

Clarion

Catholic Conversations

CRTS Convocation 2022

The Miracle of God's Written Word



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

Every September, as the Lord allows, our federational seminary holds its annual "convocation," a vintage term which simply means "an assembly of persons called together for a meeting." Lots of colleges and universities hold such annual meetings and in the case of CRTS and our churches it is a highlight for we get to see and hear about the work of preparing men to serve in the ministry of God's Word. Graduates receive their degrees (or diplomas), and we are given many reasons to thank our heavenly Father for enabling and blessing this critical work. In this issue you will find a report of the convocation itself, a report from the principal on the goings-on at the seminary, a press release from the Board of Governors, an intriguing presentation on the miraculous gift of the written word by the Women's Savings Action, and also the keynote address for the evening by our Dogmatics professor Dr. Jason Van Vliet on that age-old question asked in distress, "Why, Lord?" Encouraging and edifying all around!

The very same Dr. Van Vliet also provides us with an editorial on a little-known and often less-considered feature of our tri-annual general synods—the fraternal addresses. What is so special about these speeches? Find the answer the page over! With Remembrance Day coming up shortly and with our Queen's reign having recently come to an end, Rev. Julius VanSpronsen weaves together a comforting meditation in *Treasures, New & Old*. MERF's report this time gives a sense of the challenges facing both mission workers and new converts in their largely Islamic context, something that is good for us in the West to bear in mind as we interact more and more with Muslims in our countries. And last but not least, *Clarion Kids* introduces our younger readers to the work of the Holy Spirit in Lord's Day 20.

May all this reading enrich you to the praise of our God!

Peter Holtvliuwer

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EDITORIAL

Catholic Conversations

Synod Guelph 2022 has come and gone. By now you may have had a conversation or two about the decisions. Among other matters, a new professor was appointed, a hymn cap was maintained, and a potential change to Article 50 of our Church Order (Churches Abroad) was sent back for more study. Surely something in those 176 articles of synodical activity caught your attention.

Fraternal greetings

Allow me, though, to shift your attention from the articles to the appendices. Tucked away at the end of the *Acts* you will find fifteen fraternal greetings. These greetings come from our sister churches or, in some cases, federations that are not officially sister churches but certainly have a lot in common with us. Considered together they make for a fascinating read. Highly recommended!

But why? Are these greetings not simply ecclesiastical pleasantries that fulfill appropriate synodical decorum? No, they are much more than that. The two phrases involved, *fraternal* greetings and *sister* churches, prove the point. Viewed properly, family members in the worldwide household of God (1 Tim 3:15; BC 27) are conversing with each other in those appendices. When someone in the family talks, the rest of the household should perk up their ears and listen. It's what we do as families, especially since we are dispersed around the globe and cannot chat in the fellowship hall each Sunday.

Mutual encouragement

So, what did our sisters from near and far say to us? Well, nearly every one of them spoke about the challenges that our heavenly Father placed on their path through two years of dealing intensely with COVID issues. No one was exempt from soul-searching and congregation-straining struggles to respond in a biblical, united fashion to the illness and various public health directives.

At the same time, our sisters also spoke, with conviction I might add, of how Christ preserved and purified their church families through it all. Yes, healing is needed, but as one delegate reminded us, Christ *really* gathers, and preserves, and yes even increases his church—with or without COVID. This multilingual chorus of fellow believers from far and wide, all confessing Christ's loving care for his Bride, produces uplifting music for weary souls.

Common concerns

First, the church of Christ needs more ministers and missionaries! Yes, the CanRC is looking for more preachers, but we are certainly not the only ones. Several ecclesiastical sisters feel the same need,

even to the point that their delegates, who probably only had ten or fifteen minutes to speak, decided to mention it publicly at our synod.


Second, holding consistently to the whole, inspired counsel of God, how do we maintain and build upon our Reformed heritage, sharing it without shedding it, while at the same time avoiding the Scylla of federational hierarchy and steering clear of the Charybdis of congregational independentism?

Obviously, *that* is a loaded question. Answering it well requires wisdom. Many counsellors contribute to such wisdom (Prov 15:22). Not all of them need to be in-house. More objective, third-party advisers can also help. One sister, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, made a point of saying, "we, as your 'Down Under' sister, are always ready to assist you" in the pursuit of faithfulness. Another, the United Reformed Churches of North America, saw "encouraging" growth in mission activity in the CanRC but also reminded us "in love, to beware of compromise," urging us to "stay steadfast." The latter spoke from their own painful experiences in recent history.

Third, like us, some of our sisters are being pressured by their civil governors to conform to ungodly trends. Abortion and euthanasia are on the rise everywhere. For some decades already biblical norms on sexuality have been unpopular in our society. But in some places, they may soon become, or are already, illegal. Also in the public square, then, we must stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our sisters and uphold morals that align with God's Word, not current ideologies.

Staying in touch

Families should stay in touch. This does not become any easier as the extended family, God's own household, grows larger, spreads out further, and speaks different languages. Our overloaded agendas present additional challenges.

For family, though, we *make* time. Listening to some delegates at a general synod every three years is good, but it is not enough. Let's take every opportunity God gives us to continue these catholic conversations between synods. After all, the time is short (Rev 12:12), and as our three sworn enemies ramp up their attacks, we, sister churches, also need to be brothers in arms, wearing the same suit of God's armour and fighting the same good fight of faith. 



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O Lord Our God, Your Name Alone We Bring to Remembrance

“O Lord our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone we bring to remembrance.” (ISAIAH 26:13)

Canadians and other countries of the Commonwealth will need to get used to having a king instead of a queen. As we adjust to this change, we are reminded of Isaiah 26:13, which compares the permanence of the LORD our God to the transience of earthly human lords. Monarchs come and go. Kingdoms rise and fall. The only earthly things that seem to remain during all the reigns of the different lords are greed, betrayal, fighting, and wars.

On Remembrance Day, Canadians reflect on the wars past and present and on all the lords (and tyrants) who have ruled over the nations throughout the years. Many of them “are dead, they will not live; they are shades, they will not arise” (Isa 26:14), but the name of the LORD our God remains. In the midst of the tears for soldiers who gave their lives in wars, and the prayers for soldiers who continue to dedicate their lives for the protection of our nations, we find comfort when we bring the name of the LORD our God to remembrance. We are happy to join in with the veterans gathered at cenotaphs around the country singing Psalm 90 as it is paraphrased in the hymn, “O God our help in ages past.” The God who was our help in ages past is also our guard while troubles last. The God who is our hope for years to come is also our eternal home. Although men return to dust, the LORD is God from everlasting to everlasting.

The song of triumph that the church sings in Isaiah 26 recognizes that the LORD is an everlasting rock who keeps everyone who trusts in him in perfect peace (cf. Isa 26:3). The peace that God promises for his church, while we are still in the world, is experienced by those who know that Christ has been punished for their sins and that they have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to be citizens of God’s everlasting kingdom. Although we do not yet see the fullness of his kingdom today,

and there may be more lords ruling over us and more battles against tyrants to remember in years to come, when we bring the name of the LORD our God to remembrance, we know that we do not need to be afraid. War is a horrible thing because it is a consequence of rebellion against God, but it is also a necessary thing that God uses to defeat the works of the devil. We can only fully enjoy the peace with God that Christ Jesus has obtained for us by his death when every power that raises itself against the kingdom of God is destroyed (cf. 1 Cor 15:20–28). As lords replace lords, and wars and rumours of war continue, we may find perfect peace and eternal hope by bringing the name of the LORD our God to remembrance. 📖

Further reading

Psalm 90, Isaiah 26, 1 Corinthians 15:20–28

Questions for further study

1. What things come to mind when we bring the name of the Lord our God to remembrance in the context of war among the nations?
2. How can we enjoy perfect peace with God today, and how will that change when God’s kingdom is finally all in all?



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CRTS

Convocation 2022

JOHN LOUWERSE

The 53rd Anniversary Meeting and 48th Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) took place at its usual venue, the Redeemer University in Ancaster. With many of the restrictions brought on by COVID-19 removed, there was once again a large number of brothers and sisters in attendance.

The evening began with the chairman of the Board, Rev. John Louwerse, welcoming everyone. In prayer he gave thanks to the Lord God for his great works, including his Son's work of gathering his church around the world. He offered gratitude for the blessings of having a federation-run seminary, the appointment of Dr. Reuben Bredenhof as professor of ministry and mission by





Synod Guelph 2022, and for the successful completion of the last academic year. Gratefulness was also expressed for God's care of sister G. Deddens, widow of the late Dr. K. Deddens; sister Margaret DeJong, widow of the late Dr. J. DeJong; Dr. N. H. Gootjes and his wife Dinie; and Dr. C. Van Dam and Dr. G. H. Visscher and their wives, as these brothers continue to work among the churches.

After the opening prayer, an excerpt was read from a letter from Alwyn Terpstra, a deputy for training for the ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. This letter of congratulations and encouragement was received with much thankfulness. Then the chairman read from Romans 8:28-39, a focal passage in the address of the featured speaker that evening.

The principal of the Seminary, Dr. Jason Van Vliet, presented his annual report. You can read the contents of his address elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. Dr. Van Vliet expressed gratitude for students, welcoming the large student body for this new year. He also noted that four of the current MDiv students are from South Africa. He also expressed thanks for faculty and staff and for the renovations of the building and access to temporary accommodations. Following this report, all praise was given to God with the singing of Hymn 35:1, 2.

Then Dr. J. Van Vliet, as professor of Dogmatics, gave his address, which was entitled: "Why Lord? When God's providence does not seem to make sense." You will find the full text of this speech elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. In this speech, Dr. Van Vliet drew our attention to the well-known words of Scripture found in Romans 8:28-39 and the great comfort which is found in God alone.

After the singing of Hymn 35:3, 4, which was led by Martin Jongsma, the organist for the evening, the degree of Master of Divinity was conferred on Tsjibbe deJong, Rodney den Boer,

Dathan Pleiter (in absentia), Timothy vanBeek, Anson van Delden, and Bryan Vanderhorst.

Bryan Vanderhorst spoke on behalf of the graduating class. He drew attention to the diversity of this class: the diversity in characters and gifts, which will all be used for the building up of Christ's church in future years. He also expressed much appreciation for the work of the professors and staff at CRTS.

Following the singing of Psalm 134:1, 3, the Women's Savings Action (WSA) presentation began with a brief exposition about the beginning of words and the transmission of the Word of God. This was followed with sister Janet Van Vliet presenting the amount of \$45,000 to the seminary library. Dr. Van Vliet expressed CRTS's thanks for the faithful work and the ongoing contributions by the sisters of the WSA.

The collection was for the Foreign Student Bursary—a fund that provides financial assistance to qualified foreign students who seek a Reformed theological education but do not have sufficient financial resources themselves, and whose home church is not able to provide enough support either. During the collection, a large number of seminary students sang a beautiful song of praise to our God. Rev. Joe Poppe led in closing prayer, focusing particularly on the work of the seminary in the upcoming year. As is customary, the assembly concluded with the singing of "O Canada." After the program, everyone had the opportunity to congratulate the graduates. 🇨🇦



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CRTS Principal's Report

September 2022

Since the last Principal's Report back in May, it has become a lot noisier at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). And that's a good thing! The renovations of our lower level have begun. But first, let's focus on some other topics.

Thankful for students

Summer can be busy, but it is also a time to step away from our regular routines and find a few moments, perhaps in the early morning by a calm lake, to count our blessings. Indeed, CRTS continues to be blessed, richly and undeservedly, by the LORD our God. In the first place, for the second year in a row we are welcoming the largest group of students into our classrooms. Last year we began the year with thirty-two students, this year we start with thirty-four. The need for gospel-focused, humble-yet-bold, well-trained preachers continues to increase. Let us thank the Lord for the growing number of men who are interested in studying for the ministry. Let us also pray that the Lord leads many more in this direction.

Looking at the numbers more closely, twenty-nine students are in the four-year MDiv program studying for the ministry. Three international visiting students will spend one year at CRTS as part of their MDiv program at their home seminary in Korea. And two students are enrolled in the BTh program. The BTh program does not lead to ordained ministry but rather to some other kind of service within God's kingdom. Eight of those students are entering CRTS for the first time as our freshmen class, seven of them in the MDiv program, and one in the BTh program.

It is also noteworthy that four of our current MDiv students are from South Africa. We are used to receiving students from the Free Reformed Churches in Australia but now the Lord is also bringing us students from the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa. We rejoice in this development.

Many of our returning students have been out on summer internships, both in Canada and beyond. The reports of their experiences are beginning to trickle in. It is always a highlight to hear what they have to say after they return. Just in the past two weeks a few students said the same thing to me with slightly different words, "Now that I've experienced, in some small way, what it means to be a pastor or a missionary, I'm all the more eager to get back to class and continue the preparations." Well, that is music to a professor's ears! Not only are they eager to get back to class, but they are excited to pick up the studies to *prepare for ministry*. Under the Lord's blessing, *that* is the goal, after all. Thank-you to all the congregations, mission fields, and pastor-mentors who agree to have our students for summer internships. Your participation in the Pastoral Training Program is greatly appreciated.

This year we have six graduates: Tsjibbe deJong, Rodney den Boer, Dathan Pleiter, Tim vanBeek, Anson van Delden, and Bryan Vanderhorst. Rodney, Tim, Anson, and Bryan have already received and accepted calls to various congregations. Congratulations to all four of you! Right now, Tsjibbe and Dathan are helping out in congregations in Alberta and Western Australia, respectively, but they plan to go to classis to become eligible for call in the coming months. By the way, if you wish to learn more about our graduates and their plans, the CRTS website has a page with their profiles. Just go to www.canadianreformedseminary.ca and look under "News" for "Student and Graduate Profiles."

In addition to our website, which has many resources on it, we are also on Facebook and Instagram, with well over 2000 followers. So, feel free to join the crowd. Or if you prefer, we can send you email updates. Again, just go to our website and look for "Staying in Touch" under "News" and you will find all the details there.

Thankful for faculty & staff

The big news, of course, is that Dr. Reuben Bredenhof has been appointed as our next Professor of Ministry and Mission. Currently he is serving the Mt. Nasura congregation of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. He and his wife, Rebecca, along with their four teenaged daughters, have plans to move into Hamilton in January 2023. In one sense it will be a homecoming, since they moved to Australia from Canada about seven years ago. Still, it is big move and a significant change. May the Lord bless the Bredenhof family with all that they need. We look forward to welcoming you to Hamilton soon enough. We also wish the Mt. Nasura congregation the Lord's guidance and blessing. They, too, have a transition to make and it will not be easy to see their pastor and his family leave them.

At the heart of the department of Ministry and Mission is homiletics, that is, instruction in preaching God's Word, faithfully and effectively. In fact, the professor of Ministry and Mission is extra busy these days because, due to our growing student body, each week we have two full blocks of Sermon Session, as we call it, instead of the previous single timeslot. Before he begins teaching next September, Dr. Bredenhof will be preparing for this central task, along with other areas such as catechism teaching, missions and evangelism, pastoral care, and liturgics. It is a diverse portfolio of subjects, so we are thankful he has adequate time to prepare well.

Faculty are also thankful that the Board of Governors recently approved a part-time Teaching Assistant position and that br. Raoul Kingma, a recent graduate from CRTS, has been found willing to fill this position in addition to his other daily work. His main tasks include marking some of the students' work, under the supervision of the professors, as well as assisting professors in some aspects of their research and writing work. A TA position is common at many universities, colleges, and seminaries. But it something new for CRTS.

The professors are doing well, and so are our regular staff, Catharine Mechelse, Margaret Alkema, and Leanne Kuizenga. Each week again they help to accomplish the many tasks necessary to keep CRTS up and running smoothly. A few others deserve mention as well. Melissa Strating keeps our building clean, Sara Kingma takes care of many practical details for international students, and Harmina Vanderbrugghen volunteers in the library. Thank-you so much, everyone.


Thankful for renos & neighbours

This could easily become a long section, but I will keep it short. After many generous donations to our Partnership in the Gospel fundraising campaign (once more, thank-you!), the work has begun in earnest. As you might expect, our building project has not been exempt from delays in the permit offices and supply chain issues, but the good news is: the project is underway.

If you are curious to see what is happening, you can peek at the architectural plans on the "Partnership in the Gospel" page on our website. You will notice a lot of walls are being removed to make way for a much larger classroom and expanded student lounge. In fact, as I first typed these words some weeks ago, the last concrete blocks from those walls were being tossed into the bin. The Lord willing, by the time you read these words the installation of updated HVAC and classroom equipment, along with a new kitchen and washrooms, will be well underway.

Due to the delays, though, we need to run our classes at an alternate location for the first semester. A few kilometres away from CRTS is the Maranatha Free Reformed church building, a modern and spacious facility with adequate classrooms. This congregation has generously agreed to host our classes from September to December, while the library, administrative offices, and professors' offices will remain open at our own campus. We are deeply grateful to this Free Reformed congregation for their generosity.

In sum, then, it will be a somewhat different year again. During the past two years we have ventured into the realm of online learning, prompted by COVID but also part of our longer-term thinking and planning. Now our seminary activity will be shuttling back and forth between two locations for a few months. It certainly keeps us on our toes, as they say.

In all this, though, we remember that we are on a much greater and grander journey. We are pilgrims on our way to the New Jerusalem. As pilgrims on our way to the New Jerusalem, we rely on our LORD and go from strength to strength until each one appears for God in Zion (Ps 84). Brothers and sisters, thank you for all your faithful and cheerful support. It gives us much encouragement each day along our pilgrim way. 



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Why?

When God's Providence Does Not Seem to Make Sense

JASON VAN VLIET

God created us with keen minds. We like to figure things out. But our minds are also limited, and ever since the Fall, they have been darkened by sin. So, our finite, fallen minds cannot always make sense of everything. Sometimes we ask *why*, but the answers do not satisfy.

For example, in Romans 8:28 the apostle Paul writes, "And we know that for those who love God *all things* [not *most* things, but *all* things] work together for good." But then a young mother of four children dies from cancer. Her husband and their children cry out, "Why Lord? What *good* can possibly come of this?"

Or consider this situation. A missionary brings the gospel to a remote, coastal village in Asia. After some time, some villagers repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Small signs of embryonic faith begin to emerge. Next a typhoon hits. Floodwaters inundate the village. Homes and livelihoods are destroyed, both for believer and unbeliever. Some people in the village die. With anguish-torn hearts, the recent converts come to the missionary with one, not-so-simple question, "Why?" What should the missionary say?

Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’

Is there an answer?

Why Lord? It is ancient question. Is there a good answer? Nicholas Wolterstorff, a philosopher-theologian with a Reformed background, tried to find that answer. He and his wife, Claire, were blessed with five children. Their son Eric, though, “died in a mountain-climbing accident in Austria” when he was just twenty-five years-old.¹ Wolterstorff, then, wrestles with the *why* question not only as a Reformed thinker but also as a deeply wounded father. At one point in his struggle he writes this:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and resurrector of Jesus Christ. I also believe that my son’s life was cut off in its prime. I *cannot* fit these pieces together. *I am at a loss*. I have read the theodicies produced to justify the ways of God to man. I find them unconvincing. To the most agonized question I have ever asked I do not know the answer. I do not know *why* God would watch him fall. I do not know *why* God would watch me wounded. *I cannot even guess*.²

This believing yet grieving father writes words that are honest, open, unvarnished. Do his words resonate with your thoughts, at least at certain times in your life?

Added to that, what are we supposed to say to people with such unsettled souls? Pray for them, yes. But is that all? Can we offer them comfort that truly helps to heal their wounded hearts?

Most importantly, what does our heavenly Father say to us in his Word about all of this? In this article we will briefly review four scriptural truths to which people often point in these agonizing situations. All four truths are helpful but, as Wolterstorff discovered, sometimes they do not yet settle the soul. We yearn for more. So, in the second place, we will look more closely at Romans 8 to see what additional comfort of our God gives us.

Sin & misery come from man

To begin with, then, here are four biblical teachings that people commonly mention. First, *sin and all the misery that flows from sin, including death, originally comes from man not from God*. As the Spirit of God says in Romans 5:12, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men. . . .” This original sin also had an impact on creation. Because of man’s sin, the ground is cursed (Gen 3:17) and the whole creation is groaning (Rom 8:20-22). By contrast, God created things good, even very good (Gen 1:31). So, as we confess in Article 13 of the Belgic Confession, “God is *not* the Author of the sins which are committed nor can he be charged with them.” By extension, God is also not the Author of the miseries that flow from man’s fall into sin. As our confession explains, *he* certainly governs over all things, but we polluted his good creation with evil and injustice. At certain times we cannot help but ask “Why Lord?” but at all times we must be careful that we do not blame God for things that we, human beings, have brought into this world.

Humility

The second truth can be summed up this way: *let us be humble, our heavenly Father knows best*. Think of Isaiah 55:9: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” And Romans 9:20: “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this? Has the potter no right over the clay?’”

In other words, let us not try to confine, and then analyze, our God under our small, faulty, mental microscopes. To do so would be to turn our relationship with him upside down. He is the Creator; we are the creatures. Let us be humble, know our place, and trust him. Interestingly, when the Belgic Confession

¹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, (Eerdmans, 1987), 5.

² *Lament for a Son*, 68; emphasis added.

turns to the topic of God's providence in Article 13, it uses this phrase: "with the greatest humility and reverence." Providence can be perplexing at times. Let us pray that our hearts would be filled with reverence, not resentment.

Suffering refines faith

Next, we turn to the third important truth. Suffering is hard, and we must not downplay that, but *suffering also refines our faith and, in due course, generates hope*. We can think here of Romans 5:3-4: "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope."

In many areas of life, we need to go through pain in order to gain. An athlete may well suffer significant back pain before his muscles become strong enough for the rowing competition. The five-year-old steps onto the school bus with a wide-eyed, anxious look on her face, and perhaps even some tears, but through it she learns that Mom cannot be at her side every moment of every day. Just as an oak tree grows stronger because of the wind, so our heavenly Father uses the storms of life to strength our souls. It is good to meditate on this truth.

Agony is not forever

A distraught child of God may respond, though, saying, "But sometimes the storm is so intense that even a solid oak tree is completely uprooted and lies, all splintered and split, upon the ground. What is the good of that? Why Lord?" At this point a fourth scriptural truth is often brought up. The apostle Peter reminds us that suffering and sorrow are not forever. He says, "*now for a little while . . . you have been grieved by various trials*" (1 Pet 1:6). Like the uprooted oak tree, our souls may be splintered *now*, but our Lord has promised us that on his Great Day he will transform the splintered into the splendid. As we read in Revelation 21:4, "God himself will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

So, when anguish and confusion tear at our hearts, let us remind each other of these four great truths. They are like a spiritual anchor that steadies our souls during some of the worst storms of our lives.

1. God created everything good. We were the ones who brought sin, misery, and death into this world. In Christ it is God who forgives sin, relieves misery, and conquers death (Gen 3; Rom 5; 1 Cor 15; LD 3; BC 13).
2. Let us remain humble. God's wisdom far exceeds our intellect. We cannot see very far into the distance and what we do see, we see dimly (Isa 55:9; 1 Cor 13:12; BC 13).
3. Suffering refines our faith. By faith we are grafted into Christ, our everlasting-life vine. In him we have hope that does not disappoint (John 15:1-11; Rom 5:3-5; 1 Pet 1:1-9).
4. For those who are in Christ, all agony has an expiry date. After this life and in the New Jerusalem, all burdens will be lifted and inexpressible blessings will flow, undiluted and uninterrupted, forever (1 Pet 1:5-6; Rom 8:18; Rev 7:13-17, 22:1-5; LD 22; BC 37).

With these four truths we have received much. For these four truths we can, and we must, be very thankful.

Lingering questions

At the same time, let us be open and honest, like Wolterstorff was. Sometimes the hardship is so heavy that our soul does not settle, at least not easily. Our heart still cries out. "O Lord, I understand that you use hardship to make us grow spiritually stronger. But, O Lord, was there, or is there, not some other way to refine us? I have thought about my Baca Valley (Ps 84:6) over and over again, even into the wee hours of the morning. I still cannot make sense of it. *Why Lord?*"

Some have wondered whether we may even ask, "Why Lord?" Yes, we may, so long as we keep a humble and respectful tone in our hearts. David and the other inspired psalm writers ask "Why Lord?" no less than ten times.³ Even our sinless Lord Jesus Christ asked "Why?" on the cross (Matt 27:46). So, as we seek further comfort let look more closely at Romans 8, especially verse 28, which brings us to the heart of the matter.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.

What kind of good?

Here is a crucially important question: exactly what kind of good is the Holy Spirit speaking about here in this context? *Good* is one of those words that we use a lot. But what does it really mean? And who decides what *good* really looks like?

³ Psalms 10:1, 22:1, 42:9, 43:2, 44:23, 44:24, 74:1, 74:11, 80:12, 88:14.

Assurance is more valuable
than a solution. Look to Christ. Believe in him.
Trust your Father at his word.

In the beginning, in the first week of world history, God, and God alone, decided what good was. Time and again in Genesis 1 we hear, “And God saw that it was good.” Neither Adam nor Eve was around yet to offer their opinion on what they felt was good. From the start *God*—not us, not even our first parents—decided what *good* is.

Now, we live after the Fall, but we still need to keep this lesson from Genesis 1 in mind as we turn to Romans 8:28. This helps us listen to this verse with *the right expectations*. For example, we might come to this verse with our own assumptions about what good should look like. You can well imagine someone saying, “In my mind *good* means things that I experience as joyful or beneficial, or things that bring peace and stability into my life.” If that is the definition of *good* that we have in mind, then as the LORD takes us through some tragedy, we constantly look around in our lives—each week, each month, each year—to see how the LORD is generating joyful, beneficial, peaceful, and stabilizing things out of the tragedy. Yet maybe we just do not see those kinds of good things happening. Or they are so meagre that they hardly seem worth the avalanche of agony. So, we wait on the Lord for another few months. Still, little good seems to appear on the horizon. Why Lord?

Maybe, though, we are looking for the wrong kind of *good*. Remember: definitions also establish expectations. So, bearing the lesson of Genesis 1 in mind, how does our God define *good*, more specifically, in this passage? Please note the parallels between verses 28 and 29, highlighted in bold and italics.

And we know that **for those who love God** all things work together *for good*, **for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined** *to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

In verse 28 our Father first identifies the *people* he has in view, namely, “those who love God,” and in verse 29 he describes them further as “those who are called according to his purpose, foreknown, predestined, and in verse 30, also called, justified, and glorified.

Similarly, in verse 28 the Holy Spirit pinpoints the *purpose* toward which he is working, and in the next verse further defines this as “to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” As one commentator aptly put it, “The ‘good’ of verse 28 now receives further definition [in v. 29]: the good is achieved when believers are conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ.”⁴ This distinct, divine definition also generates different expectations. Do you see the difference? Straining our minds amid our sorrow, we try to finish a 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle. But some of the pieces are missing because we do not see the *good*, as we define it, emerging from our suffering. Why Lord?

But during this whole time our Father in heaven, with his definition of good, is working on a sculpture, not a jigsaw puzzle. With skillful and loving hands, the Almighty Potter is gradually fashioning the clay of our souls into the image and likeness of his Eternal Son.

In Christ’s likeness

That sheds a different light on things! Since God is conforming us to the likeness of Christ, we begin to see why we are going through *so much* suffering, hardship, broken relationships, misunderstanding, alienation, death, and yes, groans and sighs that words cannot express. Why? Because Christ went through infinitely more suffering, hardship, broken relationships, misunderstanding, alienation, and death, and yes, all with groans and sighs that words cannot express. We cannot be conformed to the image of Christ and be exempt from suffering.

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, (Baker Books, 1998), 453.

That would not make sense. Even as the apostle Paul says earlier in Romans 8, “If children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ *provided we suffer with him . . .*” (v. 17).

Now let’s be absolutely clear about something. The suffering of Christ is fundamentally different than our suffering. Christ suffered for us and for our salvation. We did not, and we cannot (LD 5). Still, confessing this fundamental difference, we also receive God’s Word in Romans 8:29. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Father is busy conforming us to the likeness of his Son. His Son suffered, immensely. In his likeness, we also suffer, at times immensely.

Yet this is not suffering in vain. On the contrary, it is suffering en route to gain, indeed, final glory. This holds true both for the Firstborn and for us, God’s adopted children. Romans 8:17 continues, “. . . provided we suffer with him *in order that we may also be glorified with him.*” For the Eternal and Original Son, the constraint of his agony-drenched cross became the gateway into unimaginable glory, both for him and, out of grace, also for us, his co-heirs.

Still, maybe you are thinking, “But we are not in glory yet, and besides, the Christ who went through his suffering, was and is also God, with infinite strength and stamina. By contrast, I am weak and frail. How do I receive strength, in the daily veil of tears, to carry on?”

Jesus asks “Why Lord?”

Our heavenly Abba says, “My dear child, consider this. When you cry out, ‘Why Lord?’ do you remember exactly *when* your Saviour spoke those same words?” At precisely which hour did Jesus ask the “Why Lord?” question? Matthew 27:46 gives the answer: “And *about the ninth hour* Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”

What happened immediately before *that* ninth hour on *that* particular day? Matthew 27:45 gives the necessary detail: “Now from the sixth hour *there was darkness over all the land* until the ninth hour.” During those three horrific hours of accursed darkness, the Son of God endured an eternity’s worth of God’s holy wrath “against the sin of the whole human race,” as we confess in Lord’s Day 15. Jesus Christ’s *why* question was preceded by three hours of hellish forsakenness.


Does *this* make sense to your finite mind? I know I cannot find and fit every piece of this jigsaw puzzle. Why would God the Father utterly forsake his own Beloved Son during three hours of hellish anguish when all the Beloved Son ever did was to love and obey him? And how is it even possible for *the first person* of our Triune God to utterly forsake *the second person* of our Triune God and yet remain one and the same, true and eternal God through it all? We may try to figure out that jigsaw puzzle, but at certain point we run stuck.

Nevertheless, because our God has revealed it, we do know the basic answer to Christ’s why question. No need to solve puzzles on this one! The Eternal Father forsook his Only-Begotten Son so that we, the adopted children, might never be forsaken by him—no matter how deep, how dark, or how long our Baca Valley may be (Deut 31:6; Heb 13:5).

In our long, dark days, we cry out, “Why Lord? This tragedy makes no sense to me, and it does not seem to be bringing about any good either.”

In his love, our Abba says, “My child, change the question slightly. Ask this: ‘Why, Lord, did you forsake the Firstborn?’” To which our Father answers: “I did it, my child, all for you. Because I love you. Because *he* loves you. Because this was our chosen way of making sure that nothing—and I mean nothing at all, not even death or the devil—would ever separate you from my love in Christ my Son. That’s why!”

Assurance more than solution

It is true, our keen minds cannot solve every puzzle. Sometimes, though, assurance is more valuable than a solution. Look to Christ. Believe in him. Trust your Father at his word. This is what we need more than anything else: Someone who is completely sovereign, who lovingly holds our hand, and who promises that he will never, ever let go of our hand. *That* assurance from our Father, in Christ, is worth much more than solving the jigsaw puzzle. 



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The Miracle of the Written Word

Women's Savings Action Presentation 2022

We take much for granted. Perhaps we take a little less for granted than we used to. It's shocking that much of which we take for granted isn't necessarily mundane or simple. Quite the opposite in fact. Often the things we take for granted are gifts of miraculous proportions, but because they've just always been there, we don't see them as anything special, certainly not miraculous.

Considering the Women's Savings Action focuses on all things written, it only seemed fitting that we look at the miracle of the written word. Delving into this topic proved to be overwhelming and worthy of three points and a forty-minute time allotment to cover the scope of it all, but we'll give it an honest go to stay within our given time frame.

Adam's first words

Let's start from the very beginning. It's a very good place to start. However, try as we might and no matter how much we

begged Google, there was no tracing speech, language, or writing back to . . . well . . . Adam. For really, isn't it there that we must recognize the absolute miracle and beauty of how the "written word" all began? Sure, one can find all sorts of amazing references regarding Mesopotamia and cuneiform, Egypt and their famous hieroglyphics, and of course the miraculous findings of the Dead Sea scrolls dated back some 2000 years ago. But still, none of that compares to the miracle of what must have happened when Adam was tasked with naming and documenting God's creatures.

"Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens to every beast of the field" (Gen 2:19). Automatically our simple thought process says, "Can you imagine having to come up

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

Prov 9:10



with all those names?" But to truly appreciate the vast miracle it would take to complete such a task, let's dig a little deeper.

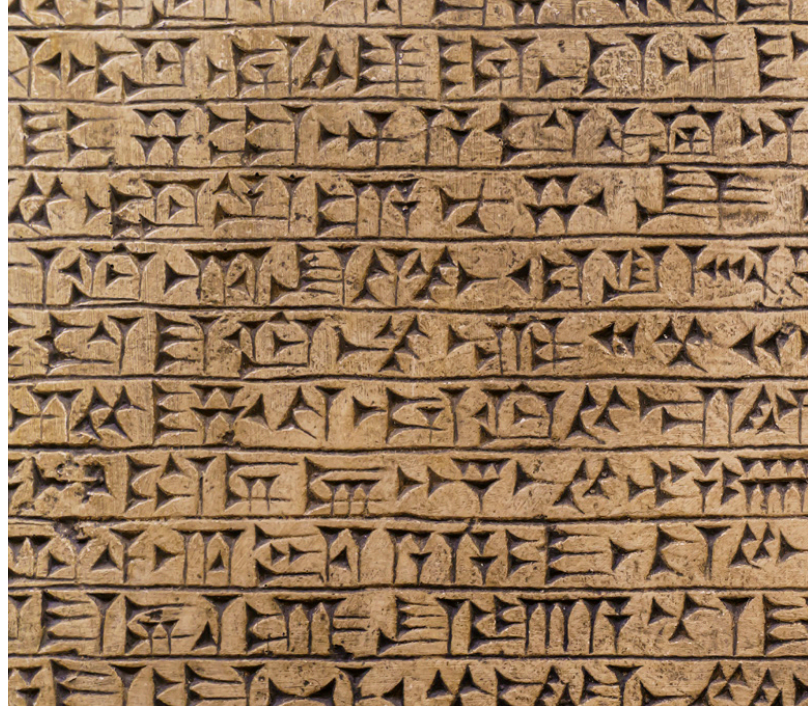
We can't fully appreciate the miracle of the written word without first recognizing the miracle of verbal speech. Speech is comprised of sounds. How many random sounds (not words, just sounds) do you think each of us can make? Some might deduce that since each letter in the alphabet has its own sound, that would put us at least twenty-six different sounds. But in fact, in the English language *alone*, there are approximately forty-four unique sounds that help us distinguish one word of meaning from another.

When we hear someone talking in a different language, and it sounds very strange, it's because we are actually acquainted with very few of the verbal sounds that humans can make. How many sounds is that exactly? Even if we managed to account for the unique sounds of the approximately 7,100 different languages in the world today, along with the varied accents

and musical tones which add additional layers of sound to our vocabulary, it would be a terrible guess at best. And the only way to learn these sounds? Is by hearing them, repeating them, and memorizing them. It's how we all learned to speak. I think here of Helen Keller, who could not see or hear and consequently couldn't speak, even though there was nothing wrong with the anatomy of her vocal abilities.

Pictogram to written word?

So, logistically, how did Adam document the new sounds he created to depict the creature before him so as to teach the next generation in some form of written context? Let's think about that for a moment. First, Adam needed to come up with a sound or series of sounds to make up the creature's name. That shouldn't be so hard; after all, we are capable of hundreds of sounds that we've never even used before. But how would you remember what you named the creature before you,



before moving on to the next? Did Adam just remember? Quite possibly. Or did he somehow document it, say, with a pictogram of sorts? Perhaps, but that then still begs the question how he remembered what *sound* each documented picture carried. In any case, let's say that eventually all those pictograms would somehow become words, and eventually those words would be comprised of letters which would initiate the creation of an alphabet of sorts. This could help to introduce abstract words in order to make a sentence. In any case, the progression of speech to language to the written word is absolutely miraculous. Humanly speaking, Adam couldn't have done this alone. And the miracle doesn't end there.

Tablets, scrolls, parchments

Stay with me. We're still in ancient times but now we have words, an alphabet, and sentence structure. All we have to do is write everything down—on stone tablets, scrolls of papyrus, and parchments of animal skins, using tools that most of us wouldn't recognize. Hmm . . . documents, ancient writings, and books can only survive for so long when using these plant/animal-based materials!

As the materials continually aged out, how were the writings preserved? There was only one way! By making copies of course. Today? Easy. Not so thousands of years ago when the only way to do so was to laboriously copy things by hand. For example, let's take a look at the Dead Sea Scrolls. Quoting from Prof. John Smith's article that was printed in *Clarion* this past July,

During the Middle Ages the Jewish community set high standard of precision for copying their Hebrew scrolls and codices. They knew exactly how many Hebrew words were found in a book, how often a particular word occurred in a particular form, where the middle word and even the middle letter of a book was to be found, and they preserved rabbinic debates on the most minute details of the text—all of this as a sort of quality control that would prevent even a single word of Scripture, a single jot or tittle, from being lost. So precise was their work that when the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, scholars were amazed to find that many of them were virtually identical to the Jewish scrolls of the Middle Ages.

Amazing! Remember, with the exception of the book of Esther, these scrolls contain parts of every book of the Old Testament, comprising roughly 900 full and partial scrolls in all. They were stored in clay jars and hidden in caves until they were recovered in 1946. Apparently, the natural limestone and conditions within the caves, along with an unusual coating of

sulfate salts helped to persevere the scrolls for millennia. How convenient that the scientists had an explanation. We, of course, know better as to how and why they were really preserved.

God's Word preserved

The unbelievable creation and preservation of the written word is an absolute wonder. We should feel comforted by the fact that, no matter how much time passes, the Lord will graciously preserve exactly what needs to be preserved for the benefit of his church. Aren't we so thankful that in a time where fallible, easily disrupted, highspeed technology threatens to take over all things written, nothing stands the test of time like the Word of God?

In our library at CRTS, we too carry some real ancient treasures in our special collections section. Although the preservation of these sorts of books can be tedious and costly, and we have limited technology and resources, we store them as best we can. We recognize that reading is the primary goal of education everywhere and the written word cannot be separated from that. And so, we consider our seminary library to be a compilation of miracles, blessed gifts, educational tools, and an integral part of what we do at our seminary.

Thank you so much for supporting that.

With great gratitude we can report that our Women's Savings Action representatives collected \$34,678.73 during the past fiscal year. We thank each one of our representatives for their time and effort to collect within their congregation. To everyone who donated, *thank you!* In addition to the collections, we received a very generous \$40,000 gift.

It is our pleasure, on behalf of the Women's Savings Action, to pledge \$45,000 for the seminary library this 2022/2023 school year. The rest of this year's donations will be pledged to the seminary, as needed, in future years. ☺



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MERF News

September 2022



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

Caring for Seekers & Converts

“If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”

Mark 9:35

إِذَا أَرَادَ أَحَدٌ أَنْ يَكُونَ أَوَّلًا فَيَكُونَ آخِرَ الْكُلِّ وَخَادِمًا لِلْكُلِّ



www.issa-almasfih.com

In God's providence unprecedented numbers of Muslims express keen interest in learning about Christ and His ways. Most do so quietly or confidentially. Others more openly show interest, especially over social media.

It is not coincidental that Christians regularly cross paths with Muslims – shopkeepers, neighbors and colleagues. They too need the gospel. If we truly love our neighbors as we ought, we certainly desire to see them gathered into Christ's fold. God called Abraham to bring blessing to all families of the earth in Christ, the promised Seed (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Galatians 3:16).

Slow and Steady

Muslims can have many reasons to show interest in the Christian faith -- admiration of Christian culture, desire for a mate, a good job or a visa. Some are just curious and some can be spies who want to identify and report true converts. It is impossible to be sure but God's Word can also change hardened hearts. While welcoming inquirers, we must guard the sheep, especially other converts.

Honor and Respect

No Muslim would put the Koran near feet or anything dirty. Nor is

it appropriate to slouch or sit cross-legged when hearing and reading it or before important persons. We need to avoid adding offense to the gospel and take care to highly honor God's Word and one another as well. Likewise, modest clothing avoids giving wrong moral impressions about the Christian life.

A Radical Change

Like all of us, Muslims are sinners who need Christ's redeeming grace. They too receive the gift of faith through God's Word and Spirit. Conversion is a work of God. To the praise of His grace,

the number of Muslims who convert to Christ is steadily growing. An Islamic background, however, adds different challenges and more obstacles to a convert's Christian journey. Converts need much understanding and care. Our prayers, listening ears, encouragement and thoughtful patience are vital in the process of nourishing converts.

The most effective presentation of the Christian world and life view is in the *Sermon on the Mount*. This is helpful in teaching Muslim converts the meaning of “All of Christ to All of Man” It provides a radically different and liberating life view,



including the worth and dignity of women.

Spiritual Nourishment

Living with and for Christ requires learning and feeding on His Word daily. God's life-giving Word gradually deals with the many in-grown false assumptions. Converts take much longer to develop biblical views and to recognize the need for changed habits. They also need time to feel comfortable and safe as part of a Christian fellowship. Small group Bible studies are helpful to discuss questions. More and

more this is done online. In time, proven converts can be safely introduced to mature believers and other converts.

Centrality of Christ

It is key for converts to clearly understand that Christ is the center of all Scriptures. He is also the objective of the divine direction of history. They need to understand that Old Testament Scriptures focus on preparing for the coming of Christ. This effectively answers many questions about his nature and earthly saving mission. It does away with the idea that God established a series of religions. It also sets aside the fallacy that Jesus is just a good prophet or even the best one.

Worship and Fellowship

Being called to be part of the body of Christ

means steady commitment to sound biblical worship and to belong to a local fellowship. Christians teach this by example. Often being ostracized by family and community means that converts need us to invest our time in listening, loving and including them as well as teaching and prayer. However, another real risk is too much attention. Indulging or overly celebrating a convert seriously endangers their spiritual health.

True Christians follow Christ

Some suffering is part of being a faithful follower, so it is not helpful to encourage converts to run away from carrying Jesus' cross. Still, they need to be counselled to be wise in dealing with friends and family. Becoming overzealous and confrontational, some converts bring unneces-

“And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

— Galatians 3: 29

sary difficulties on themselves. Christ's meekness is strength, not weakness. Converts need to be taught to be thankful for the good in their culture, such as strong, caring families and warm hospitality and to avoid stirring animosity by speaking ill of Mohamed or the Koran. Instead, they can be long-suffering and winsome, humbly showing love for Christ and His ways by being self-giving, slow to speak and quick to listen. A quiet, respectful Christ-honoring life in the community is a powerful testimony.

MERF-Canada

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

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

e-transfers:
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“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

Luke 24:44

هَذَا هُوَ الْكَلَامُ الَّذِي كَلَّمْتُمْ بِهِ وَأَنَا بَعْدُ مَعَكُمْ: أَنَّهُ لَا بُدَّ أَنْ يَتِمَّ جَمِيعُ مَا هُوَ مَكْتُوبٌ عَلَيَّ فِي شَرِيعَةِ مُوسَى وَالنَّبِيِّاءِ وَالْمَزَامِيرِ



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CLARION KIDS

AMANDA DEBOER

LORD'S DAY 20

Do you know who the Holy Spirit is? You might say, "Yes! He is God and he lives in our hearts." And you are right! First of all, the Holy Spirit is God. This means that he was not created. He was always there, even before the world was made! And he will be there forever, just like the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit also lives in our hearts. He works faith in us. Do you believe that the Lord Jesus died for your sins? If you can say yes, that shows that the Spirit is working in your heart! Because of this, you are blessed with God's love now and forever. The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter, remember? Maybe you were sad one day. Then your parents told you a comforting Bible verse. The Holy Spirit used your parents to comfort you. Praise God for the Holy Spirit!

Fill in the missing vowels (a,e,i,o,u):

The catechism also tells us that the Holy Spirit remains (or is with us) F__R__V__R.

Do you remember the Trinity? Name the three persons of the Trinity in the squares below:

God the

God the

God the

PRESS RELEASE

CRTS Board of Governors Meeting September 8, 2022

Opening and roll call

The chairman of the Board, Rev. John Louwerse, led in opening devotions. All governors were present, including the new governors appointed by General Synod 2022, held in Guelph, ON: Rev. Jeff Temple, Rev. Julius Van Spronsen, Mr. Adrian Bartels, and Mr. Herman Post. Dr. Jason Van Vliet was present as Principal and administrative assistant Leanne Kuizenga was present to take the minutes of the meeting.

Prior to the Board meeting, the Chairman and our Principal conducted an orientation session for the new governors. They have all signed forms indicating that they consented to their appointment and met the legal requirements to serve on the Board of Governors. Various governors were assigned to specific roles on the Board and on various sub-committees.

Gratitude was expressed for the service of outgoing governors Butch Medemblik, Frank Oostdyk, and Rev. Matthew van Luik.

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 meetings held on January 13 and April 21, 2022 were approved. The agenda for the meeting was established. The action log was reviewed.

Decisions, reports, agenda items

1. Since CRTS previously decided to hire a part-time teaching assistant to assist the professors with their work, a proposed role summary of the teaching assistant as well as a summary of his tasks and duties was approved.
2. Letters were sent to General Synod Guelph (2022) addressing our support of students from South Africa, the nomination of men to serve as governors on the Finance and Property Committee, and the appointment of a new professor for Ministry and Missions. After synod, a letter was sent to Dr. Reuben Bredenhof formally appointing him as the new professor of Ministry and Missions. With thankfulness we note that he has accepted his appointment! A letter was written to the Free Reformed Church of Mt. Nasura, Western Australia regarding the transfer of responsibility of Dr. Reuben Bredenhof and his family to our care, and wishing them God's blessing as they begin to search for their own pastor and teacher again.
3. A decision was made by email resolution to approve of the 2021 audited financial statements for the seminary, in order to have them submitted to the Canadian Revenue Agency by June 30 (June 24, 2022).
4. A letter was received from Providence Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton, ON regarding the possible development of a shared facility on a property they own. Further information was sought from the Providence church and this will receive consideration at a future meeting. At this point in time no decisions have been made about this. The current renovations at the seminary were necessary and will serve the seminary for many years. The development of a multi-purpose facility deserves proper consideration due to space limitations of our current property and an increasing student body.
5. A letter was received from Guido de Brès High School informing us that they had purchased a larger facility and inquiring if we had interest in the current facility. Due to the short time the Finance and Property Committee had to consider this proposal they declined this offer.
6. The Board reviewed the decisions that Synod made regarding CRTS. Synod made the decision to support the South African churches as they seek to send students to study in Hamilton. Formerly the South African churches often sent their seminary students to the seminary in Kampen, the Netherlands, and received considerable support from the Dutch sister churches. Due to their desire to have their students trained in a faithful church federation they are now sending their students to Hamilton. The Board expresses the hope that the churches will generously support the Foreign Student Bursary Fund via freewill giving, as already this year we will be supporting three students from South Africa through this fund.
7. The seminary's strategic plan was reviewed. Various committees reported on initiatives. The committee responsible for admission standards for mature students suggested a possible policy for the admittance of mature students who do not have an undergraduate degree. The Board would like to ensure that students who are enrolled have the ability to study at CRTS, while at the same time not placing unnecessary obstacles in the way of mature men who would like to study to serve in the ministry. The Board approved the direction of the committee proposal, and the committee will submit a formal proposal for the next Board meeting.
8. The committee responsible for considering the possibility of establishing an Australian Affiliate Campus gave an

initial report. This committee was established at the request of the Australian Deputies for Training for the Ministry. The Board had an initial discussion about this, and will deal further with this in January. From a big picture perspective, it needs to be remembered that the establishment of an Australian Affiliate Campus should be considered in a way that does not compromise the mission and vitality of CRTS.

9. Our Principal sought feedback from the Board on what inspires men and what may hold them back from studying for the ministry. The Board held a discussion and gave feedback.
10. Margaret Alkema joined the meeting to provide background and answer questions regarding our contact with the Association for Theological Schools, and in her role as assessment coordinator. A draft report to ATS due in November was presented, and the Board took note of a report on the ATS Biennial 2022 report, as well as an Institutional Peer Profile and a Strategic Information Report. The Board discussed the Annual Report of the Assessment Coordinator, minutes from assessment day 2022 and a metrics report we use to gauge how the seminary is doing in specific matters. The reports were received with thankfulness.
11. The Master of Divinity Program Review Interim Report was presented. It recommended some streamlining of various courses, and the combination of two two-credit courses on Contemporary Issues and Ethics into one three-credit course titled Ethics. The Board approved of the general recommendations and made a decision to combine these courses as recommended.
12. The Chairman reported on an evaluation of the Principal's work. On behalf of the Executive, the Chairman also reported on arrangements made with Dr. Ted Van Raalte regarding his teaching load for the coming year. The Board is thankful that Dr. Ted Van Raalte's health continues to improve after his accident.
13. Revs. James Slaa and Joe Poppe reported on lecture visits to CRTS from March 16-17, 2022. They also reported on visits with most of the professors and students. The Board received this report with thankfulness.
14. The Finance and Property Committee presented an annual report on their activities. They presented the CRTS annual budget for 2023, and it was approved. The Finance and Property Committee presented the financial statements for 2021, and these were formally approved. With thankfulness it was noted that approximately \$1.2 million was raised for the Partnership in the Gospel campaign. An update was given on the renovations taking place at CRTS. Due to escalating costs, there will be a further request among the churches for additional funds. Because of delays with permitting and supply chain issues the renovation is taking longer than initially


expected. The decision was made to teach the fall semester off campus. Thankfulness is expressed for the willingness of the Maranatha Free Reformed Church of Hamilton to host our CRTS community while construction is completed.

The annual assessment for 2023 was set at \$97 per communicant member, an increase of \$6 per communicant member. CRTS also plans to run a deficit budget (based on surpluses from previous years) for the coming year, saving the churches an additional \$5 per communicant member. Much of the increase relates to the appointment of a new professor for Ministry and Missions and having responsibility for him for an extra six months as he prepares himself for his teaching responsibilities.

The Board approved a revised policy on the budget preparation process.

15. Dr. Jason Van Vliet presented his Principal's report focusing on thankfulness for an increasing student body, the new professor appointed by Synod, and the ongoing help of a part-time teaching assistant. He expressed gratitude for the current faculty and staff and all the work that they do.
16. The Board received a report from Dr. Jason Van Vliet on a mini-sabbatical held during part of the summer, as his regular sabbatical was interrupted by dealing with COVID-19 and other concerns. The following annual reports were received with thankfulness: course work report, registrar's report, library report, website report, convocation committee report, Faber-Holwerda bursary report, publication foundation report, foreign student bursary report, and the lecture schedule for 2022-23. Dr. Arjan de Visser reported on a visit to a conference in Florida and on a trip to Korea where he lectured and preached in the churches. Dr. Jannes Smith reported on a visit to the churches in South Africa. These reports were received with gratitude. Governors were appointed to visit the lectures in the fall and winter semesters.

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. Clarence Vandervelde closed the meeting with prayer. 

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary,



Rev. Joe Poppe
(Vice-chairman/Corresponding Clerk)

