

Clarion

The Art of Christian Conversation

EVERYONE NEEDS A MARK
CHURCH SNAPSHOT
YOU ASKED



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The Art of Christian Conversation

*We are losing the art of conversation,
specifically Christian conversation*

Have you ever reflected on a recent social visit with fellow Christians and concluded that it wasn't very enjoyable? In fact, it was painful! I'm referring to the way the conversation went, kind of one-sided. Or maybe your visit was quite fun, with a lot of laughs, but something about it left you unsatisfied. As time goes on and a number of visits pass, do you find that your chats with church friends and/or family are getting stale, the topics of discussion only skin-deep, and the "fun" is going out of them? Unless I miss my guess, these are the experiences of many of us and it shows that we are losing the art of conversation, specifically Christian conversation.

Mr. Shy

Perhaps you've met one of the following three kinds of conversationalists (or ask yourself: could *I* be one of them?): Mr. Shy, Mr. Take-Over, Mr. Surface. Mr. Shy (or, you understand, *Ms. Shy*) sits quietly and politely on your sofa and tends to answer questions as briefly as possible – one word, if that works. You inquire about his family, his work, his interests and hobbies, but all you get is a vague picture and at the end of the visit you feel hardly any further ahead than when you started. You want to get to know him but you are being held at arms' length. Meanwhile, Mr. Shy has not asked you a single thing and the one-way discussion peters out.

Mr. Take-Over

Mr. Take-Over, on the other hand, quickly dominates the discussion. Taking your first question as an invitation to speak mostly about his life and his experiences, off he runs with the topic. He then drifts seamlessly from

topic to topic without pausing, mostly weaving his situation and opinions throughout. You hardly have to ask another question. Ever. But if you do manage to inject a comment or share something about yourself, Mr. Take-Over instantly relates that to something else in his life and quickly commandeers the conversation for another twenty minutes. For every 1000 words he speaks, you speak ten.

As much as Mr. Shy doesn't want to share anything meaningful about himself, Mr. Take-Over overwhelms you with too many details about himself to ever remember. It's exhausting. And still, no questions for you. Or maybe a quick one at the end, thirty seconds before leaving, "Oh, and how are things in *your* life? We hardly talked about you. . . ." Really?!

Mr. Surface

Mr. Surface is altogether different. He tends to keep company with Christian friends who, like him, enjoy hanging out and sharing laughs. There tend to be a number in the group who are like him, a gathering of several Mr. and Ms. Surfaces. The Surfaces often enjoy chatting with each other over coffee, a barbecue, dinner, or a games evening. They will speak freely about the weather, work, sports, shopping, boyfriends or girlfriends, their favourite beer or wine, the latest or upcoming vacation, and the like. The subjects are common, from everyday life, but what the group of Surfaces are not inclined to talk about are matters of faith and/or worship, struggles, hurts, unfulfilled dreams, or even deep joys and loves. They mostly stay with light matters and don't like opening up subjects that are close to the bone. Just pleasant conversation, please.

Nowhere conversations

You can see the problem, I think – and likely you have experienced it. No doubt we all can think of times when we've conversed like one (or more!) of these. Such conversations either go nowhere at all, arriving at a dead end, or they go nowhere *helpful* in building the bonds of Christian friendship. Mr. Shy doesn't let you in so you can't develop a meaningful relationship with him. He's not mean-spirited – probably just an introvert – but all the same, by holding back he remains in his corner, an "unknown" with whom you are unable to truly share life's experiences.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Issue 2 begins with an editorial by Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, "The Art of Christian Conversation." He speaks of one sidedness and depth, and explores ways that we can improve the conversations with our fellow believers.

Other articles include a Clippings New and Old from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam and an article reprinted from *New Horizons*.

We have news from Cornerstone church in Hamilton as they welcome the Louwerse family. This congregation has also sent in their biography for the new Church Snapshot column.

The issue contains a Treasures New and Old meditation and a press release, the You Asked column, and a mission news insert.

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CLARION
Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: 204-663-9000, Fax: 204-663-9202

Subscriptions subscriptions@clarionmagazine.ca
Advertisements ads@clarionmagazine.ca
Website www.clarionmagazine.ca

2016 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

			Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada			\$49.00*	\$ 82.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds			\$69.00	\$102.00
International			\$98.00	\$171.00

*Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra.
GST/HST no. 890967359RT

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2016 ADVERTISING RATES

Advertisements: \$20.00 per column inch
Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch.
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PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

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Mr. Take-Over, often without intending to do so, is so focussed on himself that he never really comes to know you. Such one-way conversations tend to choke off relationships, for while one person down-loads everything on his mind the other is “sucked dry,” always having to listen to the other’s recitation of experience and opinion but never being meaningfully asked to share one’s own concerns, cares, or thoughts. That can’t go on forever. Every person’s soul needs to *receive* nurture, not just give it out. Conversation needs to be a two-way street, share and share alike, from both sides. The saddest part is that Mr. Take-Over often has no idea that he is monopolizing the visit and goes home thinking how nice it was (because he was able to say all he felt like saying)!

It works both ways: we need to inquire of others and we need to let others in.
Two-way conversation!

And as for the conversations among the Surfaces, all seems well and good until one of the group hits rocky ground – health problems, faith struggles, or relationship break-downs. When all you’re used to talking about are the fun and pleasant things of life, easy subjects, what do you say to a friend who’s been diagnosed with cancer or who is thinking about leaving the church or whose spouse has left him/her? How can you as a Christian, comfort, encourage, instruct, or warn and admonish with God’s Word when you’ve never even talked about such things with each other?

Love your neighbour

Scripture points us in a different and better direction, starting with the basic command to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev 19:18). To love is to care for, do good to, exercise kindness toward. The actions of love are dictated by the circumstances of our neighbour. If he is physically in need (e.g. sick or injured), then we help him physically. If he is spiritually in need (e.g. discouraged, lonely, depressed, or straying from the Lord), then we aim to provide encouragement through friendship, talks, a listening ear, a comforting word, a correcting and guiding word, reading from Scripture, and prayer. These are concrete ways God wants us to show love, but how can we love Mr. Shy if he never tells us about himself? And how can the Surfaces address spiritual needs if they have no practice at bringing up such topics let alone offering some help? And would Mr. Shy or Mr. Take-Over

be able to appropriately help others whom they have not taken the time to ask questions of and get to know?

Two-way conversation

Christian conversation must – under normal circumstances – be two-way, where each partner in the visit takes a genuine interest in the other and gives time for the other. The Lord commands this of us in Philippians 2:3, “In humility count others more significant than yourselves; Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” We are called to be united as brothers and sisters in the Lord, to be of “one-mind” and, like Christ, to serve the other first (see Phil 2:1-11 for context). We fail in this if, during a visit, we hardly ask questions of the other, show no interest in their personal circumstances, their joys and sorrows, and never venture to touch on matters of the heart. Whether it’s the silence of Mr. Shy, the all-about-my-experiences chatter of Mr. Take-Over, or the superficiality of Mr. Surface, we are not putting our neighbour first, not seeking to build him up, and not humbly following the example of our Saviour.

Think also of the command to use our Spirit-given gifts for the well-being of other church members. Paul tells us about such gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 which include serving, teaching, exhorting, being generous, leading, doing acts of mercy – and such a list is only the beginning. Every Christian has been equipped by Christ’s Spirit with at least one gift to help others, but how can we put those gifts into practice if we (from our side) don’t take the time and effort to get to know others in the congregation through conversation? Or, if we block such efforts by refusing to open our lives to anyone in the church or to “go there” with our friends in conversation? Is this not preventing our fellow believers from using their gifts to assist us? It works both ways: we need to inquire of others *and* we need to let others in. Two-way conversation!

Listen well

Christian conversation involves at least two key ingredients and the first is listening carefully. As James says in 1:19, “Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak.” Too often our listening is sloppy, catching only a few highlights – or maybe just listening for a break so that we can jump back in and say what we’d been thinking while the other was talking (a particular problem for Mr. Take-over). But a caring, Christian friend will have a desire to know and understand what’s going on, at the deeper levels. We should lean in and listen with both ears, so to speak. Ask questions for clarification. Check

yourself during and after your next visit: Did I give the other person a genuine opportunity to speak about themselves? Did the other person speak roughly fifty percent of the time or did I not give him/her the chance? Have I really understood what he/she has said, what they are feeling? Can I repeat back an accurate summary of what they shared with me? Have I listened well and do I understand well?

True, not every person you visit with is going to be a close friend or confidante, not everyone will share their heart's troubles. We can't bare our souls to everybody. But we should love each other enough to give our conversation partner every opportunity to share their lives to whatever level they are comfortable with. And when people do share, we should respect and care for them enough to stop, listen, and empathize as best we can. And if we do reply, let us not put the spotlight back on ourselves but use our words to encourage, bless, and build up our conversation partner according to their situation.

Ask good questions

The second key ingredient is to inquire with care – not to be nosy or to gather information for tomorrow's gossip – but out of genuine concern for our Christian brother or sister. We should want to know their joys so we can rejoice with them, their sorrows so that we can grieve with them (see 1 Cor 12:26), and their struggles so we can assist them if possible.

Let us use our words to encourage, bless, and build up our conversation partner according to their situation

If we are poor at giving each other a listening ear, we are often equally poor at asking probing questions which give openings for deeper conversation. Of course it's okay to chat about light things like the weather, sports, and holidays, but let's learn to go beyond the top layer of life and ask things like: how is your family doing? (Your parents and/or siblings? Your wife/husband? Your children?). If the person is single, inquire about friendships and give an opening for them to discuss any special relationships there might be. Also, try this: how are things at work lately? (What kind of work do you do? What's your role? Where do you see your career in five years?) A person's family, close relationships, and work are huge parts of his/her life, so showing interest here demonstrates genuine concern. If people have issues that they want to open up about, it's often in these three areas.



It's also good to ask about life in the local church (What are you studying at Bible Study? What's your minister been preaching on lately?). Find out about their hobbies or volunteer work they might do (Sports? Crafts? What are you reading lately? Quilting? Thrift Store? Youth Centre?). Go a level broader and talk about subjects that are outside of your immediate lives but relevant to believers generally and which affect your Christian thinking and way of looking at the world. For example, ask about their views on the latest items in the news, politics, movies, books, health, science, music, and arts – and the ideas and mindset which undergird them. Exchanging ideas and opinions, reasoning out points of view from the Bible can be very stimulating and strengthening for each Christian in the conversation.

Much more could be said but such an approach will be a good start. Can we all take a look in the mirror to see if we are or have been Mr./Ms. Shy, Take-Over, or Surface and make the necessary changes? I'm convinced that if each of us would be more thoughtful and deliberate about developing the art of Christian conversation, under the Lord's blessing our personal relationships would flourish, our church fellowships would become stronger, and the Lord's Name honoured that much more.

C



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Lost and Found

Judges 19-21

Last year 41,352 people were reported lost in Canada. Maybe you can remember – their faces used to go on milk cartons. Now Facebook and Twitter hope to be more effective.

What are they? Missing children. Most are found, thankfully, within twenty-four hours. But 136 are still not accounted for. Now that is bad enough to consider.

But what about this: what if this happened not just on earth, but in heaven? What if the LORD one day called out the name of a chosen child, and they could not be found? Is that even possible you might ask?

Well, here at the end of Judges, that is what almost happens. A child almost goes missing. A whole tribe – Benjamin. That's how bad things have become in Israel.

It starts with a brutal scene: Sodom and Gomorrah revisited. But this time it's in Gibeah, in Benjamin. And there are no angels to stop the atrocities like in Genesis 19. Two women are used and abused, cast aside like garbage. One of them doesn't survive.

Now that is bad enough. But it's only the beginning. When Israel wants to deal with Gibeah, the tribe of Benjamin steps in and allies themselves with their relatives. It's silly what we sometimes do out of misguided loyalties. We think we are defending people – but we are really defending sin.

Because of this the whole nation goes to war against the tribe of Benjamin. And what happens sounds eerily like scenes from the book of Joshua. Complete with setbacks and ambushes – just like with Ai, for instance. The Spirit wants us to remember those scenes. But here it happens within Israel. Holy war is again declared, but on Israel herself. The passage also makes it clear that the LORD isn't sitting idly by. This is his war, too. But it is against one of his own. In the end the tribe of Benjamin almost goes the way of the dodo.

Somehow wives are found for the few men that remain, hiding out in a bunch of caves. A city is ransacked, dancing girls are abducted. Is it all ok and legit? The result is right – but the

means are a little shady. After all this, the book of Judges again concludes with the refrain, "Everyone did what was right in their own eyes."

So our eyebrows should be raised. These are only man-made solutions.

How can the future of a tribe in Israel be secured? That's the great question we end with. Sin will turn the people of God into Sodom and Gomorrah as well. There is really only one way. A far better way. And a far more dreadful way.

It is not just fathers and brothers in Israel who must graciously give up their daughters and sisters to those who have no future. A greater sacrifice must be made. The Almighty God must graciously give up his one and only Son.

Holy war needs to be declared on the Holy One – a war where God himself executes judgment. That is the only way we can find hope and a future. The Son must be lost. That is the only way none of God's children will go missing. That is why the Son must come. "Since he came us to ransom. . ." (Hymn 20:4, BOP).



For Further Study

1. How are we just like the dark world around us?
2. What do we do/defend out of misguided loyalty?
3. Where do you need to apply this truth – that God is more passionate his children not be lost than even we are?
4. Read Judges 19-21. Sing: Hymn 20.



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Is Islam a Religion of Peace?

The question whether Islam is a religion of peace may seem bizarre and unnecessary in view of a string of deadly terrorist attacks during the previous year, all in the name of Islam. Yet, too many Western leaders continue to characterize Islam this way. As Mark Durie summarized in an article (December 16, 2015) hosted on the Middle East Forum website:

The slogan “religion of peace” has been steadily promoted by Western leaders in response to terrorism: George W. Bush and Jacques Chirac after 9/11, Tony Blair after 7/7, David Cameron after drummer Lee Riby was beheaded and after British tourists were slaughtered in Tunisia, and François Hollande after the Charlie Hebdo killings. After the beheading of 21 Copts on a Libyan beach Barack Obama called upon the world to “continue to lift up the voices of Muslim clerics and scholars who teach the true peaceful nature of Islam.”

More recent examples can be given as well.

Mark Durie noted that all this is wishful thinking and has been rejected even among Muslims. The notion that Islam is a religion of peace “has not only been challenged by radical clerics such as Abu Bakr AlBaghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State, but also by mainstream Muslim leaders.” For example, Sheikh Ramadan AlButi of Syria, one of the most widely respected traditionalist Sunni scholars before he was killed in 2013, said that claiming Islam to be a peaceful religion is:

A “falsehood” imposed upon Muslims by Westerners to render Islam weak. He argued. . . that when nonMuslims fear Islamic jihad, their initial inclination is to accuse the religion of being violent. However they then change tack and craftily feed to Muslims the idea that Islam is peaceful, in order to make it so. He laments the gullibility of “simpleminded Muslims” who readily accept this “defense” as valid. He suggested that those who claim Islam is a religion of peace want “to erase the notion of jihad from the minds of all Muslims.”

Most telling of all is the fact that the world’s most prestigious Islamic institution of higher learning, Egypt’s Al Azhar University in Cairo, has refused to denounce the Islamic State as un-Islamic. In a posting on Jihad Watch (November 20, 2015), Raymond Ibrahim quotes Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah Nasr, a scholar of Islamic law, as saying that Al Azhar cannot condemn the Islamic State as un-Islamic because it:

Is a byproduct of Al Azhar’s programs. So can Al Azhar denounce itself as unIslamic? Al Azhar says there must be a caliphate and that it is an obligation for the Muslim world [to establish it]. Al Azhar teaches the law of apostasy and killing the apostate. Al Azhar is hostile towards religious minorities, and teaches things like not building churches, etc. Al Azhar upholds the institution of *jizya* [extracting tribute from religious minorities]. Al Azhar teaches stoning people. So can Al Azhar denounce itself as unIslamic?

Egyptian political writer, Dr. Khalid al-Montaser showed that “Al Azhar was encouraging enmity for non-Muslims, specially Coptic Christians, and even inciting for their murder.” He then asked: “Is it possible at this sensitive time – when murderous terrorists rest on texts and understandings of *takfir* [accusing Muslims of apostasy], murder, slaughter, and beheading – that Al Azhar magazine is offering free of charge a book whose latter half and every page – indeed every few lines – ends with ‘whoever disbelieves [nonMuslims] strike off his head?’”

As Ibrahim summarizes: “In short, the phenomenon known as ‘ISIS’ is not a temporal aberration within Islam but rather a byproduct of what is considered normative thinking for Al Azhar – the Islamic world’s most authoritative university.”

Mark Durie aptly notes that to continue calling Islam a religion of peace cannot be a fruitful strategy in the long run. “It invites mockery, such as Palestinian cleric Abu Qatada’s riposte to George Bush’s declaration that ‘Islam is peace.’ Abu Qatada asked: ‘Is he some kind of Islamic scholar?’”



Everyone Needs a Mark

This article was originally published in New Horizons, January 2015.

Moments after Darla Jantsch gave birth to her first child on July 1, 1982, she knew something was wrong. As a nurse, Darla recognized that their newborn son had Down syndrome. Her husband, Steve, however, suspected nothing. When their doctor told them in the recovery room, Steve fell apart. As the reality of raising a child with special needs set in, they cried a good deal. To learn more about Down syndrome, Steve first read that more than fifty percent of babies born with Down syndrome die before the age of one. Now they realize that that information was out of date, but at the time it heightened their concern.

While Darla's maternal instincts kicked in, Steve was comforted greatly by their pastor, Charles Dennison, of Grace OPC in Sewickley, Pennsylvania, when he spoke with them on their baby's first evening. Although he reminded them of their hope in Christ, what Steve latched onto were his words, "We will learn more from him than he will learn from us."

Growing with Mark

The Jantsches never asked, "Why did you do this to us, Lord?" They never felt it was a curse from God. Nor did they feel that Mark needed healing, as some prayed. "He's not sick," said Steve. Mark, however, was born with a hole in his heart. Yet by the time he was old enough to have corrective surgery, the hole had disappeared!

"We learned to appreciate every step of his development, even when he could only lift up his head fifteen degrees," said Darla.

Mark was taught in special education classes with mainstreaming for non-academic activities. The Jantsches appreciated that his public school trained him for employment. Mark could sometimes be a "pill" in school due to inappropriate behavior, prompting countless meetings with staff to strategize how to help him, said Steve. At

times he had shown too much attention to girls and needed to be redirected when to give people hugs.

Steve describes Mark, now thirty-two, as loving, helpful, kind, and a joy to be around, as well as stubborn, immature, challenging, and one who doesn't adjust well to change. He needs guidance on hygiene, dietary habits, interacting with others, and appropriate entertainment. Mark is high functioning with mild to moderate mental retardation. He lives at home and cooks eggs, does laundry, and goes to work on a bus. Every morning they pray with him. Each summer, he enjoys helping in the kitchen at the Presbytery of Ohio Youth Camp and going to the lectures. He has become a fixture at the camp.

Mark's confession

At the time of Mark's birth, Steve and Darla struggled with the concept of infant baptism. If salvation depended on the individual's belief in God at the age of accountability, "What if Mark never grew up and professed faith?" Steve lamented. That question helped to confirm their belief in infant baptism.

Now an elder at Grace Church, Steve points to Mark when he teaches high school students about infant baptism and salvation: "There's the symbol of grace within the covenant. We don't presume, but trust in the promises of God and pray for him. Mark professed his faith and the session was content with what he was saying: 'Jesus loves me.'"

The Jantsches chose to hold Mark back in Sunday morning instruction until his sister became old enough to attend. If Sunday school teachers and others asked how they should treat Mark, Steve told them, "He's a kid. Treat him like any other kid. Expect he'll need to be disciplined."

The opening exercises before morning instruction involved children reciting the catechisms and Bible verses they had learned that week. While most of the kids moved directly from the Children's Catechism to the Shorter Catechism, Mark went through the Children's Catechism four or five times and then got through



two-thirds of the Shorter Catechism. Since Mark reads at a third-grade level, the Jantsches helped him with the memory work weekly, paraphrasing the difficult phrases.

Mark made a profession of faith at sixteen. “My concern was that I didn’t want Mark treated too differently, but he needed a simpler set of questions,” said Steve. “We rehearsed the questions and answers until he could recite them. When an elder asked a question, he answered with a great deal of feeling. He was willing to own it.” Today when Mark passes an ambulance on his bus ride to work, he prays for the person inside. When he reads the newspaper, he brings up items for prayer.

Although not theologically astute, Mark loves to go to church and serve by putting up the hymn numbers in their wooden holders at the front of church, setting up chairs and tables for fellowship meals, and reminding the ushers that they need to get to the door to do their jobs! “He is responsible and (because of the Downs nature of liking routine) he is dependable,” said Steve. “He’s strongly OP.” Mark takes notes during sermons. Recently he told a minister he didn’t preach long enough because he had only one page of notes. At the evening service, the congregation recites a question and answer from a catechism or a section from a confession. On Sunday afternoon, Mark prepares for that by reading the text and then going to the hymnal index to find a hymn that deals with it. At evening worship, he’s the first to request a hymn. “Mark is more consistent with his devotional reading than the rest of us,” said Steve, adding that Mark often makes them late because he won’t leave until he finishes.

Lessons learned

“Mark has taught us to reflect more on what is important to God in this life as we see how Mark deals with life,” said Steve. “Simplicity, patience, empathy, and forgiveness are all heightened by his being who he is, more so than if he didn’t have Downs.”

When Mark’s future loomed, the Jantsches worried what would happen to Mark when they were no longer able to care for him. Their three younger children, Hannah, Peter, and Caleb, comforted them by saying, “We’ve always known we would take care of him.” Their children require any future mate to get along with Mark. Darla explains, “We as a family have an awareness that God is in control and takes care of all things.”

***“We will learn more from him
than he will learn from us.”***

This has become all the more important since Hannah recently gave birth to a little girl with tuberous sclerosis, a rare genetic disease that causes benign tumors to grow in vital organs. Newborn Elise has tumors in her heart and brain. “We’re sad that she will have health issues, but we’re not frantic,” says her grandma, Darla.

“Our trust is in God, not in the things of this world, even our children,” echoes Steve. “Our confidence is that ‘He works all things for good to those who love him.’ Maybe we don’t see it right now, but God sees things in eternity, and we are to think his thoughts after him. We must have a heavenly perspective on all things in our life. Earthly family is not permanent, but heaven is. Faithfulness is what is important from the perspective of heaven. Our faithfulness in raising our children is what counts.” What advice would Darla give to parents of children with Down syndrome? “Trust God and treat them like you treat your other children.” Steve adds, “Praise the Lord for another covenant child. Be open with the church about their struggles and joys.”

“Mark has been a blessing,” said Steve. “He has joy in doing his work and recreation and enjoys life. I have dissatisfactions and I learn more from him about enjoying things. Everyone needs a Mark.”

C

Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church

Hamilton, Ontario

Welcome to Cornerstone church! We are a warm, down to earth, and diverse congregation dedicated to serving our Lord and Maker in the community of Hamilton. We hope this snippet gives a true portrayal of the fun-loving people and programs we are involved in. Our current membership total is 561, though anyone can tell you that the number changes almost weekly! We are fortunate enough to have lots of opportunities for friendship with our constant revolving door. Many people move to Hamilton for the modest housing prices, theological seminary, or the Christian schools in the area.

We have been extremely blessed with the solid and faithful preaching of the Word and now welcome our newest (and recent) addition, Pastor John Louwerse as well as his wife Annet and children Joel, Liselle, and Annesa. Our calling committee wasted no time reaching out to Pastor John and within a month our gracious God gave us plans for the arrival of a new minister. Pastor John and family really do emanate how caring and sincere our congregation strives to be.

Young and old, single and families are all welcomed and appreciated for the fabulous roles they play in making Cornerstone tick. Our elderly and more senior mem-



bers have done an inspiring job creating the strong foundation we have and our goal now is to share it with our immediate community! The youth bring a wonderful passion for the gospel and that coupled with our older members' thoughtful wisdom really make for some great strides in sharing the gospel message. We have an active community Bible study and warm friendships built within it. Our gems and cadets programs attract our neighbours and welcome them to learn about Jesus in a fun and biblical way. This year was our first year doing our Mega Sports Camp VBS and doing this brought an older audience with a lot more male turnout both in participation and volunteers. We operate a 24/7 food drive for our local Neighbour to Neighbour food bank. Hamilton has a high poverty rate so it really is fundamental that we do our part to help feed our city. Many small groups have taken the opportunity to volunteer at said food bank and other places around town. It is our hope that this will grow to be a very regular contribution! We are constantly re-evaluating what more we can do to help make this city great and have some more projects in the works regarding this.





Cornerstone really proves its diversity when it comes to the varying occupations our members hold. If you ever need anything, we probably know someone for the job! We have wonderfully creative artisans and painters, even one that currently has a collection in a gallery downtown with a theme of God's Kingdom. Passionate Christian teachers fill our sanctuary with the nearby elementary and high school. If you thought you could escape the misbehaviour of your youth, think again! The hub of hospitals in Hamilton provides supportive and caring nurses and volunteers within our midst. These enduring caregivers give selflessly to make the lives of their patients more comfortable. Included in

this is our air ambulance pilot whose job creates awe in many young faces (and those who are older!). We have a young female funeral director whose life has been touched by several tragic deaths; she now wants to pass on the professionalism and care needed to give closure to those grieving. The list goes on and on but this snapshot shows the sentiment behind many of our individual members.

The hearts of Cornerstone members are large and though we are far from perfect we strive to provide support and care to each other, demonstrating Christ's love as part of a devoted church family. Blessings to you from all those who worship here!



Hamilton “Cornerstone” Welcomes the Louwerse Family

Welcome

On Friday October 16, members of Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church filled the gym of Guido de Brès Christian High School to welcome the Louwerse family to Hamilton. The evening featured, among other things, a delectable array of potluck desserts. The delicious variety of cakes, pies, squares, and puddings was only too appropriate as the congregation acknowledged just how sweet it is to have our new minister and his family in our midst. Reverend John Louwerse and his wife Annet, along with their children Joel, age 10, Liselle, age 8, and Annesa, age 6, were warmly received by the Cornerstone family of believers and the Louwerse family had the opportunity to better get to know the character of their new congregation.

The evening opened with some words from William den Hollander, whom Rev. Louwerse mentored in Neerlandia as part of the program for the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. Dr. den Hollander shared some insights into the geographical changes the Louwerses have experienced in moving from Neerlandia, Alberta, to Hamilton, Ontario. As he pointed out, Hamilton, with its population of approximately 500 000, is an enormous metropolis when compared to the quiet rural hamlet of Neerlandia. In fact, traffic is a welcome sight in Neerlandia as it occurs on Sunday, when everyone is headed to church.

Dr. den Hollander's mentorship with Rev. Louwerse also allowed him to share some things about Cornerstone's new minister. Not only that Rev. Louwerse takes the role of mentor so seriously that he had to move to Hamilton to continue the job, as was jokingly asserted, but that we in Hamilton are very blessed to receive a man who is not only a good preacher but a good pastor. Rev. Louwerse was described as an under-shepherd of the Lord who has a pastor's heart.

After the opening words, prayer, and singing of “Loving Shepherd,” there was ample time to socialize and

enjoy a few treats. One of the congregation's fellowship groups led us through some Hamilton trivia and revealed a number of interesting facts about our fair city. One of the more astounding bits of information being that Hamilton has over a 100 waterfalls, something that is bound to happen when an escarpment runs through a city. Once the mental flexing was done, we enjoyed a rousing welcome song that was specially crafted to tell us a little more about the Louwerses. In particular, Rev. Louwerse's no-holds-barred approach to board games and Mrs. Louwerse's superior gardening skills.

Next, Mr. Tim Bosch took great pleasure in first presenting Joel, Liselle, and Annesa each with a gift, and then the Louwerses also received a two year membership pass for the Hamilton Conservation Authority. The pass gives free admission to a variety of recreational spaces in the Hamilton area and is a great asset for a family who enjoys hiking and being outdoors. The family was also presented with a lovely book about Hamilton's many waterfalls. Showcasing Hamiltonian resourcefulness, the copy presented happened to be borrowed from the library which nicely filled the gap while the on-order copy is on its way.



*Rev. and Mrs. Louwerse
enjoying the evening*



Many desserts to choose from!

At the conclusion of the gift presentation, we raised our voices in a song of unity, “O How Good It Is,” and then gave audience to the Gems and the Cadets. To show us what the groups are about, the Gems sang their theme song and the Cadets demonstrated a portion of what they do at their meetings. Among the youngsters presenting were Joel and Liselle, and it was wonderful to see that the Louwerse children are already making themselves at home.

The final song for the evening was “Great is Thy Faithfulness,” and, certainly, all those present were assured of that truth as Rev. Louwerse stood up to share his appreciation and say a few words. Rev. Louwerse said a word of thanks on behalf of his family, expressed his eagerness to get to know the congregation and stated that he looks forward to a good relationship. It was beautiful to be led in closing prayer by our own pastor. As we here in Cornerstone enjoy the great blessing of our new minister’s teaching and preaching, after only a short period of vacancy, we are very grateful that our Heavenly Father has provided for us so richly.

Installation

In his sermon at the installation service on the morning of Sunday, September 27, Dr. Arjan de Visser noted with great thankfulness that Rev. Louwerse came to us after a six month period of vacancy, whereas when Rev. Bill DeJong was installed in 2008, Hamilton had been vacant for almost four years. The calling committee apparently had heard much boasting about Rev. Louwerse’s preaching, teaching, and pastoral care and, in turn, the committee had boasted about the wonderful Cornerstone congregation – full of potential and eager to serve the Lord.

While the word boasting may have some negative connotations in a secular context, a scriptural understanding

of the term reveals that boasting can have a godly purpose. Reading from 2 Corinthians 8: 1-9:5, with special attention given to verses 23 -24, Dr. de Visser urged the congregation to “Listen to Paul’s boasting.” Paul boasts about his co-workers and the congregation at Corinth, and exhorts the church at Corinth to give proof of their love and thereby glorify God in whom all confidence is placed. Paul’s initial boast is about his co-workers – Titus and two other men who are unnamed. These men were responsible for collecting money from Macedonia and Corinth and bringing it to the needy church at Jerusalem. By assuring the church in Corinth that the men are trustworthy, Paul is consciously showing that he is doing the right thing and working to avoid any problems from the rebellious minority in Corinth who continued to question Paul’s motives and look to twist his words. As Dr. de Visser acknowledged, the ministry is not always easy and hopefully the members of Cornerstone will listen to the preaching of the gospel in order to be edified and not to find fault. Indeed, the congregation was exhorted to pray for Rev. Louwerse and to be thankful that God works in the hearts of his shepherds (the minister, as well as the elders and deacons) a sincere love for the congregation which allows the shepherds to give the sheep the attention they need.

The sermon provided a thorough exegesis of the text and many important aspects of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians were addressed, not all of which can be mentioned here (although the sermon is available online at <http://www.cornerstonecanrc.org/site/services/29/5468/>). With that said, it would be remiss not to include Dr. de Visser’s reflection that when you hear the preaching of the gospel you will love the Lord Jesus Christ more, thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit, and at the same time, you will love the minister because he is preaching to you the gospel of salvation. Within this relationship of mutual affection, everyone can grow in Christ. Because our confidence is rooted in the Lord, and not in our own sinful weakness, we can boast; and when we boast, we will boast in Jesus Christ.

Following the sermon and Rev. Louwerse’s installation, Mr. Brian Vanderhout spoke a few words on behalf of council. Delegates from neighbouring churches Trinity, Blessings, Providence, and Ancaster also welcomed Rev. Louwerse. Rehoboth United Reformed Church sent their regrets as the minister they were in the process of calling, or as it were, boasting to, was visiting with them that Sunday. The service was very appropriately concluded with the singing of Hymn 8, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.”





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Q **“It’s my body! I can do with it what I want to.” I have heard this line all too often in context with the justification of body modification. I am referring to tattooing and body piercings. I have great difficulty with the age we are in and that the world seems to set the trend for the church, old and young alike. In LD 1 we confess that my body is not mine, and that Christ paid the ultimate sacrifice for our life; I am merely a steward of this body. Am I off the mark with this? Would you be willing to expound a bit on this subject as it seems to be a growing trend in our churches these days?**

A I sure am willing to expound on this subject *a bit*, yet realizing that the topic itself is too broad for this column so that I can only touch upon some of the main aspects related to it. For this answer I made use of some of the notes the Rev. J. van Popta shared of a speech he had for young people, which addressed this “piercing paganism” and other aspects of the body modification as a sub-culture. Before, only among pagan tribes in Polynesia and Africa people practised such body modification (as can be seen in many pictures in *National Geographic*). They did it to identify themselves as belonging to a certain tribe or people, to protect their body from infiltration of evil spirits, or using it in their initiation rituals. In today’s sub-culture the practice itself is used to cause pain for its thrill and ecstasy, or as a spiritual experience. It’s part of a modern primitivism that seeks to restore some human feelings to a mostly technological world. The signs and symbols of this sub-culture display and create a sense of community, of belonging to those who wish to distinguish themselves from the “normal” people. At raves these modern primi-

tives come together to let all their passions go in dance, music, ecstasy, and sex.

Today all sorts of Christians also have tattoos and multiple piercings, brandings, sub-skin in-plants, and participate in the rave sub-culture. What does the *Bible* say about this, however? Leviticus 19:28: “Do not cut or tattoo yourselves!” Romans 12:2, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind;” rather, verse 1, “offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.” And, as the questioner already mentions, our Heidelberg Catechism also professes that I am not my own but belong with *body* and soul to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ! But still, despite such clear instructions and exhortations, body modifications are on the increase in the church as well. How come?

It’s part of a post-modern attitude of “never mind what the Bible says, I do it anyway.” It thus creates a dualism, saying that I can do with my *body* as I please as long as I love the Lord with my *soul*. Yet, the Bible says, 1 Corinthians 6: 18-20, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received

from God. You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.” In the OT this meant already: distinguish yourself from the pagan practices; Leviticus 19:28: “Do not cut or tattoo yourselves” (cf. Judges 8:24, the *Ishmaelite* wore earrings; 1 Kings 18:28, the *Baal priests* cut themselves on Mt. Carmel; Jeremiah 16:6, God’s judgment came because people cut themselves). In the NT also, Paul says, do not conform any longer to the world. You’re set apart, bought at a price! This status of holiness, of belonging to God, is losing its significance due to the influence of post-modern attitudes in which we do our own thing, go our own way, dress the way we like. Then by voluntarily branding oneself, tattooing one’s body, the person is essentially reclaiming ownership of himself.

In rejecting God’s will for the body, for one’s lifestyle, and for one’s choices, they reject God’s Word, God’s way of salvation in Jesus Christ. The fundamental need of fallen

man is atonement! This is critically important to know and understand. There is only one God-provided atonement and that is the pierced and risen Christ! It’s in the covenant of grace that this gift of atonement, his work of salvation, is signified in the *water* of baptism. It’s an *indelible* mark that sets us apart as God’s special people. “In view of God’s mercies, therefore,” Paul writes (Rom 12:1), “I urge you to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, *holy and pleasing to God* – this is your spiritual act of worship.”

*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. den Hollander
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PRESS RELEASE

ILPB (Inter League Publication Board) November 19, 2015, Fergus, ON

Present for the board, Dick Nijenhuis (chair), Elsa DeGelder and Patricia Gelms, representatives of the Women’s League. Present for the Administration Committee, Paul DeBoer (Coordinator), Brandie Swaving (Treasurer), Henrietta Lodder (Sales), Cathy Jonker (Administrator).

ILPB Chairman, Dick Nijenhuis opened our fall meeting with Scripture reading and prayer, and a welcome to all.

From the committee of administration several reports were discussed.

Progress – several books are being edited, typeset, and printed, and some books are being reprinted. An outline for Daniel is being printed at the present time and will be made available very soon. The board was presented with two recently published books, *Living the Faith* by Rev. R.J. Sikkema and *I Will Be Your God* by Dr. Wes Bredenhof. We also have our very first e-book and are eager to offer more of our books in the e-book format.

Marketing – the website continues to be up-to-date and has been well-received. New books have been advertized in

Clarion and previously published books are also being promoted to ensure our readership remains aware what ILPB has to offer.

Financial – the treasurer presented the Financial Statement for the 2014/2015 year. Finances are in good order. Past due accounts have been contacted and funds have been steadily coming in. Balance sheet and Income statement were reviewed.

Sales – Henrietta Lodder continues to be the contact for those ordering books. Sales have continued so well this past season that much discussion ensued concerning the work load for one person. Effective changes are being pursued to ensure the work-load remains bearable and a joy to do.

With thankfulness the board mentioned that some books are being pursued with ministers hopefully to be published over the next several years.

Jovial, friendly discussions, fine tuning, mutual edification, and improving our work was communicated in the ongoing work of the ILPB: promoting the study of God’s Word.

Press release read and approved.

