God dwell among his people is realized in the child called "God with us." And the people's desire to have the anointed one protected and equipped by the LORD to forever rule them as loving king is also achieved in the Christ child. Who would have thought that the Anointed One would also be the very temple of God? Who could have predicted that the everlasting king of God's people would be none other than Yahweh in the flesh?

# All this began with the birth of Christ, the lamp of David!

Jesus Christ is the powerful horn against whom no enemy can stand and under whom we are invincibly protected. He is also the bright lamp who shows us the way of life by his Word and Spirit. Son of David, Son of God. He is your God and your King – rejoice in him! A blessed Christmas to you from Psalm 132!



# Your Sister in Australia



Karlo Janssen

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# Closest sister

This time we're heading Down Under to one of our closest sister, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA). In various ways the FRCA are the closest sister church of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). Like our churches, the FRCA were established by immigrants from The Netherlands following World War II. The CanRC and FRCA sing from the same Book of Praise, which means their worship is very similar. Further, the FRCA have financially supported the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) and encouraged young men wishing to prepare for the ministry to study there. Australian (raised) men (like myself) serve as ministers in the CanRC and North American (raised) men serve in the FRCA. Possibly the biggest difference between the FRCA and CanRC is the accent.

Another difference is that synods tend to happen during the winter, not the summer. There are a number of reasons for that. First, the catechism season stretches over more weeks than in North America. The summer vacation begins the week before Christmas and is much shorter than here. Finally, the winter break lasts up to a month. Hence late June and early July are an ideal time for a synod Down Under.

# Size

The FRCA consists of sixteen churches and one church plant. They are currently served by thirteen ministers; in the past five years four ministers retired, and a fifth was released for health reasons. At the time of writing one candidate is in the process of moving from Canada to Australia. The FRCA are served by one missionary and have one vacancy in the mission field. There is also a vacancy because of the church plant. Do the math and you'll find there are nineteen minister positions in the FRCA, of which three are vacant.

Considering that up until 1980 there were just three FRCAs, it is clear the Lord has granted much growth. That growth has come in part through covenantal

expansion (families). There was a wave of immigrants from The Netherlands in the early 1980s. During the late 1990s there was another wave of immigrants from South Africa. It would also seem that Canadians getting connected to an Aussie prefer Down Under to the Great White North. Finally, there have always been those whom the Lord has gathered through evangelism efforts. Of the churches, four have more than 400 members and three have less than 150 members.

Australia is a land of distances. The island continent is as large as mainland USA but has only a tenth of the population, mostly concentrated in coastal regions around large cities. The churches are found mainly in two places: south-western Western Australia and northern Tasmania. There is now also a church plant in the "Florida" or "California" of Australia: Cairns in Queensland. The mission field is in Papua New Guinea, a nation that in some ways is like a colony of Australia.

# Synod Baldivis

In my youth Baldivis was a sleepy little hamlet where swamps and farmland met dune ridges and coastal forest. Today it's a far-flung suburb of the sprawling Perth metro area. Enough people live there for there to be a church. Here the FRCA met in synod.

The FRCA are divided into three classes. The federation is too small for regional synods. So each classis delegates – if possible – three ministers and three elders to synod. This makes for an assembly of eighteen men. Synod Baldivis counted eight ministers and ten elders. By the way, of the ministers three grew up in Australia, three in Canada, one in New Zealand, and one in The Netherlands. The first seven are CRTS graduates.

# Foreign churches

Broadest assemblies typically spend a lot of time and energy considering relationships with other bonds of churches. These relationships are at times hot-button issues that make for much passion and debate.

That is certainly the case for the FRCA. An illustration of this is the relationship of the FRCA to the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). The FRCA was a charter member. However, ICRC membership proved so controversial in the FRCA that in 1992 the FRCA resigned as member. Further, just as we struggled over the years in our relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), so the FRCA have struggled what to do with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA), in essence a daughter church of the Free Church of Scotland (FCS).

# New Zealand

Also a controversial matter has been the relationship with the Reformed Churches in New Zealand (RCNZ). A bit of history might be helpful here. Reformed Dutch immigrants to Australia joined one of two churches: the Reformed Churches of Australia or the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. The Reformed Churches of Australia are now known as the Christian Reformed Church of Australia (CRCAustralia).

In New Zealand, all Dutch Reformed immigrants united to form the RCNZ. The RCNZ was then ably served by several ministers from the OPC. As such, the RCNZ has both an American Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed background. For decades the RCNZ had a hearty relationship with the CRCAustralia. The two bonds of churches were served by an independent seminary, the Reformed Theological College (RTC) in Geelong, Australia. However, some thirty years ago the RCNZ became concerned about the direction of the CRCAustralia, especially of two professors at the RTC. As concern grew, the RCNZ began to seek closer ties with the FRCA.

Recently the RCNZ decided to downgrade their sister church relationship with the CRCAustralia. It has meant ministers from the CRCAustralia can no longer serve in the RCNZ without being examined. This being so Synod Baldivis judged the time had come for the FRCA to accept the offer of ecclesiastical relationship with the RCNZ. It's a matter of joy for us, for the RCNZ have been a sister church of the CanRC since 2007.

(For completeness sake we mention that quite recently there has been a turn in the CRCAustralia for the better. The CRCAustralia has downgraded its ties with the Christian Reformed Churches in North America and is seeking to join the ICRC as opposed to the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The two professors that were a cause for concern also no longer teach at the RTC.)

### **CALL EXTENDED**

Called by Kelmscott Free Reformed Church of Australia:

### Rev. A. Witten

of Vernon, BC

### **CALLS ACCEPTED and DECLINED**

Accepted the call to the Canadian Reformed Church of Grand Valley, ON and declined the calls to Bethel United Reformed Church of Brockville, ON and to minister to the Cairns ward by the Free Reformed Church of Armadale, WA, Australia:

### **Candidate Randall Visscher**

### **AVAILABLE FOR PULPIT SUPPLY**

Having sufficiently recovered from his accidental injuries

# Rev. Mark Zylstra (URCNA)

is again available for occasional pulpit supply or longer term stated supply in the churches. He can be reached at: 289 956-0443 or at: mkzylstra@cogeco.ca

# **CHURCH NEWS**

# The Netherlands

The relationship between the FRCA and the "mother church," the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (RCN) has been under tension. Like ourselves, the FRCA are very unsettled by teachings and practices in the RCN. Synod Baldivis decided to suspend the relationship with the RCN. Ministers of the RCN no longer have access to pulpits in the FRCA and members of the RCN are no longer simply received on the grounds of an attestation. The FRCA will continue to communicate with the RCN, though, to attempt to change the direction of the RCN. The Synod press release notes: "It is the prayer of Synod that our sister churches might repent and our relationship restored." A letter was drafted by Synod Baldivis to be sent to the next RCN synod.

Suspending the relationship with the RCN raises all the more the question of entering into some sort of relationship with church groups that have broken away from the RCN. Requests to enter into a sister church relationship were considered. However, Synod Baldivis decided that would be premature at this time. It did determine, however, that the FRCA would continue to reach out to the concerned in The Netherlands, both in and outside the RCN, and exhort such to reach out to others who love the Word and the Reformed faith.

# North America and South Africa

The relationship with ourselves continues to be hearty and close. With gratitude we may note that the FRCA has also decided to look into a relationship with the United Reformed Churches.

The relationship with South Africa also continues to be hearty and close. The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) are small: eight churches of which five are needy churches. The FRCA support the FRCSA needy churches fund via an assessment. The needs in South Africa are not just material: there is also a looming shortage of ministers and the FRCSA delegate made it clear they are especially looking to Australia for help on this score. (Maybe that's a heads-up for minister delegates to our Synod Dunnville, 2016!)

# Singapore

Singapore is a tiny island nation to the north of Australia. Many Australians, on their way to Europe, will travel through it. Singapore has a Reformed community, born from mission work by the Protestant Reformed Church in North America (PRC). Dissent arose within this church plant and it led to a sizeable portion of the church breaking away from the PRC. There has been much contact over the years between what the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (FERCS) and the FRCA. Upon recommendation of its committee, Synod Baldivis decided to offer this church a sister church relationship. It's a bit of an odd situation: a bond of churches offering a single church a sister church relationship. Then again, Singapore is odd as a country and the FERCS is very isolated. No doubt the FERCS will profit much from this relationship. And should you ever be in Singapore on a Lord's Day, here's a place for you to be!

# Indonesia

Indonesia is to Australia what Mexico is to Canada: primarily a place where one goes for a tropical holiday. Because Indonesia was once a Dutch colony Dutch churches have been heavily involved in mission work there. Intense mission activity in three parts of Indonesia by the RCN led to the formation of three bonds of churches in the provinces Kalimantan, NTT, and Papua. These three recently united in a single bond of churches, the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI). In NTT there are other Reformed churches, some united in the Calvinist Reformed Churches. It's also the place where the Smithville CanRC conducts mission work. The island of Sumba, quite central to the nation, has the honour of housing, already for many years, a Reformed seminary. Our own Rev. Dr. A. J. Pol once taught there. Some of the Indonesian ministers are graduates of our CRTS.

The FRCA has a sister church relationship with (just) the GGRI. The FRCA encourage all Reformed churches to seek federative unity. The FRCA also involves itself closely with the seminary on Sumba, as does Smithville.

### Brazil

Another sister church relationship considered by Synod Baldivis was that with the Reformed Churches in Brazil (RCB). Synod determined that a relationship with this fledgling bond of churches would not be easy to maintain. Moreover, the Australians don't want to stretch their own resources too far and wish to focus efforts on sister churches in their own region. Brazil might be mostly in the southern hemisphere, but in kilometres Recife is as far away from Perth as Vancouver is!

# Growing up

The FRCA have become a sizeable federation. While thankful for the willing help they have received from us here in North America, thoughts Down Under are turning towards becoming more self-sufficient. At Synod Baldivis this aspect of "coming of age" manifested itself with regards to two matters: the *Book of Praise* and Training for the Ministry.

# Book of Praise

Though the FRCA are always granted input into the publication of the *Book of Praise*, when push comes to shove they actually have no say. At Synod Carman-West 2013 we as CanRC decided to go ahead with the publication of the new *Book of Praise* instead of waiting on more FRCA input. It meant that the FRCA now had to decide: do we go with the new *Book of Praise* or not?

The FRCA has a few issues with the *Book of Praise*. For one, the churches have had no direct say in the wording of psalms and hymns. The FRCA has also not adopted all the hymns founds in the latest *Book of Praise*. The FRCA have slightly different versions of the Creeds and Confessions. Most of the FRCAs use the New King James Version during worship services (and the NKJV capitalizes divine pronouns). All of this adds up.

The churches determined that it is time for the FRCA to stand on its own two liturgical legs. Thus Baldivis decided to set the process in motion that should eventually lead to an Australian *Book of Praise*. In the meantime, however, Synod encourages the churches to use the *Book of Praise* we adopted in 2013. So for now, you can still take your *Book of Praise* along when you head Down Under. Just realize, there are still nineteen hymns that have not been approved by the FRCA.



# Seminary

The FRCA have always encouraged their young men to study for the ministry at CRTS. They have also supported the CRTS at an assessed rate set by FRCA synods, a rate identical to the CanRC assessment. Synod Baldivis decided to continue support, thereby implicitly approving the appointing of a fifth professor. However, the tyranny of distance is felt in the issue of seminary training. I am told that some young men are eager to study for the ministry but find the four year stay in Canada as a foreign student daunting. It is also expensive, as foreign students are not allowed to work in Canada.

The FRCA has investigated long distance learning with CRTS in Hamilton. It was determined that this is not feasible. In view of the requests of a number of churches, Synod Baldivis decided to mandate their Theological Training committee to study the feasibility of an FRCA Theological Seminary in due time.

When our Synod Homewood-Carman, 1958, took a similar decision, there were twenty churches in our federation and it was ten years to the opening date of "Hamilton." With sixteen churches the FRCA are smaller. It's conceivable, though, that support should come from the west (South Africa) or east (New Zealand). Time will tell where the Lord will lead this endeavour.

### Honour

Synod Baldivis lasted only seven days. Nevertheless, the output was there, evidence of how busy the Lord Jesus Christ is with his church in Australia and worldwide. We rejoice with our sister churches Down Under and pray the Lord will continue to bless them with vitality and eagerness to express the communion of saints and reach out with the gospel of salvation. All for the honour of God, for the church is gathered, defended, and preserved, for the glory of God.



# Clippings on Politics and Religion

# Persecution and Perseverance of Christians in 2015



Cornelis Van Dam

Professor emeritus of Old Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario cvandam@canrc.org

As we celebrate the first coming of the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6) in considerable freedom and without oppression, we do well to remember that our Saviour prophesied persecution and hardship for those who believe in him. "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:20). The Apostle Paul affirmed that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12). We do not know what the future holds for Christians in the Western world as our society and culture become less tolerant of the gospel. But we do know that the full force of persecution is now experienced by countless Christians in the world today. Indeed, Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world. You would not know it from most secular media as little attention is paid to this reality. Indeed, the current President of the United States, the assumed leader of the free world, seems to have gone out of his way to ignore persecuted Christians in favour of courting Muslims. It is therefore appropriate in this year-end issue of Clarion that we remember those who suffer for the faith and pay a price we have difficulty fully comprehending.

## Sad statistics

The statistics are stunning. According to the American website of Open Doors, an organization which seeks to serve persecuted Christians worldwide, each and every month 322 Christians are killed for their faith, 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed, and 772 forms of violence are committed against Christians, such as beatings, abductions, rapes, arrests, and forced marriages. According to the Pew Research Center, over seventy-five percent of the world's population lives under severe religious restrictions and many of those who suffer are Christians. The American State Department has noted that Christians in more than sixty countries face persecution from their governments or neighbours simply because of their Christian faith.

Islamic countries give Christians the most hardship, especially in the Middle East, but also in Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, Nigeria, and the Maldives. Open Doors ranks all these countries under the category "extreme persecution." Communist North Korea is part of that list as well. Indeed, that country has the worst record of persecuting Christians. Behind all these statistics are real people who endure unimaginable suffering. Here are some examples of their suffering but also of the Lord's preserving and gathering for himself his people.

# Some examples

North Korea has imprisoned an estimated fifty to seventy thousand Christians in labour camps. It takes very little to end up in such a camp. It is virtually impossible to meet with other Christians. Anyone caught in an unauthorized religious activity is subject to arrest, arbitrary detention, disappearance, torture, and/or execution. Yet, Christ preserves his believers. Those who are in the know report that Christians in North Korea remain strong and steadfast in the faith and whenever possible share it with others.

After North Korea, the second worst place in the world for Christians is Somalia. There is no functioning government as the country is torn by civil strife. Christians are therefore easy targets for Islamic terrorists. Even where the state asserts authority, there is no room for Christianity. The persecution is very severe since most Christians used to be Muslims. Out of a population of over eight million there are an estimated one thousand Christians.

Many Christians in the Middle East have fled the region due to the unbearable conditions, especially the terror of the Islamic State which has zero tolerance for Christians. The British Roman Catholic report, Persecuted and Forgotten? A Report on Christians Oppressed for their Faith 2013-2015, concluded that if

current trends of oppression continue, Christianity will be driven out and disappear from its ancient biblical heartland. Christians are not the only ones fleeing and in his own sovereign way the Lord continues to gather his church in spite of all the persecution.

Many Muslims have fled the violence as well. Because of the beheadings and killings done by the Islamic State in the name of Allah, many Muslims are becoming disillusioned with the Islamic faith. Numerous reports indicate that in the refugee camps, more and more Muslims are coming to faith in Christ through their contact with Christian refugees. Bibles are being distributed in these camps and the seed of the Word is bearing fruit. There is, for example, an account on the Christianity Today website (Nov 1, 2015) in which Hazel Torres recounts how a Muslim was given a Bible. The recipient protested that he's Muslim and could not possibly be a Christian for he has a large family and his father is an extreme radical. The one who gave the Bible simply said that he was not asking the Muslim to become a Christian but invited him to read the Bible so he could know who Jesus Christ really is. "I want you to have a relationship with God." The Muslim agreed and actually began reading the Bible along with his wife and children. Eventually he started asking questions and on a certain day said that he didn't like Muhammad anymore and wanted to become a Christian. There are more and more accounts similar to this. Again it shows that God is in control and he is using even the horrors of the Middle East to draw Muslims to himself. The seed of the Word is powerful like a two-edged sword that penetrates into one's very heart (Heb 4:12).

# The seed of the Word is powerful like a two-edged sword that penetrates into one's very heart

Nigeria's Christians also face enormous hardships. Since early 2014, Boko Haram, a militant Islamic terror organization, has kidnapped more than 2,000 women and children, many of whom were forced into sexual slavery. Although the Nigerian army has been making progress in combatting these terrorists and rescuing hundreds of those kidnapped, many are still missing. Moreover, thousands of Christians have been displaced from the northeast of Nigeria and their future often seems uncertain. Nevertheless, also in Nigeria, the Lord

continues his work. He gives faithfulness and strength to those who suffer for the sake of the gospel and even in the midst of the turmoil there are accounts of large numbers of Muslims converting to Christ. These converts can pay a huge price. A new believer may have his wife and children taken away from him and given to another man; or his house may be burnt down. Yet, the Lord continues his work and Christians attest that the oppression makes the church stronger.

# God is in control

And so amidst all the bad news, God is in control even while despots and dictators persecute and oppress his people. He even uses them to gather together the innumerable multitude. He is also the one who sustains his own as they endure oppression. To them he has promised "to him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations - 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' – just as I have received authority from my Father" (Rev 2:26-27). And "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne (Rev 3:21). Those without power and influence now will one day be rulers and sit with Christ on his throne! And the One who said this can be counted on. "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation" (Rev 3:14).

In the meantime, as we await the second coming of the Prince of Peace, we need to remember these Christians in prayer, both at home and in the public worship service.

There is a beautiful prayer for the needs of Christendom which dates from the time of the Reformation found in the *Book of Praise*. Part of it deals with persecuted Christians. It needs to be prayed:

We pray for all your children who suffer persecution for the sake of your name and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Comfort them with your Holy Spirit and deliver them from the hands of their enemies. Do not permit the memory of your name to be removed from the earth. Do not let the enemies of your truth have occasion to dishonour and blaspheme your name. But if it is your will that persecuted Christians by their death bear witness to the truth and glorify your name, comfort them in their sufferings. May they accept their trials as from your fatherly hand and remain faithful in life and death to the honour of your name, to the edification of the church, and to their salvation.

# FROM THE PUBLISHER

# Nothing New

Looking through back issues of our magazine, it is striking how often at the year's end we noted our uneasiness about concerning events of the time: political unrest, terrorism, natural disasters, economic uncertainty. With the benefit of hindsight, we may confess with thanksgiving that our Father has cared for us through it all.

Yet we close 2015 with concerns about the spread of terrorism and the reach of ISIS. It is an indication that "what has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun." This vanity is also evident in our inability of ourselves to break the pattern of sin and its effects.

# Something New

Our Father's care for us is most fully shown in the sending of our Saviour. The Lord Jesus' birth into our broken humanity was a decisive change in the pattern of sin, suffering, danger, and death. Now we may rejoice with Paul that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." And we may expect with joy the renewal of all things at the second coming of our Saviour.

## Thank You

Thank you to our editorial team – Dr. J. Visscher, Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer, Rev. E. Kampen, Rev. K. Stam, Dr. C. Van Dam, and copy manager, Mrs. Laura Veenendaal – for your dedication in bringing together another volume of our magazine.

Rev. W. Slomp has taken over coordination of *Treasures New and Old.* Mrs. Rachel Vis has assumed coordination of *Ray of Sunshine*. Mr. Arthur Kingma coordinates *Education Matters*, and Rev. W. den Hollander interacts with your questions in *You Asked*. Thank you for your willingness to serve and your edifying contributions.

For several years, Mrs. Patricia Gelms helped to bring us *Ray of Sunshine*. Thank you for this work over the years.

Not least, we thank our faithful readers and subscribers for reading and supporting our magazine.

On a personal note, we received many notes offering support and sympathy from the *Clarion* team and readers during the brief illness and following the death of our father, Bill Gortemaker. On behalf of the family, I wish to express our heartfelt appreciation for your prayers and expressions of support.

# Greetings

Our heartfelt greetings and best wishes to you all as we celebrate this joyous Christmas season and mark the changing of years.

William Gortemaker

# In Memoriam

# Rev. Marinus van Beveren



Richard Aasman

Minister of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church at Edmonton, Alberta raasman@telusplanet.net



On October 8, 2015, the Lord called to himself his faithful servant Rev. Marinus van Beveren. Rev. van Beveren was born on August 16, 1921 in Zoeterwoude, The Netherlands. He was the third of five children. His father, like his grandfather, was a shipbuilder living on the Oude Rijn, across the canal from Leiderdorp, where he attended church and school. His early years were active ones learning to play the organ, singing in the choir, playing chess, studying, leading youth societies, and sailing. During and after the war, he worked in Leiden in the Land Registry and Tax Office. During the Second World War, he started his preparatory studies for the ministry. Also during this time he met his future wife, Nel Dekens, and they were engaged in November, 1945. They married in 1953. Rev. van Beveren and his wife were blessed with two children: Jacoba and Bea. He began his ministry on

July 28, 1957 in Vrouwenpolder, Zeeland. In 1964 he accepted a call to the Fergus/Guelph congregation. This was followed by serving in Coaldale, Alberta (1969-1972); New Westminster, British Columbia (1972-1978); Burlington Ebenezer, Ontario (1978-1982); and his final congregation in Edmonton-Providence, Alberta (1982-1988).

During his ministry Rev. van Beveren was involved in the formation of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, attending the first conference in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1982. He loved the fact that Jesus Christ gathered his church throughout history and throughout the world. He remained active in this organization for many years in his retirement.

Rev. van Beveren remained in Edmonton for many years after his retirement. The Lord called his wife Nel to glory on September 12, 1996. He was devoted to his family, loved exploring God's creation, tending his flower and vegetable garden, listening to classical music, and watching hockey and soccer games. He had a particular affinity with young people in the church who loved him as a catechism teacher. In the last few years of his life, Rev. van Beveren moved to Richmond Hill, Ontario, to be near to his family.

Rev. van Beveren was well known for preaching that was short, clear, and to the point. He consistently communicated that we have a gracious God. Although we as human beings are weak and sinners, God is gracious and forgives us for whatever sins we commit, provided we come to him in faith.

To use the words of Peter in 1 Peter 5:3, Rev. van Beveren was a servant who lovingly cared for the sheep in his care. He was an "example to the flock." Of our brother it can be said, "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."

# Guido de Bres Christian High School: Graduation of the Class of 2015

Sara Groenwold

At the beginning of this festive day, the students of the class of 2015 gathered with their parents and teachers at Guido de Bres Christian High School. They were welcomed to a lunch and a time of reconnecting with classmates after which they headed to Hamilton Place for the graduation ceremony.

# Ceremony

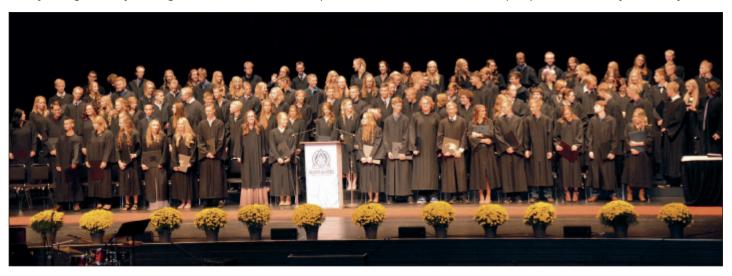
The chairman of the board, Mr. John VanderHoeven, opened the ceremony with well known words from Matthew 6: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself." We all tend to worry: parents worry about financing Christian schools; students worry about where they will go after high school. Mr. VanderHoeven reminded the audience to reflect on how God has provided for us over the years. Students may have been anxious back in grade 9 about starting high school, yet God brought them to a point where they can look back on those years with joy. God did not just provide you with a graduation diploma but he provided safety along the way, strength to work, and friendships

with peers. Yes we can celebrate accomplishments but we need to be reminded that all thanks be to God.

The principal, Mr. Roger Vanoostveen, welcomed the graduands with an imperative: Be who you are! As covenant children and graduates of a Christian high school, "we are a royal priesthood, a royal nation belonging to God," so be that!

The audience then enjoyed a powerful musical performance of Blind Faith's "Presence of the Lord" sung by Bethany Vanderveen and Alanna Wielink, and accompanied by Curtis Van Vliet, James Moore, and Stefan Bouwman.

Rev. J. Huijgen, pastor at Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Church and father of one of the graduates, gave the main address to the graduating class entitled "Lasting Legacy." He introduced his address with the story of Alfred Nobel who left the legacy of the Nobel prizes for which he will be remembered. He then directed these questions to the audience: "But how will you be remembered? What will be written on your headstone? How will people remember you after you





have died?" Rev. Huijgen expressed that we do not need to run like a pagan for a fleeting award because we already have a lasting legacy – we are remembered by God. Since our lives and legacies are determined let us seek him first. In response the audience then rose to sing "Seek ye First the Kingdom of God."

Mr. VanderHoeven, Mr. Vanoostveen, Mr. VanAndel, and Mrs. Joosse then presented Ontario Secondary School Diplomas to the graduands who then became graduates. The class of 2015 was presented to the audience with great applause. In response the audience rose to sing Psalm 138, which expresses great praise to God and confidence in his plan.

A number of graduates were recognized for particular accomplishments during their time at Guido by the presentation of awards. The list of awards and the recipients are found below.



Curtis Van Vliet came up to represent the 116 students of the Class of 2015 as the valedictorian. He reminisced about the good times and shared some words of wisdom with the younger generation that are entering Guido. He explained to them what 'homeroom' was since they would never experience it and how they would miss out on hearing Dr. Witten's laugh since he has since retired. Curtis reminded his fellow classmates to reflect on their baptism and that all thanks and praise be to God for bringing them to this point. Nathania de Haan followed this address by singing "Oceans" by Hillsong.



# Closing

Mr. John Van Dyk closed in prayer after which the audience rose to sing the national anthem. Mr. Kingma accompanied the recessional of the graduates on the piano.

Congratulations to the class of 2015! Another year has gone by and another class of students graduating is a great reminder to reflect on how richly God has blessed Guido de Bres Christian High School. May he continue to bless these graduates as they put aside their worry, act as covenant children each day, and seek him above earthly rewards.

# ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMAS

Danielle Eileena Aalbers Jesse Michael Alkema\* Taylor Larissa Bartels Janette Henderika Bergsma Kyla Anne Blokker\* Johannes Hendrikus Boer Denver Frederik Boeringa Brandi Nicole Boersema\* Alicia Louise Bontekoe\* Kimberly Irene Boot\* **Emily Rose Bos** Braelyn Marissa Bosch\* Jessica Karen Bosma\* Kate Elizabeth Bosma Jonathan Evan Bosscher Rebecca Lynn Bosscher Stefan Travis Bouwman\* Josiah Lloyd Bredenhof\* Hilary Eileen Breukelman\* Leanne Louise Breukelman\* Natasha Iena Breukelman Ioshua Iames Buist Kendrick Jonathan Buitenwerf Caleb Benjamin Bultena Michael Caleb Bultje Cole Wesley DeBoer\* Edward George DeBoer Erica Lindsey DeBoer Sydney Carolyn DeGelder Anna Selina DeHaan Nathania Dene de Haan Jeremy Wade DeRuiter Mark Gerrit Evink Madelaine Dorothy Feenstra Brandon Joseph Frebold\* Ryan Adrian Gracey Katrina Liana Gritter\* Michael Ryan Haining

Natasha Karrie Heeringa\* Benjamin Thomas Hofsink Adrian John Hordyk\* Hannah Paige Hordyk\* Deborah Rosannah Huijgen\* Darren Jonathan Huinink Johnathan Patrick Hulleman Mackenzie Hope Hulzebosch\* Dennis Jonathan Hutten\* Cassia Rachelle Jager\* Sean Robert Jager Sarah Elizabeth Jans Sean Matthew Jans Jacqueline Emma Jansema\* Jeffrey Brent Jansema\*\* Mitchell Aaron Jonker Heather Johanna Kampen\* Robyn Catherine Colette Kampen\* Tyler Benjamin Kampen Thomas Jesse Kamstra Joel Owen Knegt Christopher Albert Jan Knol\* Denver Henry Komdeur Dayton James Koning Conner Nicholas Krikke Alison Marie Lof\* Brianna Grace Lof\* Aron Michael Ludwig Jonathan Ben Ludwig James David Moore Andrew Richard Nordeman Rachelle Adrianna Nordeman Ashlynne Karlissa Raynelle Petter Hendrick Davin Post Sarah Janine Elizabeth Ravensbergen Stephen Geoffrey Quinton Redwood\* Logan Michael Reinink

Joshua Hendrik Salomons\*

Connor Wade Schulenberg Brett Michael Schutten Gregory Jonathan Schwantz\* Lisa Catherine Smeding\* Jordan Edward Stam Dustin Albert Stegenga Justin Gregory Stel\* Jacob James Stieva\* Vanessa Shianne Tenhage\* Natasha Engalyn VanAmerongen\* Julianna Rebekah Vandenberg\*\*\* Victoria Jennifer Vandenbos Clark Alexander VanderBrugghen Trevor Jacob Vanderee Erin Madelyn Vandergriendt\* Bradley Anthony William Vanderhout Bethany Anne VanderVeen Chelsea Danielle VanderVelde Michael Frederic VanderVelde Natasha Emily VanderVelde\* Samantha Ioanne vanderVelde Dean Alexander Vanderwoude Shannon Elizabeth Van Dyk\* Curtis Michael VanEgmond Joel Wayne VanSydenborgh\* Jenna-Dien Marie Van Veen\* Curtis Mendel Van Vliet\* Austin Mark Veenstra Bruce Nicholas Vermeulen\* Helena Nicole Vis\* Jocelyn Sara Wanders\* Julie Ann Joy Watson Jacob Nicholas Werkman\* Sarah Rebecca Werkman Alanna Michelle Wielink\* Kezia Joy Winkel\* Theresa Renee Wynia\* Kyle Richard Zwaagstra

<sup>\*</sup>Denotes an Ontario Scholar recipient

<sup>\*\*</sup>Denotes a Certificate of Accomplishment recipient

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Denotes an Ontario Secondary School Certificate recipient

# **Awards**

# Guido de Brès Scholarships

Jesse Alkema Jessica Bosma Curtis Van Vliet Gregory Schwantz Anna DeHaan Taylor Bartels

# Subject Specific Scholarships

The Arts
Humanities and
Social Sciences
Languages
Mathematics
Science

Cassia Jager

Adrian Hordyk Deborah Huijgen Leanne Breukelman Shannon Van Dyk

# Academic Athletics Scholarship

Jessica Bosma

# The Guido de Brès Christian High School Participation Awards

Kimberly Boot
Jessica Bosma
Jacqueline Jansema
Andrew Nordeman
Jacob Stieva
Curtis Van Vliet
Bruce Vermeulen



The Governor General's Academic Medal
Jesse Alkema

# The Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award for Students

Janette Bergsma

# The Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff Student-of-the-Year Award

Cassia Jager





# Angela Vanleeuwen

# Farewell to the Louwerse Family

It was a beautiful summer evening on August 14, 2015 when the Neerlandia congregation gathered together at the Covenant Canadian Reformed school gym to bid a fond farewell to their minister of ten years and his family. Rev. Louwerse, Annet, Joel, Liselle, and Annesa will be greatly missed.

The evening began with Mr. John Froma welcoming a full house with reading Psalm 19 and prayer. The heavens declare the glory of God the skies proclaim the work of his hands! Our neighbouring churches were given the first opportunity to say adieu with Rev. Tiggelaar, minister emeritus of Barrhead, handing Rev. Louwerse a box of Kleenex in preparation of all the tearful goodbyes. They expressed their thankfulness in having Rev. Louwerse as part of the monthly pulpit exchanges, involvement in Classis Alberta, and sharing in the joy of shepherding God's flock be it thru counselling or advice. Also our neighbouring URC pastor Rev. Pontier spoke words of thanks and encouragement for being a good neighbour and colleague and that he would be missed. Rev. VanderLinde spoke words of thanks for the many regular visits Rev. Louwerse made and for his help and encouragement he gave as he began his ministry in Barrhead. Br. Brad VanDelden on behalf of Immanuel Church Edmonton also wished the Louwerse family the Lord's blessing on their move to and also encouraged him in his new task as Shepherd and teacher for the Hamilton congregation.

After many lengthy good wishes an intermission was announced and everyone was treated to a delectable array of desserts; cake pops, cheesecake, and cream puffs to name a few, even a few healthy fruit options for those who do not have a "sweet tooth." This was all challengingly prepared by a talented sister from Barrhead congregation.

With our coffee and *gebakjes*, back to our seats we went to continue on with the evening's program. Through speech and song, young and old were able



to express the gratitude to the Louwerse family. The Tuesday Morning and Wednesday Evening Ladies Society's presented Annet with a Pandora bracelet and charms. A gift that encourages her to look back on her time in Neerlandia with fondness. Our choir sang two lovely pieces, "You are my All in All" and "Thy Word is my Strength and Song." We also heard a sincere farewell and thankyou from our school board chair, thanking Rev. Louwerse for his support and willing guidance through the past years.

Everyone had a good laugh when Joel's fellow classmates came and sang a farewell tune to remind him he'd be transitioning from small farm town to busy city life! They also reminded him that he would also be betraying his beloved Oilers to cheer on the Toronto Maple Leafs!! They gave him a hockey jersey so he could remember his class' love for recess hockey.

Liselle was gifted with a pen and paper to remind her to stay in touch with her "first" friends.

Later Joel was called upon again by his special neighbour and friend. Frieda Roodzant and Joel stepped on stage dressed in sacks. Then Frieda shared with us how Joel really felt about leaving our community! What he had really wanted to wear to the evening was "Sackcloth and Ashes!"

After another brief intermission and singing of Psalm 66, Rev. Louwerse was even bid farewell from our small hamlets grocery store stating that his frequent daily visits will be missed.

Saturday morning men's society thanked Rev. Louwerse for his leadership and lively mornings. The Covenant of Love Youth Group presented Annet with a small craft box full of small trinkets to remind her of a few things special to every congregation.

Fittingly the evening ended with a few games and personal stories. Rev. Louwerse is always up for some friendly competition! The young peoples tested





the knowledge of the Louwerses regarding their congregation's dynamics. Then we had Neerlandia Trivia followed by a fun game amongst the Council members.

Br. Albert Vanleeuwen, chairman of Council, presented a gift on behalf of the congregation for the Louwerse home as a constant reminder of their time in Neerlandia. Rev. Louwerse and Annet then had an opportunity to speak words of appreciation and thanks to the congregation and closed in prayer.

The following Sunday after the afternoon farewell sermon, letters were read from neighbouring churches in Classis Alberta (Edmonton Providence, St. Albert, Taber, Calgary, and Coaldale). The chairman on behalf of the congregation thanked Rev. Louwerse for his faithful and fruitful work of preaching, teaching, and counselling work in the congregation for the past ten and a half years. The congregation then enjoyed coffee and cake outside and had opportunity to say their final farewells.

# **Education Matters**

# Principals in the Reformed Context:

# National Principal's Conference 2015



James Meinen

James is the principal of Covenant Canadian Reformed School, a Kindergarten to Grade 12 school with 234 students, located in Neerlandia, Alberta

In late September, principals from across the country headed to Sumas, Washington, for the bi-annual principal's conference. This year marked the thirteenth time principals from across the country came together to develop professionally, network, and discuss the unique challenges we face as Reformed principals in our given contexts. The setting of the conference was nestled in the beautiful mountains of Sumas, Washington, surround by an impressive canopy of cedars! Driving up to the conference centre, one could not help but be wowed by the beauty and majesty of God's creation.

While the conference is called the National Principal's Conference, there was an international flavour to the delegates attending. This year four continents were represented, with principals hailing from Brazil, Australia, The Netherlands, the United States, and of course Canada all taking part. While the majority of the participants did indeed come from Canada, we benefitted from the international perspectives brought by the visiting principals and educators. With such a diversity of participants, opportunity abounded to network with one another and learn from each other's varied and diverse experiences.

# The principal in the Reformed context

The theme of this year's conference was "The Principal in the Reformed Context." The theme was further broken down and revolved around six "Ps." Namely preparation, planning, professionalism, personal, performance, and promotion. Each day various sessions dealt with one or more of these aspects that pertain to our work as principals. Unpacking each was helpful as our schools are quite unique when compared to those around us. While neighbouring public schools operate in a much more bureaucratic model (with School Boards and Superintendents overseeing a wide number

of schools and thus a wide number of principals), our schools do not follow this model. Here in Canada, each principal functions as both superintendent and principal under a school board that only oversees one school. This model creates challenges but also opportunities which were explored at the conference.

# The sessions were invaluable in learning about how our schools across the country operate

The approach to addressing the "P" theme took a different format than conferences in years past. Rather than having a variety of speakers and workshops, this year's conference had only one guest speaker who spoke at the various sessions. The changed format created more of a mini-course for the principals where topics pertinent to the principal could be unpacked at a deeper level. The speaker who took on this ambitious role was Mr. Alwyn Terpstra. He hails from Australia and is currently serving as principal at John Calvin Christian College in Armadale. Mr. Terpstra is a life-long educator with decades of experience in a variety of educational roles, and a life-long learner having recently completed his second Masters degree. With his background he was more than up for the challenge of leading this minicourse and did a good job unpacking the large topic of leadership.

Each day of the conference narrowed the focus to one or two key questions that connected with the theme. On day one we dealt with two questions. 1) The Reformed School: What are we aiming for and how does the principal contribute? 2) The Principal in the Reformed School: What are the requirements

for a principal in a Reformed school? While you might think it would be easy for a room full of principals to answer such questions, reality proved otherwise. With regards to question one, a variety of responses emerged. Ultimately it seemed that different contexts dictated the role the principal took on when it came to defining a schools aims. What was agreed upon was the importance of our school Boards and the acknowledgement of the authority they have over principals and ultimately their given schools. Question two also provided a lot of food for thought, and discussion largely revolved around principal evaluations. It was refreshing to see that our schools do regularly evaluate principals, although the frequency of evaluations and the impetus for them varies greatly across schools and regions.

The day wrapped up with a plenary session that looked at current issues regarding preparation, planning, professionalism, personnel, performance, and promotion. Many of the day's discussions about the role of the school board and the principal's role were revisited here. While consensus on the wide variety of topics was not necessarily achieved, the sessions were invaluable in learning about how our schools across the country operate. These discussions were also invaluable as they led to the sharing of different policies and procedures revolving around the six "Ps" between fellow principals.



# Day two

Day two continued with the key question format and focused on what actions must be undertaken by the principal in a Reformed school context. To set the stage for such talks, the day began by breaking down what a school's vision and mission is. Mr. Terpstra shared a variety of documents that were developed in Australia and were helpful in differentiating between vision and mission. The discussion then drifted towards the implementation of such vision and mission statements. While most schools have drafted vision and mission documents, the challenge seems to be keeping these alive among our church communities. The presentation definitely provided us with a good motivation to revisit these important documents and to keep them front and centre in our given memberships.

Admittedly, the conference was not all work; principals had the opportunity to head to Mount Baker for an opportunity to enjoy God's creation. The weather for our outing was outstanding and principals took in the sights of Mount Baker. Most principals enjoyed a short afternoon hike, while the more adventurous principals went on a five kilometre run/hike up a mountain! While climbing up a steep mountainside seemed sufficient exercise for most, a few decided running up was a better option. Who says principals are not in good shape! In addition to getting us out of our chairs, the hike/run provided a great opportunity to touch base with other principals about some of the challenges and successes they have had in their schools.

The conference also had a Board panel questionand-answer session that proved informative. Board members from Cornerstone Christian School, Credo Christian High, and John Calvin (Yarrow) attended. These members passion for Reformed schools was palpable, and what shone through was a robust understanding of the covenant. Acknowledgement was made that when it comes to the raising of covenantal children everyone in the church community has a responsibility. It is not every parent for himself or herself, but a community working together to tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord. This is what drove the Board members to give up their time to serve on a school board and what drives countless others around the country to do the same. The board members were also able to reaffirm the importance of school boards in overseeing the school and providing direction. Rather than simply telling a principal what to do, it was clear that boards maintain a close connection with principals in the implementation of a school's mission.

The highlight of the conference, however, may have just been the opportunity to join fellow principals in Bible reading, prayer, and in praising God in song. With just over thirty male delegates and one female delegate (Dr. Christine Van Halen Faber), the deep male voices shook the ground! Being a part of that joyful sound, was an incredible experience as leaders from around the world lifted up the voices to praise God in song!

Other notable events of the conference ranged from various plenary sessions, to hikes around the beautiful conference setting, to preliminary planning for the next National Principal's Conference, and of course fellowship with one another! After three busy days, the conference came to a close.

# Conclusion

As I wrap up this article and look for a few pictures to add to it, I came across a picture from my first principal's conference ten years ago. What strikes me is how much the faces have changed in that short time period. The role of principal is definitely one that has a higher turnover rate than other professions and with continued retirement of others, vacancy rates for

principals remains an ongoing challenge. Any scan of a Clarion in the last few years can attest to this in ad section. The challenge of finding new principals was a discussion topic that took place at my first conference and continues to take place as we struggle to fill the principal void. With that said, it was wonderful to see that there are so many capable men and women who have embraced the principal role. All the new faces attests to the fact that God does indeed provide. With eight new principals taking on the role in the last year or two alone we can see that we have been richly blessed. Conferences like this provide a great opportunity to strengthen both these new principals but also the more experienced principals, allowing them to head back to their respective schools with an increased confidence and renewed passion for our wonderful callings.

While our next National Principal Conference is set for 2017 in Ontario, the fifth conference on Reformed Education is set to take place in The Netherlands in September 2016. It is great these professional development opportunities continue and that our schools can work together both across Canada and the larger Reformed community.



# You Asked



William den Hollander

Minister emeritus of the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto, Ontario denhollanderw@gmail.com



Why have the churches gone over from "Thee, Thy, Thine, and Thou" to "you" and "your(s)" in the address to the Lord? The Dutch "U" and "Uw" are so much more respectful; and it is used to honour parents, teachers, ministers, and the queen. In the same way "Thee and Thou" sounds a lot better than "you." Then in the new *Book of Praise* even the capital letters have disappeared! How can we justify this before the Lord?

This question touches upon a matter that affects a person's preference and spiritual sensitivity very much. Hence I wish to begin by expressing due respect for such personal sentiments. It's a question that continues to be a matter of debate,

because for some the connotations of the Thee and Thou touch their spiritual feelings deeply. Indeed, that's where the issue originates: in one's personal spiritual feelings. Thee and Thou "sound" more respectful and for long appeared to express honour and glory to God more clearly. Especially for believers of Dutch descent the resemblance of their mother tongue and original practices (using "U" and "Uw" in the address of the Lord) incited an important preference for the *archaic* Thee and Thou since *in their hearing* it expressed the same honour and respect in the address and references to God, the Lord. Hence it is with due respect that we accept such preference as their personal choice!

Having said this, though, it must be observed that in the English language these connotations are not the same. In fact, linguistically and historically speaking the Thee and Thou did not denote such special respect but were rather common, ordinary, words of address. It's just in *religious* circles that these pronouns took on such spiritual overtones, particularly because the common language developed towards the more up to date address of everyone else with you and yours. Language is a living entity and language changes constantly, even in one's life time! The fact that the Dutch (German,

and French, a.o.) retained the "U" and "Uw" ("Sie" and "Ihr," and "vous" and "votre") happened because these languages could use the "jij" and "jouw" ("du" and "dein," "tu" and "ton") to express the distinction between the younger and older, the common and more respectful. In the modern English language, however, that was not the case! Although some attempted to retain a similar distinction by using Thee and Thou, linguistically speaking that was not possible; it was a matter of archaic over modern rather than of more or less respectful!

As languages change and continue to develop, so also translations in the modern vernacular change. For translations to be readily understandable and user-friendly they need to be updated every so many decades. This is one of the principles of the dynamic equivalent way of translating. It's dynamic in that it keeps in step with the times and language use of the day; it's equivalent in ensuring that at the same time the original language is expressed accurately and as correctly as possible. In this context we may also see the matter of the capitalization of pronouns. That's another issue that received much attention at past general synods (2004, 2007, 2010, and 2013!). "The Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic text of the Bible have no such practice, current rules of English usage avoid this, the NIV (and ESV) does not use this and there are no known biblical arguments for this convention," they concluded.

It's in this matter the same as with the use of Thee and Thou: we're looking at a usage over a long, long period of time! As well, the spiritual sentiments that capitalizing gives recognition to the unique character of

the Divine referent, the only true God, will lead for many to a continued use of the preferred capitals. Personally, I found it difficult to adjust to you and yours, and I still have difficulty accepting the practice of discontinuing capitalization. Yet, these are the realities of the day and this is the new practice in translations and articulations. Hence, we need to accept the expressions of our time, without losing any of the honour and respect that we can still show in the manner we pray, speak, and write.

Is there something you've been wanting to know?

An answer you've been looking for?

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. denHollander denhollanderw@gmail.com

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON LOR 1CO



# Further Discussion

# Young and Restless

In his editorial in *Clarion* of September 25, 2015 (Vol 64, No 19) Rev. Eric Kampen looks at an issue consistories and congregations are often struggling with: the attitude towards church members who decide to withdraw from the church. The author identifies different reasons people have for making this step, but most of the attention goes to the folks who no longer feel comfortable or happy in the church they grew up in, and who eventually leave and join another church.

This is the group that triggers the most discussion. That's understandable. These are the (not always, but often) young people who leave the Canadian Reformed Church – not because they do not want to serve the Lord, but because they do want to serve the Lord, and they do want to follow Jesus Christ. At least. . . that's what they tell the minister and the elders. And why would we think that they are not speaking the truth? Why should we question their intentions?

The problem I have with the editorial is not so much what it says about the seriousness of withdrawing yourself from a faithful church of Christ. But if we leave it at that, we ignore what's at stake. I believe that we need to say more and something else, if we are really concerned about those who withdraw from a Reformed

church to worship elsewhere. As churches, as ministers and elders, we need to confront ourselves with this spiritual restlessness among our younger members. Where does it come from, and how do we respond?

Rev. Kampen might say, "But that was not the topic of my editorial." Fair enough. So, don't read this as criticism of my colleague's article, but more as a response, or perhaps an addition. However, no matter what you want to call it, I am convinced that it is pretty urgent to highlight this aspect of the conversation. We cannot afford to avoid some critical self-examination as churches.

Here is what we are facing today. Everyone younger than thirty (or perhaps forty) is constantly connected with the rest of the world. Via YouTube, Blogging, Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, Pinterest, and you name it, they all find themselves in the middle of a never-ending stream of indiscriminate data, information, ideas, views, and opinions.

The question: "Do we like this or do we regret this," is irrelevant for the point I want to make. It is a fact. Of course, we all know this. I don't say anything new here. But do we realize the impact in the church? And when I say "we" I am not just talking about the older-than-forty

category among us. My question is: do we as churches try to understand the fundamental shift in how people look at the world, the culture, and the church, as the result of this permanent connectedness?

I know – our Canadian Reformed Churches have websites, some of our ministers are on Facebook, or they are blogging. But even if our young folks go there and read what they find, they are quick to move on to the next, and the next, and the next. Just click. . . click. . . click.

It means that their lives are filled with options to pick from and choices to make. . . more than ever, all the time. It can be confusing, often interesting, sometimes overwhelming. But it is inescapable. And all this applies also to matters of faith, church, and worship. . . everything spiritual – options to pick from and choices to make. What do we do with this? Are we ready to meet the challenge?

Sure – a rebellious attitude among a younger generation is as such nothing new. My grandfather was born in 1893, and passed away before the Internet came around. But he has told me about his own youth, some 100 years ago. Youngsters resisting the ideas of the older folks, and the elderly worrying about the kids. So, yes. . . . What's new?

And yet – today we live in a different situation. In the past, for most of us, the life and the world of your grandparents and parents was in the end still your life and world. And the church of your grandparents and parents was in the end still your church.

Well, that time is over. It is gone. And it won't come back. We should no longer take it for granted that our children will automatically end up in the same church as their parents and grandparents. Whether we like it or not, we'll have to realize that their intense connectedness brings them to places – also spiritual places – parents and grandparents have never been. And neither have most of the older elders and ministers.

Again – more equally interesting options to pick from and more equally valid choices to make; or so it seems! And they will ask: "Some of my friends have left the Canadian Reformed Church, and after they have joined this other church they have grown so much in their faith and their Christian life. Can you give me a good reason to stay where I am, and not to leave and go elsewhere to worship the Lord?"

How do we interact with this restless seeking and questioning?

To begin with – we should not push the panic button and resort to cosmetic changes in liturgy and worship in our churches, just to make people feel good and to silence complaints. Trying to find a quick fix to deal with some of the negative feelings and critical comments that can swirl around sometimes would be a mistake. It may seem to work for a little while, but it doesn't address the issue.

Furthermore – adjusting, watering down, or worse: walking away from what we believe, the content of the Reformed faith, based on the Bible and available as a summary in our confessions, would not just be a mistake. It would be wrong, because we would fail our restless searchers.

No – let's not dismiss those questions, but let's take on the challenge to convince the next generation that the Canadian Reformed Church is a wonderful and exciting place to be. And let's show them why. Let's walk with them. Let's love them. How? By showing them with passion why, in the midst of all the interesting and attractive choices they have, it is extremely worthwhile to stick around in the Canadian Reformed Church.

Let's take on the challenge to convince them that yes, the spiritual grass may look greener at the other side of the fence – but when you discover the simple beauty and the life-changing power of the Reformed faith, you'll find out that the grass is not greener at the other side!

Here is another challenge. Don't be afraid to ask them: "What can we do better in the church to make this a convincing case?" And don't just ask them; also engage them in this. "Please help us with practical ideas to make the depth of God's love in Jesus, as we have it at hand in the Bible and in the Reformed confessions, more and more visible in our church."

This, of course, begs the question: fathers, mothers, grandparents, ministers, elders, deacons, catechism teachers, etc.: Are *you* convinced that your Canadian Reformed Church is a wonderful and exciting place to be? Are *you* grateful to be part of it? Are *you* captivated by the simple beauty and the life-changing power of the Reformed faith? Does *your* heart sing, when your mouth sings Psalm 63:2, 3 (BoP) or Hymn 81 (BoP) or How Deep the Father's Love (not in the BoP ①)?

If you're not ... how do we expect the next generation to become passionate about these things?

Rev. Jan DeGelder

Pastor emeritus of the Flamborough CanRC

From time to time Clarion will publish longer responses to articles received. The decision as to which responses to publish will rest with the Editor.

# Letter to the Editor

I want to thank Dr. J. Visscher for his insightful article on Protestant "popes." I appreciated that he drew attention to the pandering of such "popes." I would like to interact with the article by extending the discussion on the pandering of such "popes." I look forward to some responsive wisdom.

You have followed Pope Francis in the news. You know that he is quite skilled at pandering. He often knows what people want to hear. This is indeed something we must also watch out for in a Protestant "pope" (2 Tim 4:3). I now submit some specific pandering for members of congregations to watch out for your evaluation. The order is not important.

- 1. Does a pastor in his sermon seem to prefer that everyone leaves the worship service feeling "all is well" rather than the congregation feeling a sincere call to repentance and faith? Do you get the sense each Sunday that the pastor is speaking to (not at) you and sincerely wants you to stop doing some things and start doing other things?
- 2. Do the song choices reflect the variety of the songbook or are the more upbeat psalms and hymns consistently preferred?
- 3. Do the texts chosen for preaching reflect the variety in the Bible? Or are the texts that people do not want to hear consistently avoided? (e.g. Minor Prophets)
- 4. Does the preaching seem to target everybody in the world (Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Roman Catholics, Baptists etc.) except for the people sitting right there in the pew?

- 5. Does the preaching seem to target everything in the world except the issue that is raging right then in the church?
- 6. Does the preaching avoid talking about an issue that a certain powerful individual or group in the congregation does not want addressed? Is there a certain area of God's will that certain members do not want to fall in line with and the pastor is effectively muzzled on the topic?



- 7. Does the preaching emphasize what people want to hear rather than what the text says? For example, the preacher might emphasize application or neat historical facts at the expense of the actual message of the text.
- 8. Does preaching about certain (perhaps touchy) subjects come across as confusing? Does it sound kind of right, but there is something you cannot put your finger on? As a result, you end up feeling like it was over your head and the pastor understands something you don't. You might feel dumber as a result.

I look forward to a response on my eight points. I feel like I am addressing Dr. G. Visscher since I feel like am getting graded again.  $\odot$ 

David Winkel

Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.

Submissions need to be less than one page in length.



# Ray of Sunshine

Rachel Vis

# Harbour Home

42 Spadara Drive, Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3

"This is the room where we sit in the evenings, this is where we cook, and here is my bedroom, the bathroom, and Julie's room. ..." Lisa Alkema led me in a wonderful tour throughout the Harbour Home. I got to meet Lisa, Jason Herrewynen, Jack Dieleman, and Ben Dejong. Julie Ostemier also lives there but was away at her parents'. Over the next few articles I am going to introduce to you the Harbour Home, and share with you what I have learned about each of the residents and how the home runs. Currently there are five residents living at the home, but in January 2016, Kristi Oosterhoff will also be joining the crew. This is the fifth home of the Anchor homes, and it opened in February 2015. They have four full time staff and five part time

staff. This home is right in the city so there are a lot opportunities to get involved in the community. Many of the residents are able to go to day programs and other activities throughout the week. We can thank the Lord for blessing this home with a supporting community, great staff, and wonderful residents.



# Jason Herrewynen



"I have something to tell you," says Jason, with a big smile on his face, and so begins another conversation. Jason loves to share how his day went and all the special things that he has done.

Many of his conversations are also related to sports, especially the Toronto Maple Leafs. He keeps track of all their games and scores, and he loves to watch them play. Jason has just moved from living at his parents' to Harbour Home this past August. He loves his new home and the friends he has made there. He does miss not seeing his parents every day though, but looks forward to seeing them at church and when they come to visit him.

Jason does many different chores around the house. He helps dry the dishes, brings the garbage out, and helps with the yard work, like raking the leaves. He also helps deliver the papers every Thursday.

He keeps busy during the week by going to the library on Mondays, looking at books and getting movies out for Friday night movie nights. On Tuesday nights his dad picks him up and they go to choir together. On Thursdays and Fridays he goes to the learning centre and he does many different activities such as crafts, making meals, and playing on the computers.

"I like neat things" is what Jason told me when I asked him what he likes to do. He also told me his favourite food is carrots. His favourite song is "The Old Rugged Cross." Talking with and getting to know Jason, I was able to see his deep love for Christ.

Jason is a wonderful man to chat with and he loves having visitors over.

# January

# 2 LIZ KONING will be 55

10905 163 Street Edmonton, Alberta T5P 3P7

# 6 JASON HERREWYNEN will be 42

c/o Harbour Home, 42 Spadara Drive Hamilton, Ontario L9B 2K3

## 7 CHRISTINE BREUKELMAN will be 44

2225-19th Street Coaldale, Alberta T1M 1G4

# 14 STEPHEN DYKSTRA will be 33

Box 3573 Smithers, British Columbia VOJ 2NO

## 17 HENRY DRIEGEN will be 60

#19-31450 Spur Avenue Abbotsford, British Columbia V2T 5M3

## 17 GRACE HOMAN will 60

c/o Anchor Home 361 Thirty Road S. RR 2, Beamsville, Ontario LOR 1B2

# 19 EDWIN SCHUTTE will be 32

844 Bowman Road Abbottsford, British Columbia V3G 1S9

# 19 JANINE SMID will be 46

141 Kittridge Ave. E. Strathroy, Ontario N7G 2A9

# 26 KATHERINE NIJENHUIS will be 50

c/o Lighthouse, 6528 1st Line RR 3, Fergus, Ontario N1M 2W4

# 30 TYLER HOEKSEMA will be 27

6755 Lorne Drive Sardis, British Columbia V2R 2G3

Congratulations to all of those celebrating a birthday in January. I wish you the Lords blessing in this new year, and a wonderful day with family and friends.



# A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

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

### Rachel Vis

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# Press Release

# Press Release of Regional Synod East, Grand Valley, November 11, 2015

On behalf of the convening church Br. Ed Niezen called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM, and led the assembly in appropriate opening devotions, calling on the name of the Lord for his blessing on the proceedings of the day.

Upon the examination of the credentials it was evident that all primary delegates appointed by the respective classes were present. Rev. D.J.G. Agema was appointed to serve as chairman, Rev. C. Bouwman as vice chairman, and Rev. J. Ludwig as clerk. Upon the constitution of Regional Synod, the appointed officers took their seats.

After the adoption of the agenda, the chairman gave opportunity to the delegates to speak to the various items of correspondence on the agenda. Concerning the correspondence received by Synod, the following was decided:

- 1. An appeal from Br. A. Sikkema concerning the fact that an overture sent to Classis Ontario West referencing him without his knowledge was upheld. It would have been proper that he be advised and given opportunity to interact.
- 2. An appeal from Br. J. vanderMeer concerning an overture sent to Classis Ontario West referencing him was noted. He requested Regional Synod to make public, in some appropriate way, the decisions of Regional Synod Lincoln 2013 concerning his appeal to that Synod. This was granted.
- 3. An overture from Classis Ontario West to pass on to General Synod a request to amend Article 51 Church Order was not adopted.
- 4. An overture from Classis Ontario West to pass on to General Synod a request to amend Article 14 Belgic Confession was not adopted.

At the appropriate hour, a moment of silence was granted to remember those who died to defend the peace we've enjoyed over the years, and then to sing our national anthem. Visitors from the United Reformed Churches of North America, Revs. F. Folkerts and M. Overgauw, received a warm welcome and were given the privilege of the floor. Regional Synod received an encouraging address from the brothers expressing appreciation for the contact we have together as churches and hoping for growth in further unity.

- Various reports were received as follows:
- a. The treasurer of Regional Synod East advised on the financial health of the Synod treasury. Given the costs expected in relation to the upcoming general synod, each church will be assessed \$1 per communicant member. Mileage remuneration was set at forty-five cents per kilometre.
- b. The audit of the treasurer's books found those books to be in good order. The treasurer was discharged for the work of this period.
- c. Deputies ad Art 48 CO reported satisfactorily on their work, specifically in relation to the retirement of Rev. J. Moesker.
- d. The archives of Regional Synod were found to be in good order.
- The church in Toronto advised Synod that the Liason/Deputy with the Registrar General of the Province of Ontario under the Marriage Act 1990 is now Br. Karl J. Veldkamp. Br. Cornelis Lindhout has fulfilled this role for many years, which was acknowledged with deep gratitude.

Deputies were appointed for various tasks within the Regional Synod. Of note are those appointed to attend General Synod Dunnville, 2016: Elders: Brs. Gerrit Bos, Lammert Jagt, Rick Ludwig, Carl Oosterhoff, Jeff Temple, John vanderWoerd (alt: Brian Niezen, Theo Flach, Terry Medemblik – in that order); Ministers: Brs. Douwe Agema, Dave deBoer, Peter Feenstra, Eric Kampen, John vanWoudenberg, Dick Wynia (alt: Rodney Vermeulen, Rolf denHollander, Clarence Bouwman – in that order). Nominated for the Board of Governors was Br. Clarence Bouwman, with Br. Dave deBoer as alternate.

The church of Grand Rapids was appointed as convening church for the next regional synod to be held on November 9, 2016.

The chairman judged that Christian censure was not necessary; instead, he gratefully complimented the brothers for their good cooperation. The Acts of Regional Synod 2015 were read and adopted, as was also the Press Release.

The chairman lead the meeting in closing devotions, and Regional Synod was declared closed.

> C. Bouwman. Vice Chairman e.t. 🔬



# Year in Review 2015



James Visscher

Minister emeritus of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia jvisscher@telus.net

# Churches and pastors

The first order of business, as we review the highlights of 2015, is to consider the life of churches and pastors. This year, our survey begins in the east and moves west.

### Ontario

The Jubilee Church at Ottawa continues to do well. It is both vibrant and growing. It also serves as host church to any number of events sponsored by prolife and Christian political action groups.

In 2015 the Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Brampton took possession of its new church building. After many years of negotiating, planning, and navigating red tape, the dream became a reality. The result is a small, functional, and beautiful building. Its strategic location in a large new urban area should give it plenty of exposure and should serve it well as it reaches out to the surrounding community.

Ebenezer, Flamborough, and Waterdown – all churches in the Burlington – area entered the year without pastors, but the situation improved to a degree when the Rev. Clarence VanderVelde of Elora accepted the call to Waterdown. Meanwhile, the other two churches continue to extend calls in the hope that their pulpits will soon be occupied by a pastor of their own.

The other Burlington church, Fellowship, is hoping to begin construction of its own building in the near future. Plans have been drawn up and can be viewed on the Internet. Hopefully, the last hurdles will be overcome soon and the permits issued.

Moving along the shores of Lake Ontario we come to Hamilton. In that city a new church has been instituted called Blessings Christian Church, a Canadian Reformed congregation. Almost all of the founding members came from the nearby Cornerstone church, as did its first pastor, the Rev. Bill DeJong. Meanwhile,

his former church extended a called to the Rev. John Louwerse of Neerlandia, Alberta, and he accepted the call and has since been installed as Cornerstone's pastor.

Across town the pastor of the Providence church was lured far, far away to the other ends of the earth as he accepted a call to the Launceston Free Reformed Church in Tasmania, Australia. Although he accepted this call in 2014, he did not receive his immigration papers until 2015. In the meantime the Providence church has become a vacant church. Next door, the Ancaster church is in the process of doing some renovations to its buildings. Many years of wear and tear have taken their toll and a refresher is needed.

Further south and southeast into the Niagara peninsula, the churches of Dunnville, Glanbrook, Grassie, Lincoln, Spring Creek, and Smithville continue to experience steady growth; as well they all have their own pastors. Although as some of them continue to grow the workload for some of these pastors increases. No doubt this has the attention of the elders in these churches.

Moving north we come to the Emmanuel church of Guelph. It received a new pastor and teacher on the first day of the New Year as the Rev. Peter Feenstra became its new minister. Or is it "old" minister? If you check your yearbook you can see that he has been there before as he served the Emmanuel Church from 1986 – 1992. So, the saying "what goes around comes around," applies even to ministers. Also in Guelph, the Living Word church continues to meet and makes use of the Cornerstone Christian School.

Heading north on Highway 6, one comes to the area of Fergus and Elora. The latter church, as mentioned, saw its pastor depart to Burlington. They have since commenced calling in the hope of filling their vacancy. In Fergus, the two churches of Fergus North and Fergus South appear to be doing well. The last mentioned church is thankful that its gym meeting days are over

and that it now has a brand new, tailor-made facility. The former church has a much older meeting place and that is creating a few challenges.

North and east of Fergus, we have the churches of Grand Valley and Orangeville. The Grand Valley church has been a vacant church throughout most of 2015 as its former minister moved to Guelph. Still, there is hope and help on the way as Candidate Randall Visscher accept the call to serve in this congregation. As for Orangeville, there is not much to report except that this church too is dealing with an aging building that needs some rejuvenating.

And then there is the Owen Sound church, situated in one of the prettiest areas of Ontario. It too is vacant as its pastor, the Rev. Jack Moesker, reached the venerable age of sixty-five and decided to retire and move to Fergus. He too is a case of, "what goes around comes around," as he grew up in Fergus and is now back in Fergus. Meanwhile, Owen Sound is in pastoral search mode.

The same applies to the Pilgrim Church of London. Its pastor, the Rev. Reuben Bredenhof, also caught the "Aussie itch" and accepted a call to Mount Nasura, Western Australia. The fact that he is related to the other Bredenhof who moved down under raises some suspicions as to whether there is a plot afoot in the larger Bredenhof clan. Thus far the calls extended by this congregation have not borne fruit.

Further north and west, there is thankfully nothing to report about vacancies and building plans in the churches of Kerwood and Chatham.

# Michigan and Colorado

There is quite a substantial distance between these two American states, but what they have in common is that they are both home to an American Reformed Church. The historic city of Grand Rapids is home to one of them and the capital city of Denver is home to the other. About the former it may be reported that it continues to exist in what many call the "Jerusalem" of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Also, Sr. H. Kingma, the widow of the late Rev. Piet Kingma who served the Grand Rapids church, passed on to be with the Lord on August 18. Many who knew her will remember her as the kind and warm-hearted wife of a pioneer pastor.

About the latter, there is news too, but it is of a sadder variety as the bond between it and its pastor, the Rev. Ryan Kampen, came to an end. This has caused much sadness and disappointment all around. It is to be hoped that as congregation and pastor go their separate ways healing will occur and new opportunities for service will emerge.

# Manitoba

In 2014 one of the Manitoba churches said "farewell" to its pastor as the Rev. Rolf den Hollander of the Grace Church in Winnipeg departed for Ontario. After a number of calls were extended and declined, the Grace church was finally blessed with the acceptance of its call to Candidate Rick Vanderhorst. He was ordained on November 1, 2015, and we wish him a long and fruitful ministry in Winnipeg and beyond. Meanwhile, the other Manitoba churches: Redeemer Winnipeg, Carman East, and Carman West, continue to be blessed with active and healthy pastors.

## Alberta

For the longest time the churches in the province of Alberta all had ministers and no calling work was happening. All of that has changed. In 2014 the Rev. Dirk Poppe left Coaldale for Australia and the Coaldale church has been in calling mode ever since, thus far without success. A little later, the Rev. Bill Slomp of Immanuel Edmonton retired. In 2015, the Rev. Hans Kalkman did the same as he moved into retirement status with the Calgary church. Finally, the Rev. John Louwerse of the Neerlandia church accepted the call to the Cornerstone church of Hamilton. For a time half of the churches in Classis Alberta were vacant.

Thankfully, that situation has improved somewhat. The Immanuel church called the Rev. Julius Van Spronsen, currently serving as a missionary in Brazil, and he accepted the call. His arrival is expected to happen sometime in 2016. Hopefully, the new year will see the calling attempts of the Calgary, Coaldale, and Neerlandia churches crowned with success.

One further news item is that late in the year Classis Alberta examined Br. Gerard Veurink and declared him eligible for call. This means that there is a candidate available who has the gifts to serve ably either in Alberta or elsewhere.

It is also fitting to mention here that the minister emeritus of the Providence Edmonton church, the Rev. Marinus (Ries) van Beveren, was called home by the Lord in October. At the time, he was living north of Toronto in order to be close to his daughter Bea and her husband Ross and family. The Lord blessed him with a long life of ninety-four years. His years of faithful service in the churches of Fergus, Coaldale, Surrey, Burlington, and Edmonton will long be remembered. His personality and style were unique. His faithfulness and pastoral care were legendary (more about that elsewhere in this issue). May his family be comforted!

On the building front, the Barrhead church moved into its new and much roomier premises. The Providence Edmonton church is looking into doing a major renovation.

# British Columbia

For years, the Alberta churches were the envy of the federation. It would seem that for the moment this honour has been passed on to the BC churches, where all the pulpits are filled.

But while there is no calling news from Canada's most westerly province, there are a few things to pass along. In 2015, the Rev. James Slaa, minister of the Smithers church, was granted a four month sabbatical. Meanwhile, the minister of the neighbouring Houston church, the Rev. Carl van Dam, continued to chip away at his Th. D. studies. Further south, the Rev. Ryan deJonge, one of the Langley pastors, declined a number of calls and enrolled in a Doctor of Ministry program with Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida.

The other Langley pastor, the Rev. Doug Vandeburgt, came down with a case of double pneumonia and was out of action for some time. Thankfully, he is making a comeback. It should also be reported that the Rev. Theo Lodder of the Cloverdale church was on a reduced workload for a time as he needed to support his wife Marina who was going through debilitating chemo treatments. Meanwhile, the Rev. Rob Schouten of the Aldergrove Church, who had the same disease but in a different form, continues to do well.

As for the churches in Surrey, Willoughby, Abbotsford, Yarrow, and Chilliwack, they continue to be the recipients of regular and faithful pastoral care.

# **Washington**

This survey would not be complete without some mention of the Lynden church in the state of Washington. Of the three American Reformed Churches, it is by far the largest. It also has a minister, the Rev. Bill Wielenga, who is closing in on a most unique record, namely twenty-five years in his first and only congregation. Remarkable, indeed!

# The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

For a number of years already CRTS has been hosting a conference each January and 2015 was no different. The theme this time was "Eschatology" (or, if you will, "the doctrine of last things"). The featured speaker was Dr. Lane Tipton from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. A number of faculty members also spoke on related topics. Once again the attendance was good and appreciation was expressed for the presentations made.

Later in the year an announcement was made that most of the papers delivered at the 2014 conference had been compiled into a book. It is called *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today* and is edited by M. te Velde and G.H. Visscher. It can be ordered from the Seminary Book Centre.

The month of September saw another convocation. This time five students graduated with a Master of Divinity degree, namely, Johan Bruintjes, Rick Vanderhorst, Steven Van Leeuwen, Gerard Veurink, and Randall Visscher. Seven new students were enrolled, six in the



M. Div. program and one in the Diploma program. This means that for the 2015-16 academic year CRTS will have its highest enrollment ever. Twenty-one students now make up the student body.

It is to be hoped that as time progresses these students will go a long way to putting a good dent into the vacancy rate in the churches.

The year that is now coming to a close was also a busy one for the faculty. If you turn to the Principal's Report in the October 9 issue of this magazine, you can read that all five faculty members were busy lecturing on a regular basis in Hamilton. In addition, they, and an emeritus professor, spread their wings and flew away to speak and teach in such countries as Brazil, the United States, Germany, and Norway. International demands are increasing as the Seminary becomes better known and as Reformed theology spreads its wings.

Not always so obvious is the fact that there is a lot of work being done behind the scenes at CRTS. The staff, composed of Catharine Mechelse, Leanne Kuizenga, and Margaret Alkema (Librarian), is to be commended for their efforts. Also, the work of the Ladies Savings Action (Christine Nienhuis, Joanne van Dam, Janet Van Vliet, and all the ladies across the land) should be noted as the monies that they collect for the growth of the Library is indispensable.

All the while, the situation of most retired faculty members remains a concern. Professors Jack DeJong and Niek Gootjes continue to reside at Shalom Manor in Grimsby, Ontario, where they are receiving excellent care. Sr. W. Faber also lives there and celebrated her ninety-fifth birthday. Congratulations to a most gracious lady! Prof. Jacob Geertsema, although fragile, remains mobile and can be seen at various functions. Sr. K. Deddens is living in The Netherlands where her health has also been an issue. Hence, life is a struggle for all of them, and particularly so for the spouses of our two professors. Thankfully, Prof. Cornelis van Dam and his wife Joanne are in better health and can still visit family in Houston, B.C. on a regular basis.

# Student challenges

In the midst of all of this Seminary news, there was also some troubling news. This had to do with the fact that a high percentage of graduating students did not sustain their exams for candidacy at the classical level. Such a development, coming on the heels of similar

developments in previous years, generated a lot of discussion in the churches over the summer months. People asked, "Is the Seminary not doing a good enough job? Is the classis too tough? Is there a hidden agenda here? Are the examiners being unreasonable?" Whatever the case may be, the classis in question decided to appoint a committee to study the matter and asked it to come forward with recommendations, if possible, to correct the situation.

In connection with this it would be fitting for the churches as a whole to discuss the interface between the seminary and the churches. In particular it would be good if the matter of examinations, both academic and ecclesiastical, would receive some closer scrutiny. An outsider looking at the situation might well comment that in the Canadian Reformed Churches we have contracted a case of severe "examinationitis."

What do I mean by that newly coined word? It has to do with the fact that in order to enter the ministry in the churches there are exams everywhere. In the first place, there are a great many examinations at Seminary every year. In the second place, the churches are no slouches on this score either. There is an exam to obtain preaching consent (after third year). There is a candidacy exam. There is also an ordination exam. This means that a graduating student has to sustain three sets of exams in his final year (one academic and two ecclesiastical) and he has to do so in a matter of months.

In former days when the churches did not have their own training for the ministry and students came from different seminaries, the number of examinations could be justified. Today it is becoming more and more difficult to do so. One suggestion for change has been that the candidacy exam should be eliminated and that this responsibility, at least for Canadian Reformed students, should be transferred to the Seminary.

Whatever the case may be, there is no doubt that there are a number of wrinkles here that need straightening out. If, after four years of university training and then four years of seminary education, students continue to be turned back at the classical level, it will only discourage future students, generate dissatisfaction in the churches, and cast a shadow over CRTS.

# Overtures regarding students

While writing this Review, news reached me about certain decisions taken by Regional Synod West that will

be submitted to General Synod Dunnville 2016. Seeing that these decisions have a direct bearing on theological students I decided to include them here.

The first has to do with the financial support of students. At present, this support is administered under the auspices of the Grassie church, which has appointed a committee to take care of the actual work.

Regional Synod West is recommending that this system be tweaked somewhat. It proposes that a student remain under the care of his home church and that this church would evaluate the student's financial needs and submit a budget to the Committee for Needy Students. The Committee would then assess the churches for the amount needed, collect the funds, and forward it to the particular student.

There is some merit in this proposal as the home church is often in a better position to assess the needs of a student whom they know. At the same time there are also a few pitfalls as Hamilton is distant from many churches and costs of living vary across the country. As well, different churches may use different measuring rods. The result may well be that some students are supported generously and others meagrely. Such a disparity would not be a healthy thing.

Of course one may wonder why this proposal is even being considered. The reason is that there is dissatisfaction in certain churches about the current level of support being provided to theological students. These churches are of the opinion that the student's home church is in a better position to determine the need.

Still, when all is said and done the best approach may be for Synod to give more detailed instructions to the Grassie church about the level of support that it deems fitting. The Grassie church can then pass this along to its committee for implementation.

Another decision of Regional Synod West will also be going to General Synod and this has to do with examinations. The proposal is that in the future a student be examined in his home classis when requesting permission to speak an edifying word or when desiring to be declared a candidate for the ministry. In this way one classis will no longer be bearing the brunt of the examination work.

While a change such as this will increase classical costs somewhat, it does not appear to be a serious stumbling block. From remarks heard thus far it would appear that this change is gathering steam and garnering support.

In the end the members of Synod Dunnville will have to put their minds together and weigh all the pertinent factors. May the Lord grant them wisdom.

# The Western Canada Ministerial

One might wonder about whether or not this heading is entirely appropriate as this Ministerial meets not in Canada but in the United States. Once again the beautiful facilities of Cedar Springs, Sumas, Washington, just across the border from Abbotsford, BC, served as the site for this annual gathering. Canadian and United Reformed colleagues from all four western provinces and from Washington State met there for three days of study, reflection, rest, and fellowship.

This year, the featured speaker was Dr. Mark Beach who teaches at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana. He spoke on the topic of outreach and the local churches dispensing much wisdom and insight, as well as numerous tips on how to evangelize one's neighbour and turn a local Reformed church into a witnessing community.

Since any number of pastors' wives were also present, some separate meetings were held too. Time was also set aside for book and gadget talks, as well as for walks and jogs. The food, as attendees have come to expect, was excellent.

After mulling over some alternative sites for 2016, it was decided to book Cedar Springs for another year. After all, when you have a good thing going, why spoil it?

# Synod Dunnville 2016 in view

A visit to the Canadian Reformed website (www.canrc.org) furnishes plenty of proof that another general synod is just around the corner. For some time already the reports of the various committees have been coming fast and furious. As far as I can discern the report of the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America tops the list for length at 107 pages.

Among the reports submitted there are some things that stand out. For one there is the fact that the Free Reformed Churches in Australia are very generous with their support of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary at \$82.00 (AU) per communicant member. For another there is the fact that the same church federation intends to produce a specifically Australian version of the Book of Praise. There is also the matter of the suspension of their ecclesiastical fellowship relationship



with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. As well, there is their recognition of the Reformed Churches in New Zealand as a "sister-church" or, more officially, a church in "ecclesiastical fellowship."

As for the lengthy CCCNA Report, there are several matters that are noteworthy. The first is the fact that the Committee pleads with Synod Dunnville not to keep on demanding that the same issues be discussed time after time.

As a former committee member, I can relate very well to this frustration. A synod instructs its inter-church relations committee to discuss a matter with a sister-church. It is discussed and reported on and then future synods come along and order that the same matter be discussed again and again. Why? Because one or two churches are still not satisfied with the outcome of the discussion.

I would hazard to guess that if future synods keep on doing this sort of thing they are one day going to be faced with a committee that balks at its mandate and resigns simply out of sheer embarrassment and frustration.

The CCCNA Report also recommends that ecclesiastical fellowship be entered into with the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA). This matter too has been on the agenda before. In the past, synods have refused to take this step due to the fact that the RPCNA allows for the ordination of women as deacons. Now, before local churches write Synod in protest, they would do well to read carefully what the Committee writes and recommends.

Another item that is sure to receive special attention is the recommendation of the Committee dealing with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (RCN). After a rather extensive and detailed report, the Committee proposes that Synod Dunnville restrict our relationship with the Dutch churches. This would mean an end to the acceptance of attestations and to allowing RCN ministers on our pulpits. In addition, calling a minister from The Netherlands would require the concurring advice of classis. It will indeed be a sad day if Synod Dunnville deems that such measures are necessary and have to be taken.

# Local church

Across the continent every local church bulletin gives evidence of the fact that congregational life is busy. There are worship services every Lord's Day, catechism classes weekly, Bible study groups weekly and bi-weekly, youth gatherings, choir practices, and a host of other activities. As well there are all sorts of meetings: consistorial, diaconal, committee of administration, ladies auxiliary, ushers, adult education, and outreach. Add to that the fact that speakers come to town to promote foreign mission, CRTS, ARPA, WeNeedALaw, MERF, and Word and Deed. Concerts and choirs, too, are regular items on the agenda. If you want, you can be out almost every day of the week going somewhere, listening to someone, and supporting something.

Oh, and lest we complain too much about all of this busyness, let us remember too that there are many places on earth where you can do very little of any of these things because of poverty, civil war, or persecution. In short, be thankful and participate as time allows.

# Reformed Bible College (RBC)

In many of our churches, pastors and others are also busy teaching adult education courses. Sometimes these courses are called by the rather stilted name, "post confession of faith classes." Be that as it may, the aim is good and it is to make instruction available to more than just the young people who attend regular catechism classes. These days, office bearers are looking for additional training and members want courses in the areas of marriage, family, counseling, church history, apologetics, and ethics.

In order to accommodate this need, a new venture was started several years ago in the greater Vancouver

area. It is centred in Aldergrove and it is called the "Reformed Bible College." Here courses are offered throughout the week and members can enroll in them every fall and winter.

In addition to offering courses, the RBC also sponsors special speeches. For example, every October 31 it hosts a Reformation Rally and has a guest speaker dwell on Luther, Calvin, and others things connected to this historic event.

Whether or not this endeavour will ever grow into a real college remains to be seen. In the meantime it is best to regard the word "College" in the title as both a dream and a goal. Who knows what the Lord will yet do?

# Outreach

In many local churches there is also evidence of a growing desire to be more involved with one's neighbours and community. Most churches have evangelism or home mission committees. Their effectiveness varies. In some places the congregation is quite content to leave the work of outreach to a committee. In other places committees manage to stimulate the membership to be more active.

In one church that I am familiar with the Evangelism Committee promotes such programs and efforts as Vacation Bible School, Christianity Explored, home groups, host families, greeters, Gleaners, radio broadcasting, summer camps, and homeless shelters. The opportunities are endless.

On top of local efforts there are special projects. One can think of Streetlight Ministries in downtown Hamilton, Ontario, which seeks to meet the needs of the homeless, handicapped, addicted, and depressed. This is tough work. The challenges are often overwhelming. Still, it is good to see that members from both Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches are not afraid to put their hands on the plow. We can also be thankful that men such as the Rev. Paul Aasman continue to spearhead these efforts.

Not too far away the Brampton church under the leadership of the Rev. Matt VanLuik is involved in the Word and Spirit Study Centre. Since their new church building is situated in a very multicultural neighbourhood, attempts are being made to introduce the gospel to people of many different races. In the past churches in North America sent missionaries out to the nations. Today the nations are all around us as Canada welcomes refugees and migrants from around the world.

Further north, the Owen Sound church remains involved in spreading the gospel in Quebec. At a recent conference in Korea, I spoke to a man who is currently working as a missionary in Turkey. Formerly, he had been in Quebec, and he remarked that Quebec is one of the toughest mission fields in all the world. Even Muslim countries do not compare to Quebec. Imagine that! All the more reason to stand behind the work that Owen Sound is doing by supporting the Reformed Churches in Quebec. Men such as the Rev. Paulin Bedard need our understanding, prayers, and offerings.

In Manitoba the churches continue to promote the Manitoba Mission Project. They remain hopeful that a missionary will be found in the near future and that the mission work in the Otterburne area may soon begin in earnest.

In southern Alberta the work of spreading the gospel among Chinese citizens who are working at the Lethbridge Experimental Station or studying at the University of Lethbridge, continues. Churches elsewhere in the country should also be alert to new pockets of Chinese and Korean citizens settling in their area. Often they are more receptive to the gospel than native-born Canadians or other immigrant groups.

In British Columbia, the Smithers church oversees the church planting work in Prince George. A core group is already present and attempts are ongoing to reach out to more people. The fact that the Rev. Jim Witteveen has accepted the call of the Aldergrove church to work in Brazil will no doubt complicate matters. Still, the ever increasing size of the student



body at CRTS gives promise that another young man will be found who is both excited about this work and equipped to undertake it.

Meanwhile, in Burnaby, a suburb in the greater Vancouver area, a reading room has been set up by members of the Willoughby Heights church. It is hoped that this facility will draw people who are interested in discussing the real issues of life and in embracing the Christian faith. The model of using a reading room to attract people is an interesting one. Thus far it seems to have been effective in Brazil. Still, Burnaby is not Brazil so we will need to wait and see whether this approach has potential in that city and perhaps beyond it.

Finally, in the Surrey-Langley area, the Chinese Reformed Church meeting in the Cloverdale church building keeps on attracting new members. At present, a number of attendees are preparing themselves to profess their faith. The existing members are very active in speaking with other people who come from China and in inviting them into their homes and to the worship services. It may also be reported that progress is being made on translating the Psalms and Hymns in the *Book of Praise* into Chinese. As such, this is a daunting task, especially when it comes to the Psalms, but the brothers and sisters appear to be up to the challenge. Rev. Frank D, an elder and a deacon, under the auspices of the Cloverdale Consistory, function as the leadership team.

# Youth camps

This review would be incomplete if it did not make mention of the great work being done at both Campfire! in Ontario and Camp Stepping Stones in BC. Initially, there was some resistance to the camp idea in both provinces but as more and more young people have gone to these camps and their lives have been positively impacted by them, the reservations have evaporated. Today it can be said that more and more of our church leaders are coming from the ranks of those young people who once attended camp.

These wonderful facilities also continue to expand in various ways. Campfire! recently built a large swimming pool, thanks to the generosity of a certain donor. Camp Stepping Stones keeps on making improvements and plans are being drawn up for a new main building.

# Foreign missions

In 2015 the work of foreign mission consumed a good deal of time, prayer, and money from both the sending and supporting churches. This can be seen from what follows.

### Brazil

In the last review it was reported that the Rev. Ken Wieske was sidelined with burnout. In this review it can be reported, with thankfulness, that he has staged a comeback and is once more at work on the mission field in Brazil.

This development also gave his partner, the Rev. Julius VanSpronsen and his family, the opportunity to go on furlough. Once again, they visited the churches in Western Canada, renewed ties with family and friends, and earned a well-deserved rest. Oh, and one more thing. They were able to make some plans for their repatriation, which is scheduled for 2016, when they hope to settle in Edmonton, Alberta, and become members of the Immanuel church.

Meanwhile, the sending church of Aldergrove has been busy calling. They are looking for two new missionaries and have thus far been successful in finding one. The Rev. Jim Witteveen of Prince George accepted the call extended to him and will soon be making the necessary preparations for the move south. Attempts to fill the remaining vacancy are ongoing.

Back in Brazil, the work continues. Rev. Wieske is busy teaching at the Seminary, advising churches both in the federation and outside of it, preaching on a regular basis, translating for visiting teachers and preachers, and doing a host of other things. Rev. Bram deGraaf, who has been sent out by Cornerstone Church Hamilton, is doing much of the same type of work. Although he is no longer in Maceio, he still has an advisory role there and is busy planting another church.

### China

On the other side of the world the Rev. Frank D is busy promoting the Reformed faith in China. He has the permission of the sending church to divide his work between Canada and China. This means that while he spends the bulk of his time in Canada, he also spends a considerable amount of time overseas.

What is he doing there? He is busy advising, assisting, and mentoring churches. One needs to

understand that the fast growth of the Christian faith in China has been and continues to be a reality. Of course this is a good and blessed thing, but it is also not without its challenges. Rapid growth should not become wild growth, but in many cases it has become precisely that. Hence a lot of guidance and direction is needed.

In addition, there is also the teaching and testing of students. At present about forty students are enrolled in the China Reformed Bible College (CRBC) and they need to be visited, encouraged, guided, instructed, and examined. Rev. Frank D does this work with the assistance of Br. John B. from Australia and various teachers from Canada. It is projected that the first class of students will graduate later in 2016.

Still, these are not your ordinary students. What do I mean? I mean that they do not limit their efforts to the study room or classroom. Almost all of these students are also church leaders and immediately they pass along what they learn at CRBC to other church leaders who in turn pass it along to their church members. Recently Rev. Frank D and a teacher from Canada met together with a student/church leader who informed them that he takes their material and teaches it to sixty (yes, 60!) other church leaders. And so the gospel advances in marvellous and mysterious ways!

Another development of a more recent variety has to do with federation building. An ever growing number of house churches in China want to be Reformed and to come together. This, however, makes the government very nervous. They have yet to grasp and understand that a healthy, vibrant, growing Reformed church will be a rich blessing in China. As a result extreme caution needs to be taken. Slowly but surely trust is growing, bonds are developing, pulpit exchanges are happening, and ties are strengthening. The foundation is being laid for a federation.

# Indonesia

Further south of China there is another large country called Indonesia. In that part of the world, the Smithville church and its supporting churches are at work through the ministry efforts of the Rev. Edwer Dethan in Kupang, Timor. In that place, he oversees a growing college and seminary where an ever increasing number of students are being trained to be pastors, teachers, administrators, and agricultural workers.

From time to time the Smithville church sends its minister, the Rev. Clarence Bouwman, to Timor to teach. Other pastors from Canada such as the Rev. Andrew Pol from Carman West and Rev. Anthon Souman from Willoughby church have also been there and no doubt will continue to go there to give instruction.

With the training of indigenous pastors has come also the rise of indigenous churches. Rev. Dethan's students are busy planting churches. And that represents a blessing, but it is also not without issues, such as, "Do we start a new federation of churches or do we join an existing federation of churches?" As in so many other parts of the world, the church scene is often chaotic and finding a faithful church federation to join calls for caution and discernment.

# Papua New Guinea

To the east of Indonesia lies the nation of Papua New Guinea. In its capital city, Port Moresby, Henry Versteeg and Cornelis Kleyn are serving as missionariesteachers. I add the word "teacher" because most of their work centres on the teaching and training of people to become pastors. Working side by side with them is a missionary sent out by our sister-churches in New Zealand, namely, the Rev. Alan Douma.

Of course, teaching is not the only thing that they do there. Preaching in local churches, giving advice to local pastors and church councils, teaching extra courses, translating for visiting teachers, as well as doing administrative work, are all part of the package.

At the same time what our readers do not always realize is that life in a tropical country is not always as easy as it is made out to be. Mention the word "tropics" and people instantly think of sandy beaches, pina coladas, and fantastic sunsets. What they overlook are such things as high humidity, bugs galore, power brownouts, potholed roads, polluted water, and living in compounds. So why go? More than anything else it has everything to do with the joy of bringing the gospel and with seeing lives turned around and transformed.

# Mexico

As this is being written, the Abbotsford church is still looking for a way to send a missionary to Mexico. They are hoping that at least one other local Canadian Reformed church in BC will join them in this worthy venture. I say "worthy" because it is in some ways a

strange thing that as Canadian Reformed churches we have missionaries in many far off places but we have, for some reason, bypassed the largest foreign mission field close to us (and then I do not mean the United States of America). Not very far to the south lies Mexico and all indications are that it too represents a mission field that is receptive to the gospel.

Mention should also be made of the fact that members of the Langley church continue to live and labour there. Jeremy and Ana Van Beelen, along with Duane and Mirabel Visscher, are involved in orphanage work as administrators and construction managers.

In the past, this work was supported by individual and church donations but now a new source of revenue has been found. Quite a number of members from the Langley church, along with others from area churches, have set up a thrift store called Hope for Children. This store is located in the city of Langley, is run by volunteers, has been in operation now for almost ten months and is already making substantial donations to the special needs of orphanages in Mexico.

# The Middle East

If there is one part of the world that is in great upheaval today it has to be the Middle East. Countries such as Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, and others are in the throes of civil war, terrorism, and ISIL. It is little wonder that people are fleeing and that Europe in particular is experiencing a massive influx of refugees.

Thankfully, in such a dark place there are beacons of hope, and the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) located in Cyprus is one of them. For many years already there has been a sub-committee of this organization in Burlington, Ontario, and many Canadian Reformed churches regularly hold collections for this cause. In addition, the Rev. Jan de Gelder, emeritus minister of the Flamborough church, continues to function as chairman of the board.

# The Philippines

Traveling to the other side of the Pacific Ocean, we come to the Philippines. Currently the Providence church in Hamilton is partnered with the Free Reformed Church of Baldivis, Western Australia, in order to provide theological teaching to a number of churches in that country. It is to be hoped that in the future this work can be co-ordinated with the efforts of two of our sister

churches, namely the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). Together it should be possible to develop a solid teaching strategy that will be of real help to local pastors and church leaders.

# The Canadian Reformed Missions Association

In September the Canadian Reformed Missions Association (CRMA) held its annual meeting at CRTS in Hamilton. The Rev. Matt Filbert of the Reformed Presbyterian Church spoke on short-term missions and Br. Rick Postma of Word and Deed spoke on challenges on the mission field. Both presentations were very well received and readers are urged to visit the CRMA website to watch the videos on the Filbert presentation.

With respect to the business of the CRMA, it may be reported that all of the sending churches in the federation, along with a number of connected organizations, are now members. It is not often that a venture such as this receives one hundred percent participation and the CRMA is thankful for this.

Another noteworthy thing is that the dues to the CRMA could be reduced for the second year in a row! In spite of this, progress in the development of the website, which was originally supposed to cost a great deal of money, could still proceed. In no small part this is due to the volunteer efforts of our webmaster. For a look at his handiwork, go to www.reformedmissions.net.

Once there you will note that you cannot access all of the material. This is due to the fact that part of the website is not for public viewing as it contains all sorts



of documents and policies that are in use on the mission fields. If you have a legitimate reason to view this material, permission can be granted by contacting the CRMA Secretary, the Rev. John van Popta.

# Mercy and auxiliary work

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund (CRWRF). Special attention was paid to that milestone by the organizing of an Open House in early September at Guido de Bres Christian High School in Hamilton. Many families and individuals came out to view displays of the numerous countries in which the CRWRF is working, as well as to sample some food from that area. By all accounts, it was well done and well received.

In the meantime, CRWRF has and continues to extend the mercy of Christ to the needy in forty-two different countries in Africa, the Americas, and Asia. Some of this aid comes in the form of disaster relief, some in the form of construction and teaching teams, and some in the form of regular and ongoing support for worthy projects and organizations.

In addition to CRWRF, there is also the Word and Deed organization that does much of the same sort of work. Word and Deed has its roots in the Free Reformed and Netherlands Reformed Churches, although any number of Canadian Reformed Churches also support it via collections.

It may also be reported that Children of Light, an orphanage in Indonesia, while being founded by a Canadian Reformed couple and receiving much Canadian Reformed support in the past, is now being funded in part by Word and Deed ministries.

Mission Aid Brazil is a BC based relief organization that works in concert with the mission work being done by the Aldergrove church in Brazil. It has Br. Chris Boersema as a full-time mission aid worker. He is responsible for co-ordinating all sorts of projects in the northeastern part of Brazil connected to the churches in Sao Jose, Maragogi, Recife, and elsewhere. He is soon to be joined by a Reformed Education Worker who will be promoting the cause of Christian education in the area.

In addition to these efforts, there is also the work being done by Randy and Karen Lodder in Haiti at the Adoration Christian Center in Haiti, by Andrew and Meagan Van Andel for Wycliffe in the Solomon Islands, and by Jon and Candace Jagt for Wycliffe in Papua New Guinea, by Hugo and Erica Feunekes for MAF in Papua New Guinea, by Nathan and Kim Boersema for Christian Education in Nicaragua, by Jeremy and Ana VanBeelen, as well as Duane and Mirabel Visscher, for orphanages in Mexico. No doubt this list is even longer as it is difficult to keep track of the many different ways in which our young people are spreading their wings and using their talents.

# Christian education

Closely connected to the above is the work of Christian education in our midst. Across the continent, our many elementary and high schools continue to thrive and are providing a quality Christian education to many of our covenant children.

In BC, the Smithers school has undergone an extensive renovation. A new gym was built and the old gym was turned into three classrooms. In Yarrow, plans are under way for a major addition to be made to the John Calvin School. In Langley, a major renovation to the Credo school has just been completed. In Vernon, property has been purchased and a new three room school building is taking shape.

In Alberta, the expansion of the Coaldale Christian School should by now be well-advanced. In Neerlandia too, there are plans underway for an expansion.

In Ontario, the Fergus high school project, which has been the talk of the town, is moving right along. The old Wellington High School is being transformed from an old, stately, decaying affair into a new, stately, modern structure. In Hamilton, the Timothy School is once again bursting out of its seams and alternatives are being considered. In Burlington, two schools are amalgamating into one as the old John Calvin School and the Covenant Christian School are both being phased out and a new, more centralized structure is coming in their place.

In the fall of this year principals and educators came from Australia, Brazil, North America, and The Netherlands to Sumas, Washington, and the Cedar Springs Conference Center. There they were treated to a series of lectures by Br. Alwyn Terpstra from the John Calvin Christian College in Armadale, Australia. More detail about his talks can be found elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. It proved to be a great time of learning, recreation, and fellowship.

So much is happening and I cannot keep up with it all. If I missed something newsworthy, please drop me a line at jvisscher@telus.net.

# Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College (CCRTC)

Back in Hamilton, Covenant Teachers College, as it is often called, continues to train Christian teachers, especially for the Ontario market. Dr. Christine VanHalen-Faber leads a growing staff and an increasing student body. This year another full-time faculty member was added in the person of Jack Huizenga. He joins Christine VanHalen-Faber, Judy Kingma, Allard Gunnink, and Keith Sikkema. Behind the scenes the Board of CCRTC is still pursuing the matter of accreditation in order that graduates might have their degrees recognized and be able to teach in other provinces and jurisdictions.

Meanwhile, classroom instruction, practice teaching, curriculum development and other activities remain the order of the day. For more information, you can go to CCRTC's excellent website: www. covenantteacherscollege.com.

# Special homes

Those with special needs in the community continue to be helped by special organizations. In BC, Bethesda operates special homes for the handicapped and runs a host of relief programs both in the summer and throughout the year. In Alberta, Rehoboth does much of the same type of work. In both provinces these organizations receive both public and private funding. In Ontario, Anchor Homes does the same, only without government funding. Currently it operates five homes in Beamsville, Burlington, Dunnville, Fergus, and Hamilton. Harbour Home in Hamilton is the latest and newest addition.

In BC and Alberta, most of the support comes from both the Christian and Canadian Reformed communities. In Ontario, the support comes especially from the Canadian and United Reformed communities.

Along with special homes for the handicapped, there are also a growing number of senior homes. In Ontario, Aurora is the site of a new Christian Seniors' Home. Maranatha Home in Burlington is working on a major expansion of its facilities. Such places as Trinity Towers, Shalom, Greenview Villa, Ebenezer, Emmanuel, and Manoah continue to provide quality care and support.

# **Politics**

You look at the above and perhaps you wonder whether or not a heading such as "Politics" belongs in



a church review column. In a way it does and in a way it does not. If by "politics" it is meant that the church should become political and support a particular political party of ideology, then you are correct and it does not belong. On the other hand, if by "politics" you mean that members of the church should be active in the political realm and so let their light shine as kings and gueens in the service of the great King Jesus Christ, then you are incorrect and it does belong.

Yes, and stimulating church members is what organizations such as ARPA (The Association of Reformed Political Action) and We NeedaLaw are all about. The former is led by Mark Penninga and Andre Schutten, the latter is led by Mike Schouten. Together they are trying to let the light of the gospel shine on the social, economic, and political issues of the day. Matters such as abortion, assisted suicide, prostitution, and more have their attention. Together they are educating believers and politicians. They are making a difference for good and that is something which is sorely needed in our land. May God bless their efforts to run back the tide of secularism and materialism that is sweeping like a tsunami over this beautiful country of ours.

# Wropping up

Once again my tale has been long, but please do not blame me. I do not make the news. I only report on it. Still, I am also keenly aware that there is more news out there that I have not passed along. So, if you feel the need, drop me a line and I will try to be more inclusive, the Lord willing, next time.

Blessings from BC 🚯





Season's Greetings

from all of us at

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