

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

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Clarion

*Housing Affordability
Canada's Conversion Therapy Ban
Mandatory Vaccinations
and the Church*



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:

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Loving in manner
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In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living

What's Inside

Welcome to another issue of *Clarion*! Government edicts restricting freedoms in Canada have descended upon us in more ways than one, so we are thankful to present two articles to help us think through these difficult matters. Rev. Tim Schouten presents us with the second part of his three-part series on why churches must not give in to vaccine mandates. Mr. André Schutten of ARPA Canada introduces us to new federal legislation banning "conversion therapy" with extremely broad and threatening language. This has ramifications both for those seeking counselling help for unwanted same-sex attraction or for confusion over gender and for Christians (and the church even) seeking to help such individuals. Lots of weighty things to process in these two pieces alone.

Rev. Matthew VanLuik in the editorial argues for greater awareness among us of the housing market crisis that is upon us in Canada, urging us to think creatively about how the more established can assist those just beginning to look for housing for themselves. In the *Ray of Sunshine* column, we are introduced to Jim Vanderheiden, who assures us that birthday cards are greatly appreciated by all the residents! Rev. Julius VanSpronsen concludes his latest installment of *Stories from South America* with hair-raising accounts of his adventures while a missionary in Brazil. And don't forget the comforting meditation by Rev. Jeff Poort, another *Clarion Kids* page, as well as the two press releases toward the end of the magazine. God bless!

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Email: Letters@clarionmagazine.ca
Letters to the Editor must not exceed 300 words and are to be written in a Christian manner.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

clarionmagazine.ca/subscriptions

2022 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Regular Mail Air Mail Canada \$49*
\$82* U.S.A. U.S. Funds \$69 \$102
International \$98 \$171
*Plus applicable taxes.

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Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

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PUBLISHED BIWEEKLY

by Premier Printing Ltd. Winnipeg, Manitoba
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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.

Canada

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

EDITORIAL

Housing Affordability

“Today in our sophisticated economy, we need to wonder if the system itself and government policies do not steal from people in ways we have not even thought about.” I made this remark in a sermon because of a pastoral concern for members of our community who were displaced from their homes and unable to afford the cost of new housing. How does the church help members who suddenly find their rent more than doubled?

A recent headline in the community newspaper stated that house prices in the city in the past year rose by forty percent and they continue to rise. Rental rates for apartments have risen dramatically and there are instances where people are bidding up the rental price for an apartment. This phenomenon is not confined to large cities, as prices for homes in small villages and rural areas are also impacted. This also plays havoc in the life of our churches as young couples struggle to find affordable housing. Families will need to adjust their expectations regarding their housing needs.

Winners and losers

As in many situations, there are winners and losers. Those who already own a home see their net value skyrocket as they become asset rich. They do not feel the negative impact of rising prices. In the current context, those who do not own homes feel the stress of finding affordable housing. During the time of the Great Depression in the 1930s, Canadian society also faced the issue of affordable housing. There was some discussion at the time whether housing should be distributed based on need rather than left to the private market. In the end, the modern mortgage was implemented with a long term (twenty years) amortization and a high loan to value ratio of eighty percent. This policy made it possible for many more to enter the housing market.

I am not an economist or a housing expert, but it is possible to observe from accelerating house prices that something strange is happening. A price correction may be coming, but a few trends indicate it will not be enough to resolve the issue of affordable housing for the vulnerable in our society.

Commodity verses shelter

One trend is called the “financialization of housing,” in which the housing sector has become a commodity distinct from its provision of shelter. In this scenario, the value of a home is not based on the cost of building the home and making a reasonable profit, but the value is determined by whatever the market will bear. As one commentator put it, there is now a vicious


circle of demand escalation that leads to greater mortgage indebtedness by people who just need a place to live. It is one thing to accept this kind of price appreciation for a piece of art that only the rich can afford, but it is a different matter when it impacts the basic needs of the vulnerable in our society.

Immigration

A second trend is the rising immigration numbers in Canada. Immigration numbers are now surpassing the peak of 400,900 in 1913, with 401,000 in 2021, and is forecast to increase each year to 421,000 in 2023. The immigration policy is centred on the economy to deal with our aging population and low birth rates. This policy does not consider the pressure that this growth will have on the housing market. Immigrants are coming to a country where available housing is already stretched.

The reality is that the pressure on the housing market is unlikely to wane soon because not enough housing supply is coming on the market. This issue is not high on government agendas as more attention is paid to microaggressions to promote sweeping societal changes than caring for the needs of the vulnerable. This is an issue that we need to be aware of, as it will impact our young church members as well as new immigrants who come and join the church. It is something that needs the attention of our governing officials as a matter of justice, but as God’s people we may also need to look at creative ways to help those in need to obtain their basic housing needs.

Caring for the vulnerable

Although it is not the role of the church itself, members of the church may need to look for creative ways to use the wealth the Lord has given, to provide others with a hand up rather than a handout. My purpose with this editorial is to stimulate the Christian reader not only to become aware of this need, but to think creatively about how to use God’s blessings to support the vulnerable with the ability to enjoy the basic needs of life. Where governments pay lip service to the needs of the vulnerable, the people of Christ are called to show the compassion and care of Christ. 



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Choosing Broken Cisterns

“They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” (JEREMIAH 2:13)

“You shall have no other gods before me” seems like a very straight forward commandment. And yet, in the time of Jeremiah, the biggest problem he needs to address is that there is idolatry among God’s people. They are going after other gods. And still today, although we may not be tempted to start worshipping Baal or Asherah, or even idols and gods of other religions like Hinduism or Islam, idolatry is still a struggle for us. We can be tempted to put our trust in something other than God to make us happy, or to comfort us, or to give us purpose. Maybe we put our trust in our family, or our job, in money, or in pleasures like entertainment, alcohol, or sexual satisfaction. We think, “As long as I have this, I will be okay.” But sadly anything we make into an idol will leave us disappointed.

Jeremiah 2:13 gives a most striking picture of this problem. God is showing how foolish his people are to go after foreign gods, and he compares it to someone rejecting a fountain of living water and turning to broken cisterns.

There are at least three details in this verse which point to the foolishness of idolatry. First of all, the words “hewed out” point out how much more work it is: “They have forsaken me ... and *hewed out* cisterns for themselves.” To hew out a cistern in ancient Israel, you must dig a big hole in the limestone, and then coat it all with plaster. You would also have to slope the land so that water collects into the cistern. In contrast, God is described as a fountain, a spring of living waters. You do not have to dig. You show up and receive in abundance. Think of all the work people put in to get what they want of earthly things. But God can provide the fullness of joy out of mere grace. He offers it freely.

A second difference between a cistern and a spring is in their durability. Jeremiah 2:13 says they have hewed out “broken cisterns that can hold no water.” Even if it could hold water for a time, the plastered cistern will eventually crack and break, and then it is useless. All the water seeps away. So it is with the earthly things we trust in for happiness. It might give us temporary joy, but it will not be able to give us anything that will last

for eternity. What about the LORD? As a fountain of living water, he constantly produces for us the things we need for body and soul. His faithfulness never ends and his promises are not temporary but forever.

The final reason it is so foolish to go after other gods is the quality of the water. A cistern can only hold still water. If that water is left too long, it can go bad. If anything gets into the water and contaminates it, you have to empty out the whole cistern and start over. But verse 13 says that the LORD is a fountain of “living water.” This is fresh, running water from a spring. It is truly life-giving and free from the danger of contamination. This is also what God gives to us through his Son Jesus Christ. He does not give us promises that could contaminate or go bad. He gives us the living water, the Holy Spirit, who works forgiveness of sins and righteousness by faith. This living water gives strength to overcome the contamination of sin and death. We endure to eternity with the LORD.

You wonder: how could we ever choose hewing out broken cisterns over a fountain of living water? And yet this is what we all too often do. May we humble ourselves before God acknowledging our foolishness, and seek to put our trust in him alone. 📖

For Further Study

1. Reflect on what you look to for happiness and comfort in stressful times. How is this more work than turning to God? How is this thing less durable? What kind of life and satisfaction does it truly give?
2. How can the promise that Jesus is the water of life comfort and encourage you in times when you feel discontentment?



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Canada's Conversion Therapy Ban

and Its Impact on Churches

On December 8, 2021, a mere nine days after being introduced by the Liberal government of Canada, Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy), received Royal Assent and was passed into law. The bill adds sections 320.101 – 320.104 to the Criminal Code, outlawing so-called “conversion therapy.” In the previous parliament, sixty-three Members of Parliament had the courage to vote against Bill C-4’s predecessor, Bill C-6 (2020), because of its poorly drafted definition of conversion therapy.¹ (That bill died when an election was called in the summer of 2021.) But in the first week of December, after a new conversion therapy bill was tabled by the Liberal Justice Minister, not a single MP or Senator opposed two unanimous motions to skip every stage of the legislative process in the House of Commons and the Senate. To my knowledge, never has Parliament added a new crime to the Criminal Code without any deliberation or debate in either house. Many Christians, and many Canadians, have expressed deep concern about both the collapse of the important role of the official opposition,² and the harmful impact this new law will have on our country.

Bill C-4’s broad reach

Bill C-4 was not such a universally accepted piece of legislation to justify passing it into law with no debate, opposition, or discussion. Not only did so many within the church oppose it, but a broad range of organizations—feminists and medical professionals, civil liberty experts, other religious communities, members of the LGBTQ community, and many more individuals throughout Canada—voiced concern. Bill C-4’s definition of conversion therapy is just too broad.

Most people, when they think of conversion therapy, imagine outdated and discredited practices like electrical shock therapy or pharmaceutical interventions used to change a person’s sexual orientation, usually through coercive means. If that’s what Parliament wants to ban, I am supportive of that. In fact, with the help of a handful of lawyers, I drafted such a bill before Bill C-6 was even tabled and proposed it to the Justice Minister’s policy advisor. In that draft, we defined conversion therapy very carefully.

But Bill C-4’s definition of conversion therapy is overly broad and vague. It states:

¹ For commentary on the previous bill, see André Schutten, “Bill C-6: What the Criminal Ban on ‘Conversion Therapy’ Means for Churches in Canada” The Gospel Coalition Canada, (Dec. 2, 2020), online: <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/bill-c-6-what-the-criminal-ban-on-conversion-therapy-means-for-churches-in-canada/>

² See, for example, André Schutten, “Chief Concern With Conversion Therapy Law”, *Convivium Magazine*, (Dec. 8, 2021), online: <https://www.convivium.ca/articles/chief-concern-with-conversion-therapy-law>, where André Schutten, drawing on history and imagination, “interviews” former Conservative Prime Minister John Diefenbaker about Conservative Party failure to properly oppose the new legislation.



320.101 . . . conversion therapy means a practice, treatment or service designed to

- (a) change a person's sexual orientation to heterosexual;
- (b) change a person's gender identity to cisgender;
- (c) change a person's gender expression so that it conforms to the sex assigned to the person at birth;
- (d) repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour;
- (e) repress a person's non-cisgender gender identity; or
- (f) repress or reduce a person's gender expression that does not conform to the sex assigned to the person at birth.

Of the nearly 200 conversion therapy bans passed by various levels of governments around the world, none are as expansive as Bill C-4. No medical body in North America, nor the United Nations or World Health Organization, define conversion therapy as broadly as Bill C-4 does. All other definitions are rightly limited to coercive efforts to change someone's orientation (simply adding "coercive" to the beginning of the definition: "a coercive practice, treatment, or service . . ." could fix this bill), whereas C-4's definition includes a ban on simply reducing "non-heterosexual sexual behaviour" or "non-cisgender gender expression," even for consenting adults. On this point, the Justice Minister himself had publicly stated only a year ago that banning "conversion therapy" for consenting adults would be unconstitutional.

The criminal ban, based on this broad definition, outlaws three things:

1. Providing, or causing another person to undergo, conversion therapy, whether an adult or child, in Canada or elsewhere, consenting or not (section 320.102)
2. Advertising or promoting conversion therapy (section 320.103)
3. Obtaining a material benefit from conversion therapy, directly or indirectly (section 320.104).

And in criminal law, a crime does not only capture "doing the deed," but also:

- (1) attempting it,
- (2) aiding or abetting it,
- (3) counselling someone to commit the offence, or
- (4) being an accessory after the fact.

So, with a broad definition of the practice, the reach of the law is broad indeed and, on its face, (subject to future litigation which may narrow the scope), captures Christian counselling and pastoral counselling on issues of sexuality and identity and may even capture certain types of sermons or conversations, the Justice Minister's assurances to the contrary notwithstanding.

Practical steps

What does this mean for churches practically, including pastors, elders, teachers, and parents? It remains unclear precisely which activities of churches and Christians will be criminalized or which activities will be prosecuted. We will have to wait as the law is tested in the courts to have a clearer sense of what Canadian judges think of the law.

A secular lawyer interested in reducing the legal liability of their client might urge ministers to proceed with extreme caution when preaching on the seventh commandment and may recommend that elders avoid any pastoral counselling with "clients" regarding questions of sexuality and identity. But that's an insufficient response. Christian office-bearers are called to *ministry faithfulness*. Pastors and elders must preach and apply the whole gospel to the whole person, despite personal and legal risk. Likewise, parents must raise their children in the fear of the Lord, allowing his Word to shape every aspect of who they are.

Nonetheless, we can proceed wisely and prudently. It appears that counselling is the particular target of the law here, and not sermons or conversations per se. Pastors and elders would do well to ensure any pastoral conversations with members of their churches are carefully noted, and have two witnesses present (another elder, or a spouse is acceptable). These confidential records should be kept on file for the lifespan of the member. (Criminal complaints can be made many years later.) Pastoral conversations should begin with lots of listening and careful and compassionate questions. In this sense, a biblical approach to pastoral counselling falls outside the stereotypical paradigm of so-called "conversion therapy" imagined by this bill. If a person is referred to the pastor or elder for counselling, church leaders should inquire and note whether the individual is meeting of their own volition or are being urged to do so against their will. This is where the law is constitutionally vulnerable: it makes no accommodations for consenting adults and mature minors.

Churches would also do well to be upfront and clear about what the Scriptures teach about human identity and sexuality, rejecting the language and categories of our secular-humanist

culture and using biblical categories and terms in a statement on human sexuality. Many resources already exist, and local churches can build on these. Again, by adopting scriptural categories for human identity, churches will at least place themselves outside of the paradigm assumed by the conversion therapy bill.

Religious assumptions

The religious worldview behind this bill is implicit in the preamble to the bill, in which Parliament explains the purpose or motive behind the proposed law:

Whereas conversion therapy causes harm to society because, among other things, it is based on and propagates myths and stereotypes about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, including the myth that heterosexuality, cisgender gender identity, and gender expression that conforms to the sex assigned to a person at birth are to be preferred over other sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions.

Parliament uses the word “myth” to describe a value or moral judgement, that being the preference for heterosexuality over homosexuality. (This is a non-sensical use of the word “myth,” since the term usually refers to factual or historical claims and not moral or philosophical ones.) This betrays the fact that Bill C-4 is a deeply religious bill rooted in a religious commitment to who or what we are as human beings. The question is, which religion?

Robert P. George notes that “the idea that human beings are non-bodily persons inhabiting non-personal bodies” is an ancient religious and philosophical idea known as “mind-body dualism” which arises out of a religious commitment to Gnostic Liberalism.³ This is the religious presupposition that underpins Bill C-4.

The alternative view of the soul and the body being intricately connected is orthodox Christianity’s alternative to the heretical conception of the soul as a “ghost in a machine.” But this heretical idea is the dominant religious view of the major institutions of Canadian society today: the academy, the media,

the business community, the medical establishment, mainline churches, and . . . our civil government. Caesar is gnostic.⁴

This law’s impact

The major harmful effect of this law is that it will hurt Canadians with same-sex sexual attraction and those questioning their gender identity. It denies to these Canadians the broad range of choices for counselling and spiritual support that are freely available to all other Canadians. This law allows a heterosexual person to get help reducing unwanted sexual behaviour (perhaps they are struggling with a porn addiction) but criminalizes anyone offering or providing the same help to a gay or lesbian person, even a consenting adult.

During debate on this bill’s predecessor, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights heard testimony from some LGBTQ+ Canadians who expressed how counselling helped them understand their identity and reduce their non-heterosexual sexual behaviour in ways that benefited their physical and mental health. This counselling, they testified, was not only helpful but may have saved their lives. But the help they received is now criminally prohibited with the passing of Bill C-4.

This law will also hurt the church and those who want to help Canadians who struggle with their gender identity. With Bill C-4 passed into law, parents risk up to five years in jail for arranging for a counsellor to help them work through gender dysphoria issues with their child. Likewise, members of religious communities who want to address questions of sexual ethics in a way that is consistent with their religious commitments have that option barred from them.

What about the clarification clause?

The definition of conversion therapy in the bill does contain a clarification clause. It states:

For greater certainty, this definition does not include a practice, treatment or service that relates to the exploration or development of an integrated personal identity—such as a practice, treatment or service that relates to a person’s gender transition—and that is not based on an

³ For a full description of the religion known as Gnostic Liberalism, we encourage you to read Robert P. George, “Gnostic Liberalism” *First Things* (December 2016), online: <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/12/gnostic-liberalism>.

⁴ For more on this idea, see André Schutten, “Are bans on conversion therapy actually bans on religious conversion ... in drag?” *Reformed Perspective Magazine*, (July 7, 2020), online: <https://reformedperspective.ca/are-bans-on-conversion-therapy-actually-bans-on-religious-conversion-in-drag/>.

assumption that a particular sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression is to be preferred over another.

I note three things here:

1. The reference to an “integrated personal identity” is a good one. It shows openness to the reality that our identity is complex and is more than our sexual identity. I am 1. Male; 2. A husband; 3. A son; 4. A father; 5. Caucasian of Dutch heritage; 6. Canadian; 7. A Lawyer; 8. Anglophone. These are all aspects of who I am. But those aspects are all shaped and defined by my primary identity in Jesus Christ. Here we run into trouble, because the clause allows for the exploration of your identity only where “it is not based on an assumption to a particular sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression is to be preferred over another.” What does that mean? And whose assumption is it even referring to, the client’s or the counsellor’s or both? It’s not very clear and will no doubt be the subject of litigation.
2. Nevertheless, a defence lawyer could make hay of this clarification clause and we will have to see what happens in future court cases.
3. Pastoral counselling is not coercive. It begins with lots of questions, lots of listening. In that sense, pastoral counselling done well could avoid criminal sanction for the most part. However, because enforcement of this bill will largely be complaint driven, former members of churches could make complaints later in life about the counselling they received from leaders in the church which could trigger criminal investigation. Even if not found guilty in the end, the process is, in many ways, the punishment.

Moving forward


Politicians, especially those who want to take a biblical stand, have a special, albeit challenging, task. We must continue to hold them up in prayer regularly so that with God’s help they will be able to carry out their office with conviction and integrity and uphold biblical principles. If you know a Christian politician,

encourage them but also hold them to account, with gentleness and conviction. Together we can move forward from here with a common goal of working for the good of our fellow Canadians.

I remain deeply troubled by the impact this law will have on our nation. But, in *Love Thy Body*, Nancy Pearcey writes,

As we work through controversial moral issues, it is crucial to bear in mind the main goal. It is not, first of all, to persuade people to change their behavior. It is to tear down barriers to becoming Christian. No matter who we are addressing, or what moral issue the person is struggling with, their first need is to hear the gospel and experience the love of God.

With the passage of Bill C-4, the church is faced with an obstacle to sharing the gospel, especially as it applies to issues of gender and sexuality. But we must continue to remember that God is always in control of all things. We know that Christ will come again, and every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. We must continually point ourselves to him and live a life of love for those who are harmed by laws like Bill C-4 and who need to hear the gospel and experience the love of God.

We must not fear the future but move forward in faith. As Christian philosopher James K. A. Smith states, “Our most revolutionary political act is to hope. . . . To be a Christian is to be a person who engages in politics but does so *without fear*. . . . You have already heard good news that brings great joy. The King is alive and seated on his throne, and he reigns. And not only that: he is also interceding for us at the right hand of his Father. ‘Be not afraid.’” 



André Schutten

Director of Law & Public Policy and General Legal Counsel with the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) Canada since 2011. He acknowledges the help of Daniel Zekveld, policy analyst with ARPA Canada, in drafting this article.

Mandatory Vaccinations and the Church

Part 2: The Nature of the Church

Introduction

In the previous article, we asserted that “the church cannot implement [vaccine passports]. 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.” We developed this assertion in light of the Lordship of Christ and his criteria for entry into the church. We concluded by asking: “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 answer to these questions, we can immediately make clear that the church is not a building. We see in the New Testament that the church met outdoors and in private homes. The church building is simply where the church normally gathers today. It is not the building that is important, but rather the gathering itself. The church gathers most noticeably for worship services: for the preaching, singing, praying, baptizing, and partaking in the Lord’s Supper together. The church also gathers in a more limited and informal way for Bible studies, classes, potlucks, crafts, and other activities. Will the church, assembled in whole or in part, refuse entry to the unvaccinated?

As we consider the nature of the church, it becomes clear that doing so would be a profound failure to understanding what the church is. It would be contrary to the gospel to say that an unvaccinated person cannot physically come to the gathering, the worship, and the communion of the body of Christ. It would also be contrary to the gospel to segregate members into different groups based on vaccination status.

An actual community

In the first place, the church is the actual physical community of the justified. In the Belgic Confession we confess that the church is “the assembly of the redeemed” (Art 27). We go on to confess we are “obliged to join it and unite with it” (Art 28). Further, we see that the church is an assembly that administers the sacraments and practices church discipline (Art 29). The church is an actual physical community. It is true that there is a spiritual foundation to the church, but this spiritual foundation is manifested in the real world in local churches. We see these churches all throughout the New Testament and throughout church history.

Scripturally, to come to Christ is to also come to the church. This is a God-awakened impulse that we cannot quench or discourage. It is natural and essential to the Christian life. Of course, local churches are imperfect, full of imperfect people, but they are called to function as Christ’s body, with each individual member taking a role. To come to Christ is to come to his church. To come to his church is to come to an actual community of fellow believers.

An emblem of the gospel

In the second place, the church is a picture and an emblem of the gospel. We might even say that the church is the gospel made visible. Christ’s glory is displayed in the unity of the church, in the harmony of diverse people knit together in truth and love. The apostle Paul stresses this time and again:

1 Corinthians 12:12-13: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many,

are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”

Ephesians 2:14-16: “For he [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.”

Ephesians 4:4-6: “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

Colossians 3:11: “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.”

At the time of Paul, there were serious and significant differences between different classes and ethnic groups. It was absolutely radical for Paul to equate (for example) a Torah-keeping Jewish merchant, a Barbarian slave, and an upper-class Roman citizen. And to get them in the same building around the same table was even more radical. But this is the message of the gospel: we are all equally sinners, equally saved, equally saints—and equally welcomed into the family of God. Human criteria are thrown out the window. And this needs to be *seen* in the church. That is why the apostle Paul was so passionate about not putting up man-made walls. The church is the gospel made visible.

A fountain of the gospel

In the third place, the church is a fountain of the gospel. The preaching of the gospel goes out from the church. The songs of the gospel resound in the church. The prayers of the gospel go up from the church. The love of the gospel is on display in the church. Can the church keep sinners away from this fountain? Can we refuse entry based on any distinctions made by men? “Sorry, you can’t come in—you’re a Scythian and Scythians are notoriously rude and uncivilized.” “Sorry, you can’t come in—you’re a black person and the law says so.” “Sorry, you can’t come in—you’re not able to provide proof of vaccination.” We cannot do this. We cannot refuse entry to anyone who is moved by God to join our services or activities, whether a member or a guest.

The apostle Paul writes about the power of the gathered church: “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of

his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you” (1 Cor 14:24-25).

In Revelation 22:17, we read of the centrality of the church in the gospel call: “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.” Notice that the gospel call to the thirsty comes not only from the Spirit, but also from the Bride, that is, the church. Along with the Spirit, the church calls out, “Come! Let the one who is thirsty, come! Let all who labor and are heavy laden, come, and Christ will give you rest.” And are not the unvaccinated among those who labour and are heavy laden?

The church is a fountain of the everlasting gospel, and we cannot prevent people from drinking from it.

The family of God

In the fourth place, the church is the “mother,” or nurturer, of believers. The idea of a solo-Christian is foreign to the Bible. Believers are called to gather, worship, hear the Word, partake of the Lord’s Supper, be baptized and bring children for baptism, encourage one another, and use their gifts in various ways. In the church, we experience the communion of the Holy Spirit and we draw strength from being together and sharing our challenges and joys.

Many theologians and ministers have referred to the church as the “workshop of the Holy Spirit.” Without the fire of the church, it is easy for the individual embers, that is, members, to grow cold and die. In the letter to the Hebrews, the inspired author instructs the church: “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb 10:24-25).

The church is a family, formed by God. That is why we speak of being “brothers and sisters in Christ.” Since we are family, we cannot exclude any of our siblings based on vaccination status.

Looking ahead to Part 3

In the next article, we’ll see what the Bible has to say about one more important matter—the Christian conscience. 🗨️



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Living

With the Threat of Violence

(Part 2)

Too many murders

In my work I have the privilege of visiting members of Christ's church in their homes. The purpose of these visits is to comfort, encourage, and exhort God's people with the gospel, and to pastor the flock of God in love. Before moving to South America, I had never counselled anyone who was dealing with the consequences of a murder. After moving to South America, it became much more common. One weekend, while serving members of Christ's body in a large city that is known both for its violence and for the disparity between the wealthy and poor, I found myself pastoring three different households which were dealing with the consequences of unconnected murders that had taken place in the last few days.

The first pastoral visit we made took us to an upscale neighbourhood and a well-furnished middle-class apartment. As a bank security guard (who was suspected of foul play due to a bank robbery that took place while he was on duty), this visitor to the Reformed church had been trained to shoot and kill "bad guys." Even so, when we visited him, he asked for spiritual guidance to help him process the news that the pastor of his former church had just murdered a man who had committed adultery with the pastor's wife. The man we were visiting explained that although he could recognize that it was the pastor's "duty" as a husband to perform this task, seeing a pastor do it made him wonder if it really was pleasing to God. Should he support his old friend in what he had done, or exhort him to turn himself in to the police?

The only solution is the gospel of Jesus Christ

Heartbreaking dilemmas

The second pastoral visit took place in the home of a very poor sister in the congregation. She loved the LORD but was finding it difficult to parent her adult children, who were struggling with severe drug addictions. During the visit, she asked a similar question to the one that our security guard friend had asked: "Pastor, is it right to give shelter to a son who just beat an old man to death with a brick in order to steal his propane tank so that he could get another hit?" Months later I would be back in this same house, reading the Bible and praying with this poor mother, to comfort her after the shock of having a gang invade her house and rip it full of bullets in an attempt to kill her other son. That's when she told me that the gangsters were planning to come back that night at 9:30 to finish the job. My heart started to race when I saw that it was 9:30 p.m. My back was to the door. It was hard not to get distracted by every car that drove slowly by the front of the house. I comforted myself with the thought that there was really no better way to pass through the door of death than to do it while reading Psalm 23 to comfort a distraught mother. "The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want." By God's grace, our visit ended peacefully and this dear sister in Christ was in church the next morning. The men who threatened to kill her son had not returned.

The third pastoral visit, after the morning worship service, was in the wealthier part of a poor neighbourhood. A young mother had converted to Christianity and her husband was willing to tolerate her faith, as long as she didn't turn the children against him and didn't put him to shame. They had a good business together and were doing well, but there was definitely some tension in their relationship because she wanted to serve the LORD. During our visit, she told us that the latest incident arose when she felt uncomfortable being at home alone with the young children when the gardener was there. The husband got up in hot indignation, calling her a self-righteous holy roller, who judged everybody in an unfair way: "He killed one guy, and now you're too good for him?" I admit, I was taken aback and felt a deep sympathy for the wife and mother in this home.

Pursuing the matter a little, I learned that the gardener had killed someone just two days before! Even hearing that the dead man deserved it didn't make it any easier for me to understand, much less agree with her husband.

Impunity or opportunity?

I knew several faithful, serious, concerned, and hard-working police officers, including some in the city we were visiting. When I asked them about the disturbing number of homicides in their country, they explained that it is a very difficult problem to solve. Like any other country, many people are killed because they are involved in organized crime and gang wars. However, the problem is worse in many South American countries (and other countries in the world) because many police services, especially on the municipal level, do not have the resources to keep up with the demand. Low wages, high danger, and relatively short prison sentences (due to very full prisons), give many police officers very little motivation to investigate, much less to intervene, in dangerous situations. Many police officers have concluded that it is more profitable for them to use their weapons to intimidate an unarmed populace in order to supplement their wages by "accepting" bribes at conveniently located check points (to the great chagrin and danger of the Christian police officers who do not participate).

As a result, most murders are unsolved, or at least unpunished, and many citizens feel that it is their duty to step in where the system has failed in order to obtain justice for their loved ones. Unfortunately, impunity can look like opportunity, and if it is relatively "safe" to kill others, more and more "deserving" people will have their lives cut short. Whether a person "deserves" to be attacked or even murdered for being unwise enough to be in a certain area at a certain time, or for being wealthier, or for having something that another person wants, the possibility of danger always seems to be present. When the opportunity to kill with impunity is found in the context of a system where the value of human life is determined based on one's race, socio-economic class, and education ("white



privilege" here is real!), the problem of violence only gets worse. Without entering into the complexities of the situation, it is enough to say that there is a close connection between how much human life is valued, the punishment one can expect for murder, and the number of homicides you can expect.

Murderous hearts

Giving thought to these explanatory comments, it occurred to me that the higher number of homicides in one country over another had nothing to do with the citizens and everything to do with the opportunity. Perhaps we can think of it this way. If everyone in Canada (where I now live) could kill anyone they wanted without being punished, we know without a doubt that the number of homicides would increase drastically!

Already it has become socially acceptable (and even legal) to eliminate the "bothersome" lives of all those vulnerable babies and nearly dying seniors whose lives are judged to be of lesser value than the lives of those whom Canadian citizens are not permitted to eliminate. Can you imagine if unregenerate people had the freedom (and sometimes even the duty) to eliminate people who made them angry? You can be sure that it would

greatly increase the number of homicides, even in our nice little quiet country so focused on apology.

You can be sure because our human nature is sinful, and envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge in our hearts is something that even redeemed and renewed Christians must struggle against. The good news is that although our holy God does not leave the sins of Christians who cut people out of their lives unpunished, God has punished his Son in the place of every sinner; yes, even murderers who confess their sins, repent, and believe in him.

Every goodbye your last

The only solution to discrimination, greed, addiction, selfishness, and violence is the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's why men and women, sometimes with children along, go to countries where the violence in the heart of every person is more openly manifest, and why we must continue to be fervent in our prayers. Perhaps after reading through this article your thoughts about those in dangerous places will not only help you to appreciate any safety that you enjoy, but also help you see that envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge in our hearts are very dangerous, that a "murder-meter" tuned to God's commandments and connected to our own thoughts would be kept busy, and that it is spiritually healthy to live each day on earth as if it may be your last.

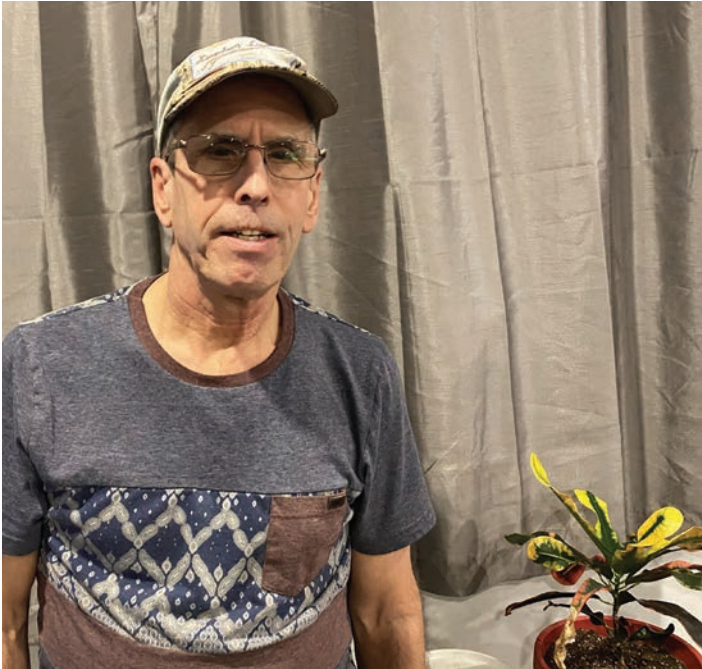
While we lived in South America, we lived with the understanding that any good-bye might be our last here on the earth. It was a good reminder that nothing is more important than our faith in God and that Jesus Christ is truly our only comfort in life and in death. In reality, all of our lives are fragile, and we don't know when the Lord will take us home no matter what country we live in. May we walk in peace with God and our neighbour every day of our lives. . . ☺



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RAY OF SUNSHINE

Rachel Vis



Jim Vanderheiden

This month I am introducing Jim Vanderheiden, who is celebrating his birthday in March.

Hello from Beacon Home,

I am Jim Vanderheiden and I'll be sixty-three this March! I have lived at Beacon Home since February 2005. I have my own room, which I have set up nicely with all my music stuff.

I also spend time playing my guitar, accordion, and harmonicas, which I really enjoy. I also love to sing, which we do every night with devotions.

Everyone at the Beacon also attends Friendship on Tuesday nights, which we all really enjoy!

I am happy to be back at Feenstra Flowers, working five days a week.

I really look forward to the cards we all get from the Ray of Sunshine, so keep it up!! Thanks to you all.

April birthdays

Happy birthday to the three of you celebrating birthday in March!
We wish you the Lord's blessing in the year ahead.

2 Derek Kok will be **52**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, Ontario N1A 1T8

23 Arlene DeWit will be **61**
#4 6560 Vedder Road
Chilliwack, British Columbia
V2R0Y6

29 Bryce Berends will be **47**
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line, RR #3
Fergus, Ontario N1M 2W4

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.

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CLARION KIDS

AMANDA DEBOER

LORD'S DAY 4

Would you say that your parents are kind? Maybe they let you stay up late to finish reading your book. Would you say that your parents are also fair? Maybe you were arguing with your brother or sister while playing soccer. Your parents made sure to listen to both of you and then decide if the goal counted or not. Well, "kind" and "fair" are words we can use for God too. We call God's kindness his *mercy*. And usually, when we say that God is fair, we say God is *just*. God is merciful and just at the very same time. God is just because our sins must be punished. And they were punished. The Lord Jesus was punished for us. And God shows us his mercy by forgiving our sins.

Fill in the blanks of following passages:

Exodus 34:6a

"The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God _____ and _____..."

Hebrews 10:30b

"The _____ will judge his _____."

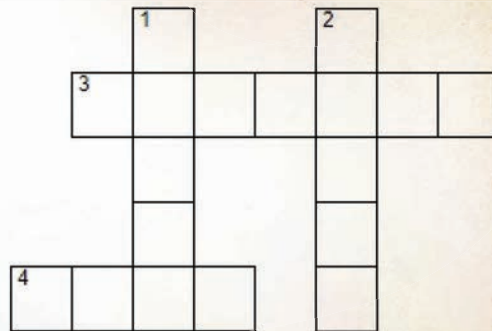
Crossword Puzzle:

Down:

1. He was punished for our sins
2. Another word for kind

Across:

3. How God created man
4. Another word for fair



PRESS RELEASE

Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

held on January 13, 2022

Opening and roll call

The chairman of the Board, Rev. J. Louwse, led in opening devotions. The meeting was held via Zoom. All governors were present, except for one who was absent with notice and another who was late on account of his internet being down. Dr. J. Van Vliet was present as Principal and administrative assistant L. Kuizenga was present to take the minutes of the meeting.

Memorabilia

Information was shared about the personal circumstances of emeriti professors, as well as widows and families of professors.

Minutes and agenda

The minutes of the regular meeting held on September 9, 2021, as well as follow up meetings on September 28, 2021 and October 21, 2021 were approved. The agenda for the meeting was established. Outstanding matters on the action log were reviewed.

Decisions, reports, agenda items

1. A letter from the Deputies for Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia was discussed. Their synod gave them a mandate to explore the feasibility of an Australian CRTS affiliate. The Board appointed the Principal and a board member from the Academic Committee and from the Finance and Property Committee to determine what the Australian churches are seeking and to gather pertinent

information from knowledgeable sources to determine the feasibility of their request.

2. The Board reviewed the one-page Strategic Plan updated in September 2021 and made a few minor additions to it.
3. A final report was received from a committee which examined the possibilities of Expanding the Pastoral Training Program (PTP). Since the appointment of this committee, General Synod 2019 approved a proposal allowing students to obtain consent to speak an edifying word after second year. The COVID-19 public health restrictions also forced the speedy development of distance education. The long-term impacts of receiving preaching consent after the second year of study on student workload, wellness, and preparation for the ministry is not yet known. The effectiveness of the PTP for distance students as compared to on-campus students is also not yet known. One of the outcomes of a recent Association of Theological Schools (ATS) visit is that CRTS will need to do a comprehensive review of the Master of Divinity Program. The Board agreed with the recommendation that there should not be any significant expansion of the PTP at this time, and that the report of this committee be forwarded to the Master of Divinity review committee, so that a modest expansion of the PTP could be considered holistically. This committee also reported on a significant increase in Dr. A. de Visser's

- workload with regards to the PTP, especially considering the large increase in student numbers in recent years. The Board needs to address this issue, and it is added to the Board Action Log.
4. An update was received from Dr. T. Van Raalte concerning his health circumstances and a report was received from the Executive Committee recommending his teaching load for second semester. The Board accepted this recommendation.
 5. The Academic Committee passed on the minutes of their past meeting. They were received for information.
 6. Revs. J. Louwse and M. H. Van Luik reported on lecture visits to CRTS on November 23-24, 2021, as well as on visits with professors. Due to Dr. Van Raalte's health circumstances the Board had appointed a Teaching Assistant to help with faculty workload. Various professors reported on how beneficial this was for them to deal with workload issues. This teaching assistant will continue to provide support in the second semester. The Academic Committee proposed, and the Board agreed to establish a permanent Teaching Assistant position for fifteen to twenty hours per week to assist the professors with workload. This will begin in September 2022 and be reviewed after the 2022-23 academic year.
 7. The Finance and Property Committee provided minutes of the recent meetings they held. A short update was given with respect to renovation plans. The Board expresses its great appreciation to the churches for the generous response to the fundraising drive for maintenance and renovations to the buildings. The Finance and Property Committee reported on difficulties finding enough men to nominate to General Synod for positions on the F&P Committee (they need one further suggestion as an alternate). Part of this is due to the fact that men appointed to the Board of CRTS are normally expected to serve for nine years (three Synod appointments of three years each).
 8. The Search Committee, appointed to find a replacement for Dr. A. de Visser due to his upcoming retirement, reported on their work. The Board agrees with the work done by this committee. A final confidential

- report to General Synod 2022 needs to be drafted.
9. The final General CRTS Report has been submitted to Synod. The Board agreed to send a supplementary report to General Synod concerning support for needy students from the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa. In the past various general synods have encouraged CRTS to support the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa in the training of their seminary students but have never specified how this would be supported financially. In the coming years, CRTS can expect up to six students from South Africa, and the Foreign Student Bursary Fund does not have the finances to provide for these student's living expenses while in Hamilton. The supplementary report to Synod gives some suggestions about how this support could be provided.
 10. The Governance Committee made proposals to change the CRTS Handbook to reflect changes with respect to Memorandums of Understanding, Book Allowance, the Foreign Student Bursary Fund, the task of the Principal, Conference Attendance and Funding, Support for Teaching and Administrative Skills, and Admission Standards. These proposals were adopted.
 11. Dr. J. Van Vliet presented his Principal's report, and this was received with thankfulness. He also provided an oral report of the COVID-19 Committee, stressing the importance of technology in allowing CRTS to function during times when in-person attendance is not possible for some or all the professors or students.

Press release and closing

The completion of the press release was delegated to the vice-chairman in consultation with the Executive and the Principal. Rev. C. VanderVelde closed the meeting with prayer.

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary,
Rev. J. Poppe (Vice-chairman/Corresponding Clerk)



