

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

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# Clarion

*Make Babies or Make Disciples*

*Discerning Devotionals*

*Prayer and Politics*



# Clarion

**Clarion:** a trustworthy and engaging magazine, widely spread and read in Canadian Reformed households and beyond.

To equip God's people for his glory, in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized in the Reformed confessions, Clarion adheres to the following core values:

Confessionally Reformed  
Loving in manner  
Attuned to current issues  
Readable and Reliable  
In Submission to Scripture  
Open to constructive criticism  
Nurturing Christian living

## What's Inside

Welcome to Issue 3! Are you aware of how much Christians are persecuted in parts of the world? Do you pray for them? Mr. Mitchell Bosveld will help us with both of these things as he presents his first installment of a new quarterly column, *Persecution of Christians*. Dr. Jason Van Vliet writes a timely word about praying for political leaders in these trying times. These same society-wide difficulties and the challenges they bring for ministers was the backdrop of a recent Eastern Ministerial Conference. Do take the time to read Rev. Cody Swaving's uplifting summary. If your pastor (and/or his wife) couldn't make it, perhaps he (with her) could attend next year for refreshment and encouragement.

Ever found yourself on the hunt for a good devotional? Rev. Wes Bredenhof gives some godly guidance and recommendations. The kids will have fun thinking about God's law via Lord's Day 2 at the *Clarion Kids* page. In my editorial I tackle the delicate topic of family sizes and assess one current reason some are using to have fewer children. See what you think. You are welcome agreement or disagreement in a letter to the editor (300 words max - see [clarionmagazine.ca](http://clarionmagazine.ca) for details).

May the contents of this issue build you up in the Reformed faith and generate healthy discussions in your home!

*Peter Holtvlüwer*

- 059 Make Babies or Make Disciples
- 060 Treasures, New & Old
- 061 Discerning Devotionals
- 064 Prayer and Politics
- 066 From the Publisher

- 067 Persecution of Christians: Troubles in South-Central Asia
- 069 A New Home for Living Word
- 072 Clarion Kids
- 073 Press Release (Classis Pac W, Dec 16)

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## EDITORIAL

# Make Babies or Make Disciples?

**F**orgive my pointed question, but it lays bare an issue that is making its way in our Reformed circles: should we be focusing on building up families or building up churches? To put it another way, does the Lord wish us to concentrate our time and energy on evangelism and mission to the world or on conceiving a goodly number of children and raising them up to serve the Lord?

## Family size

It's no secret that the size of families in society at large has greatly decreased over the last century. A two-child family is now common. Within the church, family sizes have followed a similar trajectory, though to a lesser extent. Where six-plus children used to fill many a pew, now it's more like three or four. Exceptions exist, of course, but unlike in past years larger families are increasingly looked upon (even within the church) disparagingly, as if the parents are crazy or naïve or out to prove something.

There may be a number of motives involved in the choice of family size, and every couple should evaluate them carefully in the light of Scripture. Also, none should be quick to judge others. I hasten to add that many couples would love to have a child or *more* children than they've been given, and the pain of their loss is real. In their case the choice of family size is entirely outside of their control.

## New mandate?

Yet it remains true that most couples make choices. Of late I've spotted a more theological argument that supports the choice for smaller families. That argument is that the Great Commission has replaced the Cultural Mandate. Gone is Genesis 1:28 with its command to "be fruitful and multiply" and in its place is Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." There is a more sophisticated version of this going around which doesn't outright deny the command of Genesis 1:28 as much as it spiritualizes it. "Be fruitful and multiply" has become for the Christian the calling to evangelize our neighbour so that they become children of God. Giving birth to physical children is no longer promoted. Instead, birthing spiritual children is what Jesus would have us be busy with!

Yet, as appealing as this may sound, it is not supported by the Bible. For starters, the command to "be fruitful and multiply" is repeated numerous times within the Old Testament and nowhere cancelled in the New Testament. In some circles, unless something from the OT is repeated or verified in the NT, it no

longer has validity; but the Bible is one book with one message and each Testament is of equal weight. God who commanded us "be fruitful and multiply" is the same God who commanded us to "go therefore and make disciples"—so how can one cancel out the other?

Second, nowhere does the New Testament hint that bearing children is no longer a command or even that this task is now to play second fiddle to making disciples. The Lord Jesus loved babies and little children (Mark 10:14). His apostle gave instructions about raising children (Eph 6:1-4). Paul further spoke of the task of married women in terms which echo the Cultural Mandate: "So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander" (1 Tim 5:14; cf. v. 9; 2:15; and Titus 2:4).

## Fuller mandate

A better understanding of the Great Commission is to see it as complementing the Creation Mandate. There is no dilemma here. Christians continue to have the calling to be fruitful and multiply, and raise up godly offspring who will reflect God's image to the world. And Christians have the calling to go out and disciple the nations! The Lord has pronounced children as a blessing (Ps 127, 128) so let's seek to receive and enjoy an abundance of those blessings while at the same time seeking to share spiritual blessings with all around us.

Some of those "nations" are under our roof, the fruit of marital love, God's gracious covenant blessings—and so Christian parents disciple their children in the Lord's ways. Yet we don't stop there. We reach out to our neighbour, co-worker, classmate, hairdresser, whoever, and we speak to them about faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and becoming his disciple. And as churches we cooperate in sending out full-time missionaries as well.

Parenting and especially motherhood remain noble, honourable, even glorious tasks in God's church and kingdom that will take much of our time. No need to feel guilty about that. But then let's raise our kids to also have compassion for their neighbour so they may in time introduce others to the Saviour. 🇨🇦



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TREASURES NEW &amp; OLD :: MATTHEW 13:52

# Their Angels Always See God's Face in Heaven

*“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.” (MATTHEW 18:10)*

Jesus had been instructing his disciples that they need to become like children or they would never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:3). He said this in response to their question, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matt 18:1). They were working with an earthly idea of power and influence and applying that to the kingdom of heaven. But God’s kingdom is not like that at all. It is not about worldly ideas of power but rather about humility and trusting in God completely. Jesus said to them, “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:4).

The simple believer who is like a child is pleasing to God. All too often our sophistication gets in the way of a simple, trusting faith. Jesus strongly warns the disciples against misleading such “little ones” and tempting them to do evil. Destroying the innocence of a child, leading them astray, and despising them in whatever way is a very grievous sin in Jesus’ eyes.

In Matthew 18:10, he gives an additional unexpected reason for not despising “one of these little ones.” Jesus introduces his reason with “I tell you,” stressing the authority and gravity of his words. These little ones are esteemed very highly by God the Father in heaven, for they have angels who are specially assigned for their care and protection. Those angels are not part of the outer fringes of the angelic world (if that is even possible), but they always see the face of Jesus’s Father in heaven. Of course, we do not know much about how the world of angels works, but Jesus’s words point to the high esteem in which heaven holds the little ones. Their angels are always in the presence of God, and they see God’s face. They worship him and marvel continually at his beauty, splendour, and majesty. And at the same time they are also able to care for the little ones in their charge. God is pleased to use these intermediary spiritual beings to minister to and serve the children of men who will inherit salvation (Heb 1:14).

There is a long Christian tradition that this text shows that each person has his own guardian angel. In his *Summa Theologica*,

Thomas Aquinas quotes Jerome’s interpretation of this verse with approval, “Great is the dignity of souls, for each one to have an angel deputed to guard it from its birth” (*Summa* Question 113, Art. 2). While this passage does not exclude this possibility (cf. “their”), this is not the point which Jesus is making. He is telling the disciples to keep in mind the heavenly world, which has a great interest in the well-being of believers, particularly also the little ones. Do not despise the little ones, thinking that they are of no account, for they are protected by angels who are always seeing God’s face. Looking down on the little ones will cause the displeasure of the angels who are in the presence of God himself.

These words of our Saviour remind us to take seriously the heavenly realm. His reason for not looking down on simple believers is rooted in what takes place in the unseen heavens in the presence of God. Remember also the great joy which is in heaven among the angels when a sinner repents (Luke 15:7, 10). The angels in God’s presence are actively living along with us and ministering to us as we seek to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives. Let us now also join with them in worshipping God and marveling at his beauty and splendour. One day we will also see God and be in his presence forever. ☺

## For Further Study

1. How will you take Jesus’s instruction here to heart?
2. In what ways do the angels impact your life now?



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# Discerning Devotionals

Over the years, I've received many requests from people looking for devotional literature. The one person wants a book of devotions for retired couples. The other wants a book for engaged couples. Still another is looking for something for their teenager. I used to search high and low for things I could recommend for these niche needs. No longer.

Now I recommend that people just start with reading the Bible prayerfully. Why is it that everyone feels they need someone to make the Bible relevant for them? It's almost as if we've returned to the stereotype of the medieval church: everyone talks about the Bible but no one reads it for themselves. The Bible seems to have become a mysterious book which someone else has to interpret and apply for us.

## **Supplement, don't replace**

That said, there is a place for devotional literature. There is a place for authors to share their meditations on sacred Scripture. There is a place for us to learn from our forebears how to pray and think Christianly. Yet, these things ought never

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to replace our going directly to the source for ourselves. They should be *supplementary*.

Moreover, I do wish we could lose this idea of niche devotionals—the devotional for the unemployed single mother, the devotional for the engaged couple, etc., etc. This trend is reflective of the narcissism of our day: everyone needs something crafted exactly for their personal, individual needs. Whatever happened to the catholic church? Whatever happened to the communion of saints? Whatever happened to being able to *think* and apply general truths to your individual needs?

### Types of devotionals

There are different types of devotionals. There's your traditional devotional, which has a reading for each day of the year. Usually each day has a Bible passage to read, often just a verse or two. Most of the time the author expounds and applies that Bible passage, although there are now some devotionals which might rarely or not at all involve any reading from the Scriptures.

There are also devotional books developed out of sermons. These books go into depth with one or more Scripture passages. The purpose is not primarily intellectual, but spiritual and transformative. The Puritans and other older writers are well-known for this type of devotional literature.

Finally, there are devotional books composed of prayers. You can read through these in a meditative fashion and then use them as the starting point for your own prayers. You can also pray them for yourself as they're written. A deeper and richer prayer life can be gained by listening in to other saints' communication with our God.

### Cautions with devotionals

Besides the niche concern, I see three other prevalent issues with devotional books. The first is one I hinted at above: devotions disconnected from the Bible. Beware of devotional books which are just presenting an author's ideas. Those ideas may be based on the Bible and consistent with the Bible, but the less explicit that becomes the greater the risk of not being able to discern truth from error.

A second prevalent issue involves working with the Scriptures in a way that misses their redemptive focus. For instance, I've encountered devotions where Old Testament figures are exclusively treated as positive or negative examples for believers today—with no consideration of how they connect to Christ and the gospel. Christ said that the entire Old Testament points to him, but there are devotions which miss that entirely. That's sad.

A third common issue is a superficial treatment of Scripture. I have a lot of appreciation for Charles Spurgeon and his gospel instincts. He wanted to preach Christ, and that's miles ahead of many other preachers past and present. His popular *Morning and Evening* devotional book was based on Scripture and sought to proclaim Christ. Nevertheless, there are moments where the leaps he makes are difficult (if not impossible) to justify.

It really is an art to be able to write a 300–400 word devotion that expounds Scripture appropriately, brings Christ and the gospel to bear on the reader, is theologically sound, and at the same time easy and pleasant to read. Not everyone can pull it off well. Let me highlight some which, in my opinion, can be recommended.

## Recommendations

### *The Valley of Vision* – Various authors, edited by Arthur Bennett

This has long been one of my favourites. This is a collection of prayers from Puritans and Puritan-minded folks. Prayers are here from Thomas Watson, John Bunyan, Charles Spurgeon, and many others. My only complaint about this volume is that it doesn't tell you where the prayers are from or who wrote which prayers. This book is also available in a bonded leather edition. It would be a great gift for young people doing public profession of faith.

### *Meditations on Divine Mercy* – Johann Gerhard

Still on the subject of prayer, there's this volume from Johann Gerhard, a Lutheran theologian from the seventeenth century. I just recently discovered this, and it's beautiful and powerful. Throughout Gerhard is either quoting Scripture or working with scriptural concepts.

### *The Great Gain of Godliness* – Thomas Watson

Thomas Watson is my favourite Puritan. If you think of the Puritans as obscure and difficult, you need to read Watson. This is a great one with which to start, an exposition of Malachi 3:16-18. Here's a sample quote: "Let us get love to Christ. Love is a holy transport. It fires the affections, steels the courage, and carries a Christian above the love of life, and the fear of death. Many waters cannot quench love (Song of Sol. 8:7). Love made Christ suffer for us. If anyone asks what Christ died of, it may be answered, He died of love" (p. 10). Beautiful.

### *Unseen Footprints* – Peter Feenstra


This one contains 260 meditations based on various Scripture passages. At the rate of five per week, a family or individual reader could work through it in a year. In the process, the author will take you through most of the books of Bible in succession. Feenstra works closely with the Scriptures and brings biblical teaching to bear on believers as they live in today's world. The

book is replete with contemporary application. Most importantly of all, the author is careful to be Christ-centred.

### *Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms* – Various authors, edited by Peter H. Holtvlüwer

Because of our narcissistic age, many automatically think the Psalms are primarily about us. Yet, the New Testament teaches us to regard them first as the songs of our Saviour and then, only in connection with him, are they about us. This collection of devotions works on that premise. Authored by sixteen Reformed ministers, *Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms* touches on each of the 150 psalms. Each psalm has at least two devotions, even the short ones like 117 and 131. Psalm 119 is the notable exception with eleven devotions. There are also two appendices. One has devotions on psalms related to events in Christ's ministry; the other has devotions on psalms for seasonal events like Thanksgiving. Highly recommended.

### *The Pearl of Christian Comfort* – Petrus Dathenus

Finally, there's this spiritual classic by Petrus Dathenus. If his name sounds familiar, it's because he was involved with the production of our liturgical forms as well as an early edition of the Genevan psalter in Dutch. As Joel Beeke aptly summarizes it on the back cover, "This succinct treatise lets the light of Scripture shine clearly on the practical issues involved in teaching and living the doctrines of sovereign grace." Dathenus powerfully points Christians to an all-sufficient Saviour as the true "pearl of great price." 



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# Prayer and Politics

**S**ometimes we do not know what to pray for as we ought (Rom 8:26). If an elderly saint is suffering from intense physical pain, do we pray for healing in this life or relief in the life everlasting? Sometimes it is hard to decide.

But have you also been of two minds lately when praying for our governing authorities? *That* we must pray for our civil leaders is clear. Inspired by the Spirit, the apostle Paul implores us, “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and *all* who are in high positions” (1 Tim 2:1). This command applies around our dinner tables and in our public worship services.

That small word “all” demands that we come before our God with the needs of our elected officials, whether we find ourselves on roughly the same, or the very opposite, side of the political spectrum. A stark difference in political, moral, and spiritual convictions should not diminish our desire to pray for them. If anything, it should increase it.

## **Praying for rebellious servants**

But *how* should we pray for our civil leaders? That is not as straightforward as it might first appear. Whether they acknowledge it or not, our politicians are “servants of God” (Rom 13:4). Servants ought to act as their master, or in this case Master, desires. Is that happening? God created human beings male and female (Gen 1:27, 5:2). But most of our leaders, on both sides of the political spectrum, have fervently embraced policies that undermine that truth.

As he created marriage, the LORD God also defined this sacred bond: one man joined to one woman, for life (Gen 2:24). Yet, whether through redefining marriage or allowing for relatively quick and easy divorce, our civil leaders have done much in recent decades to erode the beauty and stability of marriage.

More examples could be given, but the trend is obvious. In their office and calling our governors remain “servants of God,” but in their attitudes and actions they often prove themselves to be rebels against the Most High.



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## How should we pray for our civil leaders?

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So, once more, *how* do we pray for them? Do we simply ask the LORD to grant them abundant wisdom, a sense of true justice, and sufficient humility to recognize they are ruling underneath the King of kings? Or do we plead with our Father in heaven to bring our rulers to their knees in contrition for their insubordinate conduct? Or do we include both? In short, how do we strike *the right tone* when praying for those whom we must honour (1 Pet 2:17) but who, at the same time, arrogantly set themselves against the LORD and his Anointed (Ps 2)? Talk about praying with mixed emotions!

### Praying for rulers biblically

Thankfully, our Father in heaven has not left us in a quandary. With his command *that* we should pray for those in high positions, he also gave detailed instructions concerning *how* we should do so. Let us return to 1 Timothy 2 for a closer look. “I urge that *supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings* be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions.”

The Holy Spirit does not insert extra words into Scripture just for the sake of filling space. There must be a reason that he uses four different words and puts each one of them in the plural. This indicates that our requests on behalf of our rulers should be multi-faceted. “Lord, please guide our governors” is appropriate but also insufficient.

“*Prayers*” includes a broad category of general requests. We should indeed ask the Lord to grant our leaders those attributes that everyone in a position of authority needs every day again: wisdom, humility, impartiality, justice, patience, and, last but not least, perseverance. Leadership takes a toll on individuals; rulers, too, are finite. They need to be re-fuelled and, ultimately, the Lord alone is the source of all these good gifts and personality traits (James 1:17).

In addition to general requests, though, at times urgent needs arise within countries or counties. In these beyond-the-ordinary

circumstances, we ought to multiply our *supplications* to the Lord for our governing authorities. Handling crises—whether mild or major—places extra demands on leaders. Suddenly they must take wise decisions and set beneficial directions. Doing so may not be easy or popular, but that is what they were elected to do. More importantly, that is what the King of glory mandates them to do. They are to be servants of God “for your good” (Rom 13:4). Stressful times require us to lay additional, and very particular, supplications for our leaders before God’s throne.

Yet, God’s command contains more. *Intercessions* should also be offered. This involves praying on behalf of someone else as we do our best to empathize with their circumstances. So, should we pray for the repentance of our leaders? Absolutely . . . but also empathetically!

The biggest mistake that people in high positions make is to imagine that they have, in and of themselves, sufficient discernment and fortitude to do what needs doing. Pride always precedes a fall. The greatest foolishness into which governors plunge is the attempt to manage their corner of the world without following the norms of the Creator of this world. A haughty spirit results in destruction for many. Still, the pages of history and the chambers of current political power are packed with men and women doing precisely that: trying to provide the light of hope to their citizens when they themselves are stumbling about in the futility of their minds and the darkness of their own unregenerate understanding (Eph 4:17–18).

### Compassion and gratitude

But what is our response? Our natural reaction is to scoff at their ineptitude and to resent their arrogance. However, our heavenly Father teaches us to intercede for them. With the eyes of faith, we may see reality clearly: the blind are leading the blind, and they are all stumbling along to meet the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, who will judge everyone according to what he has done


in the body, whether good or evil (2 Cor 5:10). Preparing to give an account before the LORD of all the earth is the top priority for all people, whether they serve in low or high positions. But so many do not see it that way.

Do we have enough compassion in our hearts to pray for them? Knowing from our own personal and foolish experiences how prideful rebellion only multiplies misery, we of all people should eagerly and empathetically intercede before the Lord for the repentance of our earthly leaders.

Now, if our Lord had left it at those three kinds of petitions, the challenge would be great enough. But he adds one more: *thanksgivings*. How do we thank the Lord for leaders if they wilfully oppose our Redeemer? Is that even possible?

For starters, even unbelieving governors can show “some regard for virtue and outward order” (CD III/IV 4). We call this the light of nature, and when it peeks through clouds of corruption, we ought to thank the LORD for it, even as we realize that, in the end, it leaves man without excuse.

Beyond that, even when persons in public office engage in shameful conduct, the fact remains that our God has blessed us with a country that is governed by laws and statutes in order that the lawlessness of sinful citizens, and their leaders, be restrained (BC, Art 36). Yes, we are living in an increasingly godless society, but it is not undiluted anarchy. For this we may, and we must, still give thanks.

So, there is a lot to pray about. May the Spirit of God help us in our weakness so that our prayers are comprehensively shaped by the holy will of him whom we are addressing—also when we thank, intercede, pray, and supplicate on behalf of all those who are in high positions. 



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## FROM THE PUBLISHER

Dear Reader,

With the recent retirement of Dr. J. Visscher from our editorial team, our numbers were temporarily depleted. We're thankful to announce that Rev. Jim Witteveen has been found able and willing to join the team.

Rev. Witteveen served as missionary in Prince George, B.C. before taking up missionary work in Brazil. Since August 2020 he has served this mission work from his home base in B.C. This task includes writing training and evangelistic resources. He's also written as a contributor to the *Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms* Devotional and Study Resource, as an editor of the Creation Without Compromise blog ([creationwithoutcompromise.com](http://creationwithoutcompromise.com)), and occasionally as a writer for *Clarion*. Since February 2021, he has presented the Dan 11:32 podcast, which can be found at [rumble.com/user/Dan1132](https://www.rumble.com/user/Dan1132) as well as on Spotify and other platforms.

We thank Rev. Witteveen for joining us and look forward to his contributions to our magazine!

*William Gortemaker*

# Troubles

## in South-Central Asia

Since we ourselves are living in such uncertain and unprecedented times, it is easy for us to forget about the persecution of Christians throughout the world. Not only are we often unaware of such persecution, but our emotions of compassion can also be curbed by our sin, causing us to underreact to the horrible things happening around us. As we look now at one small part of the globe and see the Christian church in Afghanistan and Pakistan under intense persecution from strict Islamic rule, may it make our hearts cry out to the Lord.

### Afghanistan

When the United States withdrew from Afghanistan last year, the Taliban almost instantly took control. When this happened, videos began circulating of thousands of Afghans trying to flee. This situation was covered in the Western daily news cycle for weeks. The desperation of those trying to flee was obvious, and it was being broadcast around the world. In the end, not everyone escaped and many people attempting to flee are now stuck in Afghanistan. While the world is no longer being constantly updated about the situation now that the Taliban is in control, life for many in Afghanistan is by no means improved.

The Taliban is an Islamic political group which enforces their strict interpretation of Sharia law. According to Sharia law,



## Prayer requests

With all this in mind please pray for the persecuted church throughout the world:

Pray for the Taliban, that their hearts might have compassion on Afghan Christians

Pray that the blasphemy laws in Pakistan may be reformed so that Christians may not suffer injustice and abuse

Pray for the Pakistani and Afghan Christians to stay faithful to God despite their persecution

Pray that we grow in our compassion for our suffering brothers and sisters

Pray that in all things God's name is glorified!

conversion from Islam to another other religion is considered apostasy and punishable by death. Our Afghan brothers and sisters in Christ live in constant fear because of their faith in Jesus. The number of Christians living in Afghanistan is presumed to be around 10,000. Their circumstances are dire. The Taliban goes door to door looking for Christian converts; they have a "hit list" of known Christians, whom they are targeting. Christians receive threatening phone calls and Christian leaders receive letters in which the Taliban make it clear that they know where they are and what they are doing. Because of the fear that this incites, many Christians are turning off their phones so that they cannot be tracked and are fleeing from the cities to hide in the Afghanistan hills.

As they flee to the hills, we may take courage along with them, that they can find their help in the name of the Lord, and that God is their constant source of hope.

Despite the fact that it is impossible for Afghani Christians to have any church buildings, and while their children are taken away from them, and they are threatened daily with death, and they struggle to stay connected, yet the Christian community in Afghanistan continues to grow and glorify God.

## Pakistan

Across the border in Pakistan, the situation for Christians is similar. Christians there face persecution through the strict Pakistani

blasphemy laws—prohibiting the desecration of the Quran and blaspheming the name of the prophet Muhammad. These laws are used to target Christians, and over the past decade many have been falsely accused and sentenced to life imprisonment or death.

Shafqat Emmanuel and his wife Shagufta Kauser were accused of sending blasphemous text messages to a Muslim in 2014. However, the couple was illiterate and had also lost their phone a month earlier; clearly, they had been set up. Being sent to court, they were charged and sentenced to death, although there was a lack of evidence and even evidence to the contrary. And this is not out of the ordinary, as corruption is rife. Too often courts are simply reduced to the task of charging Christians with blasphemy.

The couple was separated from their four young children and held in prison, ready to face their death. Yet, by God's grace, they were acquitted in June last year by the high court, after seven years on death row.

Many Pakistani Christians have found themselves in similar situations—falsely accused of blasphemy and, by God's grace, later acquitted after spending years of their life in prison. Once released, these Christians frequently become the victims of mob violence and live in fear of losing their lives. For example, Asia Bibi was also acquitted of blasphemy in 2018, after close to a decade in prison. During her trial, a Pakistani governor was murdered because he sought a presidential pardon for her. Also, a Christian cabinet minister was assassinated for seeking changes to this blasphemy law. There was outrage in the Muslim community after her acquittal, and mobs demanded that both Bibi and the judges be killed. This forced her to seek asylum in Canada, where she still lives in fear of assassination. Even her lawyer had to flee the country, as it is no longer safe for him to live in Pakistan.

Again, our hearts cry out for such Christians as these, yet we remain encouraged by brothers and sisters whose fear can be transformed to hope in the knowledge of their Saviour. 🇺🇸



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**Note:** Most of the information from this article comes from the Voice of the Martyrs Canada and Open Doors USA websites. Both organisations have an email list which you can join if you would like to receive updates on the persecuted church worldwide.

# Eastern Ministerial Conference

## 2021

Last year, following a hiatus for 2020, many CanRC and URC Ontario ministers and their wives (and one couple from Manitoba!) came together in late October in the southern reaches of the Niagara peninsula for the annual Eastern Ministerial Conference. The speeches and meals were enjoyed at the Wellandport United Reformed Church, with rest and relaxation received at the Rathfon Inn in Port Colbourne. With more attendees than anticipated, a few lodged at the Wainfleet Motel halfway between. It was a refreshing experience to see and interact and socialize with and encourage each other after nearly two years of limited contact between ministers.

### **Courage in the Lord**

On Tuesday afternoon, conference attendees streamed into the church, and after the opening devotions, Rev. Dick Wynia encouraged us in the light of the gospel through 2 Corinthians

4. It is only in the Word of God that we may stand, and regardless of the opposition or even slander that may be experienced, despite the pains that we go through while ministering in the mercy of God, especially the pain of having the gospel of Christ Jesus questioned, there is strength and comfort in focusing only on Christ Jesus the Lord, finding courage in him, and not in ourselves as servants.

As an ice breaker exercise, the organizers gave everyone a label on their foreheads with a biblical name, and we were to go around asking each other questions about the name given us in an effort to learn who we were. Some of the names given were incredibly difficult to guess: if you had the name Jabez on your forehead, would you have been able to guess it? After some good laughs, dinner was served by Jan-Willem Stulp of Grand Oak Culinary Market, who catered the entire event. Each meal was excellent, and we were thankful for the food provided.





Clockwise from top left: Rev. Dick Wynia; Rev. Harry Zekveld; Dr. Bryan Chapell; Kathy and Bryan Chapell.

## Grace and prayer

In the evening, we drove down to the Rathfon, where we listened to our keynote speaker, Dr. Bryan Chapell. He spoke on Numbers 20, where Moses becomes frustrated with the Israelites and strikes the rock instead of obeying the Lord's commands. Moses erroneously spoke to the people instead of to the rock, although I could at least understand being easily confused between the two! But Dr. Chapell encouraged us to seek grace for grumblers, to present grace for grumblers, and to ask grace for ourselves in our own sinfulness.

Early on Wednesday and Thursday mornings, a small group of brothers gathered together in a cozy living room with warm cups of coffee for some shared prayer time. Though it was early, this was a blessed opportunity to share struggles and matters to lift to the Lord as we bowed our heads together. As encouraging as the talks and gatherings were, the power of prayer together was worth rising before the dawn. After the morning prayers, breakfast was served at the church for all to enjoy together.

## Blessings and battles

Later on Wednesday morning, Rev. George van Popta shared a few anecdotes from his time growing up, as he spoke of the grace God worked through his father Rev. Jelle Van Popta in furthering the gospel here in Canada. He shared testimony of his father's struggles and triumphs as the first minister to serve in our federation, a witness of Christ's faithfulness and encouragement to us all as fellow servants of our Lord.

Following a short (by ministerial standards) break, Dr. Bryan Chapell and his wife Kathy sat down with us and spoke of their experiences serving the Lord in the ministry he had placed them in. A recurring theme in the life of ministry is "blessings and battles." Not one of those is ever truly by itself: there are blessings found during battles, and no blessed ministry is completely without battles. Through the highs and lows of ministry, our Saviour Christ Jesus guides us and equips us to care for his people.

Throughout the afternoon we enjoyed "free time" exploring Niagara, with some going for walks or hikes or lovely drives. Wednesday evening was marked by good food and good fellowship that refreshed us as we sat down for Dr. Chapell's final address to us at the conference.

## Seeking the lost

Dr. Chapell spoke to us about Christ Jesus's final sermon, a sermon that highlighted finding what was lost. Using the parables found in Luke 15, he drew parallels between the different analogies for what was lost to different types of sinners struggling in faith. Some are like sheep, who meander and wander without being mindful of their daily spiritual life, and suddenly find themselves caught or stuck or lost. Some are like coins gone missing. They didn't wander off, they didn't storm off, rather they were forgotten. Misplaced, and remembered by nobody. Slipping through the cracks, they became lost. And some are like prodigal sons who do everything in their power to reject the faith, to leave the church, to abandon following Christ Jesus, and cause sorrow. But what joy there may be when wayward sinners are found! What blessing to witness a lost believer restored! What grace is ours to be instruments in God's hands to help find his people wherever or however they are lost.

## Wrap-up

Rev. Harry Zekveld concluded the conference Thursday morning by encouraging us from 2 Corinthians 1 to continue following Christ in suffering. No pastoral struggle is without purpose, but God directs it for the benefit of his believers. In suffering, even beyond what can be borne, we may be shown our own insufficiency in order to magnify the complete sufficiency of Christ. In suffering, in exposing the weaknesses of pastors, the power and glory of God is displayed! Suffering is a gift to be received in faith to the glory of God.

These three days spent together highlighted again and again the power of God's grace in the spread of his gospel. It is not by our strength that the Word may be proclaimed, but in him alone. Let us never cease to worship this God in the blessings he gives through the ministry of the gospel, no matter the struggle we may experience. May his Word go forth, and his Name be glorified! ☺



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## LORD'S DAY 2

What is God's law? The 10 commandments. You've heard them many times at church. Maybe you even had to memorize them for school. What does God's law teach us? One thing God's law teaches us is about our sins. We often love ourselves more than we love God or other people. Have you ever thought, "Do I have to go to church again, today?" You would rather keep playing with your friends! That's loving yourself more than loving God. Maybe you've also thought, "I really want to read that book." And then you take it away from your brother. That is loving yourself more than loving your brother. God's law teaches us our sin. It also teaches us the best way to love God and others more than ourselves.

Question and answer 4 summarizes (or says in a really short way) God's law. Draw a line from a commandment to whether it talks about loving God or our neighbour.

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourselves a carved image.
3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath Day.
5. Honour your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness
10. You shall not covet.

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

You shall love your neighbour as yourself

### WORD SEARCH

GOD

OTHERS

SIN

LAW

LOVE

N	U	I	K	W	W	W
I	E	V	O	L	A	R
S	N	J	F	Q	M	E
N	G	S	A	W	S	H
M	F	O	A	I	F	T
B	S	L	D	Q	Y	O
B	B	P	G	Q	O	B





## Press Release of Classis Pacific West,

December 16, 2021

Rev. D. Vandeburgt opened on behalf of the convening church with the reading of Micah 4:9-5:5a and prayer. A special welcome was given to Rev. Hendrik Alkema of the Free Reformed Church of Albany Australia, joining via Zoom.

Rev. D. Vandeburgt and Rev. K. Janssen reported that the credentials of the delegates were in all in order. Classis was declared constituted, and the following officers were appointed:

Chair: Rev. D. Vandeburgt

Vicechair: Rev. J. Segstro

Clerk: Rev. K. Janssen.

The agenda was adopted.

Approbation of the call of Smithers to Rev. Hendrik Alkema was given, followed by a colloquium on doctrine and polity as per Article 5 of the Church Order. Afterwards, Rev. K. Janssen offered a prayer of thanksgiving, after which Rev. Alkema left the meeting. A piece of correspondence was received and reported on.

A request from the church of Houston requesting pulpit supply once per month was received and approved.

A church visitation report was given concerning the visit to the Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church.

A question period according to Article 44 was held.

There was an opportunity given to the churches to give an update on their mission work. A report was made.

A convening church as well as the location and time were appointed, and the appointment of suggested officers for the next classis was given to the convening church.

An opportunity for personal questions was given.

An opportunity for Christian censure according to Article 34 was given.

The Acts of Classis were adopted, and the press release was approved.

Rev. J. Segstro closed in prayer at 5:30pm.

