

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

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Clarion

Do We Shake Hands?

Living with the Threat of Violence

Vaccine Mandates and the Church



On our Cover: A cold winter day on the Bow River with Castle Mountain in the background. Banff National Park, Alberta Canada.

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
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Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living

What's Inside

Have you ever wondered what life is like on the mission field? Pastor Julius VanSpronsen gives us a taste of what it's like in Brazil in his *Stories from South America*. Yet the mission field is found just as much in our own back yard in Canada and so we are pleased to bring you a new column, *Discipling the Nations* which will bring us updates (DV) on the domestic and foreign mission works undertaken by our churches. First up is Pastor James Zekveld, who gives us a status report on the mission work in Niverville, Manitoba. Similarly, you will find in the MERF newsletter an overview of the mission work among Islamic peoples in the middle east which is expanding to northern Africa and even as far as Indonesia—lots to thank God for and continue in prayer about!

Government restrictions in response to the spread of COVID-19 have been with us for about two years. Of late they have intensified in some areas of the country with the implementation of vaccine mandates for churches. How should churches respond? We welcome Pastor Tim Schouten's three-part series

in addressing this topic. As with anything we publish, you are welcome to express your thoughts on his piece(s) in a short letter to the editor (300 words). For anyone wishing to present a longer interaction with Pastor Schouten's arguments (something he also welcomes), send it in to letters@clarionmagazine.ca and we'll certainly give every consideration to publishing it.

Dr. Jason VanVliet's editorial gets us thinking about the usefulness of the traditional handshake in our worship services—is it worth keeping? Featured in this issue is also a fine meditation by Rev. Carl Van Dam on the very pleasant surprise that awaits faithful servants of Christ upon his return. As well, you can find an introduction to a certain Lisa Alkema in *Ray of Sunshine*, a fun lesson on Lord's Day 3 in *Clarion Kids*, and last but not least a press release from Classis Niagara containing the good news of another candidate for the ministry passing his examination. Here too is much reason for gratitude. Enjoy your read!

Peter Holtvlüwer

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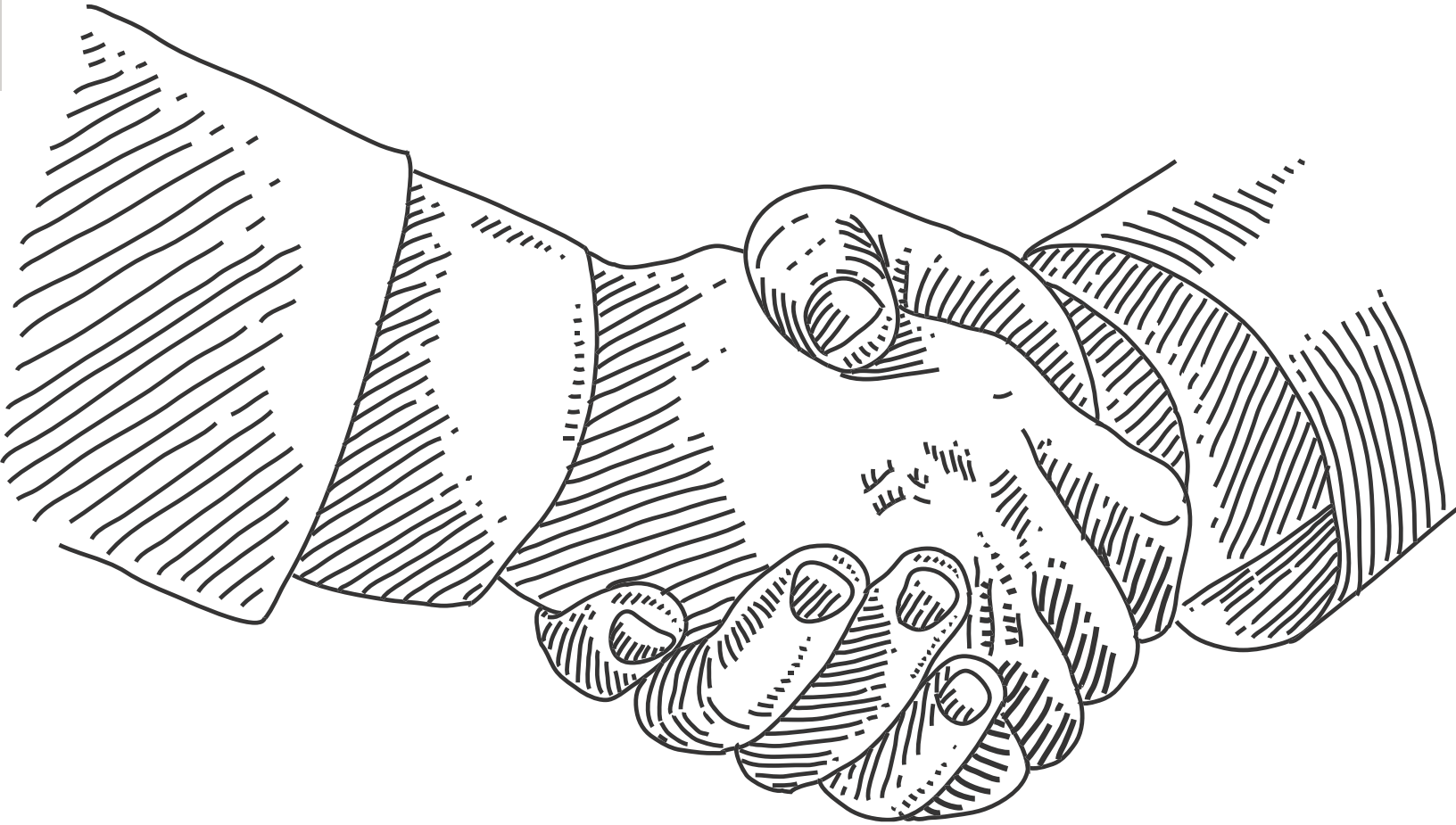
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EDITORIAL



Do We Shake Hands?

A few years ago, that question was rare. Today it is common enough. COVID-19 has even impacted our greetings and farewells.

You meet someone you do not know so well. Would they appreciate a friendly handshake? Or would clasping right hands make them feel rather uncomfortable? Sometimes it's hard to know, so we ask, "Do we shake hands?" Maybe we need to opt for a nod with a smile instead.

But what about in the church? Should an elder shake hands with the minister? A few years ago, that question was rare. In most of our Reformed congregations, it simply happened. Then

COVID entered our lives and in many congregations the handshake was put on hold. Lately, at least in my experience as a guest preacher, it is making a steady comeback.

Having, then pausing, and then re-introducing the handshake raises an understandable question, "Why do we have handshakes before and after our worship services?" Allow me to sharpen the focus. We are not asking whether we *must* have this custom. Neither Holy Scripture, nor our confessions, nor our church order even mention, let alone require, a handshake preceding or following a worship service. This custom is in the freedom of the local church.

Why?

At the same time, we do well to delve into the *why* behind this tradition. However, here is where opinions begin to multiply. Taking a cue from our regular hellos and goodbyes, some assume that the two handshakes basically mean “You are welcome to our pulpit” and “Thank-you for what you have spoken.”

For others, the first handshake symbolizes the wish that the pastor would receive the Lord’s blessing to lead everyone in holy worship. Then, after the service, shaking hands signifies the agreement of the consistory with the sermon that was preached, perhaps not down to the level of every word spoken but at least in the broad strokes of scriptural orthodoxy.

Yet one more explanation centres around the idea of authorization. Dr. Karel Deddens summed it up this way: “It is the *consistory* that calls the congregation together for worship. Thus the consistory takes the responsibility. It also expresses its authorization by way of the handshake” (*Where Everything Points to Him*, p. 38). Back in the day, Rev. W. W. J. Van Oene disagreed emphatically, asserting that any connection between the handshake and authorization is “totally without basis and completely incorrect” (*Clarion* Feb 5, 1988, p. 57).

So, if ministers cannot agree on this point, what is everyone else to think? Are these elder-minister handshakes little more than ceremonial noses of wax that everyone is free to bend in the direction of their preferred significance? Perhaps there is a better way forward.

Back to the Word

While God’s Word does not require handshakes before or after worship services, it does speak about some office bearers, James, Peter, and John, giving the “right hand of fellowship” to other office bearers, namely, Barnabas and Paul (Gal 2:9). To be sure, the occasion was more like a consistory meeting than a worship service (Acts 11:25-30). But can we still learn something from it?

Interestingly, a word-for-word translation of Galatians 2:9 reads, “the right-hands they gave to me and Barnabas of fellowship.” Obviously, the original Greek language can do things with word order that do not work so well in English. But here is the point: by using a word order that feels awkward to us, the Holy Spirit emphasizes that last word, *fellowship* or *communion*. Whatever else might be rightly or wrongly associated with a handshake, this one is about fellowship.

Fellowship in Christ

As Christians, our fellowship is rooted in Christ. Through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, we are grafted into no one less than Christ, the Son of God, and we share in all his treasures and gifts (LD 21, Q&A 55). Truly amazing!

Flowing from that, everyone is duty-bound to use his gifts cheerfully, for the benefit of the other members. The man who steps behind the pulpit is endowed with a special gift to proclaim the glorious news of salvation in a mixed-up and miserable world. The man who is shaking his hand, along with his fellow elder, has been granted the responsibility to ensure that the entire worship service is to the glory of God’s name and the upbuilding of the congregation. Our communion in Christ is rich beyond words, well worth confirming by extending the right hand—of fellowship—a few times each Sunday.

COVID may have put the handshake on pause for some months. But at a time when we all need a clear, visual reminder that our fellowship is firmly rooted in Christ and not defined by perfectly aligned perspectives on pandemics, the right-hand of fellowship is a worthwhile, and welcome, sight. 🙌



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Add to the Conversation!

We welcome interaction, whether in agreement or disagreement. Send us a letter at letters@clarionmagazine.ca.

See clarionmagazine.ca/letters for guidelines.

The Master Will Serve Them

“Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he returns. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.” (LUKE 12:37)

While he was on earth, the Lord Jesus told various parables about his return. In the parable of the ten virgins (Matt 25:1-12), five virgins were wise and well prepared but the five others were unprepared and did not have what they needed to be ready. His coming is at an unexpected time and therefore we must always be ready.

In other parables, the servants, who are waiting for their master, are expected to make good use of their time and not squander their position as stewards (Matt 24:45-50; Luke 12:42-48) or the talents with which they have been entrusted (Matt 25:14-30).

In Luke 12:35-40, we find a short parable with the same basic message about being ready for Jesus’s return, but with something unexpected, not found in the other parables. Here Jesus instructs his disciples to be like men waiting for their master to come home from a wedding feast. They have to wait up for him so that they are ready to open the door and welcome him in when he knocks. They cannot go to sleep or select one of them to keep watch while the others sleep. No, they all need to be ready together.

It is hard for us to wait. Time seems to go so slowly when we are just waiting. Yet, this waiting is worth it because we esteem so highly the master who is returning. We want to be ready for him to open the door immediately when he knocks. We can recognize this from our daily lives as well. If we are expecting a highly honoured visitor we have not seen in a long time, then we are eager for his coming and want to make sure everything is ready. We want to open the door as soon as he comes!

Jesus says that those who are actively waiting for him, who are still awake when he comes, are blessed. They will receive God’s blessing and will be granted wonderful rewards. One of these rewards is the surprising turn this parable takes when Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.”

The master will serve the servants a meal! What an amazing blessing! How great is his love for his servants who show their love for him by eagerly waiting for him. How touching is his humility; even though he is our Master, he willingly serves us and wants us to receive food from his hand. We cannot really fathom the depth of the meaning of this but we are filled with wonder at the tremendous privilege that he would want to serve us and bless us in this way.

Now that we know that this awaits those who are actively waiting for him, how do we respond to such a promise? We are now to follow his example and show such love and service to others, also those whom we might esteem less. For on the last day, Jesus will say to those who do not render service to the hungry, thirsty, sick, naked, and imprisoned that they are not worthy of him (cf. Matt 25:31-46). If we do not help those who are the least of Jesus’s brothers, we do not do it to him.

May this wonderful promise and perspective encourage us now as we wait for his coming. May our life be characterized by love and selfless service of others to the praise and glory of God who has showered us with his love and kindness each day. 🇨


For Further Study

1. What is your reaction to discovering that the master will serve you?
2. How will you follow Jesus’s example of service?



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**CHURCH
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Mandatory Vaccinations and the Church

Part 1: The Lordship and Criteria of Christ

Introduction

The topic of this series of articles is “mandatory vaccinations and the church.” As we begin, there are two words that need to be stressed.

First, we need to stress the word “mandates.” There is an important difference between vaccinations and vaccination mandates. To illustrate this, there are many people who are pro-vaccination but anti-mandate. There are many people who have received two or three doses but don’t want that choice to be forced on anyone else. There are moral issues to be discussed when it comes

to voluntary vaccination; there are different moral issues surrounding vaccination mandates.

Second, we need to stress the word “church.” This article will not be about vaccination mandates in general, but about vaccination mandates in their relation to the church. Should the church make use of vaccination passports? To make it more specific: should we have someone at the front door checking the identification and vaccination status of everyone who wants to enter? And should the people who are not able to provide proof of vaccination be refused entry? These are not theoretical questions. For the

No apostle, elder, pastor, synod, or pope can take the church into human hands and rule it with human wisdom

past few months, all churches in the *Northern Health* region of British Columbia were required by the government to do so.¹ Considering the trajectory of the past two years, it would not be surprising if many other jurisdictions implemented the same restrictions.

It is good for the church to consider this matter. How should we respond biblically when the church is told to enact proof of vaccination? Does God's Word have instruction for us on this matter? I believe that the answer to that question is a definite "yes." This is not a merely a "political" issue but a biblical, moral, and gospel issue. As Reformed Christians, we believe that God's Word is perspicuous, or clear in its teaching. It does not address every specific issue of our time, but we are able to reason from its clear principles. We can make good and necessary conclusions from the Scriptures about the matters of our day. Concerning COVID-19 vaccination passports, the good and necessary conclusion is that the church cannot implement them. The church cannot stand at the door and refuse entry to those whom Christ has welcomed. The church cannot comply with government regulations that would cause her to obey man rather than God.

In this article we will develop this conclusion by focusing on the Lordship of Christ and his criteria for entry into the church. In the following two articles we will focus on the nature of the church and the role of Christian conscience.

The Lordship of Christ

As we consider this topic, we should first keep in mind the Lordship of Christ, especially his Lordship over the church. The church is, by definition, Christ's church.

The confession that "Jesus is Lord" is so central to our faith that it serves as a summary confession of the entire gospel. For the early Christians, often persecuted, this confession was their watchword. What did they believe? First of all, that "Jesus is Lord." The apostle Paul writes, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9-10). He also writes, "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3).

Jesus is Lord over the whole world and over our whole life. He lives and reigns as the exalted ruler on the throne of God. All people of all nations are called to repent, to put their faith in him, and to become his disciples.

With respect to the church, Jesus is Lord in a very remarkable way. The church has been purchased, or ransomed, by his precious blood (1 Pet 1:19). The church is a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a *people for his own possession*" (1 Pet 2:9). The church, and every individual Christian, belongs to Christ as his purchased possession. For this reason, the apostles refer to themselves and their fellow Christians as servants, or slaves, of Christ.

¹ Northern Health Media Bulletin, December 9, 2021. "NH regional Public Health Orders revised; worship services allowed with vaccination." Accessed January 22, 2022. <<https://stories.northernhealth.ca/news/nh-regional-public-health-orders-revised-worship-services-allowed-vaccination>>

² This phrase borrowed from Harold Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart*. Lexham Press, 2019.

This special relationship is not only about mere ownership, however. It is about love, and adoption, and knowing God. The church is also called, for example, the flock of Christ, the bride of Christ, and even the body of Christ. It says in Ephesians 1:22-23 that God put all things under the feet of Christ, “and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

Jesus is Lord of the church. He bought her with his own blood and is sanctifying her by the power of his Holy Spirit. Everything the church is, and has, and will be, is from Christ.

The criteria of Christ

Since Christ is Lord of the church, it is he who sets the criteria. What is the church? What does the church do? Who can belong to the church and participate in her worship? No apostle, elder, pastor, synod, or pope can take the church into human hands and rule it with human wisdom. All church leaders are only messenger boys for the King, sheepdogs for the great Shepherd,² or servants of the divine Master. They must rule and lead the church not by the doctrines of men (Matt 15:9), but by the commandments of God, the criteria that Christ has established.

Therefore, we must ask: what are Christ’s criteria for who is invited and who can belong? What does the Lord Jesus say about entry into his church? What does the Head say about belonging to his own body?

Let us listen to the call of Christ directly from the Scriptures:

Isaiah 55:1, 3: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.... Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant.”

Matthew 11:28-30: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt 11:28-30)

John 6:37: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

John 7:37-38: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

Revelation 22:17: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”

The gospel is a gospel of free grace. All are called to come. Everyone is welcome to enter and to belong, no matter their lifestyle, their age, their sex, their ethnic background, their occupation, or their vaccination status. They must only repent of their sins (sins as defined by God, not man), bow their hearts to Christ, seek his forgiveness, and receive his cleansing—his righteousness—by grace.

God teaches us this so beautifully in Romans 10:9-13,

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

This is the biblical criteria for entry into the church—by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Criteria for exclusion that undermine the gospel and which are not rooted in God’s Word must be rejected.

Looking ahead to Part 2

But what do we mean by the word “church”? Is the church a building? By refusing entry into our building would we really be refusing entry into the church of Christ? In the next article, we’ll see what the Scriptures have to say about the nature of the church. 🗨️



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CLARION



STORIES FROM SOUTH AMERICA

Living

With the Threat of Violence

(Part 1)

As we drive peacefully down lonely country roads at night, the possibility of being attacked by bandits does not enter our minds. We might be more alert against thieves when we are on the busy streets of a city, but the likelihood of being randomly attacked, or even murdered, while we are making our way to the stadium or theatre is very slim. This makes it difficult to process the news about friends and family who do get attacked, robbed, and beaten just because they happened to be at a certain place at a certain time. Although I am among those who have been spared from direct attacks on my person or family, recent reports of such an attack brought back memories of living in a country where violent crimes had become a part of the fabric of the culture. Since we often pray for churches and missionaries in countries where violence is common, I thought it might be helpful to give those with little experience in such situations, a glimpse of what it looks like to live each day with the threat of violence. It is my prayer that the accounts of the experiences I have had will also help us to be focused in our prayers for Christ's church all over the world.

Baptized with fire(arms)?

My friends and colleagues in the South American cities where I worked used to tell me that since I'd never been held up at gunpoint, I hadn't been "baptized" as a "true" citizen of their country. Their comments reveal that it isn't just the so-called "gringos" who live with the threat of violence; this threat affects people of all races, socio-economic classes, faiths, and occupations. In a society where your life could be in danger if you have something that someone else needs, you learn to be alert, prepared, and connected to help. All the time.

Living with the threat of violence means fences and barred windows. It means passing an armed security guard standing outside your local grocery store. When there are people who don't think life is very valuable, it becomes necessary to take the "safe route" through parts of the city to make sure that you don't enter neighbourhoods where even the police will not enter. With so many stories of bank machine holdups, you learn to withdraw money in secure and public places even if it means you need to drive further from home.

The precautions that we were taught to take anticipated events that happened regularly in the neighbourhoods and cities around us

When there is a high possibility of being ambushed just because you are in a stopped car, you learn to keep moving through red lights at night, to distrust motorbikes with two people on them, and to keep a careful look out for unwelcome visitors when you have to navigate difficult corners on lonely highways.

Once I was travelling with a police officer who taught me to remember that my vehicle could be used as a “bullet” in some emergencies. Living with the threat of violence means following your gut feelings and leaving any scene that feels suspicious as quickly as possible. It’s training your children to obey orders like “get down” and “get into the safe part of the house.” It’s turning on all the lights and doing sweeps for dangers in your own home before allowing your wife and children to leave the locked and running car to go home to bed after a late night at church. All these are just precautions, but the neighbours often reminded us that it was better to regret taking extra precautions and stay alive than it was to regret not taking such precautions. Every one of the precautions that we were taught to take anticipated events that were happening regularly in the neighbourhoods and cities around us.

A murder-meter

Can you imagine seeing a digital sign posting the total of registered homicides in your state for the current day, month, and year? Not only did the university that was publicizing the

numbers need to update it every day, but the overall numbers were staggering to my sheltered Canadian mind. Another fifteen this weekend? 348 murders in the year by March 5? Could it really be true? When I spoke with fellow Christians in this South American city about the “murder-meter,” they were not surprised by the numbers. Many of them were quick to add that these were only the murders that were officially registered.

Having first seen the murder-meter while still in the early months of my time in South America, I could not process how such a disturbing number of homicides could be found among the friendly, outgoing, welcoming, and generally jovial people I had met in the general public. Even more difficult to understand was how a nation with such a high percentage of self-professed “Christians” could at the same time suffer from so many homicides. Who was committing all these murders? Could it be that people who called themselves “Christians” were also murdering their neighbours? As I was soon to discover, there were certainly times that this did happen. 🇺🇸

To be continued



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DISCIPLING THE NATIONS :: MATTHEW 28:19-20



Mission Work in Niverville

An Update

The small things

“And she gave birth to a firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).

At Ambassador Canadian Reformed Church in Niverville, MB (not yet instituted), we’ve been preaching through the book of Luke. The opening chapters are full of carefully marked out time. God is planning each moment so that the kingdom of God may come. Luke repeatedly gives us the phrase “and when the time came.” The upshot is: God is in control.

The first chapters are also full of an awareness that God is coming to undo the existing system and replace it with God’s kingdom. He does not do so through something grand; he does so through the little things, a very average middle-class family

and an old priest and his wife. Jesus, the Son of God, is born in a guest room where the beds are all taken. Therefore, Mary lays him in a manger. Poor shepherds greet him. The birth of our King is not auspicious.

In contrast are the kings that mark the times of Christ: Augustus Caesar in Chapter 2, Tiberias in Chapter 3, Annas and Caiaphas as high priests in the temple. The irony is between the lines. This baby is more significant than Augustus Caesar; he is the Lord of lords and King of kings. He is also the great high priest who will take the place of Annas and Caiaphas. In a world that is so backward, God is moving.

Perhaps I contemplate this too often: dwelling upon God’s use of simple things in the work of his kingdom. It could be a way of justifying unfitting boldness in what is small and without




in our reach due to COVID regulations. However, by God's grace, we use the opportunities he gives us.

I've also had the opportunity to make new contacts. I visited a Mosque and a Gur'dwara with Mark VanderLinde, who was with me for a month-long internship this summer. At both places, I found contacts that I may be able to develop. However, it is hard to know how these things turn out. I was also able to meet with a couple of Reformed Baptist pastors from the Morden area. I hope that God will bless those relationships. Finally, I have been given the privilege to meet with another young man through Gordon Kroeker, the head of the Youth For Christ in our area. This young man is concerned about the state of the church because of the lack of good boundaries. I hope to meet this young man sometime soon. God continues to provide opportunities despite the limited options presently.

Proclaiming the gospel

One of the more difficult things, and something I continue to ponder, is, "How does one proclaim the gospel publicly?" I mean: in the public square. In some sense, a worship service is public, although legally it can be considered public or private in favour of the needs of the moment. In general, our culture considers religion private. That means that it takes greater awareness to look for opportunities to demonstrate the public nature of the gospel, the fact that Jesus is King.

We have done that by sending a postcard to all the residents in the town proclaiming the God who made heaven and earth and his anointed one. We have proclaimed the gospel through postcards several times. Ultimately, we don't know how God will use that. But it's an excellent way to get it into every house in Niverville. We've also advertised on the website of the town newspaper, the *Niverville Citizen*. Once again, though I have not found any direct link to a contact through these advertisements, it is a way to get the church's name out there. These are things we keep doing in order that the gospel may be proclaimed in the open square. As the Scriptures say, "Cast your bread upon the waters, and it will return after many days." 



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significance. However, the Scriptures testify to something else. In my strength I am nothing. With God, through God, and according to his Word, I am honoured as God's son and God's ambassador. Even though I may feel small and weak, without recourse and subdued by the weight of the swirling events around me, God is still with me. I trust his Word when he says the kingdom of God will fill the earth so that the glory of God will shine throughout the universe. God will bless the nations through the seed that has grown into a mighty tree. A tree in which God, by his marvelous grace, has engrafted me.

This truth has been a perpetual source of encouragement to me in the ministry through this last year. We are small, and we feel even smaller in light of the world events that are going on around us, but in the midst of it all, I see the new man strengthening within me, the joy, the righteousness, and the freedom of the Lord.

The work of the Lord

I see the work of Spirit of God all around me, as I work in the Lord's field, proclaiming the gospel. We currently have five people in various stages, moving toward membership. In each one, I see the initial joy of the Lord. I say this without knowing their ultimate end (that is for God to know, who knows the hearts of all men). But I can see some knowledge of the joy and the freedom that is in Christ.

These personal relationships have been the focus this last year, consolidating friendships and, through that, developing Bible studies and moving toward membership. We are limited



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MERF News

January 2022



Middle East Reformed Fellowship—“Declaring the Whole Counsel of God”

Gospel Witness in an Islamic Context

by Pastor Armin Sukri



Stretching exercise at Palu trauma center

Founded in Beirut, Lebanon in the early 70's, the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) has always had a clear vision to “declare the whole counsel of God.” Its standards are the historic Reformed confessions. The strategy focuses on strengthening national churches to carry out the four-fold ministries of evangelism, church extension, biblical training and diaconal aid. Beginning in the Middle East, the heart of the Islamic world, the work grew gradually to other regions in North and East Africa and Asia.

Centrality of God's Word

As a service organization, MERF's continuing role is to encourage and support the witness of indigenous Christians in Islamic contexts,

where there is always high regard for sacred religious books.

High regard for and commitment to the authority of the Bible is vital in MERF's ministries. Carrying out the Great Commission (Mt 28:19-20) in Muslim lands requires careful and specialized preparation. It is an arduous process to disciple and build up new believers and incorporate them into local churches.

MERF is committed to the faithful and relevant teaching of God's Word. Strengthening churches and believers, and equipping them to face opposition and persecution, constitutes a major part of MERF's biblical training. In that way, the work identifies closely with the experiences of the suffering early Church. Faithful biblical training represents the backbone of MERF's minis-

tries. Even though it has specialized practical and applied formats in Islamic cultures, teaching must remain consistent with and loyal to the biblical content. Equipping the saints in God's Word prevents false teaching as well as defends against it.

From Arabic to more languages

At first, MERF focused on Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Then ministry to Farsi-speaking countries were added. Islamic influence is most dominant in these lands. From there the work has expanded gradually to other nations in East Africa under Islamic influence. Later, work was expanded to partner with churches in Pakistan and Indonesia. Both have huge

confessing Muslim populations.

Christians and churches in an environment dominated by Islam often face similar circumstances. This includes difficulties ranging from administrative restrictions to severe legal prohibitions and even persecution.

Strategies

MERF works from a clear principle to neither directly confront nor insult Islam, but rather to lift up the Christ of Scriptures. A loving neighbor seeks to gently and patiently win, not to publicly humiliate by attacks against the Muslim prophet, Mohammed, the Qur'an nor local customs. Therefore, MERF programs share Christ's redemptive work and His teachings in a dignified, positive approach,



West Sulawesi village thatched roof

but steer away from negative statements against Islam. This avoids stirring up unnecessary counterproductive reactions.

METF's role is not to lead the local churches, but rather to partner with and assist them, encouraging consistently faithful biblical ministries. Christ-centered, faithful living enables indigenous churches to be a good witness, even to those who oppose or hate them (Mt 5:16). Believers dedicated to correctly understanding and living according to the Bible earn the respect of their Muslim neighbors.

Building Bridges

An important strategy in METF's work is to build bridges connecting with the hearts and minds of those raised under Islam, so that they can learn and understand the teachings of the Bible. Elements of the local,

indigenous culture, like languages, food or customs can be bridges. Culture often plays a large role in personal identity, so it is important to respect habits and lifeways. Although Christians have been liberated from worldly bonds, our ministry mandate



Pig raising diaconal micro project

cannot be separated from communicating in the context of human cultures. This is where the redemption of Christ is understandably presented.

Compassionate METF programs carried out by local indigenous church volunteers meet urgent community development needs or emergency diaconal aid. These also build trust and ease entry into whole communities with the gospel. Good opportunities arise for follow up with evangelism and Bible teaching as the God, the Holy Spirit draws those who hear to Christ.

Sensitive Questions

In gospel media ministry, for example, via radio broadcasting and social media, interactions with Muslims often bring questions on core Christian teachings, like the divinity of Jesus or the Trinity. Some Muslims also ask sensitive questions by comparing the teachings of the Qur'an and the Bible. These cannot be discussed openly, but modern technology enables private chats to teach the Bible to those with genuine interest.

For example, Islam emphasizes total submission to God (Allah) and doing

"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

— 2 Timothy 3:12

indigenous people to understand the Word of God. Listener testimonials show that the radio ministry is a useful and effective tool for evangelism. Especially in remote areas, the radio messages also provide pastors with faithful materials for preaching and Bible study. Here are some samples from our Indonesian field:

"I have attended several evangelism and other biblical training events held by YPRI [METF's daughter organization]. As an evangelist, I have been very blessed..."
Mr Rudi, Selayar.

"Even though I am a Muslim, I like the Bible which teaches about love and forgiveness. Many of my friends at work are Christians, they are very kind and helpful."
Mr Abd. Aziz

"Hearing the gospel in my own language is a great joy. I pray that God's word will continue to be preached through this radio broadcast."
Mrs. Dorkas

good deeds, while the Bible emphasizes the sovereignty of God over all creation and history, while good deeds come from the salvation received through faith in Christ.

Local language radio broadcasts are very helpful for



Makassar Indonesia METF center training

METF-Canada

Thank you for your faithful support! Please make cheques payable to METF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.

Online donations can be made to Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Canada) Inc. through www.merf.org/support

e-transfers:
merfcanada@gmail.com

CLARION KIDS

AMANDA DEBOER

LORD'S DAY 3

What if you were perfect? You would never be sad. You would always listen to your parents and teachers. You would do your work cheerfully.

You would think of God more. In fact, you would never sin! God created people to be perfect. But then, there was the fall into sin. Remember when Adam and Eve ate the fruit they were not allowed to eat? They sinned. Now no one is perfect and everyone sins. But God is so good. He sent the Lord Jesus. Jesus is the only one who is always perfect and never sinned. He died for our sins. Now God forgives us when we are not perfect. He does this when we ask him for forgiveness in Jesus's name. God also does something else. Figure out the "secret message" below to learn what else God does. May this make you praise God for how good he is!

20 8 5 8 15 12 25 19 16 9 18 9 20

3 8 1 14 7 5 19 21 19 20 15 19 5 18 22 5

7 15 4

1=A 2=B 3=C 4=D 5=E 6=F
 7=G 8=H 9=I 10=J 11=K 12=L
 13=M 14=N 15=O 16=P 17=Q 18=R
 19=S 20=T 21=U 22=V 23=W 24=X
 25=Y 26=Z

Draw a line to before the fall and after the fall to show how mankind has changed.

Before the fall

good
 disobedient

After the fall

wicked
 holy



RAY OF SUNSHINE

Rachel Vis



Lisa Alkema

My name is Lisa Alkema and I live at Harbour Home. I work out at the YMCA three times a week. While I am there, the staff stays with me while I work out. I enjoy doing diamond dots. And I also enjoy doing sticker books as well. I stayed at my dad's house for ten days over Christmas. My family is very important to me. I have four sisters-in-law and four brothers as well. And one sister in my family. I also love baking in the kitchen and the staff sometimes call me the kitchen police because I know everything in the kitchen. I have lots of nephews and nieces.

March birthdays

Congratulations to those of you celebrating a birthday in March! May the Lord be with you in the year ahead.

3 Trevor Hofsink will be **44**

14407 McQueen Road
Edmonton, AB T5N 3L3

9 David Rawson will be **60**

c/o Twin Oaks
3217 Twin Oaks Cres
Burlington, ON L7M 3A8

12 Gerry Eelhart will be **60**

c/o Mrs. Grace Eelhart
120 13425-57 Street,
Emmanuel Home
Edmonton, AB T5A 2G1

13 John VanWyngaarden will be **44**

c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

14 Tineille VanRootselaar will be **26**

219 Lock St W
Dunnville, ON N1A 1V2

14 Lisa Alkema will be **41**

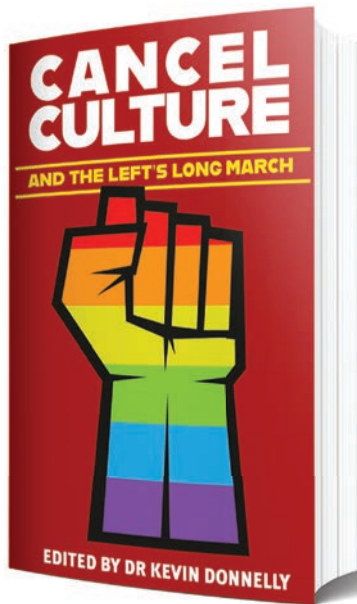
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3
email: lhalkema@gmail.com

15 Jim VanderHeiden will be **63**

c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS If there are any address changes that I need to be aware of please let me know as soon as possible.

Rachel Vis >> 731 Lincoln Street, Wellandport, Ontario L0R 2J0 | tom.rachelvis@gmail.com | 905-329-9476



Cancel Culture and the Left's Long March

Cancel Culture and the Left's Long March, edited by Kevin Donnelly (Melbourne, AU: Wilkinson Publishing Pty Ltd, 2021) 182 pages. \$9.99 Kindle or \$32 paperback at Amazon.ca.

Today we hear much about “cancel culture,” “political correctness,” and “woke culture,” leaving us wondering what they’re all about. This recent Australian publication enlightens us by tackling these subjects head-on in a series of essays by various authors.

The editor is Kevin Donnelly, a Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Catholic University. Donnelly first warned about the dangers of political correctness during the early 1990s. Along with others, he maintains that political correctness denies the individual’s right to reason and impartiality, since it defines knowledge as a social construct and sees all relationships as based on privilege and power.

Donnelly promotes the strengths and benefits of Western civilizations and our Judeo-Christian heritage that form the basis of our political and legal systems. Consequently, he opposes the rainbow alliance of neo-Marxist and postmodern theories and the way in which they undermine free and open debate.

To give readers a sense of the many valuable contributions, here is a sampling:

The Origins of Cancel Culture and the Left's Long March by Gary Marks

School Education by Kevin Donnelly

Universities by Jennifer Oriel

The Radicalising of History and What to do About It by David Daintree

Cancel Culture in the Time of Covid-19 by Tony Abbott

Slouching Towards Groupthink: Cancel Culture, the Law and Religion by John Steenhof

Divided we Fall by Anthony Dillon

Gender Fluid Laws: Cancelling Sex, Women, Parental Rights and Threatening Democracy by Patrick Byrne

Cancel Culture and the Left's Long March: The Way Forward by Stephen A. Chavaura

The purpose of this book is to help the reader develop a better understanding of the impact of the cultural left, cancel culture, woke culture and political correctness on Western societies, including our universities, schools, churches, families, political and legal systems, and the media and intermediary organizations. In doing so, *Cancel Culture and the Left's Long March* aims to foster reason and balance as a counterweight to the leftist political ideology behind such concepts.

This publication would be of great assistance to school and church leadership teams as well as students and anyone else who is interested in these issues. Strongly recommended! 📖

George Diek

Member of the Free Reformed Church of Albany, Western Australia. He has forty-five years of experience as a teacher and teacher librarian (Australia and Canada) and is a keen student of history, politics, and government
georgediek3@gmail.com

PRESS RELEASE

Classis Niagara

December 15, 2021

On behalf of the convening church of Spring Creek, Rev. Daniel Shin opened the meeting of the delegates in a Christian manner. In prayer he remembered several items, including ongoing concerns over the developments of the COVID-19 pandemic, the instruction ongoing at CRTS, the call to Rev. John Louwse from the church of Smithville, the acceptance of the call that Grimsby extended to Rev. Rolf den Hollander, together with the imminent vacancy in Grassie, and the acceptance of the call that Niagara South has extended to Candidate Ruurd Offringa, together with the examination to take place.

Upon the constitution of Classis, the delegates appointed Rev. Rodney Vermeulen as chairman, Rev. Cody Swaving as vice-chairman, and Rev. John VanWoudenberg as clerk.

The chairman welcomed the deputies of Regional Synod East, Revs. DeJong and Louwse, present to assist in the examination of br. Ruurd Offringa, who was also welcomed. Revs. Bouwman, den Hollander, and Kampen were also welcomed and seated.

Candidate Examination

Classis proceeded forward with the examination, beginning with the sermon proposal. Classis discussed the sermon and deemed it acceptable.

From there the candidate continued through the peremptory exam in open session. Thankfully, with the concurring advice of the Deputies of Regional Synod, Classis could judge that Candidate Offringa sustained the examination. Br. Feenstra led in thanksgiving prayer.

Classis approbated the call of Candidate Offringa to Niagara South and made provisions for a representative from Classis to be at the ordination service.

Vacancies and Sundry Matters


The chairman then asked each of the churches the questions set out in Article 44 of the Church Order. One church asked for and received advice concerning circumstances around instituting a new congregation. The church at Grassie asked for pulpit supply, which was granted.

Classis received a proposal from the previous classis regarding the regulations concerning the Committee for Appeals. Since all the consistories had opportunity to interact with it, it was adopted.

The deputies for Contact with Neighbouring Classes and Presbyteries presented their correspondence with the neighbouring RCUS Classis. This was received with thankfulness.

The church of Grimsby requested that Classis approbate the call Rev. Rolf den Hollander accepted from the Covenant church in Grassie. With all the documents found in good order, this request was granted, and provisions were made for a representative from Classis to be at the installation service.

Classis appointed the church of Attercliffe as the convening church for the next classis, to be held on March 9, 2022, with June 15, 2022 as alternate. Suggestions for officers for the next classis were also made.

Opportunity was given for personal question period. The chairman judged with thankfulness that censure ad Article 34 of the Church Order was unnecessary. The Acts were read and adopted. The press release was read and approved, after which the chairman asked the delegates to sing in closing, led in a prayer of thanksgiving and intercession for the churches, and then closed the meeting. 

Rev. C. Swaving, vice-chairman at that time

