



# Clarion

*05* LIVING IN COVENANT WITH GOD *11* CHURCHES OUTSIDE THE PARC

*18* DACS—CELEBRATING 55 BLESSED YEARS

# what's inside

And we're off! At the start of another New Year we are happy to bring you the first issue in another volume of *Clarion*, our 73<sup>rd</sup> in fact. Time marches on but not endlessly, as Jason VanVliet's editorial holds before us. Our Lord is on his way back! And when he returns, we will know the fullness of what it means to be "partakers of the divine nature," an intriguing subject which Arjen Vreugdenhil meditates upon. While we live on this side of eternity, we are privileged to live in covenant fellowship with our God, something Rick Vanderhorst has been writing on. As he concludes his series on this topic, he holds before the challenge and the wonder of trusting in God also through the hard times. And if we needed further reason to trust our God, George van Popta's new canticle *O LORD Almighty, God Supreme* could be just the ticket.

We are pleased to introduce a new column dubbed, "Churches outside the PARC" by the recently retired Eric Kampen. Eric uses this first installment to introduce the concept, so let me just say that we are bringing back the idea of observing Christendom further afield, something *Clarion* has done in the past. Thanks, brother, for taking this on! Arjan de Visser gives us part one of an overview of how mission is organized in the URCNA in comparison with the CanRC, with plans to bring suggestions for the CanRC in next time in part two. Wes Bredenhof urges all of us to be mindful of the great blessing it is to be able to read the Bible and to make much of the opportunity.

At the turn of a year, we often look back and Keith Sikkema helps us look way back in church history to the 700s and a scholar named Alcuin. In the more recent past, the Christian elementary school near Orangeville came into existence fifty-five years ago, a piece of history commemorated in these pages as well. Our issue rounds out with our usual columns, two book reviews, and two press releases from two regional synods. May the Lord's blessing be upon you all in this New Year of his!

*Peter Holtvlüwer*

**On our cover:** Magnificent pink and purple sunset in the snowy landscape of Bad Kleinkirchheim, Carinthia, Austria

**Photo Credit:** Aydin Hassan, unsplash.com

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# LAST DAYS

*The doctor enters the room. The news is not good. Malignant, aggressive cancer. Treatment may prolong life for a while, but full remission is not likely. Remaining life expectancy is between 12 and 18 months. The oncologist expresses his sympathy.*

Sadly, the scenario described above is all too frequent. Circumstances and severity differ, but one thing applies for all cancer patients: in the short span of a doctor's visit, life changes dramatically. "Lifetime" no longer describes an indefinite, open-ended opportunity. Instead, each day becomes a gift not taken for granted.

## NUMBERED DAYS

Perhaps you find this editorial a gloomy way to begin a new volume of *Clarion*. I understand. We all, including myself, like to focus on bright and cheery things. But at the start of a new year, we frequently read and sing Psalm 90. "Teach us to number our days," we pray, also bearing in mind that God's sense of time is shockingly swifter than ours, "for a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday" (vv. 4, 12). According to his celestial chronometer, 365,000 days flash past like twenty-four hours. Wow, time really does fly!

In this way our God *compresses* our sense of time. As we add up years, centuries, and even millennia, he speaks simply of days. Here are a few examples. "And in the *last days* it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh" (Acts 2:17). That happened way back on Pentecost Day. So, we have been in the last days now for about 2000 years. The book of Hebrews confirms this when it begins, "In these *last days* he has spoken to us by his Son" (1:2). That also took place about two millennia ago. In his first letter, the apostle John condenses our calendar even more, "Children, it is the *last hour*" (2:18). Centuries shrink into days, and days diminish into hours. True, we do not know the day or hour of our Redeemer's return (Mark 13:32). But make no mistake, in God's eyes the final day of the Lord is much closer than we might think (1 Thess 5:2).

## LIVING ON ENDOWED TIME

When people have serious, incurable diseases, they sometimes say, "I'm living on borrowed time." Perhaps we might better say that all of us are living on *endowed*, that is, gifted time. Each day, just like other good gifts, comes down from our Father of lights (James 1:17), and should be used as the Giver wants it to be used. So, what is on his to-do list for us?

First, the Lord, who tracks time differently than we do, is being patient with us so that "all should reach repentance" (2 Pet 3:8, 9). *All* is a small word with a big meaning. No one is exempt from "all," so everyone has repenting to do. What specific repenting do we, including you and I, need to do? Time is short in these last days. What are we waiting for?

Second, the apostle James warns that some in the church are storing up "treasure in the last days" (5:3), but this is not a good thing. They are storing up gold and silver, living in "luxury and self-indulgence" (v. 5). As the end of our earthly sojourn comes into sharper focus, we tend to think differently about money. "We can't take it along anyway," we say. So how should living in the last days shape our thoughts on finances?

Third, as the time for Christ's return draws nigh, false teachers, antichrists, and scoffers will only ramp up their efforts to lead us astray (2 Tim 3:1-7; 1 John 2:18, 19; 2 Pet 3:3-5). Let us constantly hone our knowledge of God's truth, eagerly teach the new generation, and faithfully plant the seed of the gospel in fields unwon. Let's double-down on holding fast and holding forth the true gospel. After all, we do not have the luxury of time. No panic, please, but steadfast urgency is in order.

## COUNTING DOWN THE DAYS

In Psalm 90 we ask the Lord to help us number our days. Counting our days also includes counting *down* our days. But then, thankfully, we can shift our view from the doctor's office to the vision of heaven's throne room in Revelation. Sin, sickness, and, sadly, death are part of our post-fall reality. But we are the Bride of Christ redeemed by our Betrothed. Saved and satiated by his gracious, loyal love, we eagerly count down the days . . . to *the* day, our Wedding Day. "Let us rejoice and give him the glory, for the marriage feast of the Lamb is coming!" Every week lived is one less week to wait. 



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# SHARING IN THE DIVINE NATURE

*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature*

2 PETER 1:3-4 (SEE ALSO VERSES 5-11)

Our Christian faith is full of rich promises. Forgiveness of sins, eternal life in the loving presence of our Lord. The apostle Peter takes it a step further: we have the promise of sharing in the divine nature. What an amazing thing to say! Especially if you consider our fall into sin, when Satan seduced our ancestors with the sly promise: “You will be like God” (Gen 3:5). But now that our Saviour, Jesus Christ, has come, there is a real sense in which we become like God.

Let me be clear: we aren’t, and never will be, gods in our essence. We rightly criticize New Agers and Mormons for blurring the distinction between God and man, between the Creator and the created. There is good reason to be critical of the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of “theosis” or “becoming God.” We will never escape our creatureliness, our physical existence that belongs to the earth. But within that earthly, human essence, the purpose of our new life in Jesus is that we become like God in a profound way.

What does that look like? A God-like life is a godly life, a life of Christian virtue. Peter says that the Lord provides us with everything we need for such a life. All we need to enjoy this divine gift is “knowledge of him who called us.” We must know the Lord Jesus and believe in him. During his earthly ministry, Jesus displayed heavenly glory, divine goodness, and perfect love; today he still calls us to follow him, to imitate him, so that we too learn these godly qualities. As disciples of Jesus our goal is to be as much like our Master as possible. And he gives the divine power to do so, through the Holy Spirit.

How do you pursue this calling? Peter makes clear that we must first “escape the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (v. 4). Make a break with habits that keep us attached to the evil in this world. Positively, our Christian faith must grow into healthy attitudes and practices. “Make every effort to supplement your faith” with various godly qualities (v. 5). It is a good start to believe in Jesus, but as that faith matures, it must also bear fruit. That requires serious work. Verses 8-10 warn us to be diligent

about this. Without divinely powered growth in godliness, our faith stagnates and will eventually fail.

2 Peter 1 is a call to action for every Christian. Verses 5-7 give us homework to do. But God’s Word gives us great encouragement in that work. Through faith, we already have access to Christ’s divine power, to his glory, and to his perfections. We can trust our calling and election. We simply must let them work themselves out in our lives. When that happens, we acquire more and more God-like qualities and share in the perfection of our Lord. Then we have, as verse 11 says, open access to the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. 

## SUGGESTED READING:

Ephesians 2:1-10; 3:14-19.

## FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. Read through 2 Peter 1:3-11. What does it say about what God has done? What does it say that we ought to do? Would you consider this passage moralistic?
2. Peter speaks of “partaking of the divine nature;” Paul often talks about “living/walking by the Spirit” (e.g., Gal 5:16ff). Are these two the same? If not, how are they different?
3. List some of God’s perfections. To what extent, and in what way, can we display these qualities in our life?
4. Verses 3 and 11 speak of “becoming partakers of the divine nature” and “an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord.” Are they speaking of the future of Christ’s return, or do they also apply to our Christian lives today?



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# How To Live in Covenant with God

*(Part 3): Trusting in God through the hard times*

RICK VANDERHORST

In this series of articles, we have been exploring the theme of how to live in covenant with God. Psalm 25 has formed the basis of this study. As we study that psalm, we see three themes emerging for living in covenant relationship with the LORD. In the first article we explored the theme of relying on God's grace. In the second article we explored the theme of asking God to lead us in his ways. The third and final theme that emerges from Psalm 25 is this: trusting in God through the hard times.

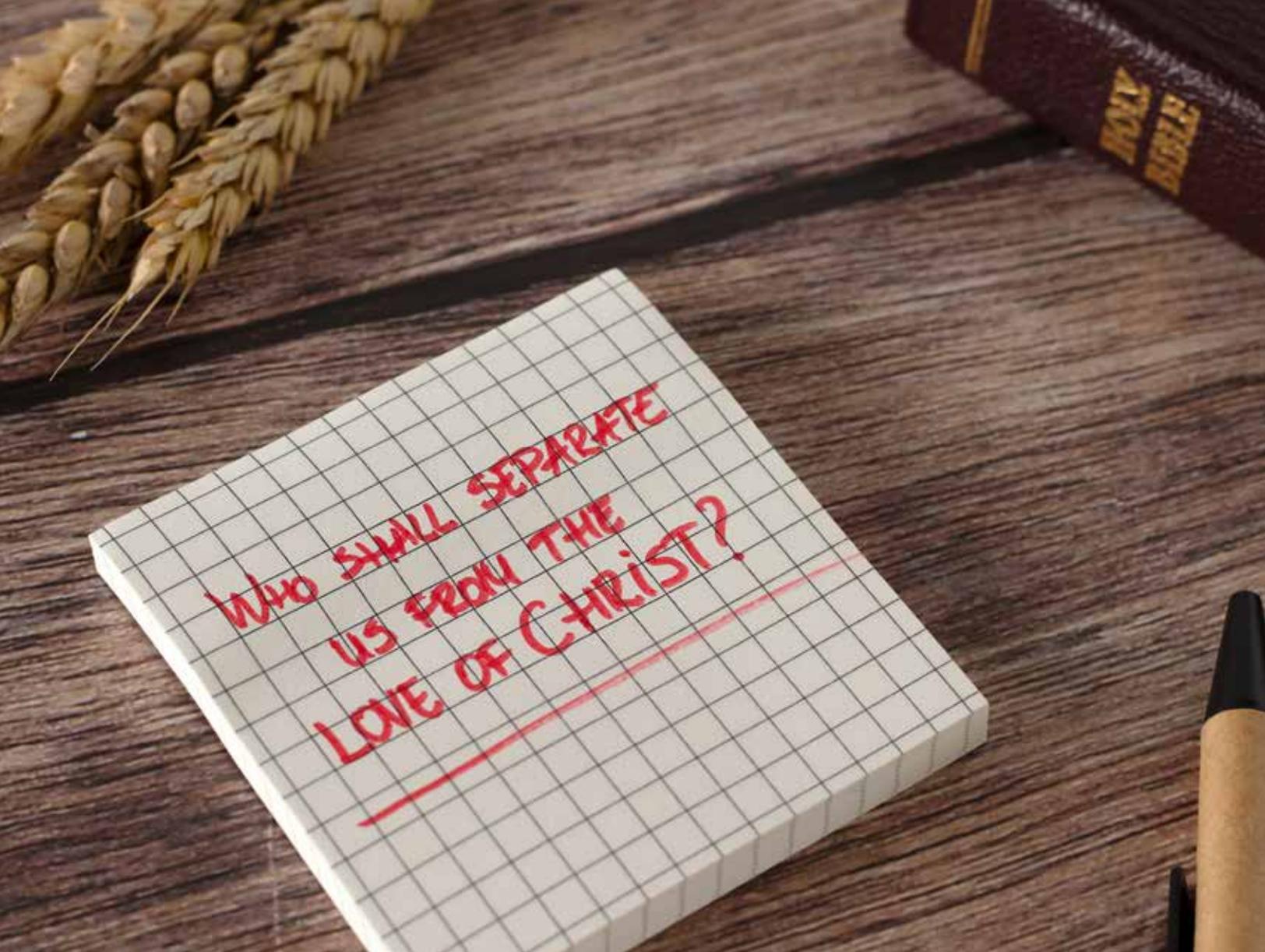
## THE STRUGGLE OF SUFFERING

Trusting in God through the hard times can be challenging to say the least. In this life God's people can face incredibly perplexing situations. We might go through times of extreme suffering or severe loneliness. Things might happen to you where you just wonder, "Why did God do that?" or, "Why did God let that happen?" or, "Why did God bring such a painful thing into my life?"

And one reason those things are difficult is because it makes us wonder, "Is God faithful?" In those times, we face what seems to be a complete disconnect between God's promises and our own experience. We look at God's promises on the one hand, promises such as, "I will be your God; I love you; you are mine." And we look at our experience on the other hand, one of deep distress, turmoil, and severe pain. The questions then arise such as, "How can these two things fit together? How can God's promises be real if this is what I'm going through?"

## KING DAVID'S EXPERIENCE

King David felt this sort of thing. Listen to some of the things he says in Psalm 25. He faces enemies, he feels trapped, and is helpless to help himself. He cries out to God: "Let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. . . . Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are



enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me” (vv. 1, 16–19).

David says that the troubles of his heart are enlarged. They’ve ballooned! And it’s not easy to trust God when you’re going through that. That’s especially true given the nature of God’s covenant: the covenant is meant to be a relationship of beautiful fellowship and even friendship. In verse 14 David even says, “The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him.” And yet in verse 16 David says, “I am lonely and afflicted.” Now, how do those things match? How can there be friendship and love with God when David says, “I’m lonely and afflicted”?

### **THE CALL TO TRUST**

But here is where God calls us to trust him—even in the hard times. To trust him even though the troubles of your heart have ballooned. To trust that he is faithful even when his promises appear to be washed away in a wave of trouble. How can we do this? How can

we bridge the apparent gap between God’s promises on the one hand and our painful experience on the other hand?

There are a number of things we must hold on to. First of all, let us remember what the Holy Spirit says through Peter in 2 Peter 3:9: “The LORD is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness.” Although the context is of Christ’s final coming, the principle remains the same. When you are going through trouble, God might seem to work painfully slow. But the truth is, God is always at work even when we can’t see it. God is not slow to fulfill his promises as some count slowness.

One way God is working through trials is to purify us. Remember that one of the goals of God’s covenant is to purify his people from sin. The suffering of this life often has a purifying effect. Sometimes trials show us the sin of our heart. Sometimes God is simply working a persevering faith in us.

Sometime ago I came across this wonderful quote from Charles Spurgeon: “The refiner is never very far away from the mouth of the furnace when his gold is in the fire.” How true this is! Yes,

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## *How can God's promises be real if this is what I'm going through?*

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God sometimes puts us through fiery trials to purify us. But that does not mean he is distant or doesn't care. He has a good end in mind, and he has his eye on us at all times. He has us in his hands through it all.

### **BUILDING OUR LIVES ON GOD**

Yes, at times trials can lead us to doubt God's promises. But they also help us to build our lives on the everlasting rock—our God who doesn't change. And that is what we need to do. David himself confessed in verse 2, "Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame." As we build our lives on God the everlasting rock through trials, we learn precious truths about him. We learn that our God can bring life out of death, joy out of pain, victory out of defeat, good out of suffering. No one else and nothing else can do what our God can.

You know, there's more going on in our lives than we can see with our own eyes. God's perspective is so much bigger than ours. One only needs to turn to the book of Job to see this. Job went through so much suffering, and he certainly had his questions for God. But little did he know that God permitted Satan to viciously attack him. All Satan wanted to do was to make Job curse God and die. Job never knew and he never found out in this life what went on behind the scenes. He simply had to trust God through the hard times. God proved faithful through it all (see James 5:11).

God might allow Satan to do the same with us. Look at what David says in verse 19, "Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me." Let me assure you that you have enemies too. The devil is your enemy, and he has nothing but pure hatred for God's people. As article 12 of the Belgic Confession says, "The devils and evil spirits with all their might, lie in wait like murderers to ruin the church and all its members and to destroy everything by their wicked devices." And in your suffering, Satan wants nothing more than to have you curse God to his face.

Now, why does God allow Satan to attack us this way? Well, we don't always know, but we can certainly say this: when we taste Satan's fierce attacks, then we see that the devil and all that he stands for is abhorrently evil. The devil and all his works are full of lies and murder. And God may allow Satan to attack us in this way to help us see that, in contrast to Satan, God is good. God's commandments are good. God is full of truth and light and life. And so we learn to put away all sin and serve the LORD, for that is good.

### **GOD'S PROMISES ARE REAL**

There's one last thing we must see to help us bridge the gap between God's promises and our suffering.

We must keep our eyes fixed on the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ bridges the gap between God's promises on the one hand and the pain we may face in life on the other hand. Think of what Romans 8 says about these things. "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who love God who have been called according to his purpose" (v. 28). But why can we be so sure of this promise? Well, listen to the logic: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (v. 32). If God was willing to sacrifice what was most precious to him for us, do you then think he will hold back the other things we need? Of course not. God will give us everything we need, even when we go through the hard times. And that's why Romans 8 then says, "Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall things like tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (vv. 35, 37).

The Holy Spirit says through the mouth of David in Psalm 25:2, "No one who waits for God will be put to shame." That is, if you trust in God also through the hard times, no one will be able to say to you at the end of your life, "Well that was a silly thing to do, you trusted in God and it wasn't worth it." No! That will never happen! Do you know what David said at the end of his life? He confessed in 1 Kings 1:29, "The LORD has redeemed my soul out of every adversity." Trusting in God through the hard times was worth it for David and it will be worth it for us.

And so, even though the troubles of our heart may be enlarged, even though they may have become massive, God's promises are bigger, they are stronger, and they will see us through to the end. David ends this psalm by praying, "Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles." That's what God has done in the death of Christ. He has redeemed us, and he has redeemed us forever. Through this redemption he will also deliver us from all the trouble of this life. 📖



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# Mission Organization of the

# URCNA

**H**ow should a Reformed church federation in North America organize its foreign mission efforts? Should it be left to the initiative of local churches? Or should foreign mission projects be overseen by a missions agency that is appointed by synod? It is an important question that has caused lots of debates over the years. If you look around among NAPARC churches today, you will find that different models are being used, ranging from very much decentralized (local churches taking the initiative) to much more centralized (a synod appointed committee leading the charge).

In this article, I want to inform the readers of *Clarion* about decisions that were made by the Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) that was held in October 2022, just across the border from the Niagara peninsula in Buffalo, NY (commonly referred to as Synod Niagara 2022). The question of mission organization was one of the most important issues, and probably the most controversial one, on the synod's agenda. This is illustrated by the fact that the committee that was supposed to serve the synod with recommendations, was not able to present a unified vision. Synod received a majority and a minority report.

By way of background, in recent years the URCNA has moved cautiously from a decentralized approach that characterized the early years of the denomination, to a somewhat more centralized approach. An indicator of this development was the decision of Synod Visalia 2014 to appoint a Missions Coordinator in the person of Rev. Richard Bout. He was mandated to provide counsel, support, and encouragement to missionaries and mission boards within the URCNA, both globally and on the home front.

## REPORTS

The majority report to Synod Niagara 2022 proposed to take this a step further. It asked the synod to appoint two central committees

(one for home mission, one for foreign mission) and to appoint two full-time mission coordinators (one for home mission, one for foreign mission). The idea was that the two coordinators would act as consultants, visit mission projects, stimulate mission efforts, coordinate training of candidate missionaries, etcetera.

The minority report proposed a different course of action. It argued that initiative and supervision should be left at the local and regional (classis) level. Instead of appointing full-time mission coordinators for the whole federation, the minority report suggested that every classis should appoint two mission visitors (ministers or elders). These brothers would be mandated to visit the mission field to advise and encourage as needed, and report back to the sending church. The minority report still envisioned a central mission committee, appointed by synod, that would assist the churches by putting together a so-called Mission Order with general mission policies and guidelines.

I was able to attend some sessions of Synod Niagara 2022. It was interesting to hear the plenary discussions and get some informal feedback during the breaks. It became clear to me that in this whole debate two motivations were at play that are both honourable but also difficult to combine: On the one hand, the desire to do more and to do things better, and therefore appoint men with missionary expertise to assist the churches in their missionary task. On the other hand, there was the desire to leave the responsibility for mission work with the churches, and not simply pass it on to a small group of mission executives. In addition to that, there is probably a fear that a small group of "experts" at the top might become a self-regulating body, pushing their own agenda onto the churches.

## DECISIONS

What did the synod decide? Interestingly, a distinction was made between foreign missions and home missions. With respect to foreign missions, the synod decided (1) to appoint a Synodical Committee for Foreign Missions, (2) to appoint Rev. Richard Bout as Foreign Missions Coordinator, and (3) to appoint so-called Field Committees to assist the various foreign mission fields (one committee for each field). A Field Committee would function as a kind of bridge between the various role players: the calling church, the mission field, the missionaries, and the synodical committee.

As rationale for these decisions, the Acts of Synod mention the need to promote “meaningful and intentional cooperation throughout the federation, while keeping local consistories and congregations intimately involved in the work of foreign missions” (Art. 101). The Acts go on to state: “While the oversight of missionaries (and missionary helpers) remains exclusively under the calling consistory, this new model makes the development of our mission fields a matter of federational cooperation and care.”

With respect to home missions a different direction was taken. A Synodical Committee for Home Missions was appointed, but the synod decided against appointing a coordinator for home missions. Instead, the synod recommended that each classis establish a Classical Committee for Home Missions for the promotion and strengthening of evangelism and church planting in its area.

## OBSERVATIONS

A number of observations can be made about the URCNA synod’s decision. First, one could argue that the decision reflects a bit of a compromise. Both sides achieved something. Those who wanted to see a more centralized approach got a missions coordinator for foreign missions (although it was hardly a “win” as this was already the *de facto* situation). Those who favoured a more decentralized approach got their wish with respect to home missions.

Second, the synod seemed to acknowledge that foreign mission is harder to manage than home missions. Literally, the synod stated that foreign mission is “a complex undertaking” that requires seeking the wisdom of many counselors, particularly brothers with specific expertise in this area (Acts of Synod, Art. 101). No doubt, the synod was thinking of challenges presented by geographical distance and cross-cultural realities. It is harder for a mission board to supervise the work of a missionary who labours somewhere on the other side of the globe than to supervise the work of a church planter in a town nearby.

Third, it is obvious that historical background played a role in the discussions, especially lessons learned from the history of the

Christian Reformed Church (CRC). The majority report describes how during the twentieth century the CRC’s organizational model evolved from mainly decentralized (mission work seen as the responsibility of calling churches) to moderately centralized (mission work seen as the responsibility of the churches together), to very much centralized (mission projects overseen by an executive committee, appointed by synod). Clearly, the URCNA synod wanted to prevent history from repeating itself. The Acts of Synod refer to the need to learn “lessons from researching the successes and failures of sister churches and our own history” (Art. 101).

At the end of the day, the URCNA has settled for an organizational model for missions that seeks to honour, on the one hand, the role of calling churches to initiate and supervise mission projects and, on the other hand, the need for cooperation and using expertise that is available in the denomination as a whole. Time will tell whether this model will prove to be effective and sufficient. Personally, I have my doubts about the practicality of the so-called Field Committees. I would not be surprised if the matter will come back on the agenda of a future synod. In the meantime, we can appreciate the motivations of the brothers in the URCNA as they are seeking to develop the most effective organizational model for missions. May the Lord bless their efforts!

One final observation: if we compare the URCNA’s mission model with the approach of other denominations within NAPARC, they hold a middle position between centralized and decentralized. By way of illustration, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s approach is more centralized: the OPC has two standing committees (one for foreign mission, one for home mission) as well as a number of full-time staff to supervise their mission projects (a general secretary, an associate general secretary, and a clerical assistant in the office).

The Canadian Reformed Churches are on the other end of the spectrum. There are no standing committees for home or foreign mission. Foreign mission work is left to the initiative and supervision of a handful of calling churches (Toronto, Hamilton, Aldergrove, etc.). The same applies to home mission. In a follow-up article, I will raise the question whether the CanRC’s organizational model still suffices and suggest that we can learn something from the decisions of the URCNA’s Synod Niagara 2022. 



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# Can You Read?

When I first started in ordained ministry, I was a missionary in Fort Babine, a small, remote community in north-central British Columbia. Some of the people there were functionally illiterate. A few could barely speak English. My wife and I had the privilege—and the challenge—of bringing the gospel to this village. It’s an experience that’s shaped me to the present day and one I’ll never forget.

Living in Fort Babine were a wonderful couple named Charlie and Marion. We loved them dearly. They were involved with our little mission congregation from the start. In fact, our sending church in Smithers had been doing outreach in the village long before we arrived, and Charlie and Marion were often involved. They struggled with things in their life, but they were usually warm to the gospel. When they were home, they almost always attended our worship services.

I also visited them regularly to read the Bible with them. You see, Charlie and Marion were virtually illiterate. Because of their age and other factors, they never did learn how to read. And yet I wanted them to hear God’s Word, not just on Sunday, but through the week too. They told me they wanted that too.

One day I was reading *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* when I spotted something about a unique way to reach illiterate people with the Word of God: the Talking Bible. The Talking Bible looked like a Bible, but it had a tape player inside it which would allow you to hear the Bible being read. The Talking Bible (in dozens of languages) is still around, but of course, the technology has improved vastly.

Charlie and Marion seemed to enjoy their Talking Bible. I say that because every week or two I still had to come and visit—but now to replace the batteries in their Talking Bible. For these people who couldn’t read, they were now able to hear the Word of God every day.

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

If you couldn’t read, to what measures would you go to still access the Scriptures?

When I was a seminary student, I read somewhere the story of William McPherson. He lived sometime in the early twentieth century. He worked at a stone quarry in Colorado. He’d recently become a Christian when he had a terrible accident. Some dynamite exploded in his face, blinding him, and also causing him to lose the use of his hands. As he began his recovery, he had a hunger for the Word of God. He heard of a woman in Britain who’d learned to read Braille *with her lips*. McPherson couldn’t do that because the accident had damaged the nerve endings around his mouth. But he still had his tongue. He learned to read Braille *with his tongue*. Over the next sixty-five years, McPherson read through the Bible four times—reading it in Braille with his tongue. Talk about dedication!

Now, if you couldn’t read, to what measures would you go to still access the Scriptures?

But you can read! You’re reading this. Yet how often don’t we neglect one of the greatest gifts God has given, his Word? Dear reader, thank God today that you can read, that you have the precious gift of literacy. Don’t take that gift for granted! Thank God today that you have the Bible in your own language—you have unfettered access to all the wonders of the gospel. Then let the prayer of Psalm 119:103 be your aspiration too: “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” Those words were never truer than when fulfilled by our Lord Jesus, but they’re to become increasingly true of Jesus’s disciples too. 📖



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# *Churches outside the*

# PARC

ERIC KAMPEN

## **FAMILY PICNICS IN THE PARK**

Our family life can be described in terms of concentric circles. At the centre is our immediate family. We think here in terms of a household. It moves out from there to the extended family. Here we think of adult siblings, uncles and aunts, nieces and nephews, and cousins. We may even take it to the level of second cousins. Beyond that, though, the connections begin to fade. We know we are related, but it goes back quite a way. If someone decides to organize a family reunion in a park, the invites will only go to so many circles. After all, humanly speaking, if you keep widening the circle, we are related to the whole human race. A person passing through the park who has no immediate relationship to the family knows that this picnic is not for him. To be sure, there is the human connection, but not the family connection that was the reason for the picnic. The family connection will be obvious in the surnames of many attendees.

## **CHURCH FAMILY PICNICS IN THE PARC**

Our family relationships serve as an analogy for the way churches relate to each other. We begin with the local congregations, a local household of faith. The members are united in a common faith. Local churches relate to other churches with the same confession and meet at a number of ecclesiastical picnics. We can think of

classes and synods. These tend to be at a regional and national level. Here we think of our Federation of Canadian Reformed Churches. We easily recognize these family members because they have the words “Canadian Reformed” in their name. We can learn about life in this extended family by reading *Clarion* and checking the federation website, [www.canrc.org](http://www.canrc.org).

Since unity is a unity of faith, it is recognized there are family connections at a broader level. This is expressed by going to parks where there are picnics attended by family members a bit further out on the concentric circles. Some are further out due to having different historical backgrounds, so we didn't grow up in the same setting. Some are further out even though historically there is a close connection. There have been some family disputes in the past which haven't been fully resolved, but they don't keep us from meeting another for a picnic in the park. Here we think of NAPARC, the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council ([www.naparc.org](http://www.naparc.org)). An annual gathering is usually held in November, hosted by one of the member churches. There is a family connection because these churches are rooted in the Scottish and Dutch Reformation. While the ones rooted in the Dutch Reformation have expressed their faith in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, and the ones rooted in the Scottish Reformation in the Westminster Standards, there is a

clear unity of faith. We can learn about life in this even more extended family by reading synod reports and updates put out by the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER) in *Clarion*. We easily recognize these family members because they have the words “Reformed” or “Presbyterian” in their name. Now, we could take this one step further. NAPARC is North American. We could go international. There we have contact through the International Conference of Reformed Churches ([www.icrconline.com](http://www.icrconline.com)). We can learn about them as well by reading synod reports and updates in *Clarion*.

### CHURCHES OUTSIDE THE PARC

But what about churches outside these concentric circles? Just limiting ourselves to North America, what about churches outside the PARC? Some churches have the words “Reformed” or “Presbyterian” in their name, but they are not present at the ecclesiastical picnic in the PARC. We can think of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), the Reformed Church in America (RCA), which also has congregations in Canada, or the Presbyterian Church of Canada (PCC). Others have names that sound a bit suspect to one raised in a Reformed church, such as Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), Anglican, or Pentecostal. There is a family connection. In some cases, the family connection is quite close, while in other cases we may have to go back as far as the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The Reformation developed in three main streams, namely, the Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed/Presbyterian. We meet people in our daily life that belong to these churches. There may be times we end up going to a funeral of a co-worker or a distant or not so distant relative who belonged to one of these churches, and we may have had good faith conversations with them. Would it not be worthwhile to be aware of what is happening in such churches, so that we can interact in a meaningful way?

### WHERE THE WORD IS, THE SPIRIT IS WORKING

Now, the thought might arise that paying attention to what’s happening in churches outside the PARC is going to legitimize them and condone them. That would be a wrong thought. The reality since the Reformation is that church life has been very messy. Schisms happened for good and bad reasons. There have been schisms because a church had drifted away from the Word of God, bringing division as some chose the path of reformation. There have been schisms where, in the final analysis, it was more personal than principled. The reality is, though, that the Word of God is still there. Wherever the Word is, there the Spirit is

convincing and convicting. Deformation may continue, or reformation may happen.

We can see this in what happened after the division of the kingdom following the death of Solomon. Jeroboam set up worship centres in Bethel and Dan to keep people from going to Jerusalem. He appointed priests who were not Levites. Remarkably, we have a record of God dealing with Israel for the next two hundred years, addressing them as his people even though they were engaged in false worship of him and guilty of idolatry in following Baal and other gods. Yet, Scripture informs us of what was happening in what we might call a false church, telling us how God was calling the people to repentance before eventually bringing the covenant curses upon them in full. So, where God’s Word is present, he is working, and his Word never comes back to him empty. As reading about the history of Israel benefits us, showing us God’s patience and grace, as well as righteous anger, so being aware of what’s happening in churches outside the PARC can benefit us.

### NEW COLUMN

The plan, therefore, is for a new column called, “Churches outside the PARC.” The purpose of the column is to pass on information about what is going on in the churches that we might consider distant relatives, yet within the broad circle of churches rooted in the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Some are closer to us historically and confessionally, while others are more distant.

In a desire to be fair in reporting, the information for this column will be sought in the official documents of the churches reviewed. We plan to begin with churches that are on what we might call the circle just outside NAPARC, that is, churches with the word Reformed and Presbyterian in their name, expanding then to other churches we know in our communities or in the North American setting, rooted in the Protestant Reformation. Once a church has been introduced in a short article, future columns will have as goal to pass on noteworthy developments.

These churches may be outside the PARC, but they are not outside God’s sight. As previously stated, his Word is still there, convincing and convicting. If reading the history of Israel warns and encourages us, learning something of the goings on in churches outside the PARC may do the same. 



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# O LORD Almighty, God Supreme

*Hezekiah received the letter [of King Sennacherib] from the hand of the messengers,  
and read it; Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD  
And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD:*

1. O LORD Al - might - y, God su - preme,  
en - throned be - tween the cher - u - bim,  
you, you a - lone are God most high.  
To you, my God, do I draw nigh.  
You made the heav - en and the earth.  
Your king - ship cir - cles all its girth.

2. Sennacherib mocks you, O LORD,  
insulting you with scornful words.  
Give ear, O God, and hear him boast.  
Lift up your eyes, O LORD of hosts.  
Assyrian kings have laid to waste  
the lands and peoples of the east.

3. Their gods they threw into the fire,  
destroyed them all upon the pyre  
for they were only wood and stone.  
Not gods at all—there's only One!  
False gods are made by human hands.  
The wrath of God they'll not withstand.

4. And now, O LORD, restore our land.  
Deliver us from his cruel hand  
that all the kingdoms everywhere  
may know this truth and be aware:  
that you alone, O LORD, are God,  
the one true God we praise and laud.

Text: Isaiah 37:16-20; vers. George van Popta, 2023  
Tune: St. Petersburg; Dimitri S. Bortniansky, 1825



# Alcuin the Scholar and Charles the King

## *Part 1: Scholar Alcuin*

KEITH SIKKEMA

### CONTEXT

*The ancestors of Dutch people included barbarians such as Frisians, Franks, and Saxons. They were pagans and believed in other gods. The Frisians settled the Dutch coastal lowlands some 2500 years ago.*

*A thousand years later, by about AD 500, Saxons and Franks moved in. To the south, the Franks mixed with the Gauls who came before them, with their Roman culture and language and their Catholic Christian beliefs. Meanwhile, Angles, Saxons, and others crossed the North Sea and invaded Britannia (England), drove its Christians westwards, and started pagan Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.*

*By AD 600, missionaries came from Rome to bring the gospel to these kingdoms. By AD 700, the Franks and Anglo-Saxons had become Christians. Their kings supported missionaries like Willibrord and Boniface to convert the Frisians and the Saxons. That was not easy.*

*This story<sup>1</sup> tells how, around AD 800, Christ gathered his church and equipped imperfect people for his service and our benefit. While earthly kings did what was right in their own eyes, Christ was the King who directed their courses and all things, for good.<sup>2</sup>*

### LEARNING

Around 732, Alcuin was born to a noble Anglo-Saxon family in York, Northumbria (later: England). He was a nephew to Wilgils and a cousin to Willibrord. From Uncle Wilgils, he inherited land as well as nearby St. Andrew Monastery and Chapel. When he was a student at the York Cathedral School in 741, the cathedral burned down, but the school was spared. Alcuin's famous teacher was Archbishop Ecgbert, who had learned from "*Venerable Bede*" (673–735).

In school, all teaching was about learning "wisdom" and was delivered in Latin. Latin allowed them to read

books by ancient philosophers and Christian authors like Polycarp, Eusebius, Jerome, Augustine of Hippo, and Bede. Students had to memorize everything the teacher said: Latin Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric (called the "*Trivium*")—but also Church History and Doctrine. Grammar helped to understand the Latin Bible (the *Vulgate*). If the teacher asked what the *moon* was, students had to suggest and debate their descriptions, and then memorize the teacher's answer. How would you describe it? (Alcuin later taught that "The moon is the eye of the night, the giver of dew, and the foreteller of storms."\*)

<sup>1</sup> This story was developed with the use of primary and secondary sources. Practices and characters' flaws and strengths invite conversation. Asterisks\* mark quotes from key characters. Other quotes are aligned with what they would or might have said.

<sup>2</sup> Ps 21; Prov 21:1, 2; Matt 28:18–20; Rev 5

Students also learned “*Quadrivium*” subjects: Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy. Now, the three *Trivium* plus four *Quadrivium* equalled seven Liberal Arts. That sounded biblical, for didn’t Proverbs 9:1 say that “Wisdom has . . . seven pillars”? Arithmetic was tough, though, for how would  $DCCXXXII + IX = DCCXLI$ ?<sup>3</sup> Yet, you needed it to explain the Bible<sup>4</sup> and to calculate the date for Easter: Disagreement might divide the church, which should be *catholic*, worldwide!<sup>5</sup> Arithmetic could also help solve fun puzzles, like, “A dog chases a rabbit. The rabbit has a start of 150 feet. The dog jumps nine feet every time the rabbit jumps <sup>7</sup>. In how many leaps will the dog catch up with the rabbit?”<sup>6</sup> Geometry was necessary to design and rebuild churches. Other subjects included Greek and Hebrew.

Alcuin graduated at the top of his class and not only became a famous scholar and teacher, but also a deacon. He taught, visited the sick, read sermons, and led funerals. His classmates became priests, bishops, monks, courtiers, and even rulers.

## SCHOLAR

It is now November 19, 766. Who might that be on the unpaved streets of York, walking towards the cathedral school? He wears black shoes, and his white strapped leggings reach above the knees. He looks about 35, is balding, and wears an elegant woollen cloak over a linen tunic, like a scholar.

He unlocks the school’s heavy door and walks to the library. Through some narrow windows, light falls on its stone floors, rough wooden tables and benches, and several chests along the walls. He walks over and opens the nearest chest. Hah, precious manuscripts, hand-written books with wood-and-leather covers! He carefully lifts one out. It is big and heavy and brown. He lays it on the closest table and opens it to the titlepage. It says, “*Venerable Bede, Book 5*”. He turns its thick vellum pages to Chapter 22. The words are in Latin, and strung together without spacing, capitals, periods, or commas: “*bydcccxvithescottishmonkswereledbygodsprowidencetoadoptthecanonicalwayofcalculatingtheeasterdate.*”<sup>7</sup> He smiles. Marvelous! By 716, the Lord gave agreement in the church about calculating the date of Easter!

His friend, the book-collector Æthelbert, comes in. “God save ye! What are you doing?” he asks.

“Well, God save ye,” Alcuin answers, “I learn in order to teach—and so should my new students! They will come in any moment now and read what Bede says about Augustine of Canterbury and the Conversion of the Scots.<sup>7</sup> But they must not only read from Bede! They must also learn to help find manuscripts of others, to read, copy, and study!”

Æthelbert chuckles, “Indeed! *Disco docere* . . . for you to teach and them to learn, do it yourself first!”

“That’s right! But like the monks of Corbie, in Francia, they must also learn to space words, make letters easier to write and read, use punctuation, and fix errors. Humph! There are so many errors in manuscripts! Many monks in Francia use lousy Latin.<sup>8</sup> Why, Boniface found that one priest baptized a baby in the name of “*patria et filia et spiritu sancta*”—the Fatherland, the Daughter, and the Holy Spirit.\* Blasphemous! It should be perfect Latin—how else will people know the faith?”

## TEACHER

When the students come in, Alcuin greets them, points to the book, and starts his lecture, “In the last 300 years, many precious ancient books disappeared by fire, rot, or rats. As servants of the Lord, you must help to find and save remaining manuscripts from cathedrals, churches, abbeys, and castles, before they all vanish. In our York library also, we must add to our forty or so books by copying them. They have wisdom we need to know. Today we will take a look at what Bede says about Augustine of Canterbury and the conversion of the Scots.”

Æthelbert nods, and Alcuin continues, “Anyway, *scriptoria* like ours at St. Andrew Monastery are extremely important! The monks in the *scriptorium* must listen attentively to the leader as he slowly reads and dictates from the original. They must write down exactly what he reads, be able to keep up, and avoid making mistakes! It takes time and concentration to write each letter one quill-stroke at a time. Yet, churches and rulers keep asking us to copy more Bibles, Commentaries, Liturgies, and even pagan books! You . . .”

A runner bursts in, panting as he bows and greets, “God save ye!” He hurries straight to Æthelbert and whispers in his ear.

<sup>3</sup>  $732+9=741$ . 732 was when Charles Martel defeated the Muslim Moors and when Alcuin may have been born.

<sup>4</sup> A number is “perfect” if its divisors add up to itself. For instance, 6 is perfect, because  $1 \times 2 \times 3 = 6$  and  $1 + 2 + 3 = 6$ . Alcuin (and others) concluded that, therefore, God created the “very good” world in exactly six days.

<sup>5</sup> At Synod Whitby, 664, Celtic Christians agreed to accept Roman calculations for Easter; embracing it took longer.

<sup>6</sup>  $150 \div 2 = 75$ .

<sup>7</sup> Bede I:23–II:3; III:1–5

<sup>8</sup> Mixing with Celtic and Frankish words and grammar, it was gradually becoming French.

What message might he have? Another war with King Offa of Mercia, the conqueror? A plague? A fire? A construction-accident at the new cathedral?

The runner leaves as rushed as he came. Æthelbert looks dejected. Alcuin asks, “What is it, my dear friend?”

“Archbishop Egbert left us never to return; we must bury him,” he answers solemnly.

Alcuin reacts, “Indeed. Eanbald and I have provided burial-spots in the new cathedral.<sup>9</sup> He is home with the Lord and sees his face in righteousness.<sup>10</sup> We shall grieve and carry on.”

### OUTCOME

Æthelbert is chosen to be the next Archbishop. Alcuin becomes the librarian. They travel much, meet King Charles of Francia and the pope, and find books everywhere. When Æthelbert dies fourteen years later, their library has over 100 books! It has become one of the most complete scholarly manuscript-collections anywhere.

Eanbald will now become Archbishop. Pope Hadrian, in Rome, must provide his *pallium* (a woollen scarf-like cloth with

six embroidered crosses), that will symbolize his authority. King Ælfwald of Northumbria asks Alcuin to go to Rome to pick it up and bring it to York. Alcuin is thrilled. It is an honour and a journey to look forward to. Along the way, he can also visit monasteries, friends, and former students, and perhaps find yet more ancient manuscripts!

And so, early in 781, carrying King Ælfwald’s credentials, Alcuin and his companions take a Frisian ferry to Utrecht to see Archbishop Alfric of the Frisians. They discuss church and state, missions, manuscripts, and Frisian cows.<sup>11</sup> From there, they take about two months on horseback to reach Rome, lodging at inns, monasteries, and bishops’ homes. After, carrying the *pallium*, they ride home along the inland pilgrim road via Parma.

In Parma, the Lord has a surprise for Alcuin. 



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<sup>9</sup> Eanbald and Alcuin supervised its construction and enlargement.

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 17:15

<sup>11</sup> Alcuin called the Archbishop of the Frisians “A lord of many cows.” The breed is much older.

## GIVE THE GIFT OF

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*Teach me  
your way,  
O Lord,  
that I may walk  
in your truth;  
unite my heart  
to fear your  
name.*

PSALM 86:11 ESV

# DACS

## Celebrating 55 Blessed Years

JEFF VANSYDENBORGH AND JASON KOTTELENBERG

September 2023 marked the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dufferin Area Christian School.

The Canadian Reformed School Society of Dufferin was first formed on April 10, 1957. It began as a Saturday school where students were taught Bible, Church History, and the Dutch language in the garage of Rev. Scholten, the minister of the Orangeville Canadian Reformed Church.

In 1965 the School Society began to seriously consider starting its own Christian day school. After much prayer, planning, and consideration the school board received approval from the membership in December 1967 to purchase a two-room school building that had previously been Laurel Central School.

On September 3, 1968, Dufferin Area Christian School first opened its doors to offer Christian education to approximately

eighty students. The Lord has blessed the membership with growth throughout the years. Over the years 573 students have graduated and the student population has been as high as 120 students, causing subsequent additions to the building to be constructed. Presently there are eight classrooms, a SERT room, a library, staff room, gym with stage, and a servery.

In the past our staff has come from as far away as the Netherlands and Australia. More recently staff has been from Ontario having received post secondary education at a college or university level or fittingly at the Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College. Some that have settled in the area to raise their families are at a point where they can work as a full time or part time teacher again or for the first time. This has proven to be a great blessing for DACS. This was echoed in the recent school



review with the comments: “It is amazing to see how we all work harmoniously, everyone playing their part of something larger than themselves” and “DACS is a tight knit, solid school due to its wonderful atmosphere and godly qualified teachers.” In this we see God’s blessing as this mind-set results in distinctly Reformed education with academic excellence which helps us meet our mission and vision.

The majority of our students, after graduating from grade 8, move on to attend Emmanuel Christian High School in Guelph, where they excel in academics, arts, and athletics.

DACS is located in the hamlet of Laurel, which is centrally located between our supporting churches of Orangeville and Grand

Valley. This has allowed us to expand our yard as required and operate safely and securely, away from some of the present day negative cultural influences. Transportation to and from school is supplied by our own buses with our own bus drivers, for which we are very grateful.

We thank and praise the LORD for the many blessings over the decades. From the small beginnings in 1968 through many challenges to the present, he has guided us on our way. We pray for his continued guidance as we strive to teach his way to his covenant children in the coming years! 

*By Jeff VanSydenborgh and Jason Kottelenberg*

# Connie

**H**i, I am Connie VanAmerongen. I was born in Hamilton and grew up in Grimsby, Ontario. I lived there with my parents for twenty-nine years. I then moved to Orangeville and lived with Gail Wiemekamp for eight years until I moved into Anchor Home. I have been living in Anchor Home for twenty-one years already—crazy! I have five siblings, one sister and four brothers, and lots of nieces and nephews!

I am confined to a wheelchair because of Cerebral Palsy, but I still manage to keep myself busy, using my computer, writing poetry, reading books, and the like. *And . . .* to anyone who would care to listen, I *love* to talk too! I have a book of writings and poems and call it Connie's Lunch Box. Writing on the computer takes me a while to do because I can only type with one finger. I try to write often and stay positive, especially as I fight depression during these days that are shorter and darker. I read books often and right now I am really enjoying the author Elisabeth Elliot. My favourite thing to do is watch movies.

Through the passport program I have been able to go on some outings where different people take me out. My favourite is going out with Lydia VanDam to River's Edge. This is a

large farm where I love interacting with the staff and holding the bunnies. I also hang out with the horses and do crafts there. I also enjoy going to concerts and going out for breakfast.

Every year I look forward to going away for a holiday during the summer either to Anchor Camp or my friends Gary and Elnita's cottage. I especially have fun going to the cottage; they keep me very busy there. I have gone there about four times, and the last time I was able to go in the hot tub which was a real treat!

I am happy in my home at Anchor. I enjoy the relationships I have built there. Grace Homan went to be with the LORD in the fall of 2022; I still miss her, but I know that she is in a better place. In May of 2023, Tracy Bartels moved into Anchor Home. Tracy sure is a lot of fun to have around here!!

I go to Vineyard Canadian Reformed Church in Beamsville. We just renovated the building and it is beautiful and spacious. I am very thankful because everything is wheelchair accessible, and on one floor!

I am so thankful for God and all he has done for me. If I didn't have him in my life, I wouldn't know what to do. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me! ☺

## FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

- 3** Ron de Witt will be **51**  
3217 Twin Oaks  
Burlington, ON L7M 3A8
- 6** Trevor Buys will be **44**  
c/o Anchor Home  
361 Thirty Road  
Grimsby, ON L3M 0L1
- 12** Connie VanAmerongen will be **59**  
c/o Anchor Home  
361 Thirty Road  
Grimsby, ON L3M 0L1  
e-mail: conniev1965@gmail.com



Connie holding a bunny named Shelli

# CLARION KIDS LORD'S DAY 40

It was time to go to your grandparent's house. When you came to the van, the only spot open was in the back. You did not like this and began to feel angry. Not only that, you wanted to get your siblings back. This is called revenge. So, you thought to yourself "Oh ya? Well, on Sunday, my friend and I will sit in the front both ways!" Now, we know these are not good feelings. In fact, in God's eyes, anger and wanting revenge are the same as murdering. When God tells us, "You shall not murder," he means more than just killing. Hate, anger, and wanting revenge are all murder in his eyes. Maybe this makes you feel uncomfortable. We can easily become angry! Then pray to God. Ask him to forgive you and change your heart. He promises to do that when we ask in Jesus's name.

**READ QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS 105 AND 106. FIND ALL THE ACTIONS THAT GOD SEES AS MURDER. WRITE EACH OF THEM SOMEWHERE INSIDE THE WORD "MURDER" BELOW.**

M U R D E R

**THE TEXT BELOW TELLS US TO SHOW LOVE TO OTHERS. PUT THE FOLLOWING WORDS ON THE CORRECT LINES:**

**Patience**

**Compassionate**

**beloved**

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and \_\_\_\_\_ . . . (Colossians 3:12).



**HEY KIDS!**

Do you have questions about something you have read in the Bible or heard in a sermon? Maybe you are wondering about something you have read in a Lord's Day. We have a new column coming called KIDS' QUESTIONS. We warmly invite you to ask Mrs. DeBoer your question! With your parent's permission, email [deboerca@gmail.com](mailto:deboerca@gmail.com) and find your question and an answer in Clarion!

**AMANDA DEBOER**

# ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED

If you are someone who is interested in the intersection of the church and the cultural wars of our time, then this edition's featured podcast may be one for you. Once For All Delivered (OFAD) is an American podcast hosted by two young Reformed pastors—Caleb Castro and Andrew Smyth. The goal of this podcast, as stated by the hosts on their website, is “to apply God’s Word to all of life” as they “tackle issues of theology and culture” on a regular basis.

Both Castro and Smyth are new to the pastoral occupation, as they graduated in 2022 and 2021 from Mid-America Reformed Seminary and Westminster Seminary California, respectively. Castro serves as a minister of the Word at Rock Valley United Reformed Church (Iowa) and Smyth serves in the same capacity at Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Hamill (South Dakota).

## BAVCAST TO OFAD

I had an opportunity to interview both of them a few months ago on the Real Talk podcast and learned that they originally met at Westminster, where they became good friends and conceived of the idea for the OFAD podcast. Originally, the podcast was called the Bavcast and focused on “exploring Reformed theology through the works of Herman Bavinck.” After realizing that this niche could only be explored for so long, the hosts rebranded the show in the fall of 2022 to OFAD, where they had more latitude to explore broader cultural trends and issues.

The name of the show is derived from Jude verse 3, where it says “Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” In their appearance on Real Talk, both Smyth and Castro expressed their desire to engage in earnest conversations about how we as Christians can share the faith that has been given to us through Christ and apply it in our day-to-day lives and the events in the culture in which we live.

While the podcast itself is still relatively new (thirty-four episodes deep at the time of writing), Castro and Smyth have covered a solid variety of topics including climate change (Ep. 26 & 27), Artificial Intelligence (Ep. 23), and transgenderism (Ep. 21). On the more theological side, they have an ongoing series called “Comparing Catechisms” where they compare what the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Shorter Catechism have to say on a given topic.

## VARIETY & LIBRARY

Another episode that readers of this magazine may be interested in is Episode 31, which is an interview style episode (not something OFAD typically does) featuring a personality well-known to many of us, Dr. Cornelis Van Dam. In this episode, the conversation was centred around Dr. Van Dam’s book *In the Beginning: Listening to Genesis 1 & 2*.

If you would like to check out the full library of OFAD podcasts, you can find that on their website, <https://www.onceforalldelivered.com>. For those of you who enjoy podcasts with a visual component, OFAD also has a Youtube channel (linked on their website) housing all of their back catalogue.

As of the time of writing, the podcast has been on break for a number of weeks, but it is my understanding that new episodes will continue to be produced and more engaging and informative conversations will be had on OFAD in the near future. For now, I would encourage any interested readers to explore previous episodes of the show and reach out to either of the hosts if you have ideas for future episode topics. 🗨️



**Lucas Holtvlüwer**

Co-host

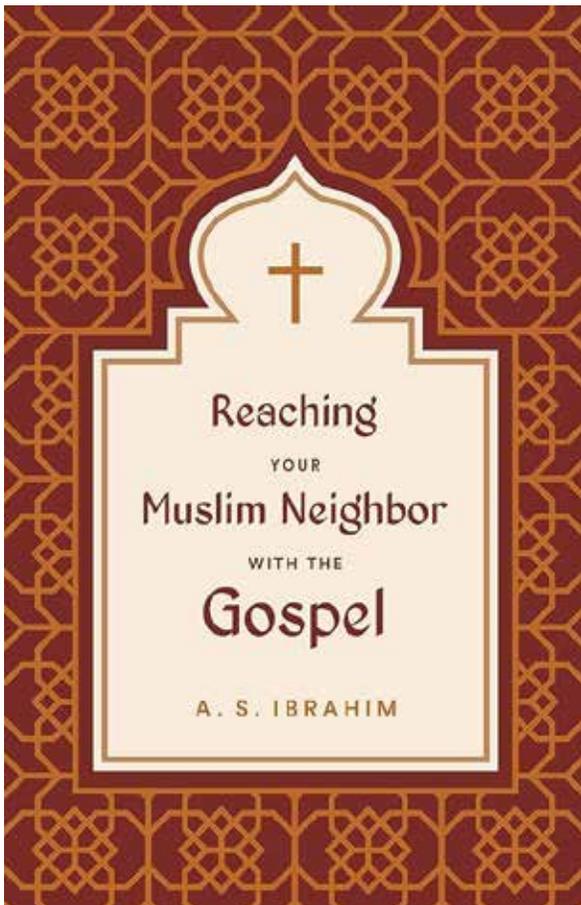
Reformed Perspective’s Real Talk podcast

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# A MUSLIM EVANGELISTIC GUIDE

*Reaching Your Muslim Neighbor with the Gospel*, A. S. Ibrahim. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022).

Paperback. 176 pages. \$17.99 CDN.



While pastoring in Hamilton, I had several encounters with Muslims. One was particularly memorable. A group of Muslims wanted to use our church building on Southcote Road for Ramadan—their own building was too small. I met with them to discuss it, i.e. to explain politely why we couldn't do that. They insisted we believed basically the same things. So I asked, "Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross and then rose from the dead three days later?" They said, "Yes, we believe that too!" At that point, I realized one of two things must be true. Either A. S. Ibrahim is correct when he says most Muslims don't actually know what Islam teaches in any detail, or I was encountering an example of *taqiya*. Islam teaches that it is permissible for Muslims to lie in order to further the cause of Islam—this doctrine is called *taqiya*.

I wish Ibrahim's book had been written about ten years ago because it sure would have been helpful in that situation. Many of us now live in communities where it's impossible not to encounter Muslims. Take a taxi or an uber and there's a good likelihood your driver will be a Muslim. And he'll probably be quite happy to discuss religion with you.

Ayman Ibrahim is well-versed in Islam, having grown up in a Christian family in Muslim-majority Egypt. He currently teaches Islamic studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. His new book reflects years of experience interacting with Muslims around the world.

## THE BOOK'S SETUP

*Reaching Your Muslim Neighbour with the Gospel* divides into two parts. In the first part, Ibrahim explains the basics about Muslims and Islam. In chapter 2, he answers the question, “Is Islam really the fastest growing religion in the world?” In chapter 5, he helps us understand the Muslim worldview. I found chapter 6 especially helpful in outlining “Basic Muslim Misconceptions about Christians and Christianity.”

Having provided that background knowledge, Ibrahim explains how to evangelize Muslims in the second part. He points out the importance of expectant intercessory prayer in chapter 8. In chapter 9, he illustrates how to ask probing spiritual questions like Jesus did. The last chapter of the book deals with the sensitive issue of speaking about the Qur’an and Muhammad with Muslims. How do we register disagreement without being disrespectful?

I appreciated Ibrahim’s emphasis on developing personal relationships with Muslims. He writes:

We must remember that we are dealing with humans created in the image of God. Muslims are not objects or projects—and if we treat them as such, they will immediately sense the disingenuous attitude and assume we do not truly care about them as people. In this way, our witness will be ineffective. Sincere conversations in a steadily growing friendship naturally lead to the effective sharing of the good news (p. 104).

On this point, I do wish Ibrahim would have provided some pointers about how to meet Muslims and begin conversations with them. Can I just walk into a mosque?

## CAUTION & ENCOURAGEMENT

There were a few places where I put question marks in this book. On page 100, Ibrahim asserts that “Muhammad did not forgive his enemies.” I googled the question and some Muslims contest this claim, referring to Muhammad’s magnanimous forgiveness

of such men as Thumama Ibn Uthal and Safwan Ibn Umayyah. Ibrahim writes on page 142 that the word *tawhid* (strict monotheism) isn’t found in the Qur’an. He uses this as an analogy to the way the word “Trinity” isn’t found in the Bible. The concept is there, but not the word. But with *tawhid*, things are a little more complicated. Other forms of the root Arabic word are used in the Qur’an and *tawhid* itself appears in the Hadith, the sayings of Muhammad which are authoritative for most Muslims. So, you might get caught out using that analogy with a Muslim who knows their faith well.

In chapter 7, he outlines four elements of a gospel presentation according to Scripture. The first is “to emphasize how God loves sinners and initiates the process of salvation.” As true as this is, we don’t see anyone evangelizing with this approach in the New Testament. The word “love” isn’t even used at all in the book of Acts. Instead, the early church evangelized by proclaiming the promise of the gospel: God holds out to you the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ—believe in him and you’ll be forgiven and saved.

When we first moved to Launceston in 2015, there were only a handful of Muslims in the whole state of Tasmania. Today we have a mosque just down the street from our house. I’m praying for opportunities to use what I’ve learned from Ibrahim’s book. If you read it, I reckon you’ll be well-equipped to begin having fruitful spiritual conversations with the Muslims God brings into your life. 

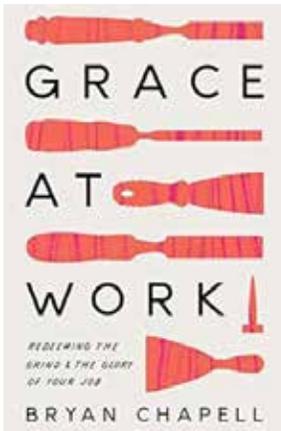


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# MEANINGFUL WORK WANTED

*Grace At Work: Redeeming the Grind & Glory Of Your Job* by Bryan Chapell.  
(Wheaton: Crossway, 2022). Paperback. 233 pages. \$22.95 CDN.

One of the challenging consequences of the restrictions on activity during the global pandemic is a diminished labour supply. It seems that the pause in working, along with altered work circumstances, triggered many people to reassess their employment. Buzzwords like work-life balance and job satisfaction now temper marketplace hiring strategies as employers try to manage rising wages alongside measured restrictions on output and increased benefit expectations from prospective employees. Working for a living is under fresh scrutiny. For a Christian, this development also prompts the re-examination of work relationships in scriptural terms and ignites the burning question of how our daily labour is connected to God's kingdom work. Is our work-life directly related to our worship of God and is this important to consider as we venture out?

Bryan Chapell, pastor emeritus of Grace Presbyterian Church in Peoria, Illinois and best-selling author, offers a resounding "yes" to this question in his book *Grace At Work*. Not only is our vocation an integral part of our worship of God, but it is also fundamental to daily professing our faith in filling and subduing the earth to the glory of God. In fact, work was commissioned at the outset of creation to provide humankind an opportunity for flourishing and carrying on God's kingdom work after he had completed his creation work and rested. Out of divine love and grace, God gave his image-bearers a meaningful way to express their gratitude to him through their work and to enjoy all that he made for them. Finding fulfillment in our daily tasks is a blessing from above while it serves to expand God's kingdom.

## CONTENTS & USES

In eleven chapters Chapell brings this lofty vision down to earth in a broken world. Combining the expertise of business advisors, scriptural exhortations, the example of Jesus Christ, and numerous practical stories, he leads the reader to see work in the arena

of God's kingdom. In doing this he explores topics such as: the purpose of work, integrity in the workplace, handling money, measuring success, the importance of humility, leadership qualities, balancing work with other commitments, and providing a Christian witness through working. All these topics are viewed through the lens of both employers and employees, making the book accessible for the whole work force, and a useful tool for appreciating workplace dynamics.

Chapell admits that the most troubling chapter in the book is the one where he addresses evil in the workplace as it permeates people, products, and production. However, exposing evil on the job site is the doorway for grace to enter into the discussion from all sides. A life redeemed by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is properly tuned for working in the kingdom, whether in the field or the factory, in the laboratory or the lavatory, either as a leader or a worker. *Grace at work* is where a Christian finds both meaning and purpose in the daily routines of labour and the ability to best work alongside or for others. Christ has redeemed our work amidst its thorns and thistles and has set it on a purposeful and glorious trajectory.

This book would serve a high school *Careers* class well for study and discussion. It is also stimulating for anyone entering the work force or reassessing their career path and looking for godly direction. It could be of benefit to parents in preparation for discussing employment opportunities with their teenagers to help set it in a Christian context.



**Rick Ludwig**  
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# REGIONAL SYNOD EAST

November 8, 2023

The meeting of the delegates was called to order in the Guelph–Living Word building by Rev. Jeff Poort. After leading in opening devotions, he examined the credentials and found them to be in good order. Regional Synod East was declared constituted. The following brothers served on the moderamen: as chairman Rev. John Ludwig; as vice-chairman Rev. John Louwense; and as clerk Rev. John Van Woudenberg. The chairman thanked the convening church for the work done in preparation of Regional Synod. The agenda was adopted. Regional Synod East entered into closed session to deal with an appeal. After discussion, Synod answered the appeal.

## REPORTS

Regional Synod received with thankfulness the treasury report. The proposed assessment of \$5.00 per communicant member is adopted. Each church should send this assessment to its classis treasurer (who will then forward this to the treasury church of Regional Synod East). Regional Synod received the reports from deputies that gave concurring advice on the retirements of Revs. M. H. VanLuik and E. Kampen. Regional Synod discharged the deputies appointed by the previous Regional Synod.

## APPOINTMENTS

The following appointments were made:

1. The Treasury Church for Regional Synod East: Grassie–Covenant.
2. The Church for the Inspection of the books of the treasury: Lincoln–Vineyard.

## 3. Deputies ad Article 48 C.O.:

- From Classis Central Ontario for Classis Northern Ontario and Classis Niagara: Rev. Clarence Vandervelde; First alternate: Rev. Anthony Roukema; Second alternate: Rev. Ian Wildeboer.
  - From Classis Northern Ontario for Classis Central Ontario and Classis Western Ontario: Rev. Marc Jagt; First alternate: Rev. Theo Wierenga; Second alternate: Rev. Jeff Poort.
  - From Classis Niagara for Classis Central Ontario and Classis Ontario West: Rev. Dick Wynia; First alternate: Rev. Rodney Vermeulen; Second alternate: Rev. Rolf DenHollander.
  - From Classis Ontario West for Classis Northern Ontario and Classis Niagara: Rev. John Louwense; First alternate: Rev. Ken Kok; Second alternate: Rev. John VanWoudenberg.
4. The Church to maintain the archives: Toronto–Bethel.
  5. The Church to inspect the archives: Brampton–Grace.
  6. The Church to convene the next Regional Synod East on November 13, 2024: Hamilton–Providence.

## CLOSING

Question period was not used. The chairman judged that censure was not necessary. The Acts were adopted and the press release was approved. The chairman led in closing devotions and declared Regional Synod East closed.

*Rev. John Louwense, vice-chair at that time.*

# REGIONAL SYNOD WEST

*November 21, 2023*

**R**egional Synod West 2023 was held on November 21, 2023 at Chilliwack Canadian Reformed Church. The chairman of the council of the convening church at Chilliwack opened the meeting in a Christian manner. He read Psalm 111, and invited the delegates to sing Hymn 79:1-3, upon which the body beseeched the LORD in prayer.

The Credentials were found to be in good order.

- Manitoba: Rev. Carl VanDam (alt.), Rev. Rick VanderHorst, br. Lawrence Toet, br. Norm Veenendaal
  - Alberta: Rev. Jan Huijgen, Rev. Steve VanLeeuwen, br. Martin Leyenhorst, br. Ray Noot
  - Pacific East: Rev. Ben Schoof, Rev. Rob Schouten, br. Richard Aikema, br. Ron DeHaan
  - Pacific West: Rev. Aiden Plug, Rev. Randall Visscher, br. Norm VanderHorst, br. Justin VanderPloeg
- Regional Synod was properly constituted and upon election the following officers were appointed: as chairman, Rev. Schouten; as vice-chairman, Rev. Huijgen, and as clerk, Rev. VanDam.

In closed session Regional Synod dealt with three appeals and two late submissions relating to one of the appeals.

## REPORTS & APPOINTMENTS

The following reports were received with gratitude:

1. Reports from the Treasurer of Regional Synod West and the Church for auditing the books of the Treasurer. The treasurer is properly discharged for the year reported on.
2. Reports from the Church for inspecting the archives of Regional Synod West. The archives are in good order.
3. The report of deputies RSW regarding a peremptory examination and a retirement.

The following appointments were made:

1. Br. John Moedt was reappointed as the RSW treasurer.
2. The Church of Coaldale was reappointed- for Auditing the books of the Treasurer.
3. The Church of Edmonton Providence was reappointed for keeping the Archives.
4. The Church of Edmonton Immanuel was reappointed for inspecting the Archives.
5. Deputies ad Art. 48 C.O:
  - Classis Pacific West: D. Vandeburgt (alt. R. C. Janssen, 2nd alt. H. Alkema)
  - Classis Pacific East: W. M. Wielenga (alt. R. Schouten, 2nd alt. D. Deboer)
  - Classis Alberta: J. VanSpronsen, (alt. S. VanLeeuwen, 2nd alt. M. TenHaaf)
  - Classis Manitoba: J. Poppe (alt. J. Slaa, 2nd alt. S. C. VanDam).
6. Edmonton Providence was appointed to convene the next RSW on November 19, 2024, the Lord willing.

## CLOSING

Question Period is made use of and Censure ad Art. 34 C.O. is not needed to be exercised. The Acts are adopted and the press release approved.

The meeting is closed with reading Matthew 5:1-16, singing, and prayer.

*For Regional Synod West 2023,  
Rev. J. Huijgen. Vice-chair e.t.*

