

Clarion

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE: TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

A photograph of a man from behind, sitting on a dark wooden park bench. He is wearing a light-colored baseball cap and a dark blue sweater over a light blue collared shirt. He is looking out over a scenic view of a river, lush green trees, and a town in the distance. A low stone wall is visible to the left of the bench.

Many seniors suffer loneliness

VOLUME 68 • NUMBER 5 • MARCH 8, 2019

*RANSOM FOR MANY
THE INVITATION TO THE TABLE*

Clarion

**Clarion: a trustworthy
and engaging magazine,
widely spread and read
in Canadian Reformed
households and beyond.**

To equip God's people for his glory, in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized in the Reformed confessions, Clarion adheres to the following core values:

Confessionally Reformed
Loving in manner
Attuned to current issues
Readable and Reliable
In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvliuw, E. Kampen, C. Van Dam, M. VanLuik

ADDRESS FOR MAGAZINE CONTENT



Clarion
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J5
Email: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

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

2019 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

Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

2019 ADVERTISING RATES

Advertisements: \$20.00 per column inch
Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch.
We reserve the right to refuse ads.

PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

We acknowledge the financial support
of the Government of Canada.



Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Issue 5 begins with "Loneliness and the Elderly." Following an article on Nursing Home Ministry, Rev. Matthew VanLuik writes about the opportunity for and responsibility to make connections between churches and the elderly in their communities.

A series from Rev. Rob Schouten wraps up in this issue. This final part of "Is Scripture Enough?" looks at ways that *sola Scriptura* can be misunderstood or misused.

In the previous issue, Dr. Bill DeJong and Dr. Jason Van Vliet wrote an article exchange on Promoting Holiness and Hospitality: The Pulpit. Now we have an exchange on Lord's Supper.

We have several of our regular columns in Issue 5: Treasures, New & Old, Clippings on Politics & Religion, Education Matters, and *Clarion Kids*. There is also an article for Further Discussion.

Laura Veenendaal

CONTENTS

- 123 Loneliness and the Elderly: A Christian Calling**
- 125 TREASURES, NEW & OLD**
- 126 Is Scripture Enough? (4)**
- 128 Promoting Holiness and Hospitality: The Lord's Supper**
- 131 The Invitation to the Table**
- 135 CLIPPINGS ON POLITICS & RELIGION**
- 136 EDUCATION MATTERS**
- 138 CLARION KIDS**
- 139 FURTHER DISCUSSION**





Loneliness and the Elderly: A Christian Calling

*Our words become powerful only when others see us
back up those words with our loving care for them*

When we think about the needs of the elderly in our cities and towns, we immediately think about those living in nursing homes. The reality is that there are many more seniors in our communities who are living in their own homes and daily suffer loneliness. It is now government policy to keep people in their own homes as long as possible, only placing them in a nursing home as a last resort. In order to help seniors remain in their homes, governments have implemented various programs. They are doing so because the senior population is exploding and putting greater pressure on the infrastructure needed to provide for this growing need. Over the next twenty-five years, twenty-five percent – a quarter of the population of this nation – will be over the age of sixty-five.

According to Canadian Census data, one-quarter of the population over the age of sixty-five now live alone. While seventy-two percent of all men over sixty-five are married or living with someone, only forty-five percent of women are married, and thirty-seven percent are widows. Nearly half of all women over the age of seventy-five live alone.¹ That explains why the number one problem seniors identify is loneliness. Loneliness affects people's mental, emotional, and physical well-being. While government programs address the material and physical needs of seniors, it is unable to address the most critical needs: emotional and spiritual. This is a need that can only be effectively provided by the church as the people of God. God's people can comfort the lonely by directing them to the only hope in Christ Jesus.

Opportunities

The early church in Jerusalem grew rapidly with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit directed the hearts of the believers to the Lord, the believers earned a good reputation within the city caring for the needs of one another (Acts 2:47). When the Greek widows were in dan-

ger of being neglected, the apostles appointed seven men to serve them (Acts 6:5-7). The Lord commanded that orphans and widows (the vulnerable) should be cared for so that they too may experience the joy and freedom of the gospel. As the Christian church spread through the world, the believers became known for their charity and willingness to assist and help the vulnerable in society (Acts 9:36). Such charity was the means by which the grace of Christ came to be experienced in the lives of many.

As the church of Christ, we are called to maintain that spirit of charity, both towards the members of the church as well as to the people in our towns and cities. If we are called by Christ to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, then we have a calling to respond to the crying need in our communities to alleviate the loneliness in the lives of so many. As church members, we can fall into danger of creating our own little ghettos, building walls around us that keeps the community out. The result is that we often live in our own comfortable bubbles and are not aware of the crying needs all around us.

First, we need to appreciate the blessing that the Lord had given to us as Reformed churches for the way the elderly and lonely within the church are being cared for. Usually within Reformed churches there is a strong sense of community in which we as members of Christ care for each other and visit one another. Although many of our elderly may desire more visits, yet it is my experience that they are visited by other members on a regular basis and if needs or cares arise, the communion of saints will rally around them. The elders and deacons generally also pay attention to the needs of the widows and widowers within the church. This is the strength that is found in the Reformed church and for which we may be grateful.

On the other hand, we tend to be unaware of the crying need around us and therefore we do not get involved in

serving the needs of people in our community as we should or could. Recently, at a Word and Spirit Institute certificate program on aging, representatives from various care organizations, many from government agencies, spoke about their frustration in connecting with churches with whom they would like to partner. A representative of a faith-based organization that had the mandate to connect churches to people with needs in their community had closed down many of their chapters, for the simple reason that churches were not interested in a ministry among the elderly in their community. We were told that churches and church leadership tend to be more interested in other ministry projects.

Churches generally tend to be focussed more on ministry to the youth than the elderly in their community. The comment was made that dealing with the elderly is not as “sexy” or “exciting.” For many church leaders, it does not seem to make sense to build or grow a church by focussing on the elderly who are nearing the end of their life. The elderly are often confined to their homes, and many do not have the financial resources to be able to give much to the church. From a human perspective, it may seem that the elderly do not have much to contribute to the church, so we would rather expend our energy elsewhere. The danger is that we measure success by growing church numbers and increasing church income. Such an attitude transgresses the will of God, in which he demands that we care for the weak and the vulnerable both within the church and our society. In a society that shows a lack of respect for the elderly by offering to euthanize them, we, as God’s people, must show an attitude of honour and respect for the elderly. We show that in the way we care for their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Now, from a mission perspective, we can reach the younger generation through the older generation. Those who are lonely in your community will welcome a visit from their Christian neighbours. They love to be able to talk about their own lives and tell you about their struggles. If they have a Christian past, it may be possible to connect with them through what they learned in their youth; if they are from other religious backgrounds, there may be other opportunities to connect with them about your own Christian convictions. The lonely are happy to forge bonds of friendship and, as trust develops, it is possible to talk about our own faith in Christ. The greatest witness we give to Christ is to show the lonely the love of Christ through our love and care for them.

By caring for the lonely and so reflecting the love of Christ, we witness to their children and grandchildren. They will remember the love and generosity you have shown to their father or mother. In that bond of trust, we witness to our own love and commitment to Christ.

Making connections

If there are so many lonely in our community, how can we make connections with them? First, look close to home and get to know your neighbours. You may discov-

er there is someone on your street who needs some extra help. As a family, you may be able to shovel the snow from their driveway, repair something in their home, or run an errand. You may also find in your community organizations or government agencies that are able to connect members of the church with those who are lonely and would like to receive visits. Some of representatives of government agencies at the WSI certificate course told stories of how they have been able to build flexibility into their programs in order to help people. The greatest need they identified is to connect those who are lonely with others who are able to give people attention. To see how your church may be able to help in your community, contacting your local Senior’s Centre is a good place to start. They may have ideas or other contact information that you can follow.

Church’s calling

In this and the previous article on Nursing Home Ministry, the purpose has been to help us realize the need as well as the opportunities to reach out in our community with the riches of the gospel in Christ. Church members often ask: How can we evangelize in our communities? We often try to reach others with the gospel by sending out flyers and inviting people to evangelistic events, but it is much more effective to build personal relationships. By building a relationship of trust, we can effectively witness to our faith in Christ with both word and deed. Our words become powerful only when others see us back up those words with our loving care for them.

As churches, we can easily become hidden in our communities, so that the church seems to be a place that is closed to others. For the church to become a light within the community and a place that becomes attractive for others to come, it is important that the members of the church are actively building bonds within the community. If the Lord has blessed you with a church building, there is the opportunity to use that asset as a gathering place for your community. They can function as community centres, where people can make social contacts and form bonds with the church community. When Christians become active in helping others in the community, especially those who are vulnerable and lonely, the community begins to see the church as a safe place where they can find help in their time of need, a place that reflects the grace and loving kindness of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

¹ <https://www.comfortkeepers.ca/loneliness-and-isolation-can-affect-senior-health-in-canada/> Much more detailed information on the aging Canadian population can be found at Statistics Canada <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/subjects/Seniors>.

Correction. In my last article, “Nursing Home Ministry,” I made reference in a footnote to 1 Peter 2:12. The reference should have been to James 1:27.





Ransom for Many

“For even the Son of Man came. . . to give his life as a ransom for many.”

(Mark 10:45b)

It was more common for our Lord to simply foretell of his death than to state why he must die. Our passage falls in the latter category of Christ’s sayings.

We don’t use the word “ransom” that often, other than in relation to a kidnapping, so its meaning may be unclear at first. A ransom is a price paid to free a slave or prisoner. Someone would make a payment that either matched their value or paid their debt.

Christ came into the world to pay a ransom for slaves – you and me. But the ransom price could not be paid in money, for what put us in prison was not financial but spiritual bankruptcy! Our sin shackled us and left us to fester and rot in the prison of our own rebellion. So, the only ransom price sufficient to pay our enormous debt was the giving of the Son of Man’s very own life! That was the only ransom price that God could consider sufficient to free us from God’s justice and wrath.

Our passage pushes us to think more deeply into the mystery of the cross. Both before and after Christ, people have given up their lives. But what Christ did is give his life as a ransom, *for many*. Here, “for” does not mean

“for the sake of;” it means “instead of,” “in place of.” That means that he *very intentionally* put his life into the bondage of guilt and shame and suffering and death! That was the bondage in which our lives were held by God’s justice and wrath. So, to become the ransom means to take the place of the other *and to accept every last consequence thereof*.

That gives further depth to what Christ’s service was all about. In his cross we see him put to death every last possible ounce of desire to rule. He came to give his life as a ransom for many.

The sacrifice of one, the sacrifice of the Son of Man to be more specific, bought the freedom not of one but of many. His work was abounding in its fruitfulness, in its efficacy.

And to whom was the ransom paid? God. That humbles us. For Christ, service to God took precedence even over service to man. The fact that he came to give his life as a ransom for us was an act of love for God no less than an act of love for us. To glorify *God* and serve *him* forever was the chief end of our Saviour. Yes, that humbles us.

It also gives us focus. We are to render our lives to God. And maybe we don’t do it as a substitute for *many*. But perhaps we concentrate our energies on those closest to us. Those who are *part* of the many. We are to love our neighbour as ourselves. And love that serves the neighbour is in many ways love that substitutes ourselves in sacrifice. It’s fairly easy to love someone who has got it all together, or someone you often agree with. That kind of love really doesn’t cost you much at all. But if you have ever tried to love someone who is struggling spiritually, emotionally, physically, you likely have found that it’s going to cost you. There’s a certain kind of exchange that goes on. You exchange your love for their troubles. The best way to love another is by pursuing them through substitutionary sacrifice.

And so it made perfect sense that a Saviour who is more loving than you or I could ever be came into this world to set it aright by substituting his life for ours. When you look at the cross, before you think of forgiveness, think of ransom. Ransom was the only way for your and my forgiveness.



For further study

1. Just how precious was the ransom price, according to 1 Peter 1:18?
2. With the ransom paid, and thus the guilt and power of sin removed, how do Paul’s words in Titus 2:14 now bear on the Christian’s life of service toward others?
3. How might this passage in its surrounding context speak to the matter of servant leadership (whether at home or work or otherwise)?



Is Scripture Enough? (Part 4)

One can encounter people who think they are being good Protestants when they say, “I don’t need anything besides the Bible.” If they are feeling particularly confident, they may add, “Who needs creeds, commentaries, or even sermons? After all, I have the Holy Spirit. I’m anointed and so I can know all I need to know about the Bible just by reading it on my own.” Are such thoughts a genuine application of the principle of *sola Scriptura*?

Protestant misconceptions about sola Scriptura

A proper understanding of *sola Scriptura* enables us to appreciate that while Scripture is the *ultimate* authority for all matters of doctrine and life, other authorities exist as well. These additional levels of authority are secondary and always subordinate to Scripture, but they are authorities nonetheless. Rejection of these secondary authorities is really a form of spiritual individualism that has more in common with sixteenth century Anabaptist fringe groups than with genuine Reformed thought.

To understand the significance of secondary authorities in the church, we should consider, in the first place, that the Bible is God’s gift not simply to individuals but to the whole church. As such, we read the Bible in communion with our brothers and sisters throughout the ages. Reading our Bible in a self-imposed vacuum, isolated from the history of the church, will result in imbalanced and incorrect understandings of the way of salvation and the proper worship of God. The church has been reading the Bible for many centuries and we should be cautious about interpretations which are out of step with the tradition. Instead, we should greatly value what Christian teachers and scholars have said about the Bible in times past.

Sola Scriptura does not imply that we are all solo Christians! We acquire our understanding of the Bible in the context of the church which is itself generated by the Bible. As Matthew Barrett writes in summary of Luther’s view:

“Reading Scripture is a fellowship activity in which the voices of those who have read before us need to be heard attentively.”¹

Not only has God gifted the whole church with the Bible, but he has also supplied for the church preachers and teachers of the Word of God (see, e.g., Eph 4:11-12). Those called to preach/teach the Word have God-given gifts and special training for the careful reading and explanation of Scripture. If someone says that he has no need of teachers or preacher, he/she is guilty of spiritual pride. Of course, what preachers say needs to be tested by the Word itself (see Acts 17:11) but this does not diminish the authority of the office and of the public teaching of the Word of God.

Reading our Bible in a self-imposed vacuum will result in imbalanced and incorrect understandings of the way of salvation and the proper worship of God

Additional to the office of teachers and preachers, we must mention also the authority of creeds and confessions. While many Christians will say, “I have no creed but Christ,” this is not the Reformed position. A proper understanding of *sola Scriptura* leaves room for creeds and confessions as secondary authorities in the church. Creeds and confessions have legitimate authority inasmuch as they are faithful summaries of what the Word of God teaches.

The “Rule of Faith”

Already in the earliest years of the Christian church, believers were asked to express their agreement with what was called “the Rule of Faith.” This summary document

drew out from Scripture some of the basic truths about God and salvation. There were different versions of the “Rule of Faith,” some of which coalesced to eventually become the Apostles’ Creed. To be accepted into the church through baptism, one had to express his/her agreement with the “Rule of Faith.” In short, the “Rule of Faith” had genuine albeit secondary authority.

It can be healthy to question the practices and opinions prevalent in the church

By means of its “Rule of Faith,” the church was able to accomplish a number of important tasks. First, it was able to articulate in a healthy way the *central message* of the Bible. For instance, if we look at the Apostles’ Creed, we discern immediately its Trinitarian structure. It does not deal with secondary matters, but with the Being of God and the Persons of the Trinity. We also note that the Creed follows the scriptural track of creation, redemption, and consummation. Taking its cue from the Bible, it also emphasizes the central truths of the Person and the gracious work of Christ. The Apostles’ Creed is a good example of keeping the plain things of Scripture as the main things for Christian doctrine and life. As a “Rule of Faith,” the Creed helps to focus the hearts and minds of believers on what matters the most, the things of “first importance” (1 Cor 15:3).

Beyond the Apostle’s Creed, the church also possesses the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. These summaries of faith focus on the doctrine of the Trinity. As the church dealt with a variety of false teachings about the Trinity and especially about the Person of Christ, it eventually came to a consensus about what Scripture teaches in regard to these matters. This consensus is expressed in the ecumenical (catholic) creeds. Again, while these creeds do not have the same authority as the Word of God, they do possess a derivative authority. For this reason, the church is able to use these creeds as a standard for doctrine and teaching.

To summarize, the churches of the Reformation do not entirely reject tradition. On the contrary, they accept genuine tradition albeit not on par with the inspired Word

of God. As one writer puts it, “Scripture and tradition are not mutually exclusive. . . . The former generates the latter, while the latter serves the former.”²

Anti-traditionalism

While it’s important to resist Roman Catholic notions of extra-biblical tradition, it’s also important for Reformed Christians to be aware of the equally seductive pull of anti-traditionalism. Tradition as properly understood is a guard against our spiritual impulsiveness, narrowness, and short-sightedness.

Over the centuries, the Holy Spirit has guided the church into a proper understanding of the Word of God. This work of the Spirit adds nothing new to the content of the Word of God but leads the church into a fuller appropriation and understanding of God’s revelation. In general, the church today has a low awareness of her history. We don’t read Reformed writers from a generation ago, never mind from the Reformation or from medieval times or from the early centuries. This lack of historical consciousness leaves us quite vulnerable to the imbalanced thinking and distorted practices of our own time.³ We ought to respect the work of the Spirit by seeking to deepen our awareness of church history.

Traditionalism

Finally, the principle of *sola Scriptura* reminds us that the ultimate standard for doctrine, worship, and life is not tradition. It can be healthy to question the practices and opinions prevalent in the church. After all, while Scripture is infallible, the same is not true of the traditional beliefs and customs of the church. It’s important, however, that scrutiny of tradition should be based on the sacred writings themselves and not simply on human reason or contemporary culture.

¹ Mark D. Thompson, “Sola Scriptura,” in *Reformation Theology. A Systematic Summary* (Crossway, 2017), Kindle Edition, Location 2949 (pg. 156).

² Allen, Michael, Swain, Scott R., *Reformed Catholicity. The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Baker Academic, 2015), pg. 82.

³ For a very pleasant introduction to early Christian history, one would do well to consult Justin Holcomb, *Know the Creeds and Councils* (Zondervan, 2014) and *Know the Heretics* (Zondervan, 2014).





Promoting Holiness and Hospitality: The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a high point in the life of a congregation. We celebrate a holy feast, hosted by our Saviour and providing much-needed nourishment for our souls. What could be better?

Sadly, controversy rather than joy sometimes permeates our discussions about this sacrament. Especially in connection with guests at the Lord's table, various questions arise. Are we required to use the time-honoured convention of travel attestations or is there room to admit guests after an interview by elders? Is there any place for self-attestation? If you are hoping to find definitive answers to all these questions in this article, I am afraid I will disappoint you.

This article has a specific focus. In the November 2, 2018 issue of *Clarion*, I asked why the Blessings consistory admitted a Baptist to their pulpit when we agree in Article 61 of our Church Order that to be admitted to the Lord's Supper someone must publicly profess "the Reformed faith." My question, then, was this: if we've agreed not to admit a Baptist to the Lord's table, how can we open the pulpit to a Baptist?

In his response, Dr. DeJong implied that my understanding of Article 61 may be questionable. Furthermore, he sensed that I had failed "to grapple with the apostle Paul's argument in Galatians 2 that to establish a bar of admission higher than faith in Christ is to deny the doctrine of justification by faith." Our goal is to take a closer look at these two matters.

Galatians 2

For now, my comments on Galatians 2 will be brief since I am not sure how Dr. DeJong wants to connect this chapter to the question at hand. So, I'll first listen to him and save further interaction for my response.

Allow me, though, to explain why I do not readily see the relevance of this passage to the matter we're discussing. In this chapter the apostle Paul admonishes his fellow

apostle, Peter, who was caving into pressure from "the circumcision party" and shrinking back from "eating with the Gentiles" (v. 12). Here *eating* could simply refer to regular, household meals (Luke 15:2), but it could also include the Lord's Supper (as 1 Cor 5:11 implies).

If the Lord's Supper is in view, what exactly is happening? Peter is withholding *himself* for the wrong reason. Of all people, Peter should be fully convinced that in the new covenant Jews and Gentiles can eat together in regular meals and at the Lord's table. After all, the Lord gave *Peter* a vision, repeated three times (Acts 10:10-12, 16), that clearly demonstrates that the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, including food laws and circumcision, had been fulfilled in Christ. Therefore, they were no longer in use (BC, Art 25).

Obviously, then, Peter should not withhold himself from eating with Gentiles. But how does this apply to the question of whether Baptists should be admitted to the Lord's table in a Reformed congregation? Peter is withholding *himself*; according to Article 61, the *consistory* should not admit someone who does not profess the Reformed faith. Those are two different things.

Also, the point is really that Peter and his fellow Gentile believers held *to the same belief*, even though Peter was *not acting* according to his better, God-given knowledge about Old Testament food laws. But how does this apply to the admission of Baptists to the Lord's Supper? That's a different question: is it proper before God for two parties, who are diametrically opposed on a major point of doctrine, to sit together at the Lord's table and celebrate unity?

Having said this, let me refrain from further comment until I've first heard Dr. De Jong's point of view.

1 Corinthians 11

One passage that speaks clearly about celebrating the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner is 1 Corinthians 11. What was the problem? According to verse 18, it revolved

around “divisions.” There were divisions between poor and rich because some went hungry and others became drunk (vv. 19-21). Back in chapter 1 we learn that this congregation was also plagued by “divisions” (v. 10) among groups who preferred one church leader over another. One cheered for Cephas while the other was loyal to Apollos.

The apostle Paul did not lightly shrug off these divisions over income levels or pastoral preferences. Instead, these differences had the potential to de-sacramentalize the Lord’s Supper – “When you come together, it is *not* the Lord’s supper that you eat” (11:20) – and turn it into a regular meal, albeit a rather unpleasant, fractured one.

If the apostle warned so strongly about socio-economic disparities and pastoral partialities at the Lord’s table, what about disagreement on a major point of doctrine? Surely, it is more serious to disagree on whether the children of believers actually belong to God’s covenant than it is to dispute about which pastor is preferable. Consequently, the way forward is *first* to resolve the doctrinal division and then one day, under the Lord’s blessing, celebrate the sacrament together – something we should long for and work towards.

Article 61

The Canadian Reformed churches have agreed to a simple statement concerning admission to the Lord’s Supper. “The consistory shall admit to the Lord’s Supper *only* those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life” (CO, Art 61; emphasis mine). This article is not a CanRC peculiarity. For example, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Free Reformed Churches of North America have similar articles in their church orders (Articles 57 and 61, respectively). In fact, the wording of our Church Order goes back to the decades before the Synod of Dort. It’s been around for more than 400 years now!

Of course, we can discuss *the exact procedure* by which a consistory will determine whether someone has met the two basic criteria: public profession of the Reformed faith and a godly walk of life. On that point, one consistory may do it in a slightly different way than the next. However, concerning *the standard* used, we have made a clear agreement and we must all honour it. After all, the Holy Spirit teaches us that our “yes” should be “yes” (James 5:12).

Some Baptists are adopting parts of the Reformed faith, especially a greater emphasis on God’s sovereignty and the

AVAILABLE FOR CALL

The Council of the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church wishes to inform the churches that

Rev. Ken Wieske

is available for call among the churches. Rev. Wieske can be reached at ken.wieske@gmail.com

CALLED

The Legana Free Reformed Church has extended a call to:

Rev. Calvin Vanderlinde

of the Barrhead Canadian Reformed Church, Barrhead, Alberta

CHURCH NEWS

covenant, but it is not accurate to say that they publicly profess the Reformed faith. Baptism of covenant children is an integral part of the Reformed faith. Therefore, abiding by our church order, a consistory should not admit them to the Lord’s Supper.

Hospitality

We are still left with a challenge, though. Sometimes guests arrive when the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, and we run into awkward situations. If they have a travel attestation, it’s all straightforward. But what if they come from some other church background? What if they sincerely believe in Christ and wish to participate but simply don’t understand how we supervise the Lord’s table? Our congregations might even offend some visitors.

Yes, these are valid concerns. Here are some things to consider. First of all, since hospitality is a divine command (Rom 12:13; 1 Pet 4:9), we should make a concerted effort to invite visitors into our homes on Sundays, and even pay special attention to this on Lord’s Supper Sundays. At the same time, we should remember that our living rooms and kitchen tables are the normal venue for showing hospitality (compare Hebr 13:2 with Gen 18:1-8). The Lord’s table, as a sacrament, has a different purpose: to refocus and strengthen our faith (LD 25).

Secondly, on Lord’s Supper Sundays some congregations now include a well-worded paragraph for guests in their bulletin or liturgy sheet. This explains why and how the sacrament is supervised and assures guests that this does not imply any judgment on the sincerity of their faith. Such notifications are hospitable and commendable. This could be complemented with an effort to speak in person, as much as possible, with guests about this explanation. We may well discover that some of them appreciate the care taken to supervise the sacrament.

Thirdly, by definition sacraments are “holy, *visible* signs and seals” (LD 25). To be sure, there are added elements of touch and taste. The value of these additional aspects

should not be diminished; they are very strengthening. At the same time, we should not forget that the Holy Spirit uses the *visible* aspect of the sacrament to fortify our faith. When baptism is administered, only one person receives the sacrament by touch, but the Spirit uses the visible sign of water to strengthen the entire congregation, including any guests who receive the sign with a believing heart. Similarly, with Lord's Supper only the communicant members (plus admitted guests) receive the sacrament, eating the crucified body of

Christ and drinking his shed blood by faith (LD 28). But the Spirit also uses the visible signs of bread and wine to strengthen the faith of non-communicant members and any guests who are not admitted to the table. These guests are still greatly blessed by the sacrament just like our own children are.

If we think along these lines, we can responsibly maintain the holiness of the Lord's table, consistently uphold our own Church Order, and charitably extend hospitality to guests in our worship services.

Response to Dr. Jason Van Vliet

Once again, I'm grateful to Dr. Van Vliet for a clear presentation of his views and for his interest in this exchange. Regarding Galatians 2, Dr. Van Vliet misses the implications of Peter's refusal to have table fellowship with Gentiles. It isn't simply a failure to recognize that the ceremonial laws have been fulfilled in Christ; it is the implicit establishment of a prerequisite for table fellowship that transcends faith in Christ itself. By refusing to have table fellowship with Gentiles, Peter was communicating the message that only those who believed *and were circumcised* (and followed other Jewish customs) could be welcomed to the table. Paul regards the establishment of any prerequisite for table fellowship beyond faith in Christ to amount to a denial of justification only by faith (see vv. 15-16). It seems that this is precisely what is being done when professing Christians guests are barred from the Lord's table in Canadian Reformed churches either for not belonging to a Reformed church or for not holding to Reformed doctrine.

It's interesting to me that Dr. Van Vliet would appeal to 1 Corinthians 11 to support his claim that Baptists should not be welcomed to the Lord's table. What disturbed Paul about the Corinthians was not that rich and poor were eating together with unresolved differences, but that rich and poor were eating apart. In other words, socio-economic divisions did not need to be resolved before the Lord's Supper could be celebrated; rather, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated together *in spite of* socio-economic divisions. In short, resolution to socio-economic differences isn't required for a proper celebration of the Lord's supper; unity

in socio-economic diversity is. Analogously, resolution to all doctrinal differences (among which there were many in Corinth) isn't required for a proper participation in the Lord's Supper; unity in theological diversity is.

I think I make the case in my article that the use of "Reformed" in Article 61 of the Church Order need not imply the exclusion of non-Reformed guests and I provide some historical examples in support of this claim. Perhaps I can conclude with some comments on hospitality. Dr. Van Vliet argues that hospitality should be shown to Baptists in our homes and not at the Lord's table. I would argue rather that the bounds of home hospitality should not exclude the unchurched and that the bounds of table hospitality should not exclude professing Christian believers. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a sacrament of Christian unity (or catholicity), not a sacrament of Christian parochialism (or sectarianism). "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many," Paul writes, "are one body, for we all share the one loaf" (1 Cor 10:17; NIV). Is that one body the Reformed church? Not only is that an unlikely conclusion; it is an impossible one, anachronistic as it is.

In conclusion, I'm extremely grateful to the editors of *Clarion* for creating space for this exchange and to Dr. Van Vliet in particular for his interest and feedback. It's clear that we think about things quite differently and I'm delighted that we can debate our differences on important matters with mutual respect and without rancor.

Bill DeJong 



The Invitation to the Table

Cultural anthropologists have long recognized the power of meals. Unless we are eating alone, we never leave a meal the same way we came. It's not simply that we walk away with a different chemical constitution, and perhaps a little more weight. When food is enjoyed around a table, relationships are forged, friendships are renewed, and sometimes enemies are disarmed. Given its social power, it's not surprising that Jesus prescribed a meal to function as a confirming ritual for believers.

In the history of the Canadian Reformed churches, the Lord's Supper was often celebrated at tables. In the discipline of liturgical studies this is sometimes called "the Scottish rite" because it was also the longstanding practice of the Scottish Presbyterians to be seated at tables in their celebrations of the Lord's Supper (a position some wanted codified in the Westminster Directory of Worship). Personally, I favour this way of celebrating the Lord's Supper (provided it's possible to include the whole congregation at one such table) because it reminds the congregation that this sacrament is a meal, a banquet.

But for whom is this banquet? In this article I will argue that the Lord's Supper should *not* be restricted to members of the Canadian Reformed churches and sister churches or even to those who are confessionally Reformed. The Lord's Supper is a banquet for God's family and therefore should be open to all of its members.

The biblical data

It's clear from many places in Scripture that the Lord's Supper is for the brothers and sisters of Christ in God's family. We ought not to show "table" hospitality to those who promote a false gospel (see 2 John 10). Those who pervert the grace of God are "blemishes" at the love feasts of the church (Jude 4), and those who stubbornly persist in sin should be barred from the Lord's table (1 Cor 5:8).

On the other hand, we ought to offer "table" hospitality to those who dedicate their lives to Christ (see 3 John 8). To

fail to do so is reprehensible in the eyes of the apostles. The apostle John, for example, is disturbed by Diotrephes who, in wanting to occupy a position of privilege, "will not welcome us" and "refuses to welcome other believers" (3 John 9-10). Loving one another within the church is a key mark of the church (see 1 Thess 4:9-10). To hate a brother or sister, while claiming to be in the light, is to live in darkness (1 John 2:9-11), to forgo one's status as God's child (1 John 2:10), to be a murderer (1 John 2:15), and to prove that one does not know God (1 John 4:20).

One can now understand why the apostle Paul upbraided Peter in Antioch to his face. Out of fear for the circumcision group (who regarded circumcision as a boundary marker of God's people), Peter withdrew from eating with Gentile believers. It was as if Peter believed that to be accepted by God one needed something more than simply faith in Christ. This move on Peter's part was, for the apostle Paul, not simply an act of inexcusable hypocrisy (Gal 2:13); it was an implicit denial of justification only by faith (Gal 2:16).

"Doctrinal boundaries around the Lord's Supper are necessary," Peter Leithart writes, "for we are not permitted to welcome Buddhists or Mormons to the Lord's table." These boundaries are those of the Christian faith itself. "Paul taught," Leithart continues, "that Peter's practice of denying table fellowship to Gentiles cut to the heart of the gospel because it set up a test of membership other than faith in Jesus and it was a fool's bargain in which the gospel was exchanged for something that was no gospel."¹

What precisely is being communicated to a professed Christian guest when he or she is denied admission to the Lord's table? It seems as if the church is suspicious of the sincerity of the guest's profession or, worse, believes that a Christian profession is insufficient for admission to the Lord's table and that one must in fact be Reformed. The love required of Christians in Scriptures, however, is one that "always trusts" (1 Cor 13:7). Apart from evidence to the contrary, Christians

should take each other's words at face value and not to fall prey to the hermeneutics of suspicion (à la Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx, the forbears of postmodernism).

When non-Reformed Christians are barred from the table in Canadian Reformed churches they are sometimes told, "We don't doubt your Christian testimony." To bar someone from the Lord's table, however, is to judge him or her, biblically speaking, to be outside of God's family, in spite of whatever is said in connection with doing so.

The Reformed confessions

I was delighted recently to hear my friend Eric Watkins, a pastor in the OPC, speak at the CRTS conferences in January. In one of the Q & A sessions in Langley, BC, Watkins rehearsed this wonderful line, "The doorway to the church should not be more narrow than the doorway to heaven." This is precisely what is taught in the Belgic Confession, which alleges of the church that "there is no salvation outside of it" (Art 28).² If one claims that Baptists, for instance, are true believers (which, hopefully, no one denies), then it follows that they are members of the church because there is no salvation outside of it.³

I do not want to belabour this point except to say that it is deeply problematic to me that we should refuse at the Lord's table those the Lord himself embraces. How can we deny the cup to those for whom the Lord has shed his blood? How can we deny the broken bread to those for whom the Lord's body was broken? There is a confessional truth here that is being contradicted by excluding from the Lord's table sincere Christians who perhaps are not confessionally Reformed.

The Church Order

But does the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed churches permit non-Reformed guests? At first glance, Article 61 of the Church Order seems to forbid the admission of guests to the Lord's table who are not members of the Canadian Reformed churches or sister churches. I believe this is a facile reading and therefore I want to use some space to parse this article.

The article begins by saying that "the consistory shall admit to the Lord's supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith." This sentence applies specifically, it seems, to those within a particular Canadian Reformed congregation who would like to partake. If they are catechumens, for instance, whether baptized members or neophytes, the route to the Lord's table is through public profession of the Reformed faith. Catechumens are to be

instructed in Reformed doctrine and it is the expectation that they will affirm Reformed doctrine.⁴

The language of "Reformed doctrine" (*Gereformeerde religie*) goes all the way back to the Synod of Dort.⁵ It should be noted here that the adjective "Reformed" was used in distinction from especially Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Anabaptist. The plethora of evangelical denominations in the world today simply did not exist then. But this descriptor was not meant necessarily to exclude from the Lord's table those who weren't Reformed.

The Dutch church polity scholar Harm Bouwman (1863-1933) indicates that guests from non-Reformed churches could be admitted to the Lord's table provided their confession "sufficiently agreed" (*genoegzaam overeenstemde*) with that of the Reformed church. He argues, for example, that if there were no Lutheran church in town, a Lutheran could be welcomed to the Lord's table.⁶ Professor Jacob Kamphuis (1921-2011), furthermore, points out that in the context of the Remonstrant controversy, the regional synod of Gouda (1620) argued that churches should not necessarily discipline those who could not fully agree with the five points adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-19) but be patient with them (Art 78).⁷

One might argue, however, that the Church Order permits consistories to admit to the Lord's table only guests with attestations. This would be a misreading, however. The Church Order indicates that "members of sister-churches shall be admitted on the ground of a good attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct." Here is the policy for welcoming guests from sister-churches. Nothing will be demanded of them but an attestation. The Church Order makes no prescriptions, however, for welcoming to the Lord's table guests from non-sister churches, and so consistories are presumably free to devise them.

I believe, in summary, that there is ample proof, in terms of the history of Reformed church polity, that consistories have discretionary power to admit to the Lord's table, both within and without of their respective congregations, those who don't necessarily agree with all Reformed doctrine.

The Lord's Supper is a banquet for God's children, for all those who are in Christ, for all members of his holy catholic church. We should embrace at the Lord's table all those Jesus embraces and serve bread and wine to all those for whom Jesus died. To refuse to do so is perhaps to fall prey to the sin of the apostle Peter – namely, establishing a prerequisite for table fellowship higher than faith in Christ itself.

Response to Dr. Bill DeJong

I thank Dr. DeJong for making his position much clearer. Allow me three comments.

Galatians 2

Dr. De Jong is correct that if the apostle Peter continued to give in to the circumcision party, then he could lead people into believing that justification is a matter of faith *plus* works of the law. Galatians 3:1-9 makes that abundantly clear. However, he is incorrect to suggest that Reformed consistories that do not admit non-Reformed Christians to the Lord's Supper might end up "deny[ing] the doctrine of justification by faith" (*Clarion*, Nov. 2, 2018). Such a consistory is *not adding*, in any way, the requirement of "works of the law" to faith. Instead, it is simply and rightly ascertaining that the *content* of someone's faith is in line with God's revealed Word. Together we confess that true faith includes a sure knowledge whereby we "accept as true all that God has revealed to us in his Word" (LD 7). When consistories apply this definition of faith in the context of admission to the Lord's table, they will need to use pastoral wisdom. But if someone publicly denies an integral part of God's Word, such as the baptism of covenant children, then the consistory has every right to say, "There is something here that needs to be addressed and corrected *before* this person can be admitted to the Lord's table." Such a consistory is not denying justification by faith; rather, it is exercising due diligence in its God-given responsibility to supervise the Lord's Supper.

Applying Article 61

In this article we agree that "the consistory shall admit to the Lord's supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life." Dr. DeJong feels that "this sentence applies, it seems, to those within a particular Canadian Reformed congregation who would like to partake." We should be clear, though, that nothing in this article restricts this sentence *only* to regular members within the local congregation. These same principles apply to guests, otherwise we end up with a double standard.

Dr. DeJong also refers to an article (*Clarion*, Oct. 8, 1993) by Rev. G. van Popta, who mentions the possibility of admitting a "member of the Greek Evangelical Church on a temporary work or study term *attending the services at our church regularly and functioning as part of the congregation*" (emphasis mine). By way of context, the Greek Evan-

gelical Church is a Presbyterian Reformed federation that affirms infant baptism. This situation is very different from what Dr. DeJong is envisioning, namely, that guests who deny baptism to covenant children not only could be, but indeed should be, admitted to the Lord's table, so long as they "dedicate their lives to Christ" and do not "stubbornly persist in sin." What is more, Rev. van Popta affirmed that to open the table in a CanRC congregation to a member of a local Lutheran or Christian Reformed Church would be "disorderly and dishonest." He continues, "Why should the barriers and 'the denominational distinctives' which we insist upon and stubbornly refuse to remove suddenly fall away when we prepare the communion table?" Again, this is profoundly different from what Dr. DeJong is saying in his article.

Similarly, Dr. DeJong cites Dr. H. Bouwman, who comments that a Lutheran might be admitted to the Lord's table in a Reformed congregation if he happens to be living for some time in a place where there was no Lutheran church. For one thing, Lutherans affirm the baptism of covenant children. More than that, Dr. Bouwman maintains that before admitting someone like this to the Lord's table the consistory must have clear evidence that: "1) he has been admitted to the Lord's Supper in his own congregation...; 2) his walk of life is irreproachable; 3) *his personal faith conviction concurs with the confession of our [that is, Reformed] church.*"⁸ Once again, this is fundamentally at odds with Dr. DeJong's proposal that Reformed, Baptists, Arminians, Lutherans, and anyone else who dedicates his life to Christ should all sit together, celebrating the Lord's Supper, despite deep doctrinal differences and divisions into different church federations.

Other significant concerns

As far as I can see, Dr. DeJong sets up a double standard for admission to the table. For baptized members and new converts within the congregation there is "the expectation that they will affirm Reformed doctrine," but for guests there is no such expectation; in fact, they can even publicly affirm teachings that explicitly *deny* key parts of Reformed doctrine, but they would still be most welcome at the table. Our Lord strongly disapproves of double standards (Prov 20:10, 23); so should we.

Next, he latches on to this quote: "The doorway to the church should not be more narrow than the doorway to heaven." One-liners are interesting but there is more to be said. The width of heaven's doorway is measured by the con-

tents of God's book of life (Rev 21:27). We don't have access to that book (Deut 29:29). Instead, God has given us elders who have a duty to supervise the table according to God's Word, as summarized in our confessions, and in full agreement with our church order.

Based on Article 28, Dr. DeJong argues that so long as someone is a true believer then, confessionally speaking, we are obliged to serve this person the Lord's Supper. Actually, our confession presents a different emphasis. *This person* is obliged to submit to the "instruction and discipline" of a faithful church (Art 28), which can be identified by the three familiar marks (Art 29).

Conclusion

Our federation of churches has never embraced such an open view of the Lord's Supper as the one Dr. DeJong is now promoting. Everyone should consider his proposal carefully. Compare what he writes not only with Articles 27 and 28, but also Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. Re-read the straightforward language of Article 61 in our church order and evaluate his proposal. I cannot help but conclude that his proposal goes against both of them.

In his initial article (*Clarion*, Sept. 21, 2018) Dr. DeJong advocated for more "intentional outreach" in our federation. I sincerely agree with that particular point. But we do not need to open our pulpits to Baptist ministers in order to do intentional outreach. We do not need to admit to the Lord's table guests who publicly deny integral doctrines in God's Word in order to do intentional outreach. So, let's unreservedly steer away from those practices, diligently keep the peace in Jerusalem, and earnestly focus together on becoming more intentional about outreach.

Jason Van Vliet

¹ Leithart, *Blessed are the Hungry: Meditations on the Lord's Supper* (Moscow: Canon, 2000) 145–46.

² The Latin slogan (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) behind this phrase, which originated with Cyprian, the third century bishop of Carthage, was frequently invoked by, *inter alia*, Augustine and Calvin.

³ See a wonderful article on this subject by C. Trimp where he argues, in reference to Articles 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession, that the word "true" does not add anything to the word "church" ("True and False Church," *Clarion* 43:24 [December 2, 1994] 564–565).

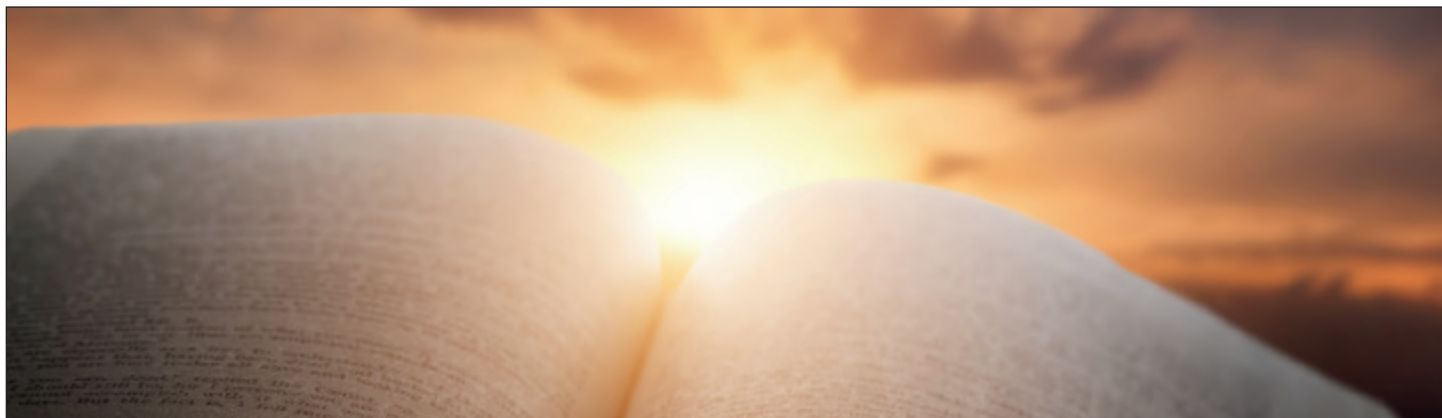
⁴ That this line applies to those within the congregation (whether catechumens or neophytes) is argued also by George van Popta (see *Clarion* 42:20 [October 8, 1993] 423).

⁵ The famous Convent of Wezel (1571; ch.6, art.7) simply had the language, "profession of faith" (*fidei confessionem*).

⁶ H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht II* (Kampen: Kok, 1934) 390–91. George van Popta argues something similar when he suggests that if an individual from the "Greek Evangelical Church" were visiting Canada, attending a local congregation, and "showed by his faith and conduct that he was an heir of the grace of God in Christ," it would "be orderly and honest for the elders, in the name of Jesus Christ, to open the Lord's table to this guest" (*Clarion* 42:20 [October 8, 1993] 424). Similarly, F.L. Rutgers argues that Reformed churches must not simply deny (or outright admit) non-Reformed guests to the Lord's table, especially when they are known to members of the council (see *Kerkelijke Adviezen II* [Kampen: Kok, 1905] 162).

⁷ Kamphuis, *Om de Heiligheid van de Gemeente* (Kampen: Kok, 1982) 121. Cf. F.L. Rutgers, *Kerkelijke Adviezen II* (Kampen: Kok, 1905) 157. Moreover, in previous submissions to *Clarion*, I've drawn attention to the (GKN) General Synod in the Hague (1914) where it was judged that an objection to the doctrine of infant baptism *per se* need not be a barrier to admission to the Lord's table.

⁸ Bouwman, H. *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht*, 2.391; emphasis added. **C**





Child Marriage

Once Iran officially accepted Sharia law, the age of legal marriage became nine for girls and thirteen for boys. According to official Iranian statistics, 180,000 child marriages take place in that country each year. That amounts to twenty-four percent of all marriages. Because many marriages can be performed without the need for registration, the rate is probably higher. Before the Islamist party of the Ayatollah Khomeini came to power in 1979, the legal age of marriage was eighteen for girls and twenty for boys.

Little girls who are forced into these marriages usually encounter physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Under Sharia law, these young brides have to comply with all the wishes of their husband, who are often middle aged or older men. If the husband is not happy, he has the right to divorce his wife at any time, but the wife does not have that right. Currently, because of such divorces, there are more than 24,000 child widows in Iran. After going through the marriage trauma, they are abandoned and left to fend for themselves.

The unfolding tragedy, highlighted by Dr. Rafizadeh's article noted below, is that this problem is not restricted to Iran, nor for that matter to Muslim majority countries. There are disturbing realities and trends. Soeren Kern reported that on December 14, 2018, the highest court in Germany "ruled that a new law that bans child marriage may be unconstitutional because all marriages, including Sharia-based child marriages, are protected by Germany's Basic Law." Kern notes that the ruling effectively opens the door to legalizing Sharia-based child marriages in Germany. It "is one of a growing number of instances in which German courts are – wittingly or unwittingly – promoting the establishment of a parallel Islamic legal system in the country." The issue is a real one. As of July 31, 2016, Germany had 1,475 married children, including 361 under the age of fourteen. Germany had therefore passed a law in 2017 setting the age of consent for marriage at

eighteen, banning child marriages, and nullifying all those contracted abroad. That law has now been declared unconstitutional.

Germany is not the only Western country with child marriage. The problem seems to present itself wherever Muslim men can fly under the radar and take on a child bride. Sweden, for example, has seen an increased reporting of forced and child marriages. It is not only Europe; North America also has this problem. In an *Independent* article, Chris Baynes noted that in the United States more than 200,000 children were married over the last fifteen years using legal loopholes, including three ten-year-old girls and an eleven-year-old boy. More than 1,000 children under fourteen were granted marriage licences. The true figures are probably much higher because ten states provided no or incomplete statistics. "In rare cases children were permitted to wed someone decades older. A 14-year-old girl married a 74-year-old man in Alabama, while a 17-year-old wed a 65-year-old groom in Idaho." In spite of all this, in 2017 Chris Christie, governor of New Jersey, refused to sign into law a measure that would ban child marriage because "it would conflict with religious customs."

Canada is trying to end child marriages in the international forum. There seem to be no statistics on the practice within our country. There is, however, anecdotal evidence. Human rights activist, Samra Zafar, who hears from Canadian child brides, told CTV News that forced marriages of minors in Canada are "more prevalent than we all think."

Sources used: Majid Rafizadeh, "An 8-year-old Bride" and Soeren Kern, "Germany: New Law Banning Child Marriage Declared Unconstitutional" on the Gatestone website; Chris Baynes, "More than 200,00 children married in US over the last 15 years" (July 8, 2017) www.independent.co.uk; Sonja Puzic, "Forced marriage in Canada 'more prevalent' than thought: ex-child bride" June 22, 2017 on CTV news website.





ACRES Expansion Project, With Thankfulness to the Lord

Our history

Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Elementary School (ACRES) suitably obtained its title from not only the acronym but perhaps unintentionally from the large 100-acre tract on which it was built.

The history of the school finds its roots in John Calvin School of Smithville. The influx of Dutch immigrants that settled in the Niagara region after the Second World War resulted in the establishing of the Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville. Recognizing that the gift of children and God's promises to them necessitates a pledge of response, immigrant parents laboured to provide homes to further nurture what they professed in church. This pledge included providing a biblically based Christ-centred education.

The building of the John Calvin School in 1964 was an answer to many prayers. It provided a place to educate the youth of the church, but inadvertently provided the magnetism for many Canadian Reformed families who did not as yet have established Christian schools in their area. As a result, many moved to the Niagara region. As a second generation started families, the school population continued to grow exponentially.

The expression *growing pains* is probably the best way to describe the troubles and difficulties that arise when trying to find a suitable solution to an increasing student body and the unavailability of suitable building facilities. The plentiful deliberations and reflections were aptly put to rest with the donation of an approximately 100-acre parcel of land, home of the current facility. It is fair to say that initially there was an air of skepticism voiced by some for the viability of the building project. However, this skepticism may also have provided the catalyst for solidarity, camaraderie, and cooperation that was and still is wonderful.

In addition, a sizable financial gift from our Dutch brothers and sisters convinced the newly formed school society that moving forward was achievable. Underscoring it all was the realization that to be successful was only possible under the guidance and blessing of the Lord. The continued evidence of these blessings can only be explained as a constant indication of God's grace.

Completion Project 1

The initial eight classroom building opened its doors in 1995. In order to keep the tuition rates reasonable, the society has had and continues to make several concessions. During the course of the school week, a steady stream of volunteers assists the staff with many tasks including marking as well as helping students with special learning requirements. The daily school cleaning is performed by a weekly team of volunteers that keep the building clean and presentable. The grounds are maintained by teams of volunteers, each on a schedule of grass cutting and trim work. When playground equipment needs improvement or replacement, it is done by volunteers.





Completion Project 2

The steady increase in enrollment, as well as the continued need to accommodate the learning requirements of those special children God has granted us, warranted the need for a four-classroom expansion in 2014.

Completion Project 3

As a parental school, parents, staff, and administration have recognized that the physical education of our students also plays an essential role in their overall well-being and abilities to learn. Not having a gymnasium presented some challenges in providing athletic training and exercise. Weather and field conditions may not always be conducive. The facilities at Robert Land Academy were graciously made available to us in a special arrangement. However, the dream has always been to have our own facility. This dream has become a reality and we could celebrate this with an Open House on Saturday, December 8, 2018.

Open house

A shuttle bus service from the Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Church parking lot ferried the +/- 400 attendees to the school for the festivities. Special seating arrangements for dignitaries, former ACRES principals, ministers, and former board chairmen provided a decorum of official formality.

Current Board Chairman, John VanderHoeven, emceed the celebration. Throughout the many presentations, remarks from the Mayor of Wainfleet Kevin Gibson, comments from the MPP for Niagara West Sam Oosterhoff, as well as the ribbon cutting and presentation of the Gym Key, there was an atmosphere of thankfulness and recognition of the Giver of the blessings. The Scripture readings from Psalm 78: 1-8 and Luke 12:22-31 aptly conveyed the need for telling the coming generation of God's faithfulness and to do so in trust. The decisive volume present in the singing of several psalms throughout the program quantified the expressions of gratitude.



Reflection

As we reflect on twenty-three years of projects, we may be thankful for a school society of parents, staff, and students that is closely integrated and bound together in a common faith. This has not been without its hardships, failings, and our sinful natures. Yet God has been good and faithful to us and blessed us beyond all measure. May we move forward in serving him and each other. **C**

Clarion Kids

The Ascension

Matthew 28, Mark 16, John 20

Before Jesus went up into heaven, he promised to send the Holy Spirit to be with his people. At Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came, a large group of believers were gathered together. They heard a sound like a loud wind blowing and saw what looked like tongues of fire coming to rest on them. Everyone there was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in different languages. Other believers who passed by heard this, and were amazed. But some other people who heard what was happening made fun of them. They thought the people had had too much wine.

Go to www.clarionmagazine.ca to print and colour this picture!



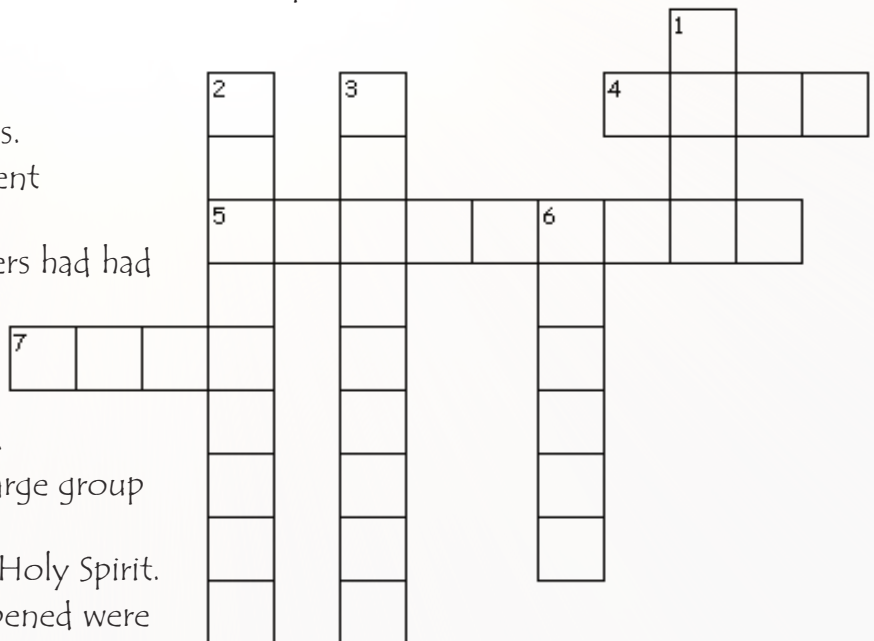
Crossword Puzzle: Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.

Across

4. They heard a loud sound like this.
 5. Everyone started speaking different _____.
 7. Some people thought the believers had had too much ____.

Down

1. The people saw tongues of _____.
 2. The Holy Spirit first came to a large group of _____.
 3. What we call the coming of the Holy Spirit.
 6. The believers who saw what happened were _____.



by Emily Nijenhuis

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Dear Editor,

I look forward to reading Rev. W. den Hollander's "You Asked" column. He often surprises his readers with "unconventional" responses and leaves us with food for thought. His answer to "Do office bearers have to sit up front?" (Vol. 67, No. 21) was interesting. However, Abraham Kuyper, the influential nineteenth century Dutch statesman, churchman, theologian, and historian, gave a very different answer to this question in his book *Our Worship*.¹ In this chapter, Kuyper discussed the practice or non-practice of kneeling in prayer and in receiving communion. Incidentally, he addressed the beginnings of the practice of office-bearers sitting in separate pews at the front of the church. I'll let Kuyper speak for himself. He wrote:

One also has to imagine the actual situation. Under the old Roman [Catholic] hierarchy, it was customary to bury people in [the floor of] our grand old churches. This required that the whole center part of the church be cleared after the service. Pews were used only in the chancel; in the central part of the church there were only chairs, and these chairs were picked up after the service and stacked on the side. At the next service people took a chair from the side and placed it wherever they liked. The chairs served the dual purposes of being used for kneeling in prayer and for sitting. They were built in such a way that the back was higher and the seat somewhat lower than a regular chair, and at the top of the back there was a flat surface on which one could lean the elbows when kneeling on the seat.

When the Reformed consistory took over these church buildings, they closed off the chancel, because the mass was discontinued, but otherwise followed the old customs. People used the available prayer chairs. After the service the chairs were stacked on the side in order to keep the main area free for funerals. For the next service, people would take a chair and place it wherever they wanted in front of the pulpit. These chairs were not put close together, but with sufficient space so that they could be used as prayer chairs. One would stand up, turn the back of the chair to the pulpit, kneel on the chair, and pray. Sometimes prominent la-



dies would send their servants ahead to set up a chair. When the lady arrived, the maid would stand up – a practice that the consistories protested.

This continued for about a century after the Reformation, but eventually a change occurred. The honorable magistrates wanted to be acknowledged in the church as representatives of the “confessional government” and therefore wanted pews. These pews were usually placed right in front of the pulpit around the pillars, higher than the chairs, in order to symbolize the importance of those seated there. Reacting to the government officials, the church officers then decided they wanted similar seats of privilege. The church therefore built the so-called doophek around the pulpit [literally, “baptismal partition” – a wooden partition about three feet high, enclosing a space for baptism and pews. trans.]. Here were pews for ministers, elders, and deacons, while church administrators were directed to a pew to the left or the right of the government pew.

These new pews for the consistory and church government officials did not permit kneeling. There was no room to kneel, and the pews were not built for it. These officials therefore adopted the custom of standing during prayer. Of course, this example influenced those sitting on chairs, so that increasingly they discontinued kneeling and began to stand up during prayer. Moreover, because of the growing population and the shortage of space in the churches, chairs were placed so closely together that turning them around for

prayer became less possible and even difficult and cumbersome, especially for women. For this reason, many women stood up during prayer.²

Though Kuyper was addressing the matter of kneeling during prayer, the reader might find it intriguing that he makes no comment about the practice of special seating for the government officials and subsequently for church officers. However, he does so earlier, in a discussion about church architecture. In that part, Kuyper points out that during the nineteenth century the church government had been taken over by the civil authorities, and thus the civil authorities wanted special recognition by way of their special seating. He dismisses this practice as inappropriate: “We must avoid building ‘throne seats’ for anyone. The assembly of believers does not recognize different levels of worth. It follows from that principle that benches for the poor in the back of the church are no more appropriate than benches for the dignitaries in the front” (*Our Worship*, p. 88).

Perhaps it is time for us to re-evaluate the practice of special pews for office-bearers, because, as Abraham Kuyper has shown, it finds its historical roots in privilege, pride of place, status, and influence; not in Scripture.

John van Popta

¹ *Our Worship*. Trans. H. Boonstra. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids (2009) Pg 144ff; originally published in 1911 in Dutch as *Onze Eeredienst*.

² This is an updated translation by the translator and found at <https://www.reformedworship.org/article/december-1995/come-let-us-bow-down-reflections-kneeling>.



*From time to time Clarion will publish longer responses to articles received.
The decision as to which responses to publish will rest with the Editor.*

