



Clarion

51 NURTURING OUR MARRIAGES *56* TECHNOLOGY IN WORSHIP

62 NAPARC REPORT

WHAT'S INSIDE

contents

Welcome! We have a wide variety of topics in this issue beginning with a plea from our editorialist Dr. VanVliet to be more purposeful in strengthening marriages, both our own and those around us. Some fine ideas there! The meditation from Pastor Carl Van Dam has an angle that our younger readers may well appreciate while the next installment of Pastor Tyler Vandergaag's series on the fruit of the Holy Spirit will make us all grateful for our Saviour's gentleness and long to emulate it.

Several articles bring us international news in Reformed endeavours. Pastor Cornelis Kleyn in *Discipling the Nations* sketches the situation of the mission work in the large country of Papua New Guinea and gives us specific matters to pray for. In nearby Indonesia MERF supports work among the largely Muslim population and this work, along with a round-up of other activities, is reported on in their newsletter. A little closer to home for us Canadians and Americans, Mr. Otto Bouwman gives us a glimpse into a meeting of thirteen Reformed and Presbyterian churches at the recent annual NAPARC event held in Atlanta.

Conferences of all kinds are back in full swing these days and so we bring you a report of the 2022 Eastern Ministerial Conference (Ontario) by Pastor John Bouwers and a summary by Pastor Keith Davis of a youth conference held last summer north of Calgary. You'll also find a review of a book which Pastor Wes Bredenhof urges will serve well as an "on-ramp" to Puritan writings, a worthwhile goal as he tells it. Rounding out this issue is *Clarion Kids* with a lesson on the sacraments, *Ray of Sunshine* highlighting the birthday of Brent Baartman, and two press releases from ecclesiastical assemblies. In all of these things we can see the Lord's hand at work for the furtherance of his kingdom so be encouraged, be in prayer, and be joyful in the Lord!

Peter Holtvlüwer

- 51 Editorial: Nurturing Our Marriages
Jason Van Vliet
- 52 TREASURES, NEW & OLD
In My Father's House, *S. Carl Van Dam*
- 53 In the Fruit of the Spirit is Gentleness
Tyler VanderGaag
- 56 Technology in Worship, *Frank Ezinga*
- 59 DISCIPLING THE NATIONS
May The Lord's Purposes Stand
Cornelis Kleyn
- 62 NAPARC Report, *Otto Bouwman*
- 65 MERF Newsletter
- 67 "Go & Tell!" 2022 Summit Reformed
Youth Conference Recap, *Keith Davis*
- 70 Eastern Ministerial Conference 2022
John Bouwers
- 72 RAY OF SUNSHINE *Rachel Vis*
- 73 CLARION KIDS *Amanda DeBoer*
- 74 BOOK REVIEW
Hearty Piety to Stir Your Soul
to Prayer, *Wes Bredenhof*
- 75 PRESS RELEASE (CPW, Sep 22)
- 76 PRESS RELEASE (RSE, Nov 9)
- 77 LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Clarion

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- L**oving in manner
- A**ttuned to current issues
- R**eadable and Reliable
- I**n Submission to Scripture
- O**pen to constructive criticism
- N**urturing Christian living

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NURTURING OUR MARRIAGES

As the apex of his creation work, our God fashioned a rib into a woman and brought her to the man. Breaking out into a poem, Adam embraced his wife (Gen 2:22–23). The first wedding ceremony was indeed “very good” (Gen 1:31)!

Sadly, marriage did not remain so good. The Fall turned poetry into finger pointing: “The woman whom you gave to be with me. . .” (Gen 3:13). There it all started, and it has not stopped since. Also within the church, and even within so-called healthy marriages, couples face many troubles (1 Cor 7:28). All things considered, the church has a vested interest in nurturing marriages to be the best they can be. How well are we doing that?

MARRIAGE HAS BIG IMPLICATIONS

Marriage has the potential to be an immense blessing, at present and for generations to come. Conversely, as our sinfulness tarnishes our Maker’s gift, much misery may seep into matrimony, both for the couple and for those around them. Marriage is a profound mystery (Eph 5:32) with profound influences.

For example, where will our children learn to be Christ-like husbands and godly wives? Pre-marriage classes have a role to play, but it all begins with kids watching their own dads and moms interact over the years. Healthy marriages can spawn more healthy marriages. Regrettably, the opposite is also true: sinful patterns in our own marriages may well be repeated in the marriages of our (grand)children.

Turning to another area of life, if children struggle at school, be it academically or socially, teachers often wonder, “What is happening on the family front?” Tension between husband and wife at home can manifest itself in the conduct of their children in the classroom or on the playground.

All of this should not be so surprising, given how our LORD speaks about marriage in the psalms. Psalm 127 moves seamlessly from a family room full of children (v. 3) to the city gates where important ecclesiastical decisions are made (v. 5). Similarly, Psalm 128 swiftly moves our attention from a cozy supper table (v. 3) to a long line of covenant generations (v. 6a) and finally out to the entire nation, Israel, which is the church (v. 6b). Marriage has such wide-ranging implications, both for good and for ill!

More specifically, the well-being of our marriages impacts the future of church leadership. Ministers, elders, and deacons should not only be wise men with sound doctrine but also men with godly wives, strong marriages, and well-ordered households (1 Tim 3). If our congregations are to have enough men to serve well in office,

we need healthy marriage relationships as much as leadership training sessions.


Yes, our God generates blessings, also out of brokenness. But the question remains: are we doing enough to nurture our marriages?

MARRIAGE NEEDS ONGOING ASSISTANCE

For years our congregations have offered pre-marriage counselling. This is excellent but not enough. To begin with, let’s pay more attention to the prayer life of our couples, not just at the dinner table but especially in the master bedroom. On home visits, elders should be bold enough to ask specific questions about when and how our couples pray together, just with each other. Like pebbles in a shoe, little irritants easily accumulate in married life. But holding hands and praying together for forgiveness *every evening* goes a long way to keeping husband and wife united as soulmates.

Next, in the six months prior to the wedding day we schedule pre-marriage counselling and parents try hard to remember all the truths and tips they should pass on before their children tie the knot. But what about after the “big day”? True, newlyweds need space to find their way. But after six months, could our parents and/or pastors stop in for a coffee *and* an intentional, heart-to-heart chat about how things are going in their marriage?

Finally, when a baby is born, meals arrive at the door, lovingly prepared by our congregation. Can we apply that thought to other occasions in life? Stepping away and having someone else take care of the kids for a few days is a breath of fresh air for couples. Husband and wife reconnect, talk at length (and uninterrupted!), and rekindle the flame. Sometimes grandparents step up and make this happen. But what if grandparents are not around or not able? If we can deliver meals when a baby arrives, some time later can we offer to take care of all the kids for a few days so that a marriage thrives?

Daily marriage prayers, sixth-month marriage check-ups, and occasional marriage retreats. That list is short and incomplete. Maybe you have even better ideas. Please share them. Because marriages in God’s church are worth nurturing well. 



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IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

LUKE 2:49

We can wonder what Jesus’s childhood was like. We know very little about it. What we do know we find at the end of Luke 2. Luke writes in Luke 2:40 that the child Jesus “grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favour of God was upon him.” He grew up and became taller and stronger just like all young boys. He went through all the physical changes that are involved with growing. He was a real boy, a real man.


He also grew in wisdom and knowledge. He would have studied the Scriptures as a faithful, believing Israelite. The favour of God was upon him, and he grew in his obedience and service to his heavenly Father. He was filled with the practical knowledge of how to live a God-pleasing life. He was helped in this by the grace of God. God’s favour rested upon him. He sought his Father in heaven. His Father blessed him with his grace.

All we know about Jesus as a boy was when he was twelve years old. His parents had taken him to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, as they did every year. When his parents started to journey back home to Nazareth, they did not realize right away that Jesus had not come along with them. When they did, they searched for him in Jerusalem in great distress for three days. Finally they found him in the temple. It seems that was the last place they looked, the place where they the least expected him to be.

The boy Jesus was surprised that his parents were looking all over for him. Didn’t they know he would be in his Father’s house? Jesus’s favourite place to be was in the house of his heavenly Father. He had a special relationship with God for he was his eternal natural Son. Jesus was aware that Joseph was not his natural father. He respected Joseph as his earthly father, his father by law, but his real Father was God the Father in heaven. Jesus had a special and unique relationship with his heavenly Father. They had been together already from all eternity.

Jesus was in the temple where he really wanted to be. He was “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers” (v. 46–47). How Jesus had been diligent in searching the Scriptures and learning from God! He had already

been living very close to his heavenly Father and had been growing in wisdom. The favour of God was upon him, and it showed also now in the temple. He was fully occupied with the things of God and made it his aim in life to obey God and follow him in all that he did.

Are we also the happiest and most at home when we are with our heavenly Father? Or do we prefer to be doing other things? Boys and girls, now is the time to be faithful and diligent in reading the Scriptures and growing in the Lord. Make a good habit of it now already, so that it will stay with you the rest of your life. Don’t start later or it may never happen. This applies to all of us no matter how old we are. Today is the day to make a new start in diligent and repentant service to the Lord! God created us to serve him and to have a personal relationship with him. He wrote the Bible for us to read and to take to heart. The more we listen to our heavenly Father, the more we want to worship him, praise him, and pray to him. May we all desire to be at home with him in his heavenly dwelling and begin now already to live with him with our whole heart, soul, and mind. 

FURTHER READING

Philippians 2:5–11; Hebrews 5:1–10

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. What must it have been like for the teachers to be amazed at Jesus’s understanding?
2. How can we be more diligent in studying Scripture personally?
3. Where are we most at home?



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In the Fruit of the Spirit is
Gentleness

TYLER VANDERGAAG

Who of us are not weary or burdened in some way or another? Whether it's a sinful struggle that you can't seem to break, the realization that your heart is growing cold towards the Lord, or disputes with fellow believers and friends, whether it's health difficulties, troubles in the family, or the death of a loved one, we are all weary and burdened to some degree and in some way or another. What a blessing, then, to know that we can find rest in the Lord Jesus, who is filled with the gentleness found in the fruit of the Spirit! In turn, his gentleness is what the Spirit uses to move us to follow his example, to embrace and grow in Spirit-filled gentleness.

JESUS'S GENTLENESS

Our tendency—at least my own—is sometimes to keep it all inside, to bury our burdens deep within our souls, to pretend it's all good. We sometimes even think that our burdens disqualify us from coming to the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is high and holy, exalted and glorious. How could we possibly come to him with our wearisome burdens and sin? You unload those on a close friend, not a king! How can I come to him when my soul is so overwhelmed with grief and sorrow and confusion? And how can I possibly come to him when my heart is cold? Will he not throw us out as soon we enter the throne room of

God's grace? But no, he won't. Think of what he said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That word "all" includes everyone who is burdened in one way or another. What sweet music to our ears! Your sin doesn't disqualify you from coming to Jesus. Your burdens don't either. Neither does your coldness towards him or your weakness, your fears or anything else.

Now, the very thing that qualifies us to come to Jesus—being weary and burdened—is also what he promises to relieve us from: "I will give you rest." That's what we need. Rest from our toils and burdens. Rest when our souls are overwhelmed and when sorrows like sea billows roll. That's what Jesus promises us. Is your heart restless? Are you weary and burdened? Run to Jesus in faith. Heed his call. Embrace his promise. Find rest for your soul.

How could we possibly come to him with our wearisome burdens and sin?

What the Lord Jesus says in plain language in Matthew 11:28 he says in metaphorical language in the next verse: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (v. 29). Jesus is not talking about egg yolk here. A yoke was a wooden bar that was used in those days to connect one animal to the another. This allowed animals to effectively work side-by-side (cf. 1 Kings 19:19). That might seem a bit odd, though; what comfort is there in being yoked like oxen? Yet Jesus promises not to treat us like an ox or work us to the bone: "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (v. 30). The word "easy" is elsewhere translated as kind (Eph 4:32). That's what his yoke is: an easy yoke, a kind yoke, a light burden. His yoke, then, is more like the yoke placed on horses and attached to a chariot. That's a light yoke and is really no yoke at all! You've seen racehorses in chariot races, I'm sure. Yoked together, the horses fly and flourish as they run at full speed! That's what the Lord Jesus is promising here. He replaces the heavy yoke of sin and misery that wearies and burdens us with an easy yoke, a light burden that allows us to run free and flourish, to truly rest in his faithfulness and love.

MEEKNESS, NOT WEAKNESS

This doesn't mean that our lives will be sin-free, care-free, or struggle-free, though we often wish it did. My life isn't sin and struggle free. Yours isn't either. "In this world you will have trouble," Jesus

says in John 16:33. But we can take heart. Why? Because of what Jesus says about his own heart. The heart—from a biblical perspective—is the core and centre of who a person is. It's what makes us tick and what drives us. So, what words does Jesus use to describe his own heart? What drives our Saviour? What makes him tick? Power? Majesty? Greatness? No. Gentle and lowly—those are the words he uses to describe his own heart. "I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt 11:29).

Being gentle is not to be mistaken for weakness. Gentle tongues can break bones (Prov 25:15). Being gentle is not acting cowardly either. Those who can patiently endure suffering are the gentle (Ps 34:2, translated "humble"). Neither does gentle mean timid. Gentle as Jesus is, he pronounces woes on unrepentant cities (Matt 10:20–24). So, what does gentle mean? Well, the same word is found in the first beatitude: "Blessed are the meek" (Matt 5:5). Gentle. Meek. These words convey a sense of care, compassion, and understanding. A gentle person, one author explains, can handle a tray of fragile crystal wine glasses without breaking one of them (J. Bridges, *The Fruitful Life*, 122). Jesus, gentle as he is, does the same with our frail, fragile, and delicate hearts. He's gentle, careful, meek, compassionate, and wise enough to know how to care for us, how to encourage us, and challenge us too. He's the shepherd of Isaiah 40:11, who gathers the lambs in his arms and who gently leads those that have young. That's Jesus: the gentle

When you know your own heart, you'll deal gently with hearts of other sinners

shepherd who carries us close to his heart.

All this is to say, Jesus's gentleness is as bottomless as his love, as complete as his joy, as powerful as his peace, as unlimited as his patience, as unusual as his kindness, and as great as his faithfulness. It's who he is. It's what makes him tick. His heart is gentle and is set on giving us rest. It's why he went to the cross—to bear our wearisome burdens for us, to relieve us of our guilt, to give us hope and calm our restless hearts.

With such a Saviour, what possible reason do we have to resist his call to come to him? What reason do you have to cling tightly to your burdens and wearisome fears? What reason to refuse his yoke could you possibly have? There is no reason, not one. Your Saviour and Lord is gentle and lowly, meek and humble. Run to him! Find rest for your souls in him. His yoke is easy. His burden, light!

OUR GENTLENESS

Now, gentleness was not high on the list of virtues in the ancient world. The same is true today. Gentle people get nowhere in life. Gentle people are pushed around and taken advantage of. But even still, Jesus himself calls us to embrace this aspect of the Spirit's fruit. Right before he tells us about his gentle and humble heart, he says "learn from me" (Matt 11:29). In other words, "follow my example."

We know by now that Jesus's gentle (and humble) heart flows from the reality that he was full of the Spirit. He lived by the Spirit, was led by the Spirit, and so kept in step with the Spirit. What he did, he calls us to do as well. Learn from me. We too, then, must rely on the Spirit to cultivate gentleness in our hearts, to cause it to blossom, bloom, and produce a rich harvest in our lives. Gentleness. Meekness. Humility. It's the Spirit's way. It's the Spirit's fruit.

And as we rely on the Spirit to work gentleness in our hearts, we also strive to keep in step with and grow in gentleness too. We especially need gentleness when dealing with the sins and struggles of others. This is the very thing Paul commands shortly after he lists the fruit of the Spirit. "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted" (Gal 6:1). In a spirit of gentleness—that's how we're called to deal

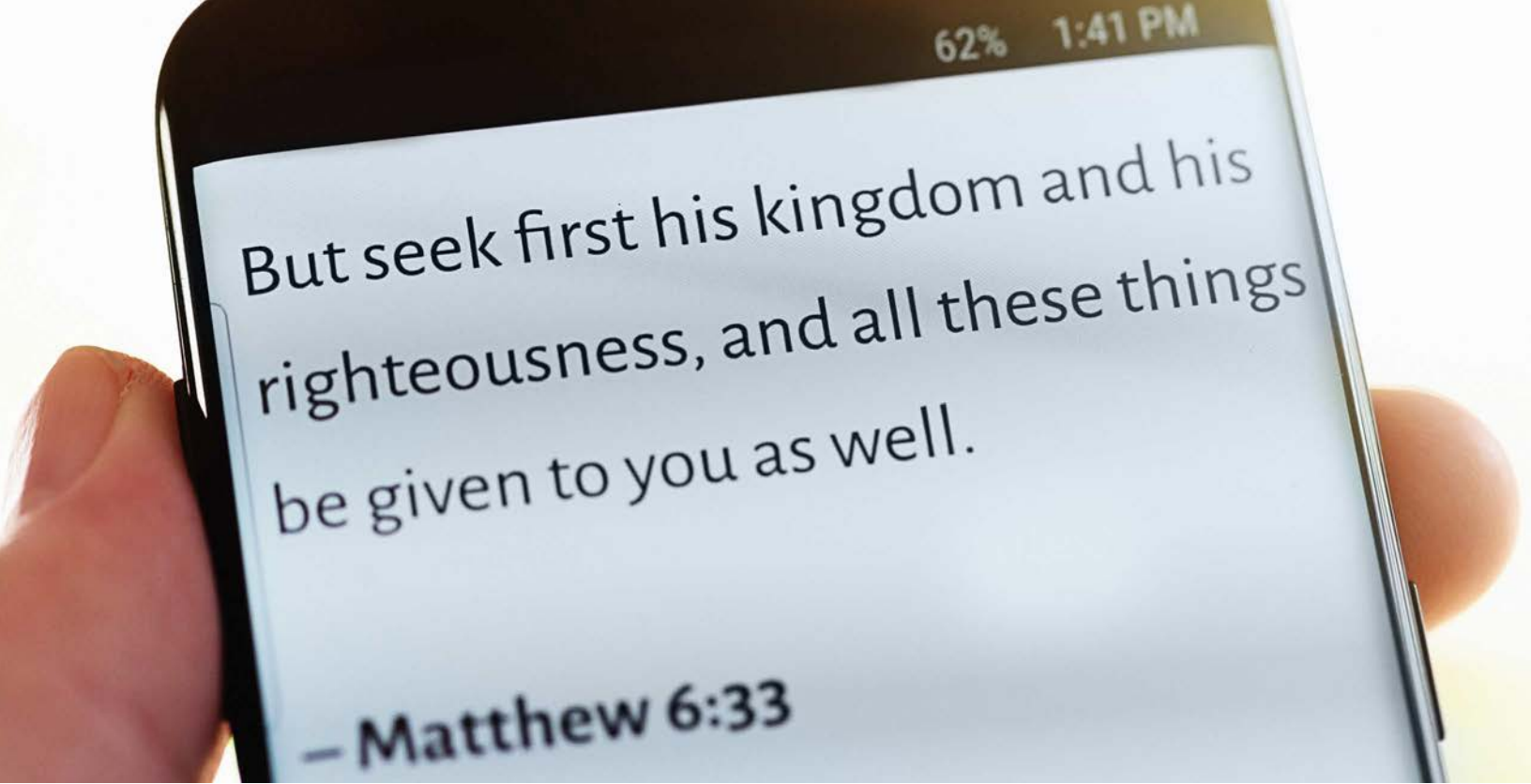
with those who are stuck in sin or hardened in it. And not only the hardened sinner in the church or your family, but also those who live and grieve without hope and without God in this world. They too need to be called out of sin and called to run to Jesus with their sorrows and burdens, but we must do so with "gentleness and respect" (1 Pet 3:15).

This gentle restoring of sinners can only happen when, by God's grace, we know our own flaws and failings, and how gently Jesus deals with our fragile and sinful hearts. It's then that the Spirit enables us—not to come with a holier-than-thou attitude, but with the same gentleness and humility of Jesus himself. Don't think for a minute you're above the one who got tangled up in an affair or struggle with same sex attraction or caught up in drugs or alcohol or some other voluntary slavery to sin, or who has anger issues or can't tame their tongue, or whatever else. When you know your own heart, you'll deal gently with the hearts of other sinners. Gentleness. Meekness. Humility. It's the Spirit's way. It's the Spirit's fruit. **C**



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TECHNOLOGY IN WORSHIP

FRANK EZINGA

Technology is essential in the twenty-first century. Technology facilitates communication, financial traffic, supply chain, mobility, information, monitoring, and more. In the church, much depends on technology for membership administration as well as organizing the calendar and schedules. Technology facilitates the online broadcast of worship services to the outside. Inside, some churches use projection screens in worship. While the growth of such screen use generally leveled off about fifteen years ago¹, some Canadian Reformed churches recently added screens, and perhaps some are considering using screens. This article hopes to provide some thoughts for deliberation along the way.

INTENTIONS & CONSEQUENCES

Technology, like all new developments, generated some unintended consequences. Steve Jobs did not realize his devices would result in developmental issues and even death in infants due to screen addiction.² But the technological intentions were different: innovations and developments aimed to “make life better.”³ Steve Jobs shared with *TIME Magazine* that computers aim to change the world.⁴ Michael Bess, a historian of science, observes that the definition of “human” will change as technology takes over more human functions.⁵ Technological innovation is not to solve a problem but to bring change.⁶ Technology makes people’s lives more

¹ Barna Group, *The State Of The Church 2008*, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, 2009.

² D. N. Kardaras, *Our Digital Addictions are killing our kids* (New York: New York Post, 2018).

³ Stacy Collett, *Humanizing the Digital Experience* (CIO, 2019).

⁴ Mark Milian, *The Spiritual Side of Steve Jobs* (CNN Business, 2011).

⁵ Sean Illing, *Technology Isn't Just Changing Society - It's Changing What It Means to Be Human* (Vox, 2018).

⁶ Nitiin Nohria, *Managing the Unintended Consequences of Your Innovations* (Harvard Business Review, 2021).

Churches should evaluate the intention, intended, and unintended consequences when considering using technology in worship

efficient, making people want more. The result is that efficiency has become the golden calf of western culture. Postman refers to the dependency on technology as the “deification of technology.”⁷ Therefore, churches should evaluate the intention as well as the consequences (both intended and unintended) when considering using technology in worship.

GUTENBERG PARENTHESIS

Before the printing press, knowledge was oral; now, in this post-Gutenberg era, knowledge is increasingly formed through “secondary orality.” This theory is called the Gutenberg Parenthesis. Today’s society is more visual than before, as we increasingly use videos and images socially and in professional environments. However, we are not returning to the pre-1500s—printed materials have changed knowledge capture, transfer, use, and development. Books will continue to be used but now in conjunction with visual aids, resulting in the need to make choices. If both options are available, which do we choose and why? Educators face this dilemma as well.

YOUNG PEOPLE

A reason for using screens in worship may be the fear that young people may leave the church. Researchers such as Pew Research and the Barna Group have followed the younger generations for decades and concluded that technology and fear characterize young people’s lives. At the same time, they are more dependent on technology, lonelier, and spiritually illiterate.⁸ A report in the UK revealed in 2021 that tech-savvy young people suffered from “Zoom fatigue,” and they preferred personal contact instead. Technology may not be the solution if there is a young people’s concern. Perhaps there is another compelling reason.

SCREENS IN WORSHIP

Could projection screens be used in corporate worship? Could a church in the twenty-first century worship without using screens? And if screens are used in worship, what is the purpose? Can we worship better by using screens? Was the worship experience broken that it needed fixing? Could technology promote consumerism? There is no general answer, and every congregation must decide for themselves.

Such an evaluation may include the impact on the activity of the congregation. When people read from the screen, their involvement is limited to looking at the screen. Parents may find it challenging to engage children physically as screens project everything for them. And it does not seem logical to ask the congregation to keep the Bibles open after they read the Scripture text on the screen. Regarding the singing, participation may be impacted negatively when the projection does not include the music. The congregation struggles with some songs more than they would when using a book that includes music. Teaching new songs or improving the singing of existing songs is more challenging or impossible. This concern sometimes impacts the minister’s song selection for worship. These are practical issues, and they can be addressed in some cases. However, using screens may also have other implications.

ABSORBING KNOWLEDGE

The congregation sees the Scripture text, catechism question, or stanza for as long as it takes to read or sing. Reflecting before or after the reading or singing is based on memory, as there is no visual anymore. People have different learning styles. Screen use limits visual learners because of the limited time displaying content, and there is nothing left for kinaesthetic learners. For church members with limitations, such as dyslexia, worship becomes problematic when using screens.

Another point is that screens don’t display context. The 2014 *Book of Praise* includes the five divisions in the book of Psalms, which are only visible when using the printed *Book of Praise*. And when reading, e.g., from the Sermon on the Mount, the surrounding passages are not visible on screens. In our tradition of singing stanzas, the printed *Book of Praise* provides the context of the stanzas. Much information and knowledge made available in print is lost when replaced by digital projection.

⁷ Neil Postman, *Technopoly* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 71.

⁸ George Barna, *New Insights into the Generation of Growing Influence: Millennials In America* (Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, 2021)

MORE THAN BOOKS

The *Book of Praise* or the Bible is not only a medium for words, which could be either printed or projected. The structure of the Bible books has significance, and the *Book of Praise* is more than a songbook. It is a “Book of Worship” with the orders of worship, creeds, confessions, prayers, liturgical forms, etc. Using the books exposes the worshipper to much more than only the song or text.

OUTREACH

Screens could be considered essential in making guests feel welcome in the church service, as the projection will guide them through the service. Although screens could be useful, it removes the necessity for church members to guide guests through the service. While guests may browse through the *Book of Praise* and discover creeds, confessions, prayers, and liturgical forms, screens display limited information for as long as needed. Primarily church members make people feel welcome and included in the church service. If guests are to know more about our faith, the *Book of Praise* gives many opportunities for interaction during and after the service.


CONNECTING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Older generations might be fascinated by technological advances; younger generations are often indifferent, as they grew up with technology and use it all the time. During the pandemic, Millennials and Gen-Z became more dependent on technology, from small to large screens. These highly connected generations increasingly experienced loneliness and anxiety. Researchers conclude that young adults don’t need more technology in the church but, “Now, more than ever, young adults are longing for meaningful connection—something young people are hoping the church will offer.”⁹ This meaningful connection is not digital but a personal relationship for young people. Do screens facilitate personal relationships in the church community? If some worshippers, who are themselves dependent on technology, experience loneliness and anxiety because of technology, it’s necessary to ask: is technology an effective tool in worship?

DIGITAL ART

Reformed churches in the Calvinist tradition are known for a minimalist presence of art and symbolism. Church bulletins may feature an image for the children or a logo, but sanctuaries generally do not feature artistic works of sculptures, carvings, paintings, and drawings. Yet, screens feature digital art through pictures, images, symbols, and, perhaps, videos. When screens in Reformed worship show digital art, we should consider how to worship God through digital art. Screens display art temporarily but in a dominant manner. Is there also a place for more permanent and less prevalent art in our auditoriums and church buildings? Does the source of purchased digital art matter in worship? Are there opportunities for artists in the congregation to be involved? Using screens likely requires a more in-depth exploration of art and worship.

WHAT IS BENEFICIAL?

“Everything is permissible”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible”—but not everything is constructive” (1 Cor 10:23 NIV84). Some evangelical and Canadian Reformed churches have screens but intentionally do not use them in worship. Evaluating technology requires defining the role and purpose of (corporate) worship and how screens impact worship. The consistory’s concern is the spiritual well-being of the flock. How does the impact of screens in worship contribute to the congregation’s spiritual growth over time? Does using screens increase the knowledge of God’s Word so that church members grow closer to God, worship him with greater love and understanding, and are more effective disciples in the world? Our motivations, intentions, and desired outcomes of using screens in worship require foremost a spiritual perspective. 



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⁹ Barna Group, *State of The Church 2020*, Detroit, Michigan, 2021.

May the Lord's Purposes
STAND

"Many are the plans in the mind of man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand."

(PROV 19:21)

CORNELIS KLEYN

Paul Ame, far right, being examined at Classis Beretele

There are many plans that we make in the church of God. In Papua New Guinea, events form a big part of this. We often think about the future and make plans that may help to grow the church of God. And at times when we lose the big picture and fail to keep thinking about the future, we miss opportunities for development.

For the churches, questions such as the following continue to come back to us:

What is needed for this church to move forward?

What are things that hinder its growth including common sins and weaknesses?

Why has God planted this church in this location? What is God's purpose with this church?

The progress is often slow and at times the answers seem to change considerably from year to year. It is a blessing to know that God is the One at the end of the day who determines the outcome of our many plans. His purposes will stand! In this report we will focus on certain events of the last half year, mostly in chronological order, that give a little picture of what is going on.

REFORMED CHURCHES BIBLE COLLEGE

The 2022 academic year at the Reformed Churches Bible College (RCBC) has been a good year of teaching and learning. On July 29, while the principal, Mr. Mark Mulder, was overseas for his furlough and presentations in Canada, RCBC had its annual *ples bilong mi* (my village) event. Basically, everyone at the Bible College makes a dish and has an item (whether song, play, or dance) from their home village. It struck me that evening how many PNG cultures we represent here at the RCBC.

PNG consists of over 300 languages and cultures scattered over about forty provinces. The students represent nearly half of these provinces this year, covering a lot of this vast country. We seek to prepare the students for works of service in the churches. This is certainly a challenging task, as many of them come from broken homes and have serious addictions including pornography, smoking, and drug addictions that we have been dealing with again this year too. And yet we hope and pray that one day in the future God may plant solid Reformed churches in each of these provinces represented by the students.

UNITED REFORM CHURCHES

The Bible College has six teaching blocks and in between them we have block breaks. Pastor David Pol is a new missionary, and we had the privilege of working together during teaching block 4. He and his wife Erika stayed in Port Moresby a little after the teaching block and so we took the opportunity on August 9 to tour five of the fourteen United Reform Churches, also to strengthen our ties with them. These churches are by no means Reformed in doctrine yet and are a separate federation of churches from the Reformed Churches in PNG that we are busy establishing. But with two previous RCBC students serving there as pastors already, one more hoping to join them in 2023, and another few of their students still studying at the RCBC, we hope these churches will reform over time.

BERETETE

On August 16 a Toyota Landcruiser filled with classis delegates made its way up the muddy road to the Beretete church building. On the following day, a Public Motor Vehicle (PMV) filled with church members also made the roadtrip up all the way to the church building in order to witness the 9th Classis of the Reformed Churches of PNG and particularly the final exam of Veifa'a's Candidate Pastor Paul Ame and the candidacy exam of Nine Mile's Elder David Kaupa. With thankfulness to our Gracious Father, both of these men passed their exam over the next two days after many long hours of examinations.

The congregation had done amazing preparation in order to host this large event, despite recent setbacks and troubles with some members in the community. A tractor had been fixed by a church member but claimed by others outside the church. In anger the church member had come to slash the large tractor tires but those who claimed the tractor felt threatened and took this to court and refused any attempt at reconciliation. God intervened and sent sickness to a relative of the accuser that required immediate transport to the hospital. When they could not arrange this themselves, the church was asked and we as missionaries were able to step in to help without requiring any payment. Reconciliation had not yet taken place by the time of Classis, but it is now planned, and we hope it will happen soon in the form of a shared meal.

Despite this, the congregation stepped up for the church event and used the various gifts they had to make the whole event a blessed success. In preparation, one of the young men in the congregation had extended the church building, while others cleared the property. The women had busily decorated the church building and cooked up a storm assisted by some women from neighbouring congregations. These preparations helped confirm the plan for Beretete to work towards institution in the near future, maybe as early as 2023.

EAST BOROKO

In a dirty settlement of Port Moresby is a tiny Reformed church with big plans! Workdays were carried out on June 11, July 16, and September 3. The property was cleaned up by having the grass cut and rubbish removed. Water pipes from all sorts of neighbours were fixed, the road into the property was constantly worked at, and a toilet was raised for the church to use. The church has a big plan for 2023 and 2024 to build a road that can actually be driven on, another fence to demarcate the actual church property, and finally a manse on the property in preparation to have a pastor or candidate pastor start work in the congregation. Despite the small number of members, we pray that the Lord will bless their plans.

NINE MILE

On the afternoon of September 3, after a busy workday in East Boroko, I met up with Pastor Aisi Kosa (Nine Mile pastor) and went to visit two men in the congregation. Although Nine Mile is a growing congregation, with profession of faith on October 30 of another eight adults (three youths and five adults), making the membership well over forty, the congregation is drastically short of men, particularly men that can take up leadership. The problem is, the only elder in the congregation, David Kaupa, is soon leaving for Lae for candidate ministry. There is one more man who is

stepping up for the work of deacon, but it may take another year or two before a man can step up into the role of eldership. And so, we visited two wayward men on September 3 and hope to continue to follow up with church discipline. The pastor would love to see the church institute, but it may be a few years yet. Currently the biggest needs are male leadership, but the congregation is also working on a new church building for which we request your prayers; if you are able to contribute financially to this, please communicate with the Toronto Mission Board for more information.

VEIFA'A

On September 18, two cars filled with people took the three-hour plus journey from Port Moresby to the small village congregation of Veifa'a. The convoy arrived at 10 a.m. to a beautifully decorated building, ready for the very special event: the ordination of Pastor Paul Ame. At the last minute a mat was organized and, while kneeling, two national pastors and two missionaries laid their hands on Paul Ame as a beautiful picture of God's Spirit remaining to assist him in his work. The congregation was swelled by extra people that day and we all enjoyed the plentiful food together.

Although the congregation struggles with land issues, men able to work together in leadership, and faltering church programs, Pastor Paul Ame, although already in his 60s, is a real asset to the congregation. He loves to share the story of a Chinese missionary who saw no converts despite many years of hard work, eventually leaving in disappointment. On returning to China many years later, he found out that nearly the whole village had turned to Christ. Pastor Paul knows his task is to faithfully bring the Word and not grow weary in doing good despite minimal results. But we pray that God will give him bountifully in his ministry for the sake of his glory and the village of Veifa'a.

KAMKUMUNG (LAE)

One of the most exciting days of 2022 for the Kamkumung Church, on the northern side of the Owen Stanley Ranges, was September 25, with the profession of faith of several new members, a few baptisms, and the Lord's Supper celebration. That day the RCBC Principal Mark Mulder and several women from the Port Moresby churches were also present. Mark was there to encourage young and old to come and study at RCBC, while the women were on their way to the national women's conference in Wantun that would start on the following day.

This year, Pastor Isidore and his wife have struggled on the property with at least three break-ins. For that reason, they are currently in Port Moresby on a bit of a furlough, but plan to return

to Lae in the coming year ready to help tackle a candidate ministry with Candidate Pastor David Kaupa. We pray that this instituted congregation may grow from strength to strength and that the candidacy may also help strengthen the congregation.


WANTUN

The Port Moresby women continued to dribble into the Lae airport on Monday, September 26 and took the journey to Wantun. Although it is meant to be a three-hour journey, it ended up taking most of the day, as the vehicle dealt with two flat tires. But once the PMV finally arrived in Wantun, the massive week-long national women's conference got underway attended by about sixty women. It was a very exciting week, with four speeches delivered by national pastors and missionaries, while the men and youth in the congregation did the amazingly anti-cultural thing by helping out with all the cooking. On Tuesday there was also an opening of a new church building with Australian Mission Board members present to witness. The event shows a greater growth towards maturity of this outback village congregation, and we pray that our gracious Father will continue to grow his own.

HILA

The newest church plant in the federation sent six of their women from the highlands on a PMV and they walked into Wantun after their long journey to also join the women's conference. Two missionaries drive three hours each week and sometimes even twice a week in order to serve this church plant in preaching and membership classes. It is our hope and prayer that by the end of the year the first group can do their profession of faith and some formal stepping up of leadership can happen at the same time. And we pray that next year (2023) they can call their own national pastor to lead them on.

CONCLUSION

Many plans and programs have been fulfilled in 2022, but we depend on the Lord for this work. We may plant and water and fertilize, but it is the Lord God alone who gives growth. Please pray with us and for us that the Kingdom of our Father may continue to advance in this country and that God will indeed give that growth! 



Cornelis Kleyn

Missionary in Papua New Guinea sent by Bethel Canadian Reformed Church at Toronto, Ontario
kleync@gmail.com

NAPARC REPORT

An Opportunity for Collaboration and Encouragement

OTTO BOUWMAN

“Fawthers ‘n brawthers, y’all are welcome to the 47th meetin’ of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council” (NAPARC). Those were not exactly the words used to open the proceedings in Atlanta, GA, on November 8, 2022, but they suggest something of Presbyterian formality (“Fathers and Brothers” is a customary address) as well as the casual warmth of southern hospitality. For three days, approximately fifty participants enjoyed a time of sweet fellowship. Churches which sent delegates and observers to the Council are listed, along with some recent statistical information, in a sidebar. Four members (Rev. Marc Jagt, Rev. Jeff Temple, Rev. Steve Vandavelde, and I) of the CanRC’s Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER) attended the Council. To this “NAPARC newbie,” the days, though intense, were a wonderful time of learning, sharing, and fellowship.

Within the context of a common confession of “Jesus Christ as only Savior and Sovereign Lord over all of life,” NAPARC churches established a formal relationship of mutual assistance. The relationship provides opportunity for “the constituent churches to advise, council, and cooperate in various matters with one another and hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.” Its stated purposes are to:

1. Facilitate discussion and consultation between member bodies on those issues and problems which divide them as well as on those which they face in common and by the sharing of insights “communicate advantages to one another” (*Institutes IV, 2, 1*).
2. Promote the appointment of joint committees to study matters of common interest and concern.
3. Exercise mutual concern in the perpetuation, retention, and propagation of the Reformed faith.
4. Promote cooperation wherever possible and feasible on the local and denominational level in such areas as missions, relief efforts, Christian schools, and church education.

REPORTS & DISCUSSIONS

For three days, delegates participated in plenary sessions. It took quite a bit of time to complete the item on the docket (agenda) entitled “Reports from Member Churches.” (That was followed by “Reports from Official Observer Churches.”) During these reports, statistical updates were shared, along with highlights and particular challenges facing each federation/denomination. Information was passed along regarding mission activities, both at home and abroad. After each presentation, a designated delegate from another church would come forward and ask (sometimes rather pointed) questions. After they had been answered, further questions usually came from the floor. Each presentation was followed by a word of thanksgiving and prayer.

In addition to the general updates, there were opportunities for presentations and discussions on several different topics. For example, one denomination sought advice on what to do about a denominational age restriction regarding infant baptism. Due to COVID restrictions, regular church life had been interrupted in such a way that unbaptized children had passed the age limitation—now what to do? Encouragement was given to honour the biblical understanding of household baptism and be flexible about the prescribed age, and also to be very deliberate about discipling the youth after their baptisms. There was a presentation and subsequent discussion in connection with findings from a recent survey involving half the ministers in the PCA about minister self-care (see the seven main points in sidebar). A question was raised about formulating a biblical response to the dramatic rise (2000% in the last decade) in incidences of gender dysphoria amongst young women in North America; there was universal acknowledgement that this demands our attention. Relevant resources were shared and the suggestion was raised that this might be a challenge that NAPARC churches could study deliberately. A presentation entitled “Human Design from a Theological Perspective” was also much appreciated.

BILATERAL MEETINGS

For three days delegates also participated in bilateral sessions. During these bilateral meetings, which usually ran about an hour in length, discussions took place where points of common interest were shared, and prayers for our respective federations were brought to our Father's heavenly throne. CanRC delegates had opportunity to sit down formally with delegates from the ARPC, ERQ, FRCNA, HRC, OPC, RCUS, RPCNA, and URCNA. The CER looks forward to participating in future NAPARC bilateral meetings during the next two years, and will be reporting on them to the next general synod, to be held in Aldergrove, BC in May 2025, DV. It was evident that bilateral meeting opportunities at NAPARC meetings are an efficient manner to engage in inter church relations.

At each of the bilaterals we reviewed some of the major decisions of Synod Guelph. That usually included reference to the appointment of a new professor at our federational seminary, the confirmation of a cap on the number of hymns in our *Book of Praise*, and the merger of our interchurch committees. Everyone was supportive of the latter development; in our increasingly interconnected world, others appreciated having a single committee that could interact with all aspects of ecclesiastical relations.

One of the discussion points raised at most of the bilaterals concerned some different practices within the CanRC regarding local pulpit access. We explained that officially (or "at our general synods we have decided that") access to CanRC pulpits is limited to ministers of federations/denominations with whom we have formal Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and that formal relationship

PRESENTATION SUMMARY: HOW CAN PASTORS SURVIVE AND THRIVE IN THEIR MINISTRY?

If pastors deliberately pay attention to each of the following areas, they are likely, by God's grace, to be a long-term blessing in their ministry.

- 1. Spiritual formation:** How is your personal walk with God? Are you deliberately dependent on the Lord?
- 2. Marriage and family:** How are your family relationships? Are you present? Can you be the husband/father that helps your family know the love of Christ?
- 3. Self-stewardship:** Are you caring for yourself, like you steward God's other gifts? Do you maintain healthy boundaries? Do you take a weekly Sabbath?
- 4. Emotional intelligence:** Do you know how others perceive you? Are you led by other people's emotions, or can you remain deliberate and intentional?
- 5. Cultural intelligence:** Are you aware of and sensitive to the issues of the day? Can you speak appropriately to those issues?
- 6. Leadership and management:** Are you able to delegate tasks? Can you manage all the extra aspects of your job?
- 7. Financial wellness:** Are your short-term finances in order? Are you appropriately stewarding the finances you have? Are your long-term finances in order?

OTHER SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS OF THE STUDY INCLUDED:

- ◆ Most pastors feel isolated. There is usually an empathy gap between a minister and his congregation. Congregations don't really understand the unique stresses in a pastor's life. Never being able to "take off the pastor's hat" (even at the baseball game) is challenging. Most say their families are good, but as a couple, they are isolated.
- ◆ 70 % of pastors say that pastoral demands impede their own spiritual growth. Unfortunately, it then becomes likely that pastors root their identity in their occupation rather than in their relationship with Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Though pastors are usually good at attending to the needs of others, they don't always read their own emotions as well. To compensate, a pastor needs to lean on his wife, is encouraged to regularly engage in counselling, and seek assistance in peer cohorts.

FOR THE FULL STUDY CHECK OUT:
genevabenefits.org

| MEMBER CHURCHES | ACRONYM | MEMBERSHIP TOTAL | CONGREGATIONS* |
|---|---------|------------------|----------------|
| Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church | ARPC | 31,000 | 273 |
| Canadian Reformed Churches | CANRC | 20,000 | 74 |
| Église Réformée du Québec | ERQ | 200 | 5 |
| Free Reformed Churches of North America | FRCNA | 5400 | 23 |
| Heritage Reformed Congregations | HRC | 1300 | 10 |
| Korean American Presbyterian Church | KAPC | 80,000 | 650 |
| Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) | KPCA | 10,000 | 122 |
| Orthodox Presbyterian Church | OPC | 32,000 | 334 |
| Presbyterian Church in America | PCA | 380,000 | 1900 |
| Presbyterian Reformed Church | PresRC | 200 | 7 |
| Reformed Church in the United States | RCUS | 3600 | 45 |
| Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America | RPCNA | 7600 | 107 |
| United Reformed Churches in North America | URCNA | 25,000 | 131 |
| OFFICIAL OBSERVERS | | | |
| Bible Presbyterian Churches in America | BPC | 2100 | 30 |
| Protestant Reformed Churches in America | PRCA | 9000 | 33 |


*Includes church plants

is one that is determined exclusively by our churches at general synods. We also explained that this is an ongoing topic of discussion in our churches; it will likely again be discussed at our next general synod. We were encouraged by others to find unanimity and clarity on this matter.

GROWING TOGETHER

As stated above, NAPARC churches are to “hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.” There are at least three pairs of NAPARC churches where there have been recent discussions regarding such organic union. In all three situations, organic union is not easily achieved. Faithful and similar churches find it challenging to compromise or give up their own distinctives and nuances. Love for the institution in which God has placed us was evident from all the NAPARC attendees. At the same time, there

was universal acknowledgement that Christ’s church gathering work in North America extends far beyond the boundaries of any one of our churches. Within that continued desire for organic union, we grow and work together as God provides opportunity.

For three days delegates shared meals. There were many informal opportunities to ask each other questions about federational developments or recent/imminent interactions with churches in other places around the world. Or to informally share stories of God’s good care for us in our families, churches, and communities. Or to simply listen to the tall tales that others could regale us with and laugh together. New acquaintances were made and existing friendships were strengthened. Brotherly encouragement was given and mutual confidence grew. Thank God for the many opportunities of mutual assistance and fellowship at the 47th NAPARC meeting. 



www.merf.org

MERF News

December 2022



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

MERF’s International Council 2022

By Timothy & Rosalind Burden



How good and pleasant it is when the Lord’s people meet together, united in the work of the Gospel. All who attended this year’s IC at the John Calvin Centre in Larnaca joined with one heart in praising God. Praising him for past benefits, His forgiveness of our sins, healing and hope and for the assurance of His steadfast love (Psalm 103:1-5). For many it was a time of renewal. Renewal of in-person fellowship and reinvigorating the vision for MERF’s mission.

Ministry reports were of both harvest fields and battlefields; telling of blessings and conflicts. The interna-

tional MERF support bodies provide the supply line of prayers and provisions. The front-line field workers seek to steadily advance the kingdom by gospel proclamation amid hardships. Like war correspondents reporting, representatives could tell of the victories of the Lamb and human weakness.

Support Committees

In various countries, MERF support committees raise awareness of MERF’s field operations. Zoom deputa-tion meetings had been a blessing during COVID. Now, the opening up of face-to-face meetings is renewing contact with old friends and

making new ones. We heard both of veterans retiring after many years of faithful service and of fresh commit-tee members. There are still openings for a younger generation to get behind this marvelous work.

Harvest Fields

Indonesia - Pastor Armin Sukri reported that on the island of *Sulawesi* MERF ministries are “active and growing.” The team is receiving lots of invitations to visit and minister across the island. Library reading rooms have been opened where school children can come to do homework and learn from the Bible.

Muslim children who make use of these feel welcomed and blessed. In August, thirty people attended evangelism training – the Lord is sending laborers into His harvest field.

From *Java* island, Pastor Jonson in *Malang*, is also reaching out to the 99% Muslims in the island of *Madura*, known as a base for radical Muslims. He is building friendships, a platform for gospel witness. Also on Java, Tommy and Elisa, in *Jakarta*, are extending the reach of internet gospel programs to *Sumatra*, *Kalimantan*, *Nusa Tenggara*, *Maluku*, and *Papua*. Other gospel

*“Bless the Lord,
O my soul,
and all that is
within me,
bless his
holy name!”*

— Psalm 103:1

bridges: 150 radios were distributed to listener communities prepared for pastoral visitation. In addition, Bibles have been distributed and small Christian schools in remote areas supported.

Ethiopia – MERF’s team in Ethiopia reported that demand for literature and ministry training was continually growing. New converts are hungry for the truth and starved Christians too are wanting to learn more and grow. On our recent visit, each Sunday we witnessed people expressing the desire to belong to Christ. Also, Ethiopian churches are challenged to be courageously and faithfully sharing the gospel with their Muslim neighbors.

Egypt – It was encouraging to hear an update on the *Minya* project, a church



planting work begun with MERF support a few years ago. A congregation of around 200 has been established and started its own church-planting work in a new area.

North Africa – Through the Lord’s help, different media is used to bring the gospel in the native language. Many people are interested in knowing and following Christ. In fact, whole families are coming to faith and being followed up. The energy, courage, and faithfulness of the team there is impressive.

Arabic Media Harvest – Varied programs and materials on three different websites reach Arabic speakers all over the world. The greatest number come from countries within the *Middle East* and *Gulf States*. The gospel content is changing lives, and many respond by saying how their lives are being transformed by understanding Christ Jesus’s perfect life, heavenly teaching and saving work.

Spiritual Battlefield

It is no surprise to any Christian that the Lord’s harvest fields are also his battlefields. While the victory is his, along the way there are casualties and wounded souls. We heard of churches and villages burned in *Pakistan*, of 12 churches burnt in *Ethiopia*, of many hostile responses to the Arabic Media work as well as positive ones, of opposition to a young church and pastor in *Lebanon* and of the



Above: MERF children ministry in Sulawesi Indonesia.
Bottom left: MERF Arabic Library mobile phone app.

extreme caution required of believers in some countries for their own safety.

While some field workers were buoyant in their reports, others may have sounded a little tired and battle weary. We should remember that the enemy of our souls would aim at bringing down each faithful servant of Christ and his gospel work. As Jesus prayed for Peter’s faith and witness to survive Satan’s antagonism, we need to pray for the Lord’s servants to withstand Satan’s attacks -- praying for their holiness, their marriages and family lives, their health and their witness, as well as for our own.

Field workers

MERF’s teams are completely made up of indigenous people; some are courageous believers of Muslim background. This is so helpful since they know the culture, the questions and barriers to a Muslim’s embracing the Christian faith. We can thank God, not only for these team members, but

also for giving them highly honed skills in media work, which they are using to reach their fellow citizens.

In God’s providence, with migration around the world, Muslim neighbors whom we can befriend with the love of Christ are not far from most places. Let us take the time to meet, greet and prayerfully listen to them and gradually understand their way of thinking to effectively share the gospel of God’s grace in Christ. MERF is committed to encouraging and supporting these gospel efforts with native language materials, advice and prayer. We praise God for what is past and trust Him for all that’s to come.

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: merfcanada@gmail.com



GO & TELL!

2022 Summit Reformed Youth Conference Recap

KEITH DAVIS



The Summit Reformed Youth Conference of 2022 will be remembered for many things: amazing speakers, the near miss of a tornado, a rubber chicken performance, and, as we will see in a moment, a number of *firsts*.

The 2022 conference featured pastors Al Bezuyen (from Zion URC, Sheffield, ON) and Greg Bylsma (Living Water URC, Brantford, ON). They both presented personal and engaging messages based on the conference theme “Go & Tell” from Matthew 28:19 (the passage we refer to as the Great Commission). On Wednesday, speaker Jojo Ruba presented a message calling us to take our stand and battle against the onslaught of evil in this present age.

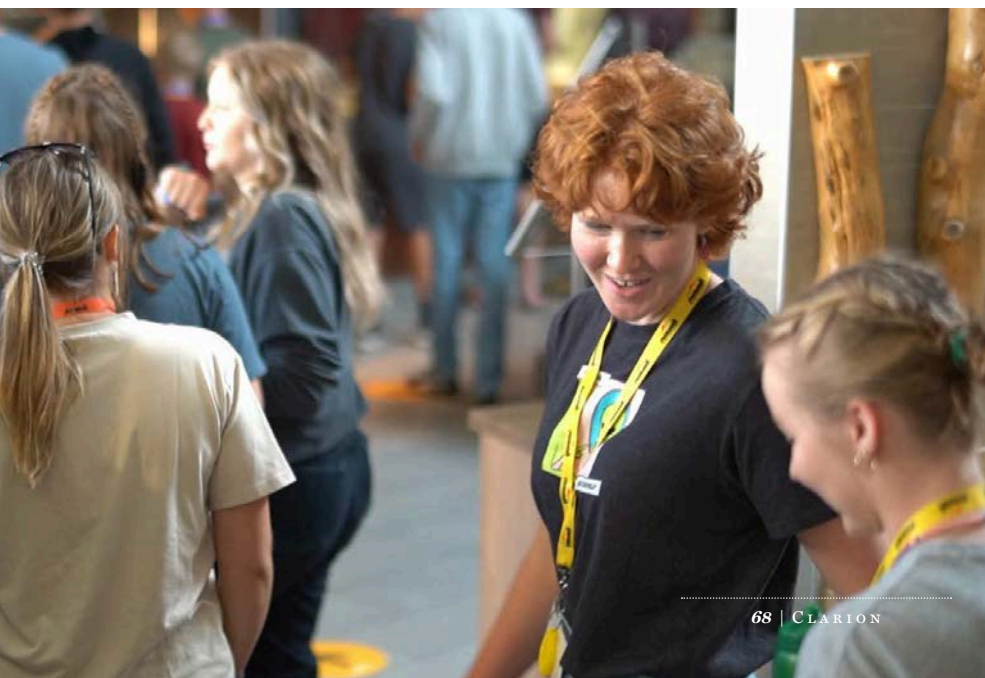
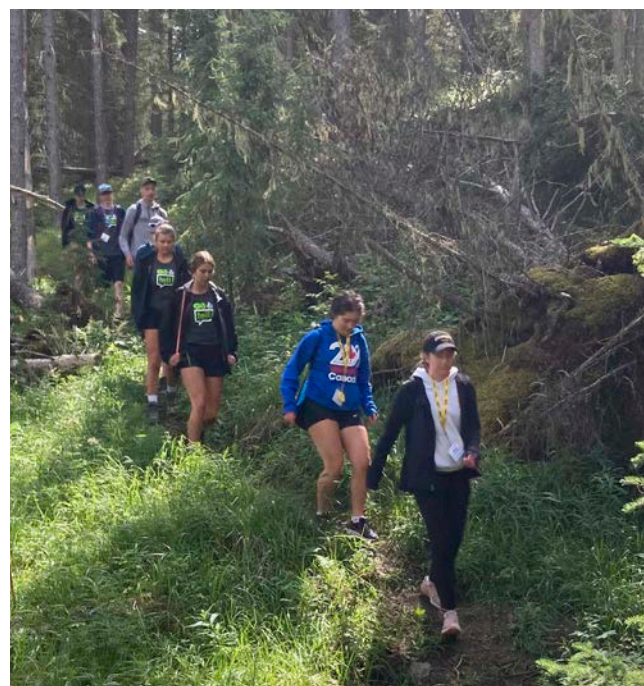
There were nine Break-Out Sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday—all connected to the “Go & Tell” theme. The sessions were: *Disciples Who Disciple* (Rev. Julius Van Spronsen), *Hell—Where the Fire is Not Quenched* (Rev. John van Eyk), *Sharing Jesus with Your Neighbour* (Rev. Jason Vander Horst), *Cross-Cultural Missions* (Rev. Rich Anjema), *Flirt to Convert?* (Rev. Tad Groenendyk), *Open Homes-Open Hearts* (Rev. Ken Wieske), *Is your Hope Showing?* (Rev. Bill Pols), *Walking Free and Pure* (Rev. James Slaa), and *Finding a Better Identity* (Mr. Jojo Ruba).

This was Summit’s sixth summer youth conference; yet, this year had its share of *firsts*.

THE 1ST FIRST: VENUE CHANGE

The 2022 Youth Conference was held August 1–5 on the campus of Olds College in Olds, Alberta. This was the first time the Summit conference was hosted at a location other than the campus of Calgary’s Mt. Royal University. Olds College is a fifty minute drive directly north of the city of Calgary.

The main reason for the venue change was the COVID vaccine mandate. In early March, Mt. Royal University still had the vaccine mandate in place for everyone on campus. At that time the decision was made to search for another location to host the conference. Olds College was a perfect choice.





This required a bit more planning and preparation but, in the end, the Olds campus worked out very well as a hosting site. However, there was one major limitation with the Olds Campus—and that brings us to the next first.

THE 2ND FIRST: RECORD ATTENDANCE

The Assembly Hall at Olds College accommodates 390 people. The organizers anticipated that 2022 might attract over 300 attendees, but they did not anticipate exceeding 390 and therefore having to turn people away. But that's exactly what happened. The previous registration high point (in 2019) had 270 registrants.

About this increase, Rev. Keith Davis remarked, "As a committee, we're not fixated on numbers nor are we striving to reach a certain size. The truth is, each year we're humbled and amazed to see so many young people and chaperones come to Summit and many return again and again! We're simply committed to accommodating as many of the churches' youth and young adults as possible so that, Lord willing, we don't have to turn anyone away. In light of that, as we make plans for the August 7–11, 2023 conference, we will be returning to the Mt. Royal University campus which can accommodate over 400 registrants."

THE 3RD FIRST: GROWING INTEREST AMONG CANRCS

A third first had to do with the growing interest of Summit among Canadian Reformed Churches. Of the 390 people who registered in 2022, over one third of the registrants belonged to Canadian Reformed Churches. One of the stated goals of Summit is to serve the youth of our churches in the broader Reformed community, which makes this added interest from the Canadian Reformed Churches an exciting development.


THE 4TH FIRST: MISSIONARY VIDEOS

The "Go & Tell" theme prompted an idea to incorporate into each Main Session a video greeting and challenge from various foreign and domestic missionaries, church planters, military and prison chaplains, as well as MINTs professors and teachers. In the months leading up to the conference, missionaries and church planters etc. were contacted and asked to prepare a two-to-three-minute video where they would say "Hi" to Summit attendees and tell them a bit about their work.

The response was amazing. It was so very beautiful and inspiring to hear the voices of these godly men and women coming from as far away as Italy, Romania, Ecuador, the Philippines, and Mexico, challenging the youth of our church to prayerfully consider God's calling for them in mission fields—both near and far.

Special thanks to Mike Visser from Bethel URC who (as a professional videographer) was able to compile these videos into bite sized segments to be shown each day.

SUMMIT 2023: "THE BATTLE FOR TRUTH"

Lord willing, the 2023 Summit Youth Conference will be held August 7–11 in Calgary. Pastors Bill Boekestein and Jason Tuinstra have agreed to be the Main Session speakers. The organizing committee covets your prayers as they make plans for next year. The Summit Reformed Youth Conference is a ministry of Bethel URC, Calgary. Summit is supported by personal donations and by the generous giving of local churches. If you would like to learn more about Summit, contact pastor Keith Davis at kdavis@bethelurc.org. To inquire about how you or your church can support Summit financially, contact the Summit treasurer, Debbie Oostenbrink, at payments@summitrefcon.org. 



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Eastern

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

2022

JOHN BOWERS

This past October 25–27, some sixty brothers and sisters, Reformed pastors and their wives, were blessed to be together for a time of refreshing at the 5th Annual Eastern Ministerial Conference. Most of the conferees were from the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed churches in Ontario. Brothers and sisters from Manitoba and Mexico were able to join us as well. It was a beautiful time of fellowship, fun, and scriptural edification.

VENUE & SPEAKERS

This was the first year it was held at the beautiful Muskoka Bible Centre just south of Huntsville. The setting was magnificent, yet serene, and the facilities were excellent, spacious, and very conducive to a time of refreshing and encouragement for all who could attend. Everyone who did attend encouraged the use of MBC in Muskoka for future years' conferences as well.

The speakers this year were Pastor John and Lucy van Eyk of Trinity United Reformed Church of Lethbridge, Pastor Winston Bosch, of the Jubilee Canadian Reformed Church of Ottawa, and Pastor Scott Wilkinson of the New Creation Reformed Presbyterian Church of Kitchener.

Winston Bosch opened the conference with a pastoral address that very helpfully set the tone for the conference. Using the command of the Lord for Israel to have tassels on the corners of their garments from Numbers 15:39, brother Bosch showed from Scripture how he believed it was reasonable to conclude that we are also being urged to appreciate the concern God would have us express for those on the margins—at the end, frazzled, and frayed. With this the conferees were compelled and enabled to speak openly and honestly about our own frailty, frustrations, and failings in order that we might also encourage one another in the



faithful care and keeping of God, touch the corner of his garment, and come under the shadow of his wings.

Pastor Scott Wilkinson led two practical and helpful sessions on apologetics and an evangelistic presentation of the gospel. In his first presentation, making use of “the traditional square of opposition” dating back to Aristotle, he demonstrated that an understanding of everything in the world could be reduced to one of two basic worldviews, of which only one could be true. Either there is a worldview where everything is eternal, the pantheistic, pagan worldview of being and becoming, or you have the worldview of the Creator and the creation. In his second session he demonstrated helpful, simple, and practical ways to move a conversation to spiritual things and to the gospel. He also demonstrated the helpfulness of having conversation partners themselves read and reflect directly out of the words of Scriptures like Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, and John 3:16.

PASTOR JOHN VAN EYK


The main speaker for this year, Pastor John van Eyk, gave three very helpful talks. In his first, “Preaching to the Heart,” van Eyk gave an address that would challenge every one of us ever to have a cold, perfunctory view of preaching as merely the conveying of information, but rather to preach a rich Christ from hearts that are themselves gripped by the glory and beauty of Christ’s person and work. It was a very thoughtful and comprehensive study, reflecting a depth and breadth of study and years of fruitful pastoral and pulpit experience.

Pastor van Eyk’s second address focused on the victory of the Lamb. He developed the *Christus Victor* theme of the atonement from all of Scripture. Over against tendencies in theology that would pit this theme of the atonement against the traditional, biblical understanding of penal substitutionary atonement,

brother van Eyk ably demonstrated that the two views are not in opposition, but wonderfully and indispensably complementary. The victory of Jesus is the victory of the Lamb who was slain. He also very helpfully showed how better appreciating this theme of victory can have practical, fruitful consequences in terms of a more confident and optimistic approach to our own sanctification and of the ministry of the church in the world.

In his final address, Pastor van Eyk spoke about promoting family worship among God’s people. Reminding us that before any exhortations could be effective, or any tools useful, the heart and godliness of God’s people need to be addressed as foundational. Pastor John spoke winsomely with illustrations from the lives of others and from his own experience about the rich blessing found in maintaining this practice.

Lucy, Pastor van Eyk’s wife, also lead a session on “Ministering from the Manse.” She spoke of the blessing she, her husband, and family have enjoyed over the years internationally, and particularly of the blessing and challenge of exercising a ministry of hospitality.

In all, a time of great encouragement was enjoyed by all. There is room for many more participants, and for the future we would urge consistories of all NAPARC churches in Ontario or Quebec to consider urging and enabling their pastors with their wives to attend. Next year’s main speakers will be Dr. Greg Beale and his wife, and the MBC conference grounds in Muskoka have already been secured for October 17–19, 2023. For more information, contact Rev. Pete van’t Hoff (petevanthoff@gmail.com). 



John Bowers Pastor

Hope Reformed Church (URCNA)
Brampton Ontario
husband of Julie

BRENT BAARTMAN

Hi, my name is Brent Baartman. I grew up in Richmond Hill and now live in Anchor Home, and I love it here. I go to Niagara Christian Gleaners four mornings a week to work there. On Monday mornings I go to the Laundromat/dry cleaners and work there. In the summer I cut the grass at my home, on a riding lawnmower. I also have to feed the fish we have in our fish tank. I do my own laundry every week. My favorite things to do are playing Nintendo switch games and watching the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Blue Jays with Jerry. I also love visiting my family, and most of all giving hugs.



MARCH BIRTHDAYS

Happy birthday to all of you celebrating a birthday in March! We are thankful you are able to celebrate another year in our Heavenly Fathers care. May he bless you all in the year to come.

3 Trevor Hofsink will be **44**
14407 McQueen Road
Edmonton, AB
T5N 3L3

9 David Rawson will be **61**
c/o Twin Oaks
3217 Twin Oaks Cres
Burlington, ON
L7M 3A8

12 Gerry Eelhart will be **61**
c/o Mrs. Grace Eelhart
120 13425-57 Street,
Emmanuel Home
Edmonton, AB
T5A 2G1

13 John VanWyngaarden will be **45**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8

14 Tineille VanRootselaar will be **27**
219 Lock St W
Dunville, ON
N1A 1V2

14 Lisa Alkema will be **42**
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON
L9B 2K3
email: lhalkema@gmail.com

15 Jim VanderHeiden will be **64**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8

23 Brent Baartman will be **34**
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON
L0R 1B2

CLARION KIDS LORD'S DAY 25

The Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts in many ways. The two main ways are by the preaching and the sacraments. The minister preaches two sermons every Sunday. Try hard to listen! The Holy Spirit can use anything you remember to help your faith grow! The Holy Spirit also uses sacraments to help our faith grow. Sacraments is a big word, isn't it? Well, sacraments are actions that we see. These actions remind us of God's forgiveness. Have you ever seen the minister put drops of water on a baby's forehead? That is the sacrament of baptism. And what about your parents eating a small piece of bread? That is the sacrament of Lord's Supper. There are two sacraments. God is good to us. He knows that we sometimes need to see these actions to be comforted. He knows we need reminders that, yes, Jesus died for me.

DRAW A LINE TO SHOW WHICH ACTIONS ARE SACRAMENTS AND WHICH ARE NOT SACRAMENTS

Actions that remind us about God's forgiveness

A sacrament

Singing

Not a sacrament

Baptism

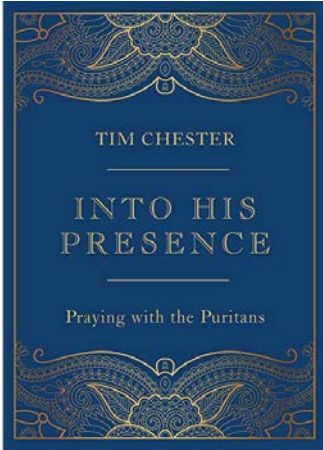
Lord's Supper



HEY KIDS!

Do you have questions about something you have read in the Bible or heard in a sermon? Maybe you are wondering about something you have read in a Lord's Day. We have a new column coming called KIDS' QUESTIONS. We warmly invite you to ask Mrs. DeBoer your question! With your parent's permission, email deboerca@gmail.com and find your question and an answer in Clarion!

AMANDA DEBOER



HEARTY PIETY TO STIR YOUR SOUL TO PRAYER

Into His Presence: Praying with the Puritans, by Tim Chester.
(Epsom: The Good Book Company, 2022). Hardcover.
207 pages. \$28.40 CDN.

The Puritans and other post-Reformation Reformed theologians have often been maligned as holding forth a cold and dry form of the Christian faith. I believe it was Dr. Richard Muller who raised the question of what the opposite of “cold and dry” might be. A warm and moist Christian faith?

That popular caricature portrays the Puritans as fixated on the mind or on the Law. They allegedly reduced the Christian faith to a matter of intellectual knowledge of doctrines laid out schematically or, even worse, to a matter of commandments to be obeyed legalistically. If that’s your idea of Puritanism, then you need to have a look at this beautiful little book compiled by British pastor Tim Chester.

The bulk of *Into His Presence* consists of prayers originally written by Puritans, as well as prayers created by Chester out of Puritan sermons or books. Besides prayers directly addressed to God, Chester has also included a number of meditational passages and poems. Particularly noteworthy is the inclusion of a number of poems by Anne Bradstreet, a Puritan woman who emigrated to New England in 1630. Other authors included are such notables as Thomas Watson, Isaac Ambrose, John Owen, and John Bunyan.

There are over eighty prayers, meditations, and poems. Some of the categories include:

Prayers of Dependence on the Spirit

Prayers of Confession

Prayers for Times of Temptation

Prayers for the Lost

Prayers for Morning and Evening


Chester has modernized all the English so it’s easily understood. At the end of the book he provides biographies of each Puritan included, as well as a listing of all the sources. There’s another popular collection of Puritan prayers, *The Valley of Vision*. Unfortunately, the compiler of that one (Arthur Bennett) didn’t include the sources and, as it turns out, some of his “Puritan

prayers” were actually self-composed. So I appreciate Chester going to the trouble of listing all his sources.

There are two things I really appreciate about these devotional writings.

It’s sometimes been said that our language of prayer has become disrespectful, especially after we gave up the use of “Thee, Thou, etc.” I defy anyone to read these prayers, written in modern English, and tell me they aren’t baptized with an absolutely holy reverence for God. While they’re intimate and hearty, at the same time they’re also deeply conscious of God’s transcendent majesty. This book aptly illustrates how to hold both of those things together in our prayers.

Charles Spurgeon once said that if you were to cut a Puritan, he would bleed “bible.” The Puritans were people of the Bible—it ran in their veins. The Bible shaped their prayers—and that’s beautifully evidenced in this book. The prayers from Matthew Henry provide the biblical references—but that doesn’t mean the other ones aren’t influenced by Scripture. Take this example from the beginning of a mealtime prayer from Lewis Bayly: “O eternal God, in whom we live and move and have our being. . . .” He’s quoting Acts 17:28. If you want to learn better how to incorporate God’s Word into your prayers, study the Puritans.

Tim Chester’s goal is to have this little devotional book serve as a gateway to other Puritan writings. I can’t think of a better on-ramp to some of the best Christian authors in history. *Into His Presence* would make a wonderful gift for professions of faith, graduations, or other special events. 



Wes Bredenhof Pastor
Free Reformed Church
Launceston, Tasmania
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CLASSIS PACIFIC WEST SEPTEMBER 22, 2022

Rev. K. Janssen opened Classis on behalf of the convening church of Willoughby Heights. He led us in the singing of Psalm 93:1-4 and read Psalm 11. In prayer we remembered the examination of Kevin Star, the installation of Rev. H. Lee in Houston, the departure of Rev. B. Schoof to Chilliwack, the desire for a second pastor in Smithers, the passing of Queen Elizabeth II, and the ascension of King Charles III.

Classis was declared constituted and the following officers were appointed: Chairman Rev. D. Vandeburgt, Vice-Chairman Rev. R. Visscher, and Clerk Rev. H. Alkema. The agenda was adopted as presented. Rev. H. Lee signed the Form of Subscription.

EXAMINATION

Classis then proceeded to the preparatory examination of br. Kevin Star. Br. Star presented a sermon proposal on 2 Chronicles 32:24-26. Classis agreed that br. K. Star “rightly handled the word of truth” and the sermon was judged sufficient to continue with the examination. Br. K. Star was then examined in Old Testament exegesis using Psalm 45. This was followed by a New Testament exegesis examination on Mark 1:21-45 with a focus on Mark 1:40-45. Finally, there was an examination on doctrines and creeds which centred on covenant theology, with a focus on the inter-relationship of the biblical covenants. Br. K. Star sustained his examinations and is now eligible for call within the Canadian Reformed Churches. Classis gave thanks in prayer.

APPEAL & APPOINTMENTS

A letter was received from the Appeals Committee regarding an appeal. Since the Appeals Committee could not complete their work before the convening of Classis, a motion was passed for Classis Pacific West to reconvene on a later date so that the Appeals Committee could finish their work.

The Chairman asked the questions specified in Article 44 of the Church Order. In response to a request for advice, advice was given. The churches then apprised one another regarding their local and international mission efforts. The convening church of the next classis will be Cloverdale on Thursday, December 15. The alternate date is Thursday, April 27.

Classis appointed the following brothers to the Committee for Appeals: Rev. D. Vandeburgt (convener), J. Van Seters, R. Jacobi. Alternates: Rev. K. Janssen and J. Lengkeek.

Delegates for Regional Synod West 2022 were chosen. As ministers: Rev. H. Alkema and Rev. D. Vandeburgt. Alternates: Rev. R. Visscher and Rev. J. Segstro. As elders: N. Vanderhorst and S. Koat. Alternates: G. Gunnink and D. Driegen.

Opportunity was given for personal questions. There was an opportunity for Christian censure, in which the Chairman noted with thankfulness the conduct of the delegates. The Acts were approved up to that evening. Classis went into recess.

NOVEMBER 3 AND 4, 2022

Classis reconvened on November 3 and 4, 2022. Delegates from Houston and Smithers joined through digital conferencing. The Chairman read from Proverbs 18:1-10. The delegates sang from Psalm 72:1, 4 and the Chairman led in prayer. Classis dealt with an appeal in closed session. Following a power outage, Classis agreed to have the Executive finalize the press release and Acts of Classis. The Vice-chairman closed in prayer.

*For Classis Pacific West
(September 22, 2022; November 3 and 4, 2022),
Rev. R. Visscher (Vice-chairman of that classis)*

REGIONAL SYNOD EAST NOVEMBER 9, 2022

The meeting of the delegates was called to order in the Redemption CanRC building by Rev. Hilmer Jagersma, minister of the convening church, Fellowship CanRC. After opening devotions, including various memorabilia, the examination of credentials, and the election of officers, Regional Synod East (RSE) was declared constituted.

APPEAL & REPORTS

RSE dealt with an appeal against a decision of Classis Niagara March 9, 2022. After discussion, RSE denied the appeal.

The treasurer's books were found to be in good order and the recommended assessment of \$1.00 per communicant member was adopted.

The archives were also found to be in good order. The various Regional Synod Deputies reported on the work that they did in classical examinations in this past year. It was noted with gratitude that four new ministers could fill our pulpits while one (Rev. D. G. J. Agema) could enter emeritus status after thirty-eight years of faithful service.

After the meeting approved the Acts, made provisions for a press release, and engaged in devotions, the chairman declared Regional Synod East closed. **C**

Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer (vice-chairman at that time)

APPOINTMENTS

Synod made the following regular appointments:

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Treasury Church | Grassie–Covenant |
| Church to review the treasury books | Lincoln–Vineyard |
| Church to maintain the archives | Toronto–Bethel |
| Church to inspect the archives | Brampton–Grace |
| Convening Church and date for the next RSE | Guelph–Living Word, Nov 8, 2023 |

Synod appointed the following as synodical deputies (CO 48) for the upcoming year:

| | |
|---|--|
| From Classis Central Ontario as deputy to Classis Northern Ontario and Classis Niagara | Rev. Clarence Vandervelde; First alternate: Rev. Bill DeJong; Second alternate: Rev. Anthony Roukema |
| From Classis Northern Ontario as deputy to Classis Central Ontario and Classis Ontario West | Rev. Marc Jagt First alternate: Rev. Theo Wierenga; Second alternate: Rev. Jeff Poort |
| From Classis Niagara as deputy to Classis Central Ontario and Classis Ontario West | Rev. Dick Wynia First alternate: Rev. Rodney Vermeulen Second alternate: Rev. Rolf DenHollander |
| From Classis Ontario West as deputy for Classis Northern Ontario and Classis Niagara | Rev. John Louwerse First alternate: Rev. Ken Kok Second alternate: Rev. John VanWoudenberg |

DEAR EDITOR,

The comments below are about the article “Evaluate the Experts” (*Clarion*, 71 (23):667). It is hard to discern the meaning of the article. The author writes that “on the one hand there is much to appreciate about experts” and notes that he has much appreciation and generally follows the advice of his auto mechanic and family doctor. The writer then asserts that experts can most certainly be wrong and suggests that “there is a place for your gut instinct and intelligent evaluation of what the experts are telling you.” The author continues by stating that “the need to evaluate what experts say is obvious too from how experts of equal credentials and experience disagree amongst themselves. Did we not witness that during COVID-19?” One wonders how the author would determine who the experts of equal credentials and experience are.

Regarding COVID-19 infection and its prevention, I would suggest that *Clarion* readers not only listen to what experts say but also examine their writings, especially those that have been peer-reviewed and appeared in reputable scientific journals. Such

articles are readily accessible online by visiting a website such as pubmed.gov. Permit me to refer to one article that appeared in *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports (Morb Mort Wkly Rep; 70:1284–1290)* titled: “Monitoring incidence of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths, by vaccination status – 13 US jurisdictions, April 4 – July 17, 2021.” In it the fifty-nine authors reported that vaccination offers strong protection against COVID-19 in that, after Delta became the most common variant, fully vaccinated people had a reduced risk of infection (5X), of hospitalization (>10X) and of death (>10X) (please note the Table and Fig 2 of the publication). May the readers be guided by expert advice in decision making.

Cornelis Poppe,
DVM MSc PhD (veterinarian and research scientist)
Expert on Salmonellosis (1993-2018) of the OIE
(Office International des Epizooties, Paris)

