



Clarion

183 INFLUENCERS *185* YOU ARE IN EVERY LINE I HAVE EVER READ

190 MULTICULTURAL REFORMED CHURCHES

WHAT'S INSIDE

Issue five offers a veritable potpourri of topics to build you up in faith. Do you have trouble relating parts of the Old Testament to your Christian faith? Then Jake Torenvliet's article will help you put on "Emmaus" reading glasses to help. Have you thought about reaching out with the gospel to the immigrants who move to our neighbourhoods? Either way, Kwangyoung Park's heart-felt plea for us to be more deliberate in doing so is worthy of consideration. How is the gospel faring in Muslim-dominated Indonesia? MERF's newsletter gives us reason for encouragement. What can we learn from saints of long ago? Keith Sikkema's historical introduction to Polycarp (who personally knew the apostle John!) will get you started.

And still there is more. Why are Reformed ministers bound for life in their office? Jan DeGelder helps us understand in another installment of *Governing the Church*. One of our ministers has given most of his adult life (50 years now!) to the ministry of the Word and is still going strong in his retirement—a blessing described for us by Ginny VanderHorst. Need some reading material? Three book reviews offer recommendations on topics from Mosaic laws to forgiveness to actively helping your pastor. And for the musically inclined we feature a rendition of the Nicene Creed by George van Popta—could this be a future addition to our *Book of Praise*?

On top of the above you'll find our regular columns plus a thoughtful editorial by Eric Kampen on influencing and being influenced. Enjoy your read and may God add his blessing to it!

Peter Holtvliuwer

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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:

- C** onfessionally Reformed
- L** oving in manner
- A** ctually relevant 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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INFLUENCERS

A phenomenon in our time is the presence of influencers. This term is used to describe someone who affects or changes the way that other people behave. If the goal of influencers is to influence others, one could say that a minister is an influencer. Through the preaching of the gospel, he hopes to affect or change the way other people behave. When we think it through, though, everyone is an influencer. We may not think so, nor be so deliberate about it as those on social media, but if we go about our lives in a conscientious way, we will influence others.

I thought of this while reflecting on brothers and sisters who have influenced how I have gone about my task as minister. I will mention a few, as an encouragement to all to interact with their ministers to help them grow in their task. Perhaps the words said will benefit others as well. I will mention seven of them.

CHRIST, COMFORT, & CONCISENESS

First, and perhaps it is good it was first, were the words of a brother in an early preaching review. He was quite emphatic in the way he said he wanted to hear about Christ and what he has done for us. I suppose I should have known that, but the passionate plea to hear the gospel resonates still. I have learned over the years that telling people what to do does not necessarily produce the change hoped for; but talking about the love of God in Christ moves hearts to respond in love.

Second, there was the suggestion to end sermons on a positive note, even if there was a strong warning in the sermon. It may seem more effective to conclude with an exhortation, but again, it seemed to have the opposite effect. So, when there is warning and comfort, warning first, and the last word with which the listeners go home is the comfort of the gospel.

Third, don't be too long. That's hard when one thinks there is so much to say. Listeners, and we must think of the little ones too, can only take in so much. Also, you make it harder on yourself as minister. If there is so much to say, divide the text and preach two sermons.

CONFESSION & CONFIDENCE

Fourth, follow your confession. This one came from a fellow minister when working through some challenging issues. It is a helpful guide. When you follow your confessions, you walk a well-trod

path that you have promised to follow. Someone can't fault you for keeping your promise.


Fifth, don't give the congregation your own translation of the original languages. It may come across as very learned, but it undermines the confidence of the congregation in the Bible translations they are using. There are other ways to bring out nuances in the original language that show the minister has spent much time with the text.

ATTRACTION & AFFECTION

Sixth, be winsome. Again, this is something that should have been known from the start, but it was something that needed to be stressed. One may think the listeners will be drawn in by some controversial statement or some crass way of saying things. However, you are more likely to alienate those you are trying to win, even to the point they won't hear another word of the sermon.

Seventh, ministers should not come with an agenda, but should just love and care for the people they are called to serve. Of course, loving and caring for the sheep could be considered an agenda, but it is God's agenda to walk with the sheep in all the troubles and challenges of this life, picking them up when they fall and supporting them as they stumble through life. The weekly preaching of the gospel of grace does exactly that. The pulpit is the congregational feeding station.

One of my daughters once sent me a sign to encourage me: "One person can make a difference, and everyone should try." As I think about these seven influencers, I realize that we don't have to set out to be an influencer. When we just go about our tasks, dealing with one another in love, we affect or change other people. As these examples show, none of them exhibited an agenda to be influencers. I may not have fully followed through on all that was said, but the fact that I recall these incidents indicates they did influence me for good, and I am thankful for that.

Take time to reflect and think about the influencers God has given you to influence you for good. 



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DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM

“The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid.”

JOHN 13:27–30

The gospels mention men more often than women. Jesus’s twelve apostles were men. But that doesn’t mean that men are more important in the Kingdom of God than women. In fact, women have a place of honour in the events around Good Friday and Easter. In this brief devotional we consider the role of women in the narrative of Luke 23:26–24:12.

When Jesus, carrying his cross, walked out of the city to Golgotha, a parade of women stood along the road wailing and weeping. Most of them were probably local women who lamented that such a young man should come to such a terrible end. When Jesus had entered the city like royalty only a few days earlier, they might have had a flicker of hope; now all seemed sad and dark. They mourned without understanding the deep meaning of Jesus’s suffering. But the Lord Jesus, merciful as always, stopped for a private teaching moment. “Don’t weep for me!” The real tragedy was Jerusalem’s failure to recognize the Messiah they had longed for. Jesus warned these women of the coming judgment over that unbelief.


The Jerusalemite women returned home but Jesus’s female disciples followed him to Golgotha and witnessed the horrible ordeal of the crucifixion. They observed the hatred and ridicule from most bystanders. They didn’t dare come close but they couldn’t leave the Lord they loved so much. Even after Jesus died, they stayed there for several hours. They saw the soldiers arrive to take down the body. Then they followed Joseph of Arimathea to know where Jesus would be buried. The women were powerless to do anything, but they were faithful and showed that in their actions.

That night the women went home for the Sabbath, a day of worship, on which no work was done. But on Sunday, as early as possible, they came to take care of Jesus’s body properly. They had no detailed plan—for instance, how to remove the stone from the mouth of the tomb—but their love drove them to do whatever they could to honour their Lord, even in his death. Just like Jesus’s male followers, they were clueless about the meaning of his death, but there was no question about their dedication.

Now, to these women God granted the privilege of witnessing the most glorious fact in history first. They saw the empty tomb. They heard the gospel of the resurrection. John tells us that Mary Magdalene even had the honour of being the first to meet the risen

Lord. Their mourning turned to joy as they realized that Jesus’s Kingdom had not ended in his crucifixion but had broken through in power in his resurrection.

And then the women became proclaimers. The angels hardly needed to instruct them what to do. They went to the other disciples, who were still deeply grieving, and proclaimed the miracle. At first, the men dismissed them: “Typical for women, to make up such hysterical stories!” But that masculine skepticism broke down when they saw for themselves the empty tomb, and most glorious of all, their Lord and King in person.

Sometimes people behave as if men have a greater place in the Kingdom of God than women. But the gospel of Jesus’s resurrection came first to the true daughters of Jerusalem, to the women who faithfully followed Jesus. Ever since, all Jesus’s faithful followers, male and female alike, share in the life of Christ’s resurrection. 

FURTHER READING

John 20

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. What do we know about the women “who had come with Jesus from Galilee”? See e.g. Luke 8:1–3.
2. Can you think of a reason why, among all these women, Mary Magdalene had the privilege of meeting the risen Lord first?
3. In the events of Luke 23 and 24, did the women show a stronger faith than Jesus’s male disciples? Why or why not?
4. Think of other examples in the New Testament where female disciples have a place of honour.
5. In the Christian church, roles of leadership and authoritative teaching are reserved for men. Is that in conflict with the role of the women in Luke 24? Why or why not?



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A shepherd in a hat and vest stands in a field, herding a large flock of sheep. A dog is visible in the foreground. The background is a lush, green valley with rolling hills and dense trees.

You Are in Every Line I Have
Ever Read

JAKE TORENVLIET

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

In Charles Dickens's classic novel *Great Expectations* there's a scene in which two individuals are confessing their love for one another. One of them says—and it's a wonderful quote—"You are in every line that I have ever read." In context, the character is saying, "I'll never forget you. How could I? My entire life up to this point has been about you."

The thing is that something similar could be said about Jesus and the Bible. The Bible, of course, is a much different book than Dickens's classic. We read it as one book with one divine author though it is comprised of sixty-six individual books written by forty different human authors, over the course of 1,600 years, in thirteen different countries, using three different languages. And yet, we can confidently say about Jesus in the Bible, "You are in every line that I have ever read."

*A Christian doesn't simply read
Jesus back into the Old Testament.
No, Jesus was always there!*

THE EMMAUS CODE

One of my favourite scenes in the Easter narratives of the gospels is in Luke 24:13–35. Two grieving disciples were travelling from Jerusalem to the town of Emmaus when the risen Lord Jesus suddenly appeared incognito and joined their conversation. To their surprise, Jesus asked them what they were speaking about. The one named Cleopas responded, saying, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” With that he launched into a recap of the events of Good Friday and the shock of the empty tomb on Sunday morning. Crestfallen, Cleopas admitted that their hopes had been dashed because they had hoped that this Jesus, who had died and whose body was now missing, “was the one to redeem Israel.”

It's clear from the passage that Jesus had appeared to these disciples for a reason (and we happen to be beneficiaries of this reason and their spiritual dullness). Luke writes in verses 25–26: “And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

WHERE IS JESUS?

It's a remarkable Easter revelation, isn't it? It's one that compels us to read the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, using a specific lens: a Jesus lens, a cross-shaped lens, an empty tomb lens. The “Emmaus Code,” or hermeneutic, teaches us that we should read every passage of the Old Testament with great expectations! In my current pastorate, my predecessor once preached a sermon on these verses in Luke using the analogy of *Where's Waldo?* Like Waldo, Jesus can be found on every page of the Old Testament. Or, to quote Dickens again, “Jesus is in every line that I have ever read.”

Sometimes a passage whispers his name. Other times his name is shouted from the roof tops. But in every instance, Jesus is there. Not artificially, or as an imposition on the text. Not as an afterthought or a post-script. Jesus is intrinsic to a right understanding—a gospel understanding—of every text. Jesus is in the

Law; Jesus is in the prophets; Jesus is in the Psalms; Jesus is in the narratives (cf. Lord's Day 7). It may sound sacrilegious, but rightly understanding an Old Testament passage cannot be restricted to what the LORD is doing. No, the inevitable question the Christian will eventually have to ask is: where is Jesus? And if he hasn't been found, seen, or heard, then, to paraphrase Jesus, a preacher or a reader remains “foolish, and slow of heart to believe.”

THE EXAMPLE OF SCRIPTURE

The New Testament is replete with examples that demonstrate this very point, but I'll limit myself to three:

In 2 Corinthians 10:1–5, the apostle Paul looks back in redemptive history to the exodus and Israel's wilderness sojourn. When we read the narratives of Exodus and Numbers we never actually find the name Jesus, or the title Christ, but the inspired apostle, wearing his Emmaus glasses writes: “For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”

In his short letter, Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, looks back on the same events. What he writes in verse 5 should stop us in our tracks: “Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, *that Jesus*, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.” How many times have we heard the words of Exodus 20:2 in our morning worship services? “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” But Jude teaches us that Jesus is in every line of the Law: “I am Jesus your God, who brought out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Finally, we turn to the book of Hebrews. The entirety of Hebrews is a masterclass in applying the Emmaus Code to the Old Testament. In Hebrews 2 the author uses Psalm 8 while arguing for the supremacy of Jesus. Typically, when we read Psalm 8 within its Old Testament context, we understand that the psalmist is marveling at the place, or status, of humans in this world. God has made mankind a little lower than divine. Humans are unique in that we alone are created in the image of God; we alone have been given the task of ruling over creation.

But in Hebrews 2:6–9 the author shifts from the emphasis on “mankind” generally, to a specific human, Jesus. He reads Psalm 8

*Pick up your Bible and read
with great expectations.
Read in community. Pray for the
Spirit to give understanding.
After all, he is our greatest helper!
And look for Jesus. He is in every
line that you'll ever read.*

as a prophetic template for the Son's humiliation and exaltation. Psalm 8, he says, speaks about how for a little while the eternal Son was made lower than the angels. The one who lived in glory stepped off the throne and took on flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He entered into our mess. Suffered and died on a cross for our sin. Then, after the little while was over, he was raised from the dead for our justification. He was exalted. He ascended into heaven and now reigns over all things. He writes in Hebrews 2:9: "But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death. . . ."

THERE WAS JESUS

In each of these examples we find a common thread. And we need to be clear about it. A Christian doesn't simply read Jesus back into the Old Testament. No, Jesus was always there! And the Spirit needs to open our eyes to see this reality if we are to rightly understand the entirety of Scripture (cf. BC, Art. 25). O Jesus, you are in every line that I have ever read!

The always quotable Charles Spurgeon gave the following famous advice to a struggling young pastor: "Young man, from every town and every village, and every little hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London. And so, from every text in Scripture, there is a road to the metropolis of the Scriptures,


that is Christ. And my dear brother, your business is when you go to a text, to say, 'Now what is the road to Christ?' and then preach a sermon, running along the road to the great metropolis—Christ. And I have never yet found a text that has not got a road to Christ in it."

RESOURCES

As a child, when I read *Where's Waldo?* I would occasionally struggle to locate Waldo, his many lost items, or his companions among the sea of people. The keen eyes of another reader were often (although not always!) appreciated. The same could be said about finding Jesus in every line and every page of the Bible. We don't need to do this alone. In fact, we shouldn't!

For families with younger children there are a number of excellent story Bibles. *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name* by Sally-Lloyd Jones (2007) and *The Gospel Story Bible: Discovering Jesus in the Old and New Testaments* by Marty Machowski (2011) can be used by parents to train young children to wear their Emmaus reading glasses when reading the Bible.

For older children of God (that's you, dear reader), David Murray's *Jesus on Every Page: 10 Simple Ways to Seek and Find Christ in the Old Testament* unveils the face of Christ in the creation narrative, the law, the psalms, the prophets, and the proverbs. It will help you know the Old Testament for what it truly is: full of Jesus.

Not everyone is a preacher. But we are all students of Scripture. So, pick up your Bible and read with great expectations. Read in community. Pray for the Spirit to give understanding. After all, he is our greatest helper! And look for Jesus. He is in every line that you'll ever read. 



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Bound for Life

In the previous article we touched briefly on the question of why it is so difficult to get out of the ministry. When Article 12 of the Church Order describes the “way out,” so to speak, it speaks about *exceptional and substantial reasons*. In other words, a minister cannot just say one day: “I no longer feel like doing this,” or “I got a better job offer—I quit.”

To understand this better, let’s have a closer look at Article 12. It does indeed describe the exit-option for exceptional and substantial reasons, but the main point is, that *a minister of the Word, once lawfully called, is bound to the service of the church for life*.

That sounds like a daunting commitment. And apparently it is not sufficient that the minister himself thinks that his reasons to get out are exceptional and substantial. No, the exit light will only turn green when the consistory with the deacons, the classis, and the deputies of the regional synod all agree on this.

BOUND TO WHAT?

Before we get to the question of “why” a minister is bound to serve for life, it is good to have a right idea of what it means and what it does not mean.

It does not mean that the office of minister has an indelible or permanent character. In the Roman Catholic Church ordination is a sacrament, called “Holy Orders.” This makes one a priest forever.

Through his church, God entrusted ministers with the glorious message of salvation by grace in Jesus Christ

When a priest misbehaves, he can lose his legal rights, like administering sacraments, but once ordained even the church cannot strip him of his “ordination.” The office is permanently bound to the person. Once a priest, always a priest.

In the Reformed churches the office is not bound to the person, but to the service of the church. In Article 6 it says that “no one shall serve in the ministry unless he is bound to a certain church.” This implies that if a man, once ordained as a minister, for whatever reason is no longer serving a certain church, he is no longer a minister. In some circumstances there is flexibility when it comes to applying this principle—think of the last paragraph in Article 11—but eventually a man who is not bound to a certain church will lose his ministerial status. The federation does not employ ministers “at large” or “in general service.”

It is important to keep this in mind when reading Article 12. We tend to focus on the words “a minister of the Word is bound

for life.” That’s the heading, after all. But the first question is, of course: bound to what? Well—to the service of the church, it says. Then the next question is: which church?

Now, it becomes important to remember the difference outlined above. The ordination of a priest makes him an office bearer in the worldwide institution of the (Roman Catholic) church, regardless of how and where and even if he is serving in that institution. The ordination of a Reformed minister makes him an office bearer in the local church that called him. As the Form for Ordination puts it: “The Holy Spirit has made you pastor and teacher of this congregation.” He is therefore bound to service in that church. Articles 6 and 12 speak the same language.

SERVING FOR LIFE, UNLESS . . .

And yes—that lawful calling and ordination is for life in that church. Is it always healthy, attractive, or satisfying to serve perhaps for decades as minister in the same church? That’s a different discussion. But the principle is clear. If no other local church calls him, he cannot say after ten or twenty-five years: “It has been nice getting to know you. But I’m done here.” Whether serving one church in your lifetime or six—the ministry is a calling for life. If he moves to a second or third congregation, he must again be prepared to serve that local church for the rest of his life.¹

It is true—all this does not mean that a minister cannot move from church A to church B. But it’s interesting that here again it is not just the minister on his own who one day decides that he is going to move from A to B, just because he feels like it.

Article 9 makes clear that, yes, a minister can move from church A to church B, but only if he is lawfully called by church B, and only if the consistory with the deacons of church A gives him permission to do so. That’s not just a formality. It indicates again that the office of minister of the Word is not tied to the man only, but to the man in his service of the church. That link is indispensable.

At the same time, the fact that the ministry is a calling for life in the service of the church does not mean that it is impossible for a minister to be released from his office. Three articles in the Church Order regulate scenarios that can lead to a situation where a minister will no longer serve the church for the rest of his life: Articles 11, 12, and 71. At this point we won’t look at these articles in more detail but note that in all those scenarios it is not the minister’s

decision to leave the ministry. In Article 12 the request may come from the minister, but in all three situations the judgment of the consistory with the deacons is decisive, in cooperation with the representatives of the federation: the classis and the deputies of regional synod. That makes sense. After all, those are the bodies that issued and approved his call.

BUT WHY?

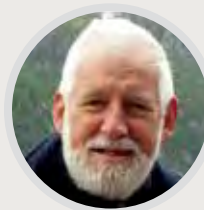
Two questions are left: the “why” question has not been answered yet, and what could qualify as *exceptional and substantial reasons*?

To begin with the latter—it is impossible to make a list or categorize such reasons. It is very personal. I remember one case. The brother was a capable, well-read theologian; he knew his biblical languages as no other; but he was deeply unhappy in the ministry. Eventually he became a teacher and he flourished.

Finally—why do we have the rule that a minister is bound to serve for life? As we saw earlier, through the call of the congregation he is called by the Holy God himself. But the same is true for elders and deacons (Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons). And they serve only a few years (Art. 24). In a future column I hope to come back to this “term-eldership” topic.

A practical aspect of having ministers serving for life is that those men have studied long and have been trained for many years. But there is more. In Scripture, God calls prophets and apostles to bring his Word to his people, and many were called for life. Think of Isaiah and Jeremiah in the OT, and the apostles, as well as men like Timothy and Titus in the NT.

The church can be busy with many good things, but its supreme task is to teach and preach God’s Word. Through his church, God entrusted ministers with the glorious message of salvation by grace in Jesus Christ, and they are called to deliver this message to God’s people, as long as they are able. ☑



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¹ “Sometimes it was said of a minister with little chance to ever receive a call, ‘he brought his shovel along.’ This meant: he will stay here till his grave is dug and he is buried. In essence, this applies to all ministers, and they, too, had better realize it.” W. W. J. Van Oene, *With Common Consent*, Winnipeg 1990, 51



Multicultural

Canadian Reformed Churches

KWANGYOUNG PARK

Have you ever imagined Caucasians, Asians, Africans, Middle Easterners, and South Americans gathering together to praise God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ? Revelation 7 shows us “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb . . . crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Rev 7:9–10). Jesus Christ, our Saviour, has ransomed people from every tribe, language, and nation (5:9). People from various ethnicities, cultures, nationalities, and languages can become one community in one Lord, knowing one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph 4:5). Can we expect to see such a beautiful image in our Canadian Reformed Churches?

CANADA’S CULTURAL MOSAIC

Canada is often called a “cultural mosaic” because it includes a mix of different ethnic groups, languages, and cultures. Canada is full of diversity and people from various cultures live together peacefully here whether studying together at school or working beside

one another. However, they often attend separate churches based on their ethnic or cultural identities. For example, Koreans typically go to Korean churches, while Chinese people go to Chinese churches. A year ago, Pastor Gerrit Brintjes challenged me when I prayed for Reformed Korean church planting in Toronto by asking why Canadian churches do not embrace multicultural diversity when the secular Canadian culture embraces it so well. This question prompted me to join the CanRC with a dream of a multicultural Canadian Reformed Church.

Culture is identity-forming thoughts and practices. Under the influence of culture, individuals develop their own identities. For example, Koreans speak the Korean language, eat Korean food, and consume Korean culture. And they think of themselves as Korean. People easily feel a sense of kinship with those who share their culture and may conflict with those from other cultures. Canada, however, is already a multicultural community, and Canadian society has tried to overcome potential cultural conflicts by fostering tolerance based on benevolence.

Canada’s mosaic culture is incredible, and I respect it, but the church seems to embrace this diversity less than the secular



The church seems to embrace diversity less than the secular world

body in Christ. I believe the CanRC can become a better multicultural community than secular Canadian society because we are fellow citizens of heaven and members of God's household in the covenant.

In contemporary Canadian society, the CanRC has a unique opportunity to become a multicultural church. According to Statistics Canada, "In 2021, more than 8.3 million people, or almost one-quarter (23%) of the population, were, or had ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident in Canada."¹ Canada has been a country of immigrants from the beginning; many immigrants have already come from all around the world, and more will come. In 2021, nine million Canadian residents—more than one in four—had a mother tongue other than English or French. There are now over 450 mother languages in Canadian society.² One can meet people who speak nearly any language in Canada. This context offers the CanRC a unique opportunity to embrace various people, proclaim the gospel to them, and become a multicultural church.

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Jesus Christ said to his disciples, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). Jesus does not want his church confined to a monoethnic or monocultural group. He said, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This is the core mission of his church. Jesus Christ wants us to be his witnesses to the end of the earth. Countless missionaries throughout history devoted their lives to travelling around the world, as this was the only way to reach those at the end of the earth and preach the gospel to them. However, in the twenty-first century, we can be his witnesses to these people right here in Canada because they have come to us from the end of the earth. What a great opportunity we have!

Cultural differences and tensions, however, make it difficult to become a multicultural church. The early church had divisions

world. I believe the Christian church should facilitate a better multicultural community because Christians share a transcendent higher identity beyond earthly cultural differences. After becoming disciples of Jesus, all Christians adopt a new identity. We are all covenant people with citizenship in heaven (Phil 3:20). Despite our different earthly identities, nationalities, ethnicities, and languages, we have kinship based on the covenant. Because we are all brothers and sisters in the household of God (Eph 2:19), the church can thoroughly embrace diversity. In particular, the sovereignty of God, the authority of the Scripture, Reformed theology and the Reformed confessions form the foundation which can be shared with various ethnicities, languages, and nationalities. Our belief is universal because we share a confession based on the Scripture, which is the Word of God for everyone. In faith, there are no distinctions among different cultural groups. Whether Dutch, Canadian, Asian, African, or Hispanic, all can become one

1 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026a-eng.htm>

2 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220817/dq220817a-eng.htm>

We can better overcome cultural tension or conflict because we have a higher identity transcending diverse earthly cultures. Our citizenship is in heaven, and our Lord Jesus Christ is our peace

and conflicts among different cultural groups, such as Jews and Gentiles. However, as Paul proclaimed, Jesus reconciled them, breaking down dividing walls of hostility (Eph 2:14). Jesus Christ established a new higher identity that transcends every earthly culture. Jesus created “in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross” (Eph 2:15–16). Therefore, in Christ, all people—Jews, Gentiles, and other cultural groups—are “no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens and members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19). The gospel proclaims true reconciliation and peace in Christ. Human sinfulness always creates divisions and tension between ethnicities, nationalities and cultures, and everyone suffers from the conflict of culturally different groups. However, the gospel of Christ can overcome every earthly cultural division and break down all barriers and tensions.

The question is: how can the CanRC proclaim the gospel of this reconciliation to a multicultural Canadian society today? Suppose that we love one another beyond the cultural differences in a multicultural CanRC, particularly if we share true brotherhood and genuine unity as a spiritual family and fellow citizens of heaven beyond ethnic differences. In that case, Canadian people can know that we are Jesus’s disciples because they cannot find genuine love, reconciliation, and unity beyond the cultural tension in this secular world. Jesus taught us, “a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34–35).

Moreover, a multicultural church can contribute to evangelization and the global mission. Think about the Antioch Church—the first church that sent missionaries into the world. Acts 13:1 says, “there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.” Look at this church’s leaders: Barnabas was Jewish, a Levite, but a native of Cyprus (Acts 4:36). Simeon was called Niger, implying that he was an African. Lucius was from Cyrene, a city on the coast of North Africa. Manaen came from a noble family. Saul, also called Paul, was a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees (Acts 23:6). With

leaders from various cultures, the Antioch Church might have been multicultural. Although we do not know precisely how this diversity affected the missions of the Antioch Church, we can assume that diversity helped them reach out to various people in the Mediterranean region in the first century. The CanRC can be multicultural, like the Antioch Church; we have already begun to see more diverse people within us. We have some non-Dutch, non-Caucasian ministers among us, and immigrants from many different countries have become communicant members. I hope we can have more diverse ministers, elders, and deacons in the CanRC because I believe this diversity can contribute to evangelizing multicultural Canadian society and spreading the gospel around the world.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES

The CanRC has the pure gospel and precious Reformed legacy. It is a special blessing for us. The gospel and the Reformed legacy must be preserved within us, handed down to future generations, and extended to Canadian society and the world. I think that the CanRC has unique opportunities to become a multicultural Reformed church in a multicultural Canadian society.

First, we can be a home for new immigrants looking for a faithful church. For immigrants, finding their “home church” in Canada is one of the first tasks of settling in to Canadian society. In particular, immigrants from the Reformed church are looking for a faithful Reformed church in Canada, which is difficult to find. Few churches in Canada keep the Word of God faithfully, leaving limited choices for immigrants from the Reformed church background. When I have met such immigrants, they told me how difficult it was to find a faithful church in Canada. That led to many wandering aimlessly in their search for a home church. Although they visited several churches, many could not settle because the churches either did not faithfully follow the Word of God or were too exclusive. Many brothers and sisters in Christ are searching for a faithful church across Canada. They are our fellow citizens and spiritual family. I believe the CanRC can help our brothers and sisters who have lost their homes and are wandering, and I hope we can help them more actively.

Second, we can share the gospel with unbelievers from various cultural backgrounds in this multicultural Canadian society. We can easily see the diversity in both big and small Canadian cities. It is not difficult to find different ethnicities and cultures, even in rural areas across the country. The essential commission of Christ's church is proclaiming the gospel to those who do not know God and saving the lost for whom our Father is searching. Though we cannot know who has been elected by God, it is clear that we must proclaim the gospel regardless of whether they are Caucasian, Asian, African, or Hispanic and we must do so in season or out of season. "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

Moreover, the fact that immigrants come to Canada from all over the world offers significant opportunities. Today, preaching the gospel to the Chinese in mainland China is very dangerous, and spreading the gospel to Muslims in Iran or other Middle Eastern countries risks one's life. However, in Canada, we can freely deliver the gospel to the Chinese and Muslims who have come here. When the Holy Spirit gives them faith and leads them to our church, we should be willing to embrace them with rejoicing, no matter their cultural backgrounds. Bethel Canadian Reformed Church was willing to embrace them in recent months, and many immigrant guests from China, Korea, Japan, Iran, Brazil, Vietnam, Honduras, Chile, Burundi, Iraq, etc., have come to us. Moreover, second-generation immigrants and Caucasian Canadian guests also visited us. We can freely reach out to White, Black, Asian, Hispanic people, and so on, in Canadian society. What a fantastic opportunity and critical responsibility we have.

Third, we can have opportunities to train and send immigrants back to their home countries as missionaries. Imagine if Chinese immigrants were sent back to China after studying Reformed theology and training in the CanRC. Aren't they the most suitable missionaries to establish the Reformed Church in China? What if Persian immigrant missionaries were sent back to Iran after studying and training in the CanRC? I believe that the multicultural CanRC can contribute to establishing Reformed churches around the world. Who knows if God has a plan for a global mission to establish Reformed churches at the end of the earth through the CanRC? This is what we can dream of in a federation of multicultural Canadian Reformed Churches.

CONCLUSION

Culture involves identity-forming thoughts and practices. Before I became a member of the CanRC, I was told that the CanRC was a closed, exclusive community of Dutch immigrants. However, most of the CanRC people I met in Toronto, Hamilton, Guelph, and across the county were not closed-minded but warm-hearted, willing to embrace other cultures and prepared to accept a multicultural Reformed church. The forefathers of the CanRC chose the new church's name, not as the *Dutch* Immigrant Reformed Church but as the *Canadian* Reformed Churches. Additionally, they made the language of the CanRC English, not Dutch. I think it was an effort not to be confined to a mono-ethnic church.

I would not say that a multicultural church is the most biblical or that a monoethnic church is unbiblical. However, it is obvious that the CanRC has a unique opportunity to become a multicultural Reformed church embracing a multicultural Canadian society. Multicultural CanRCs can better serve multicultural Canadian society with the pure gospel and sound doctrine. We can better overcome cultural tension or conflict because we have a higher identity transcending diverse earthly cultures. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20), and our Lord Jesus Christ is our peace (Eph 2:14). Although there are many differences, we are not strangers and aliens; we are fellow citizens of heaven and the family of the household of God (Eph 2:19). How beautiful and glorious it is! I want to see a great multitude from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, praising together in our churches, "Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb!"

Doesn't it make your heart race just thinking about it? I am now praying for more and more multicultural CanRCs and in doing so I often adapt the words of Psalm 22:27, "May all the ends of the earth remember and turn to the LORD *in Canada*, and may all the families of the nations shall worship before you *in the CanRC*." His will be done within us! Amen! 🇨🇦



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INDONESIA: To Mountain & Valley

By Tommy & Elisa Christanto



Receiving radios in Ngaduman

Indonesia is a very large string of islands south of Asia and north of Australia with the largest Muslim population in the world. The over 280 million people are of multiple languages and ethnicities, over 85% are identified as Muslims, though most are either uninformed or nominal in their affiliation. Muslims are especially concentrated in the dense population of western and central Indonesia. In the east, they are less dominant.

Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, is in the west on Java Island. It is the center of economic activity. MERF,

through its daughter organization, YPRI, has a ministry center in this huge city. From there, MERF reaches out to many places on Java Island, west to Sumatra Island and even to eastern Indonesia. The Lord called us to share the gospel with Indonesians – across water, valleys, hills and mountains.

On the Mountain

We minister in various mountain locations, among them is Ngaduman village, the highest village on the slopes of Mount Merbabu, Central Java, with an altitude of 1800m(5905ft) above sea level. The main occupation

of the villagers is vegetable farming. They are there by the Lord's own design. By receiving radios, the villagers, who are 99% Christian, continue to enjoy God's Word even while working in the fields. Through the radio messages, their faith can continue to grow. Muslims in this village also want to listen to the radio broadcasts. They even join in Easter and Christmas celebrations.

Also in another remote village in the southern limestone mountains of Java, God is at work. Of the 153 families in Wintaos village, only 3 are Christian, the rest

are Muslim. Yet, the numbers are meaningless. The Lord has used these 3 families to be a light to their neighbors. Their loving and caring lives testify to Christ's saving grace. This overcomes religious fanaticism despite differences. The 35 ladies from the neighborhood Quran study group visited a Christian home this past December 25th to wish them a Merry Christmas. It was the first time this happened in that area where, until recently, there has been much opposition to Christians. It was a gift from God. We consider this a miracle.

In the Valley

Not only in the mountains of Java, but we also serve in the valleys of Sumatra, specifically in two ethnically-mixed areas, namely Tulang Bawang Barat and Seputih Surabaya. We pass through muddy, pot-holed, badly damaged roads in that valley to get there. It took an hour and a half to drive only 10km (6.21 miles). These two churches are from six widespread communities, the furthest being about 25km (15 miles) from the mother church.

In this location, we serve the elderly of the congregations by providing radios to listen to spiritual radio broadcasts. So that when they



*“So, they shall
fear the name
of the Lord from
the west and his
glory from the
rising of the sun.”*
— Isaiah 59 : 19a

are at home alone, or even working in the fields, they can still listen to the Word of God.

Radio has become a means of evangelism. Some Muslims who hear the radio programs ask for prayer for their children and, in time, have come to faith in Christ. Although the radio is a simple device, radio programs have a great impact to help nourish the faith of new believers.

In addition to bringing gospel radio programs, the ministry in this mixed area includes Sunday School Teacher training and chil-

dren’s Joy Bible Camp. The simple supplies we provide help the Sunday school leaders in their work among children in each of the 6 regions of these 2 churches. In total, more than 100 Sunday school leaders and more than 220 children attended our “Joy Bible Camps.” One Sunday school child attended the camp, even though he is being raised by his Muslim sister. Our services to this location will continue in order to encourage growth of the churches in this area with additional families. Along with radio ministry, Sunday school teacher training and Joy Bible Camp in person,

we also conduct online ministry over the internet.

Over the Internet

Activities over the internet that began as a necessity during the COVID lockdown still continue. Using Zoom we regularly organize Sunday school teacher training and Sunday school children’s worship online. At the beginning of the pandemic, this Zoom activity began with very few participants, around 10 children. But God expanded the network and increased the number of participants every month. To date, more than 120 children are reached through

online Sunday school children’s worship every month. They come from remote villages, including some who find difficulty getting an internet connection. But they persevere with a deep desire to fellowship and praise God online with their friends from other regions in Indonesia. Sunday school teachers who accompany the children online are also happy to get new ideas for teaching the Word of God to the children.

So, ministry trips take us to various areas in Indonesia where God is at work. On the slopes of high mountains, God is at work.

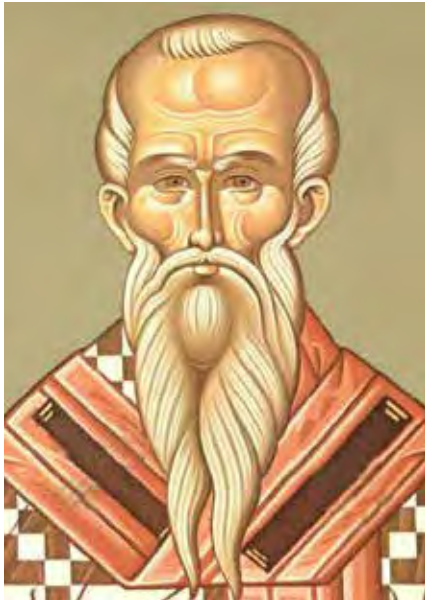
He opened doors to go down in the valley. He was already at work there, using seemingly simple things to make great miracles, even those that have never happened before. Please pray that this ministry becomes more fruitful, touching many more souls.



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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.
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Top: Joy Bible Camp -Tulang Bawang Barat. Above: Christmas visit in Wintaos. Right: Tommy & Elisa Christanto family.



Bishop **Polycarp** *of Smyrna*¹

~ 69 – 155 AD

It is February, AD 155, in the bustling port-city of Smyrna, a two day trek north of Ephesus. It is a rainy, damp-and-chilly time of the year. Rome, the Empire's capital, is more than 1000 km away and a bit warmer, but hardly less rainy. Antoninus Pius is Roman Emperor, and, since about AD 140, Marcus Aurelius has been his Caesar, or heir apparent, and his son-in-law. In Smyrna, the governor encourages people to worship the emperor, to burn incense for him, or to sacrifice at the Temple of the Imperial Cult and take vows or swear by his "genius." They believe that this helps protect them from earthquakes, famines, plagues, or defeat. It doesn't.²

*His heart is at peace with God,
he is content*

POLYCARP

Bishop Polycarp³ of Smyrna is eighty-six and sits at his desk. There is a damp chill in the house. An oil lamp gives enough light to show his balding head and grey beard. His eyes look warm in his friendly but wrinkly face. He has just finished writing a letter, and the lamp's light reflects in the wet ink. It flickers a bit when he stands up from his desk to wrap his woollen robe a little tighter, and to put the letter to dry on the shelf behind him. In the morning he will scroll it to be delivered. Polycarp sits down again

and warms his chilled and wrinkled hands by the flame of the lamp. He figures that the young man Germanicus can be trusted to deliver the letter, as he knows the destination, and *the Way* of the Lord. He has wrestled with what it means to be a Christian, he knows the hope and comfort, but also the dangers, especially when persecutions flare up.

Polycarp reflects on a long day of shepherding work in the Lord's church: visiting members, meeting people in the street or the market, preparing sermons, and writing that letter. On other days, he also teaches catechumens and copies epistles of the apostles. How he loves the Lord's work and people! He prays for those the Lord entrusted to his care, and for their partnership in the gospel (Phil 1:3–5), so they, too, may show *much fruit*. He remembers how the Lord Jesus Christ set people free from slavery and bondage to sin, so their citizenship would be "in heaven, from [where they] await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform [their] lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject all things to himself" (Phil 3:20–21). This fits with the encouragement he personally received from John the Apostle, "that you may have fellowship . . . with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ . . . so that our joy may be complete" (1 John 1:3–4). His heart is at peace with God, he is content, and he rejoices. He is a man of simple and beautiful faith, familiar with Scripture, and of a loving heart.

He is old, but his work is not done. The Lord's work for his church never ends; people always must be instructed and

¹ Sources for this story include, among others, Eusebius of Caesarea (~260–339), Ecclesiastical History IV, ch. 15. He and his sources contain miraculous elements about Polycarp's exemplary martyrdom and saintly status, (e.g. the Martyrdom of Polycarp), which, for their legendary flavour, I mostly relegated to footnotes. Smyrna is now Izmir.

² A massive earthquake destroyed the city in AD 178. It was rebuilt with funding from emperor Marcus Aurelius.

³ A bishop is an overseer, a minister. Polycarp means "much fruit."

encouraged. He remembers well how Bishop Ignatius of Antioch had urged him to “stand firm like an anvil under a hammer” and to keep carrying out his duties. He smiles as he gets up and reaches on the shelf for the letter Ignatius wrote him long ago. He reads, “A minister must not give in to being tired or weary . . . for a Christian is not lord of his own life, but he has time only for God. This is the work of God—and it will be yours too when you fulfill your destiny. By grace I trust that you are ready to do a good work for God.”

IGNATIUS

Ignatius! How he served the Lord unwavering, and encouraged others in his final days, despite being threatened for refusing to deny Christ! When, before a bloodthirsty crowd, the cages in Rome’s amphitheatre were opened to let ravenous lions devour him for refusing to sacrifice to the emperor, he had said, “I long to see my Saviour! Let them come; I do not fear!” The gates of the persecutors’ lions’ cages might open, but the gates of hell would not prevail against God’s church (Matt 16:18). Ignatius’s name could be added to the cloud of witnesses in the letter to the Hebrews. Polycarp is not sure who wrote it,⁴ but he believed the encouragement: “Let us also run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith . . . who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:1–2).

Ignatius’s words were like those John wrote to the congregations in Asia, especially the one to Polycarp himself, as the “angel” of Smyrna, “The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown” (Rev 2:8–11). What other encouragement could he wish for? These were words from the Lord Jesus Christ himself!


Certainly, those words had come true! Oppression and persecutions did indeed come from the Jews, from the citizen mob, and from governing authorities—but the Lord had preserved his church. The Lord’s people were encouraged to remain faithful, to conquer the wiles of Satan—and keep their hope in the Lord Jesus

Christ! That was the gospel he, Polycarp, had been allowed to proclaim for decades on end—even though some had fallen away.

PRESERVED

How the Lord had preserved him and his congregation, allowing them to live for him, to not be distracted by poverty, hardship, or fear of death in persecution . . . or be misled by heresies—but to look for the *crown of glory* in heaven (1 Pet 5:4). In his own letter to the Philippians, Polycarp encouraged others to remain in the Truth preached by the apostles. When they were fighting each other, or risked being led astray, he had admonished them like the apostle John: “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth . . . keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 3:18, 5:21). Yes, it *was God’s work* that Polycarp and other believers could hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing by faith that God loved them because of Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross! In that hope they would not be hurt by the second death of eternity in hell—no matter what cruelties and tortures the enemy would commit against them!

A smile of joy comes to Polycarp’s face: God is good. Yet, a slight frown of anguish also comes to his brows. Persecutions have erupted against his own congregation again, as an anniversary for the Imperial Cult is coming up. Philip, the cult’s high priest, already tried to make Polycarp acknowledge Caesar as Lord, and has been stirring up the mob against the Christians. Pagan priests like Philip despise the Christians; they hate them, they call them atheists, god-deniers, and they want them gone, dead. The crowds agree, because they fear the gods’ wrath; the Jews agree, because they don’t believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour (some even join the Imperial Cult); and the governor agrees, because he does not fear God and wants to look good in the eyes of the emperor.

In the morning, he should not forget to ask Germanicus, to deliver the letter! As Polycarp goes to bed, he thinks of running the race and prays for the peace of the churches everywhere. He sleeps well. The next day will not be as he expects. 



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⁴ As reported by Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History VI, 14:2-4, 25:11-14, Clement of Rome (~35--101) may have written it. Clement of Alexandria (~150--215) was inclined to accept it as canonical. Origin (~185--254) held that it has “the thoughts of the Apostle but the expression and composition of one who recalled the Apostle’s teachings.” The canon as we know it was confirmed at the Council of Carthage, 397.

Reverend Dr. James Visscher

Celebrating 50 Years in the Ministry

“What does one preach on, after preaching in the Canadian Reformed Churches for 50 years? And now, 75 years old. Is there anything left to preach on? Yes, the Word of God is inexhaustible, still full of gems and jewels. I feel like I’ve barely scratched the surface. So why this text, Philippians 3:12–16?”

Those were the opening words of a sermon by Rev. James Visscher on October 23, 2022, as the congregation of Langley Canadian Reformed Church, together with many of Rev. James and Willy Visscher’s family, came together to commemorate and celebrate this momentous occasion.

The sermon was titled, *Pressing On!* The points:

- 1) We’re not there yet (v. 12–13)
- 2) Straining forward (v. 14)
- 3) Hanging in there (v. 15–16)

Some people in the time of the apostle Paul thought that Paul had already arrived, had moved from imperfection to perfection. Paul speaks about his life before his conversion. Now, a follower of Christ, a recipient of God’s grace. He bears the scars of serving Jesus. But, can he relax now, take it easy, coast? No, the climax of perfection or completeness is never found in the here and now.

Keep pressing on to the goal ahead! Why do we need to do this? Because Christ has made us his own possession, before the foundation of the world, adopted as his own. So, respond to that upward call, to Christ, the prize, the fullness of life and glory.

What a blessed hope we have! Hear his call! Live by faith! Ask yourself: Is that the intention of my faith? Is it still growing? Am I still persevering?

Is that easy? No. Hold true to what we have attained. Our world is full of people who used to profess Christ and have left the faith. It’s hard to be a Christian in an affluent world. People forget that the most important thing is to worship God, claiming to have found a better life in their toys and pleasures. But it is the devil that sucks people into a whirlpool of emptiness, with a prize—vanity, death, the grave, and hell. Yes, a biblical teaching and reality that Christ warns us about.

So, avoid living for *this* life. Don’t exchange the pit for the prize. Live the new life in Christ. Live for the prize of Christ our Lord!

Rev. Visscher closed his sermon with the words: *“Press on! I’m pressing on! Are you with me?”*

In his closing prayer, Rev. Visscher acknowledged that it has been God’s sustaining grace and the power of the Holy Spirit that made fifty years of ministry possible. And he thanked God for the support of his dear wife Willy, children, and grandchildren.



Clockwise from left: Rev. James Visscher, with wife Willy; ICRC — Namibia, 2022; Executive of General Synod — Smithville, 1980; First ICRC meeting in Edinburgh — Scotland, 1985.

CONGRATULATIONS & THANKS

After the service was closed, Rev. Doug Vandeburg took to the pulpit, to express some words of congratulations and thanks, for fifty years of ministry, for Rev. and Willy's 50th anniversary, and for both of their 75th birthdays.

Rev. James Visscher was ordained as a minister of the Word on October 17, 1972, and started his ministry in Coaldale, Alberta. In January 1978, he accepted the call to serve in Cloverdale, BC; in May 1987, he became the minister in Langley. He served here until his retirement from active ministry, now working the last ten years as associate pastor.

During those years of diligently serving in congregations, Rev. Visscher was also very active in federative work. Already in 1980, he was on the executive of General Synod, the young man on the team. For many, many years, he was editor of *Clarion* magazine, having just recently given that over to others. His "Year in Review" is a "must-read!" During all that, he also managed to earn his Doctorate in Ministry.

In 1985, the first gathering of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) took place in Scotland. He was there, having been part of the formative work. He remained

Corresponding Secretary for years, and attended the most recent ICRC gathering in Namibia just this year.

Rev. Visscher was also very involved in setting up mission work in Asia, making countless trips overseas, co-labouring with Rev. Frank Dong and other ministers, educating and training others there in the work of ministry.

He was also very busy in Langley; it became the largest congregation in Canada, and it finally adopted a co-pastor model which still exists today. He served together with Rev. Wes Bredenhof and Rev. Ryan DeJonge.

Rev. Visscher opened Synod Coaldale 1977 with these words to the delegates, "Be faithful to him. Be dependent on his Spirit. Be mindful of his Word. Do everything to the praise of his glory." *May we all take his words to heart.*

Rev. Vandeburg closed in prayer, thanking God for "using this jar of clay, with all its chips and cracks, to pour out the beautiful message of the gospel." *Amen Lord!*

The congregation rose to sing the Doxology, and then celebrated with refreshments. 

Ginny VanderHorst

The Nicene Creed

George van Popta, 2023

Strasbourg 1539 / Geneva 1551

(Tune: Genevan 36 / 68)

1. We all be-lieve in one true God, Al - might-y Fa-ther, him we laud,
Mak - er of earth and heav - en. He made all things that we can see.
The un-seen things he called to be. Of this we can be cer - tain.
And we be-lieve in Je - sus Christ, the Lord in whom we place our trust,
God's on - ly Son, our Sav - iour. Be - got - ten from e - ter - ni - ty,
he shares the Fa-ther's de-i-ty. Through him we know God's fa - vour! (A - men. st 4)

2. Christ, God of God and Light of Light,
is truly God in glory bright.
Him we will always honour.
He was begotten and not made
but God's divinity displayed,
one substance with the Father.
All things were made through him, the Word.
He came from heaven as our Lord
for us and our salvation.
He by the Spirit was conceived
in Mary's womb, the promised seed—
the wondrous incarnation!

3. He suffered and was crucified
by Pontius Pilate, and he died.
And then our Lord was buried.
But on the third day he arose
as Scripture has to us disclosed.
His borrowed tomb was emptied.
Then he ascended into heaven
to sit at God's right hand, to reign
together with the Father.
He will return as our great Head
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom lasts forever!

4. In God the Spirit we believe,
the Lord and Giver of all life
proceeding from the Father
as well as from his only Son.
Together they are three-in-one
to be revered forever.
He spoke through prophets from of old.
And we believe one catholic fold,
the holy congregation,
one washing for forgiveness,
and endless joyful happiness—
the blessed resurrection! Amen.



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SHAELYN KOTTLELENBERG



Bonjour! Je m'appelle Shaelyn!

I am twenty-six years old and I am turning twenty-seven on May 30. I live at Lighthouse in Fergus, Ontario. I attend Fergus North Canadian Reformed Church and I grew up in Orangeville. I love languages and especially love speaking French! I love words and expressions. I enjoy reading, colouring, word searches, and working in my workbooks. I

often explode with excitement about all the fun things I get to do! Every Monday I go to a day program with my sister Lindsay, where we do lots of fun activities. Thursdays are also a busy day. We deliver papers with a smile in the morning and in the afternoon, I attend an art program in Elora. We make lots of beautiful masterpieces at art class. Some of my art projects will even be in an exhibit in the gallery!

I am so thankful for all the blessings that God has given me!

MAY BIRTHDAYS

Happy Birthday to Clarence, Debbie, Rob, Eddie, Bernie, and Shaelyn! We wish you all the Lord's blessings in the year to come.

May you continue to be a light to all of those around you, witnessing your love for him in whatever you do.

"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well."

(PSALM 139: 13, 14)

1 Clarence Zwiep will be **69**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8

10 Rob De Haan will be **58**
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON
L0R 1B2

30 Bernie De Vos will be **48**
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON
L0R 1B2

4 Debbie Veenstra will be **49**
4238 2nd Concession Road
Sherkston, ON
L0S 1R0

21 Eddie Van Rootselaar will be **30**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8

30 Shaelyn Kottlelenberg will be **27**
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line, RR #3
Fergus, ON
N1M 2W4

CLARION KIDS LORD'S DAY 28

Sacraments are actions done in church to remind us of God's forgiveness. There are two sacraments. One is baptism. What is the other one? The other sacrament is Lord's Supper! And Lord's Supper is another reminder that Jesus died for our sins. The minister breaks a piece of bread. The bread reminds us of Jesus's body. His body was "broken" on the cross for us when he died. When you see the bread break, you know it's broken. And that's how sure you can be that Jesus died for your sins. Also, when you see the wine being poured into the big cup, then you know it was poured. That's how sure you can be that Jesus's blood came out of his body to forgive you. And when you get older, you will be allowed to taste the bread and wine! As one psalm says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good!"

WRITE THE TWO SACRAMENTS IN THE SQUARES BELOW.

□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□			
□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

A M L S Z V F J O M J X
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 W L R C B R E M I N D B
 O V D R O A T Q H T V K
 S Z S A B B P M V J H C
 J B S M G O T T R I S A
 I V U E C X B H I U L V
 J O P N R X X D J S S Z
 P W P T P J X R B N M J
 U I E S S H F R U C N O
 C F R W A V T R Q P L Z
 A Y Y Y M O W D G V J Z

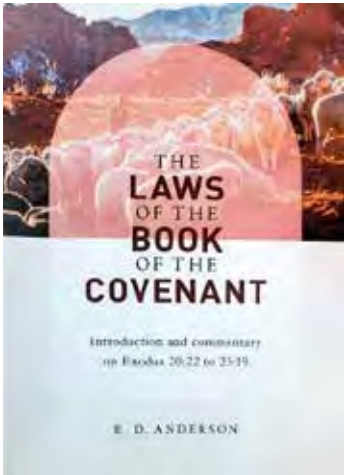
WORDSEARCH

- sacraments
- baptism
- Lord's Supper
- remind
- faith



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



GOD'S LAWS ARE RELEVANT FOR TODAY

The Laws of the Book of the Covenant: Introduction and commentary on Exodus 20:22 to 23:19, R. Dean Anderson. (Armadale: Pro Ecclesia Publishers, 2021). Paperback. 214 pages.

Australians can purchase this commentary through the Pro Ecclesia Bookshop proecclesia.com.au.

Canadians can order the book through Heritage Resources heritageresources.ca or through Amazon.

DIFFERENT LAWS

The Old Testament gives us a record of various kinds of laws. Moral laws outline our obligations to God and our neighbour, ceremonial laws govern worship, and civil laws address various issues arising in day to day society in ancient times.

The relevance of some of those laws is immediately evident, while other laws may be somewhat puzzling. Why did the LORD our God have them recorded? The Rev. Dr. R. Dean Anderson, minister of the Free Reformed Church at Rockingham, Western Australia, has written a book called *The Laws of the Book of the Covenant* to deepen our insight. He focuses specifically on Exodus 20:22 to 23:19, providing us with an introduction to that portion of Scripture and a commentary on it.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Dr. Anderson gives us his own translation of the verses followed by a commentary for non-scholarly readers who are willing to put in the effort. There are paragraphs in smaller print for students of Hebrew and Greek, as well as for ministers looking for further guidance in understanding the biblical text.

The book also includes the Hebrew text next to an ancient Greek translation (the Septuagint / LXX). This gives insight into how translators at that time understood and interpreted the Hebrew words. Anderson supplements this section with various helpful lexicographical and grammatical notes.

APPLICATION

How can one move forward from understanding the text to seeing its relevance for today? Meeting such a challenge begins with studying the text in its immediate and broader context. This commentary therefore highlights connections with other portions of Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments. This opens the way for theological reflection and various practical observations.

Readers seeking further insights along these lines may be interested in examples of Dr. Anderson's sermons on such laws.

They can be found at the website of the Free Reformed Church at Rockingham, Western Australia (see <https://www.frrockingham.org/worship-services/sermon-videos-browser/>).

HARMONY

God's laws teach us how to live in harmony with him as well as with each other. Where sin has caused disruption, God in his grace provides for reconciliation. That can be seen in various ceremonial laws ultimately fulfilled by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Other laws give instruction about leading a holy life dedicated to serving God, pointing the way to achieving restored harmony among God's people.


SOME HIGHLIGHTS

Liberal scholars denying divine inspiration assume that the legal section reflects later circumstances in the land of Israel. Anderson counters this by arguing that God already gave laws to Abraham and later patriarchs (see Gen 26:5 and Ex 18:16). This also impacted surrounding cultures and can explain parallels between the Book of the Covenant and ancient legal codes such as the Code of Hammurabi (see page 12).

Anderson notes further that it is important not only to study the laws themselves, but to see them as embodying certain presuppositions and judicial principles such as restitution, and retribution, i.e. the *lex talionis* (eye for eye, etc.), or by substitution, where punishment consists of fines (pages 11-25). He elaborates on this in the subsequent commentary on the various laws in the Book of the Covenant.

God's concern for the weak and vulnerable members of society can be seen in many of the laws. Those interested in the topic of slavery among God's people in Old Testament times, for example, will find food for thought.

Anderson's commentary on the law concerning sex before marriage is striking. The fine to be paid to the father of the girl is equivalent to five years of wages, even if the father refuses to give his daughter in marriage to the man who has taken her virginity (p. 130-132)!

While various laws are not directly applicable to our situation in life, much can still be learned by considering their implications. A combination of justice and mercy does much to further the cause of harmony among God's people and in society as a whole. 



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FIGHT FOR YOUR PASTOR

Fight for Your Pastor, by Peter Orr.
(Wheaton: Crossway, 2022).
Paperback. 112 pages. \$13.49.

This review was originally published on the author's
blog, challies.com. It is reprinted here with
his kind permission.

Sometimes a preposition makes all the difference. We do not need to look far to find examples of Christians who fight *with* their pastor. If you speak to just about any one of them I expect he will be able to tell you of people who have fought him tooth and nail over some peeve, some cause, some perceived slight. But much rarer are those who fight *for* their pastor, those who honour him and his position by battling for his success, for his joy, for his encouragement.


Some time ago I wrote a review of Michael Kruger's *Bully Pulpit*, a book that addresses the problem of heavy-handed leadership or spiritual abuse. And while that issue has received a lot of attention of late, it is important to acknowledge that the great majority of pastors are leading in love and serving their churches well. Hence, I wanted to draw your attention to Peter Orr's new book *Fight for Your Pastor*—a book that encourages you to do exactly what the title indicates.

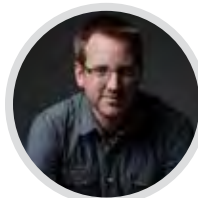
While it has always been difficult to be a pastor, it seems that there are some unique challenges today. "Think of the difference between climate and weather," says Orr. "The 'climate' for pastoral ministry is constant. The world, the flesh, and the devil are long-term climate factors that remain between Christ's first and second coming. But it feels as if—in the West, at least—there's been a change in the 'weather.' There is now a general weather front of apostasy, secularism, unbelief, and so on that is making the life of a pastor—particularly a conservative, complementarian, and evangelical one—more difficult. Whether on matters of sexual ethics, gender, or the uniqueness of Christ, a faithful pastor who proclaims and stands for the word of God faces rising hostility from the world."

That kind of pressure comes from outside the church but there is also pressure from within—pressure related to a rising awareness of spiritual abuse, pressure related to having to lead through a time of pandemic, pressure related to being commonly and often unfavourably compared to pastors whose ministries are so easy to see through the internet. Hence, "this short book is written as a call to more actively love and support our pastors. If you are reading this book, I am sure you love your pastor, but I want to nudge you to love him more intentionally. I invite you to pause and think about how you can support him more. In short, I am calling you to fight for your pastor."

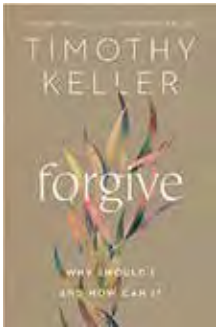
Orr structures the book around seven imperatives:

- **Fight!** for your pastor by praying for him, acknowledging that "the person who is under more satanic attack than anyone else you know is your pastor. The person whose faith Satan wants to derail the most is your pastor. The person whose marriage Satan would most like to wreck, whose kids he most wants to cause to rebel, whom he most wants to discourage, is your pastor. You need to fight in prayer for your pastor."
- **Encourage!** your pastor by deliberately acknowledging the blessing he is and intentionally building him up. "Sometimes we think that people have to earn our respect and admiration. They have to prove themselves. God's economy differs: the pastor he has placed over us is, from the beginning, worthy of a respect and esteem that needs to translate into how we speak about and to him. We need to intentionally encourage him."
- **Listen!** to your pastor as he teaches you from God's Word.
- **Give!** to the church to ensure that your pastor has his financial needs met and is able to dedicate himself to his ministry.
- **Forgive!** your pastor for his sins and failures, for he will at times let you down. "As evangelicals, we take sins seriously, know that repentance is critical, and understand that Jesus had to die for our sins. But there is a place for overlooking and not confronting every sin. Every good marriage operates on that principle, as does any healthy friendship, including our relationship with our pastor."
- **Submit!** to your pastor. "Submission may be the most counter-cultural thing that we can do. But the Bible commands it, our church's health requires it, and our identity in Christ must reflect it."
- **Check!** if accusations against your pastor are actually true rather than believing all that people may say about him.

These are good and necessary exhortations and, if we all obey them, our pastors will be better equipped to lead us in ways that are beneficial to our lives and faith. "In the end, this book sounds a call to abandon a passive, consumerist model of church. It calls us to abandon the notion that the pastor performs the ministry, which we evaluate according to how it benefits us. It is a call to reject the error that he is our once-a-week religious entertainment provider. It is a call to abandon the idea that he is our spiritual guru, who will drop everything any time we need him. It is a call for us all to be devoted to the work of the Lord. It is a call for us to love and support our pastor. It is a call to fight for him!" It is a call I hope many Christians will hear, accept, and obey. 



Tim Challies
Blogger
Challies.com



HOW TO DO THE HARDEST THING

Forgive: Why Should I and How Can I?
by Timothy Keller. (New York: Viking, 2022).
Hardcover. 272 pages. \$37.00.

There are different levels of hurt someone can inflict on you. When it comes to the worst hurts, it can be *so* hard to forgive. Take abuse. Or sexual assault. How can you forgive someone who perpetrates these heinous sins? *Can you?*

As a seasoned pastor, Tim Keller acknowledges this seemingly impossible challenge and how it's become even harder in our culture. Right from the beginning of *Forgive*, he speaks about the turn against forgiveness spawned by the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements. "Black forgiveness of whites only results in support for white supremacy." "Forgiveness of abusers only encourages more abuse." Keller quotes one author who proclaims, "To Hell with Forgiveness Culture." Forgiveness, she says, is just "a deeply ingrained religious hangover from Christianity" which idealizes "the pseudo-spiritual fairy-tale of redemption and forgiveness over the inherent right for people not to be abused."

Forgive is a stout defence of the biblical concept of forgiveness. But not merely. It offers a blistering critique of the current alternatives. And it explains clearly from Scripture how Christian forgiveness can and should happen, even in the worst cases. He deals with all the hard questions, including:

- Does forgiving mean forgetting?
- Is forgiveness supposed to be automatic and unconditional?
- When can we let "love cover a multitude of sins" and just overlook an offense?
- What if I just can't forgive myself?


Best of all, in typical Keller fashion, he grounds all of this in the gospel.

I really appreciate Keller's distinction between two types of forgiveness. He writes, "Reading Luke 17 apart from Mark 11:25 has led many to believe that no forgiveness is necessary until there is full repentance and restitution by the offender" (p. 105). Keller believes Scripture must interpret Scripture. When the whole context of Scripture is considered, we discover there's a forgiveness that has to take place in the heart, regardless of what the offender does—that's Mark 11:25, "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have

anything against anyone." Keller calls this attitudinal forgiveness. But there's also a forgiveness that involves an interaction between the offender and the offended—that's Luke 17:3, "... if he repents, forgive him." Keller calls that reconciled forgiveness. The first is meant to lead to the second. Yet there can be instances where the first is as far as you can go; for example, if the offender has died.

Another positive feature is the use of real-life stories. There's the well-known story of Rachael Denhollander, an American gymnast repeatedly sexually assaulted by a doctor, Larry Nassar. How was Denhollander able to forgive Nassar while at the same time being part of the process which brought him to justice? Keller tells of Kevin McDonald, a New York City police officer paralyzed in a shooting involving a fifteen-year old boy. McDonald began writing with the imprisoned Shavod Jones. It appeared reconciliation was happening. But Jones died in a motorcycle accident shortly after his release. How did McDonald process that in terms of the forgiveness process? There's the story of Corrie ten Boom being confronted with a repentant Nazi concentration camp guard. He asked her to forgive him. How could she when her sister Betsie died in that brutal camp?

Others and I have been critical of Tim Keller for his stance on theistic evolution. Unfortunately, there is one place where evolution briefly comes up in *Forgive*: "Did we get the idea that God is love by looking at nature and its beauty? This seems more promising until we look more deeply. Think of modern evolutionary theory, which is absolutely brutal so that only the 'fittest' survive" (p. 76). Keller appears to equate "nature" with "modern evolutionary theory." He could have said "natural selection" and I wouldn't be mentioning this. Natural selection is, after all, an observable process in nature. While it may be a component of evolutionary theory, it's not synonymous with it. It's regrettable the author slipped this in. But since it's one sentence in the whole book and not foundational to its argument, I think we can spit out this bone.

Forgiveness is hard, no doubt. If you're struggling with it and are looking for a well-written, biblically-based, pastorally sensitive guide, then *Forgive* fits the bill. 



Wes Bredenhof Pastor
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CLASSIS CENTRAL ONTARIO

AT EBENEZER CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCH

FRIDAY, MARCH 3, 2023, 8:00 AM

Rev. Winston Bosch, on behalf of the Convening Church Jubilee Canadian Reformed Church in Ottawa, welcomed the classis delegates and called the meeting to order. Pastor Winston read Proverbs 18:13 and offered a brief reflection on the importance—the discipline—of listening before answering and of the perfect example of Christ in this. He then called on God in prayer to guide the deliberations of the day and the brothers sang from Hymn 46.

After examination of the credentials, Pastor Winston reported that all delegates were properly sent and seated. All primary delegates were present, except for Bethel-Toronto, where an alternate

was present. Pastor Winston declared Classis Central Ontario constituted. Rev. Jan DeGelder and Rev. Paul Aasman were seated as advisors.

The appointed officers took their place: Rev. Ian Wildeboer (Mercy Church) as chairman, br. André Schutten (Elder delegate, Jubilee Church) as vice-chair, and Rev. Paul Aasman, (Blessings Christian Church) as clerk.

The agenda was adopted with a minor adjustment.

Classis noted the following matters of memorabilia: the ongoing health concerns of Rev. Chris Bosch, Rev. John van Popta,

and Rev. George van Popta and thanksgiving for the successful CRTS prospective students' event. Rev. Vandervelde led Classis in prayer over these matters.

EXAMINATION AND COLLOQUIUM

Fred Stuik presented himself for his licensure examination. Classis found all documents to be in good order. Rev. Jake Torenvliet prayed for Fred before he delivered his sermon on Matthew 22:1-14. In closed session, Classis deemed the sermon proposal sufficient to proceed with the remainder of the examination. In open session, Fred was informed of this decision. He was then examined in Doctrine and Creeds. In closed session, Classis deemed the examination sufficient. In open session Fred was informed of the decision that he sustained the exam and Classis grants him license to speak an edifying word upon completion of his second year at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, until June 30, 2025. (Rev. Clarence Vandervelde and Rev. Tony Roukema led the evaluation of the sermon and Rev. Jake Torenvliet led the examination in doctrine.) Rev. Hilmer Jagersma led in a prayer of thanksgiving and an opportunity was given to congratulate Fred.

Upon finding the necessary documents complete and in good order, Classis then conducted a colloquium with Pastor Mark Stewart (Fellowship-Burlington). Rev. Tony Roukema prayed for pastor Mark and for a blessing over the colloquium. Rev. Winston Bosch led a conversation on doctrine and Rev. Ian Wildeboer led a conversation on church polity. In closed session, the colloquium was deemed sufficient. In open session, the chairman informed pastor Mark of the decision. Classis approbated the call of Fellowship-Burlington to Pastor Mark Stewart. Rev. Winston Bosch led in a prayer of thanksgiving. The Chairman read the Subscription Form for Ministers of Classis Central Ontario. Pastor Mark willingly signed the form of subscription. Classis appoints Jubilee Church to represent Classis at the installation service, Deo volente March 19, 2023.

QUESTION PERIOD & APPEAL

The delegates from the churches were asked, according to Article 44, CO, whether the ministry of the office bearers is being continued, whether the decisions of the major assemblies were being honored, and whether there is any matter in which the

consistories need the help of classis. All churches answered yes, yes, and no, respectively, with the exception that two churches (Bethel-Toronto and Mercy-Hamilton) sought advice from Classis. Classis entered closed session to discuss and pray over these pastoral concerns.

Classis returned to open session. Rehoboth-Burlington asked a question of Classis regarding Bill C-4 (2021), the criminalization of conversion therapy, and whether churches have adopted a standard statement on this issue. Classis gave feedback on this issue.

Rev. Vandervelde read a letter from the CRTS into the meeting regarding dates for graduation and subsequent classes where the timelines for examinations might be affected.

Classis then considered an appeal against a decision of the Consistory with Deacons of Ebenezer-Burlington. After careful deliberation, the appeal was denied.

CONCLUSION

Classis made the following appointments for the next Classis:

- A. The convening church for the next classis will be Toronto-Bethel, and hosted at Burlington-Ebenezer.
- B. The suggested officers for the next classis:
 - a. Chairman: Rev. Paul Aasman
 - b. Vice-chairman: Elder delegate from Toronto-Bethel
 - c. Clerk: Rev. Gerrit Brintjes

Next Classis Central Ontario is scheduled for June 9, 2023. Alternate date is September 15, 2023.

Question period was utilized. Christian censure according to Article 34, CO, was not necessary.

The Acts of Classis will be finalized by the executive team, and a draft of the Press Release was read and adopted.

Rev. Winston Bosch led in prayer. Rev. Ian Wildeboer declared Classis Central Ontario closed. 



For Classis Central Ontario,
André Schutten (Vice-Chair at the time)

