

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

71 | 08

APR 15, 22

# Clarion

*(Re)building the Church of God*

*The Picture in Putin's Head*

*Welcome to Pastor Greg Davidson*



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

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

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

## What's Inside

Welcome to Issue #8! Every three years our federation of churches holds a general synod and the next one is scheduled for May 2022, DV. Thus, it is timely that Dr. James Visscher provides for us an overview of the major agenda items. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has captured the world's attention since it began in February, but it's been hard to find a Christian assessment of what's happening. We are pleased to present an initial analysis from Reformed theologian Dr. Erik van Alten as summarized in the article "The Picture in Putin's Head." We anticipate more analysis from his pen in the coming months.

In *Discipling the Nations*, Rev. Jon Chase provides us with an update on the mission work in Brazil—the LORD is very busy there! The need for missionaries and pastors continues to be strong throughout the world including in our own federation, and so it is a joy to read about the addition to our ranks of Dr. Greg Davidson, the new co-pastor of Blessings Christian Church. Rev. Arend Witten, who by the time you read this will have left

our fair land to take up a call in the Land Down Under, leaves us with a fine article encouraging all of us to be about the work of building up the church in the aftermath of a stressful and sometimes divisive period. Farewell, brother, and God bless your labours in Baldivis!

Readers are finding their voice too by way of writing letters to the editor, of which we have two for your reflection this time. Letters in response to letters are also welcome. Amanda DeBoer walks the kids through a lesson about faith (Lord's Day 7) in *Clarion Kids*, while in *Ray of Sunshine* Rachel Vis acquaints us with our brother, the quick-witted and bird-loving Bernie deVos! There's a new church history book out aimed at young people and Keith Sikkema kindly reviews that—be sure to check that out! Rev. Calvin Vanderlinde provides an edifying meditation on meekness. Concluding this issue are two press releases of two recent classes. Lots of food for thought in these pages—may you enjoy digesting this bi-monthly meal!

Peter Holtvlüwer

- 211 EDITORIAL: Rebaptism
- 212 TREASURES, NEW & OLD
- 213 (Re)building the Church of God
- 215 Looking Ahead to Synod 2022

- 218 The Picture in Putin's Head
- 222 DISCIPLING THE NATIONS
- 225 Welcome to Pastor Greg Davidson
- 227 RAY OF SUNSHINE
- 228 CLARION KIDS

- 229 BOOK REVIEW
- 230 LETTER TO THE EDITOR (Harthoorn), (Jager)
- 231 PRESS RELEASE (Classis AB, Mar 8) (Classis Niagara, Mar 9)

### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: Peter Holtvlüwer  
 Managing Editor: Laura Veenendaal  
 Contributing Editors: Eric Kampen, Jason Van Vliet, Matthew VanLuik, Jim Witteveen

### GENERAL INQUIRIES

CLARION 8 Inverness Crescent,  
 St. Albert AB T8N 5J5  
 Email: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

### ADMINISTRATIVE CONTACT

CLARION Premier Printing Ltd.  
 One Beghin Avenue  
 Winnipeg, MB Canada R2J 3X5  
 Phone: 204-663-9000

WEBSITE clarionmagazine.ca

### 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.

### SUBMIT AN ARTICLE

Email: submissions@clarionmagazine.ca  
 Only articles which agree with Clarion's guidelines will be considered for publication. See clarionmagazine.ca for these guidelines.

### 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.

### RETURN UNDELIVERABLE

CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:  
 One Beghin Avenue,  
 Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

### CANCELLATION AGREEMENT

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

### ADVERTISEMENTS

clarionmagazine.ca/advertisements

2022 RATES  
 Full page \$434 | ½ \$219 | ¼ \$109 | ⅛ \$54  
 We reserve the right to refuse ads.

### PUBLISHED BIWEEKLY

by Premier Printing Ltd. Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd. All rights reserved.

No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.



Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438



## EDITORIAL

# Rebaptism: Questioning God's Integrity

One Sunday a couple attended our worship service and expressed their frustration that other churches they had visited expected them to be rebaptized. Today we have members who leave the church to get rebaptized in such churches. Many do so because they no longer consider their baptism to be legitimate, for they argue that baptism must always be accompanied by faith. Since children cannot believe, therefore their baptism cannot be valid.

The meaning of baptism has been changed from God's assurance that his promises are trustworthy to an assurance of one's own faith. Baptism is not considered God's sign to us, but our sign to God that we believe. But how can a sign assure us of our faith? Every doubt of faith that creeps into our mind instantly calls into question the legitimacy of our baptism. The LORD understood our doubts and weaknesses and therefore he gave us a sign to assure us: not that our faith is real, but that his promise is trustworthy.

To answer the question of rebaptism, we first need to ask whether it is a sign God gives to us or a sign we give to God? If baptism is a sign we give to God, it leaves open the need for rebaptism if one concludes it was not given in faith. On the other hand, if the sign is given to us by God, then by our rebaptism we call into question whether the sign God gave us is real. When God's sign is called into question, it undermines the assurance God gives about his promise.

## Signs and the promise

In Scripture, signs are always connected to promises God makes. Paul reminds the believers in Ephesus (Eph 2:12) that before they came to faith, they "were separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the *covenants of the promise*, without hope and without God in the world." These Gentiles were excluded from the covenants (plural) God had made with Israel and therefore they were excluded from God's promise (singular). God made many covenants, but the promise was the same in each covenant. In 2 Corinthians 1:20 he writes, "For no matter how many *promises* God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ." Here Paul speaks about the promises in the plural, referring to the many covenants, and yet all these promises find their "yes" in Christ.

In all God's covenants, in both Old and New, the Lord gives the promise (singular) of the Christ. The entire Bible is a unified message: God is working for our salvation in Jesus Christ. To


Adam and Eve God promised a seed who will save his people, to Abraham a son through whom he would bless the nations of the earth, to David a son who would sit on his throne forever. All these promises are now fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Lord often gave signs with these promises to assure his people he would keep them. The signs act as an oath from God, and he now works in the same way with his New Testament believers.

## Baptism and the promise

Baptism is a sign from God that his promise from long ago has now been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Baptism is God's sign today that his promise in Christ is trustworthy and no one should doubt that he will do what he has promised. That is the point Peter made at Pentecost, saying, "Repent and be baptized, everyone one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38-39). Peter connects baptism to the promise that is given in Christ Jesus. Therefore he continues, "The promise is for you and your children."

The promise of the gospel has never changed from the beginning, and it remains forever. Just as the signs in the Old Testament were never signs of a person's faith, so baptism cannot be a sign of one's faith. It is a sign of God's promise in Christ Jesus. God confirms to believers and their children in both covenants that his promise of salvation in Christ Jesus is trustworthy. Therefore, rebaptism is a serious offense against God; it brings into question God's integrity, for God is always faithful to his promise. Baptism should never be repeated—one ought to be baptized only once.

## No guarantee of our faith

It should be clear that none of God's signs, including baptism, can ever guarantee our faith. That would lead to a false sense of security. God's sign is intended to encourage us to put our faith and trust in his promise. God strengthens our faith by reminding us that his promise, once given, is absolutely trustworthy. 



**Matthew Van Luik** *Minister*  
Canadian Reformed Church  
Brampton, Ontario  
[mvanluik@rogers.com](mailto:mvanluik@rogers.com)

# Meekness Not Mistaken

*“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (MATTHEW 5:5)*

**T**he beatitudes of Christ are as remarkable as they are counter-intuitive and countercultural. They are incomprehensible to natural ways of thinking. After all, who would ever think that global conquest and possession of the world belong not to the most powerful and aggressive but to the meek?

Asked and answered: *Christ* does. *He* gave us the beatitudes. Evidently meekness is a big deal.

What, then, is it? Rightly understood, meekness is not weakness or timidity. It does not necessarily describe someone who is mild-mannered and soft-spoken. It certainly does not refer to someone who is spineless or easily pushed over. The word “meek” could be translated as “humble” or “gentle.” Fundamentally, the concept is that of strength under control for good. The word carries the sense of a wild horse tamed—its strength is harnessed for good. It could also apply to a strong wind harnessed to carry a ship through the use of its sail. Or it could speak of mighty waters controlled by a system of dams, dykes, and pump-stations such as ordinarily prevents flooding in the Sumas Prairie flatlands. Furthermore, meekness is not a natural disposition or a personality type. It is a supernatural and Spirit-generated trait of citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Check Galatians and you will find gentleness among the fruit of the Spirit.

So how does meekness function? Consider times of disagreement and conflict. We live in a period of time where people are disagreeing almost everywhere and over everything. In these kinds of scenarios, many respond with either flight or fight. Retreat in fear or become defensive and assertive. But meekness does not mean you roll over like a wet noodle or that you blast back at other people. We have probably all encountered silly and useless arguments where nobody wins—where even the one who prevails gains nothing. In 2 Timothy 2:23-25 Paul said, “Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.” Instead, he urges Timothy to correct his opponents “with gentleness” so that “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.”

And meekness is not only displayed in how one offers correction, but also in how correction is received. When corrected, a meek person is teachable and not unreachable. They refuse to become defensive, for they realize their flaws and their need to learn. The meek are careful with their opinions, and will listen to and weigh the perspectives of others as they develop their own convictions. They do this because they know that all have many miles still to travel in their own sanctification.

In addition, the meek know how to respond when afflicted or when others around them make mistakes or when circumstances deteriorate in their lives. They will act patiently, trust in the LORD’s provision, seek to restore and encourage, and resist the temptation to respond in an unrighteous way.

Why? Because they are freed from having always to be right or first or get even or be perfect. The meek understand that their security is found in Christ. Praise God for that! Therein they have a settled security that cannot be shaken by any kinds of circumstances that come their way. They need only to humble themselves before God, knowing that he will exalt them at the proper time and give them what he has promised, without having to grasp it for themselves. 🍷

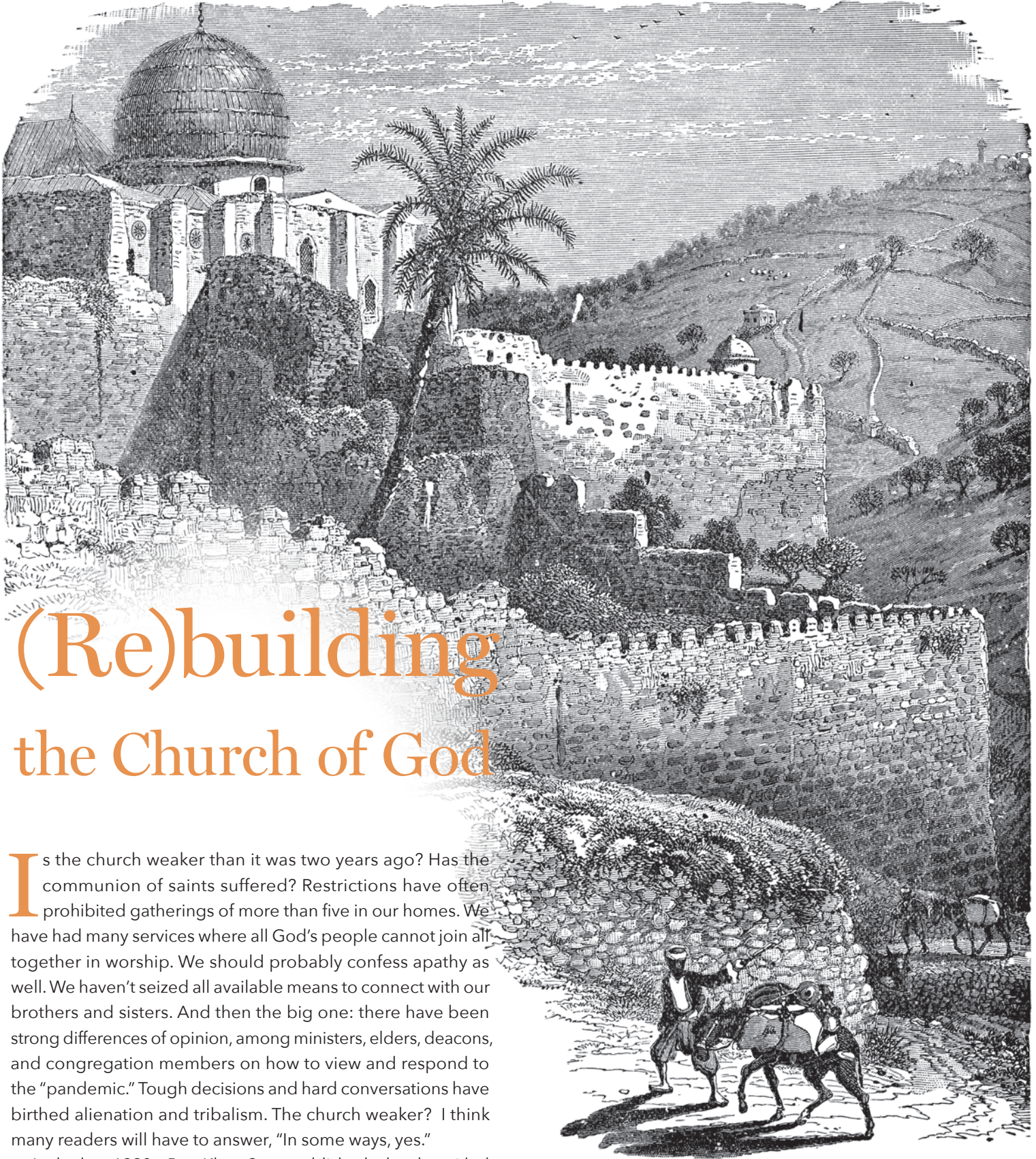
## For Further Study

1. What happens when weakness is confused with meekness?
2. Two people in the Bible are notably singled out as meek—Moses (Numbers 12) and Jesus Christ (Matthew 11). How did they exhibit “strength under control for good”?
3. What is the significance of the word “inherit” in the promise of this beatitude? How does this echo and fulfill Psalm 37?



**Calvin Vanderlinde** Minister  
 American Reformed Church  
 Nooksack Valley, WA  
[calvinvanderlinde@gmail.com](mailto:calvinvanderlinde@gmail.com)





# (Re)building the Church of God

Is the church weaker than it was two years ago? Has the communion of saints suffered? Restrictions have often prohibited gatherings of more than five in our homes. We have had many services where all God's people cannot join all together in worship. We should probably confess apathy as well. We haven't seized all available means to connect with our brothers and sisters. And then the big one: there have been strong differences of opinion, among ministers, elders, deacons, and congregation members on how to view and respond to the "pandemic." Tough decisions and hard conversations have birthed alienation and tribalism. The church weaker? I think many readers will have to answer, "In some ways, yes."

In the late 1990s, Rev. Klaas Stam published a book entitled, *Building the Church of God*. It was a collection of sermons on the book of Nehemiah, and the mission Nehemiah had to rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem. As the title suggests, Rev. Stam understood that in the progress of redemptive history, the New



Testament church is Jerusalem today. Christ is head of his church, and he is building his church through his people. There is a lot in the book of Nehemiah that speaks to our moment. By this article, I'd like to share some of the "building blocks" we find in the first two chapters of Nehemiah for building our own churches today.

## Sad love

When Nehemiah hears in Susa that the walls of Jerusalem are broken down and burned with fire, he is deeply grieved. For "many days" (1:4) he mourns and prays. In Nehemiah beats a heart like our Saviour's. Jesus loves his bride so much that he bought her with his blood, and wept at her stubbornness (Luke 19:41). Today too, those who love Christ must love his church (1 John 3:17). To see the elderly saints isolated and lonely is grievous. To watch Bible study and fellowship group activity stagnate is disheartening. To see once-warm friendships cool deeply saddens a Christian. Sad love is an appropriate response to pandemic fall-out.

## Repentant prayer

Nehemiah includes a lengthy prayer in chapter 1. He cries out to God to fulfil his covenant promises to his people. But what arrests the reader is Nehemiah's repentance. There is no self-pity ("I deserve better!"). No blaming others ("Can you believe those people?"). Nehemiah acknowledges his own contribution to the situation. "Both my father's house and I have sinned" (Neh 1:6). He is humble. Writes Stam, "Only people who humble themselves in this kind of prayer are useful to God. Others are a hindrance to Him." By prayer, we confess our own sin that has weakened the church and acknowledge our complete dependence on God.

## Ora et Labora

And yet, we must also work. Nehemiah risks his neck petitioning Artaxerxes the king and makes the trek to Jerusalem. He sacrifices comfort and privilege to serve. Now that reminds us of Someone (Phil 2) and thus also motivates us. What can you do to rebuild the church? Invite for lunch. Go for coffee. Maybe throw a party? Fellowship has been weakened. Fellowship must be strengthened. Certainly, think again of care groups and study societies. Remember those intentional times of discussion about the Scriptures and our faith. These build up and promote understanding among us as Christ's church.

## Careful understanding

When Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, he is not the proverbial bull in a china shop. The gates had been burned for some 140 years by now. In a clandestine reconnaissance mission recorded in chapter 2, he examines the walls of Jerusalem. Understanding comes before speaking and acting. How sparsely this is seen in Canadian public discourse. The highest levels of government have stooped to petty name-calling. May it not be so among us. Building the church starts with understanding the needs of Christ's church.

Being together, asking questions, and not assuming motives engenders careful understanding. We need to understand to rebuild relationships. The Chief Shepherd knows his sheep (John 10:14), those who are his under-shepherds must too. Evening reconnaissance meetings (home visits), conducted with humility and patience, are needed to understand the hurts, struggles, temptations, and weaknesses in the church for rebuilding to happen.

## Realistic hoping

It is easy to identify weaknesses, sin, and brokenness in the church. But to give hope . . . that is the work of God. When Nehemiah understands the problem in Jerusalem, he immediately tells them also about the good hand of God upon him. God had given all that was needed. "Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision." In Jesus Christ, surely the church today is also equipped with all we need for life and godliness. We have his forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and his Word to guide us. Realistically, there is nothing that we are lacking!

## Get started

Is your church weaker than it was two years ago? Are there broken relationships? Have the fault lines of your heart been exposed? Why not read through the book of Nehemiah? Maybe dust off your copy of K. Stam's *Building the Church of God*. This is not the first time Christ's church has needed rebuilding, and the Head of the church is pleased to use us. "Come, let us build." 🏗️



**Arend Witten** Minister  
Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church  
London, Ontario  
[arendwitten@gmail.com](mailto:arendwitten@gmail.com)

# Looking Ahead to Synod 2022

If all goes according to plan, the next general synod of the Canadian (American) Reformed Churches will meet in Guelph, Ontario, on May 10, 2022. The convening church for this synod is the Emmanuel church. As with previous synods, no end date is set, but the speculation is that it will last around two weeks.

With regard to the make-up of the synod, there will be six ministers and six elders coming from the east and an equal number from the west, for a total of twenty-four members. (From Regional Synod East: Ministers Eric Kampen, Jeff Temple, Clarence VanderVelde, John VanWoudenberg, Rodney Vermeulen, and Dick Wynia; Elders George Bartels, Peter Engbers, Cornell Feenstra, James Jonker, Carl Oosterhoff, and Art Witten; from Regional Synod West: Ministers Karlo Janssen, John Ludwig, James Slaa, Carl Van Dam, Doug Vandeburgt, and Julius VanSpronsen; Elders Chris DeBoer, Kent Dykstra, Lyndon Kok, Harry Moes, Lawrence Toet, and Bert Vane.) Unlike Presbyterian churches and some Reformed churches (such as the URCNA) who send delegates from each local church, ours is a representative assembly. This means that so many

represent the churches in Regional Synod East and so many those in Regional Synod West. With the number of churches continuing to increase, there is no doubt that these limits will get another look in due time and may well be raised in the future from twenty-four to thirty-two.

In the meantime, there will be a lot of work for the twenty-four members who will be assigned to various advisory committees. Included in the work to be done are matters relating to the Seminary (CRTS), relations with other churches, standing committee reports (Bible Translation, *Book of Praise*, Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad, Churches in North America, Archives, Pastoral Training, Needy Students, Website), various overtures from regional synods, and appeals from churches and members. In short, there will be hundreds of pages to plow through and an endless amount of information to process.

## **The Seminary (CRTS)**

Singling out a few matters for special mention, we begin with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (also known as CRTS). As always, Synod will need to wade through a lot

of reports and paperwork. The Board of Governors is divided into the Academic Committee and the Finance and Property Committee. The former, as its name suggests, pays special attention to all matters relating to professors and staff, curriculum, student affairs, and ATS (the accrediting body). The latter oversees matters relating to salaries, pensions and benefits, as well as the physical plant. In connection with the building, you may have read that a recent fundraiser was held for upgrades, seeing the ever-increasing enrollment. The target was a million dollars, but that amount has been surpassed and thus far \$1,230,000 has been collected.

One especially noteworthy matter relating to CRTS is the appointment of a new Professor of Ministry and Mission. The current professor, Dr. Arjan de Visser, is slated to retire in 2023. Some time ago the churches were asked to submit names of potential candidates to fill this upcoming vacancy. A committee was appointed to come to the Board with a recommendation, and now the Board will come to Synod asking it to designate a certain person. As always, speculation abounds, and any number of names are being bandied about, but the real unveiling will have to wait until after May 10.

In connection with appointing a new professor, it has become apparent that the list of possible future and potential professors has shrunk greatly. Hardly any of the younger ministers are pursuing graduate studies. No doubt there are a variety of reasons for this: an ever-increasing pastoral workload, extra study costs, a lack of congregational encouragement, and so forth. All of this does not augur well when it comes to future staffing requirements at CRTS. It also creates some big challenges for the future.

## **The Book of Praise**

The last synod gave the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* (SCBP) a big mandate. From the reports received, it would appear that the committee was up to the challenge. It met over 100 times since that last synod and is to be commended for their prodigious efforts and extensive work.

Included in this work was the need to ask the churches for alternate psalms and additional hymns. As always, the churches did not hold back, and the result was an avalanche of recommendations for the Committee to consider. In due time it sent a considerable number of suggestions to the churches for

testing and evaluation; thereafter it worked its way through all the reactions received. It now presents Synod 2022 with a long list of final recommendations. What is to be appreciated in its report is that the Committee goes through the pros and cons of each of these psalms and hymns. In some cases, it recommends adoption. In others, it proposes adoption after some revision has been done relating to archaic language. In a few cases, it recommends deletion. Those who have been at past synods and complained of insufficient documentation will very much appreciate the detailed work the SCBP has done.

Still, one suspects there will be no limit to the debates on the Committee's proposals both in committee and on the floor of Synod. New songs bring out the subjective side in all of us. People may be ignorant when it comes to music and melodies, but we know what we like and dislike. Gauging feedback in the Fraser Valley region where I live, it seems that some of the psalms and most of the hymn recommendations have a lot of support. One question that has been heard several times has to do with the new proposed psalms. It goes like this: if the intent was to add new psalms where present ones were deemed difficult, why are alternates being proposed for psalms that are eminently singable and suitable?

The Committee recommends that the adopted psalms and hymns be printed together in a supplement. In that way, the churches can do some more practicing, as a lot of that went by the wayside during COVID times. One suspects that any number of churches may also refrain from ordering supplements in large quantities, seeing that more and more are making use of large screens in the worship space.

Of course, there is a lot more to the SCBP's report, and you are urged to read all about it by going to the federation website.

## **Inter-church relations**

Currently in the Canadian Reformed Churches there are two committees that deal with relations with other churches. We have the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA) and the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA). The former deals with relations with the ARP, FRCNA, HRC, KPC, OPC, RCUS, RCQ, RPCNA, URCNA, as well as NAPARC<sup>1</sup>. The latter deals with relations with the FRCA, IRB, GGRI, GGRCI, GGRI, KPCK, RCK, IRCK, GKV, DGK, GKN, RCNZ,

<sup>1</sup> For full church names, see page 2 of the electronic report of the CCCNA here: <https://canrc.org/documents/8924>



FCS, FCC, FRCSA and the ICRC<sup>2</sup>. Needless to say, these lists represent a lot of churches.

Still, the work being done does vary. Some churches receive only brief mention, while others require more extensive treatment. At present, church developments in such places as Indonesia and the Netherlands require a considerable amount of attention. Other matters that relate to churches in North America and in other parts of world, not so much. For details on each, you are urged to read the reports.

What you will also find is that there is a proposal to merge these two committees, seeing that they are both dealing with the same matters. It would then be called the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER) and it would have twelve members. In addition, there is also a proposal to move from one relationship to three categories of relationships (called Ecclesiastical Fellowship, Corresponding Relationship, and General Contact).

Finally, there is also a proposal to involve classes in the category two relationship called "Corresponding Relationship." This comes from one of the churches that asked how ecclesiastical fellowship can be acknowledged and experienced at a local/classical level. As some of you may know, relations with other churches have always been governed exclusively by general synod. But times have changed, and circumstances can too. One thinks in this regard of the discussions held with the URCNA. As a result, the Majority Report favours a degree of classical involvement when it comes to the category two relationship.

Such a proposed changed, however, did not win the support of all the members in both committees, with the result that there is also a Minority Report. Three members do not see room for classical involvement and would simply continue the present practice.

Now, no one can be sure what Synod will decide, but one wonders whether the time has not come to opt for a little more of a decentralized approach. Canada is a big country, and in different regions there are different circumstances. For example, the Ottawa church is one of our more isolated churches, but there are a number of very faithful Reformed Presbyterian Churches in the area. Why can that situation not be recognized and some flexibility be built into the system in terms of allowing for pulpit exchange that has classical support?

Or another case that has been lost in history: during the 1970s, 1980s, and into the 1990s, there were many meetings between the Langley Canadian Reformed Church and the Abbotsford Free Reformed Church (AFRC). It led to a decision wherein each local church recognized the other as a true church of our Lord. In addition, the Langley church offered to exchange pulpits occasionally with the AFRC and to inform Classis of this decision. For its part, the AFCA never responded to this offer and thus the matter died. Still, it shows you that already more than twenty-five years ago there was a desire for greater flexibility and classical involvement.

## Other matters

In addition to the above, Synod will also be dealing with various Regional Synod overtures. Both Regional Synod East and West want the cap to be removed limiting the *Book of Praise* to 100 hymns. Regional Synod East is proposing some shorter Lord's Supper forms and wants Synod to remove the bracketed remark about the Abbreviated Form being only for use in the second service. Regional Synod East also wants to see Preparatory Exams for students (whereby they are declared eligible for call) held in the student's classis of origin.

Well, let me close with this. Of course there is more that can be reported on, but what has been mentioned here are some of the main points under consideration. Together it all underlines the fact that Synod Guelph 2022 will have its work cut out for it. The brothers will need lots of energy, wisdom, and faithfulness as they work their way through the agenda. Let those of us who are members in the federation remember them in our prayers. It is not easy work, but it is necessary work for the promotion and well-being of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. 🇨🇦



**James Visscher** *Minister emeritus*  
Canadian Reformed Church  
Langley, British Columbia  
[jvisscher@telus.net](mailto:jvisscher@telus.net)

<sup>2</sup> For full names, see page 92-94 of the electronic report of the CRCA here: <https://canrc.org/documents/8913>







This article is a translation of "Dominee vertel van oorlog en 'die prentjie in Poetin se kop,'" which was published in the Afrikaans newspaper *Beeld* on March 4, 2022. It is translated and republished with permission.

# The Picture in Putin's Head

MURRAY LA VITA

Translated by Mieke deGelder

**T**he story of their first year in Ukraine is one of revolution and war, says Dr. Erik van Alten from his home in Pretoria, South Africa. He and his family lived in Kiev for six years, where he taught at the Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine (ERSU). The Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands, which financially support this seminary, asked him to accept this post. His ties with the RC(L) were formed while he was living in the Netherlands and working on his PhD in Systematic Theology at the Theological University of Kampen.

"I must confess, I had to go check on a map to see where exactly Ukraine is, but in the end my wife and I and our four children moved there in July 2013, staying until November 2019. Thereafter we returned to Pretoria, but I was still connected to the ERSU and the idea was that I would travel there five times a year to teach." Van Alten currently serves as pastor of the Pretoria congregation of the Free Reformed Churches in South

Africa. "Of course COVID messed everything up. I was unable to travel to Ukraine in 2020, but in 2021 things worked out, and the last time I was there was in November 2021."

He tells of their first year in Ukraine: "In November 2013, the Maidan Revolution began in response to then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's refusal to sign a trade agreement with the European Union following pressure from Russian President Vladimir Putin. And in February 2014, there was that great uprising during which more than a hundred people were killed on Maidan Square, the central square in Kiev—these slain are referred to as the 'Heavenly Hundred.' We lived about two kilometers from there. In March 2014, Russia occupied the Crimean Peninsula and shortly afterwards you got these two rebel republics in eastern Ukraine—Donetsk and Luhansk."

## Birth story

According to Van Alten, especially the younger generation in Ukraine is inclined to look westward, toward Europe and the EU. "And this completely contradicts with the ideology that lives in Putin's head. We stare at the bombs and tanks, but there is a story. And the story is that Putin does not recognize the sovereignty of Ukraine as a state. Why not? To establish this, we must not merely go back a hundred years and to the time of the Soviet Union; we must go back a thousand years.

"In the year 988 Kiev was Christianized: Prince Vladimir of Kiev-Rus (also known as Vladimir the Great) became a Christian,

**Page opposite, clockwise from top left:** An image of the Maidan Revolution: the helmet of one of the slain; Dr. Erik van Alten at home in Pretoria, with photos taken during their stay in Ukraine in the background, photo: Deaan Viviers; Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill releases a white dove on April 7, 2014, during a church service at a cathedral in the Kremlin in Moscow, photo: Getty Images; The Friendship Arch of the Slavic People in Kiev; Inside an Orthodox church in Kiev; Van Alten and his wife, Tineke, and their children Júhan, Klarize, Henri and Etienne in 2014 before the St. Volodymyr's Cathedral, the 'mother cathedral' of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

## Ukraine is facing a David-and-Goliath situation, says Erik van Alten (44), who worked as a theologian in Kiev for a number of years—and he is not sure whether David will stand.

and all his people with him. Hence in Putin's thinking, Kiev forms part of the birth or origin of the Russian Empire. And this is deeply entangled with religion. We know that the Russian Orthodox faith is the state religion of Russia. Now I say this carefully . . . for most adherents, this is not a personal faith as we know it. For Christians, a personal relationship with Christ is central, but there it is not so: your Orthodox faith is part of your Russianness, your national identity.

"Throughout the centuries, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has fallen under the headship of the Patriarch of Moscow, until about two or three years ago, when the Patriarch of Constantinople, the head of the Orthodox Church, granted autonomy to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Now, this was a huge blow for Putin, because suddenly the birth story of the Russian people—which originated in Kiev—was taken away from him. He no longer had control over the birth story. And again: this is not so much about personal faith or a relationship with God; it may not even be about salvation and eternal life at all. At the very core it is about the nature and identity of Russia . . . 'Mother Russia.'

"If Putin does not have Ukraine, then his narrative is out the window. Of course, there are other factors at stake as well. For example, the Russian gas lines run through Ukraine, so there are economic considerations. But deep down, I think we need to understand this story of the origin of this idea of 'Mother Russia.'"

### Church and state

It is important to understand the close connection between state and church in the Orthodox tradition. "They call it 'symphonia'—there is a symphony between church and state. And it's very interesting: when the Patriarch of Moscow was confirmed in office in 2009, he visited the Kremlin and in his speech he used



Vladimir and Lyudmila, during a church service in Moscow when they were still married. Photo: Getty Images.

that exact same word: symphonia. There are still quite a few Orthodox churches in Ukraine that consider themselves under the Patriarch of Moscow, but there has been a growing divide and many of the churches now fall under the Patriarch of Kiev.

"In the middle of Kiev stands what is known as the People's Friendship Arch. It's a massive steel structure, one of those typical Soviet structures. It's also called the Friendship Arch of the Slavs, referring specifically to Russia, Ukraine, and also Belarus. This arch shows that the various local populations are bound together by very strong ties. The Ukrainians do not want war with the Russians. And I think if you look at, for example, the protest marches that are currently taking place in Russia itself, then it shows that part of the Russian people also do not want war.

"One must also remember that the Russians . . . I say this with caution, but the Russians are exposed to formidable propaganda: the Russian propaganda machine is genius, and it stems



back to the Communist era. Putin is not a Communist, but he uses the Communist tactics. So, that propaganda machine is working overtime and that is what is frustrating everyone—this story that is being told in Russia. Look, that’s Putin’s way, right? You create a problem or you suggest there is a problem and then you come in as the saviour to solve that problem.

“And this is the story he’s telling the Russian people: that the Russian-speaking people in Ukraine are being killed; that there’s a genocide going on in Ukraine; and that there are lots of Nazis in power in Kiev—which is of course utter nonsense, because Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the current President of Ukraine, is of Jewish descent.”

### **Optimism and fear**

On the one hand, there is tremendous optimism among the people of Ukraine. “I think the successes achieved so far in the war make that optimism even greater. And that optimism is also simply driven by the fact that the Ukrainians have nowhere else to go. It’s their country; Ukraine is their country! On the other hand, there is fear. Every time you think to yourself: ‘No, Putin won’t do that’—and then he goes and does just that. ‘No, he will not take Crimea;’ then he takes Crimea. ‘No, he will not invade the east;’ then he invades the east. ‘No, he will not start a full-scale war;’ then he launches a full-scale war. And at this point it is: ‘No, surely he won’t use nuclear weapons’—but who knows?

“So, there is fear. Many people are fleeing and standing in the severe cold for days at the Polish and Hungarian borders. And then there are many in bomb shelters, too. I have regular contact with my colleagues at the seminary. They fled to the city of L’viv in the west of the country. The west is more Ukrainian and nationalist. I think if Putin wants the whole of Ukraine, he will run into a very strong nationalist force from Kiev westwards.

“I also have contact with people who stayed behind in Kiev. I think it’s getting harder and harder to get out. The Russian forces are apparently blocking the highways around Kiev. This past weekend (February 26-27) there was a curfew—everyone was in bomb shelters or in their homes—but now on Monday (February 28) they allowed people to go out and buy food. They stand in rows for hours. One friend sent me some photos and they show that the shops are largely empty. It reminds people who grew up in the final days of the Soviet Union of those times.

“For the time being the morale is still high, but if you are facing such a power, if you are up against such a force . . . I don’t know . . . I don’t know what is going to happen. I am concerned. I’m

afraid that it’s really a David-and-Goliath situation in Ukraine, right? And I am not sure if this David will stand.”


### **“Superstitious” Putin**

Van Alten emphasizes how Putin’s identity is determined by his Orthodox faith. “Putin is Orthodox and my impression is that he is very superstitiously Orthodox. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of January they commemorate the baptism of Christ. That’s in the middle of the winter, and what then happens is they cut a hole in the ice in the shape of a cross, and then you go into that water. And this then is water that has been sanctified beforehand by the priest, and it is said to grant health for the year. And Putin does this every year: he goes through that water every year. And therein we encounter something superstitious.

“And once again: the Orthodox religion and the Russian national identity or character are very closely entwined. And for Putin—it’s an added element—that religiousness and that character must be protected, even if it has to happen by force. For example, in Moscow they recently finished building a cathedral dedicated to the Russian armed forces. The exterior has a camouflage finish. And if I am right—but now I am speaking under correction—they wanted to insert an icon of Stalin and Putin, but I think Putin rejected the icon of himself. Still, it shows how closely the religious and the political are intertwined. The use of the Russian military to protect Russia’s identity and religion is part of the picture Putin has in mind.”

### **“Delusions of greatness”**

Van Alten believes Putin’s moral values flow forth “precisely from this Russian identity and not so much from a religious or biblical faith. . . . Look, in the Orthodox Church many people do not even read the Bible: that is the work of the priest. So, I think his values are derived from a traditional Russian national identity.

“We are talking about the nature of Putin’s personality and the behaviour that results from it. It’s a personality that goes hand in hand with a paradigm. And I think the personality is one in which a kind of delusion of greatness manifests itself, and the paradigm is the longing for the empire, the Russian Empire—not for Communism and the Soviet Union, but for the Russian Empire of the tsars. He really has a nostalgia for the Russian Empire of the end of the nineteenth century. And if you put those two together, and you add his power on the one hand and wealth on the other—then as far as I’m concerned, you’ve got the perfect storm.” 

# Mission Work in Brazil

Last year in May, *Clarion* published an overview of the mission work that has been carried out by the Canadian Reformed Churches in Brazil, overseen by the churches of Surrey and Aldergrove. We hope to now begin publishing regular updates (twice a year or so) here in *Clarion*, to help not only our supporting churches but all of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the readership of *Clarion* maintain awareness of the work that is being done, so that you may rejoice together with us for the fruits that the Lord is bringing in as he builds his church in Brazil.

In our article last year, we drew attention to the fact that Brazil is, in name, a largely Christian country. Although the majority of that Christianity is Roman Catholic, there is also a large and still-growing Pentecostal presence here in the country. Thus, the work that we are engaged in is different than the type of missionary work that is aimed at those who have never heard the name of Christ. We want to promote reformation in the churches of Brazil, so that believers and churches would be raised on the strong foundation of the gospel, rather than the many and diverse inventions of man-made religion or distortions of the gospel.

## Reformation in the south

We rejoice to see the federation of the Reformed Churches of Brazil continue to grow, both numerically and spiritually. This

past November, the churches held their thirty-seventh synod (they have two a year, as they have not yet divided into multiple classes), in the coastal town of Cabo Frio, some hours from Rio de Janeiro. It has been especially encouraging to see the growth of the churches in the south of Brazil. Historically, our mission work has been centred in the northeast, apart from some Dutch colonies in the south. However, there has been increasing interest for the establishment of Reformed churches in the south, especially in the most populous cities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and the capital city of Brasilia. The young congregation of Brasilia has continued to grow over the last year, and we were especially thankful to witness the ordination of yet another elder and deacon, bringing this congregation very near to the point where they can institute as a church.

Meanwhile, the church in Cabo Frio has been supporting a church plant in Caraguatatuba (a coastal city a couple hours from São Paulo), and the church of southern Recife has been supporting yet another in Santo André near São Paulo. There is much

**Page opposite, top:** Church plant in Caraguatatuba, overseen by the church of Cabo Frio; middle left: Instalation of Elders in Brasilia; Church Plant in Caruaru, overseen by the church of Greater Recife; Bottom: Church Plant in São Paulo, overseen by the church of IPSEP in Recife.









The 37th Synod of the IRBs held in Cabo Frio, October 2021

excitement as the churches in the South are building ties with one another and encouraging each other along. Yet another independent Reformed church in the São Paulo region (Indaiatuba) has been working closely with the IRBs with the goal of joining the federation, and yet another church plant from Presbyterian roots has expressed interest. We give thanks to God for the excitement and passion of these brothers as they have embraced and promoted the Reformed faith and confessions.

### Ups and downs in the north

Meanwhile, up here in the northeast, we missionaries continue to focus our efforts on the seminary of the IRBs. Jim Witteveen had to return home to Canada last year in order to continue caring for the foster children who have been part of his family for years. We anxiously hope that God will open a door for them to be able to return to Brazil, but in the meantime, he has been teaching classes, recording video content, and leading office-bearer training sessions (among numerous other duties) online. I arrived here in Brazil in July of last year, and have been teaching at the seminary while steadily gaining familiarity with the various churches, projects, and structures here in Brazil. Our family is settled into a comfortable home only a few minutes away from the seminary, and we're very thankful to have developed a good routine with homeschooling and family life.

There are a number of congregations to care for here in the northeast as well, alongside the various instituted churches with their own pastors. We were saddened to see the church in Paulista have to de-institute for lack of a sufficient number of office bearers. The church of southern Recife (IPSEP) has taken over supervision of this congregation and hopes to help it get

back on its feet. In another part of Recife, I've been supporting the congregation of Beberibe, which is part of the church of Greater Recife. The long-term hope, of course, is to see this group establish themselves as an instituted church. A couple hours inland, Pastor Lucio has been energetically working in the city of Caruaru, and that congregation has experienced good growth. Further north, in the state of Paraíba, a small congregation has been meeting in the city of João Pessoa. I've been going there on a monthly basis to preach and offer support.

We've been blessed with the constant support of the Mission Aid Worker, Chris Boersema, whose tasks are far too numerous for me to list here, but whose help has been indispensable. The three of us meet (online) every month to share updates and make decisions together before we report to the mission board back at home. We are thankful for the close cooperation that we enjoy—also with the mission board back home—and pray that God would continue to preserve this good harmony. We are also very thankful for the prayers and constant support of the churches back home that maintain this work. May God give us joy as we remember the work that is being done, and the abiding fruit that is being produced to his glory! 🇧🇷



**Jonathan Chase** *Missionary in Brazil* sent by the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church  
[pastorjonchase@gmail.com](mailto:pastorjonchase@gmail.com)



# Welcome to Pastor Greg Davidson

**O**n December 15, 2021, an unusual event (though not without precedent) occurred in our federation of churches: Rev. Dr. Greg Davidson of Central Presbyterian Church in downtown Hamilton accepted the call extended by Blessings Christian Church to serve as co-pastor. The unusual part, of course, is that a minister in a non-sister

church has become a pastor within our own federation. Since Dr. Davidson is virtually unknown among our Canadian (and American!) Reformed churches (including to myself), I invited him to come by for a chat with a view to introducing him to our wider church community. He was willing and the results I now share with you below.

The Davidson family.







Watson's Mill, Manotick, Ontario.

## Origins and studies

Gregory Davidson was born in 1975 and was raised in the charming village of Manotick, near Ottawa. He grew up as a dyed-in-the-wool Presbyterian, being the seventh generation of the Davidson clan to belong to the Presbyterian Church in Canada (dating back to 1824). After completing a B.SC./B.ED. at Queen's University in Kingston, Greg went on to earn an M.Div. at Knox College in Toronto and from there travelled across the Atlantic to the UK to spend three years working on a Ph.D. in the Hebrew Bible (specializing in Isaiah 40-55).

Along the way in 1998, Greg and his fiancé Lindy became married and have since been blessed with three children. Since completing his studies, Greg, Lindy, and their family have moved around Canada a bit, living in Montreal, Beaconsfield (QC), Ottawa, Kingston, and more recently Hamilton. Though Greg has been a lecturer at various institutions in those places, his heart has always been drawn toward pastoral ministry. He loves the Reformed faith and has upheld and promoted the Westminster Confessions throughout his ministry in the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

## From PCC to CanRC

For the last seven years or so, Pastor Davidson has been the minister at Central Presbyterian Church in downtown Hamilton, which is close to the location of Blessings Christian Church. That proximity eventually led to a connection with Pastor Bill DeJong of BCC, and the two colleagues soon became friends. Around the same time (2019), Pastor Davidson began to experience tension with the PCC with regards to certain doctrines he professed and taught. Pastor Greg for his part wanted to maintain the confessional teachings of the Reformed faith as laid out in the Westminster Confessions.

It was during this time of uncertainty that Blessings Christian Church, seeking to fill its co-pastor vacancy, decided to work toward calling Pastor Greg. Dr. Davidson took plenty of time to think, pray, and seek counsel about this possible move. Eventually he felt led by the LORD to work together with Blessings. Because Dr. Davidson was unknown to our churches and was not a minister in a sister church, a different process needed to be followed to make this happen. Blessings first sought the advice of Classis and proceeded to implement that advice until the way was clear for Dr. Davidson to undergo an examination at Classis Central Ontario. This took place on December 10, 2021, and, with the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod East, Dr. Davidson sustained his examination and was declared eligible for call. On January 16, 2022, Rev. Davidson was installed as co-pastor of Blessings Christian Church.

Dr. and Mrs. Davidson and children, welcome to the Canadian Reformed churches! We recognize the difficulties you (and your family) have faced, Pastor Greg, as well as your desire by God's grace to continue preaching and teaching the Reformed faith, and we thank God for leading your path into our midst. May your ministry at Blessings Christian Church and more broadly in our federation be long and prosperous to the glory of our God and King! 🇨🇦



**Peter H. Holtvlüwer** *Minister*  
Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church  
Ancaster, Ontario.  
[pholtvluer@gmail.com](mailto:pholtvluer@gmail.com)

# RAY OF SUNSHINE

Rachel Vis



## About Bernie DeVos

If you know Bernie a little, you'll anticipate a familiar question: "How was your sleep?" or "What did you have for breakfast?"

Bernie was born in Smithers, BC to Ben and Hilda DeVos. The youngest of seven children, Bernie was a beautiful baby. Already as a toddler though, there was some concern as he was not reacting the way he should, and it became obvious that something was awry; Bernie could be happy one minute and then something could trigger an extreme adverse reaction the next. He could spin plates for hours, and really did not speak at all. As you can imagine, this was a very frustrating and difficult time for him, as well as for his parents. It was a few years before he was diagnosed with global delay and autism.

One of Bernie's favourite summer activities was going to camp. In BC it was Bethesda, and after the family moved to Ontario, it became Anchor Camp. If you know anything about these wonderful camps, they are a joy all around, for campers as well as volunteers. It is also a wonderful opportunity for the family to have some respite.

Bernie grew into a wonderful young man, with a dry, but impeccably timed sense of humour. He can now speak just fine, reads and writes, and loves doing math. He also loves to sing and listen to music, often directing the "orchestra" with wild abandon. A favourite activity was turning off the organ after each church service. He would wait patiently until Mr. Bergsma was done in London, and has continued that here in Lincoln

with Mr. Schulenberg as well. In high school he would stand by the door and hold it open until all the students would pass, saying good morning to each of them. They really loved him.

When his eighteenth birthday approached, a difficult decision had to be made by Bernie's parents. A placement had become available at Anchor Home, and they had an option to have Bernie become a resident. This was difficult for them, and something that was done with much trusting. It is a blessing to have these wonderful homes!! Bernie continues to grow in independence at Anchor Home. He loves his Lord with all his heart and talks about how the Lord even takes care of the birds...Bernie loves birds.

Week by week, you will find Bernie is quite busy. Monday and Wednesday he is helping Mr. Rozema; Tuesday and Thursday mornings he is working at Grimsby Chrysler. Wednesday evening the catechism class is in full swing, and Friday evening you will not be able to ignore the sound of the Anchor Band. On Sunday evening a good game of Memory is played . . . which he will probably win, as he has an extraordinary memory. On Saturdays he makes his way over to visit his mom for a much-enjoyed afternoon. The past two years have been difficult for all dealing with COVID, but especially for the residents of Anchor Home. They are thankful that things are beginning to open up again.

Although he may have a different perspective, and a unique skillset, Bernie is fearfully and wonderfully made, a part of the body of Christ, and given a special place there. Indeed, he is a ray of sunshine. He has been blessed and is a blessing in his home and church . . . and yes, Bernie, we had a great sleep! ☺

## May birthdays

Happy Birthday to all of you celebrating a birthday in May! We wish you all the Lord's blessing in the coming year.

**1** Clarence Zwiop will be **68**  
c/o Beacon Home  
653 Broad Street West  
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

**10** Rob De Haan will be **57**  
c/o Anchor Home  
361 Thirty Road, RR 2  
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

**30** Bernie De Vos will be **47**  
c/o Anchor Home  
361 Thirty Road, RR 2  
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

**4** Debbie Veenstra will be **48**  
4238 2nd Concession Road  
Sherkston, ON L0S 1R0

**21** Eddie Van Rootselaar will be **29**  
c/o Beacon Home  
653 Broad Street West  
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

**30** Shaelyn Kottleben will be **26**  
c/o Lighthouse  
6528 1st Line, RR #3  
Fergus, ON 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.

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



## CLARION KIDS

AMANDA DEBOER

## LORD'S DAY 7

Let's say your Dad said, "We are going to town." You would believe your Dad's words. There will be a trip into town! Well, even more, we must believe God's words, shouldn't we? Another way to say this is that we must have *faith* in God. But what is faith? Faith is knowing that the Bible is true. Faith is also knowing that God's promises in the Bible are for you. God has promised to forgive your sins. God has promised you eternal life. Why? Because you are so good? No, because God is so good! He decided to send the Lord Jesus to die for your sins. And God sends his Holy Spirit to give you faith. There are many ways to show God that we have faith. One of those ways is by singing. In Church, we often sing the Apostles' Creed. So next time, sing loudly, "I believe!"

Hebrews 11:1 talks about faith. Unscramble the words to give a proper quote to this text.

"Now (afnit) \_\_\_\_\_ is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not (eens) \_\_\_\_\_."

## Apostles' Creed Crossword Puzzle

## Across:

- God the \_\_\_\_\_ is the Creator of heaven and earth
- I believe in the Holy \_\_\_\_\_
- The resurrection of the \_\_\_\_\_

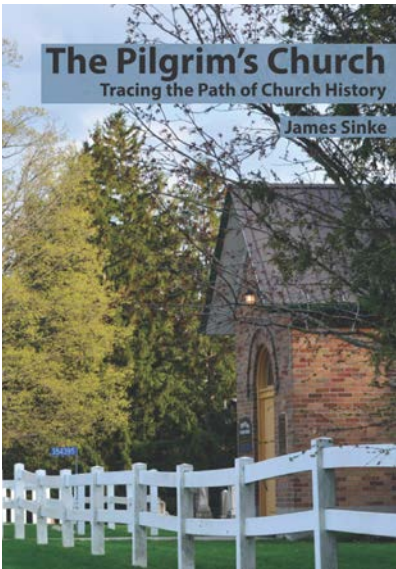
## Down:

- On the \_\_\_\_\_ day he arose from the dead
- God the \_\_\_\_\_ suffered under Pontius Pilate

1		2				
3						
		4				



## BOOK REVIEW



# The Pilgrim's Church

**JAMES SINKE**


The Pilgrim's Church: Tracing the path of Church History  
Written and published by James Sinke (254 pages, paperback)  
Available on Amazon for \$19.50

James Sinke is the pastor of Bethel URC of Woodstock, Ontario, and stands in awe of how God led his church in the truth for 2000 years. Its pilgrimage to Zion sometimes led to either exuberant joy or profound suffering and hardship. This book is the story of how the LORD blesses those whose strength is in him, how he is their sun and shield (Ps 84). It is the story we must know, the story to which we belong, and which teaches so many lessons about who we are, about (and pertaining to) our own pilgrimage as witnesses on the highways to Zion (Ps 84).

The book was written with senior Catechism students and their teachers in mind and surveys the history of Christ's church-gathering work since Pentecost. Each of its twenty-six chronologically arranged chapters begins with a curiosity-raising quote. From there it thematically develops the content with highly relevant snapshot drive-by paragraphs—without getting lost in flesh and detail, context, and flow. Each chapter includes content-focused review questions as well as deeper-digging connection-making reflection questions.

In his introduction, Rev. Sinke shows how to obtain a free PDF teacher's guide, which underlines his desire as expressed

in 3 John 4. He also gives chapter summaries, lesson objectives, answers and discussion points for the questions, further references, a glossary, suggested memory work, and songs (from the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*). The book is enriched with a timeline on each page, and several illustrations. In short, it has anything any teaching elder or pastor could wish for. It also includes an appendix with a ten-page history of the United Reformed Churches. In addition to the resources listed, readers may also find Rev. Eric Kampen's *Sharing in Abraham's Blessing* a supportive source with its thirty-five chapters and some discussion questions.

Rev. Sinke's book is highly recommended and deserves to be seriously considered for personal enrichment, study societies, older students in Catechism class—and for their teachers. 



**Keith Sikkema**

Semi-retired from Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College and still teaches Church History and Foundations of Curriculum courses  
[sikkemak@gmail.com](mailto:sikkemak@gmail.com)

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

**In the January 21, 2022 edition of Clarion, Brother Kampen outlines some unintended consequences** of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly, namely that in an effort to increase its frequency the sacrament will be elevated to the detriment of the preaching.

The Lord's Supper is a beautiful, visible portrayal of the Word. It seems only natural that it is an extension of the worship service. The celebration does not need to take a lengthy portion of the service (although our traditions require this length).

Brother Kampen acknowledges that shorter forms may assist churches to celebrate more frequently; perhaps flexibility could be also given to pastors to summarize the form into their own words.

More can be said about ideas for celebrating the sacrament to keep it in line as a supportive, secondary means of grace. However, I would like to use this opportunity to highlight practices and traditions that *already do* elevate the sacrament above the preaching of the gospel or at the very least higher than it ought to be. These include, but are not limited to: the taking of attendance by elders only on Lord's Supper Sundays; calls by elders to congregants only when Lord's Supper services are missed; "preparation services" (i.e. the reading of only the Institution and Self-examination portions of the Form a week in advance); avoidance of travel on Lord's Supper weekends; "dressing up" for Lord's Supper; stacking the babysitting room with non-professing members; the singing of a select few hymns; treating a public profession of faith as primarily a means to gain admission to the Lord's Supper table; etc. Most of these concerns would be immediately eliminated with a weekly celebration.

Whatever results, I pray that what we believe is promoted and supported by our traditions.

In Christ,

*Peter Harthoorn*

**Re: "Mandatory Vaccinations and the Church" by Tim Schouten, Clarion Vol. 71, No. 4, February 18, 2022**

At the beginning of his article, Rev. Schouten asks: "How should we respond biblically when the church is to enact proof of vaccination?" I do not see the passage from Romans 13 being quoted, where Paul informs us "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment." Nor do I see Rev. Schouten refer to 1 Peter 2:13.

Rev. Schouten then informs us that "the church cannot comply with the government regulations that would cause her to obey man rather than God." Was the government ruling that church members could not obey God? The government was enforcing the command to be vaccinated before allowing people to gather in a congregation.

Rev. Schouten does not inform us that we should be imitators of Christ, who, when he appeared before Pontius Pilate, remained silent, even when he was accused of many crimes. Nor does he inform us that we should be humble and live in humility, as indicated by many verses in the Old and New Testaments. He seems to suggest that we not live according to the words Paul writes in Philippians 2:3: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."

What was the government trying to do? It was trying to protect each member from spreading COVID to, and getting COVID from, their neighbour sitting in the bench beside them, in front of them, or around them. This was only a temporary measure in the battle of getting control of this disease.

*Hank Jager, Fergus, ON*



## PRESS RELEASE

### **March 8, 2022 meeting of the churches in Classis Alberta**

The chairman of the convening church of Calgary called the meeting to order. We read from Romans 12 and sang Psalm 133. After a few reflections on the passage, the chairman led in prayer remembering the following memorabilia: Devon and Barrhead Canadian Reformed churches remain vacant, Rev. Steve Swets declined the call extended to him from Devon, Rev. Dirk DeJong (former pastor of Calgary) has passed away, General Synod in Guelph on May 10, Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS), Rev. T. VanRaalte is back to teaching full time, the weakening of the COVID-19 virus and the subsequent easing of mask mandates and gathering restrictions.

The credentials are found to be in good order and Classis is constituted. All are welcomed. The suggested officers take their place. Chairman, Rev. M. ten Haaf; Vice-chairman, Rev. J. VanSpronsen; Clerk, Rev. J. Huijgen. The agenda is adopted with a few additions.

The following reports are received: 1) The inspection of the Classis Archives, which are in good order; 2) Contact with provincial government; 3) Church visitors' report on visits made to the churches of Immanuel and Devon (Art. 46, C.O.); 4) The delegate for contact with URCNA gave a positive and encouraging report of a visit on October 6, 2021.

The church at Barrhead requests and receives monthly pulpit supply to assist them during their time of vacancy. In the ecclesiastical question period (Art 44, CO), the chairman asks the pertinent questions, which are answered by the churches. In closed session two churches seek and are given concurring advice in two matters related to the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline in their churches. The churches of Classis Alberta received an appeal which was dealt with in closed session.

The convening church for the next classis is Coaldale, date: June 14, 2022, alt. September 13, 2022. Suggested executive officers for next classis are J. Ludwig, chairman, M. ten Haaf, Vice-chairman, J. VanSpronsen, clerk. Delegates were given an opportunity for personal questions and for brotherly censure (Art. 34, CO). Classis agreed that the Acts and the Press Release could be approved by the moderamen after Classis was adjourned. In closing, we sang Psalm 107:1, 2, the chairman led in prayer, and the meeting was adjourned.

*Rev. J. VanSpronsen, clerk. e.t.*

### **Classis Niagara, March 9, 2022**

On behalf of the convening church of Attercliffe, Rev. Rodney Vermeulen opened the meeting with devotions. After Classis was constituted, the chairman thanked the convening church for its work.

Rev. Ruurd Offringa, recently ordained as minister of the Word in Niagara South, signed the Form of Subscription.

Church visitation reports to the churches of Attercliffe, Dunnville, Grassie, Grimsby, Smithville, and Spring Creek were made. It was noted that the church visitation to Niagara South is still outstanding.

The matter of classical pulpit supply was discussed: it was noted that this should be kept flexible.

Classis then dealt with an appeal in closed session.

Classis appointed Rev. Rodney Vermeulen as counsellor for the church of Grassie.

Classis appointed the church of Dunnville to convene the next classis on June 15, 2022 (alt Sept 14, 2022).

After adoptions of the Acts, approval of this press release, and closing devotions, Classis was closed.

*John VanWoudenberg (vice-chairman of this classis)*

