



Clarion

325 HOW CHURCHES SHOULD RESPOND TO SEXUAL ABUSE

329 ONE CHURCH: UNITY WITHIN A FEDERATION *338* NIAGARA SOUTH

WHAT'S INSIDE

Sin is a reality in every heart, which is why we need the Saviour Jesus Christ. Sometimes Sin shows itself in particularly ugly ways in our churches such as in cases of abuse. Are we as churches seeking to prevent abuse and are we equipped to deal with it should it occur? Wes Bredenhof helps us with an article on dealing with sexual abuse and with a review of a book dealing with abuse of authority in the church. Sobering topics but necessary to consider. Jason Van Vliet continues (from a previous article) to unpack for us the biblical way of viewing and being the church while missionary Edwar Dethan informs us of the church gathering work of Christ in Timor in *Discipling the Nations*.

Why do we ask office bearers to sign the Form of Subscription? Is it important? Read Jan DeGelder's latest installment of *Governing the Church* to find the answer. Ilse Vandermeulen brings us the story of how the Lord led Niagara South church to develop a relationship with and ultimately purchase a church building from a Presbyterian congregation in Welland, ON. A few ministers will be on the move this summer after having accepted calls. One of those is pastor Tyler Vandergaag, whose departure from Taber, AB is described by Anna Bareman. The Fraser Valley annual women's League Day could once again be held (after a forced hiatus) as reported on by Joanna Vanderpol.

Issue 9 is rounded off by *Clarion Kids*, *Ray of Sunshine*, and a press release from Classis Manitoba that informs us of a mixture of developments in that area. Throughout all these articles we can find many reasons for thankfulness as well as the need for ongoing intercessory prayer. Enjoy!

Peter Holtvliuwer

contents

- 323** EDITORIAL Preaching in a Mission Setting
Matthew Van Luik
- 324** TREASURES, NEW & OLD
Christ's Divine Power Over All Things
Clarence VanderVelde
- 325** How Churches Should Respond to Sexual Abuse
Wes Bredenhof
- 329** One Church: Unity Within a Federation
Jason Van Vliet
- 332** GOVERNING THE CHURCH
Sign Here...Really?
Jan DeGelder
- 334** DISCIPLING THE NATIONS
Blessings Abound in Timor
Edwar Dethan
- 338** A New Building for Niagara South
Ilse VanderMeulen
- 343** Women's Fellowship Day
Joanna Vanderpol
- 344** Farewell to Rev. Vandergaag
Anna Bareman
- 346** RAY OF SUNSHINE *Rachel Vis*
- 347** CLARION KIDS *Amanda DeBoer*
- BOOK REVIEW(S)
- 348** Confronting Spiritual Abuse
Wes Bredenhof
- 349** Letter to the Editor
- 349** PRESS RELEASE
Classis MB, May 26

Clarion

A trustworthy and engaging magazine, widely spread and read in Canadian Reformed households and beyond.

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- L**oving in manner
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- R**eadable and Reliable
- I**n Submission to Scripture
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PREACHING IN A MISSION SETTING

“My church wants to be more mission-minded but I am afraid that it will lead to watered-down preaching.” Someone else comments, “For our church to become more mission-minded, our preaching needs to be made simple.” These are not uncommon comments. One expresses a fear that the message will be watered down and the other that a mission-minded church needs to change the message to make it more appealing.

However, neither of these needs be. In fact, for the church to be an effective witness in this world, it *cannot* offer a watered-down message to appeal to the listeners. What attracts people to the church is the complete gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ. For instance, a woman began attending our church after listening to a Christmas Day sermon online. What attracted her was the clear message about Christ coming to this world to pay for the sins of mankind. When asked why she wanted to become a member of the church, she replied, “Because you teach the hard stuff.” What attracted her were the hard truths about our sin and the great need for salvation in Jesus Christ.

BIBLICAL DEPTH ATTRACTS

It should not be so surprising that people are attracted to preaching that explores the depths of God’s Word. The greatest period of mission activity took place in the time of the early church. The apostles preached to Jews and Gentiles alike and they did not proclaim a simplified version of the gospel. They wrote letters to new believers in which they explored the depth of the gospel, and they were not afraid to tackle difficult and controversial topics. The people needed to hear the “hard stuff.” They needed to hear about the wrath of God as well as the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus. They needed to be admonished as well as encouraged.


People will begin to trust the preaching only when they realize that it is faithful to the Word of God. New listeners need to be convinced from Scripture before they will accept the message. When people come to the worship service, the church is being tested to see if it is faithfully preaching the Word of God. People often come from places of worship where they realize they have been lied to about the gospel message. They know a good church by the preaching.

CLEAR & UNDERSTANDABLE

A preacher does need to understand his audience, keeping in mind the level of education of the listeners, cultural issues, as well as the religious background of the listeners. In our context, people come from all kinds of educational, cultural, and religious backgrounds, which can make it more challenging. It is crucial for every preacher, whether in a mission context or not, to give a clear explanation of the message of the text.

Clichés need to be avoided, for new listeners will not understand them and clichés can also obscure the message. Theological terms found in Scripture are important, but the preacher cannot assume that the listeners will understand them. When these terms are used, they need to be carefully explained. Faithful preaching expounds the theological concepts of Scripture in a way that every person can understand. For example, using the word “covenant” twenty times in a sermon does not make it a covenantal sermon if the message does not clearly show the listener how God comes to enter into a living relationship with his people.

NOT “HOW TO” MESSAGES

Effective preaching clearly reveals from the text what God is doing for his people. People will not respond to a message about how to become a better Christian, or how to live a better life. The message that will change people is to hear what God has done for them in Christ Jesus. For example, when preaching on the ten commandments, the minister has to be mindful that God is not using the law to show us how to live better lives but rather to expose the idols that live in our hearts. No one is being changed by being told about the rules by which they should live, but we are being changed when the Lord exposes the corruption of our hearts through his commandments. When the idols of our heart are exposed, then the message of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ will turn the heart of the listener to love the Lord for his grace. Those deep riches of the gospel must be proclaimed to every listener of the gospel. 



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CHRIST'S DIVINE POWER OVER ALL THINGS

“And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” MARK 6:51, 52

Sometimes we Christians are very slow of understanding. We just don't get it. That can have detrimental consequences for our lives as Christians because then we don't function as we should. The Twelve Disciples experienced that very thing.

The disciples had returned from teaching and healing and were going with Christ by boat to a quiet place for some rest. However, the crowd followed over land on foot and arrived ahead of them. So, Christ taught them.

When it became late, the disciples suggested that Christ send the crowd away to buy food for themselves. Then Christ startled his disciples by telling them, “You give them something to eat” (6:37). They thought it meant they should buy bread for the people, but Christ meant something even more startling. Christ wanted the disciples to feed the people without even purchasing bread! After all, Christ had sent them out earlier to heal. Would the disciples think it was within their Christ-given power? Would the disciples think it was within Christ's power? Christ was testing them (John 6:5, 6).


Christ then performed a miracle with five loaves and two fish, turning them into enough food to feed 5,000 men plus women and children. This miracle shows that Jesus Christ is the Son of God with divine power over all things! Christ provided for the crowd abundantly. It was a feast. Twelve baskets of leftover bread and fish were gathered afterwards.

Then Christ sent the Twelve to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, while he dismissed the crowd. Christ went up on the mountain to pray. From the mountain, Christ could see that they were making headway painfully because the wind was against them. Christ did not go to them immediately but waited several hours until early morning. He let them struggle for a while to test them as they tired. Would they trust in Christ that they would make it to the other side?

Then Christ came “to them,” but we are told that “he meant to pass by them. . .” (6:48). Christ expected the Twelve to realize that it was him and was indicating to them that everything would be alright! Christ would go ahead to the other side, and they would arrive too. Sadly, the disciples' reaction was that they thought he was a ghost. Then Jesus got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased.

The disciples were utterly astounded. Why? Because “they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened”

(6:51, 52)—“hardened” meaning senseless and dull. They had not learned the lesson of the feeding of the 5,000, that is, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God with divine power over all things. But now they understood. Matthew tells us, “And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God” (Matt 14:33).

What about us? Today Christ sees us from heaven. Nothing in our lives escapes his notice—our joys, sorrows, frustrations, and struggles of faith. That's comforting! Christ doesn't always remove problems immediately, and sometimes never in this life; then we are being taught to persevere in the faith and not give up. Christ went on ahead of us to heaven to prepare a place for us (John 14:2, 3). From heaven, Christ watches over us on the journey through life to the other side. Believers will arrive (Ps 138:8). Sadly, we often lose sight of Christ as we face the headwinds of life. We often don't get what the Bible tells us about Christ having divine power over all things, and don't draw comfort from it. Be comforted and encouraged—Jesus Christ is the Son of God with divine power over all things! He watches over us on the journey through life, and he protects us and provides for us so that we arrive on the other side in the presence of Christ our Saviour in glory. 

FURTHER READING

Mark 6:1–13, 30–52

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. What is the connection between the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of Israel with manna in the desert?
2. What is the connection between the feeding of the 5,000 and the Marriage Feast of the Lamb (cf. Isa 25:6–8)?
3. Think of situations in your life when you focused more on the headwinds of life than on Christ's power to protect you and provide for you.



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How Churches Should Respond to

SEXUAL ABUSE

Ten Best Practices

WES BREDEHOF

After a few decades of publicity surrounding the issue of sexual abuse in the broader culture, one might think that churches have developed better ways of handling it. However, there are regularly reports that indicate otherwise. Especially churches without a safe church program are vulnerable to mishandling sexual abuse allegations. This is highly problematic because it further victimizes victims and often emboldens and protects abusers. To help churches in developing policies and procedures, I want to share some best practices. We have to do better and perhaps this can help to further the discussion and create safer communities for the most vulnerable among us.

DEFINITIONS & CAVEATS

Let me first say a few words about definitions. In general, abuse is inappropriate conduct towards another person. It can be a single event or a pattern of behaviour. In particular, sexual abuse is “the sexual exploitation of a person or any sexual intimacy forced on a person (either physical or non-physical). Child sexual abuse can include taking advantage of a child who is not capable of understanding sexual acts or resisting coercion such as threats or offers of gifts. Sexual abuse includes harassment by means of verbal or physical behaviour of a sexual nature, brought on by an individual and aimed at a particular person or group of people with the aim of obtaining sexual favours.” These definitions come from the

Child Abuse Policy of the Free Reformed Church of Launceston. Additionally, child sexual abuse occurs when age of consent laws are broken. For example, in Canada, children under the age of 16 cannot legally give consent to any person more than five years their senior, or who is in any position of authority over them (a coach, or youth group leader of any age).

Since it is the most common form of sexual abuse, I will be referring to the male as the abuser and female as the victim. Also, statistics reveal that over 50% of women have experienced sexual violence and 25% have experienced rape—however, only 1 in 26 men report having been raped.¹ Sadly, the statistics are similar inside of church communities.

Three caveats are in order.

First, this list of best practices is not exhaustive. Even with the ones listed, I haven't said everything there is to say. That would take a book.

Second, this list does not cover every conceivable situation. It is a general set of guidelines. The application may differ in cases of historic abuse, abuse involving a church leader, or incest. Again, to cover all these different situations would require a lot more than what I've written here. If you see such words like "as a rule," please realize that there might be exceptions. These are complex matters and guidelines cannot cover every permutation.

Third, though I may know more than the average church member, I don't claim to be an expert in this area. I have pastoral experience, I have had many conversations with sexual abuse survivors, and I have read more than one or two books on it. I am drawing mostly on the last two here. I was particularly helped by a document prepared by an Australian expert in this area.² She's an experienced counsellor and has also helped churches in developing better responses to sexual abuse. I was also helped by advice from a retired pastor, a long-time professional Christian counsellor, and several sexual abuse survivors—they read a draft of this document and provided feedback.

OBEDIENT MANDATORY REPORTING LAWS

All jurisdictions have mandatory reporting laws. For example, Tasmania's law requires that a church leader inform police if he has reasonable grounds to believe that an abuse offence has been committed against a child under 18. It does not require a church leader to inform police if the complainant is over 18 (reporting

abuse that happened when under 18) and does not wish it to be reported to police. It is the responsibility of church leaders to be familiar with the mandatory reporting laws in their own jurisdiction and then follow those laws. That is a matter of obedience to what Scripture says in Romans 13:1. Sexual abuse is a crime, and it needs to be dealt with as such by the civil authorities in the way they have laid out. If a church member was murdered by another church member, would you keep it in-house, even for a short while? Know the law, follow the law.

PROTECTION IS PARAMOUNT

Whatever policies or procedures are developed should always keep in mind the safety not only of the complainant, but also of others potentially at risk. "Love your neighbour as yourself" is the second great commandment according to our Lord in Matthew 22:39. This means that just as we instinctively protect ourselves from harm, so we should also protect others. Certainly that means giving thought to how we protect the most vulnerable among us. We need a perspective of protection.

TRANSPARENCY

As a rule, when there are allegations of sexual abuse involving a congregation member, the church leadership should inform the congregation in a timely and well-considered manner. Church leaders would do well to coordinate the dissemination of that information with law enforcement laying charges (since charges are only laid when there is a strong likelihood of conviction). Transparency not only prevents gossip and speculation, it also serves for the protection of the congregation. They have the right to know if there is potentially a sexual predator in their midst. They also ought to know the identity of the accused, but not the victim. According to one counsellor, suppression orders do not apply to public church announcements in a worship service (at least in Australia), although they do apply to written communications. Churches may and must announce the name of the accused, but the victim should never be identified. Furthermore, before any announcement is made, it should be discussed with the complainant (or with the complainant's parents if he/she is a minor). The accused should also be informed of the announcement to be made. Afterwards, there should also be regular updates about the progress of the matter.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/fastfact.html>

² "Responding to Sexual Abuse in Church Settings," WCB. Available online here: <https://media.thegospelcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/03/12121021/Sexual-abuse-in-church-settings.pdf>

Transparency also means being clear and accurate in our language. Sometimes church leaders will soft-pedal matters: “A brother has been accused of having sex [or worse: inappropriate relations] with a girl.” No, he has been accused of rape, and that is the word that should be used. Call sin what it is. And again, he should be named. If he has confessed to it, then that should also be mentioned.

TAKE THE VICTIM SERIOUSLY

According to Michael Kruger in his recent book *Bully Pulpit*, “The percentage of false accusations in cases of sexual abuse hovers between 2 percent and 7 percent. And given that most abuse cases are not reported, the actual percentage is probably lower still” (p. 88). Think of the enormous price that complainants often have to pay for coming forward—it is a huge risk. Therefore, church leaders ought to choose to take complainants seriously. Taking them seriously means being respectful and careful with our conversations. Do not ask things like, “What were you wearing?” Or do not say, even to yourself, “There are always two sides to the story.” And certainly do not say, “Why don’t you just forgive and get over it?” Respect the victim and do more listening than talking. Finally, in cases of historic sexual abuse, it is not helpful or necessary to ask, “It’s been so long, why come forward now?” Every victim has their reasons, and it is not your place to judge or evaluate them.

HELP BY GETTING TRAUMA-INFORMED

Sexual abuse involves trauma, even if it was experienced once. According to the American Psychological Association:

Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea.³

Many church leaders have made blunders in dealing with sexual abuse victims because they did not understand the complexities of trauma. If someone in your care has been abused, it serves their best interest for you to get the best understanding you can of trauma so that they are not hurt further. Two recommended books: *Trauma and Recovery* by Judith Herman and *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel Van Der Kolk (particularly the first three chapters; the other chapters have some issues).

DO NOT NEGLECT THE CARE OF VICTIMS

It can sometimes be difficult and awkward, but church leaders should never ignore the pastoral needs of the abused person, especially as these may be long-term. According to Pierre and Wilson (*When Home Hurts*), a good rule of thumb for church leaders is “to move faster with caring for victims, and slower with correcting perpetrators” (pp. 83–84). Once a perpetrator goes through the legal system, there’s a temptation for church leaders to think that the matter is finished. But it is not finished for the victim. He or she will have no choice but to continue to wrestle with it. They will need your loving spiritual nurture. You ought also to be willing to facilitate provision of third-party professional counselling to deal with the trauma.

For church members who are not in leadership, you also have a responsibility. One survivor told me,

The worst thing you can say is nothing to brethren you know are suffering. It’s not a competition between a perpetrator in the church and their victim, but if you only have the capacity to drop one meal over, to only say one prayer, etc.—make it to the victim over the perpetrator.

Again, do not forget that this is going to be an ongoing issue for the victim, often involving difficult mental health struggles. A Christian counsellor commented:

As a church community we are in a unique and blessed position to help those who are suffering. We can help to be the healing balm needed. . . . If you do not know what to say, say nothing—just be present and honest. It is okay to say, “I am sorry to hear about this pain, I don’t know what to say, but I am here for you and with you.”

A recommended resource for churches: *Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused*, ed. Brad Hambrick.

MATTHEW 18 DOES NOT APPLY

To expect an abuse victim to confront her abuser in the manner of Matthew 18:15–17 is both foolish and unbiblical. As Michael Kruger notes (pp. 82–83), a few verses later Jesus tells the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. The servant abuses his fellow servant by choking him and then throwing him into prison. The matter isn’t dealt with by the principle of Matthew 18:15–17. Instead, the other servants go straight to the king. As Kruger says, Matthew 18:15–17 should not be “treated like a universal cure that can be applied to every situation” (p. 82). Insisting that victims (including children) have to confront their abusers is foolish because it

³ <https://www.apa.org/topics/trauma>

ignores the power dynamics of abuse. Because abuse by its nature involves an imbalance of power, a victim is going to be further traumatized by being forced to confront her abuser. Why would a church leader torture one of his sheep like that? Is that what Christ would do?

NO QUICK REPENTANCE FOR ABUSERS

Sexual abuse is a serious sin. Those who are accused of this serious sin should be dealt with pastorally. Sometimes abusers will quickly confess and claim to repent. Church leaders should give ample time (normally months, at least) to see whether this repentance is genuine. Professionals recommend that church leaders should take things slowly with abusers. In *Is It Abuse?* Darby Strickland writes about men who perpetrate domestic violence, but what she says here is equally applicable to sexual abusers:

As you engage the oppressor [or abuser], you will want to lay out concrete ways for him to do battle with an entrenched sin pattern (such as by going to counselling, attending an abusive men's group, reading, confessing, praying with overseers, or putting on humble and servant-like behaviours). The more detail you provide regarding what is required of him, the more it can be used later on to assess firsthand how teachable, broken, and earnest he is becoming. So be sure to create specific benchmarks that will help you to measure his progress (p. 209).

Whatever we do, it can never be a simple matter of, "He admits it. He has confessed to God and asked for forgiveness. So, he's clearly repentant. Let's move on." That approach cheapens repentance and does the abuser no good. It is theologically irresponsible and amounts to pastoral malpractice.

WITHHOLDING FROM THE LORD'S SUPPER

Elders ought to ask anyone accused of sexual abuse, but who professes innocence, to nonetheless voluntarily withhold himself from the Lord's Supper. This is not disciplinary, but a wise precaution until such time as his guilt or innocence can be established. If no clear conclusion is reached within a reasonable period of time, this measure would be reassessed by the consistory.


In the case of an accused abuser who professes his guilt, he ought to be immediately withheld from the sacrament. Like with other serious sins, this censure ought to remain in place until such time that there is a repentance which can be judged to be sincere. This is for several reasons. First, elders are responsible to ensure the Lord's Supper is not profaned by unrepentant members. Judging true repentance takes time. Second, elders are responsible to ensure the abuser does not heap further judgment upon

himself. Finally, the elders are responsible for the other members of the congregation who may be scandalized by the attendance of an abuser and thus unable to partake of the sacrament in the way intended. Imagine if you are a sexual abuse survivor and you have to partake of the sacrament with someone who has just recently admitted sexual abuse. Or imagine that you are the one who has been sexually abused by that person and you have to watch him partake of the sacrament. It is pastorally irresponsible to allow it.

A complainant should not normally be withheld from the Lord's Supper. This is not your average vanilla conflict between church members. This is someone we believe to have been hurt and is in need of Christ's love through the sacrament. In the case of a communicant member, you would only add to the hurt by preventing her from partaking in Christ's body and blood. If an abuse victim is struggling with her emotions towards her abuser, this is not necessarily reason to withhold her. It can be difficult for an abuse survivor to untangle anger towards *what* happened to her from *who* did it to her. Moreover, we do not withhold people from the table who are genuinely struggling. Because this is so complex, it is normally best to leave participation in the Lord's Supper to the victim's conscience.

DEVELOPING POLICIES

Any church confronted with sexual abuse ought to learn from its experience to develop policies. Regardless, every church should have policies in place to prevent sexual abuse in the church community. Every church ought to have guidelines for how they will respond to future allegations, including allegations against church leaders. Those guidelines ought to include consideration of when it is best to involve independent third-party investigators. Consider whether there should be policies regarding attendance at public worship of convicted (or even accused) sex offenders. Finally, if they do not already have one, denominations/federations should consider the benefits of a safe church program—like that of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia.⁴ That would go a long way to ensuring that policies are consistent across the entire denomination/church federation.

"If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6) 



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⁴<https://safechurchcrca.org.au/>

ONE CHURCH

Unity Within a Federation

JASON VAN VLIET

In November of 2021 I published an article entitled “One Church” (*Clarion*, Vol 70.24). It dealt with an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, the church publicly affirms, “We believe *one* holy catholic and apostolic church” (Nicene Creed). On the other hand, in 2021 about 45,000 different Christian church groups existed worldwide. In the intervening months, that number has climbed to 47,300. If current trends persist and our Lord does not return before then, by 2050 the total number of church federations will reach 64,000.¹ How do we deal with this massive discrepancy? Forty or sixty thousand is *not* one!

In that article, we turned to Professor Klaas Schilder to help us make some headway in this sad conundrum. Back in 1935 he developed nineteen insightful theses about the church. We zeroed in on his first, and foundational, thesis:

That there is a church, one cannot see but *only* believe. Every attempt to determine the “essence” of the church . . . on the basis of what one observes here in this world, or on the basis of axioms other than those which Scripture has *revealed*, is therefore a work of unbelief—even if the results include a number of truths.²

Walking by faith leads us straight back to God’s Word (LD 7), which speaks clearly and consistently. Christ has *one* body (Eph 4:4), *one* betrothed bride (Eph 5:23–33; 2 Cor 11:2). Our creeds and confessions rightly follow this inspired direction, speaking of “one church” (Nicene Creed), “a church” (Apostles’ Creed), and “one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers” (BC, Art 27). Each time again the church is in the singular, not the plural. If you wish to read more about this scriptural emphasis, please refer to my previous article.³

So, we must stand firm on this biblical principle. Practically speaking, though, we must also live in this misery-laden world. Christ’s bride is sore oppressed, rent asunder by schisms, and beset by all manner of toil and tribulation (“The Church’s One Foundation”). In this article we delve deeper into some implications of confessing *one* catholic or universal church. But to do that well we first need to bring another principle into focus

ONE MORE KEY PRINCIPLE

Of course, the quick and easy way to resolve this apparent contradiction would be to say: just add them all up and the many become one. Take the total membership of those 47,300 church federations, combine them *in your mind’s eye* into a single, huge collection of Christian believers, *et voilà*, you have *one* catholic church—if not in reality, then at least in concept!

To be sure, many people think like this about the church. In fact, commonly used terms have even settled on either side of this math equation. They may refer to the 47,000 church groups as the *visible churches* (plural) and the conceptual sum total of true believers as the *invisible church* (singular). However, does *Christ*, the groom of the church, address his bride’s brokenness with math equations or terminological distinctions? Thankfully not. But then, what is he doing? Let us turn again to Professor Schilder’s theses on the church, this time to the fifth one.

The Son of God, through his Spirit and Word, gathers unto himself a congregation chosen to everlasting life. He does so from the beginning to the end of the world. . . . He is working to this end in the *present-progressive tense*.⁴

¹ www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity

² Canadian Reformed Magazine, Vol 21.17 (Aug 19, 1972), 1–3. Schilder’s theses can also be found online at <https://spindleworks.com/library/schilder/19thesis.htm> or in the newly published Klaas Schilder Reader, ed. G. Harinck & M. De Jong (Lexham Academic) 267–72.

³ This article is available online: <https://www.clarionmagazine.ca/archives/2021/665-692v70n24.pdf>.

⁴ See Note 2.

No, we do not need a different doctrine of the church

This is the other key principle we need. Christ deals with friction and fracture in his church *by his Spirit, using his Word, and steadfastly over time* (cf. LD 21).

Maybe an analogy will help. Suppose a contractor is busy building a new home for your family. He tells you it will take about 250 days to build. On day twenty-five you walk onto the construction site. Excavation is done, the forms for the foundation are up, and the concrete has just been poured. Excitedly, you pull out your phone and snap a picture.

Back in your rented house, around the supper table, you show your picture and joyfully announce, “Hey children, have a look at your new home!” Disappointingly, their response is lack-luster. One child even quips, “That doesn’t look much like a home to me, Dad. Maybe you should hire a new construction guy.” Poor general contractor! But what’s the real problem here? The children are only going *by sight* (rather than trusting the contractor) in the *freeze-frame tense* (rather than acknowledging that this is a work in progress).

Too often we do the same with the church. Rather than trusting that Christ is still steadfastly working on the unity of his church, by his Spirit and Word, in the present-progressive tense, we whip out our phone, so to speak, focus on the church, snap a picture, and declare, “Oh no, this doesn’t look much like *one* church! Maybe we need to find a new doctrine of the church.”

No, we do not need a different doctrine of the church. The letter to the Ephesians, as summarized in the Nicene Creed, Lord’s Day 21, and the Belgic Confession Articles 27–29, has stood the test of time. Rather we need to recalibrate our principles and flip our hearts over from *sight* to *faith* and from *freeze-frame* to *present-progressive*.

Now let’s apply these principles to how local congregations act toward each other *within* a faithful federation. Next time, I hope to take it a step further and examine how this works out *among* faithful federations.

ASSOCIATION OR INTEGRATION?

The apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians describes the church as the body of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 1:22–23). A body is a most fascinating part of God’s creation. It consists of 639 muscles, 206 bones, and 78 organs, all divinely crafted from some 30 trillion cells! God weaves all these different body parts together (Ps 139:13, 15) into a most amazing, intricately integrated body.

Yes, the members of the human body are *integrated* with each other, not merely associated. There is a difference. Our family is associated with our neighbours across the road. We chat regularly.

At times we loan tools to each other. Once we even put on a garage sale together. But I would not say our two families are integrated—associated, yes; integrated, no. It’s different, though, with my heart and my lungs. Those two parts of my body are so intricately woven together that they are, quite literally, co-dependent.

But what about my right foot and my left ear? At first glance, they may appear to be more associated than integrated. However, if my feet do not regularly move me to the table for meals, eventually the cells of my left ear will become malnourished, not function properly, and perhaps even die off. Likewise, if my left ear does not send the signal that a car is rushing up behind me, I may not get out of the way on time and my foot—or much more of me—could be seriously injured. All this to say, all body parts are truly integrated, one way or the other, especially when you consider the longer term, not merely the immediate moment.

By choosing the word *body* to describe the church, the Holy Spirit is teaching us that he is weaving us together in a wonderful, even mysterious, integrated union. We *believe* this because our God reveals this. We trust that over time, *in the present-progressive tense*, the Holy Spirit knits us more and more together, despite sin’s injuries and diseases.

INTEGRATION WITHIN FEDERATION

Within our local congregations we see Spirit-worked integration in action. Body-of-Christ members communicate, encourage, exhort, help, and serve each other. To be sure, it is far from perfect, but it is evident.

However, what about among local congregations within a federation? We are finite folk; we can only be in one place at one time. Consequently, much like the foot and the ear, we sometimes struggle to stitch together geographical or chronological distance with ecclesiastical unity. For example, church members of a congregation in Smithers, BC, may say, “How do we actually experience any kind of *integrated* unity with our fellow believers in the congregation of Spring Creek, ON?” Good question. Vacation time and family travels aside, we may not regularly *experience* so much Spirit-worked unity with our geographically-removed brothers and sisters, let alone with past or future generations of believers.

For this reason, we might think of a federation as an *association* of dozens, or even hundreds, of locally integrated, congregational bodies. We might suppose that, like neighbours, in our federation we chat, share tools, and even work together on some joint projects—not a garage sale but, for instance, a seminary. But does the eternal Bridegroom speak about his bride as an association? Interestingly, the Spirit of Christ does not speak in Ephesians

about associated *bodies* of Christ. Christ's one body is *the fullness* of him who fills all in all (Eph 1:23). No single, local congregation at any given moment in history will ever be able to state that it, by itself, is the fullness of Christ. But the church catholic that Christ is gathering "out of the whole human race, from the beginning to the world to its end" (LD 21) is, by God's grace, that fullness.

Based on this revealed truth, the Belgic Confession even goes so far as to affirm that "we believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a *holy congregation and assembly* of the

blessings in their midst? And, please forgive me if this seems like advertising, but what can you and your congregation do to boost readership of this magazine, *Clarion*, which is an important cross-road of information and ideas within the CanRC?

Finally, a *servant attitude* is key. If the heart only pumps blood for itself, it will not be pumping for long. Taking on the attitude of Christ, individual members of a congregation are called to consider others better than themselves and make sacrifices for the well-being of other members (Phil 2:1-11). But the same applies among

Are we communicating enough with each other as congregations?

true Christian believers." The catholic church as "a holy congregation" (singular). Striking language, isn't it? Most likely, we would opt to say, "we believe one catholic or universal church, *which is comprised of various local congregations and assemblies*." Of course, in a certain sense, this is correct. After all, the NT does refer to the "churches [plural] of Christ" (e.g., Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 11:16). But if we stop there, we fail to capture the full extent of Christ's glorious work with his Bride. By his Spirit, he is weaving faithful, local congregations together into an integrated body. Federative unity is a beautiful expression of this.

INTEGRATED UNITY IN ACTION

What does this all look like in concrete action? It begins with *awareness*. In our local congregations, when we are discussing initiatives or working toward decisions, it is quite natural to think, "How will this go over with the entire congregation? Will it help or hinder? Cause friction or promote fellowship?" But we do well to pause once and while and ask ourselves, "If we do X or refrain from doing Y, what implications will this have, both in the short-term and the long-term, on our federation?" Within one body, ears need to consider their eyes and eyes need to keep their ears on the radar screen.

Next, it calls for *communication*, lots of it! Just think about how many communication signals are constantly zipping around in your body from organ to organ, from hands to feet, from cell to cell—all coordinated through the head, which in the case of the church is our Lord Jesus Christ. Are we communicating enough with each other as congregations? It does not take much for the left hand to lose touch with what the right hand is doing. Are enough members reading classical press releases to know what is happening throughout the federation? Are congregations sending in appropriate and interesting updates to *Clarion* about the Lord's

congregations within a federation. It is not just about doing what is best for our own local congregation. Of course, that is an important consideration, but it is not the only consideration. Sometimes we all need to make sacrifices—not of the truth but perhaps of a preference—to maintain unity within the body of our Saviour (Eph 4:3).

FOLLOWING CHRIST OR WANDERING OFF

Is all this the way that we are praying and working within our own federation? Depending on our Saviour's grace and power, are we moving in the direction of looser association or tighter integration? Please do not misunderstand. We are not speaking here of hierarchy. The church only has one Head, and that is Christ. Neither are we speaking about rigid uniformity. Rather, in faith we are striving to confess the whole counsel of God's inspired Word concerning his church.

Peaceful and productive association already takes much thought, effort, and coordination. But our Saviour deserves more. More than that, he is working on more. We like quick and easy results. Spirit-worked, generations-long integration of sinful, selfish, inclined-to-pride Christians takes time and supernatural work. But that is the body building that Christ is working on, in our local congregations and in our federation. Let's follow Christ, even if it is the harder road to travel. Our gracious Groom is certainly worth following. **C**



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SIGN HERE...

Really?

How important is church polity? It is often seen as something that may be good for the *well-being* of the church, but not necessary for the *being* of the church. A church order assists by providing some rules for the running of the church and for organizing things, but has very little impact on the essence of the church. To be and remain a faithful church of Jesus Christ requires submission to God's Word; it does not need a church order.

To some extent this is true. It is not difficult to make a list of articles in our Church Order to illustrate this. Think for instance of Article 29 (assemblies), Article 43 (archives), Article 45 (counsellors), Article 48 (deputies of regional synod), and Article 64 (church records). All these things support good government of the church(es), but do not determine how faithful a church is.

However, we should not be too quick to disconnect the Church Order from what it means to be a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps you remember some of the previous articles in this series, about the biblical convictions behind Reformed church polity. The Church Order does play a role in protecting the being of the church. Some articles are clearly intended to make sure that the church stays with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that she will continue to show the marks of a faithful church, as described in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession.

PROTECTING THE UNITY OF FAITH

A good example of this is Article 26: "All ministers of the Word, elders, deacons and professors of theology shall subscribe to the

confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches by signing the form(s) adopted for that purpose." The second part of this article outlines the consequences of refusing to do so.

Some have asked: If the council of the church concludes that a brother meets the requirements found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 2, and this is confirmed (via the election process) by the congregation, what biblical right do we have to insist that an office bearer must sign the Form of Subscription, when such a requirement does not appear in Scripture?

At first sight that sounds reasonable. Are we not elevating a human form above the standards of Scripture? But the point is: what begins good does not come with the guarantee that it will always automatically remain good. This does not imply that we should approach each other with suspicion, but the spiritual unity of faith in the local church and among the churches of the federation is important enough to agree on measures to preserve and protect this unity.

There is a link here with Article 27 of the Church Order. Especially ministers and elders have the task "to ward off false doctrines and errors which could enter the congregation and constitute a danger to the purity of its doctrine or conduct. . . ." It shows how faithfulness to the doctrine of Scripture must actively function in the congregations. This is not just good for the well-being of the church. Doing this or failing to do this as office bearers will impact the very being of the church.¹ The congregational flock must be protected.²

¹ See Titus 1:9.

² See the Forms for Ordination/Installation, Book of Praise, 618–627.

REFUTING THREATS TO THE UNITY OF FAITH

The New Testament makes very clear that there is an ongoing need for refuting false doctrine.³ The Bible often uses strong language. In Matthew 7:15 Jesus himself warns against false prophets who come as ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing. In Acts 20:29–30 Paul uses similar terminology when he warns against what he calls fierce wolves who will speak twisted things, while in Philippians 2:3 he calls those people dogs. It stresses the danger that false teachers will accomplish what Satan is after: devouring the believers (1 Peter 5:8).

All of this sounds pretty serious. It is actually so serious that a shepherd of the church (minister or elder) must not hesitate when he detects false teachings creeping in.

At the same time, it is also good to be careful here. This should not turn into witch-hunting for people who think differently than I do. Not every disagreement among brothers is the result of false doctrine. And not every disagreement should be elevated to that level either. When we face differences in opinion, the first thing we need to do is listen to each other patiently and in sincere humility. But as we do so, we must remember 1 John 4:1.⁴ Let there be no misunderstanding: teaching that goes beyond Holy Scripture has no place in the church. Time and again history has shown how necessary this is. Paul's warning against fierce wolves remains relevant today.

BOUNDARIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

That's precisely why we have the "Form(s) of Subscription." Reformed churches have always been confessional churches. We maintain and hold on to written confessions to express our unity of faith and defend the truth of God's Word. The confessions provide the boundaries, and subscribing to those confessions provides the accountability we owe each other when it comes to respecting those boundaries. It shows that we care about the spiritual health and theological faithfulness of the church, by teaching what is true and refuting what is wrong.


Subscribing to the confessions has been in Reformed church orders since the Synod of Dort 1618/1619. That synod even adopted a form for that purpose. But in the CanRC Church Order there was no reference to a form until 1983, and it was not before Synod

Smithers 2007 that standard forms for subscription were adopted.⁵ The form(s) in use since then have three main parts: a declaration, a series of three promises, and the right of appeal.⁶

STAND FOR WHAT WE BELIEVE AND CONFESS

Some have voiced other objections than the one mentioned earlier, against the stipulation of Article 26 of the Church Order. It looks as if we declare that the confessions are infallible and beyond criticism. They are not. Only the Word of God is. Signing the Form of Subscription does not mean that the confessions can never be changed. Neither is the intent to stifle ongoing exegetical research and theological debate. Based on God's Word one may come to the conclusion that a point of doctrine can be formulated in a different and perhaps better way.

However, the form includes the promise to follow a particular procedure to submit such a new insight to the church with the willingness to have it examined. After all, the confessions are not just anybody's personal documents; they are foundational for our spiritual unity as churches. We are not ashamed of who we are as Reformed churches and there is nothing hidden about it. This is what we believe. Ministers come and go. Elders come and go. But that does not change what we stand for. And if you come to any of our local churches, this is what you can expect and trust us to preach and teach, without ifs or buts.

Let's be alert—there was, there is, and there will always be false doctrine. That makes it important to help each other remember the boundaries established by our creeds and confessions. And let's respect the Form of Subscription as an effective tool to do so. 

Editor's Note: Rev. DeGelder is willing to receive questions from our readers on the topic of church order and church polity. Please send such questions to him at jdegelder@cogeco.ca.



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³ The warnings against false teaching or false teachers appear in virtually all the apostolic letters, with very few exceptions.

⁴ "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

⁵ *Acts of Synod Smithers 2007*, Art. 11.

⁶ *Book of Praise*, 661

BLESSINGS ABOUND IN TIMOR

An Update from Mission Timor Indonesia

EDWAR DETHAN



GROWING IN FAITH

Easter is the time for pre-confession students to make profession of faith. This time around, however, the students will have a bit different way of examination before they make their profession. Usually the students are examined in front of the consistory—as commonly happens in Canada. But at the beginning of this year two consistories in the federation of churches that developed from Smithville’s mission work (Geraja Geraja Reformasi Indonesia-Timor; hereafter GGRIT) decided to examine the pre-con students in front of the whole congregation. You wonder why?

Well, it started with a discussion on Radio Sahabat FM about the importance of making public profession of faith; that was a question from one of the listeners. The general answer was that we want a person to promise in front of God and his congregation that he/she believes in God and wants to be a faithful member of the church.

Now, you need to understand that for most Protestant churches in Indonesia, you can profess your faith if you are able to recite the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles’ Creed; living a God-fearing life and submitting yourself to the discipline of the church is not a prerequisite.

Not surprisingly, many never show up in church once they have professed their faith—for them it was the thing to do once you hit a certain age. The understanding is that once you’ve passed the exam, you are good and done for life! Others easily convert to other religions such as Roman Catholicism and even Islam for the sake of a “better” future. Through the on-air discussion at Sahabat FM and interviews with young people, we came to the conclusion that there is a huge lack of teaching on what and why we believe. Sadly, most churches have done away with the Heidelberg Catechism—such a helpful tool to instruct and remind the members of the flock.



The result of this research was that two churches of the GGRIT federation have decided that parents and congregation members need to more involved. There are weekly reports on how many students participated in the catechism classes, what they have covered, and what the memory work is. These churches also decided that pre-con students would be examined in front of the congregation as a witness that they have indeed understood and taken to heart the doctrines taught and upheld by the church.

One of the young people professing her faith was Siska, a 19-year-old who has been coming to church with her mom since she was 5. Siska did not grow up in a Christian home. Her father is a non-practicing Roman Catholic who lives unmarried with her Muslim mother and older brother. Through a former Muslim who joined the Dalam Tuak congregation, Siska's mother was invited to attend our worship services. She has been a faithful guest member for years, always attending together with her daughter. Siska has

grown in her faith through the preaching of the Word, the teaching in the Elpida school and weekly catechism instruction, to the point that she wanted to make a public profession of her faith. A powerful witness of how God works through the teaching and preaching of his Word!

MAGAZINE

For a few years already a monthly magazine (*Obor Pembaruan*, which means "Reformed Torch") has been published for the benefit of the churches; it's been a blessing to many. The last two issues focused on the meaning of Good Friday, the dying of the Lord Jesus. We extensively covered questions such as: "If the Christian God is so powerful, why did he not prevent Jesus's death?" And: "If Jesus is God, why did he not get rid of the Roman soldiers just as God wiped out the sinners in Sodom and Gomorrah?" These questions were answered based on the explanation of Lord's Day 16. We

raised these questions in response to the advance of Jehovah's Witnesses in Indonesia, especially in the province of NTT and Timor Island.

Many Christians are being challenged with such basic questions by both Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims. Many are worried about these developments. We, however, see these as an opportunity. It is the time for Christians to defend and explain what we believe.

One of our readers, Reny, a mother of four, said: "It is only reading the Reformed Torch that prevented me from going to the Kingdom Hall and forsaking my Lord and Saviour Jesus. I am so thankful that I came across this magazine which clearly explains the biblical understanding of who Jesus is. I hope and pray that more and more people will read this. There is so much available on YouTube and we can listen to sermons in church, but this magazine is something tangible I can go back to."

RADIO TALK: "SOCCER, ISLAM, MONEY, AND POLITICS"

Two years ago Cyclone Seroja demolished our radio station, Sahabat FM. We are so thankful that it is up and running again, with increased range; thank you for your generous gifts that made its repair possible. The radio ministry is such a huge asset to the

Reformed ministry, opening doors across the country. Radio provides a wonderful way to discuss and explain current topics and trends from a biblical perspective.

The hot topic of the last few weeks has been soccer. Perhaps you have heard that Indonesia was supposed to host the U-20 World Cup soccer. Soccer is huge in Indonesia; many young people dream of becoming professional players in the hopes of making lots of money. This also includes some of the young people in the GGRIT churches. After all, who does not want to earn \$200,000 per year as a 20-year-old?! Sports and Christianity was the topic of our weekly "What Does the Bible Say" program. With the upcoming U-20 World, this was a timely subject which resulted in a heated discussion!

As it turned out, the U-20 World Cup was cancelled because two provincial governors opposed the presence of the Israeli team. FIFA then cancelled the tournaments and punished Indonesia. Shocking! The question arises: why, and what is behind such an impactful refusal? First of all, Indonesia is a majority Muslim country with a strong dislike for Israel. Digging a little further it is clear that money and politics are the roots of this controversy. Professional sports and politics are tightly interwoven in Indonesia.





It is important for Christian parents and their children to understand how professional sports work in Indonesia. For starters, this understanding will help parents and our young people deal with the question of whether it is good to pursue professional sports in Indonesia.

Having considered this, it is also important to realize that sports can easily become our false god. Yes, we are called to glorify God in all things—this includes sports. Yet, the temptation of turning the Lord’s Day into a sports day is very real.

Of course, about 90% of the listeners disagreed with me initially, arguing that such a high salary would be beneficial to the church! Yes, very true, yet the church is not about the money, but being faithful to our heavenly Father’s commands. It was an eye-opening topic for many listeners, for they had never thought about the impact of the profession one chooses on church life.

One of our listeners, Om Harun, says, “We are thankful for the discussion of the current issues of how to direct our children.” Om Harun lives 100 km from Kupang and is able to listen to Sahabat FM clearly. Om Harun says, “Now we can really hear Sahabat FM, without going up to the mountain. Right in our house we can hear the explanation of God’s words through the program ‘What Does the Bible Say.’ What a blessing it is.”

DEVELOPMENTS

We have four new potential Bible study groups starting up. There are connections not only on Timor Island but other islands as well. It is very exciting and a huge blessing to see and be part of the Lord’s expanding Kingdom.

This does mean that the need for more preachers and teachers is pressing. Please pray for all students currently enrolled at the Seminary and Teachers’ College (STAKRI), that they may use their time and energy to absorb all instruction and take it to heart and put it into practice. Please pray also that those that are currently doing their practicum will receive strength and wisdom to spread God’s Word faithfully and diligently in the remote areas of our island. We also request prayer for students considering enrolling at STAKRI this year, that God’s Spirit will guide them to commit to studying his Word. Thanks again for your prayers and support. ☪

In Christ’s service,
Edwar Dethan, Missionary in Timor
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THE STORY OF HOPE

A new building for Niagara South CanRC

ILSE VANDERMEULEN

Niagara South Canadian Reformed Church rejoices in God's goodness as this new congregation has the opportunity to purchase its own building, the Hope Community Church in Welland. This Presbyterian church building has been rented by the new congregation since its institution in May 2020. The process of changing ownership was the result of patience, generosity, and Christian love toward an aging congregation.

Niagara South CanRC was instituted with the primary focus of growth in the city of Welland, Ontario. Some members from the Dunnville and Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Churches bid their congregations a warm farewell to start Niagara South and the church now consists of over 170 members. Since January 2022, Rev. Ruurd Offringa has been serving as their pastor.

One of the tasks of the Institution Committee was to investigate the rental of a worship facility. The Presbyterian Hope Community Church (HCC) appeared to be the most suitable for congregational worship on account of its location, facility size, parking, and accessibility. Nick VandenOever, a member of the Institution Committee, was the one contacting Hope church. "They were very interested in meeting with us," he says. The Presbyterians have deep roots in the community. They renamed their building HOPE, as it stands for House of Prayer Everywhere. They welcomed a rental arrangement with the new Reformed church.

“They had difficulty meeting their financial obligations, and this arrangement would also provide physical relief to operate and maintain the facilities and the gardens around the church as many members are advanced in age.”

Due to the pandemic and local and regional restrictions, the use of the HOPE building over the past years was often interrupted. The congregation of Niagara South is compelled to recognize the truth of Proverbs 16:9, “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.” Now back to regular worship over the past year and a half, there truly has been an opportunity for the brothers and sisters of this young Reformed church to get to know each other and the desire grew to own their own building.

The possibility of Niagara South CanRC purchasing the church and property was an aspiration expressed by several of the members. However, when the possibility of buying the building was discussed early on, it was clear that the Presbyterians were not yet ready for this.

Rudy Ouwersloot was part of a committee looking into the option of buying the building. “It was delicate, and it had to be their decision to part with their building. It is their ‘home’ after all.” VandenOever adds: “With selling a building comes sadness, and we have to acknowledge that. We offered to meet with them and the whole congregation to introduce ourselves and explain who we are as a Reformed church and we later heard that they appreciated that gesture very much.” Niagara South further contacted Living Word Canadian Reformed Church in Guelph, which also purchased a building from a Presbyterian congregation, to find out how they had arranged their sale.

Ouwersloot and VandenOever recommend building trust, having an open relationship, and being generous. VandenOever: “We have so many resources and youthful exuberance as Canadian Reformed churches. Put that to use. For example, Hope congregation thoroughly enjoyed the new energy and seeing the little kids. It was emotional for them. Their nursery had not been used in twenty years.”

Further, a helpful document was the Covenant of Intent to answer the question of what it will look like if this sale becomes a reality to both parties. VandenOever: “They put something together describing their purpose and allegiance to the Presbyterian Church of Canada, and we added that we subscribe to our confessions and abide by our Church Order. We promised to take care of each other, still independent, but worshipping under the same roof. That created an atmosphere of trust. The Presbyterians said with gratitude that they saw this process as a younger congregation taking care of an older congregation.” The Presbyterian



congregation will rent the building for worship for the next seven years.

In 2022, with an earned respect for each other, serious talk of a sale began. Conversations and subsequent meetings between an ad hoc committee from Niagara South and the session (the council) of the Presbyterians started taking place. Ouwersloot and Vandenoever, together with a third member of their church, were invited to Hope’s congregational meeting in January of this year. The meeting was led in a very capable manner by a moderator who was appointed by the Presbytery of Niagara to assist the Hope congregation during its vacancy. One of the members of Hope recalled that their church had been established as a beacon of light for Christ in the community and, with this sale, it would continue to be that. After much discussion the resulting vote was a strong “yes” and the Niagara South CanRC congregation received




the directive in principle to continue pursuing the purchase of the Hope Community Church.

At a congregational meeting this spring, Niagara South also voted in favour of the purchase as well as a facility use agreement so that the Presbyterian congregation can continue to use the building for some years. Ouwersloot: “Anything historic in the building, like plaques, will be given to them if we want to remove it from the building. Some artifacts we plan to keep in the building to showcase the original history and they appreciated that.”

The sign in front of the building will display both congregations’ names and time of worship. Ouwersloot: “This way also the neighbourhood can see that two churches cohabit in a building. That is a good testimony of cooperation when you hear so many negative stories about churches splitting up.” Niagara South CanRC

experiences more exposure now, as they are in the middle of town, with regular visitors, including students from Niagara College.

After starting a new congregation, and being blessed with a new pastor, Niagara South can now look forward to being the owners of a building in the fall. A fundraising campaign for \$400,000 has started under the fitting name: Enduring Hope Campaign, also referring to Hebrews 10:23: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” 



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Photo credit: Renee van de Kamp

Women's Fellowship Day

in the Fraser Valley

May 11, 2023

JOANNA VANDERPOL

On a very beautiful and sunny spring day, about 175 ladies throughout the Fraser Valley made their way to Langley church to come together to hear Brigette VanHuisstede's speech, "Live in Harmony: How the Gospel Changes Everything!" and to meet each other again after a hiatus of three years because of COVID. Bernice Wubs welcomed us all to this 2021/2022/2023 Fellowship Day, aka League Day, making this the 57th Anniversary, although it should have been our 60th. We sang Psalm 121:1, 2 followed by prayer and the reading of 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22.

GUEST SPEAKER

Debbie Johnson, from Lynden, introduced our speaker, who attends Mercy Church in Hamilton. Brigette encouraged us to step aside from our anxieties and busy lives for a few hours and instead walk together in God's gospel. She read from Romans 5:1-5, which gives a practical, tangible answer to what a gospel-flavoured life looks like. Her speech examined why and how the good news of the gospel transforms our thoughts, our lives, and our relationships with one another. The world wants us on its side to shape us: what we think about family, sexuality, arts, music via social media, culture, and world. But we must not become so well adjusted to the culture of the day that we fit into it without even thinking. Because we have been completely transformed through the gospel; we rejoice in hope even if life is tough; we are patient in tribulation, waiting on God for all things because he always fulfills his promises; we are constant in prayer to a God who wants to hear his children. Our lives blend together, and we live in harmony, rejoicing together in good times and mourning together in times of sorrow. We are one body with many members, but we are one in Christ and use the gifts he has given us to walk alongside each other.


Brigette spent some time outlining what mourning together looks like. The most important point is to pray for each other. That

sometimes means praying right at that moment as you sit in that café for a cup of coffee or are standing on that path where you are walking. We are to "bear each other's burdens and so fulfill the law of God." As we live in harmony, we show hospitality to each other and to strangers (Heb 13:2). After the speech we broke into ten groups and enjoyed some very good discussions.

AFTERNOON SESSION

After a delicious lunch and lots of visiting, we came back together. The afternoon began with the singing of the League Day song, which has been our anthem for as long as we have celebrated League Day. It was also sung in Holland for many years at their annual Bondsdag. Mr. R. Koat translated it for us. As tradition has it, we enjoyed some entertainment: a short skit put on by the Chilliwack ladies.

Brigette had been given the gist of our discussions and now addressed those. The common theme was walking alongside those who are suffering. We are often afraid to express our sorrow because we are afraid of gossip, or we think we are hanging out our dirty laundry, or we don't want to be vulnerable. Praying for wandering adult children or other family members can be so difficult but we need to realize that we are not the Holy Spirit and cannot change lives. Instead, we pray for them and then say, "Your will be done." Together we share each other's burdens, pray for each other, and encourage each other in the Lord.

Bernice Wubs thanked everyone who made this a special day, including our faithful church organist, Dicky Jansen, who is about to celebrate her 85th birthday. This, of course, required us to sing Happy Birthday! Dicky then led us in the singing of Hymn 85. This was our first post-COVID Fellowship Day and it had a very special feeling of joy. After more refreshments and visiting, the ladies all headed home again to their busy lives refreshed and encouraged with the words of Scripture singing in their hearts. 

ALL FOR THE
Glory of God



Farewell

TO REV. VANDERGAAG

ANNA BAREMAN

Spring has finally sprung in Taber. The air is filled with the dust of seeding tractors and after a long winter all the spring flowers are simultaneously blooming. Along with this anticipated change comes another, less anticipated change. We say goodbye to our pastor and preacher of the last eight and a half years.

FAREWELL DESSERT EVENING

Taking a spring evening off work is not to be taken for granted in Taber, but on Friday, May 12 most of the congregation gathered to honour Rev. Vandergaag with his family before they head east. Our MC for the occasion noted how farming in Taber has similarities to life in ancient Israel. We also live in a desert, and even with technological advantages this is a community that heavily relies on the providence of God. Psalm 65 was read, and it was noted that we live not only on physical food but also on Christ as our spiritual drink. We are collectively grateful for the provision of spiritual nourishment through our minister. The local ministers also gave thanks for this, noting that for a time Rev. Vandergaag was the only Can Ref minister in southern Alberta.

Upbuilding letters from congregations within our classis were also read, songs of praise and songs of fun were sung. The young peoples gave Rev. Vandergaag a lesson about one-year-old sheep that will ensure he never underestimates the nature of a Passover lamb again. After carrying the stubborn specimen around the gym, he graciously did not elaborate on how apt the metaphor may have been in his pastoral work among us! Another brother may have done it for him when summing up our minister's hockey hobby: better to slash the opposing team than a congregant.

Gifts were presented to occupy their children on the long trek to Guelph and to reflect some precious memories from their time in Taber. A rustic coat hanger crafted by a carpenter in the congregation will hopefully grace the new manse. There was a photo book that featured time spent at Taber Youth Camp where Rev. Vandergaag taught us new campfire songs and how to spend quality time in devotions. He also received a framed photo of a view of

the Old Man River and surrounding coulees where he spent a lot of time mountain biking and falling in love with the unique landscape.

Not one to just sit and watch, the minister and his wife also had a little surprise for us. Beginning by saying “whose ox have I taken?” or “Whom have I defrauded?” he began returning items that belonged to various members of the congregation. Out of a large box he pulled out many items including books, a piece of a piano, and finally the keys to the church. Our pastor is an emotional man and he teared up a little returning those keys as he thanked the congregation for their prayers, advice, and love over the years. He assured us the gospel is as much for him as it is for us.

FAREWELL SUNDAY, MAY 14

The very next Sunday, Rev. Vandergaag ended his ministry among us how he had begun. He preached on Ephesians, noting that it was in fact an unfinished series he started all those years ago. Ephesians begins with a blessing of grace and peace and ends with the same—but adds love. This blessing is specific to all who love the Lord. This love is born out of the peace that Christ bought us by restoring the unity that sin had corrupted. The mystery was that Jews could find unity even with Gentiles! This was a surprise to them and no less than miraculous. Therefore, since we are all built on the foundation of Christ, this is also the source of our peace and unity, making all others issues trivial. It is noteworthy that Paul does not end with a farewell, but a benediction. This benediction is also a prayer, and our minister declared to us that this is also his prayer for us. And so, the end of the text, sermon, and the service itself culminated in a trinity of blessings on the congregation. The lack of dry eyes between the pulpit and those that looked up to receive that final blessing is a sure indicator of the warmth and love that flowed between this shepherd and his sheep.

The seasons turn, and our Father is faithful in every one. May this fresh season in Guelph be as joyous as spring in Taber, as Rev. Vandergaag brings living waters, hope, and possibly “Snoep ‘n Doc” to that congregation. **C**



RAY OF SUNSHINE

Rachel Vis

Jack Dieleman

Let me introduce you to Jack Dieleman. Jack is an easy person to talk to, with a positive attitude and strong faith. He was born with spina bifida from the waist down, but he is still very mobile and independent.

Jack grew up in Toronto with his family until he was 27. He then lived in his own apartment with attended care for a few years. When Jack got sick, he moved back home for a year. Then he moved to a group home in Burlington for about four years. In 2009, Jack moved to Lighthouse and lived there for six years. When he heard they were opening a home in Hamilton, he applied to be on the wait list there. He was very happy when he got a spot in the new Harbour Home, because he could once again live in the city. Jack still resides at the Harbour Home in Hamilton and enjoys living there with his housemates.

Currently Jack has been spending a few months in St. Peters Hospital dealing with a bed sore. He had surgery at the beginning of April, and is finally able to be off of bed rest. He will need to recover and regain strength over the next month or so, and Lord

willing can go home after that. He keeps busy watching shows on his laptop and gets lots of visitors. He appreciates any phone calls or visits! You can reach him at 519-400-6830. He is very thankful for live stream from Rehoboth United Reformed Church and the many relationships he has built in that church.

Before Jack was in the hospital, he kept busy volunteering at Timothy Christian School in Grades 1 and 2, and at Cairn School in Grade 3. He works with the kids one on one and in groups, assisting them with their math, spelling, or helping them keep on task. He also works at the Tim Hortons Field as an elevator operator, and at the First Ontario Centre scanning tickets for events. They were both great employers and he hopes he can get back to some of it when he is able.

During COVID quarantines, people would send crafts and puzzles to the home. Someone brought them paint by number and now it is one of Jack's new favourite things to do.

Jack continues to leave everything in God's hands, knowing he is in control. ☑

4 Terence Berends will be **47**
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line, RR 3
Fergus, ON
N1M 2W4

9 Rose Malda will be **66**
Mt. Nemo Christian Nursing Home
4486 Guelph Line
Burlington, ON
L7P 0N2

31 Kristi Oosterhoff will be **33**
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON
L9B 2K3

5 Philip Schuurman will be **64**
323 Scott St
St. Catharines, ON
L2N 1J6

23 Jack Dieleman will be **51**
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON
L9B 2K3

CLARION KIDS LORD'S DAY 32

Do you remember that we talked about something called good works? Good works are things we do to thank God for sending the Lord Jesus to die for our sins. You see, the Holy Spirit makes us to be more and more like Jesus in how we act, talk, and think. And one way of doing this is making us want to do good works. Now, God has two other reasons for good works. God actually comforts us by our good works! Maybe you have a day that you are not sure if you have true faith. But then you remember some good works that you have done. "Thank you, Lord," you can pray, "I praise you for working true faith in my heart." But it doesn't stop with you, because even people who do not know God can be blessed by your good works!

Like when you make a card for a sick neighbour. He might read the Bible text you wrote and want to learn more about God. Then God's name is praised more and more!

We've come quite far into the catechism now. We've come to the Third Part! So, let's take a moment and find out what the parts of the catechism are called. Please get a Book of Praise and find Lord's Day 32. You will notice that above the Lord's Day it says "The Third Part: Our Thankfulness." So, this part of the catechism tells us all about how to say thank you to God.

YOUR JOB IS TO FIND THE SECOND AND FIRST PARTS OF THE CATECHISM AND WRITE WHAT THESE PARTS ARE CALLED ON THE BLANKS BELOW. (MAYBE ASK YOUR PARENTS FOR HELP IF YOU CAN'T FIND THE ANSWERS.) THE THIRD PART IS DONE FOR YOU.

The First Part _____ The Second Part _____

The Third Part Our Thankfulness

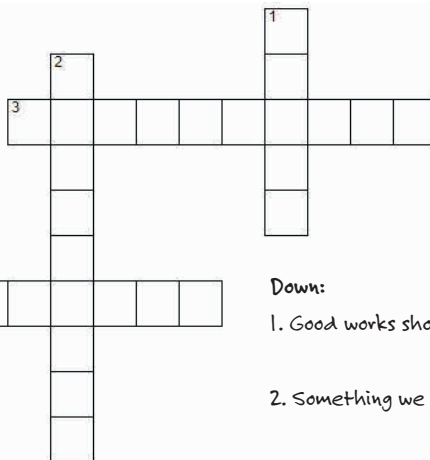
CROSSWORD

Across:

3. He uses good works to make us more and more like Jesus.

4. _____

4. Our _____ might want to learn more about God because of our good works.



Down:

1. Good works show us that we have _____.

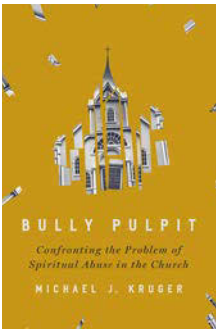
2. Something we do to say thank you to God.



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



CONFRONTING SPIRITUAL ABUSE

Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Problem of Spiritual Abuse in the Church, by Michael J. Kruger. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022). Hardcover. 164 pages. \$31.99 CDN.

Back in about 2006, there was a lot of excited talk about a new celebrity pastor in Seattle. Guys especially appreciated Mark Driscoll's no-nonsense approach to being men. And the fact that he claimed to be a Calvinist (albeit four points) was an added attraction. So I bought his book *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.* While thought-provoking, it also contained some deeply concerning language about people in his church. He asked, "Do you have the guts to shoot your dogs?" By that he meant, among other things, eliminating "loser leaders" and "pathetic people." Elsewhere in the book he referred to the church needing a colon so it can get rid of sick people. In due time, Driscoll's world came crashing in on him along with allegations of spiritually abusive behaviour. It was all documented in the powerful *Christianity Today* podcast, "The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill."

Now it's easy to throw stones over at Driscoll and other fallen celebrity pastors, but we need to consider whether we have our own problems with spiritual abuse. For example, there are stories of victims of sexual abuse or domestic violence being placed under discipline, while their abusers aren't. As I look back over my own ministry so far, I feel convicted that I'm implicated in this problem as well. It's an easy trap to walk into.

DEFINING TERMS

That's why this book by Michael Kruger is so important. As a pastor (PCA) and seminary professor (Reformed Theological Seminary), he's been around and seen a thing or two. He's written this book as a church leader for other church leaders to help identify and stop spiritual abuse.

What is spiritual abuse? Kruger defines it like this:

Spiritual abuse is when a spiritual leader—such as a pastor, elder, or head of a Christian organization—wields his position of spiritual authority in such a way that he manipulates, dominates, bullies, and intimidates those under him as means of maintaining his own power and control, even if he is convinced he is seeking biblical and kingdom-related goals (p. 24).

Now, as he points out further, applying this definition can be tricky. Just being unfriendly or intimidating by nature isn't spiritual abuse. Nor is accidentally hurting someone or confronting sin (although sin is sometimes confronted in an abusive manner). These complexities can make it difficult to identify and to hold accountable those responsible.


Though it's not a long read, Kruger seems to cover all the questions that might arise. How do powerful spiritually abusive men manage to get away with it? What about Matthew 18 and "meeting with the monster"? How do church leaders deal with their suspicion of false accusations? What are some ways that the risk of spiritual abuse can be mitigated? Kruger answers all these questions and more with sound, biblically-informed wisdom.

CONSEQUENCES

It's a weighty problem. Kruger writes, "Anyone who thinks spiritual abuse is a minor problem has not reckoned with the documented devastation" (p. 109). He notes how it can lead to doubts concerning the church, Christianity itself, about God, and finally about oneself. Kruger describes how spiritual abuse can result in trauma and subsequent Post-Traumatic Stress (PTSD):

For spiritual abuse survivors, experiences that remind them of their abusive pastor or church situation usually trigger these [PTSD] effects. These triggers could be something as simple as going to church, hearing a sermon, or seeing individuals from their former church. A complicating factor in spiritual abuse cases is that the abuse is perpetrated by an institution or a person the victim knew and trusted, known as "institutional betrayal." Studies have shown that abuse within a trusted relationship is significantly more traumatic than abuse by a stranger (p. 101).

When a parishioner struggles with church attendance, it might be worth considering whether he or she has experienced spiritual abuse in the past.

I'd recommend *Bully Pulpit* to all pastors and elders. It would definitely be a worthwhile book for consistories to discuss. In addition, it should be required reading for all seminary students and other aspiring office bearers. For the sake of the gospel and out of love for Christ's sheep, we have to do better—Michael Kruger will help us. 



Wes Bredenhof

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Launceston

bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca

Dear Editor,

In light of what is happening in contemporary religion and outreach, Dr. Van Vliet's editorial about the name and title of Jesus Christ is a timely and well-written warning to take to heart ("Jesus . . . Christ," May 19, 2023). At the same time, it would seem that those who were involved in the translation of the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible did not fully consider the importance of the title of Christ. Compared to the New King James Version (NKJV), the name of Christ is omitted at least twenty-three times in the ESV.

Here are a few examples:

1. John 6:69 NKJV: "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ESV: "and we have believed, and come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."
2. Ephesians 3:14 NKJV: "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." ESV: "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father."
3. Hebrews 3:1 NKJV: "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus." ESV: "Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession."
4. 1 John 4:3a NKJV: "And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God." ESV: "and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God."

The ESV Bible translation is being used by most of the Canadian Reformed churches. Is it not concerning that the title of Christ does not have as strong an emphasis in the ESV as it does in the NKJV?

Respectfully submitted,

Simon Breukelman

Fergus, ON

CLASSIS MANITOBA

May 26, 2023, Winnipeg Redeemer CanRC

WELCOME & OPENING

On behalf of the Winnipeg Redeemer CanRC, Rev. Joe Poppe welcomed all gathered for Classis. He led the gathering in opening devotions. In prayer for the proceedings, he also remembered a number of matters including the departure of Rev. James Zekveld and family to the Trinity Covenant Church (Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches) in Fort St. John, BC. He prayed for the retired pastors and their life circumstances and continuing service (Rev. & sr. John & Agnus VanRietschoten, Dr. & sr. Andrew & Inge Pol, and Rev. Klaas Jonker). Finally, the vacancies in Elm Creek CanRC and Niverville mission church were remembered.

Rev. Poppe especially welcomed Mark and Sheri Vanderlinde, who were present for his preparatory examination. Having completed the four-year program at Canadian Reformed

Theological Seminary, br. Vanderlinde was presenting himself before Classis for examination with a view to being declared eligible for call. Rev. Poppe also welcomed the Grade 10 students of Immanuel Christian School, who were in attendance to observe proceedings, particularly the examination.

All the primary delegates were in attendance, except the delegates from Denver Emmanuel, who joined later via Zoom. Classis was therefore constituted. Rev. Carl VanDam was appointed president, Pastor James Slaa was appointed vice-president, and Rev. Rick Vanderhorst was appointed clerk. The agenda was adopted.

EXAMINATION

Classis proceeded to the examination of br. Mark Vanderlinde. He provided the required documents allowing Classis to examine him.

Br. Vanderlinde first presented his sermon proposal on Romans 12:1-2. In closed session Classis evaluated the sermon proposal and decided to sustain this portion of the examination, thus allowing the examination to proceed. After conveying the decision, Classis proceeded to examine our brother regarding his spiritual life and motives for becoming a minister, then on Old Testament exegesis focusing on 1 Samuel 8, then on New Testament exegesis focusing on Mark 1:1-34, then finally on doctrine and creeds (focusing on the doctrine of man, the doctrine and person of Christ, and the doctrine of election). Once again Classis went into closed session and decided that the second part of the examination was also satisfactory and therefore declared that br. Mark Vanderlinde was eligible for call in the Canadian Reformed Churches for a period of three years. Brother Vanderlinde was informed of this decision, and together all rejoiced at this blessing! After Scripture reading of 2 Timothy 4, prayer was offered for br. Vanderlinde and his family, thanking God for the successful examination and praying that br. Vanderlinde would receive a call to the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

DENVER

In closed session, a report was read of a church visit to Emmanuel American Reformed Church of Denver, CO. Included in this report was the disheartening development that this congregation can no longer continue as an instituted congregation of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. This is in part because two of the five office-bearers are moving away from this congregation, and an additional office-bearer will be joining another church in the area. They will remain as instituted church until after the Denver Family Camp in mid July. After that it will continue as an independent Reformed church. In the interim the existing office-bearers will care for the flock to ensure that no members will be left alone. Also, in the interim, Classis appointed Rev. Joe Poppe as a Counsellor (Art 45 CO) to aid them in the transition. Classis inquired about and was assured regarding the proper safety and distribution of remaining funds. In addition to this report there was a letter from the Committee for Aid to Needy Churches (CANC) seeking direction regarding support for Denver, since they will no longer need funds due to the departure of their pastor at the end of June. Classis instructed the CANC to stop sending support and Classis will inform the churches that the requisition for the second half of the year will no longer be required. The delegates from Denver expressed to Classis and to the churches of Manitoba their deep appreciation and thankfulness for all the support they received over the years, both spiritually and financially. There were words

of well-wishing and prayer was offered as well for the brothers and sisters in Denver.

ADVICE, REPORTS, & CORRESPONDENCE

Question Period was held as per Article 44 of the Church Order. One church requested advice in a matter of discipline with a view to proceeding to the second public announcement for a non-communicant member.

A report was received from the Committee for Contact with Neighbouring Classes and Presbyteries (CCNCP) requesting input from the churches regarding filling a vacancy in this committee due to the departure of Rev. Steve Vandevelde. Classis also received correspondence from the General Synod appointed standing Committee for Ecumenical Relations (CER) requesting classis to inform CER about any ecumenical relations. Classis instructed the CCNCP to inform CER of their activities. Another report was received very late and declared inadmissible, with encouragement to resubmit it to the next classis.

An additional correspondence was received very late but was declared admissible due to time sensitivity. Redeemer church informed Classis with sadness that Rev. James Zekveld and his family have withdrawn their membership from Redeemer CanRC because of his acceptance of the call to the Trinity Covenant Church of Fort St. John, BC (Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches), with which we do not have ecclesiastical fellowship. Redeemer church requested Classis to decide that Rev. James Zekveld no longer retains any ministerial credentials in Classis and in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Classis so decided, and at the same time expressed thankfulness for Rev. Zekveld's faithful and fruitful labours and activities in the Ambassador CanRC mission work for the past five years. Classis expressed wishes for God's blessing on him as he continues to pastor at Trinity Covenant Church. Classis also wished blessing on the work that continues in and for Ambassador church, including the establishment of a calling committee and the search for a new missionary.

The convening church for the next classis will be Carman East. The date will be September 22, 2023, DV, at 9:00 am. Classis also made suggestions for officers for the next classis. With thankfulness the president ruled that brotherly censure was not necessary (Art 34 CO).

The Acts of Classis were adopted and the Press Release was approved. Rev. VanDam led in closing devotions and Classis was closed. 

For Classis, Pastor James Slaa

