




Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
Year-End 2014

A cozy interior scene featuring a green lantern on the left, a pair of red boots with white laces in the foreground, and a window with blue textured glass in the background. The scene is warmly lit, suggesting a comfortable and inviting atmosphere.

*Best Wishes and the
Lord's blessings
in the year 2015
to all our readers*

Dr. J. Visscher, editor

Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer, co-editor

Rev. E. Kampen, co-editor

Rev. K. Stam, co-editor

Dr. C. Van Dam, co-editor

Mrs. L. Veenendaal, copy manager



Cornelis Van Dam

Professor emeritus of Old Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org

New Year Challenge and Joy

As we leave one year behind, we look forward to a new one. What will it bring? For many Christians, more oppression, misery, and pain. Especially in North Korea and the Middle East the suffering of countless believers has been of staggering proportions. Communists and Muslims who hate Christianity make a frontal assault on the children of God, killing and imprisoning with impunity. One can imagine that like the souls below the altar in Revelation 6, they too can cry: “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Yet, in spite of their wretched condition, they cling to the faith entrusted to them. Willingly they face death rather than deny their Lord and Saviour. Their choices in life are very clear and stark. Luther’s hymn resounds with them: “Let goods and kindred go; this mortal life also, the body they may kill, God’s truth abideth still.” We cannot begin to imagine what these believers go through.

Yet their challenge to hold on to the faith also brings them the deep and lasting joy of knowing their Saviour in circumstances that bind them in unbreakable bonds of love and commitment to their Lord. Their love for him knows no bounds and they literally sacrifice everything, including this earthly life, for him. Although it may be beyond our comprehension, they experience the word of our Saviour. “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven” (Matt 5:11-12). And the Lord gives them the peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:7).

Our challenge

As we pray for these Christians, we should realize that many of them also pray for us. They correctly see that we need their prayers for we too face enormous challenges. In the Western world, Satan does not use the tactic of a frontal assault. He has more insidious weapons at his disposal, one of which is the culture of narcissism and individualism.

Oppression and persecution have a way of strengthening the faith and making clear what is really important in life. However, freedom, prosperity, and the seductive power of materialism can be very corrosive and damaging for the faith. History shows that when we don’t seem to “need” God as much, he tends to fade more into the background. The danger is that the things of this life become more and more important and can even form the focus of our lives.

The challenge we face is to oppose and counter the caustic and subtle influences of our ungodly culture. The only real solution is to grow into a closer relationship with God even as the world tugs at our hearts and minds. Nurturing and cultivating a living bond with our Lord and Maker is the only adequate answer to the demonic challenges of our time. In short we need more and more to know our God and Saviour.

Today we enjoy unprecedented access to knowledge. Computers and search engines have made for information overload. But that is not the kind of knowledge that is needed.

Many years ago Hosea warned, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge” (4:6). What the prophet had in mind was not intellectual knowledge. In theory Israel knew who God was and knew what the Lord expected of them in terms of outward obedience. The problem was that they did not heed God’s will and live in close communion with him. To know God is to love him and to treasure prayerful fellowship with him; it is to experience his nearness and grace. As those living in the last age, to know God includes being in awe of the privilege of being a child of Father in heaven who of mere grace has reached down to us unworthy beings and embraced us in unfathomable love in Jesus Christ. It means being in awe of Almighty God, Creator and Renewer of all things, before whom we worship in holy reverence and fear. While the worldly culture around us is fixated on individualistic interests and what *I* want and what works for *me*, a child of God is focussed on his Lord and Saviour and what *he* wants.

The Lord has richly blessed us in the past year. As the overview elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion* shows, churches could gather in peace and freedom and evangelism and mission projects prospered. We have been richly blessed with faithful office bearers, with Christian education, and with our seminary. Also on a person level God has been gracious to us in so many ways and we give thanks to him for family and friends, for the communion of saints, and for the freedoms we have as Christians in this country to live out our faith!

At the same time, as one year transitions into another, an opportunity for self-evaluation presents itself. We need to ask ourselves about the progress we are making in terms of knowing our God and Saviour and our single-minded devotion to him in all our activities. Could it be that some of the corrosive effects of the me-culture are becoming visible in our midst? Afternoon worship services are not always attended as they should be. It does not always seem to be the priority that it used to be. Trying to solve the problem by making services more user-friendly is doomed to fail. We do not go to church to feel good, to be entertained, accommodated, or to be humoured, but we go to worship our gracious God in holy reverence, to thank him for the opportunity to sing our praises to him, and to hear his Word. Does our Sunday demeanour and deportment in church always reflect the awe and privilege of meeting holy God in adoration and worship? Even the angels in heaven are in constant awe of his majesty (cf. Isa 6:1-7). Should the current dress-down culture and the fixation on what's comfortable for *me* influence us when we come into the presence of the King of kings, sovereign Lord of all the earth? Why is it that in many cases Christian education is not as widely supported by the entire church community as it used to be, in spite of the fact that times are more prosperous than when the schools were first established? On the home front, are we always finding appropriate time for family worship and personal devotions? In our hectic society and myriad commitments is there still time for reflecting on the Word and giving the Spirit the opportunity he needs to mould us as God's children after the image of Father?

The questions for the necessary godly self-examination as we enter a new year can be multiplied, but you get the idea. As the Psalmist put it: "Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name" (Ps 86:11).

Growing in knowing God and living in the fear of his holy Name will enable us by God's grace to be discerning and to see and withstand the subtle attacks of the evil one in the New Year. Then one no longer conforms to the pattern of this world, but is transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rom 12:2). Knowing God also means having the joy of the children of God.

The joy

Meditating on God and his Word gives tremendous delight and happiness (Ps 19:8; 119:162). As we fill our minds with his Word, we grow in faith, gratitude, and joy in the Lord (Ps 119:11; Col 3:16). Christ promises us that as our life is moulded by God's Word, then Christ's joy will be in us and our joy will be complete (John 15:10-11). This joy is far richer than the world's happiness. Indeed, it is of a completely different order. The joy Christ gives can never be taken away from us. Even though we can expect hostility and even persecution from the world, our Saviour assures us that although "you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. . . but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy" (John 16:20, 22). This is possible for in this the final age, the age of the Spirit, those who know God also know the reality of Christ's promise that he will live in us by his Spirit. Believers enjoy inseparable communion with the Father and the Son (John 14:20). With the Apostle Paul, the believer can say that it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20)! So close is the relationship between the Lord and his people that when they persecute Christians, Christ is persecuted (Acts 9:4). This reality is what helps keep Christians in the Middle East, North Korea, China, and elsewhere going. Their fellowship with the living God is an unbreakable bond and they savour it and rejoice in it.

When we know God in this rich and real way, then we can face the challenges of the new year as children of light in a world of darkness. And therefore, as the imprisoned apostle wrote from his dungeon: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:4-7). Have a blessed New Year in knowing God and the joy of his salvation!

What's Inside

As 2014 comes close to its end, so does another volume of *Clarion* magazine. We are pleased to bring readers a special year-end issue, celebrating the birth of our Saviour and looking ahead to a new year. It is a blessing to have all we need to publish the magazine every two weeks for the past year.

On these pages you will find articles specially prepared with the season in mind. We have our editorial and Treasures New and Old meditation. There is an article from Rev. Klaas Stam. We are also thankful to be able to reprint an article that originally appeared in *New Horizons*, "Do You See the Angels?" by Allen Harris. And looking back on the past year for the Canadian Reformed Churches, there is Dr. James Visscher's Year-End Review. There is also a message from the publisher.

This final issue of the year contains many other articles: news reports from the federation, the final article in a series from Rev. Eric Kampen, and a variety of regular columns.

One of our traditions at *Clarion* is to print greetings from members throughout the federation. May I do so as well: to all our readers, I wish you a blessed Christmas season and joyful New Year.

Laura Veenendaal

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvliuwer, E. Kampen, K. Stam, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER

Clarion
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert AB T8N 5J5
E-Mail: veenendaal@telus.net

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

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TREASURES, NEW & OLD

MATTHEW 13:52

Reasons for Joy

“They will rejoice before you.”

(Isaiah 9:3)

It is the season of joy. This is just one of the many descriptions of Christmas. It is an accurate description of Christmas for reasons I'll explain in just a moment. But before we get there, let's ponder what joy is. Joy is an emotion, an emotion of great happiness that wells up in your heart.

Life contains events that bring great happiness. No doubt you have experienced this at some point. Maybe it was your wedding day. Maybe it was the birth of your child or grandchild. The joy of Christmas can be compared to the joy you experience at such moments. Christmas is an event that brings great happiness. Or to maybe say it more accurately, the Lord increases your joy through the Christmas event.

This is the way the prophet Isaiah speaks in 9:3. He says that the Lord has increased the joy of his people. And then Isaiah goes on to say of the people of God, “They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.” Their joy before the Lord is compared to the great happiness experienced during certain life events.

But why is there this great happiness that can be compared to the joy of children being born or people getting married? Why is the Christmas season reason for you to rejoice before the Lord? Because of what the Lord has done for you through Jesus Christ! In the verses immediately following Isaiah 9:3 the prophet provides three reasons for your joy.

The first reason for your joy is that through Jesus Christ the Lord our God shattered the yoke that lay upon us because of our enemies. In Isaiah 9:4 the prophet compares the victory of Christ on the cross to the day of Midian's defeat. He does so because the victory of Christ belongs to the Lord alone. So rejoice before the Lord because Christ has shattered the yoke of sin and death! He has increased your joy.

The second reason for your joy is that the final victory of Christ over all our enemies has been guaranteed. In Isaiah 9:5 the prophet draws a picture of the end of all war.

He declares, “Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.” Everyone who has experienced war knows that with the end of war there is great joy. This was certainly the experience of many in Europe when the Allied armies defeated the German army. As the Allied troops rolled through villages the townspeople came out to greet them with shouts of joy.

Because we anticipate experiencing great joy over the end of all spiritual warfare we can already now, in the words of Lord's Day 22, feel in our heart the beginning of eternal joy! Rejoice before the Lord for he has increased your joy.

The third reason for your joy brings us to words that are often repeated during the Christmas season, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given” (9:6). The joy of Christmas is not just like the joy we experience at the birth of a child. It is the very same joy. For to *us* a child is born. For to *us* a son is given.

His birth brings us such great joy because of what he grows up to become. He grows up to become our everlasting King: “And the government will be upon his shoulders. . . of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.”

What follows the end of war in the kingdom of God? What happens once all the garments rolled in blood are burned in the fire? There is everlasting peace. This is what the child born to us will do for us as our everlasting King. As the Prince of Peace he will bring about everlasting peace! Rejoice before the Lord for he has increased your joy.

He has increased your joy by giving you his son. To you a child is born. This child grew up to shatter the yoke of sin that lay heavy on your shoulders. This child grew up to ascend to the right hand of God from where he will bring about the end of war and usher in everlasting peace. For these reasons the celebration of his birth is indeed a season of joy. May you have a joyous Christmas!



Doug Vandeburgt

Co-pastor of the Canadian
Reformed Church at Langley,
British Columbia
dvandeburgt@gmail.com

Do You See the Angels?

Allen Harris

This article was originally published in New Horizons magazine. It is reprinted with permission.

If you are a genuine believer in Jesus Christ, not simply a religious person who is sympathetic to Christianity, then you live simultaneously in two worlds. You, of course, live in the world you can see and touch, like everyone else. But, unlike unbelievers, you are aware of a world you cannot see, a heavenly reality you know only by faith.

You affirm this, but sometimes it is hard to distinguish what you cannot see from fantasy. This is true especially in hard times, when God seems to be absent and it feels as if this world is all there is.

The Book of Revelation was written to Christians in hard times to *reveal* what we cannot see: the cosmic battle going on between God and Satan in this world. It portrays what sometimes seems so unlikely to us, that Jesus is Lord of all history, and that he will *win* in the end. It opens our eyes to the world we cannot see, to give us hope in the suffering of this world.

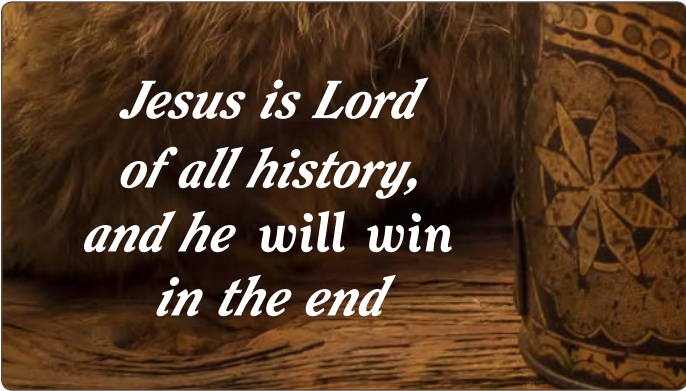
This dual perspective is nowhere more evident than in the Christmas story. Let us examine that familiar story from these two perspectives. First, we shall consider the world of what Mary and Joseph saw and felt when it seemed that God had abandoned them. Then we shall see how the Bible gives us a glimpse of the heavenly reality and involvement.

The earthly perspective

Mary got pregnant before her marriage to Joseph. Imagine the awkwardness and humiliation she must have felt. There was no way to convince people that she was innocent. Those must have been very lonely days for her. Joseph seriously considered a private divorce to spare her further shame. Did she think, “Lord, why don’t you vindicate me?”

He did vindicate her, at least to Joseph, but then she heard that the Roman government required them to travel eighty miles to Bethlehem for a census. Did she think, “This does not seem like very good timing, Lord?” Having to walk

eighty miles when she was nearly due to deliver her son did not suggest that God was in control, but rather Caesar Augustus. Well, at least she would be spared the shame of family embarrassment at the birth. Small comfort.



*Jesus is Lord
of all history,
and he will win
in the end*

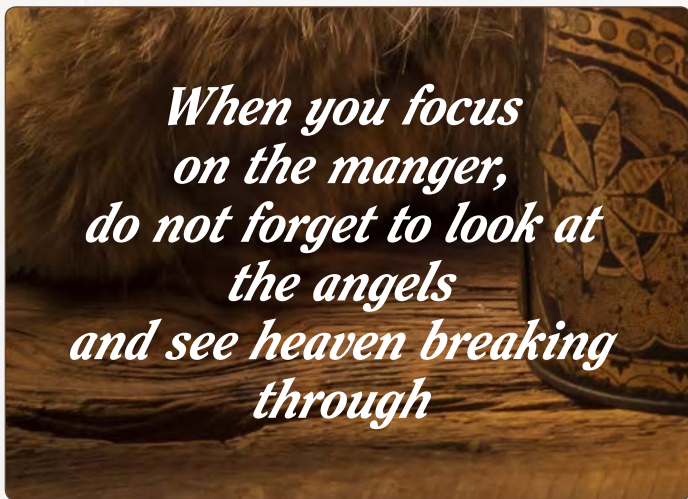
So they arrived at Bethlehem. The “inn” that Luke speaks of was a half-open enclosure. It was first come, first served. Were there relatives living there who had heard of Mary’s pregnancy and refused hospitality to such a shameful woman? We are not told. All we know is that no one made room for her when she went into labour. Joseph undoubtedly pleaded her case: “Please, my wife is having a baby!” Response: “Go have it in the barn.” It was probably a cave in the nearby limestone hills where animals were sheltered.

So “she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7, ESV). *She* wrapped him; she laid him. She did not receive help from any other woman. All she had was Joseph, and you women can tell us how much help a man is at that point!

Did she wonder, “Where are you, Lord?” Could she comprehend that he was right there – lying in the manger?!

They tried to settle down after the birth. They were dog-tired, and the animals were no help. Suddenly, as they were drifting off to sleep, they heard the rough voices of shepherds outside: “Is there a baby in here?” I can hear Joseph: “You gotta be kidding! Do we have to move?” Remember that Mary and Joseph had not gotten the memo from the angels about shepherds coming to worship.

They decided to stay in Bethlehem and try to make a new life there. It must have been difficult to find a home and start up a carpentry business in a new area. We know at least that before too long they had a house to live in, since Matthew mentions that the magi came to visit them there (Matt 2:11).



*When you focus
on the manger,
do not forget to look at
the angels
and see heaven breaking
through*

But then Joseph learned that Herod was out to kill his son, so they were uprooted again and took a hasty, long journey as refugees to Egypt. While they were there, they heard that Herod’s soldiers had slaughtered all the baby boys in the environs of Bethlehem two years old and under – probably about twenty infants. That was about the same number of children that were gunned down in Newtown, Connecticut, eleven days before Christmas [2012]. Remember the horror we felt about that child massacre.

Mary and Joseph certainly knew those families. They probably knew some of them well. Jesus may have played with some who were killed because of him. Surely Mary and Joseph felt deep grief and possibly guilt. “God, what are you doing? This world is so full of pain. Where are you?”

The heavenly perspective

Before our hearts are too weighed down, let us look at the same story from the heavenly perspective. God reveals himself again and again – largely through *angels*, those messengers of heavenly reality.

In Luke 1, we read that Zechariah was an aged priest – ordinary, but faithful. An angel appeared to him to announce that his wife, Elizabeth, would give miraculous birth to a son, John. Then an angel announced the birth of the Messiah to Mary, his mother. So she knew that whatever would happen, God would be with her.

Elizabeth rejoiced when Mary, her relative, came to visit her, because Elizabeth’s baby, John, leapt in her womb at Jesus’ presence.

Mary was given a song, which she sang to Elizabeth. Mary was no doubt smart and spiritual, but what Galilean teenager could have crafted “the Magnificat” extemporaneously? The song must have encouraged Mary as much as it has encouraged countless believers down through the ages.

Then an angel, in a dream, vindicated Mary to Joseph and assured him of her innocence and supernatural pregnancy (Matt 1:20-25).

An angel announced the birth of the Messiah to some shepherds, and was then joined in a heavenly chorus. (I know the Greek says they “said” [Luke 2:13], but could such a pronouncement have been without melodic crescendo?)

Luke tells us that after the shepherds reported to her what they had seen and heard, “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19, ESV). Surely she was given a glimpse of the Lord who was indeed with her, and she was comforted.

One or two years later, as they began their life in Bethlehem, some strangers in rich garb came to their door from the east and said a light had led them to this house, where the king of the Jews was living. The visitors then presented extravagant gifts. Mary and Joseph did not know that these were God’s provisions for a long trip that they would soon need to make. This was another evidence that he was with them.

Again an angel appeared to Joseph and warned him of Herod’s nefarious plan. God warned, delivered, and protected them. And in another year or so, this dreadful man was dead. In the coming years, Mary would see her

son be misunderstood, mistreated, and then crucified. She didn't see that it would be in his moment of deepest agony, at Gethsemane, that God would again reveal the unseen reality with an angel's comfort (Luke 22:43).

Jesus' crucifixion crushed all hope for his disciples. God seemed to them to be totally absent. Evil appeared to have won the day, and it was hard to imagine going on. But on the third day, Mary, together with other women, would have the resurrection of Jesus announced to them by angels (Matt 28:2-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:4-7; John 20:12-13). Again the unseen inhabitants of our world disclosed the reality we so need to perceive in our darkest hours. They announced the power and presence of God in a way that changed everything, transforming the very world that seeks to erase him from our thoughts. No matter how grim your circumstances, the resurrection of Jesus is your window into that reality and hope.

The risen Christ appeared to many over the next forty days. Then he ascended to heaven, where he is no longer seen. He is now seated at God's "right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority" (Eph 1:20-21, ESV). And God has even "raised *us* up with him and seated us *with him* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6, ESV). Our true life is "hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3, ESV). You cannot see that any more than you can see the angels, but it is as real as the chair you are sitting in. Ah, but "when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col 3:4, ESV). This is that enduring reality of which this world is only shadows.

Yes, we live in a suffering world. When you feel overwhelmed by your trials and wonder where in the world God is, I ask you, as strange as it sounds, to look at the Christmas story. Realize that there is always a dual drama unfolding – one that we can see, and one that we cannot.

When you focus on the manger, do not forget to look at the angels and see heaven breaking through. Then, like Paul, you will not lose heart because you know that "this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." We look "not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:17-18).

The Song of Mary

*My soul does magnify
the Lord, for he Most High
has shown to me his favour.
I praise him with my voice;
my spirit does rejoice
in him, my God and Saviour.*

*The Lord, so good and great,
looked on my lowly state.
Now will all generations
from age to age attest
how richly I am blest.
Great is my exaltation!*

*How holy is his name!
The Mighty One, he came
and showed me his great favour.
With mercy he is near
to all who him revere;
his love endures forever.*

Hymn 17, Book of Praise

The Baby Jesus



Klaas Stam

Minister emeritus of the
Canadian Reformed Church at
Hamilton, Ontario
cstam@sourcecable.net

“Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

(Psalm 2:12)

We live in a time of uncertainty and insecurity. Lately things have not been going well in the world. Some of the things that bother me most this Christmas? There is the constant Russian provocation in the Ukraine. Mr. Putin seems to be building another empire. The “cold war” is heating up.

There is the ferocious fighting in the Arabic world. ISIL does not hesitate to brutally murder thousands of men, women, and children. In Africa Al Shebaab kidnaps hundreds of girls and ambushes others. Palestinians are firing rockets at Israelis. The Israeli Defence Force strikes back. Synagogues are killing floors.

There is widespread concern over the spread of Ebola. Thousands of people have already died from this illness. Many others are infected with the Ebola virus. There is again hunger in the Sahel area. Because of brutal fighting in the Sudan millions of people have fled their homeland and are congregated in unsafe refugee camps. No refugee feels protected. It seems that the world is caught in a death spiral. In this kind of a world we celebrate Christmas.

What is Christmas about?

Should you ask most people what Christmas means, the answer would probably be: Christmas? That’s when *the baby Jesus* was born. It is true. Our Lord came into this world in the weakness of human flesh, subject to all the conditions in which every baby is born. He became completely like us, except without sin (Heb 5:15).

Do you think that Russian soldiers and Islamic Jihadists care about the baby Jesus? What effect can the birth of a little baby born in poverty and laid in a dungy manger have

on the powerfully unfolding events in this angry world? His birth did lead to a massacre: King Herod had all the children in Bethlehem under a certain age killed without any pardon or mercy. The man was a beast, as there are many beasts today.

Christmas is about the baby Jesus. But these are all external matters. Once again Christmas reminds me of my own sins and sinfulness. Never mind Putin or ISIL, it is amazing that the Son of God was willing to take upon himself *my* curse. To do this he came as the baby Jesus, starting where we all start: in the womb and through the difficult procedure of birth.

Okay. But when we read Psalm 2 we do receive a more complete picture. The manger-child is no longer a cooing baby. He has been elevated to kingship. He has received all power in heaven and on earth.

Psalm 2 has been called a “coronation” psalm, commemorating the enthronement of David as Israel’s king. We find a clear indication of this in the verses 6 and 7, “I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill. I will proclaim the decree of the Lord: He said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’”

This does not mean that before Jesus birth in Bethlehem and the enthronement in Jerusalem Jesus was not God’s Son or that God was not his Father. But it means that especially then when David ascended to the throne, God officially and publicly ordained the eternal Kingship of Jesus, David’s Son and Lord.

In the New Testament Christ’s coronation is evidenced in *his resurrection*. Paul said, “We tell you the good news: what God promised to our fathers, he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’” (Acts 13:32, 33). The great coronation and enthronement on the throne in heaven came after our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead and ascended into the glory

of his Father. We have a King in heaven who is coming to judge the living and the dead.

Kiss the Son

The baby Jesus is a baby no more. He is a full-grown Lord who lives in glory and is preparing the day of his coming, the great Day of Judgment. The Psalm tells us that the nations conspire and the people plot in vain. All their power and cunning is useless. Psalm 2 –as all other Psalms– teaches us to recognize the glory of the Son. There lies the true value of the Psalms: *they are all perfectly Christological.*

How ought we to prepare for and expect the coming of the King, Jesus Christ? Psalm 2 has only one way: “Kiss the Son.” What’s this about kissing? Not every kiss is the same. Judas tried to betray the Lord with a kiss. Kisses

are easily given: Stalin once kissed Putin, and called him a “*Doerak*.” Check that word out. But that kiss was only to seal a conspiracy. KGB stuff. In the world of dirty politics much kissing is hypocritical, *pro forma*. Such kisses lead to the Lord’s anger and to destruction. We sometimes tend to forget that the Son’s “wrath can flare up in a moment” (Ps 2:12). It does not mean that the Lord has a bad temper. He is long-suffering. But he is no longer the baby Jesus. He comes as judge of all. Beware of his wrath.

The kiss that we must give is the kiss of joyful recognition. It comes with an exuberant embrace. Our kiss is not *pro forma* but *pro rege*. In the fear and chaos of the Day of Judgment, “blessed are all who take refuge in him” (Ps 2:12C).

Ebenezer

*The Lord, our salvation and light,
The guide of our strength and our days,
Has brought us together to-night,
A new Ebenezer to raise:
The year we have now passed through,
His goodness with blessings has crown'd,
Each morning her mercies were new,
Then let our thanksgivings abound.*

*His Gospel, throughout the long year,
From Sabbath to Sabbath he gave;
How oft has he met with us here,
And shown himself mighty to save?
His candestick has been remov'd
From churches once privileged thus;
But though we unworthy have prov'd,
It still is continu'd to us.*

*For so many mercies receiv'd,
Alas! what returns have we made?
His Spirit we often have griev'd,
And evil for good have repaid,
How well it becomes us to cry,
“Oh! who is a God like to thee?
Who passest iniquities by,
And plungest them deep in the sea!”*

*To Jesus, who sits on the throne,
Our best hallelujahs we bring;
To thee it is owing along
That we are permitted to sing:
Assist us, we pray, to lament
The sins of the year that is past
And grant that the next may be spent
Far more to thy praise than the last.*

John Newton



Eric Kampen

Minister of the
Canadian Reformed Church
at Orangeville, Ontario
eric.kampen@canrc.org

The History of Contact Between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (3)

The struggle to live in ecclesiastical fellowship

Second thoughts

The previous two articles described the long and arduous history that led to the establishment of ecclesiastical fellowship between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 2001. That this did not result in a scenario of the two churches living happily ever after is evident from the acts of the synod held in 2004. It had to deal with a number of appeals. Some went so far as to call for rescinding the decision to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship. Other appeals took issue with the way the 2001 synod had rejected the words added to the agreement about the supervision of the Lord's Table by the 1998 synod.

The synod denied the appeals and maintained the relationship, but the relationship did not receive a wholehearted endorsement. This is evident in the mandate given to the committee, prompted in part its own report. In its report to the synod, the committee indicated it saw no point in just a general discussion on differences, as they had been discussed extensively over the years and many position papers had been prepared. It suggested discussion should focus on the fencing of the Lord's Table and confessional membership.

The 2004 synod deemed it beneficial if the churches would receive evidence of these many discussions and their outcomes. Accordingly, it mandated the committee to publish a synopsis on the various issues and position

papers written over the previous twenty years. Further, it mandated the committee to focus discussion on the two points of the agreement, "as amended by Synod Fergus 1998." By doing this, the 2004 synod hurdled backward over the 2001 synod to 1998, to the amendment that had proven to be an obstacle to moving the relationship forward.

This leap back to 1998 shows second thoughts about the relationship, which is reinforced by the way the synod of 2004 stated that "the goal of these discussions should be to determine whether this unity of the faith regarding the church, the covenant and the sacraments is adequately and faithfully expressed in our confessional standards. . . ." The overall impression of this decision is that the OPC continued to be under the scrutiny of the CanRC. The unity of faith was still an open question.

Being consistent

The report submitted to the 2007 synod contained the requested synopsis of the discussions. It is found in the appendix to the acts of that synod. The committee itself recommended that this synopsis serve as the basis for further discussion with the OPC. The synod, however, put a stop to this, exposing the inconsistency with the fact that ecclesiastical fellowship had been established. It indicated that the mandate of Synod 2004 to continue the discussion with the OPC on the existing differences "cannot be repeated because it does not take into account

the decision of Synod Neerlandia (2001) to establish ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC. The establishment of ecclesiastical fellowship means that unity of faith is recognized.” It indicated that there were many other issues facing the churches that needed attention. The matters of supervision of the Lord’s Table and confessional membership should be pursued where appropriate, but should not dominate. By this, the synod of 2007 put the relationship in proper perspective, stepping away from the narrow focus that had dominated the relationship for so many years.

Remaining cloud over the relationship

Anyone who peruses the reports to the 2010 and 2013 synods by the committee that looks after contact with the OPC will see there is a flourishing relationship of mutual trust and appreciation. Committees meet annually to share and discuss what is happening in their respective churches. The acts of these synods, however, indicate there continues to be a cloud over the relationship from the side of the CanRC. There is a push by some to keep issues of the past front and center. The synod of 2010, for example, considered that, while issues like supervision of the Lord’s Table and confessional membership should not be labelled as “outstanding divergencies,” and it was not proper to belabour these issues, nevertheless felt they should be discussed “purposefully and vigorously.” This language did not reappear in the actual mandate, but it cast a cloud over the relationship. The word “purposefully” suggests there is some goal that should be achieved before the discussions can stop. The history of contact suggested the goal was uniformity. The word “vigorously” seems quite inappropriate for a meeting between brothers, implying that the one side should use strong terms to bring the other to agreement. This does not reflect the atmosphere of ecclesiastical fellowship where brothers meet as equals before the Lord. There is no sense of considering others better than oneself.

This cloud reappeared at the 2013 synod. One submission interacting with the report of the committee that has contact with the OPC draws attention to the fact that there is no evidence that the committee discussed the matters of confessional membership and supervision

of the Lord’s Supper “in a purposeful and vigorous way.” Another submission charges that the OPC has not changed its approach and practice and that there is no evidence that the committee discussed these matters. Rather than interact with such suggestions, by pointing to the direction set by the 2007 synod, the 2013 synod allowed a cloud of suspicion to hang over the relationship as it leaped all the way back to 2001 and mandated the committee to give “particular attention ... to the functioning of the 2001 agreement.” It is rather remarkable that the 2013 synod allowed the comments from two churches, out of fifty-five churches, to dictate the public face of the CanRC towards the OPC. It gives the impression that the supervision of the Lord’s Supper and confessional membership is all the CanRC either think or care about, and implies, without evidence that the OPC is deficient in these areas as long as they do not exactly imitate CanRC practices.

Conclusion

The history of contact between the CanRC and OPC has travelled a long and arduous road. There was a sparkle of light after fifteen years from the first time the matter appeared on the agenda of a general synod, when the synod of 1977 finally explicitly stated what had been explicitly assumed, namely, that in the OPC the CanRC met fellow faithful churches. It took another twenty-four years, filled with internal dissension and discussion and critiquing of the brotherhood in the OPC, before the OPC finally called the CanRC to task and Synod 2001 responded in humility, admitting past faults and working out the implication of recognizing the OPC as a true church, by entering into ecclesiastical fellowship. The years following that decision have seen many positive developments in the relationship, but it labours under a cloud of suspicion coming from the CanRC side. It is to be hoped that future synods will not let the cloud of suspicion continue to set the agenda for the relationship but allow the relationship to function for its intended purpose, namely, that of mutual support, accountability and encouragement. After more than fifty years of interaction, in which the OPC has shown tremendous patience and love with the CanRC, it should be clear we are dealing with a true sister church.



Cornelis Van Dam

*Professor emeritus of Old Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org*

Israel not on the Map

A fact unknown to many in the Western world is that the pervasive Arab propaganda against Israel and its very existence means that Palestinian maps do not include the state of Israel. This means that school children learning their geography are not taught that there is a legitimate country called Israel. Rather the strong impression created as they grow up and hear and learn of Israel's existence is not a legal state and must disappear. It's not on their map. It doesn't belong in the Middle East. Indeed, the elimination of Israel is the stated and well advertised aim of groups like Hamas and the chairman of its "parent" the Muslim Brotherhood. Israel must go! Small wonder that there has never been a successful peace deal with Israel. The willingness on the part of the leaders in the Palestinian Authority is simply not there to recognize Israel, let alone make a peace treaty with it.

All of this was underlined this fall when a popular Arab television program broadcast from Saudi Arabia's MBC TV featured Israeli Arab citizens, Manal Moussa, twenty-five, and Haitham Khalailah, twenty-four, as contestants on its Arab Idol program. The sin of this station in the eyes of many of the hundreds of millions who watched it was that it showed a map with Israel on it as the country of origin for their guests. The media reported that within minutes there was a tremendous spontaneous uproar and protest, not just from Palestinians, but from the entire Arab world because of this transgression. Israel should not even be mentioned! It should not be on the map! Because of the vigorous protests and threats of future boycott, the station was forced to apologize and claimed that showing a map with Israel on it was a "technical error." The country of origin was quickly called Palestine, and the singers were identified as Palestinians, even though they hold Israeli passports.

Such an incident is quite sobering and shows that even to recognize the existence of Israel is considered intolerable in the Arab world, including the upcoming younger generation. As the Gatestone Institute stated on their website: "If a powerful TV network such as MBC was unable to face pressure and intimidation and had to remove Israel from its map, how can anyone seriously expect that Arab leaders will be able to win the backing of their people for an initiative that talks about 'establishing normal relations' with Israel? And how can anyone seriously expect that if Israel pulled back to the pre-1967 lines, the Arab world will consider the IsraeliArab Conflict over?" The reality is, as articulated in the website of the Palestinian Media Watch, that "the Palestinian Authority makes no attempt to educate its people towards peace and coexistence with Israel. On the contrary, from every possible platform it repeatedly rejects Israel's right to exist, presents the conflict as a religious battle for Islam, depicts the establishment of Israel as an act of imperialism, and perpetuates a picture of the Middle East, both verbally and visually, in which Israel does not exist at all. Israel's destruction is said to be both inevitable and a Palestinian obligation."

So, one small step necessary for any real peace talks to succeed is for Arab leaders to put Israel back on the maps used in the classrooms of their schools. The next generation needs to be taught that Israel is a legitimate state and should be recognized as such. Such a simple and honest step would indicate a willingness by Palestinians to recognize Israel. If that step is not taken the prospects of any meaningful peace between the descendants of Jacob and Esau are extremely dim and Israel will remain a thorn in the side of the Islamic Middle East.

Hearts, Legs, and Lungs on Fire?

Leah Aasman

In the middle of a monthly ROOTS meeting about a year ago, a comment was shared by a participant to a team member that they really enjoyed participating in ROOTS events and would love to see more events happening in between the two big conferences that we organize every year. This triggered one of many brainstorm sessions by the team, resulting in the idea that we would try something new: we decided to host events on the last Sunday of each month where we could meet as Christian youth, sing together, listen to a short speech, and foster continued relationships within the communion of saints. We coined these evenings “Hearts on Fire” and picked out the theme of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, focussing each speech on a different aspect of love and how to improve our love to better reflect the love of our Father.

But I suppose I’m getting ahead of myself and should first explain who and what ROOTS is. The ROOTS team is a group of ten young adults in the central Ontario area who seek to “encourage and support the growth of a community of young people as they increase in love for Jesus Christ,” as stated in our mission statement. We are all professing members of Canadian and United Reformed churches who work collaboratively with youth groups around Ontario to organize events throughout the year that gather youth to grow together in the service of our God, to train in leadership, to encourage community service, and to foster a sense of community within the younger demographic of the communion of saints. These events include two big weekend conferences, community service days, Youth Leadership Symposiums, Hearts on Fire, and a variety of other fun events, under the supervision of the Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church of Burlington. The name “ROOTS” came out of Colossians 2:6-7 which encourages us to “continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

We set up the very first Hearts on Fire evening, quite unsure of what to expect or if anyone would be interested in coming out. But as it came closer to 7:30, people kept



pouring into the church and soon the whole auditorium was filled! It would quite something to enjoy an evening of singing with around three or four hundred youth who came from all over Ontario to hear about how “Love Is Patient.”

At the end of the evening, we made an announcement that we were looking for other churches who would be willing to host Hearts on Fire. During the refreshment time after closing, we were flooded with youth group leaders who really enjoyed the evening and were excited about the prospect of hosting an event that requires relatively little preparation or stress.

Over the next year and a half, we hosted Hearts on Fire on the last Sunday of each month in different churches all around Ontario. Each evening took on a similar forum, starting with a few songs, followed by a twenty minute speech, some more singing, closing, and announcements, and finished with some fellowship and refreshments. We sang a variety of songs from the ROOTS song book, which we picked through carefully to ensure all songs have appropriate theological content, in addition to a variety of songs from the *Book of Praise* and the *Psalter Hymnal*. The speeches each focussed on different facets of love, as outlined in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, starting with “Love is Patient,” followed by “Love is Kind,” all the way until “Love Never Fails.”

Since we finished up in September with 1 Corinthians 13:8, “Love Never Fails,” we hope to focus the next few months on the Beatitudes from Matthew 5.

Please join with us in encouraging youth to grow together in the Lord by spreading the word about Hearts on Fire, attending the events yourself, or volunteering with your youth group to host Hearts on Fire. If you have any questions about Hearts on Fire that were not addressed, please feel free to email us at contact@rootyouth.ca.

Celebration: Forty Years of Covenantal Education at Timothy Canadian Reformed School in Hamilton

“Continue in what you have learned and believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 3:14,15

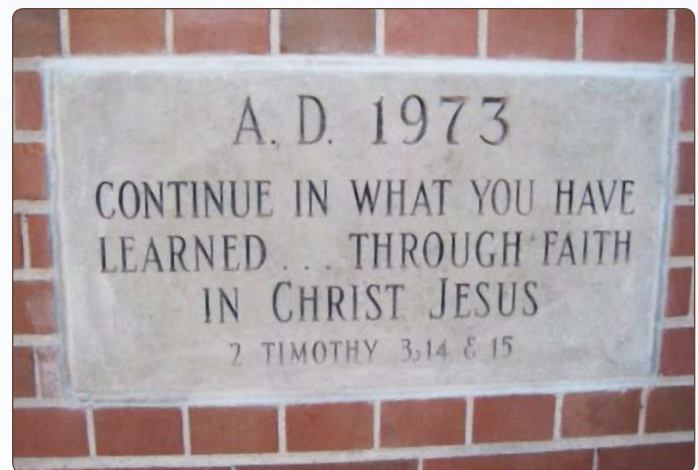
The crowd slowly gathered to the smell of bacon, sausages, and pancakes in the early morning of Saturday, June 7, 2014 to share in the celebration. After many pounds of bacon, countless links of sausage, a power outage, and too many pancakes flipped to count, everyone was ready for the formal part of the morning.

Timothy’s doors have been open for forty years of Christian education, and the Timothy community gathered together in thanksgiving and praise to our heavenly Father to commemorate this milestone.

The board chair, Ed Vanderlaan, opened the program with prayer and praise and remarked on the blessings the school has been given over the years.

Judy Kingma, principal from 1977-1985, reminisced about her time at Timothy, the changes and growth seen over her years as principal of the school. A few things she highlighted were: the story telling full of the great deeds of the LORD, school devotions with the entire student body in one room, singing the praises of the LORD, skating on a frozen field by the first school building, and forts in the bushes at recess time.

Henk Nobel, principal from 1985-1997, focussed on the wonder of our created world. Have you ever seen a bull fly, or pizza grow on trees? Would these be any more amazing to see than watching an eagle fly or acorns grow on trees? “And then there’s the wonder of living things.



And our children are full of that wonderment. What a blessing it has been to have been able to speak and to teach about the handiwork of a joyful Creator who enjoyed creating and having his world repeat the same delightful things over and over again. For forty years our God has given us the freedom to assist parents to present his wonderful world to his covenant children at Timothy.”

Henk Plug, our current principal highlighted some of the changes, the steady growth in enrolment, the “heat” day in September (and to find out later there was air conditioning in the school), the dodging of rain buckets with any amount of rain, the graffiti problem at the current building until cameras were installed, the unwanted school “pets” that made themselves at home, etc.

Timothy opened in 1973 out in the middle of farmers’ fields, with a student population of fifty-one in four classrooms, with three full-time teachers. By 1997, the farmers’ fields were Guido’s sports field and Timothy building and yard were crowded, so a move was made to

Queensdale Avenue. Little did we foresee that Timothy would be blessed with many more covenant students, and this building would only suit our needs for ten years. In the middle of the 2006/2007 school year, after months of cleaning/painting/renovating done by an army of contractors and volunteers, everyone and everything was moved again, into our current building on East 25th street. We had SOOOO much room! We would never run out of space! So we thought. After only six years in the new school, we had to add four portable classrooms to accommodate increasing enrollment.

Three different school buildings, scores of students, and several hundred different staff members have marked the years since Timothy opened its doors. Along with them, many challenges and changes came as well; technology being introduced into the classroom, new Bible and *Book of Praise* versions, resource program expansion, teacher research and development programs. There have been countless volunteers, bus drivers, board members, committee members, too numerous to count. Yet the focus

has remained the same, to educate the children in the fear of the Lord in every subject through work and play, so they could move on with a firm foundation in knowledge and love for the Lord and their neighbour.

Our building's cornerstone has traveled with us from the previous school building and was fittingly (finally) laid and unveiled at the celebration, a testament and reminder to the LORD's faithfulness.

It is this foundation of God-given freedom that links the Timothy of yesterday to the Timothy of today and tomorrow.

Mr. Nobel ended his speech with a charge to the school community going forward: "Marvel at creation, and then praise your Creator also through the wonderful avenue of the schools we are allowed to maintain. Keep alive that joy and wonder in your heavenly Father, the creator of all things, at this wonderful school, Timothy. As you enter the next forty years and beyond, glorify this God as school society; glorify this God in your classrooms; glorify this God by holding up his amazing creation before

your students; glorify this God when we speak of his wondrous works in our daily interactions with each other."

We thank God for all the blessings that he has given over the past forty years, and move forward in his grace and with the words at the end of Psalm 104 on our lips: "May the glory of the LORD endure forever. I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord. Bless the LORD, O my soul! Bless the LORD!"



Toronto Welcomes Her New Pastor

Geraldine Salomons

Photo credit Gerald Boot

After being without a pastor and teacher for nearly two and half years, there was much excitement in the air on October, 5, 2014 in the Bethel congregation. We had once again, with the blessing of the Lord, and in his time, been able to receive another minister of the Word. We received the exciting news that Candidate Bruintjes had accepted the call we had extended to him in July, as we were celebrating our sixtieth anniversary as the Toronto congregation. However, we still had to patiently and prayerfully wait until Candidate Bruintjes sustained his peremptory examination, which with God's blessing he did.



Ordination

Dr. A.J. deVisser led the installation worship service and chose for his text Isaiah 40:9-11 using as his theme: The herald of good tidings is sent to call God's people. Isaiah 40 is the second part of the book of Isaiah and often referred to as the Book of Comfort. The first part of the book of Isaiah, chapters 1-39 are referred to the Book of Judgement. Now in chapter 40 God instructs Isaiah to speak words of comfort to his people. The Babylonian captivity would come to an end and her sins had been

paid for. Isaiah, in a vision sees the Lord on his way, returning to Jerusalem, victorious. However, God's people are still despondent and Isaiah prophesies that they need a herald, someone to bring the Good News to his people. Zion and Jerusalem are called to be this herald. Jerusalem is where the priests and Levites lived. They were called to instruct God's people in the doctrines of salvation. So also today, the ministers and elders have the same calling. He encouraged Pastor Gerrit to proclaim the Word of God from the pulpit, in our homes, but also to "others whom God calls." Just as the LORD gathered his people back to Jerusalem, so also now, even though the work of a Pastor may involve struggles and resistance, Pastor Gerrit must always "be strong in the LORD and in his mighty power" (Eph 6:10). He must strive to be Christ-like and shepherd the flock so that none are left behind.



After the form for ordination was read and an affirmative answer received, we as congregation once again were able to witness the "laying on of hands" in which our most senior member, Rev. VanBeveren, was able to participate. Following the service, the Chairman of Council, Gerald Boot, welcomed the Bruintjes family to our congregation.



He thanked our Heavenly Father above all, who during the last two and a half years of vacancy blessed us with the faithful preaching of his Word each Sunday again. Opportunity was also given to those delegates present, both on behalf of Classis as well as other congregations wishing to offer their words of encouragement. Letters were also received and read.

In the afternoon service, our new Pastor used as his theme: In Jesus Christ there is no decay! God had fulfilled his promise that he had made so many years ago by sending his Son Jesus as the Messiah and, having raised him from the dead, our Saviour would never decay. The reason God had given this promise was because of our fall into sin. We must flee to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for forgiveness from all our sins. We are called to cling to Christ and abide in his grace. We may not rely on our own strength

but always walk in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Pastor Gerrit encouraged us, as he begins his ministry in our congregation, "Take care that Christ always remains front and centre."

Welcome evening

The following evening we could welcome our new Pastor and his family in a less formal way and encourage him to "Consider yourself at home." This theme was carried through a number of the presentations made by the Teen Club and as whole congregation as Annet Selles read a story introducing most of the members of our congregation to our new pastor. . . this included everyone wearing a hat and tipping it to our pastor when instructed to do so. The Men's Society presented the Bruintjes with gifts representing the various vocations in our congregation. We were also entertained by Jeopardy hosted by the Young Peoples. The choir also sang the beautiful song "I Will Serve Him All My Days." The pastor was also challenged on his knowledge of the Scriptures, of which some of the answers surprised him. One of the questions was: Who was the greatest lawbreaker in the Bible? Moses – he broke all Ten Commandments at once.

Following all of the presentations Pastor Gerrit thanked everyone for making them feel at home. We sang "Great is Thy Faithfulness" and closed the evening with prayer. A time of fellowship was enjoyed in which opportunity was given to personally speak to Pastor Gerrit. All praise and thanksgiving goes to our Heavenly Father for once again blessing our congregation in such a wonderful way!



New Pastor for Kerwood!

Phyllis Tamminga

This year at Thanksgiving we in Kerwood have much to be thankful for! As well as gathering with family and friends and enjoying the autumn colours; we were especially grateful to witness the ordination of our “rookie” pastor, Rev. J. Poort. After successfully passing his classis exam, Jeff Poort was ordained as Minister of the Word during the morning service of October 19, 2014. Rev. R. Bredenhof, from London Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church had the honours of installing our tenth minister after two and a half years of vacancy.

In the afternoon service Rev. J. Poort preached to us his inaugural sermon from Isaiah 55:6-13. The theme was “The Invaluable Invitation.” We are to seek the Lord through his Word of salvation, because of its height, its power, and its result! He reminded the congregation that it is not by any shepherd’s ability that the word has any effect, it is by God’s will and through his power. The Word always accomplishes the purposes for which God sends it out. We can therefore be eager and excited to accept the invitation to come and be fed and nourished by God’s Word every Sunday again.

Just as ministers are also instruments of God, so Rev. J. Poort has been entrusted to guide our church. Therefore Brother B. Dokter could joyfully officially welcome Rev. Poort and his family on behalf of Council and church.

After the signing of the papers, there were many letters of congratulations on behalf of the local and surrounding churches.

Welcome program

Following the afternoon service on November 2, a program was organized to welcome the Poort family. He was welcomed with much singing and presentations from the various study societies and clubs. But first a poem was read that was written by Judy Lenting. I wish I had the space to print it all, but unfortunately that is not possible. It began as follows:

We are gathered here today
To celebrate in a special way,
To welcome our new pastor and his wife,
As they begin a new chapter in their life.
We are so happy that you came
We hope you feel the same,
We hope you like our little town
And that soon you may settle down,
From Parkhill to Inwood, Wyoming they come
As well as Strathroy, Watford and then some.

Judy then went on to give a delightful poetical excerpt about all the families in the congregation.

Next our small but hearty Young People came up and read a “homemade” poem also. This was done in a clever manner by rhyming it all with Poort: They welcomed Rev. and Mrs. *Poort* and *portkins*, they promised to keep it *short*, none the less they are very *important*, Kerwood is no holiday *resort*, yet our hospitality no one can *thwart*. We are the *sort* that grows on you like a *wart*, yet we always lend *support*, from tech to child *support*, We will challenge you in any *sport*, from the volleyball *court* to the tennis *court*. We hope we don’t fall *short* of your expectations. But we are very happy we *imported* you Family *Poort*. And I may add, as we all are.



Rev. and Mrs. J. Poort



Next Irene VanGorkum came forward and spoke on behalf of the Women's Society, who meets every Wednesday morning at 9:30. She gave a brief comical history, based on the minute book, of how they started in 1957. Their first purchase was new carpet for the church. It was a very busy time with lots of babies so they also purchased a playpen for the nursery. The first function (one of many!) was organizing a welcome evening for Rev. Vanderwel. She continued to tell of many other current activities that they were involved in and hoped Mrs. Poort would feel welcome to join them.

Teen Club was next on the list. They meet once a month to study God's Word. They then involved Rev. Poort in a game in having to guess the teens' names, ages, and who their parents were. As Rev. Poort started to scratch his head, his wife quietly came up to assist him!

This was followed by a delightful presentation from Sunday School and Kids Club. It was directed by Tracy VanBerkel and they entertained us by singing "Trust and Obey" and "Father I Adore You."

Now from the opposite of the spectrum, the EverGreen Club; the seniors of the congregation. Or as Mr. Smid so nicely put it, the "Old Folks!" But he continued to say they are still very young at heart. They meet every other Tuesday Morning at each other's homes, sing their favourite songs, study Scripture, and reflect on the faith and love that they receive from their Heavenly Father.



Then, new to Kerwood, was our Welcome Committee Quartet! Consisting of Don VanGorkum, Tracy VanBerkel, William Dokter, and Ineke Haan, they serenaded the Poort family (and the congregation) with a welcome jingle all about KER-WOOD! We decided this quartet would be thoroughly enjoyed by the residents at the nursing home, which we visit the second Sunday of the month.

Mike Janssens then came forward and presented the minister with a map to find where everyone lives, since some tend to live a little far away. And even though we seem to be a smaller congregation, we should warn you that changes drastically in the summer when people come to visit "our" famous provincial campground, the Pineries. It may be due to our awesome hospitality. You never have to drive back between services. The host family will always find you an eager family to take you home and feed you some delicious baking and a bowl soup. They will even entertain you with a game of bocce ball or euchre if it is pouring rain.

The evening ended with a delicious meal provided by members of the congregation and an opportunity for everyone to socialize and get better acquainted with the Poort family.

I would like to close this report with the ending of Judy Lenting's poem: "We thank God you've come here, to bring God's Word loud and clear. May he bless you in all you do, to be faithful, trustworthy, and true. May it be our heart and aim, to bring glory to God's name."



From the Publisher

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

Unrest

Ours are times of unrest. This past year has seen war break out again in Israel and Gaza, the brutal rise of the Islamic State, and provocative Russian military action. Nations such as Iran and North Korea continue to be a danger to their neighbours and the world. Closer to home, we were recently shocked by the murders of two Canadian servicemen, and the fire inside Centre Block on Parliament Hill.

We know that such unrest is the result of sin, and we know it personally, too. Our lives are often marked by unrest. We can carry heavy burdens because of our broken world and our own corrupted and restless hearts.

Rest

What good news our Lord Jesus brought in his ministry on earth. He said to those burdened because of sin: "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

In the midst of an unrestful world, may we joyfully take the easy yoke of our Lord, and receive his promised comfort and rest.

Thank you

This good news of our Lord Jesus Christ is the focus of *Clarion*. It has again been a pleasure to work with our editorial team –

editors Dr. J. Visscher, Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer, Rev. E. Kampen, Rev. K. Stam, and Dr. C. Van Dam, and copy manager, Mrs. Laura Veenendaal – in the past year. Thank you for supplying and coordinating excellent content for another year!

Others regularly contribute by way of writing articles or coordinating our regular columns. Mr. Arthur Kingma coordinates *Education Matters*, and Mrs. Patricia Gelms coordinates *Ray of Sunshine*. We also thank Mrs. Corrine Gelms, who for some time has helped her with this column. Rev. W. den Hollander receives and responds to a wide variety of questions in *You Asked*. Thank you!

Special thanks are due to Rev. R. Bredenhof, who has coordinated *Treasures New and Old* for the last seven years, and to Dr. W. Bredenhof, who has contributed many articles and reviews to *Clarion* over the years. We wish you both a blessed and fruitful ministry in Australia!

To our faithful subscribers and advertisers: thank you! Your continued support is much appreciated, and is essential to the publication of *Clarion*.

Greetings

Warm greetings and best wishes for the coming year during the Christmas season and in the coming year! May we all look forward to receiving the blessing of complete and eternal rest.

W.J. Gortemaker



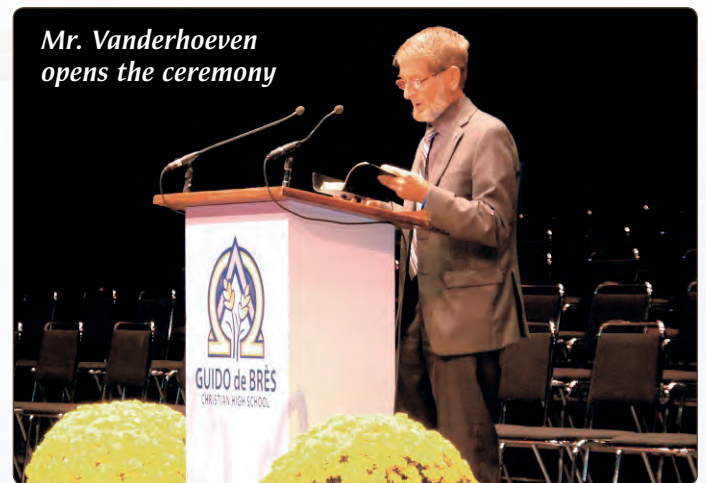
Guido Commencement 2014

Calvin Wieske

The morning of September 27 dawned cool, crisp, and clear. As the sun stole over the horizon and the final drops of dew leapt into the sky, the doors of Guido de Brès were thrown open to welcome the graduating class of 2014 one last time. While teachers and parents entered the gym to peruse the scrumptious luncheon buffet, students wandered about, snapping photos with friends and stealing a final wistful glance at Guido's hallowed halls. After a cup of coffee, a bite of lunch, and a chat with friends it was time to bid Guido a fond farewell and head to Hamilton Place for the main event.

As Alanna Wealink performed a musical prelude, the gowned graduates trickled in to the auditorium to take their seats. Mr. J Vanderhoeven welcomed all on behalf of the board, opening the ceremony with a reminder that throughout life's many changes, God's faithfulness is constant and unchanging. This is why we are called to live a life of service to God, for the benefit of our neighbour.

Principal Roger Vanoostveen stood up to speak a few words concerning our life as God's people. Drawing on David's experience in the caves of Adullam he asked the students, "Is your growth like that of David's mighty men?" Principal Vanoostveen further encouraged the graduates to make learning, growth, and development a lifelong process in order to "become the mighty men and women you are called to be!"



*Mr. Vanderhoeven
opens the ceremony*

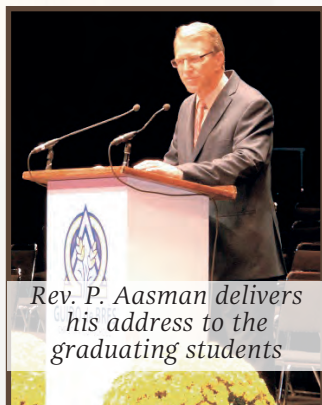
After a stirring rendition of *The City Harmonic's Strong* by Reuben Aasman, Hannah Boyko, Dan Hordyk, Salva Kasweka, Charlotte Spanning, Tyler Vanderlaan, and Alyssa Vandervelde, Reverend Paul Aasman addressed the graduating class with a powerful message on "Uncommon Courage." Drawing examples from courageous characters in classic literature, Rev. Aasman showed that we naturally admire uncommon courage. He explained that Jesus' life and death was the ultimate story of courage, illustrating how we are not strong in ourselves, but in the encouragement of faith, as "courage springs from faith." We were



Class of 2014



especially exhorted to ask for this courage in the loss of Trevor Nordeman, a dear friend, brother, and son who was called home this past year. He urged us to have faith that Trevor's passing was not an end to life but the beginning of a new and fuller life with Christ! The audience responded to this message with the singing of Psalm 27, "God is my light, my refuge, my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The LORD comes to my aid. He is my strength in all my tribulation. Of whom shall I then ever be afraid?"



Rev. P. Aasman delivers his address to the graduating students

At this point, the graduates rose to receive their diplomas, to the applause of all present, followed by the singing of "Lo What a cloud of Witnesses." After the graduates were seated, the recipients of the various scholarships, participation awards, volunteer awards, governor general's academic medal, and student-of-the-year award were called forward to accept recognition for the diligent use of their God-given talents.

Finally, Brad Schouten stood up to present the valedictory address. He reminisced about some of the highs and lows of the past four years, and reminded us that

God directs our paths in both good times and bad. Brad drew our attention to Trevor Nordeman as an example of how we should live in faith, as a witness in the world even through difficulty and hardship. The speech concluded on a lighter note with some tongue-in-cheek reflection on the four years spent at Guido highlighting anecdotes that were both "meaningful because they were enriching. . . and enriching because they were meaningful."

In memory of Trevor Nordeman, fellow students Nathania Dehaan, James Moore, Bethany Vanderveen, and Alanna Weilink performed *When It's All Been Said and Done* by Jim Cowan, professing to God,

When it's all been said and done
There is just one thing that matters
Did I do my best to live for truth
Did I live my life for You.

After the audience responded with the singing of *How Deep the Father's Love for Us*, Mr. J. Joosse closed in prayer. The audience rose to sing our National Anthem, followed by the recessional postlude performed by Bethany VanderVeen as the newly minted graduates exited to be congratulated by friends and family.

Congratulations Guido graduates of 2014, and may God continue to bless you and make you a blessing in the years ahead!

AWARDS

Guido de Brès Scholarships

Jennifer Boerema	Kristen Buist
Jeremy Buist	Gabrielle Vanderbrugghen
Corrine VanWoudenberg	Nadia Wieske

Subject Specific Scholarships

The Arts	Brenna Knegt
Humanities and Social Sciences	Danielle VanderVegte
Languages	Kendra VanderLaan
Mathematics	Brad Schouten
Science	Michaela Blokker

Academic Athletics Scholarship

Diedric VanBarneveld

The Governor General's Academic Medal

Corrine VanWoudenberg

The Guido de Brès Christian High School Participation Awards

Hannah deHaan
Marc Joosse
Kyra Vanderwoude

The Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award for Students

Aiyanna Hoogsteen

The Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff Student-of-the-Year Award

Hannah deHaan

Graduating Class of 2014

Reuben Aasman
Thomas Jordan Alkema
Jessica Hilary Bartels
Arin Auke Bergsma
Michaela Breeann Blokker
Tyson John Blokker
Jennifer Pauliene Boerema
Sarah Margaret Anne Boeringa
Mitchell Benjamin Bouwman
Matthew Jonathan Boverhof
Hannah Lauren Boyko
James Bert Breukelman
David Jonathan Buikema
Jeremy John Buist
Kristen Alyssa Buist
Corey Benjamin Jacob Buitenwerf
Suzanna Lynn Bultena
Kaitlyn Jayne Crewe
Caleb Alexander Datema
Chanelle Jennifer DeBoer
Colin DeBoer
Devon John DeBoer
Joshua Daren DeBoer
Elizabeth Mary DeBoer
Veronica Maria DeBoer
Hannah Arianne de Haan
Zachary Thomas Dekker
Tarissa Dawn DeRuitter
Anita Grace Draaistra
Amanda Marie Gracey
Brandon Joshua Groen
Scott Isaac Groenwold
Kaitlyn Breanna Haining
Lubertus Johannes Heemskerk
Aiyanna Joy Hoogsteen
Daniel Harrison Hordyk
Jessica Amber Jager

Alexander Jeremy Jagt
Michelle Heather Jansema
Marc Clarence Jooose
Michael Andrew Kalte
Jasmine Paige Kampen
Jessica Lindsay Kampen
Monga Salva Kasweka
Brenna Leigh Knegt
Melissa Alexa Krikke
Matthew Marten Ligtenberg
Joshua Leonard Linde
Taylor Roslyn Lodder
Mark Andrew Ludwig
Matthew Ryan Ludwig
Bradley John Mans
Randal Lee Muis
Kailey Rebecca Nicholson
Spencer Cole Nordeman
Malcolm Jacob Oliver
Rachelle Justina Petter
Katherine Elise Pilon
Nicole Kelly Poort
Aaron Matthew Post
Jesse Hendrik Post
Taylor Jane Post
Rebecca Geraldine Prinzen
Lauren Aubrey Ravensbergen
Jessica Nadine Schenkel
Jonathan Tyler Schoon
Bradley Robert Schouten
Kirsten Gertrina Schutten
Rosalie Jayne Schutten
Michael Frank Selles
Katrina Ainsley Sloots
Owen Wesley Sloots
James Martin Smeding
Charlotte Tina Anne Spanninga

Morgan Jane Stegenga
Kevin Tyler Tamminga
Sara Marie Tenhage
Lucia Joanna Terpstra
Samantha Hermina Togeretz
Erin Cole Henry Turco
Laura Kathleen VanAndel
Diedric Jan van Barneveld
Melanie Alicia VanDasselaar
Leah Kaitlyn Vandeburgt
Calvin Zachary Vandenberg
Gabrielle Adria Vanderbrugghen
Justin Vanderbrugghen
Kendra Lynn Vanderlaan
Tyler Wayne VanderLaan
Jason Andrew VanderVeen
Marisa Sharon VanderVeen
Danielle Dawn VanderVegte
Alyssa Jane vanderVelde
Connor John VanderVelde
Kyra Maaike Vanderwoude
Jason Tyler VanEgmond
Jodi Diana VanEgmond
Robert John VanGoolen
Brett Matthew VanLuik
Benjamin Shawn VanRootselaar
Corissa Nicole VanWoudenberg
Corrine Carolin VanWoudenberg
Tara Michelle Veenstra
Alekszander Bastiaan Verwey
Jason Leonard Werkman
Kimberly Nelene Werkman
Amy Michelle Wieske
Nadia Rose Wieske
Rebecca Judith Wolsley

Emmanuel Christian High School Graduation 2014

Arthur Kingma

October 3, 2014 in Fergus, ON

At 5:30 pm, after all the graduands, parents, board members, and staff had arrived, the festivities began. Once the chatter and laughter that had filled the hall died down, Mr. Gerald Alkema welcomed all, especially the forty-seven graduands, led in devotions, thanked our heavenly Father for this joyous occasion, and then gently urged us to enjoy the generous bounty of food that the present grade 12 moms had prepared. Between the main course and the dessert, the staff shared a jeopardy game that highlighted special characteristics or unique events of many graduands. Delicious food, delightful entertainment, and a blessed reason for celebrating boosted the spirits and bolstered the anticipation for the big ceremony, especially among the grads. They, having been apart for a few summer months, and having started new educational or career paths, could catch up with one another, complement one another on clothing, hairdos, and “you have grown taller over the summer,” and then, under the specific instructions of the principal, put on their gowns and memorize procedural directions to ensure that everything will go well during the ceremony.

Attendants assisted drivers in parking their vehicles. Over 600 guests walked down the atrium, received a program from the ushers, and found their seats in the auditorium. Those who arrived early were treated to screens that displayed various slides of the grads in some sort of action during their former years at school. Ten minutes before the grads would enter and take their seats, a former grad, Kailey VanVeen, took her place behind the keyboard, preparing the audience for the grand arrival.

By 8:00 pm, the graduands arrived. Mr. Nobel ensured good order, while Mr. Andrew Wildeboer, the chairman



*Jakob Faber delivering
his valedictorian
address*

of the board, opened the evening. After singing, Bible reading, and prayer, he offered words of welcome and congratulations to the graduates, one being his own daughter. He then called the keynote speaker, Mr. Jim Menken, to address the grads and the audience. Mr. Menken, a former teacher, and now a woodcarver, built his address on Isaiah 40: 28-31. After telling us that his favourite thing to carve is an eagle, he developed several analogies between eagles and grads. As eagle parents build nests for their young, so do Christian parents. As eagles teach their young to fly, so do Christian parents. As eaglets must learn to fly, so must Christian youth. As eaglets must extend wings out fully to soar, so must Christian youth. He warned the grads not to tuck in the wings, nor to let vain philosophies clip the wings, but to soar in hope and boldness that God provides: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” And he concluded, “So grads, we want you to eventually leave the nest, to soar, to keep your eyes focused on Jesus, to always return to your Master, to live godly lives and to remain humble.”

PRESENTATION OF THE AWARDS

Honours Achievement Award

Sheri Bouwers, Stephanie Breukelman, Jacqueline Brouwer, Zach Brouwer, Rachel Eygenraam, Rebecca Horsburgh, Natasha Jansen, Laura Kottelenberg, Madison Lodder, Lyndsey Menken, Danielle Nijenhuis, Shae Nijenhuis, Nick Nobel, Laurissa Sikkema, Evan VanGrootheest, Jamie VanSydenborgh, Maria Vanwoudenberg, Brianna Wildeboer

Post Farm Structures Award

Natasha Janssen

Royal LePage RCR Realty Business Excellence Award

Danielle Nijenhuis

L. Martin Toet Memorial Athletics Scholarship

Laura Kottelenberg, Nick Nobel

Governor General's Academic Medal

Rebecca Horsburgh

Jordan Hutchinson Memorial Academic Proficiency Award

Madison Lodder

The Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award

Randy Sipkes

Citizenship Award

Rachel Eygenraam

Stewardship Award

Madison Lodder

Golden Eagle Award

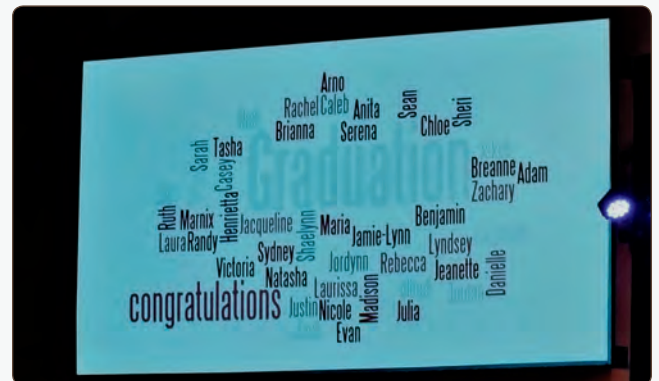
Nick Nobel, Laurissa Sikkema, Serena Van Ommen

Mr. Nobel then gave his parting words to the grads before handing out the diplomas. He connect Mark Twain to Philippians 4:8. How? Mark Twain writes: "What a wee little part of a person's life are his actions and words. His real life is led in his head, and is known to none but himself." Our real life is our thought life. Then Philippians 4:8 ends: ". . .think about these things." So our real life, which is our thought life, should be filled with all the positive things described in Philippians 4: that which is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable. Where do we find all these positive things? In the God-breathed Word. And logically, if our thought-life is filled with good things, our actions and words will be too: "The reality of Jesus Christ will shine in you, and you'll be a living example to others."



Jeannette receiving her diploma

Mr. Nobel, along with the chairman of the board, then proceeded to give the diplomas to all the grads. When Jeannette Wierenga came up to receive her diploma, Mr. Nobel announced to us all that it was also Jeannette's birthday, so we all heartily burst out into a melodious "Happy Birthday, dear Jeannette" song. After the formalities, clapping, pictures, and thankful reflections, the grads returned to their seats.



The last part of the ceremony included the traditional awards ceremonies. After several awards and bursary scholarships were awarded to students (see side bar), Jakob Faber delivered his untraditional valedictorian speech. He peppered his speech with fake nervousness, sports and car stories, accidents, lab experiments gone awry, confessions, reminders of things not yet done but should have been, and a special goodbye to Mr. Dave Nienhuis, who left to teach in Immanuel Christian High in Winnipeg. Despite all the untraditional things mentioned, Jakob ended with more traditional words: "As crazy as it sounds, school is a place to learn. For this I would like to thank each and every

teacher and remind them that each one had an impact on our lives. Teachers don't only instruct; they also motivate. What they tell their students can shape our futures."

A graduation evening brings students, teachers, parents, and the whole supporting community together. I was able to find a vantage point to see everyone: how beautiful it is that God provides for Christian education and that we can celebrate it. It's an amazing gift! True, not everything that was taught, learned, or done was without sin, but we, as a whole Christian community, may prosper in hope. May God continue to prosper Christian education and his covenant youth. May our thought-life be filled with thanksgiving and praise.



Graduating students



Ray of Sunshine

Liz Koning



HELLO! My name is Liz Koning. I am fifty-three years old, born on January 2, 1961. I have seven siblings, four brothers and three sisters. Five live with their families in other places, (two in Langley B.C., one in Vancouver, one in Calgary, and one in Angola). I'm so glad that I have my Mom, one brother, and one sister and her family living close by me here in Edmonton!

Since 1998 I've been blessed to live in a group home run by Rehoboth Christian Ministries. I used to go out to a day program, but now I'm "retired." I still go on outings with my housemates and our staff.

The house I lived in for sixteen years was called "Five Gables." The staff there was always amazed with how many birthday cards I received. In June, 2014, I moved to "Mayfield Home" and I hope the workers in my new home will also be impressed with how many birthday cards I get. I LOVE getting them!

My new address is 10905-163 St, Edmonton, Alberta, T5P 3P7. Thank you and may God bless.

(Many thanks as well from Liz's Mom and family.)

January

- 2 LIZ KONING will be 54**
10905-163 Street, Edmonton, AB T5P 3P7
- 6 JASON HERREWYNEN will be 41**
"Parkway Crossing"
#8 633 Park Road, N., Brantford, ON N3R 8B6
- 7 CHRISTINE BREUKELMAN will be 43**
2225-19th Street, Coadale, AB T1M 1G4
- 14 STEPHEN DYKSTRA will be 32**
Box 3573, Smithers, BC VOJ 2N0

- 17 HENRY DRIEGEN will be 59**
#19-31450 Spur Avenue, Abbotsford, BC V2T 5M3
- 17 GRACE HOMAN will be 59**
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road S., RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
- 19 EDWIN SCHUTTE will be 31**
844 Bowman Road, Abbotsford, BC V3G 1S9
- 19 JANINE SMID will be 45**
141 Kittridge Avenue E., Strathroy, ON N7G 2A9
- 26 KATHERINE NIJENHUIS will be 49**
598 Walker Street, Fergus, ON N1M 3J3
- 30 TYLER HOEKSEMA will be 26**
6755 Lorne Drive, Sardis, BC V2R 2G3

Congratulations with your birthday! I hope you have a lovely day celebrating with family and friends. I wish you the Lord's blessing in this your new year and may you have all you need to live to the glory of our great God.

Happy Birthday



A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

If there are any address or other changes that I need to be aware of please let me know as soon as possible.

Patricia Gelms

5080 Airport Road East, Mount Hope, ON L0R 1W0
henri.trish@sympatico.ca
905-692-0084

You Asked



William den Hollander

Minister emeritus of the
Bethel Canadian Reformed
Church of Toronto, Ontario
denhollanderw@gmail.com

Q Do children get punished for the sins of their father? The NIV translates Exodus 20:5 as “*punished* the children for the sin of the parents,” while the RSV says “*visiting* the iniquity of the fathers upon the children.” What is the difference? I think it should be visiting but I may be wrong. I think that if the parent wasted all the income so that the children go hungry then that is not a punishment, for the children didn’t do anything wrong, but it is the *result* of the sin of the parent or the *visiting* of the sin of the parent. Ezekiel (18:4) and Jeremiah (31:29) are quoting a saying that was popular in their days, which seems to draw the conclusion from the sanction of the 2nd commandment that the children are punished for the sins of the parents, but these prophets have to correct it by saying: “Everyone will die for their own sin.”

A Beginning with the matter of translation, it is clear that the Hebrew word used here can be translated differently depending on the context. The connotation of “visiting” denotes that the LORD knows the situation, paying close attention (Exod 3:16; 4:31).

He examines the ways of the fathers and sees the effect on the children, so that he becomes involved in it (positively). He does so in his love! This same love, however, shows in his jealousy when he observes a manner of worship which does not give him the first and foremost place in the life and worship of his people (as expressed in the first commandment), but rather do their own thing. Then he sees the wrong, the iniquity of the fathers, quite often also in their children, even in their grandchildren and great-grandchildren; namely in that their offspring doesn’t love him anymore either but “hate” him (i.e. they’re also putting themselves first, designing their own ways, setting their own standards in service and worship, instead of showing their love in a life of obedience to the LORD). Then the LORD visits them too (negatively), coming against them, chastising them (i.e. in the way of punishing them, but for

their own sinful and self-designed ways which they saw in their fathers and followed without discerning the wrong of such ways). So either way, in his love the LORD is intimately involved in the life of his people (first commandment) and in the manner of worship and service of his people (second commandment), and he responds to it in a covenantal way with blessing (to those who love him and keep his commandments) or curse (i.e. punishment, chastisement; thus he requites the sins of the fathers in the generations)!

Indeed, sometimes there is the reaction, “It’s not fair that the LORD punishes the children for the sins of the parents.” However, that’s not what it means. You can see that in Ezekiel 18, for instance, as the questioner correctly notes. No, what it means is this: “The LORD follows up on the self-willed rebellion in the children, in the grandchildren, and in the great-grandchildren, if they hate me” (i.e. if they also are unfaithful to me). The LORD does not punish the innocent, but if the children continue in the sins of the fathers the LORD will punish them too. He doesn’t do so automatically (as also the blessing of the covenant isn’t an automatism), but only if and when the children do not turn away from the sin of their father but consciously and/or intentionally persist in it. The children, then, remain personally responsible for their way and

manner of worship and service to the LORD! At the same time, the fathers in the families should be fully aware of the significance for him and his descendants of them turning their back on the LORD to practice idolatry and self-willed religion.

When parents don't take their covenantal faithfulness, service, and worship in love to the LORD seriously anymore, taking it easy, developing their own ways and standards, it should not surprise us that it affects the relationship of the children with the LORD and their personal service to him. Of course, then the children may not blame their parents for their own unfaithfulness, yet their upbringing has a decisive influence on their life which the LORD characterizes as iniquitous. If parents are self-indulgent and permissive,

so will be the children. If parents tend to be sloppy in the LORD's service so will be the children. When the parents decide that you don't have to go to church twice, the parents' attendance ends up being sporadic and the children won't go anymore, while the grandchildren won't know a thing about the LORD and his service any longer! When the parents consider the living preaching of the gospel too heavy, too long, and too serious, asking too much of the flesh, a real miracle has to happen to make the children hunger and thirst for the bread and water of life. Then we must observe among the members, the families, too, that those who have will receive more, but those who do not have the right attitude, the right submission and love for the LORD, even what they have will be taken from them.



**Is there something
you've been wanting to know?**

**An answer
you've been looking for?**

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to

Rev. W. denHollander

denhollanderw@gmail.com

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0

Letter to the Editor


RE: “Christians face the most Persecution” by Cornelis Van Dam (Clarion Vol. 63, No. 19, September 26, 2014)

The following letter was submitted as a school assignment.

Christians are undoubtedly the world’s most persecuted people. Take ISIS for instance. The harms they inflict on our fellow believers are so dreadful and the terrors they endure; so unimaginable. Cornelis Van Dam did an excellent job describing and outlining violent injustices done to Christians. As he states in his article: “80% of all acts of religious discrimination are directed at Christians.” He also points out some statistics found at the Centre for the Study of Global Christianity that estimate approximately 100,000 Christians being killed per year. If math is not your strong point, that rounds out to about eleven Christians dying per hour. What the article fails to mention is that Christian persecution does not refer solely to physical persecution. In fact, persecution can be defined as: “To pursue in such a way as to afflict, to harass, or to cause to suffer because of belief.” Upon reading and reflecting on that definition we can conclude that even the government refusing to fund our Christian education is a form of persecution in itself. When dealing with such a topic, it is impossible for me to not analyze my own family’s position regarding Christian education in the process. As one of six children I am easily able to recognize how much of a financial burden that has placed

on my parents. Paying for education for twenty-two years, at times in both elementary and high school separately, undoubtedly puts a strain on your finances. I would deem that as a sort of persecution. I go to a Christian high school and to me it is an invaluable and most rewarding blessing. Daily, I am able to thank God for the opportunity, and that my parents are willing to put the money in to allow me the chance. When a government denies aid in providing quality education and respectable staff to students due to their religion, it is a form of suffering and thereby a form of persecution as well as a denial of the right to freedom of religion. Consider the aspect of persecution that does not involve being tormented physically and remember that God will reward us for our struggles and persecutions we endure here on earth.

Take comfort reading from the Belgic Confession, Article 37 where it states: “Therefore, with good reason the thought of this judgment is horrible and dreadful to wicked and evil people. But it is very pleasant and a great comfort to the righteous and elect, since their total redemption will then be accomplished. They will then receive the fruits of their labor and of the trouble they have suffered; their innocence will be openly recognized by all; and they will see the terrible vengeance that God will bring on the evil ones who tyrannized, oppressed, and tormented them in this world. The evil ones will be convicted by the witness of their own consciences, and shall be made immortal – but only to be tormented in “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Megan Baron 



*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*

Press Release

Classis AB of October 14, 2014 convened by Edmonton Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church

On behalf of the convening church of Immanuel CanRC, Rev. W.B. Slomp opened the meeting and invited the assembly to sing Hymn 24:1, 2, 5. He then read Colossians 1:1-19 and led in prayer. Welcome was extended to all, including Candidate Tyler Vandergaag and Rev. Pontier from the Neerlandia URC. Some matters of memorabilia were noted. After the credentials were examined and found to be in good order, the classis was declared constituted. The officers suggested by the previous classis took their respective positions: Rev. R. Aasman, chairman, Rev. A.B. Roukema, vice-chairman, and Rev. J.D. Louwerse, clerk. After some modifications the agenda was adopted.

Candidate Tyler Vandergaag delivered his sermon proposal on Matthew 14:22-33 and was examined on various areas of theology. Classis decided that Br. Vandergaag had sustained his examination and, with concurring advice from the regional deputies, he was granted permission to be ordained as a minister of the Word.

Rev. Pontier, fraternal delegate from the URCNA brought greetings and words of encouragement. Rev. Roukema responded in kind.

The following reports were received. 1) Classis Treasurer report, 2) Audit of books of the Classis Treasurer.

Question period according to Article 44 CO was held. All the churches but one answered the first two questions in the affirmative and the last question in the negative.

Classis appointed the church of Edmonton Providence to convene the next classis on December 9, 2014, with March 10, 2015 as alternate date. The suggested officers are: Rev. J. Kalkman, chairman, Rev. J. D. Louwerse, vice-chairman, and clerk, Rev. R. Aasman. RCUS – Kalkman, Roukema; URCNA – deferred to Classis Pacific West.

Personal question period was held.

Censure according to Article 34 CO was not necessary. The Acts were adopted and the press release was approved. We sang from Hymn 85:1 and Rev. Aasman led in closing prayer.

*For classis,
A.B. Roukema (vice-chairman e.t.)* 🕯️



Year-End Review



James Visscher

Minister emeritus of the
Canadian Reformed Church at
Langley, British Columbia
jvisscher@telus.net

Abide with Me

There is a well-known classic Christian hymn *Abide with Me* which includes this memorable line, “Change and decay in all around I see; O Thou who changest not, abide with me.” How fitting, especially at this time of year as we experience the change of the seasons and the end of another year. Change is in the air.

Indeed, change is *always* in the air. We look in the mirror and we see it. We look at our children and we see it. We look around in the world at large and we see it. Change is everywhere.

For most of us this is an unsettling thought and reality. Of course, if you are young you may be looking forward to change and the passage of time. “I can’t wait to get my driver’s license. I can’t wait to leave home and explore the world. I can’t wait to get married.” Such are the hopes and aspirations of the young.

Still, I suspect that most of us do not view change so positively. “Who wants to leave a cosy home and move to an unknown city? Who enjoys having to retire from a well-paid job? Who looks forward to facing life as a widow or widower?”

And then if you add “decay” to the mix, the apprehension only grows. “Change and decay” – what a formidable duo! If “change” makes us uncomfortable, then “decay” infuses us with disgust. No one likes decay. It is an enemy. It is a most unpleasant reality. We detest rust on our cars, wrinkles on our skin, holes in our socks, mould on our food. Why? It is because decay reminds us of death and the end of all things. The popular saying is, “Nothing lasts forever.” How true!

Or is it? The hymn just mentioned would have us believe, and sing, that this is not totally true. There is One who does not change. The Lord our God does not change. Isn’t that what he tells us in the last book of the Old Testament? “I the LORD do not change” (Mal 3:6). He does not change as far as his person is concerned. He does not change his mind or will or heart. He is always the same. And he has a Son who is

always the same as well. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8).

So what? How does this help us? The hymn gives us the answer. It says that because he does not change, he can always abide with us, stay with us, stand beside us, surround us, and support us. It means that he remains the same person as far as his personality is concerned: eternal, invisible, wise, just, sovereign, good, loving, forgiving, compassionate, and merciful. It means too that he remains the same as far as his works of deliverance are concerned. His agenda does not change. His program does not get altered. His salvation in Jesus Christ is a constant. You can count on it. You can build your life and hopes on it.

Who of us knows what the year 2015 will bring? No doubt a lot of changes will come our way and some will even buffet us, but one thing will never change. Our God and his glorious redemption in Jesus Christ will remain the same, now and forever! He will abide with us!

Churches and pastors

It is with this comforting thought in mind that we begin our tour of the churches. This time we turn our attention first to the West.

British Columbia and Washington

In British Columbia and Washington there is not much to report about either churches or pastors. When it comes to vacancies, all of the churches in this area now have pastors. The last church to receive a new one was the church at Langley. It welcomed a second pastor in the person of the Rev. Doug Vandeburgt who came from Ontario in the late summer months. He joins Pastor Ryan deJonge in shepherding the largest church in the federation.

Alberta

In the province of Alberta next door, there is more to report. For some time all of the churches there had a pastor but 2014 brought some changes. Rev. Dirk Poppe of Coaldale accepted a call to the Free Reformed Church

of Southern River, Western Australia. Since his departure the Coaldale church has begun calling but thus far without success. In the meantime, the ministers of the neighbouring United Reformed Church in Lethbridge, the Revs. Hank Van der Woerd and Wybren Oord, have been found willing and able to assist with the preaching.

To the east the church at Taber also saw its minister depart, as the Rev. Marc Jagt left for Fergus, Ontario. Meanwhile, the Taber church called Candidate Tyler Vandergaag, who accepted the call, passed his classical exam, and should, the Lord willing, be ordained into office by the time you are reading this issue.

Heading north we come to the church at Calgary. Its minister, the Rev. Hans Kalkman, came down with health issues and was granted time off to recuperate. He is back in the saddle now but will soon be riding off into the sunset as 2015 will mark his retirement year.

Further north the Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church of Edmonton knows what this is all about as its pastor, the Rev. Bill Slomp, reached a certain age and retired from his normal duties in the congregation. Some times when a minister retires we say that he has left “active” service, but that is hardly accurate as he, and others who share his status, often remain active in the areas of preaching, teaching, counseling, visitation, and missions.

Our most northern congregations reside in the town of Barrhead and the hamlet of Neerlandia. The former church is hard at work constructing a new church building which they hope to occupy some time in 2015. The latter church is not in the building mode but they are in the “what shall we do next” mode as the membership continues to increase and their building becomes too small. There has been some talk about starting a church plant in Westlock (which would be great) or it may be that some members who live closer to Barrhead will request their attestations to that church once their new building has been completed.

Manitoba and Colorado

Until recently the Manitoba and Colorado churches were also in the enviable position of each having a pastor; however, the departure of the Rev. Rolf den Hollander changed that. He left the Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Winnipeg and accepted a call to the Grassie church in Ontario. Meanwhile, the calling work has commenced but without success thus far.



Barrhead Canadian Reformed Church

Ontario and Michigan

Moving on to Ontario and Michigan we see a part of the continent that, as far as our churches are concerned, has the highest number of vacancies. In that regard perhaps the biggest surprise was that at around the same time the Bredenhof cousins both decided to accept calls to Australia. The Rev. Reuben Bredenhof, who is serving the London church, said “yes” to the call of the Mount Nasura Free Reformed Church and the Rev. Wes Bredenhof, who is working in the Providence church at Hamilton, said the same thing but then to the Free Reformed Church of Launceston, Tasmania. Their departures, however, may take some time as there is a lot of immigration red tape to plow through.

At the moment the largest concentration of vacant churches can be found in the Burlington area. In that part of the province the Flamborough church, the Ebenezer church, and the Waterdown church are all without pastors. Calls have been issued but thus far without success.

Further afield the church at Grand Valley joined the ranks of the vacant when the Rev. Peter Feenstra felt called to go to the Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church of Guelph.

Still, all is not as bleak as it seems. A number of pastors either came to or shifted places in Ontario. In addition, the arrival of some new ministers also augmented the pastoral ranks. The churches at Fergus-Maranatha, Toronto, and Kerwood all received newly-minted pastors. The church at Grassie welcomed Rev. den Hollander from Grace Winnipeg.

And then there is the church that may well have the most to be thankful for, namely, the church of Fergus North. Not only did they welcome a new pastor in the person of the Rev.

Marc Jagt, but they are also in the process of completing the construction of both a new church building and a new manse. New preacher, new pulpit, new parsonage - how is that for an ecclesiastical triple play?

Finally, in the latter part of 2014 Classis Ontario Southwest gave the green light for the institution of a new church in the Hamilton area called "Blessings." This church will be composed of members coming from the Cornerstone Church that for some time has been experiencing growing pains. It plans to commence operations in the new year and will bring the total number of Canadian (and American) Reformed Churches in the federation to fifty-five.

The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

The month of January is always a busy month at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario, not because so many lectures are being held, but due to the fact that it is filled with conferences and seminars. In that regard the year 2014 was no different. In the first half of the month special seminars were organized for the students.

From January 16-18, CRTS hosted a conference called "Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today." The speakers at this conference came mostly from CRTS, the Theological University in Kampen, The Netherlands, and Mid America Theological Seminary in Dyer, Indiana. Their papers illustrated that the subject of hermeneutics or biblical interpretation remains a challenging field, also in Reformed circles. While there was considerable agreement in some areas, there were some pronounced differences in others. Whether or not this conference resolved any of the outstanding issues remains to be seen. Our readers can catch a glimpse at what was said by reading a book that has come out bearing the same title.

At the annual convocation in September, CRTS once again presented a crop of new students for the churches to consider and call. In due time Candidate Gerrit Bruintjes was called and accepted to the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church at Toronto, Cand. Tyler Vandergaag accepted to the Taber church and Cand. Jeff Poort to the Kerwood church. All have since been ordained and, together with their wives and children, are adjusting to their first charges. May a good relationship develop between these churches and their rookie ministers.

*Tyler Vandergaag
Gerrit Bruintjes
Jeff Poort*



The departure of some students was balanced out with the arrival of three new students meaning that the enrollment at CRTS remained steady at eighteen students. Of course, the question that is always being asked has to do with whether or not this is enough. In one sense it is never enough as the harvest is still plentiful and the workers remain few. A quick look at the needs at home and on the various mission fields indicates that more is always better.

At present, if one includes those who have accepted calls, new churches, and mission postings, there remain about a dozen vacancies in our Canadian Reformed Churches. To that one needs to add a number of approaching retirements, unforeseen developments, as well as the fact that not all of the students are Canadian Reformed. Hence one can see that the demand is barely being met. The need for more students remains a constant. Committed and bright young men, the Lord still wants you to step up and into his service!

In the meantime, the daily work of instructing the students continues to go well. Having spent some time there last year, I can testify to the fact that it is a great place in which to teach and learn, research and grow. The atmosphere is stimulating as a most able faculty consisting of the Profs. Arjan deVisser, John Smith, Jason VanVliet, Ted VanRaalte, and Gerhard Visscher challenge the students and as a diverse, inquisitive, and capable bunch of students digest and debate what they are being taught.

At the same time the support staff consisting of Margaret Alkema, Leanne Kuizenga, and Catherine Mechelse keeps on doing an excellent job.

All in all the churches may be thankful for what they have at CRTS. It ranks among the best little seminaries anywhere in the world!

Book of Praise

Unlike 2013 the year 2014 was not a synod year. This means that there is not as much to report on the broader federation front. Still, there are a number of things that should have our attention. The first is that the work on the *Book of Praise* has at long last reached completion. In November the churches were presented with the new and final product.

In all respects it is a beautiful piece of work. The design supplied by Compass Creative (Jason Bouwman) is clear and attractive. The layout and type font by Premier Printing make it conducive for singing and reading. Even the electronic edition is well done. It is easy to navigate, to search, and to carry. Do not be surprised if you see an ever-increasing amount of iPhones, iPads, and Android devices being used in the worship services.

Of course, in all of this final is never really final. No doubt this edition will serve the churches well for a number of years. Nevertheless, the call for some better Psalm tunes and for additional hymns will not go away. Is that something to complain about? On the one hand, it has an unsettling side to it. Yet, as I said in my opening remarks, change and decay are hallmarks of this present age, and we might as well come to grips with that. As for changelessness, it is a hallmark of God and of the age to come.



The English Standard Version

Along with a new *Book of Praise*, Synod 2013 also gave us a new recommended Bible translation in the English Standard Version. I say “recommended” to remind our readers that in the Canadian Reformed Churches we do not have an “authorized” version. The decision concerning which Bible translation to use in the worship services remains in the freedom of the churches. Currently in our midst the following translations are in use: New American Standard Bible, the New King James Version, the New International Version, and the English Standard Version.

Will that change? I suspect that as we move further into 2015 we will see more and more churches opting for the ESV. Still, in listening to the voices out there it would appear that the situation is far from one of complete happiness. Some churches have already decided to keep on using their old NIVs until they wear out. They have grown accustomed to this translation and are reluctant to spend a considerable amount of money to equip the pew with new Bibles. Others have been reading the ESV and find its style rather wooden and hard to get used to. In short, the jury will be out for some time as to whether or not the ESV will become the translation of choice in the churches.

Voting in the churches

Since we are dealing with decisions of Synod 2013, we may as well touch on the matter of voting in the churches, especially women voting for office bearers. This matter too continues to have the attention of any number of churches as appeals are currently being prepared against the decision of Synod 2013 and are sure to find their way to Synod 2016.

The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands

On the inter-church relations front, 2014 has proven to be an eventful year, especially when it comes to the developments taking place in our sister churches in The Netherlands. As previously mentioned, the year began with a hermeneutics conference in Ancaster hosted by CRTS. There it was quite obvious that a disconnect exists between the theological faculties of Hamilton and Kampen in particular and between European and North American theological scholarship in general.

Back in The Netherlands the Reformed Churches were continuing to meet in their general synod. Later in the year these churches hosted a foreign delegate’s week at their synod. Sometime after that week was over, this synod decided not to accept a report that recommended that all of the offices in the church be opened to women.

Some breathed a sigh of relief; however, that proved to be premature as later the same synod decided to continue to move forward with merger plans with the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC), a federation that some time ago opened all of its offices to women.

A special committee appointed by our synod to discuss our concerns with the RCN went there and had a number of frank and open meetings with their Dutch counterparts; however, it appears to have had little positive result.

One additional development that needs to be mentioned has to do with the departure of Prof Dr. J. Douma from the RCN. For many years he served as a minister of the Word and as an ethics professor in these churches. He was also involved with the influential church magazine, *De Reformatie*. His literary output then, as well as now, remains impressive. He was in all respects a leadership figure in the RCN.

But no more! In the middle of the month of November, he announced that he and his wife were leaving the RCN and joining a small break away federation called the Reformed Churches Netherlands (also RCN but with the “in” missing). For him the ongoing attempts to merge with the NRC in particular, but also developments relating to continued liturgical experimentation, the acceptance of homosexual and co-habitation lifestyles, and the lack of church discipline proved to be too much. Broken hearted - he departed. A sad development indeed!

So where do we as Canadian Reformed Churches go from here? Ultimately Synod 2016 will have to decide on how much longer we keep walking down the road with our Dutch sister churches. Will it be until such a time as they make a clear decision on this matter, or has the time arrived to sever the contact? The choice will not be easy.

At the same time the RCN will also be faced with a hard choice: either join with the NRC and risk saying “farewell” to the sister churches in Australia, Canada, and South Africa, or vice versa. Should they opt for the former, we may well end up being “motherless.” Needless to say, that will be traumatic, especially for many of our older members, as it is never easy to sever the ties with mother.

The United Reformed Churches

The year 2014 was also a synod year for one of our North American sister churches, namely the United Reformed Churches in North America. It met in Visalia, California from June 3-5. Noteworthy for our readers is the fact that this synod decided to put the merger talks with the Canadian Reformed Churches on hold. The night before this decision was taken a public discussion took place between two Canadian Reformed theologians, namely Profs. Ted VanRaalte and Jason VanVliet, and two professors who are members of the United Reformed Churches, namely Profs. W. Robert Godfrey and Cornel Venema. The topic was covenant theology.

From the reports received from those present, the discussion went very well. There appeared to be no major differences of opinion on the matter. More than a few observers even remarked that it was obvious that what unites us is much more than that which divides us.

As a result, it is hard to blame this meeting on covenant theology for what happened the next day. The more obvious explanation is that there remains within the URC a good deal of reluctance to merge with the CanRC. This reluctance is especially present among URC churches in the United States.

In some ways this was confirmed later in the year when Classis Pacific NW, now a completely American classis, decided to send an overture to the next URC synod calling for an end to merger talks altogether. It all brought to light that there appears to be a preference among any number of URC churches for our two federations to simply recognize one another as sister churches, and leave it at that.

Is that good enough? In some ways, it is not; however, perhaps it is time for those of us in the CanRC to take a step back as well. It seems as if in our history we are the ones who are always pushing for church boundaries to come down and for union to take place between churches of the same confession and practice.

Such a conviction rightly emerges out of our reading of John 17 and Ephesians 4, as well as the theological teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder. Nevertheless, it takes two willing partners to make this happen. With respect to the URC, it would seem that many are not willing and, if that is true, it will only be an exercise in futility for us to keep on beating the merger drum. Let us then live together side by side as sister churches, continue to pray for unity and union, build our relationships, especially in Canada, even stronger, and leave the rest to the Lord.

The western ministerial

One way to build that relationship is through on going contact. In that connection it was good when in early November over thirty CanRC and URC pastors from Western Canada and the USA, together with some of their wives and a number of children, met for several days in Sumas, Washington. The speeches by Mrs. Marcia Vanderbos on counselling and by Prof. John Smith on various OT topics were well received. The debate by Prof. John Smith and Rev. Ralph Pontier on Matthew 24 was instructive. The facilities

were better than ever. The food was good. The fellowship was great. Indeed, the ties forged by this annual event keep on getting stronger. So if anyone doubts that CanRC and URC pastors can get along, and get along well, they should drop in for a visit, the Lord willing, next year.

North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)

The 2014 meetings of NAPARC were held this year also in November in the Grassie Canadian Reformed Church. On the night before the meeting a prayer service was held at which Prof. Dr. Gerhard Visscher preached the sermon. The subsequent meetings, at which delegates were present from many faithful Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in North America were present, went well and even wrapped up ahead of schedule.

Outreach in BC

The year 2014 also saw a lot of attention being directed at reaching out to people who do not know the gospel. In northern BC the Rev. Jim Witteveen continued to work diligently as a home missionary. The church there is continuing to grow in faith and number. Several families and individuals in the area have expressed interest and others are moving into the city from other parts of the province. It is hoped that over time a church may be instituted.

In the south the church at Willoughby Heights continues to spearhead attempts to bring the Reformed faith to the Burnaby area. The latest efforts involve finding a location for and setting up a Reading Room. As such this type of evangelism has been underway for some years in Brazil and has met with considerable success. In the past Christian Science used to have such Reading Rooms sprinkled around North America and different parts of the world. Of course, the aim is to imitate their approach but not their theology.

Not too far from Burnaby the Chinese Reformed Church is still meeting in the Cloverdale church building every Sunday. Under the leadership of the Rev. Frank Dong, and its office bearers, it keeps on growing in faith and number. At present five people are enrolled in its new members class. Soon the numbers will be such that a move will need to be made from the Catechism Room to the Fellowship Hall.



It should also be mentioned that along with these efforts, an evangelism course called *Christianity Explored* is being used in the churches of Abbotsford, Cloverdale, and Langley. Especially the last church has had its efforts blessed as a number of new members could be welcomed into the congregation.

Outreach in Alberta

In the Neerlandia area discussions are under way about the possibility of doing a church plant near or in the thriving town of Westlock. Having driven through that part of the province not too long ago, it would appear to be a place with potential. It might also solve a little of the overcrowding in the Neerlandia church and save some members a long drive every week.

In the Edmonton area use is being made of an ESL program to bring the gospel to the unchurched. Some of our churches that are willing and able might do well to explore that option as it represents a great way to sow the seed among new immigrants.

Further to the south the Coaldale church is also actively pursuing outreach among foreign students at the Lethbridge Experimental Station, the local community college and the University of Lethbridge. The result is that every week a sizable number of people are brought by bus to the Coaldale Christian School for Bible study and fellowship. Some of them have also become members of the Coaldale church. Seeing that many of those who attend are of Chinese extraction, plans are underway to increase the contact between the members of the Chinese Reformed Church in BC and those who attend the Coaldale Fellowship.

Outreach in Manitoba

For some time now the churches in southern Manitoba have been working hard to establish a mission post in their area, especially in Otterburne. As a result, a number of ministers and candidates have been called, but thus far none have answered the call. Still, the dream lives on and the efforts continue. Hopefully, one day soon the Lord will see fit to bless this project.

Outreach in Ontario

A different kind of outreach is being done in the city of Hamilton, Ontario. As in most of Canada's cities, the downtown areas are places where the poor, the addicted, and the mentally ill live. In the past churches moved out of these parts and relocated in the suburbs. But now the suburbs are re-connecting with the city centres. In addition, an ever-increasing number of committed Christians see it as their calling to move into these formerly forgotten areas and let their light shine.

In part this is also what is happening with *Streetlight Ministries*. For more than ten years it has been doing outreach work in one of Canada's poorest neighbourhood. It is hard work; nevertheless, that has not deterred the Rev. Paul Aasman and his band of helpers and volunteers. In some small way they are doing what they can to bring the comfort of the gospel to a world that only seems to know suffering. Through Bible study, Lord's Day worship, life skill classes, counselling, and other efforts, they are making a difference. As such they deserve our respect, prayers, and support.

In the Brampton area *Word and Spirit Ministries*, an initiative of the local church there, continues to let its light shine. Unlike Streetlight, this is not inner city work as much as it is evangelism through education. Currently they are offering what are called "Life Renewal Sessions" and are thereby trying to make an impact in a society where there is so much brokenness in marriages, families, and individual lives.

In many places in Ontario, as well as across the land, senior citizen homes have the attention of local evangelism committees. The result is that brief but special worship services are organized regularly in these places and fellowship is extended to seniors, many of whom live lonely and forgotten lives.

Radio broadcasting continues to happen too in Ontario and elsewhere. The program *The Voice of the Church* can be heard on many local stations. Listeners receive an opportunity to call in or to submit their comments in writing. As well contacts are made, and local churches are engaged in follow-up.

Youth camps

In both British Columbia and Ontario, associations organized by church members run summer camps for young people. In BC Camp Stepping Stones operates for at least five weeks during the months of July and August in the mountains near Deroche. The same applies to Campfire in Ontario. This youth camp has been around longer and operates on a larger scale, as well as for a longer time in the summer than the camp in BC. It also operates out of a beautiful property near Markdale.

In both places many organizers, camp workers, and counsellors put their shoulders to the task and give hundreds of young people a most memorable experience. They also make a lasting impact on those young people who come from un-churched homes. Finally, it is not too much to say that any number of our present church leaders owe a good deal of their commitment to a life transforming and affirming camp experience.

Foreign outreach

The churches continue to support the work of foreign outreach in such places as Brazil, China, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and South Africa.

Brazil

The mission work in Brazil has the attention of sending churches in both the East and the West. In the eastern part of Canada, the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton, with the support of some churches in Ontario, remains active in the city of Maceio. At the end of 2012 a church was instituted. It continues to receive support from Hamilton and its missionary, the Rev. Bram deGraaf, although he is no longer assigned to that church.

In the western part of the country the church at Aldergrove, supported by almost all of the churches in Western Canada, leads the mission efforts in such places as Recife, Sao Jose, Marigogi, and elsewhere. Currently

it supports two missionaries, namely the Revs. Julius VanSpronsen and Ken Wieske. Inquiries are being made as to whether or not the supporting churches are prepared to stand behind the calling of a third missionary.

During 2014 much of the work fell on the shoulders of the Rev. Julius VanSpronsen as his colleague and co-worker, the Rev. Ken Wieske, came down with a severe case of burnout. Thankfully there appears to be improvement and Rev. Wieske is hoping to return to Brazil in the month of December.

Once the missionary team is re-united the pace will no doubt pick up when it comes to both seminary work and supporting work in the churches. Thankfully the work of teaching new students could continue throughout the year. Rev. VanSpronsen, who leads the charge on this front, continues to be in good health. As well, he has been assisted by teachers who have come from Canada and other parts of the world.

At the same time the list of churches needing help and new churches making inquiries has not slowed down. In a country such as Brazil where the hunger for the Reformed faith keeps on growing, our missionaries will need to exercise their self-control and learn to balance labour and leisure. So easily the work can overwhelm the workers.

Thankfully, there are other resources as well that are of great help. I think here of Brother Chris Boersema, our mission aid worker, who takes some of the pressure off the missionaries and supervises the local support work. In this he is also assisted by Brother Shawn Raap, who moved down to Brazil for a time and has been helping out on a part-time basis.

China

In a vastly different part of the world the Canadian Reformed Churches of Cloverdale and Langley, with the support of the Free Reformed Churches of Kelmscott and Mount Nasura, are hard at work. China, the most populous nation on the face of the earth, is the object of their attention. These outreach efforts are led by the missionary, the Rev. Frank Dong, who spends a good deal of his time online and on site counselling church leaders, settling disputes, giving guidance, and providing instruction.

He also coordinates all of the teaching teams that are sent abroad to Asia and leads a good number of them in person. He edits the work of the translation team. He is responsible for the day to day working of the China Reformed Bible College. On top of that, he also acts as the pastor of the local Chinese Reformed Church. Needless to say, he is a super busy man.

Thankfully though he has the support of a very able board. He also works with a very capable full-time translation team composed of the sisters Jean (co-ordinator), Maple, and Helen, as well as a qualified band of translators at home and abroad. Together they make sure that the website receives a steady stream of new material.

In addition, Rev. Dong is also not afraid to call on his colleagues across the country for advice, and they are more than willing to assist him in any way they can. They wholeheartedly support what he is doing and see it as an honour to lend a helping hand.

As a result, the work of the online Bible College could continue and expand to thirty-four students in 2014. Some of these students are in their introductory year, others are in their first and second years of study. All of them are extremely hard working and some show great promise for the future expansion of the work. Indeed, some are already taking what they have just learned and are spreading it far and wide.

Hence the work at home in Canada and in China advances; but, it does so not without set back. You can read more about this in the latest edition of *Mission Matters*. It highlights the fact that on his last trip to China the Rev. Dong was picked up and interviewed by the religious authorities and given some very stern warnings. What the consequences of this will be for the work remains to be determined; however, it does mean that greater care will need to be taken in the future. Your prayerful support is needed.

Indonesia

Far to the south of China one can find another large and populated nation, namely Indonesia. Here the Rev. Edwer Dethan is hard at work in Kupang, Timor, where he is in charge of a large and growing college and seminary. His work is also multi-dimensional as he has to be in turn a preacher, a teacher, an administrator, and counsellor. He also has to make do at times with limited resources, in a region where there is much poverty and limited opportunity.

Thankfully his work continues to receive a great deal of assistance from the sending Canadian Reformed Church at Smithville and its supporting churches. The Mission Board there works hard to see that the needs of its missionary and its mission field are being met.

Part of Rev. Dethan's work also has to do with the planting of new churches and the mentoring on new pastors. Thankfully the Reformed presence in that part of the world is growing and exerting a positive influence.

Papua New Guinea

The same can be said in a neighbouring nation, namely that of Papua New Guinea. In the city of Port Moresby, the Revs. Cornelis Kleyn and Henry Versteeg from the Canadian Reformed Churches, together with the Rev. Alan Douma from the Reformed Churches in New Zealand, are hard at work training men for the ministry of the gospel.

As with so much foreign mission work, the focus has shifted. It used to be that missionaries were sent out to plant churches in foreign countries. Now missionaries are more and more being sent out to teach local young men to become missionaries and church planters.

It just makes so much better sense in a number of ways. Usually it takes years for a foreigner to learn the local language well. Added to that, it may take decades, perhaps even a lifetime or never, before they really understand the culture. In such a situation, how much more effective it is from a talent, time, and money perspective to train local people.

Mention also needs to be made of the fact that some distance from Port Moresby there is another Reformed mission presence. It is situated in the city of Lae where some Canadians namely, Revs. Ian Wildeboer and Tim Sikkema, are working on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Armadale church in particular. In that work they are supported by Chris and Nicole Steenhof as mission support workers.

Mexico

Going east across the Pacific one comes to another large country, Mexico. At present the Canadian Reformed Churches do not have a mission post in that country. However, they do have a presence in the northern area where two brothers are hard at work. Brothers Jeremy VanBeelen and Duane Visscher are both doing mission aid work as they are involved in the administration and

construction of orphanages. Both brothers and their families are mission members of the Canadian Reformed Church of Langley.

In addition the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford has also expressed an interest in setting up a mission post in that area. Towards the end of 2014 this church decided to send the Revs. Karlo Janssen and Jim Witteveen to Mexico to investigate the possibilities and to draft a report.

The Philippines

Another part of the world that is attracting attention is the Philippines. Currently the Providence Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton and the Free Reformed Church of Baldivis, Western Australia, are sending teaching teams to that nation. The Revs. Wes Bredenhof and Stephen t' Hart have been there, as has the Rev. Carl Vermeulen from Darling Downs. Efforts are also being made to coordinate future mission work with the United Reformed Churches of North America who also have a missionary presence in the region.

At present it is hard to predict where all of this will go. Still, the reports coming back indicate that in the Philippines too there is a great hunger for the gospel and the Reformed faith. It is a strange but true situation in our day that while many in the West are busy resisting the gospel, many in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are hungering for it. May the Lord see fit to use us in some small way to feed that hunger.

Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF)

One agency that is trying to do that is called MERF. Located in Cyprus and operating under the leadership of the Rev. Victor Atallah, this organization seeks to spread the gospel through the Middle East in countries that adhere to the Islamic faith. By means of radio broadcasts, literature distribution, Internet teaching, leadership training in Larnaca, onsite theological instruction, and diaconal aid work, it seeks to make a difference in the religious climate of the Middle East.

As a result of this noble aim, it receives both prayer and financial support from many of our churches and members. The Canadian committee of MERF located in Burlington does outstanding work and the Rev. Jan deGelder continues to serve on the board of MERF.

*Children of Light school
in West Timor*



Mercy and Auxiliary Work

As Reformed believers we have always insisted that it is the whole man that needs to be ministered to. While the soul is vital, the body needs attention as well.

As a result, mission work goes together with mercy or mission aid work.

Currently and as mentioned above, Brother Chris Boersema is directing the mission aid work in Brazil. Supported by the Mission Aid Brazil Committee in BC and monies coming from the church members in Western Canada, he distributes funds, identifies worthwhile projects, oversees various efforts, and does what he can to promote the living conditions of the brothers and sisters in Brazil.

In Indonesia, Sister Femmie Dethan, although not a designated mission aid worker, is doing orphanage work as she involves herself in the New Hope Orphanage. In that same country the Children of Light organization, now under the Word and Deed umbrella, remains hard at work. Originally this organization supported the Rev. Yonson Dethan and his wife Mary-Lynn who founded a large school of 1200 students. Today it encompasses a K-12 school, a trade school, a computer school, as well as a theological high school. Recognition should also be given to Brother Andy Vandenhaak, who together with his wife Gerda, started Children of Light, but was taken home by the Lord in 2014.

In Mexico, as previously reported, we have the VanBeelens and Visschers doing the same type of work.

In Papua New Guinea we have Hugo and Erica Feunekes hard at work for Mission Aviation Fellowship. He is in charge of the MAF airplane maintenance and repair facility.

In Haiti, we have Randy and Karen Lodder using their talents in the areas of education as they operate the

Adoration Christian Centre. In Nicaragua, we have Nathan and Kim Boersema doing what they can to raise educational standards in that country.

On a much broader scale we also have the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund (CRWRF). It collects monies from the churches and distributes it to worthwhile aid projects in Africa and Asia. It also dispenses assistance whenever a disaster strikes somewhere in the world. Much of the same type of work is being done by the Word and Deed organization also located in Ontario. The prime difference between them is that while the former is entirely staffed by volunteers, the latter uses a combination of paid staff and volunteers.

The Canadian Reformed Missions Association (CRMA)

After experiencing some teething problems in its early years, this organization is steadily maturing and finding its place in the ever increasing mission and mission aid work being done by our churches. At present all mission calling churches and mission aid organizations are members. The only exceptions are the Ancaster church which supervises Streetlight Ministries and the Smithers church which oversees the Prince George work.

The annual meeting of the CRMA is usually held in the month of September in the Hamilton area. This year, upon special request, it was decided to hold the meeting in Langley, BC. Once the delegates assembled business matters were quickly dealt with. A number of churches and organizations brought the members up to date on new developments. Attention was paid to the new website being launched. During coffee breaks and intermissions, there was a lot of re-connecting going on and a great deal of information being shared.

The main speaker this year was brother Mark Bube, the Director of Foreign Missions for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Mark is a lawyer by trade but a missionary at heart. For many years now he has been the face of OPC missions to the world and every year he travels the globe keeping contact with the men and women in the field. Based on his wealth of experience, he gave some very inspiring presentations about both the theology and methodology of Reformed missions. Any number of the attendees were busy making notes of the things they learned. No doubt they planned to take this wisdom back home to their local churches and committees.

Christian education

Speaking of wisdom, we should not overlook all of the prayers, donations, and labours that go into our school network. On the whole the Canadian Reformed community in Canada is rather small and easily overlooked. Nevertheless, a closer look reveals that the Lord has richly blessed not just our churches but also our schools.

Perhaps it is also good to remind everyone that our schools, unlike Roman Catholic schools and some others, are not parochial schools. This means that they are not operated and controlled by the churches. Ministers and elders, consistories and church councils do not run these schools and give teachers their marching orders. No, our schools are parental Christian schools. The parents in the church are responsible for them. They elect a board and that board hires teachers on their behalf, determines educational philosophies and policies, as well as sets budgets and oversees physical plants.

Local school news

As for school news in 2014, it may be reported that our schools in the Fraser Valley have been struggling to co-ordinate future growth and development. At present the William of Orange School is shrinking in size, while Credo Elementary and John Calvin Elementary are both experiencing growing pains. A joint plan to address this matter was developed, presented, voted on, but it failed to garner enough support.

While this matter was under discussion, the members of the Credo Christian Elementary School in Langley decided to support the construction of an addition to their school, as well as to renovate the entire structure and the playing fields. Meanwhile the John Calvin School in Yarrow is looking at some major building plans as well.

Further east the small Christian school in Vernon keeps on growing and gaining support. The members recently made a decision to buy a neighbouring piece of property. They plan to renovate the home on that property and to move their new portable on to it as well, thereby creating space for future expansion.

In Alberta, the board of the Coaldale Christian School held a drive and raised more than 1.6 million dollars for a major addition to the school. This money, I am told, came from both Canadian and United Reformed families in the area. Apparently there is some controversy in Alberta over



the future of Christian schools generally. Many of the inter-denominational schools have gone under the public school umbrella for funding purposes and this has raised a considerable amount of concern about the future of these schools. The result is that some of the parents in United Reformed circles are re-examining their options and sending their children to Canadian Reformed schools.

Moving on to Ontario, the big news there in 2014 has to do with Fergus, Ontario. If you happen to be visiting the area and approaching Fergus from the south you cannot miss a large, beautiful stone structure on your right as you enter the town. For years it sat abandoned, but no longer as the local Canadian Reformed school society, together with lots of neighbouring support, decided to purchase this building, renovate it and turn it into a new regional high school site.

It is quite an ambitious project and will cost millions. Thus far, however, the money appears to be coming in and the plans are proceeding. One can only hope that there will not be a lot of unforeseeable expenses (old buildings often hold costly surprises) and that in due time a new high school will give new life to an old building. If all goes as planned, I will go out on a limb and say that Fergus will have one of the most beautiful high schools in the country.

In the Burlington area the subject of Christian schooling has also been in the news. If I have my facts right (and that's always a challenge when you live 8,000 kms away) then it has been decided to sell the old John Calvin School property, to either sell or renovate the Covenant Christian School, and to build a new school in the area. As always this will have been and may continue to be a painful

process for some. Whether it is a matter of selling a church or a school, or doing away with a school near an existing church, it is never an easy decision. Still, there are times when tough decisions need to be made, or they will in time be made for you. Whether that is the case in Burlington or not, is a matter best left to the readers in that area.

In the Hamilton region schooling was also in the news. The Guido de Brès High School needed a new roof but the work could not be completed on time. The result was that the students had their summer holidays extended. I am sure that many of them did not mind. As for their parents? Well, that is most likely another story.

The continued growth of the Timothy Christian School in Hamilton has the attention of parents and board members alike. There is some discussion about the Glanbrook church being bought and turned back into a school. Should that happen then the church will no doubt try to build (zoning permitted?) on some nearby property that they own.

CCRTS

Going back to Hamilton, the Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College (CCRTC) continues to train students to become good teachers. A capable staff, under the leadership of Dr. Christine VanHalen-Faber, is committed to providing an education that is at least on par with and in many ways superior to other forms of teacher training.

A challenge remains, however, in the area of accreditation. Living as we do in a society that champions pluralism but does not truly practice it, this is an uphill battle. Still, the Lord is mighty and also in this case there is a need to petition his throne and to plead with him to move mountains.

Special homes

While many of our senior members live in their own homes, there are any number that have either chosen to move into care homes or who needed to move into such homes. For some of them the choice was an easy one but for others it was a most difficult step to make. Still, once it is made many of them will acknowledge over time that it was a good and necessary thing to do.

No doubt one of the reasons that make it good has to do with the quality of many of these homes. In our midst we have been blessed with some great homes whether they

be in Surrey, Langley, Abbotsford, Edmonton, Carman, Winnipeg, Brampton, Grimsby, Shelburne, Fergus, or Waterdown. In addition, new homes are under construction all the time. At present our church members are looking at new homes in Aurora, Burlington, and Lethbridge.

Along with senior homes, we also have an ever-growing number of special care homes. Currently, Anchor Homes for the handicapped has purchased another home in the Hamilton area to augment existing ones in Beamsville, Burlington, Dunnville, Fergus, and Grimsby. In other parts of the country similar facilities are available whether they are called Bethesda, Rehoboth, or something else.

ARPA

Thankfully our members have not bought into some of the two kingdom views that are out there and that would undermine our attempts to bring the gospel to bear on the social, economic, and political areas of life. As a result the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) continues to receive good and growing support across the country. Its two leaders Mark Penninga and Andre Schutten spent a great deal of time in Ottawa this year and around the country drumming up support. As a result of their efforts and the input of many, inroads could be made. One thinks of the new prostitution law in Canada that will especially target the people who buy sex and the pimps that sell it. One thinks too of their intervener status in the legal cases dealing with assisted suicide and parental authority in education.

One thinks of the attention paid to the plight of the unborn. ARPA, together with the *WeNeedaLaw* organization fronted by Brother Mike Schouten, are making a difference. Let us all pray that these steady and persistent efforts will one day bear fruit and turn our nation into an abortion-free zone.

Closing

I realize that there is much, much more that can be said and written about the year of our Lord 2014 but it is time to bring this long tale to a close. If I missed anything major, please forgive me and drop me a line at jvisscher@telus.net.

For the rest, I wish our readers every blessing during the upcoming festive season and hope that you will be on the receiving end of God's many gifts and graces in 2015. 🙏



Season's Greetings

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