

Clarion

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

A photograph of a vibrant rainbow arching across a sky filled with dramatic, orange and blue clouds. The rainbow starts near the horizon on the right and curves upwards and to the left. The bottom of the image shows a dark, silhouetted horizon line.

**We seek the things
that are above**

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PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP
CRTS CAMPUS VISIT

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
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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Our Ascension Day issue leads with Dr. Cornelis Van Dam's article, "Our Saviour, Seated at God's Right Hand." Rev. Calvin Vanderlinde's meditation also focusses on Ascension Day.

In our previous issue, we had the first part of Rev. Jan DeGelder's article on church polity. This time we will have a closer look at four biblical principles that are fundamental for how God expects us to run his church. He also answers the question: Does church polity matter?

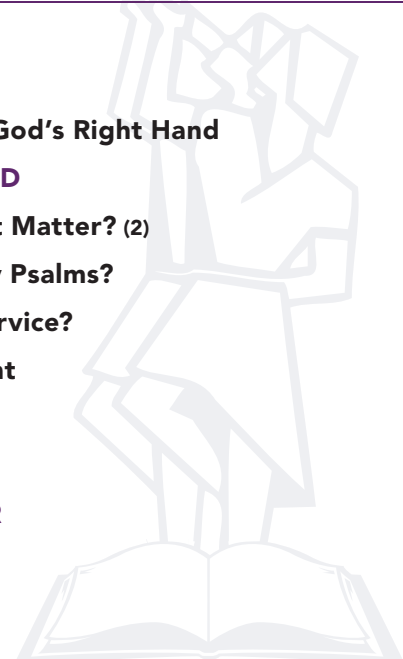
Readers may have been confused at the brevity of an article in Issue 8, "Why Do We Sing Mostly Psalms?" Well, the first half of the article was accidentally deleted in the editing process; in this issue we correct the mistake by reprinting the *entire* article that Rev. Wynia wrote! Also on the topic of Music in Our Churches, we have some reader responses to the question: "Why Sing before the Service?"

Earlier this year, CRTS hosted a Campus Visit Event for men in our federation to find out a little (or perhaps I should say a lot) more about Seminary and preparing for the ministry. Issue 10 has a report from Dr. Ted Van Raalte on this event. There is also *Clarion Kids*, Ray of Sunshine, a letter to the editor, You Asked and a press release.

Laura Veenendaal

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Our Saviour, Seated at God's Right Hand

*Jesus knew that his ascension would mean
his triumph at the Father's right hand*

As we celebrate the ascension of our Saviour, our thoughts go to heaven, and “we seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Col 3:1). Let us take a moment to reflect on just two aspects of this awesome historic event: first, the fact that our Saviour is seated and, secondly, that he is seated at God's right hand. These truths hold enormous implications and tremendous comfort for us today as we confess this part of biblical truth in the Apostles' Creed each Sunday.

Seated in heaven

When Jesus ascended up to heaven in the sight of his disciples, then he went up as our only high priest. In one sense, he did what countless high priests before him had done. Once a year, all through Old Testament times, Israel's high priest had passed through the temple curtains into the Holy Place and then through another set of curtains into the Most Holy Place to bring the sacrificial blood into the very presence of God to atone for his sins and the sins of the people. Christ as our only high priest also entered into the very presence of God. But to prepare for his entry into glory, he first presented *himself* as the only truly atoning sacrifice for our sins on the cross, he rose from the dead for our justification, and then he ascended as our high priest through the curtains of the heavens into God's very presence. And so, he entered into the Most Holy Place not by the means of the blood of animal sacrifices, “but by means of his own blood” (Hebr 9:12). His was *the* perfect atonement sacrifice. “By a single sacrifice he perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Hebr 10:14).

The significance of this epochal event cannot be overestimated. He, a true human being, passed through the heavens into God's very presence for *the* atonement of all our sins. That means that the sacrificial work so labouriously done through the centuries in Old Testament times was done, completed! This high priest could rest from his task and remain in God's presence. Yes, he could sit down! His work of atoning was finished! No high priest in the order of Aaron could ever rest or sit down in the presence of God in the earthly sanctuary. They could not rest from this task but had to keep on sacrificing and sprinkling blood and once a year enter the Most Holy Place. God therefore never prescribed a chair as part of the holy furniture in the tabernacle or temple. They had to continue sacrificing. But Christ could sit down, and he could do so even in the heavenly sanctuary.

He sat down at God's right hand! His being seated, however, does not mean that our Saviour is now inactive. Not at all. He wants those whose sins he has atoned to join him in glory. As our only high priest, his concern is that we too may enter into the presence of the Father. After all, the ascension of the man Jesus Christ is but the first; more are to follow. He went to prepare a place for those who believe in him (John 14:2). And therefore, he who is seated in glory “also intercedes for us” (Rom 8:34).

Seated as advocate

The right hand position is one close to the Father. It is a position of trust and confidence, which facilitates Christ's work as our advocate with the Father. He is a most

effective advocate, for he knows our situation. “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebr 4:15). He who through the ascension brought his sacrifice into the heavenly Most Holy Place remains a human being and knows our every need. Nothing we experience is foreign to him. He has been through it all and he wants his people to join him. If we fall into sin, the apostle John reminds us: “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

They had to continue sacrificing

We can and indeed are encouraged to approach “the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebr 4:16). The One seated at God’s right hand is *our* high priest, who has our interests in mind. He cannot and will not forget us. His feet, hands, and body are like ours. He works all things to our benefit. He is able to do so as one seated at the right hand of the Father. After all, being seated at God’s right hand means having a position of authority.

Seated as ruler

As high priest seated at God’s right hand, the Saviour shares in the ruling authority of the Father. The right hand is a position of power. This is clear from Psalm 110, where the command “sit at my right hand” is followed by a description of the shattering of the enemies and the execution of judgment on them. Indeed, Christ “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities and power having been subjected to him” (1 Pet 3:22). In other words, with Christ’s ascension into heaven, he achieved victory over all spiritual forces arranged against him. “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them” (Col 2:15). Although Satan is characterized as “the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (Eph 2:2), he has been defeated and in principle the battle has been won. Jesus knew that his ascension would mean his triumph at the Father’s right hand. Although he was unarmed, captive, and mocked, he could therefore declare to the Sanhedrin that he was the Son of Man and that they would “see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62). On that day which will surely come, he will deliver “the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and ev-

ery authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24). In the meantime, as one seated at the right hand of the Father, our Saviour rules over all. Although Satan still exercises demonic influence in this world, the certain reality is that one day Christ will abolish the devil’s power once and for all.

The abiding comfort

The kingship of the ascended Christ is a great comfort. With the ascension, “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11).

The ascended Christ rules! This is a tremendous consolation. Christian influence on our society is in many ways waning. Our culture is becoming more and more godless and pagan and our position as Christians is becoming reminiscent of the position of the church shortly after the ascension. Those Christians were persecuted first by Jews, then by Romans as well. Today many believers also experience harassment and oppression. Even in our own country there are pressures, some subtle, others more direct, to conform to the sinful patterns, goals, and dreams of this age. But as the humanistic dreams seek to exult man to a position of final authority on justice and morals, we may remember our ascended and exalted Lord Jesus Christ, true man and true God, seated at the right hand of the Father whose kingdom is sure and has no end. We may call to mind that when God the Father seated Christ at his right hand in the heavenly places, he put him “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come,” he appointed him head over everything for the church (Eph 1:21). Christ rules with a view to the well-being of the church so that one day as a result of his redeeming work “he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Eph 5:27).

In the growing tension and in some parts of the world open warfare between the kingdoms of darkness and light, we may therefore resist without compromise the evil one for we know that heaven, a perfect world, will not come on earth by means of human efforts and dreams, but it will surely come when our Saviour returns. Christ’s ascension and his being seated at God’s right hand will and must be followed by his return on the clouds of heaven when all knees will indeed bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus!





Above All Glory Seated

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."

(Colossians 3:1-2)

One might be tempted to think of Christ's ascension as though it was simply the "second bookend" of his life on earth. According to this way of thinking, his ascension was merely his exit and departure out of this world, the functional counterpart to his entrance and arrival at his incarnation.

As you pause to reflect on those first two sentences, hopefully the words "simply" and "merely" do not sit comfortably with you. The rest we can agree with. But it is good to reflect on Christ's ascension more meaningfully.

We must understand that the ascension was the great culmination of Christ's work accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection. His ascension was his return to heaven, but it was not an act of retirement or retreat. It was an act of his reign! For he now sits enthroned at the Father's right hand, from where he rules over all forevermore.

This is remarkable when we consider that Christ ascended visibly and bodily into heaven. He remained a true human being, for his ascension

happened "before the eyes of his disciples." That tells us heaven is not the sort of place where only disembodied spirits live floating around on the clouds. Heaven is a real place, as solid as the created world we know, a place where a human can live. The proof is found in Christ our Forerunner. We who belong to him may be confident that we will one day trace his path.

But Christ's ascension was even more glorious when we consider that he ascended into the realm of God's presence. In the beginning God and man were together, but sin tore that apart. What happened at Christ's ascension was that a true human being was welcomed back into that realm of fellowship with God. This was a truly historic event of such a kind that had never taken place before. It was something beyond our understanding and beyond what we can right now envision or experience. It was a mystery, but a mystery we believe and confess.

Now, what difference does it make? A great difference indeed! Upon his

ascension, Christ proceeded to pour out his Spirit by whose power we are enabled to "seek the things that are above, where Christ is." This means that Christ's kingdom is not only found where he is presently. His kingdom is showcased here below through us as we display what a world set right and renewed looks like. The heavenly gifts he sends us are not meant for self-serving purposes, but to serve his great purposes. As his Spirit works in and through us, we show what humanity is supposed to look like when God and his people dwell together in harmony.

Is this not why Christ has left us here? Ever wonder why he did not zap us straight into heaven? Was it not so that we would witness to this world with our lives? So that others may see the wisdom, goodness, glory, and power of God's kingdom and be drawn to it? Christ's ascension underpins all of that. May we then make the most of our lives so that our God and King may be praised and glorified through us.



For further study

1. Christ's ascension signaled his reign and led to the bestowal of divine gifts. What are those gifts and how are they precious to you?
2. Ponder in specific terms how Christ's miracles showcased not only his divinity and compassionate heart, but also previewed how his kingdom would transform the world, defeat the evil one, and roll back the effects of the curse.



Church Polity. . . Does It Matter? (Part 2)

In the first installment we looked at the need for and value of having a church order. We saw that running the church of Jesus Christ is not an insignificant issue. It is actually a very spiritual matter in the light of God's character as a God of peace (1 Cor 14:33, 40), and of the nature of his church according to Scripture, as we found it summarized in Question and Answer 54 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

This time we will have a closer look at four biblical principles that are fundamental for how God expects us to run his church.

Jesus Christ is the Head

In the very centre is the relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and his church. We saw how the Reformed confession emphasizes that the church is established by Christ.

In the Bible this relationship between Christ and his church is described with the help of several images or metaphors: he is the Vine and we are the branches (John 15); he is the Good Shepherd and we are the sheep (John 10); he is the Head and we form the body (1 Cor 12).

In the New Testament, the Christian community, led by the apostles, acknowledged the glorified Christ as its only Head, the King. This position can never be taken by anyone else: not by civil authorities (political leaders, tribal leaders), not by one powerful or influential, charismatic individual, and not by a democratic majority either. In this sense the headquarters of the church are not on earth, but always in heaven (Gal 4:26). This means that the proper structure of the church is never a democracy, monarchy, aristocracy, or dictatorship. The church is and must always function as a Christocracy. No human leader in the church can ever demand absolute obedience for himself.

Yes. . . it is useful and good to regulate matters of the church so that things are being done in an orderly fashion.

However – no human laws, rules, traditions, opinions, or ideologies may infringe on the freedom the believers have received in Christ. This is everyone's freedom of conscience, to be judged by the highest Judge in heaven and on earth.¹

At the same time, this freedom-in-Christ is not an excuse for ignoring or showing disrespect for what has been agreed upon by the churches. That has to do with mutual trust in the church. You cannot use your freedom-in-Christ to justify not keeping your word.

But if running the church is a matter of submitting to Christ as Head of the church, can we still make decisions by majority vote? Yes, we can. Of course, a majority vote cannot overrule God's Word. But quite often we have to make practical decisions in which the truth of the gospel is not at stake. In those cases, decisions should preferably be reached by common accord. But if that proves difficult it is appropriate to decide a matter by majority vote, as long as it serves one goal – that is, the peace of the church under Christ as Head.

Office bearers

The next biblical principle for the proper government of the church is the development of offices.

There is a significant emphasis in the New Testament on what is called "the gifts of the Spirit."² When you look closely at those gifts, you will notice that you can divide them in two categories. Some of these spiritual gifts are more incidental. Things like miraculous healings and speaking in tongues or languages happen at special occasions. Others are institutional. Things like instructing or teaching, providing leadership, governing, and serving are meant to last. These remain important for the church throughout the ages.

In 1 Peter 2:5, 9, the apostle Peter addresses the church community as “a royal priesthood, a holy nation.” But beside this “priesthood of all believers,” the Bible also speaks about the special, ordained offices in the church. In Ephesians 4:11, 12, Paul points at those as given by Christ himself “to equip God’s people for works of service, to build up the body of Christ.” Such men are to help the believers grow and mature in faith, to encourage them to holy living. They must do so by teaching from God’s Word and confronting them with God’s will for their lives.

This began in the New Testament with the apostles. As ear- and eye-witnesses of Jesus’s life and work, they had a unique office, and were not replaced.

Then we read in Acts 14:23 that during his first missionary journey, the apostle Paul appointed “elders” in all the congregations. In his pastoral letters, Paul instructs Timothy and Titus to do the same, and he gives detailed requirements for elders and deacons. Based on 1 Timothy 5:17, John Calvin concluded that elders come in two categories: *ruling elders* and *teaching elders*.

Autonomous churches

A third foundational principle for Reformed church polity is the observation that almost all New Testament references to the “church” or to “churches” refer to local groups of believers that enjoy fellowship together and worship together.³

It appears that those local churches are autonomous entities in themselves. Every local church is a complete church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the local office bearers to ensure that the church they serve and where they represent Christ is a community that, united in faith, enjoys justice, peace, and mutual love.

A church order that reflects biblical principles for running the church cannot give so much authority to regional or national assemblies that the local church does not have the room to exercise her own freedom under the headship of Jesus Christ. One of the implications is that no assembly or other authority can force elders or deacons upon a congregation “from the top down.” And no assembly or other authority can dismiss, suspend, or depose office bearers of a local congregation.

After the apostles died, some leaders had more influence and moral authority in the broader Christian community than others (think of the early church fathers). This also happens today with ministers or professors who write books or blogs. But the Bible does not give room for office bearers who have governing authority beyond their local church.

Accountable churches

However – and this is the fourth foundational principle – this does not mean that local churches should be independent and have nothing or little to do with each other. Reformed church polity is different from congregationalism.

When we hear about “hierarchy,” we usually think of a denomination that is run from the top down with a synod or pope having the final authority. But there can also be local hierarchy, when a dominant minister or a group of elders ignore or won’t tolerate dissenting views or opinions in the congregation.⁴

But in all humility the local church must be willing to have her own decisions and conclusions tested by the judgment of the sister churches in the federation, churches that share the same biblical and confessional basis. That’s why local churches accept the responsibility to cooperate and help each other to remain faithful to the truth of God’s Word and the confessions. Together they guard the unity of faith.

Such cooperation also provides a recourse when there is a conflict in a local church. The believer who feels treated unjustly by an action or decision of the local elders can appeal to the other churches in the federation for help. This makes it important that in the federation we can trust that all the churches operate within the parameters agreed upon in the Church Order.

Of course, the New Testament does not talk about classes or synods. The meeting mentioned in Acts 15 was unique. It was not a “synod” as we define synods. However, what happened in Acts 15 is an example that reflects the biblical principle of mutual consultation, cooperation, and encouragement between the churches.

This responsibility to apply the Church Order in such a way that we can trust each other to keep our promises does not diminish the first and direct accountability of the local church towards her Head Jesus Christ. Reformed church polity maintains a fine balance between hierarchy on the one hand and independentism on the other hand.

Maintaining this “fine balance” is so fundamental that one of the crucial articles in Reformed church orders is the rule: “No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no office-bearer over other office-bearers.” This implies also that no major assembly shall lord it over a minor assembly or a consistory. In our CanRC Church Order this is Article 74, close to the end of the CO. But at the first Reformed synod, held in Emden in 1571, which had the job to build the Reformed church federation from scratch, the brothers thought this was so important that they made this rule the very first article of the church order they put together at that time.

It does matter

It is clear that one cannot say: “It doesn’t really matter how we run the church. The one system is as good as the next. Whatever you prefer – God doesn’t really care, as long as you love Jesus.” When it comes to organizing and running God’s church, we are to make careful decisions and establish rules within the parameters of what the Bible teaches us about the character of God, the nature of the church, and the things mentioned above: the priesthood of all believers, the headship of Christ, the local church as the body of Christ, and the fact that elders are called by Christ to shepherd his sheep.

While those concepts provide the foundation for running the church of Jesus Christ, many of the details of our church-government are the result of our own judgment (or the judgment of our forefathers). Some of the rules reflect the culture of the time in which they were made (for instance: Article 38 – ministers as chair of council/consistory, Article 44 – non-delegated ministers may attend Classis in advisory capacity, and Article 46 – only ministers as church visitors.) Other articles reflect wisdom (for instance Articles 7, 25, and 55).

Only for Reformed people

How do we apply all this when we “do” church together? A typical Reformed church order is brief. It contains only the basic rules for doing things in a proper way in the churches and for how we live together as churches. And that is good. The church order does not have to be very extensive and detailed. Brief and basic also allows for flexibility in interpreting and applying the church order in special circumstances.

Some may not like such “flexibility.” They are afraid that it opens the door for arbitrary, inconsistent ad-hoc decisions that may cause division more than promoting justice, peace, and harmony in the church.

But there is something unique about applying the Church Order and governing the church of Jesus Christ. When I was in seminary, one of my professors said: “Reformed church polity only works for Reformed people.” What does that mean?

When office bearers are filled with love for the Lord and for his people; when they do their work in humble submission to the Bible as summarized in the Confessions; when they are committed to maintain the harmony and unity in the federation, by loyally keeping what we have agreed upon – then the Reformed church order is not perfect, but it is a good and sufficient tool to work with.

Where the rubber hits the road

Sometimes churches may feel that certain Church Order articles are more a hindrance than a help in their situation, or the Church Order does not provide the parameters they look for. If that’s the case, it is better to seek revision of the Church Order, rather than trying to find a minimalist interpretation to suit your own circumstances.⁵

Every local church is a complete church of Jesus Christ

Not every possible scenario we might run into in operating the church has been covered in the Church Order. The result is that consistories and assemblies can spend a fair bit of time discussing questions about interpreting and applying the rules.

But always remember the foundational biblical principles mentioned earlier in this article. In other words, when consistories or synods make decisions, these are the crucial questions: Does this decision serve the glory and the holiness of God? Does it honour Christ as the Head of the church? Does it promote peace and justice in the church and among the churches? Does it confirm the truth of the gospel? Does it promote the unity of faith in and among the churches? Does it protect the freedom of God’s people to live according to God’s Word? Does it resolve conflicts and restore relationships?

¹ See John 8:32, 36; 2 Cor 3:17, Gal 5:1, 13 and 1 John 2:20, 27, as well as BC Art. 32.

² Think of 1 Cor 12, 13, and 14; Rom 12:6-8; 1 Pet 4:10, 11.

³ The authors of the epistles in the NT address one local congregation (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1), or sometimes a group of local congregations (Gal 1:2; 1 Pet 1:1; Rev 2, 3).

⁴ Just Google “abusive churches.”

⁵ Right now, occasionally a CO article is amended when a synod adopts an overture to that end, coming from a local church, via classis and regional synod. That makes for a haphazard approach and leads to patchwork. A regular revision of the CO, every ten years or so, might be helpful to maintain it as an adequate tool for running the churches. Every nine years, or so, a synod could appoint a Church Order Committee, not to redo the whole thing, but to solicit input from the churches as to where the CO should be updated to remain current. Interestingly, our sister churches in New Zealand (RCNZ) have a Standing Committee for the Church Order. This committee is available to answer questions for clarification on matters of church order, coming from churches, a synod, and even from members, if they wish. A synod can also instruct it to look into matters related to the CO.





He has previously served on the Songbook Committee for the URCNA and currently serves on the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise for the CanRC

Why Do We Sing Mostly Psalms?

This article was prepared for the “Music in Our Churches” issue (Vol 68, No 8). Unfortunately, during the editing process, the first half of the article was accidentally deleted. Here is the article in its entirety; our apologies to Rev. Wynia.

Understanding why we do what we do in our worship services is critical to our ability to genuinely glorify God and to be edified in the worship services. Each believer needs to understand and to “own” for him/herself the worship practices of the church. Sometimes, questions about our practices are sparked by exposure to what other believers do. One of those questions is: “Why do the Canadian Reformed Churches insist on singing predominantly psalms in our worship services?”

Historical precedent

For the sake of perspective, a quick sample survey of the practices of other Reformed and Presbyterian churches may be helpful. In the United Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches, the Reformed Church in the U.S., the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Christian Reformed Church, the psalms are given “preferential treatment” over hymns. That’s the historical, and almost universal practice among Reformed and Presbyterian churches everywhere. The words of Article 39 of the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches capture the principle that has been adopted by these churches: “The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches.”

Historically, we can explain our practice as part of the heritage of the Reformation, and especially, of Calvinism. John Calvin advocated for exclusive psalmody, and he in turn could point back to the practice of the early church.¹ There are some Reformed and Presbyterian churches that have followed Calvin’s preference, but most, including the Canadian Reformed Churches, include hymns among the songs that are approved for use in public worship.

God-given songs

This may explain our practice from a historical point of view, but it doesn’t answer the question, Why? That is spelled out quite clearly and succinctly in The Directory of Worship of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS): “Since the metrical versions of the Psalms are based upon the Word of God, they ought to be used frequently in public worship.”

In his introduction to the Genevan Psalter of 1543, John Calvin put forward the same argument, although somewhat more forcefully: “Now, what Augustine says is true, namely that no one can sing anything worthy of God which he has not received from him. Therefore, even after we have carefully searched everywhere, we shall not find better or more appropriate songs to this end than the Psalms of David, inspired by the Holy Spirit. And for this reason, when we sing them, we are assured that God puts the words in our mouth, as if he himself were singing through us to exalt his glory.”

That’s the fundamental difference between psalms and hymns,² and the fundamental reason why the Presbyterian and Reformed churches sing mostly psalms: when we sing the Psalms, we’re singing words inspired by the Holy Spirit, whereas, when we sing hymns, we’re singing uninspired human poetry.

The regulative principle

So, the psalms have been given priority over hymns in Reformed worship out of a desire to sing God’s Word. There are two basic motives that drive that desire. The first of these motives is summarized in what is called the regulative principle of worship (RPW). This is what leads to a very distinct difference between Reformed worship and what we find in virtually all non-Reformed churches. Painting with an admittedly broad brush, we might summarize the

principle followed in other churches more or less as, “We may do whatever God does not forbid us to do in worship.”

The RPW, on the other hand, says, “The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited to his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture (Ex. 20:4-6; Deut. 4:15-20; 12:32; Matt. 4:9-10; 15:9; Acts 17:25; Col. 2:23)” (Westminster Confession of Faith 21:1). The continental Reformed version of the regulative principle is found in Answer 96 of the Heidelberg Catechism, where we confess that in the second commandment, God requires that “We are not to . . . worship him in any other manner than he has commanded in his Word.”

Aiming to please God

The RPW helps us to defend the worship of the Lord from our inclination to do what pleases us, rather than asking what pleases God. It says, essentially, that God tells us in his Word how he wants to be worshipped. Anything that we add to what God has commanded in his Word actually takes away from what we offer him. When we add elements or make changes to the worship service to satisfy our tastes and preferences, we turn the focus of worship from what pleases God to what pleases us. That’s what God forbids in the second commandment, because that’s what perverts the worship of the true God, changing it from a sacrifice of praise offered to God into an opportunity for us to please ourselves.

The evidence that we have come to life with Christ – and that Christ has come to live in us – is the presence and the development of a heartfelt desire to please God in everything that we do (Rom 12:1-2; 1 John 3:22). That is the very essence of the sanctifying work of Christ, through the Holy Spirit (HC, Q/A 86, 90). That desire is particularly and intentionally displayed in our official worship services on Sundays, the day of Christ’s resurrection, where we show that we have been raised to new life with him (Rom 6:5). The desire to please God governs everything we do, but it especially directs and motivates us in the way in which we worship him. If we consciously strive, in principle and in practice, to please God in worship, we’ll be encouraged to please him in everything we do, because the way we worship sets the tone and the pattern for the way we live.

By rule and by tradition, therefore, the Reformed churches have adopted the practice of singing mostly psalms in worship. The heart of the issue, though, is not whether we are obedient to a rule that we have put in place, or to a tradition that we have inherited. God is not pleased with worship that is no more than obedience to rules and observance of traditions. He seeks worship that flows from thankful and joyful hearts. He seeks worship that we offer as a sacrifice of praise to him, from the hearts and mouths and hands of those who want in all things to please him, above all else, and that is why we sing mostly psalms: because we believe that we are best able to please God in worship when we sing songs that he has given us. As we reflect on this question, it’s critical that we recognize the temptation that we face, namely, to focus on ourselves, our preferences, and our experience, in worship. Indeed, this is the “flavour” of so much contemporary evangelical worship: it’s more about what we experience than about what we offer to God.

Protective measure

In the second place, as Reformed believers, we acknowledge the truth of what the Bible reveals about the continuing influence of sin on our hearts and minds, and on our motives. We need to take that seriously when we’re deciding how we’re going to worship God. The old Latin expression, “*lex orandi, lex credenda*” (essentially, what you sing is what you believe) reminds us that the songs of the church are “sung theology.” What we sing reflects – and shapes – what we believe. In view of that fact, the Reformed churches have recognized that it’s safer for us to sing the inspired Word of God than to sing uninspired human compositions.

Singing what uninspired people have written can introduce mistaken impressions, and even perpetuate doctrinal error in the church. Sometimes intentionally, much more often, unintentionally, people have written hymns that do not accurately or fully reflect the teaching of Scripture. History shows that unlike the Spirit-inspired psalms, hymns are subject to certain doctrinal and ethical impulses. Quite often this has led to an over-emphasis on certain aspects of the individual Christian’s life, and an under-emphasis on the objective work of God in Jesus Christ and of our place in the kingdom of God and the congregation of Jesus Christ. Church history is marked by a pattern created by spiritual trends or theological developments, which in turn provoke reactions or counter-developments.

CALLED

The Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church has extended a call to:

Rev. Marc Jagt

of the Canadian Reformed Church of Fergus North.

CHURCH NEWS

Hymnody's risk of imbalance

Both before and after the Reformation, pietism and mysticism arose in reaction to formalism, intellectualism, and hypocrisy. The strains of pietism and mysticism show up in many hymns as subjectivism: an over-emphasis on the individual believer, and his or her personal spiritual experience. The result is that we lose the focus on objective scriptural reference points, such as the covenant, the congregation, and even the character of God himself, and the tendency is to encourage worshippers to build their spiritual confidence on what they feel, and what they experience as individual believers. One of the most egregious examples of this unhealthy and unscriptural emphasis on the spiritual experience of the individual believer is the hymn, *I Come to the Garden Alone*, in which the singer claims that he experiences a communion with Christ "in the garden" which "no one has ever known." Further, there often seems to be an almost exclusive focus on God the Son, and in particular, his death on the cross, rather than a full-orbed worship of all three Persons of the Trinity, and recognition of all of the work that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit do for us.³

According to the principle *lex orandi, lex credenda*, these weaknesses can lead to weaknesses in the doctrine and life of believers. For instance, seeking spiritual certainty in the quality of our personal spiritual experiences and condition distracts us from faith's focus on God's steadfast love for us, displayed throughout salvation history and pre-eminently in Jesus Christ. Looking to our spiritual experience for validation of our status as God's children is bound to lead to doubt, rather than certainty.

It is important to mention a couple of caveats at this point. First of all, the argument in this article is not against singing hymns *per se*, but about the potential dangers of singing hymns *predominantly*. As churches, we recognize that there are sound scriptural hymns that may be sung to the glory of God and the edification of the congregation. Second, some of the potential dangers of hymns may not be obvious when we consider particular hymns. The potential dangers associated with singing hymns has more to do with what we might describe as a kind of cumulative effect or impact that singing hymns predominantly could have on our faith and our life.

The Psalter's perfect balance

The truth is that the Psalms reflect the whole range of our experience as believers. Luther wrote, ". . . the Psalter is the Book of all saints; and everyone, in whatever situation he may be, finds in that situation Psalms and words that fit his case, that suit him as if they were put there just for his sake, so that he could not put it better himself, or find or wish for anything better." Calvin said, "Not without good grounds am I wont to call this book an anatomy of all parts of the soul, since no one can experience emotions whose portrait he could not behold reflected in its mirror. Yes, the Holy Spirit has there depicted in the most vivid manner every species of pain, affliction, fear, doubt, hope, care, anxiety, and turbulent emotion, through which the hearts of men are chased."⁴

But the Holy Spirit has not only depicted "every species of . . . turbulent emotion" in the Psalms. He has also provided nourishment and instruction for our faith, by directing us to the foundation of our faith: the steadfast love of God, revealed in all of his mighty acts of salvation. For these reasons, Reformed and Presbyterian churches have historically adopted the principle of singing predominantly psalms in public worship services.

¹ Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 2002), p. 45; 163

² Historically, Reformed and Presbyterian churches have sung as hymns other Old Testament "psalms", such as the Song of Moses, the Song of Deborah, as well as New Testament "psalms", such as the songs of Mary, Zechariah and Simeon. There are also hymns called "canticles", which are essentially Scripture texts other than the psalms, set to music. For the purposes of this article, however, I'm using the term "hymns" only to refer to Christian sacred songs, that are not based directly on any passage of Scripture.

³ F. Van Deursen, *Psalmen II in De Voorzeide Leer* (Barendrecht, NL: Drukkerij Liebeek en Hooijmeijer, 1978), pp. 353-384. In the essay, *Een vergelijking van psalmen met gezangen* ("A comparison between psalms and hymns") among other things, Van Deursen traces the development of pietistic and mystical hymnody in the medieval period, and its reappearance, in post-Reformation hymnody, especially among the German pietists (e.g. August Hermann Francke, Nicholas von Zinzendorf), but also among the Methodists (e.g. John Wesley). He identifies several examples of hymns that reflect pietistic and mystical influences. The medieval fascination with the physical aspects of the passion of Christ is reflected in a hymn such as, *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*, based on a composition attributed to the mystic monk, Bernard of Clairvaux.

⁴ Both quotes found at this website: <http://www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/glorysufficiencypsalms.htm#.XD0dds1OmM9>.





Connect with him on
Facebook or Twitter (@
PeterHoltvluwer) where
he is currently tweeting
on Christ in the Psalms.

Why Sing Before the Service?

Last fall in the editorial “Passionate Singing?” I asked interested readers to write short answers to several questions relating to musical practices in the Canadian Reformed Churches. It came with the promise to publish the most helpful of them in *Clarion*. I thank all respondents for their engagement and efforts – it’s all so beneficial to further the discussion! Below are three responses to the following question: “What is the rationale and purpose for pre-service singing?” Read, enjoy and engage (with letters to the editor as well)!

Preparation for Worship

By Peter VanDelden

The practice of singing prior to the worship services varies from place to place. Some congregations have done so on an ad hoc basis, while others have a longstanding practice of singing before the service. Most recently the ad hoc practice had a well-known purpose of testing the hymns of the “Augment.” By contrast, the reasons that began the longstanding practice in some places are less clear, but perhaps still accessible in some of the physical or mental archives. Instead, the intent of this submission is to provide a practical rationale for singing before the worship service.

Memory-aid

The importance of having God’s people sing his praise was recognized already at the beginning of the Reformation. God has given us songs to direct our thoughts towards him. Thus, keeping the complete set of melodies (and words) fresh in our minds is important. How many people can, unaided, describe the contents of Psalms 88, 114, and 120 without knowing the melody? Yet, is this a reason to sing before the service?

There are many opportunities to sing over the course of church (and personal) life. We sing more than 500 selections over one year of church services. Our *Book of*

Praise has been sufficiently small, with less than 200 melodies, that with judicious choice by a minister the melodies could all be sung twice per year. For decades it has been the practice for children to learn the psalms and hymns in our Canadian and American Reformed schools. It has been common practice that opening and closing of study society and other meetings includes singing verses of a psalm or hymn. However, the common practice is becoming less common. It is currently not unknown for meetings to skip singing and particularly young people’s society meetings to sing popular or praise and worship songs instead of from the *Book of Praise*.

Pre-service singing increases the amount we sing, although it adds only a small amount. Singing through the *Book of Praise* systematically with pre-service singing of one selection per service would take more than two years. Does the pre-service singing then encourage putting God’s praises in our hearts and on our lips?

Preparation

Before each church service, we enter the building with our burdens and joys. Each member of the congregation arrives with a different bundle of thoughts, feelings, and experiences to worship together as one. It is usual for organ or piano to be playing. Ideally, the music brings us together. It does not suggest places other than the worship service, because its purpose is to prepare us for worship. How effective this preparation is can often be deduced by a careful listener during the first singing. The more effectively this occurs, the better the congregation will sing.

One aspect of singing together is “conversation” with the musician. Whether people realize it or not, how the singing is conducted depends on the instrument being played, on the player’s style, and even on the player’s frame of mind at that time. In situations where there is a roster of several musicians, or where the congregation does not

have a regular musician but must rely on whomever they can borrow for that particular service, the congregation needs to become (re)acquainted with the musician's style; for example, start-of-verse, singing tempo, and end-of-line rests. With this knowledge, the congregation develops the trust and resulting willingness to sing in a heartfelt way.

Beyond developing the congregation's trust, the playing before the service gives a musician opportunity to focus the congregation for worship. In the hands of a skillful musician, the music can break down a listener's preoccupation with burdens, thoughts, and cares of the week to redirect towards the worship service. The skill of a musician at doing this is different from the ability to play the instrument. It is a skill in using the instrument to redirect the thoughts of the listeners. Sadly, the ability to focus the congregation on worship through pre-service playing is weak or lacking in many musicians.

Yet, preparation before worship can be achieved through pre-service singing. It brings the participants together. The congregation and musician are afforded "conversation" to develop trust. Singing in unison causes the congregation to come together by bringing the breathing patterns together. Together they prepare for the service. Each person's singing is a coordination of listening and doing. The coordination effort leaves less room for preoccupation, thus weakening individual distractions and common focus on what is sung. It would not be helpful to discourage participation by choosing an unfamiliar psalm or hymn. Active participation is needed to bring the congregation together. Singing together brings thoughts and actions into greater unity.

Pre-service singing and music can be considered as a way to prepare the congregation for worship. Regardless of why the practice began, bringing the congregation together in thought and action may be a reason to continue pre-service singing. May our worship be pleasing to God!

An Historical Perspective

By Frank Ezinga

Organist for Canadian Reformed Church at Langley

Canadian Reformed congregations that use a pre-service song often have *their own reasons*. In some cases, the pre-service song is used as a work-around, to sing songs that we have agreed not to sing within the service. Liturgically, there is no provision for the pre-service song in our churches. This can result in interesting dialogues in announcing the pre-service song, such as: "We start our worship service

with the pre-service song," but what does "pre" mean if the service starts? Or when the minister announces after the pre-service song, "Let us *now* lift our hearts to the Lord," as if we didn't do that during the pre-service song. The place of the pre-service song is somewhat awkward in the Canadian Reformed churches.

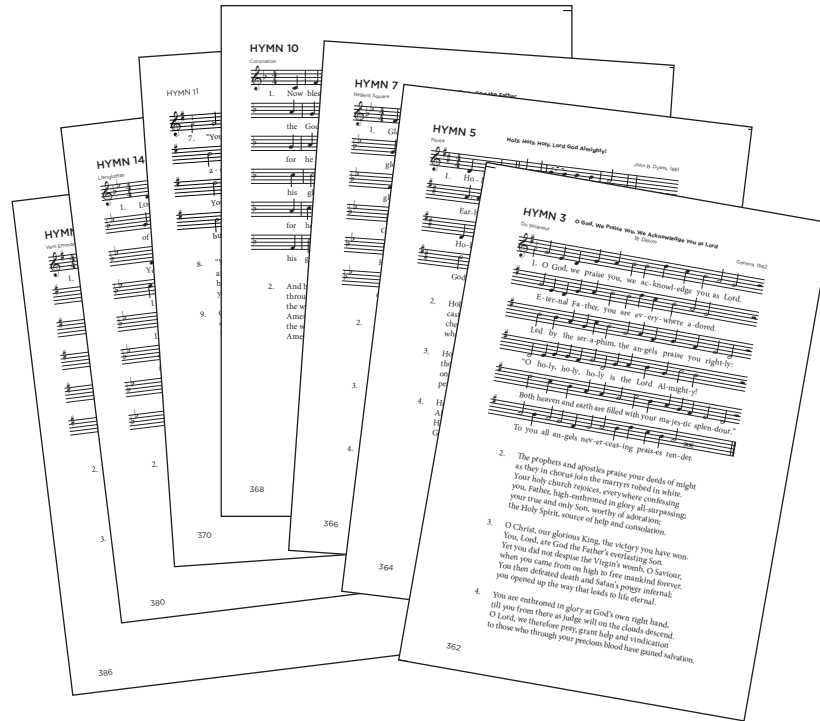
A walk through the past

In Scripture, we find the songs of ascent: songs that were sung while going up to Jerusalem to worship. Therefore, a sung preparation for worship is not foreign. There is limited information about the early liturgies (the Didache AD 100, Justin the Martyr AD 150, Hippolytus AD 220), but the first singing before the service is attributed to Celestine I (d. 432). Gregory I (540-604) formalized this practice in the church. This Introit (Latin *introitus*, entrance, to go in) song included the singing of a complete psalm followed by *Gloria Patri* (also called "Little Doxology," Glory be to the Father and the Son. . .). These (short) psalms would be related to the time of the church year: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, etc. and in most churches these psalms were chosen by the federation, so that all congregations would sing the same psalm. The purpose of this singing before the greeting is preparation, so that the hearts of the congregation would be lifted up.

After Gregory I, this Introit psalm-singing was regretfully reduced to the singing of only a psalm verse. After the church of Rome lost its faithfulness, the subsequent Reformation of the sixteenth century resulted in revised liturgies by the Reformers. Calvin's liturgy did not include the Introit singing anymore. However, Martin Luther did include the Introit in his liturgy, but with the intention that the psalm would again be sung in its entirety, rather than just one verse.

Church services in Anglican, Lutheran, or Roman Catholic churches often start with the Introit: singing of a psalm which is concluded by the *Gloria Patri*. During this singing, the office bearers usually enter and join the singing. Towards the end of the singing, the minister takes his designated position and commences with the greeting. The tradition of a local Anglican church in Vancouver is that the organ plays an organ piece as Introit. The music is mentioned in the liturgy, people are quietly listening: this is the only organ music before the service.

How about our own tradition? Some Reformed churches in The Netherlands still sing a "*voorzang*," initially just to learn the tunes. Today this song is also used to sing the school memory work, "reinforcing the school-family-church



connection,” as one church mentions on their website. These are practical, pragmatic reasons. Yet, many churches don’t have a pre-service song and start the worship service in the Calvinistic tradition with the “votum” and greeting.

Going forward

Should we continue our tradition, or could we incorporate an Introit song? If this would be done with liturgical intentions and church historical awareness, it would not create an awkward situation but would become meaningful, enriching the experience of the worshipper while coming to the heavenly Jerusalem. Are we now singing too much in church? Wait. . . can we ever sing too much in church? In Calvin’s time the average (!) number of stanzas was twenty per service. Most of our congregations are not even close to this.

(And while we are at it, let’s review the liturgical purpose of the music before the service as well.)

To Teach the Congregation

By Martin Jongsma

Pre-service singing is primarily pedagogical; a means to teach or refamiliarize the congregation with the ecclesiastically adopted or proposed church songs. John Calvin even stressed the importance of memorizing the church songs in his preface to the 1543 version of the *Genevan Psalter* (properly known as: *La forme des prières et chants ecclésiastiques*). Calvin writes: “Now the peculiar gift of a person is to sing knowing what he is saying. The heart and affection must follow after the intelligence, which is impossible unless we

have the hymn imprinted on our memory in order never to cease from singing” (McKee, *Writings on Pastoral Piety*, 96).

Clearly, we need to know the melodies of our church songs if we want to truly absorb and appreciate the contents of these versifications (aka. poetic rhyming of texts organized into stanzas). Extant records from the sixteenth century indicate that this was also a concern for the Genevan church leadership and in 1561; the Genevan children were instructed to “sing before the service in order to teach the people the newly published Psalms” (McKee, *The Pastoral Ministry and Worship in Calvin’s Geneva*, 205). Through pre-service singing, the gradually expanding psalter (1539-62) was taught to the Genevan congregation.

In the Canadian Reformed context, pre-service singing can also have a pedagogical function. It can help to increase familiarity with and appreciation for the *Book of Praise*, so that these songs take on new personal and corporate meaning within the liturgy. Of course, I am assuming that the accompanist/vocalist is prepared to lead such pre-service singing in a confident and accurate manner. Despite the practice of some Canadian Reformed churches, pre-service singing should not become a “back-door” or “beneath the radar” strategy for integrating songs that are presently outside of the repertoire of ecclesiastically adopted or proposed church songs. Rather, learn to value and appreciate the rich contents of the entire *Book of Praise* which is currently adopted by our churches.





CRTS Campus Visit Event for Prospective Students

You would know what I mean if you had been there. Where? What was it? Men arrived on flights from across Canada the day before, stayed in billets, and then joined other local men on Thursday, January 17 for a special visit of prospective students to the campus of our own Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) in Hamilton, ON. The day began with hearing a meditation on God's Word, singing, and praying, then taking in four presentations, asking questions, and enjoying good food. That evening the annual CRTS Conference began, and all these young men received free registration, billets, and most meals on January 18 and 19 as part of their introduction to CRTS and to each other. It's very hard to capture the anticipation, the energy, the encouragement, the joy, and the impact that this event had, not only on our guests and their desire to prepare for gospel ministry, but also on every one of us at the seminary and those at our conference. The Lord richly blessed this endeavour and we want to make our joy complete by writing about it.

Planning

The idea of a Campus Visit Event came from a student recruitment committee of CRTS and was approved by the Board. The committee then canvassed all the consistories in the federation of churches, asking them to send us one or more young men who might want to know more about preparing for the ministry of the Word. This involvement of the consistories from the start was key to the success of the event. Local elders and pastors know the young men in their churches, their gifts and their desires, and many of the churches were able to send prospective students to us. Not just five or six or seven, but far more than we dared to hope for – the count was thirty-three students! I hope you caught that – thirty-three prospective students! They told us that we were a great encouragement to them, but we want them to know that their presence was a huge encouragement to us in our work at CRTS as well. We were in awe of God's answer to prayer!

Why? Why did we urge the consistories to send us prospective students? We are well aware of the number of vacancies in the churches, of statistics that suggest that this will only increase, and of a culture that has been ignoring and marginalizing men for some time. With prayer and action, we are seeking to reverse this trend.

From the start the Lord showed us that he would bless this, and we should never have doubted, for within two hours of the first invitations going out to the churches, a brother replied with the offer to assist any church that could not afford to pay for the travel of their prospective student. We had not even asked for this!

The event

Thursday began with the principal, Dr. Jason Van Vliet, addressing the body of men from Joshua 1, about being of good courage. Then two pastors, Rev. Richard Aasman and Rev. Jake Torenvliet, spoke about what it means to be called by God and how God had put the desire in their own hearts and had in due time called them to ministry through his church. After that, Dr. Ted Van Raalte spoke about how to prepare for seminary studies and what to expect at CRTS. While the seminary provides an advanced academic degree, it also works hard to shape men unto godliness and leadership. From the start, the attendees showed lots of interest and asked lots of practical questions. One of the participants wrote in our survey a few days later, "Before this it was just a crazy idea. This event gave that idea a foundation in reality. It showed me the path forward and gave me resolve to take the next step. I will be pursuing studies in ancient languages and before this I was probably not going to."

The seminary provided lunch for the current students and the prospective students, and in that context the current students formed a panel to talk, in between bites, about life as a student. One of the faculty reminded the Board members, who also had a meeting that day, that we had over fifty potential future ministers in our chapel.



What a glorious thought, and how humbling to think that the Lord is giving us an opportunity to contribute to their training! All glory to him alone!

After lunch, two other ministers, Rev. Rolf DenHollander and Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, talked about what life in the ministry is really like. Their practical talks were warmly received and they hosted many more excellent questions.

Supper was a thing all in itself. Since one of our current students, Mr. Mark Ten Haaf, has experience as a chef, we let him prepare a menu that really shouldn't be mentioned here, lest you think that we eat like that all the time. This was for our current and prospective students (professors excluded, unfortunately), to say thanks to our current students for all their willing assistance in driving, billeting, befriending, and fielding questions. We could not have done this without them. And it just wouldn't do to feed mac and cheese or hotdogs to our guests from all across the country! Needless to say, survey feedback said that this meal couldn't have been done better.

Reflections

What was the most encouraging aspect of this event? It's hard to say. When our committee reviewed the surveys afterward we marveled with thanks to God that our first-ever event of this kind turned out so well.

The committee will be considering how often to hold this event, and will be making a recommendation to the Board. Though we didn't feel at liberty to invite men from the Canadian churches of the URCNA, several found out and joined us (we currently have two URC students and recently graduated another). It seems like a good idea to invite them next time.

We would like to thank all the consistories who sent young men to us and all the men who came. Each of you were used by the Lord to encourage us to continue faithfully with our task. When you visited us, we just kept thinking, "This is what it's all about!"

Let me close with reflections from four of these fine young men. "The encouragement that I received through-

out the open house was phenomenal. I really experienced the openness of the school, students and faculty while I was there, and it assured me that if I do decide to enroll one day, I won't be struggling by myself."

"I felt that the combination of the event with the conference was nice. It made for a weekend full of learning and spiritual growth."

"It was really encouraging to hear something of others' experiences in training and ministry. Overall this weekend has greatly impacted my desire to study for ministry in a positive way. On top of that it was very inspiring and encouraging to meet others with similar aspirations and questions and to converse with them on a personal level. This helped strengthen me in my faith and encourage me to really take my personal relationship with the Lord seriously. Overall, this was an amazing weekend that has positively impacted me in more ways than one. Thank you for putting it on."

"I was strengthened and encouraged by the humble group of men, both speakers and attendees, who spoke of the sacrifices and joys of a life of ministry. The speakers were quite honest about the difficulties of pastoral work, but at the same time, they stressed and exemplified that God gives the strength and wisdom daily to face each of these issues as they come. One aspect of the visit that I found striking was the sense of rich community that the seminary builds, and that is extended and also cultivated by the local churches in support of seminary students. Even in our brief stay, it was clear that God uses the seminary community in a special way to strengthen those whom He calls for this task. I'm still daunted by the journey, but, especially in light of the urgent need for pastors, this event impressed upon me a growing, or perhaps renewed, desire to serve God and His church in this way."

We at CRTS are filled with thanksgiving for God's blessing on this event. To him be the glory! May he uphold these many young men and help them pursue this task, one step at a time! If you know someone on this journey, please continue to encourage them and support them, also with finances, if that is needed.



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



Double Puzzle

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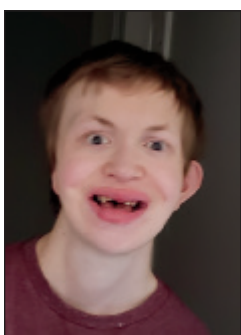
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**by
Emily
Nijenhuis**

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Acts	Barnabas	Conversion
Gentiles	Journey	Missionary
Paul	Silas	Three



Devon Niezen

Hello, my name is Devon Niezen. I will be turning nineteen years old on June 26. I live at home with my parents, but I am on the waiting list for a room in Anchor. I also spend some respite care at the Lighthouse at least once a month.

I have Emanuel Syndrome, which is a partial translocation of two chromosomes (eleven and twenty-two). It affects my physical and mental abilities. I started walking when I was around five years old and I do not talk. I am starting to learn to dress myself, but I am not very coordinated. Although I am usually happy, I can get frustrated easily. Mainly because I can't tell people what I want.

In the winter I like to go on the snowmobile with dad, I would be on there all day if I could. It is so fun to go fast, the faster the better! In the summer I like going for walks with mom, especially in the stroller. I love going swimming in the pool and going camping. I will be going to Anchor camp again this year for two weeks this year, it is fun. I like to watch the Blue Planet movies; I think mom knows all about under water animals by now. I am still at school and really enjoy it. I am learning how to communicate with my iPad, but it is pretty hard. I am learning how to do some cooking and mixing things and some other chores like folding clothes, pushing in chairs, clearing the table, and

emptying the dishwasher. I have learned how to ride a bike and really, really love it. The teachers have to run to keep up with me, I go so fast. I can even steer around other students walking the halls. I am glad summer is almost here so I can spend more time outside.

I go to church every Sunday usually twice but sitting that long is hard for me because I like to be busy. I may not understand but I am sure God has a purpose for me. I have parents that love me, and God, and I am in good hands.

June Birthdays

- 17 JOAN KOERSELMAN will be 62**
2113-16 Avenue, Coaldale, AB T1M 1J8
- 20 LARS HUIJGEN will be 28**
2629 Aspen Drive, Coaldale, AB T1M 0A2
- 26 DEVON NIEZEN will be 19**
7000 2nd line, Arthur, ON N0G 1A0
- 30 BEVERLY BREUKELMAN will be 57**
19th Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4

Congratulations to everyone celebrating a birthday in June! We wish you all the Lord's blessing in the coming year, and a wonderful day with family and friends.

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

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

Rachel Vis

731 Lincoln Street, Wellandport, Ontario L0R 2J0
tom.rachelvis@gmail.com • 905-329-9476



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I followed with interest the exchange between Prof. J.P. Van Vliet and Pastor B. DeJong. Many issues were debated, and of course not always agreed upon.

However, it did shed some light on why Blessings Christian Church decided to do things differently from what the Canadian Reformed churches are used to doing, and what a lot of members (including myself) feel was a non-adherence to the Church Order.

As to abiding to the Church Order, I would like to quote an answer that Rev. Doug Barnes of the Covenant Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa gave in *Christian Renewal* magazine, dated March 8, 2019. It was about a different issue, namely about the neglect of regular preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism.

I found the answer one that all our churches would be strongly advised to take note of. I quote:

Not only are they abandoning a practice that is beneficial for the church, but they are acting faithlessly towards the churches with which they have joined themselves. If they really believe the change is proper, they should seek to change the church order – making their case openly, with willingness to submit to the wisdom of their brothers. That’s how we show love and respect for the churches with which God has blessed us to be united.

Because of the many misunderstandings about Blessings Christian Church, it might be beneficial if Pastor B. DeJong would explain two questions that many people wonder about. It might help us to understand Blessings Christian Church better and hopefully restore the unity among us.

1. Why did Blessings Christian Church decide to omit the name “Canadian Reformed Church”?
2. Why did Blessings Christian Church request to change to a different classis?

Rudy Kampen
Orangeville, ON

Response

Those with questions about Blessings Christian Church are always free to address them to personnel at Blessings. Having said that, I’m quite happy to offer brief responses to Mr. Kampen’s two questions.

To include the name “Canadian Reformed” in the name of the church is (a) cumbersome because it adds multiple adjectives to the noun “church,” (b) unhelpful, because the terms “Canadian” and “Reformed” either don’t communicate anything (“Reformed” is a label largely unknown in the community) or mislead people (“Reformed” for many suggests something political [e.g., the Reform party] and “Canadian” suggests a kind of patriotism), and (c) harmful because the primary association for those familiar with the name, from our informal research, is with those who are hard-working albeit heavy drinking and judgmental. In these ways it became apparent that the name “Canadian Reformed” would be more of a liability than an asset and so the example set by Streetlight Christian Church was followed.

Regarding his second question, Blessings did not request a change to a different classis. Along with Brampton, Blessings was invited to join Classis Central Ontario to redress the obvious inequity in size between it and neighboring classes. After seeking the advice of Classis Ontario West, Blessings decided to accept the invitation.

Bill DeJong

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions can be sent to editor@clarionmagazine.ca and need to adhere to a 750-word limit.*





Q Can the terms “covenant” and “community” be used interchangeably?

In recent times, the terms community and covenant seem to be used interchangeably both in conversation and preaching within the CanRC. Is this proper application of these terms?

A The two terms included in this question each has its own meaning. In our church life and conversation, we speak about our church “community” as a variation for the “congregation” or the “communion of saints” or even for the membership of our federation and churches in ecclesiastical fellowship. In the latter sense, we note that we have a strong and widespread community (or Reformed community) here in the Niagara Peninsula or in the Fraser Valley for instance.

The term “covenant,” too, has its own meaning, denoting the special and precious relationship between the LORD, our covenant God, and his people. When speaking about our worship services, we use the term “covenant assembly” to denote and modify one of the characteristics of the congregation that is gathered for worship. In the same sense, we could speak about the “covenant community” that works together in the establishing and operating of a Reformed school for the purpose of covenantal education. The church community, too, is a gathering of covenant people who share with each other God’s covenant promises and obligations, holding each other (young and old) to it as well.

In view of the question raised, we need to observe therefore in what context the terms are being used. The terms as such – covenant and community – don’t lend themselves very well for them being used “interchangeably.” Their basic meanings are different. In conversation and preaching, however, the connection between the two entities can be used by speaking about it in the way as shown above. Although “covenant” and “community” are different entities with their own specific meanings and connotations, there also is a special connection which shows in our speaking about covenant communities, covenant assemblies, etc., i.e. the one term modifying the other. That certainly is a proper application when it regards matters these two terms have in common!

*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
denhollanderw@gmail.com

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0



PRESS RELEASE

Press Release: Classis Northern Ontario, March 21, 2019

On behalf of the convening church, the Living Word Canadian Reformed Church of Guelph, Rev. D. Agema began with the reading of Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 and a brief meditation on these verses. He then led in prayer, followed by the singing of Hymn 76:2, 3. In addition to welcoming the delegates, Rev. Agema also noted that Rev. P. Feenstra could not be present due to health concerns and that Rev. J. Moesker (Emeritus minister of Owen Sound) was also dealing with health concerns.

The following officers were appointed: Rev. D. Agema as chairman, Rev. R. Visscher as vice-chairman, and Rev. T. Wierenga as clerk.

A report from a committee appointed by CNO Sept. 27, 2019 to evaluate the manner in which candidates for the ministry are examined was presented for discussion. Input was given and noted by Rev. Wierenga, who is serving as

the convener for this committee. A church visitation report was received with thankfulness in regards to a church visit made on June 20, 2018 to Living Word.

The chairman asked the questions set out in Article 44 of the Church Order. Classis was asked to give concurring advice in a matter of discipline. Concurring advice was given.

The convening church for the next classis will be Orangeville Canadian Reformed Church. The suggested date is Friday June 21, 2019. The suggested officers are: Rev. J. Chase as chairman, Rev. T. Wierenga as vice-chairman, and Rev. D. Agema as clerk.

Question period was made use of. The chairman determined that there was no need for censure. The Acts and Press Release were read and adopted.

Following the singing of Psalm 98:3, 4, the chairman led in prayer.

For Classis Northern Ontario, March 21, 2019

Rev. R. Visscher, vice-chairman **C**

