



Clarion

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what's inside

As spring fades to summer and crops, trees, and flowers are in full bloom, the timing is right to reflect on our own personal growth as children of the Lord. Rick Ludwig's "Growing Vulnerable" helps us think about opening ourselves up in sensitive situations while Peter Feenstra's "We all Need a Little Encouragement" helps us to see one another's needs and come alongside with care and compassion. Carl Van Dam's meditation is itself an incentive to want to grow closer to our God knowing that one day we will see him face to face.

Jason Van Vliet returns with a second article on the delicate subject of when it is right (in the Lord's eyes) for a young believing church member to begin participating in the Lord's Supper. I trust you will find it edifying. Another delicate subject is addressed by Matthew Van Luik in his editorial "No Longer a Victim" which gets to the heart of moving away from a victimhood mentality. There surely are victims of abuse in this world and Christians frequently bear the brunt of such oppression as related in *Persecution of Christians*. Yet, in the Spirit of Christ they too are enabled to move beyond victimhood to keep serving.

What does church membership mean? What are its privileges and responsibilities? Jan DeGelder shines a light on these issues by way of what we as churches have agreed upon in the Church Order. In terms of mission work you'll find a report on Rev. Cornelis Kleyn's time working in Papua New Guinea as well as another on the spread of the gospel among Arabic speaking people through the agency of MERF. We may also rejoice with Hope church in Neerlandia in receiving a brand-new building in which to worship and Covenant church in Grassie in receiving a new-to-them pastor who can regularly lead them in worship each Lord's Day. It is good to thank and praise our God for all such blessings!

You'll find more in three book reviews, a catechism lesson for kids, and birthday greetings. Enjoy the warm sunshine and we hope you will also enjoy reading *Clarion* while sipping lemonade or the like in some shady spot!

Peter Holtvlüwer

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor in Chief: Peter Holtvlüwer
E: pholtvlwuer@clarionmagazine.ca
Managing Editor: Laura Veenendaal
Contributing Editors: Eric Kampen, Jason Van Vliet, Matthew VanLuik, Jim Witteveen

CONTENT INQUIRIES

E: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADMINISTRATIVE INQUIRIES

W: clarionmagazine.ca
E: publisher@clarionmagazine.ca
T: 204-663-9000

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Clarion

A trustworthy and engaging magazine, widely spread and read in Canadian Reformed households and beyond.

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

- C**onfessionally Reformed
- L**oving in manner
- A**ttuned to current issues
- R**eadable and Reliable
- I**n Submission to Scripture
- O**pen to constructive criticism
- N**urturing Christian living

NO LONGER VICTIMS

Today our culture looks at social issues through the lens of victimhood. It believes that the issues in society are the result of a power struggle between the abuser and the abused. For instance, black people are the victim of white privileged people who enslaved them in the past. The problem with the family structure is the imbalance of power between children and their parents. The problem is the abuser who wields power over those who are abused.

Is there legitimacy to this? Yes, we cannot deny that black people were enslaved by privileged white people, although in Africa it was privileged black people who enslaved fellow black folk. Parents have misused their authority over their children and a variety of people have wielded their power to abuse those under them. Scripture reveals that after the fall into sin, all mankind has become guilty of abusing others, so that we have all been victims of sinful actions. On account of sin, the relationship between people has been negatively affected. When we follow the desires of our own heart, our desires become more important than the well-being of our neighbour. We have all been victims at the hands of others and we have been abusive towards others.

MOVING ON FROM ABUSE

The question for God's people is, "How does our faith in Christ affect how we deal with this brokenness in our relationships?" Before we answer this, we first need to understand that the experiences in our individual lives will impact each person differently. Those who have gone through similar difficulties will often process the pain differently. Everyone has been stung by hurtful words from parents, children, or friends; hurtful as they are, they usually do not have the same impact as being sexually, emotionally, or physically abused. There is a difference in impact between being verbally abused or physically violated. While every situation is a violation of our person, yet there are degrees in which they impact our lives.

If we live by faith in Christ, how do we move on from the abuse that we have suffered in all these varying degrees? The biblical principle remains the same, no matter what degree of violation we have experienced. The principle we are to follow has been set by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was a victim, for he suffered a great

injustice. Although innocent and perfect, yet he was reviled and led to the cross to die a horrible death. Christ had every right to speak hurtful words against mankind, to seek revenge for what we did to him, and yet at the cross he prays, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Even though he is the victim of injustice, yet he seeks to serve us in love. The greatest victim on earth reveals his love for those who cause him untold suffering. We will never find greater love or commitment than what Christ has revealed for us.

SERVING ABUSERS IN LOVE

Our culture teaches that if you are a victim, you have no obligation to love or serve those who have hurt you; in fact you have the right to be resentful to them. That is not how Christ responded to the abuse that was heaped upon him. Being redeemed by the blood of Christ, we are called to serve out of love even those who have hurt us deeply. It does not mean there are no consequences, for scars will always exist to some extent, but it does mean that we learn to put aside our bitterness to serve them in love. True healing cannot take place until you learn to put aside the anger and bitterness against others and instead seek their eternal well-being.

Many respond: that is easy to say, but difficult to do. Well, if Christ has served you, then you are called to serve your neighbour. One may object: since we are not Christ, we do not have the power of Christ. That is true, but you overlook the fact that Christ has the power to give you that strength. Remember, Christ has the power to change your life. Christ did not only die as the great victim for our sin, but he overcame all the abuse he suffered in his resurrection. Therefore, in Christ we now receive the strength no longer to live as victims, but as great victors who seek to serve others, even those who have hurt us, looking out for their eternal well-being. 



Matthew Van Luik

Minister Emeritus

Grace Canadian Reformed Church, Brampton

mhvanluik@gmail.com

SHOW ME YOUR GLORY!

Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.'"

EXODUS 33:18, 19A

What would it be like to actually see God's glory? The heart of God's child yearns for closer fellowship with God. The mind of God's child desires to know more about God. As God's children, we have a desire to experience God more fully than we do now as we live by faith rather than by sight.

Many years ago, back in Old Testament times, Moses led God's people out of bondage in Egypt into the wilderness, on their way to the Promised Land. The LORD renewed the covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. God himself spoke the ten words of the covenant from the mountain. We read in Exodus 24 that Moses went up on the mountain together with Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu and seventy of the elders and saw God. Under God's feet there was "as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness" (v. 10). They saw God and did not die, and they also ate and drank. They had a meal in God's presence. They received a special viewing of God himself, but it was not the fullness of God's glory.

After this meal, Moses was allowed to go up into the presence of God on the mountain. We are told that the "appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel" (v. 16). Moses entered this cloud and was on the mountain in God's presence for forty days and forty nights (v. 18).

Yet despite these special gifts from God, in Exodus 33 Moses asks God to show him his glory. Moses knew that what he had seen so far was not all there was to God's glory. He had received glimpses, but he wanted to see and know more about God's glory.

Moses makes this request in all sincerity and in genuine love for the LORD. He is not shy, but bold. We can learn from this boldness in our own walk with the LORD. Do you approach God boldly in your prayers and requests? The LORD delights in us pursuing him, in showing the fruit of faith in our prayers to him. Let us not become too passive or resigned in how we speak to the LORD. Certainly, we must always approach him with awe and respect, but we must also not be shy. The LORD will answer how he thinks is best, but he does delight in our prayers and rejoices when we come to him and take him seriously and pursue him with all our heart, soul, and mind.

The LORD answers Moses by saying that he will make his goodness pass before Moses. Moses cannot see his face and live. God in all his glory is too overwhelming for sinful man to handle. The LORD tells Moses he will show him his glory in the revelation of himself as the good, compassionate, and merciful God. He will proclaim to Moses his name, the LORD, Yahweh, the faithful covenant God. The revelation of his name takes place in the next chapter, Exodus 34, when the LORD passed before him and proclaimed his name (v. 6, 7).

As those who live in the time of the new covenant, we may see God's glory more fully revealed in the depth of his love for us in Jesus Christ. He was willing to give his life for us in order that we might be saved and receive God's mercy. We may receive God's grace, his undeserved favour for us, and may receive Christ's righteousness as our own by faith. How great is the glory of Jesus Christ! He shows God's glory in a way that we can handle right now in this life. Later in the next life we will see more of God's glory in an even fuller and richer way and will continue to learn more about his glory forever more. How wonderful that will be! 

FURTHER READING

Exodus 34:1-9; 2 Corinthians 3

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Do you desire to see God's glory?
2. How is Deuteronomy 29:29 connected to this passage?
3. How do we share in God's glory and how do we share that with others (see 2 Corinthians 3:12-18)?



S. Carl Van Dam

Minister

Canadian Reformed Church at Carman East

s.carl.vandam@gmail.com

We All Need a Little **ENCOURAGEMENT!**

PETER FEENSTRA

We don't have to venture too far into our present-day society to be convinced relationships have run amuck. Friendships and associations have become tense, strained, and messy. People are prickly, easily agitated, and uptight. So many bemoan the fact that individuals have become rude, crass, and lost all filters. If someone happens to be upset with you or disagrees with your view on a matter they will go all out to destroy, gaslight, or cancel you, quickly dismissing you as toxic.

Regrettably, the Christian community has fallen into the same patterns and perhaps we self-righteously think we are justified in doing so. More than ever, we are suspicious of each other, polarized,

and quick to throw out vitriol against others, even against our very brothers and sisters in the Lord. It seems more common than ever that individuals who once got along together refuse to talk to each other or acknowledge each other as fellow believers—and most often for reasons that have no eternal significance.

Where do we go from here? Are we to accept this as the new normal? Absolutely not! Where we are at as a society in general is contrary to the intentions of the Holy Spirit. And here's why. The Spirit commands those who are in union with Christ to encourage one another.

Where we are at as a society in general is contrary to the intentions of the Holy Spirit

MEANING OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The word most often used in the New Testament for “encourage” is the verb form of the Greek noun “*parakletos*.” The basic meaning of this verb is “to come alongside.” We are called to come alongside each other as those who are brothers and sisters in Christ. Such encouragement involves coming close to someone’s life, their struggles, their story, their joys, and their sorrows. It calls us to listen and to hold our opinions in check. When you come alongside someone you are not able to wag your finger in their face in a censorious and disapproving manner.

Christ uses the noun “*parakletos*” to describe the Holy Spirit. He says in John 16:7: “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper [*parakletos*, i.e. the One who will come alongside you] will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” The Spirit comes alongside us with the Word of Christ and his encouragement changes everything. Filled with the Spirit and Word of Christ, we ourselves become encouragers—coming alongside others to encourage, exhort, comfort, and help.

It is especially in such a time as this, when discouragement, disappointment, and disillusionment have the upper hand, that we are to put a halt to all uncalled-for negativity. It is our God-given calling to come alongside each other and even more so as the day of Christ’s return draws near (Heb 10:24, 25). And if we are to encourage each other properly, we need to be immersed in the truth of the gospel, because the Word of God changes what we can say to each other and how we say it.

GOD’S WORD ENCOURAGES

Indeed, there’s no better place to turn for encouragement than to the Bible. The book of Acts gives an example of how believers encouraged each other, even as they worked through differences of opinion. We read in Acts 15:30–32: “So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words.”

Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians is filled with statements counselling members of the church to come alongside each other so that they should walk in a manner worthy of God. In chapter

2 Paul says this: “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:11, 12). Later, after admonishing the congregation to be ready for the day of Christ’s return Paul writes, “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (5:9–11). Note the connection! Encouraging one another and building each other up go hand in hand. Both are hard to do if we forget that the church belongs to Christ.

FOUR OBSERVATIONS

Taking a cursory glance at some of the New Testament texts that speak about encouragement leads to four observations. First, encouragement is built on God’s Word, not our own. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:18: “Encourage one another with these words.” “These words” refer to what he wrote in verses 13–17 about the second coming of Christ. “These words” are encouraging because they come from God and give us a sneak preview of what is going to happen at the end of times. When you encourage each other with the Word of God you will have something meaningful to say to each other, also in times of sorrow!

Second, encouragement looks to God and his promises. He is the God of all comfort and encouragement (2 Cor 1:4). Both our strength to keep going and our greatest encouragement comes from him. Listen to the amazing declaration of Romans 15:5, 6: “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In the third place, since our identity is in Christ there will be encouragement in being associated with him and with his people. We will not do anything out of selfish ambition but in humility we will consider others in the communion of the church as better than ourselves (Phil 2:1–4). Belonging to Jesus our hearts are united with all who belong to him. What others must see in us (and we in them) is a real, tangible, and practical love for the whole church of Christ. If encouragement is missing from life in the congregation, people will feel unloved, unimportant, useless,

If encouragement is missing from life in the congregation, people will feel unloved, unimportant, useless, and forgotten

and forgotten. When the good news of Christ's life, death, and resurrection is the filter through which we see life, it will minister great grace to others as we navigate our way through this broken world side by side.

Fourth, encouragement is foundational to the way in which we appeal to each other to walk in a manner worthy of God. We are not exemplifying the fruit of the Spirit when we spout off our opinions or come at each other with guns blazing. As we saw above, Paul acted toward the Thessalonians like a "father with his children," urging them with gentleness and persistence (1 Thess 2:11, 12). Walking in a manner worthy of God we act and speak in ways that fit with who God is and how he works in our hearts by his Spirit.

PRACTICING ENCOURAGEMENT

Paul's goal for writing to the Romans was "that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (1:12). What follows are some suggestions for how we can be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

1. Use Scripture to encourage. Nothing encourages more than the Word of God.
2. Find ways of linking men with men and women with women into relationships for prayer, encouragement, emotional support, and friendship.
3. For every inclination to be negative or complain about congregational life, find a reason to give thanks for others (1 Cor 1:4). Make encouragement a daily discipline. Be intentional.
4. Pray that God create a culture of encouragement in your congregation. Ask God to make you a community that encourages in specific, tangible ways.

5. Make a point of sending someone an encouraging card, email, text, or do the old-fashioned thing and pick up the phone and call them. Consider visiting in person.
6. Make a treaty with yourself and your friends that you will only use social media to encourage others.
7. Encourage the leadership of the church. Write them without expecting anything back.
8. Ask your deacon, elder, or minister if there are ways you can be of service in the congregation.
9. Encourage young men and women to be under the mentorship of older Christian men and women (Titus 2:1-11). Open doors for encouragement by reaching out to those who are not in your age group. As a single person invite a couple into your home. As a married couple invite the unmarried and make sure your conversation is not only about what may come easily—your work, your kids, your grandkids, etc.

CONCLUSION

May the Lord do more in your church than you can imagine through just a little encouragement. "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Eph 3:20, 21). 



Peter Feenstra
Minister Emeritus
Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church, Guelph
feenstragg@gmail.com

WHEN SHOULD YOUNG BELIEVERS BE ADMITTED TO THE LORD'S TABLE?

JASON VAN VLIET

Perhaps you lingered over the title of this article and asked, “What exactly does *young* believers mean?” Nine years old? Fifteen? Eighteen? Twenty-two? “Young” means different things to different people.

To make matters concrete, let's picture in our minds a nine-year-old child in the covenant. This boy or girl loves the Lord, occasionally sings psalms and hymns while playing in the family room, and conscientiously seeks to do what is right in God's sight. Should this child be admitted to the Lord's table? Before answering this question, let's briefly revisit the three understandings of paedocommunion mentioned in my previous article, “Do Children Belong at the Lord's Table?”¹

REVIEWING DEFINITIONS

The first view holds that *all baptized children, regardless of age*, receive the bread and wine of Holy Communion. This includes newborn babies who may suck on a wine-dipped piece of bread.

The second practice is to allow *children who are old enough to begin feeding themselves at the family dinner table* to join also in celebrating the sacrament. We examined this view in the previous article.

Finally, a third approach, which we are looking at now, might be called *young-faith communion*. As recommended in a synodical report for the Christian Reformed Church, when children begin to respond to the gospel and have a basic understanding of what happens at the Lord's table, they may be admitted.²

¹ *Clarion* Vol 73, No 7.

² Agenda for Synod 1988 Christian Reformed Church of North America, p. 282; emphasis mine.



Returning to our example, should nine-year-olds in the church who respond to the gospel and who understand the basics of the Lord's Supper be admitted to the sacrament? After all, we receive this holy meal "by faith, as the hand and mouth of our soul" (BC Art 35), and as far as we can ascertain, children like this do genuinely believe. Perhaps you have even had such a child ask you, "Dad, Mom, can I eat the Lord's Supper bread, too?" Yet most often in our congregations those admitted to the table for the first time are considerably older, well into their teenage years. Why? Is this right?

WHERE THINGS CURRENTLY STAND

Neither Scripture nor the confessions mention a specific age at which sons and daughters in the covenant should begin partaking of the body and blood of Christ. Indeed, Article 61 of the Church Order simply says, "The consistory shall admit to the Lord's supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life." No age bracket specified! Interestingly, Presbyterian churches lay the matter out in a little more detail. In Answer 177 the Westminster Larger Catechism affirms that "the Lord's supper is to be administered . . . only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves (1 Cor 11:28–29)." Although no specific age is given, the Larger Catechism clearly expects a certain level of spiritual maturity. Those who partake in the sacrament need to be "of *years and ability* to examine themselves." Moreover, this Catechism explicitly grounds this conviction in the Word of God: 1 Corinthians 11:28, 29.

So where do we go with this? Rather than focusing on numbers, Scripture, confessions, and the Church Order all highlight specific *spiritual abilities and faith convictions* such as examining oneself

(1 Cor 11:28, 29), being truly displeased with our sin, consciously resting in Christ's atoning work, and committing to a life of ongoing renewal (LD 30, Q&A 81), professing publicly the Reformed faith and leading a godly life (CO Art 61). We'll return to all this a little later.

For now, let's simply affirm that some things in life cannot be tied to a number. Would we say that *all* twenty-year-olds are ready for marriage? Probably not. Also, wisely not. Some may be ready sooner and others later. Similarly, if many seventeen- to nineteen-year-olds in our congregations are being admitted to the Lord's table, let that be so because those spiritual abilities and faith convictions are coalescing in them and not simply because they have stepped over the threshold into a particular age bracket. By the same token, for some children of God this *coalescing point* may arrive sooner; for others it will occur later.

THE BIGGER, COVENANTAL PICTURE

Next, let us step back and look more carefully at the God-given identity of those who may be admitted to the Lord's table. They are, and they are to be, *baptized* persons who have received that precious sign and seal of our LORD's covenant of grace. Note the order in Acts 2 concerning adult converts. First, by the working of the Holy Spirit they received God's Word; in other words, they believed (v. 41). Next, they were baptized (v. 41). After that they joined in "the breaking of bread," including the Lord's Supper (v. 42; cf. Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor 11:24). This progression from baptism to Lord's Supper is reflected in the opening sentence of Article 35 of the Belgic Confession. At the Supper Christ nourishes those whom he has "already regenerated and incorporated into his family,

Making a vow is a big commitment.

which is his church.” This incorporation is sealed at baptism, as we confess in Lord’s Day 27, Q&A 74.

Our Form for Public Profession of Faith also emphasizes the covenantal connection between baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It begins by thanking the Lord for “receiving us into his *covenant*,” and it asks the one publicly professing faith if he or she “acknowledges God’s *covenant* promises, which have been signified and sealed to you in your *baptism*?” Consequently, two things are woven together here, most intricately and so beautifully: *responding* to God’s covenantal grace given in *baptism* and *being further nourished* by his grace at the *Lord’s supper*.

OF OATHS AND VOWS

The covenant of our Lord involves an oath and a vow. From his side, our LORD graciously confirmed his covenant in the strongest way possible, by swearing an oath in his own holy name. The angel of the LORD said to Abraham, “By myself I have *sworn* . . . I will *surely* bless you, and I will *surely* multiply your offspring” (Gen 22:16; see also Exod 6:8; Ps 105:9; Luke 1:73). As God’s children today we are blessed to belong to the new covenant in which God’s own Son, Jesus Christ, fulfills and re-affirms this divine oath thereby becoming the “sure and steadfast anchor of our soul” (Heb 6:13–20).

As we know, every covenant contains two parts: a promise and an obligation. How then shall we, enabled by the Spirit of Christ, fulfill our covenant obligations? We do that by cleaving to our Triune God, trusting and loving him wholeheartedly. We also do that by hating the ways of the world and putting off our old nature. From baptism onwards our God sovereignly and constantly *calls* us to this response.

Under God’s blessing, our sons and daughters start fulfilling their covenant obligations long before they reach their later teenage years. At least that is the way it should be! But where does *the oath* fit into our covenantal response? Truth be told, it is more necessary that it comes from our side than from God’s side. God *is* faithful, eternally and immutably so. He was not required to confirm his commitment to us with an oath, but he did so because he desired to show his faithfulness even “more convincingly to the heirs of the promise” (Heb 6:17). In our covenantal response, though, there is every reason for us—who are, by nature, anything but faithful—to commit ourselves to him with an oath, or to be

more specific, *a vow* of thanksgiving. Particularly in the psalms the Holy Spirit teaches us the importance of joyfully making and keeping thanksgiving vows. Here are a few examples. “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and perform your vows to the Most High” (Ps 50:14). “I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you” (Ps 56:12). In a similar vein, we can think of the much-loved Psalm 116: “What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD, I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people” (vv. 12–14).

Making steadfast commitments “in the presence of all his people” is also reflected in the New Testament. The apostle Paul reminds his spiritual son Timothy, who grew up in the covenant (2 Tim 1:5), that he made his “good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim 6:12). When he reached a point of maturity, he stood publicly, in the presence of many witnesses, and offered his vow, his own living sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Making a vow is a *big* commitment. A substantial level of spiritual maturity is necessary. Making a vow is also a *personal* commitment. In the presence of God and his holy church, we say, “I do.” Indeed, what a blessing to have our fellow pilgrims surround us! But we should also be clear: we say, “I do,” not “we do.” Moreover, once I make my vow I must not back out, saying “Sorry, I didn’t know what I was getting into.” According to the Preacher, to speak like that is foolish and stirs up God’s anger (Eccl 5:1–7; Num 30:1, 2).

Therefore, the matter at hand is *bigger* than “Does the covenant child have a sincere faith since at the Lord’s table we eat and drink by faith?” We also need to bring in this aspect: “Is this covenant child prepared to respond to God’s oath and calling, also confirming by thankful vow that he or she personally commits to fulfilling the obligations of the covenant with the help of the Lord?” As the Form for Baptism of Adults makes clear, this is the commitment that is asked of new converts before they partake of Lord’s Supper (*Book of Praise*, p. 601). We should expect nothing different and nothing less of our youth who grow up in the covenant. Our God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34).

CLEARING UP A MISCONCEPTION

When covenant youth publicly profess their faith, you may hear people speak about them “joining the church” or “becoming full members of the church.” Speaking this way may be well intentioned but it is incorrect. Let’s keep our language in line with our catechism. Infants, as well as adults, *belong* (not partially but fully) to God’s covenant and congregation (LD 27).

You can compare it to family life. Our little ones *belong* to our households—one hundred percent! They may not partake in all household activities right away. Certain “years and ability,” to borrow some Westminster language, are required before they prepare a meal, use the car to pick up siblings after school, or participate in a discussion about voting for new office bearers. But all this does not take anything away from their full inclusion as members of the household right from day one.

PULLING THINGS TOGETHER

What spiritual abilities and faith convictions does someone need to partake of the body and blood of our Saviour *in a worthy manner* (1 Cor 11:27)? The following three-point summary is not comprehensive but hopefully it will be beneficial. First, the baptized person must have sufficient spiritual maturity to examine himself or herself. The Holy Spirit plainly says: “let a person examine *himself*” (1 Cor 11:28). Yes, consistory has oversight of the sacraments, and we have a mutual responsibility toward each other, also within our families, but that does not diminish this divine requirement. Worthy celebration includes the ability to *self-examine* in a deep and meaningful manner (LD 30, Q&A 81; Form for Lord’s Supper).

Second, true faith, by which we eat and drink the body and blood of Christ, is more than loving Jesus and wanting to serve him. To be sure, it includes that! But it is not limited to that. True faith is a sure knowledge whereby I accept as true all that God reveals in his Word (LD 7). Obviously, that will take time and careful, deliberate instruction. Accordingly, the Reformers emphasized diligent and thorough catechetical training *before* admission to the Lord’s table. Added to that, true faith includes a firm confidence that God’s gracious promises apply not only to others—and not only to my parents and older siblings—but also to me. The *firmness* of this conviction usually develops through some sanctifying fires of life’s trials (James 1:2–4).

Finally, as God’s covenant children walk the path from baptism to Lord’s Supper, they should mature to the point that they can knowledgeably and sincerely profess their faith with a thankful vow in the presence of all God’s people.

ADVICE FROM BAVINCK

Of course, one last question still hangs in the air. *When* are youth in the covenant sufficiently mature for all this? At nine years old?

Fifteen? Eighteen? Twenty-two? We have already seen that neither Scripture nor our confessions nor our church order pins it down to a certain age (range). Let’s follow that wise counsel and refrain from “giving it a number.”

Still, if we are looking for something more, Professor Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), a highly respected Reformed theologian, made a helpful comment. He observed that during the years of puberty a person “undergoes an enormous overall change.”³ Whereas before puberty a person sees himself included in and represented by his parents, during and after puberty they gradually realize that “they have to answer for themselves,” including a response to “their [own] baptism.” In short, God often uses what he himself designed in the process of puberty to bring his covenant children gradually to the very thing that lies at the core of worthy participation in the Lord’s Supper: the conviction that I need to respond personally to my covenant God and the ability to *self-examine*.

Bavinck also warns against “rushing” the spiritual development of our youth. “All that is alive takes time to grow,” he says, and therefore it is not surprising that “Christian churches have generally fixed the first communion or confirmation, public confession, [and] admission to the Lord’s Supper . . . in this period.”

So, if we need to orient ourselves, let’s work with the Lord’s amazing design and purpose during the years of puberty. It may well take some more time for the heart and mind to catch up after the legs and arms have stopped growing. But, with the Lord’s blessing, at some point on the other side of puberty, God’s covenant youth will recognize in and for themselves that “coalescing point” of spiritual maturity. At that point, along with them we will praise God who instills in his children the desire to publicly profess their faith in him and so receive admission to the holy supper. 



Jason Van Vliet

Principal and Professor of Dogmatics
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary
jvanvliet@crtcs.ca

³ Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics*, Volume 4, pp 156-57 for this, and following, quotes.

GROWING

Vulnerable

One of the interesting discussions on sports talk radio over the last number of years has to do with vulnerability. There was a time when being physically vulnerable was considered a weakness for an athlete. The best athletes knew how to avoid injury by being vigilant, keeping their guard up, their backs to the boards, and their heads on a swivel. Being caught off guard was your own fault, whatever the consequences. Today, with a greater emphasis on skill, dexterity, and speed, and a lot of money on the table, professional sports organizations have decided it is important that they protect their athletes from serious harm or injury. Players are being held accountable for their actions when another player is in a vulnerable position. No late hits on the quarterback. No checking from behind into the boards. No hitting too high or too low. No dirty plays. Stiffer penalties and suspensions are handed out as a deterrent. Vulnerability is now a mutual responsibility and respecting it is emphasized in both professional and amateur

sports. Interestingly, with physical vulnerability now held in higher esteem, recognition and concern for emotional vulnerability followed right behind.

UNCOMFORTABLE

I'm not exactly sure why these conversations got me thinking about the Christian life. Perhaps I recalled that as a young boy, book-ended by pairs of sisters, I did not like feeling vulnerable or being an emotional middle child in the family. Vulnerability did not seem very masculine or comfortable. Feeling susceptible was a personal foible you simply needed to overcome. Get a grip! And church life was similar. There it also felt like being very confident was most important. Being certain of your faith, your doctrine, your church, your opinions, etc. was a sign of spiritual strength. Not having these things nailed down left one vulnerable and prone to confusion. Possibly prone to wander. Overcoming vulnerability was part

of a good spiritual posture and helped one to maintain a healthier and more stable faith life. Less leaning and more leading. I don't think anyone specifically taught me this or even preached it to me, but somehow I absorbed it and adopted it. Solid self-management just felt better and seemed the responsible way to live at home and in the church.

DEFENSELESS

Like many people, as I get older, my perception of the world around me continues to get reshaped. This includes my early aversion to vulnerability. The word vulnerable finds its root in the Latin word *vulnus* which means wound. Being vulnerable essentially means being susceptible to wounds. To put yourself in a vulnerable position means that you open yourself up to the possibility of attack or injury. You either let your guard down or you go to places where the possibility of harm is present or increased. As I recall Easter my thoughts go to our Lord Jesus as the epitome of vulnerability. How is it possible that the Lord of the universe, the conqueror of the devil and death, the restorer of all things, cloaked himself in weakness and susceptibility? That gets us to the heart of the gospel, doesn't it? The Son of God "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Phil 2:6) in order to become like us. He did it so that he could suffer in our place, be wounded for our sin, face hellish agony on our behalf, be rejected by everyone, even by his Father in heaven. During his ministry on earth, he went to desolate places, he hung out with people of questionable character in shady homes, he challenged the false teaching of spiritual leaders in their own synagogues, he risked contact with lepers, the unclean, and even the dead, and he spent time with strangers and foreigners. He was homeless and dependent on others for his daily needs. The gospel descriptions of Jesus Christ completely mocked, rejected, and hanging naked, nailed to the cross are as exposed and assailable as it gets. When he cried out to God, "Why have you forsaken me?" he had let go of all his defenses. *He was completely vulnerable.* He did this to save sinners. In this, he also became an example to us.

LEANING AND LEARNING

I think when the risen Christ calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him it has something to do with us learning this type of vulnerability. It clearly does not have to do with us saving ourselves, as that part is already done! The message of Good Friday

and Easter Sunday is not meant to strengthen our personal resolve as we soldier forward as warriors for Christ. Rather, it is to encourage us to personally surrender ourselves to him. To let go of our own grip. To soften us, to open us up to others, to generate forgiveness and mercy and love in our hearts. To discover what it really means to love one another. To be open to sharing and confessing to each other, leaning on one another and learning from each other, struggling together, and lifting each other up in prayer and good deeds. Jesus warned that the gospel message will be both welcoming and winning as well as risky and revolting. Bearing our cross means being vulnerable to carry that good news with us everywhere in love, expecting both the best and the worst. Christ illustrated that love and vulnerability are closely connected. He also told us that following him will have us share in his suffering. The gospel goes out to the world through the church in love, in the face of a world of hatred. But love wins. Vulnerability will one day come to an end and be unnecessary. There will be no more wounds to be suffered. But for now, it still remains the way of the cross.

STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

In my church, our evening worship service is still intimate enough in size that we often have a time for community prayer. Those in attendance can raise their hand and ask for prayer for themselves or for another. I am in awe of the people who can specifically name their sin or fear or need and ask us to pray with and for them. In their weakness, they have grown in vulnerability and in their trust of the Lord and their brothers and sisters. In their frailty, God has made them strong. Strong enough to really admit who they are and to find their rest in the arms of their Saviour. Confident enough to believe his grace will be sufficient for them and his power will be perfected in their weakness. One day I hope I will be brave enough to raise my hand and ask for a prayer for me. I'm growing vulnerable but it feels risky, and I still find my head on a swivel and often live with my back to the boards. Easter reminds me that it does not have to be that way. And that God my Father knows me and is patient with me. He waits, while *earnestly, tenderly Jesus is calling, calling "O sinner come home!"* 



Rick Ludwig
Streetlight Christian Church
rludwig@kitchingsteepeandludwig.com

BLOOM

Where You're Planted

What does it mean to be a “member” of the church? What do we mean when we talk about “church boundaries”? And is there anything about these things in the Church Order? No, not if you look for a separate article that would give us a definition and a list of rights, privileges, and obligations of such membership. That being said, when called to run the church well, we will be confronted with questions around membership and church boundaries. In fact, the word “members” is used several times throughout the Church Order. And whenever the Church Order mentions “the congregation” or “members of the congregation,” it refers to a defined group of people, distinct from others, which implies boundaries.

MEMBERS IN THE CHURCH ORDER

Let’s have a closer look at some of these references. A brief survey shows that our church order stipulates that church membership is required for serving as office bearers (Art. 3 and 4) as well as for voting for office bearers when that may be called for (Art. 3). Church members must receive pastoral care (Art. 16 and 22), which also implies responsibility to accept the authority of the elders. When you make public profession of your faith you even promise to submit willingly to this kind of supervision and authority, as a *living member* of the church. Article 61 implies that such membership includes admission to the Lord’s Supper. The matter of mutual spiritual accountability and the elders’ authority comes out in particular in the section on Christian discipline. Here the Church Order uses terminology like “anyone,” “someone,” or “the sinner,” but in this context it obviously refers to members of the church, in distinction from others.

In Article 62 we have agreed that by moving from church A to church B people end their membership in A and join B as a new member. Among the sister churches we accommodate this

transition by giving an attestation. For that purpose, the churches keep track of their members. That’s mentioned in Article 64 which points at the significance of church records.

All of this leads to the question: how do you become a member of the church? There are a few ways in which this can happen. When you are born of parents who are church members, you are a member yourself from the very beginning, as confirmed in your baptism.¹ Your public profession of faith later in life admits you to the Holy Supper but it does not *make you* a member of the church since you were a member since birth. This is the distinction between what we often call “communicant members” (i.e. those members with permission to commune or fellowship at the Lord’s Table) and “non-communicant members” (i.e. those who have not yet received this permission as they have not yet publicly professed their faith).

Another way of becoming a church member is by professing your faith when you join the church as an adult. If you have been properly baptized as a baby in another church (but for whatever reason did not grow up in the faith or perhaps left it for a time), you won’t need to be re-baptized. Following a period of instruction in the Reformed faith you would simply make profession of faith. However, if you have never been baptized, immediately after your profession of faith you would then receive baptism.

MEMBERS OF CHRIST

Before we get lost in the formal aspects, it’s good to remember that all of this is rooted in the spiritual reality of belonging to Jesus Christ. Answer 32 of the Heidelberg Catechism says that being a Christian means that “I am a member of Christ by faith.” This is where it all starts. At the same time, this is not where it ends. “Being a member of Christ” is not just what I feel to be my personal Christian identity. It is more than that. The New Testament makes

¹ This is the Reformed conviction, based on the character of God’s covenant. In Q/A 74 of the Heidelberg Catechism we confess that “by baptism, as sign of the covenant, infants *must* be incorporated in the Christian church.” In line with this, parents agree in response to the first question in the Form for Infant Baptism that “our children as members of Christ’s church *ought* to be baptized” (emphasis mine).

abundantly clear that you cannot separate being “a member of Christ” from being “a member of the body of Christ.” And this “body of Christ” is not just some vague or elusive entity. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 the apostle Paul describes how, as a member of the body of Christ, I am called to embrace my responsibilities towards my fellow believers, to share my gifts, to submit to the church leaders, to commit to mutual accountability, to accept financial obligations.

Many of these things are not spelled out in the Church Order. That makes sense. After all, the Church Order is not a detailed lawbook. It is a mutual agreement between churches about the responsibilities of office bearers, councils, and consistories, and not so much about responsibilities of local church members.

NEW MEMBERS

Nevertheless, the Church Order does reflect some of the things expected from members of the congregation. In other words, the Church Order assumes or expects some form of regulated, formal church membership. In our ecclesiastical practice today, that can be a challenge for some of our consistories.

More than in the past, many of our churches see an increasing number of visitors attending the worship services. Some of those stick around for a long time and become regular guests who feel very much at home and get engaged in other church activities as well. There is much reason for joy and gratitude here. But does all of this make them “members”? They may think so. They may even declare to family and friends: “This is now my church. I feel that I belong here.”

However, there is no accountability towards the elders; there is no real commitment towards fellow believers. Should elders try to change this and work towards full membership after profession of faith? I believe that should be the goal. It will often require much patient teaching and faithful discipling before your guests may be ready for this step. As such that’s okay, and not a reason to question the sincerity of their faith. But the North American love for individual liberty, enhanced by today’s culture that tells you to do what you feel like doing and only as long as you are comfortable with it, does not help.

MOBILE MEMBERS

This culture of the day also affects our “regular” church members. Reformed church polity respects the integrity and autonomy of the local churches. This implies that each church has its own area or territory with geographical ecclesiastical boundaries.² In the not-so-distant past people would respect those boundaries. If you moved to a neighbouring town, you would also join the church in that place. When churches are far removed from each other, that will naturally still be the case, but in areas where we find a cluster

of Canadian Reformed churches in close vicinity, this is no longer as self-evident as it used to be.

We see people moving from one congregation to another without moving physically. I’m a member in church A, but I don’t like it here, so I’m going to join church B. It’s more than 20 km down the road, but I feel more comfortable there. We simply ignore the old boundaries, and the result is that congregations living in reasonably close proximity are drawing their membership from the same geographical area. At times people drive by one or more churches of the federation to worship where they wish.

Is this an improvement? I don’t think so. It leads to an unhealthy spirit of competition between popular and less popular churches and preachers. The result is that you find yourself in a church with likeminded people where our unity is more in what we all like, prefer, or feel comfortable with than in Christ. That’s not very healthy either. You look for a church where you can be involved in a way that suits you, a church that you think will live up to your expectations when it comes to preaching, liturgy, style of leadership, emphasis on this or that aspect. But in the end the church is about “me.”

ONE BODY

However, the Bible teaches that the church is not about me. The church is about glorifying God and serving others. It means that we are called to be faithful and loyal towards the congregation God has placed us in, with all the colourful and rich variety of gifts, ideas, and views people have. Imagine the picture of the church in 1 Corinthians 12:4–27.

Article 28 of the Belgic Confession echoes this Word of God when it comes to our attitude towards the church. Believers “must submit themselves to [the church’s] instruction and discipline, bend their necks under the yoke of Christ, and serve the edification of the brothers and sisters, according to the talents which God has given them as members of the same body.”

Are we still talking church polity? Think about it. Perhaps consistories should not readily accept that members want to leave (or join) without moving physically, just because they think that the spiritual grass looks greener at the other side of the ecclesiastical fence.

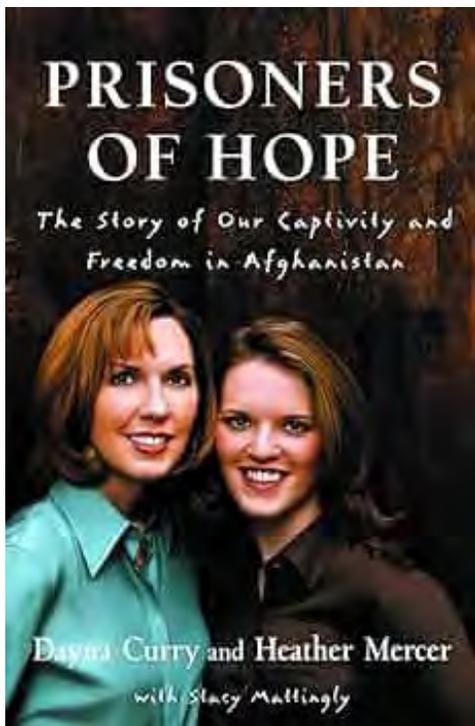
So, yes—bloom where God has planted you. 



Jan DeGelder
Minister Emeritus
Flamborough Canadian Reformed Church
jdegelder@cogeco.ca

² It is good to note here that this territorial principle with geographical boundaries is not prescribed in Scripture. But it is something we see growing throughout the New Testament.

Strong & Courageous



The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) is a missionary organization that serves persecuted Christians around the world. On March 8, 2024, they hosted an online event during which several people gave first-hand testimonies of their encounters with persecution. What follows is the story of Heather Mercer, an American, who was imprisoned for spreading the gospel in Afghanistan.

HEATHER MERCER

Heather recalls that the first time she had a strong conviction to minister to Muslims was when she heard a sermon that spoke of the millions of Muslims around the world who had never heard the gospel message. It was stated that the global ratio of Muslims to missionaries was almost a million to one. At that time Afghanistan was fully in the control of the Taliban, and women in particular were mistreated. While this was undoubtedly an area in high need of humanitarian aid and evangelism, it was also one that had obvious threats for Christians. And yet the need to spread the gospel was central to Heather's decision-making, in spite of the potential cost to herself.

So, Heather joined one of the many global relief agencies that offer humanitarian aid with hands and hearts like Jesus. On August 3, 2001, she

and seven co-workers visited an Afghan family in the context of facilitating a jobs skills training program. They shared the gospel message with the family which included a short video which had been produced in the native language of the area. Beyond the video message, the mere presence of these aid workers in their home caused this family to want their hearts to love in the same way—a love that sees far beyond the potential risk to self.

After departing, the taxi Heather was riding in was stopped by a man who jumped into the back seat. Instead of arriving at her destination, Heather was taken to a local jail where she saw her seven co-workers who had also been arrested. All eight of them were put into the same prison cell. On the first night of captivity, while lying on the ground of a cold, damp cell, Heather says that she was reminded of some verses from Isaiah 43, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.” What a beautiful thing that Heather had previously memorized these verses. I asked myself, “If I was captured and put in a jail cell, how much of God’s Word would I be able to recall?”

All eight were charged and tried under Islamic law for “crimes against Islam.” The penalty would most likely be death, but rather than execute them immediately, the Taliban leaders filled their days with marathon interrogations. They demanded to know: Who do you work for? Where have you been? To whom have you spoken? Although Heather didn’t report any physical mistreatment, she and her colleagues were able to hear torture going on in cells adjacent to theirs. The psychological trauma this would have inflicted didn’t deter Heather and her friends from witnessing to other prisoners in the evening hours when the interrogators had left. Their gospel video, which had been confiscated upon their arrest, was watched by prison guards on the night shift who showed interest by inquiring further.

THE ANTIDOTE TO FEAR

None of this is to say that every day was hopeful and joyful. Indeed, Heather and her colleagues had days of despair and fear,

of wondering why God had not protected them from capture. Was their mission in this world almost over? Ultimately, they realized that the antidote to their fear was found in Matthew 10:39, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” It made the importance of their current physical situation so much smaller in their minds than the bigger reality—that even if they were killed, they belonged to God.

While in prison, they became aware of the September 11, 2001 attack on the United States. The guards told them the Americans had entered Afghanistan to retaliate but they had few details. At one point the entire prison population was moved. Into the back of a pickup truck went all prisoners who could fit and those that couldn’t were executed and left behind. Heather and her colleagues were spared for the moment, but with the daily sound of bombs and gunfire they were regularly reminded of how precarious their situation was.

On November 13 the prison doors burst open and in came several heavily armed Afghan warriors who ordered the prisoners to follow them. Once in the streets, Heather became aware that these were not Taliban men coming to execute them, but Afghan resistance fighters. They had been freed, but it took a few days for that reality to set in. After a brief time of recuperation back home, most of this team were redeployed, this time to Iran.

Heather’s experience shows that the Spirit of God can do amazing things in the lives of his children. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” May we all believe in the limitless power of the Spirit to change hearts and lives for the glory of God. 📖



Andrew Douma
Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church
Hamilton
agdouma99@gmail.com

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

Report on the Work in

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

ILSE VANDERMEULEN



During the months of January and February 2024, Rev. Cornelis and Mrs. Greta Kleyn visited several churches in Southwestern Ontario involved in the ongoing work of mission in Papua New Guinea. With much thankfulness, the Kleyns reported about the work God enabled them to do in PNG over the last 11.5 years. They are now closing this chapter of their lives and Rev. Kleyn has been installed as the new minister of the Free Reformed Church of Comet Bay in Western Australia.

Finishing a decade of missionary work comes with many emotions. “We are sad to leave so many people behind that we have come to love,” says Rev. Kleyn. Making the transition into the Western world is intense as well and the family visited a program at Mission Training International in Colorado Springs to work through some of these feelings and receive tools to help them transition.

During their presentation to the churches in Ontario, Rev. Kleyn gave an update on the two instituted churches, the two

churches that are close to institution, three church plants, and the Reformed Churches Bible College in Port Moresby. Most congregations, as well as the Bible College and the Christian day schools, are blessed with growth and faithful leadership.

CROSS-CULTURAL

The missionary highlighted the challenges of working cross-culturally and how this affects bringing the gospel. Rev. Kleyn: “In the West, our culture mostly follows a guilt and forgiveness paradigm, because of the long effect of the rule of law. But in PNG the visible part of the culture is more based on honour and shame while in the hidden elements of culture fear and relief are very prominent with much witchcraft (*sanguma*) still present.” As an example, Rev. Kleyn applies this to how a person experiences sin and forgiveness in Papua. “When someone has sinned, they deal with deep feelings of shame and even fear and it affects not just the individual but the whole community. Therefore, in PNG it is important not just to share the Lord’s forgiveness with the sinner, but to physically and publicly show the restoration of relationships often in the form of a meal.”

Rev. Kleyn encouraged young boys and men to consider the calling of missionary work. For the future, the missionaries in PNG prayerfully aim to work towards five instituted churches, ten church plants, and fifteen national pastors by 2030.

In Elora church, all catechism students attended the presentation. Junior students Cameron Jonker and Dustin Feenstra were impressed by the stories of missionary work. “I think it’s very hard work to do,” said Cameron, referring to the challenges the Kleyns mentioned in their presentation, like medical struggles, safety issues, and many practical challenges at home and when they travel. Dustin was quite impressed with Rev. Kleyn’s story of quitting a church service because gangs close by had started shooting at each other. Rev. and Mrs. Kleyn both mentioned apprehension about going to PNG at first, but that the blessings far outweigh the challenges.

WESTERN WORLD

The Kleyn family has arrived safely in Australia and is getting used to their new surroundings. “On the mission field, your head



is full of the different needs you tend to and physical struggles. I’m looking forward to having more time,” says Rev. Kleyn. As he starts his work in the Western world, he hopes to again focus on sharing the gospel. “How can others be made to feel welcome in our church, also cross-culturally?”

Rev. Kleyn appreciates the support of the consistory of Comet Bay, as they have helped other missionaries during their transition. The six Kleyn children look forward to entering classrooms after years of homeschooling and online learning, although the long days in class can be challenging. Rev. Kleyn: “On the mission fields missionary kids are put on a pedestal and our children are looking forward to making friendships that are more equal and long-lasting.”

Rev. Timothy Slaa is continuing part of Rev. Kleyn’s missionary tasks in PNG. It is Rev. Kleyn’s prayer that the Lord will also provide a suitable candidate for the new teaching position at the Bible College. 



Ilse VanderMeulen
Elora, Ontario
ilsevandermeulen@hotmail.com



NEW BUILDING FOR HOPE CANRC

JOHN FROMA

Hope Canadian Reformed Church of Neerlandia held the dedication service for their new church building on Friday, February 2, 2024. The service was led by Rev. G. Veurink, minister of the Word in our neighbouring congregation of Barrhead. Rev. Veurink also serves as our counselor during our vacancy. He chose 2 Chronicles 6:40 as the text for the sermon, “Now, O my God, let your eyes be open and your ears be attentive to the prayer of this place.” The theme of this sermon was, “Solomon prays: Be attentive to the prayer of this place.” The three points of the sermon were: the marvel of this prayer, the content of this prayer, and the confirmation of this prayer. As it was Solomon’s prayer that the Lord would be attentive to their prayers, so it is our prayer as well. It is our prayer that we as God’s covenant children may be gathered here in the beautiful building each Sunday to praise and worship him. May we be instructed, admonished, and encouraged to live

in the comfort of the grace and mercy that he so lavishly bestows upon us. May we ever be thankful for the gift of salvation granted to us by the redeeming work of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that the Holy Spirit will work in the hearts of all of us to mold and shape us so that our desire is to serve God and our neighbour.

OUR STORY

After the worship service, our council chairman br. Grant Van Assen spoke words of welcome to all in attendance. He briefly recounted our beginnings. The Neerlandia congregation had grown too large for their church building. The church was originally designed to seat approximately 360 people. Over time, the pews were moved closer together, more pews were purchased, and a balcony needed to be developed. This was still not enough, so chairs were set up in the basement with livestream. It became

clear that something needed to be done. After looking at different options, it was decided to do a north/south split. A rental agreement was arranged with the north congregation for the use of their building. This arrangement was to be temporary, five years or less. After five years had passed, we started to feel that we had overstayed our welcome. Some of us hoped that we were only imagining this feeling, while others were convinced it was real.

The first order of business was to secure a parcel of property on which to build a church. One of the members of the congregation offered to sell us some land. The location was great, so the deal was made. The different committees were formed, and the work began in earnest. The congregation started looking at plans in 2020. In February 2021, a plan was approved and the building committee started meeting regularly. Later that year, just prior to freeze up, the foundation was completed. By February 2022, the building was framed, and the roof trusses were on. Now, a little over two years since the foundation was poured, we may be using this beautiful building for the purpose of worshipping our Heavenly Father. The Lord has richly blessed us in every way, for which we are truly thankful. We were able to experience good harmony during the building process. The Lord provided the financial means, talented trades people, various committees, and many volunteers. We are thankful to all those who contributed to the building of this church.

Br. G. Van Assen then pointed out that some of the physical features of our new building point to the greatness, beauty, and

awesomeness of our God. The height of the steeple, the clean and uncluttered interior, the high vaulted ceiling complete with large wooden beams, as well as the attractive exterior lighting were some of the features mentioned. The large clock located in the steeple tower shows some significance as well. Time in God's kingdom is important. Psalm 95 says, "Today hear his voice, and do not harden your hearts."

CONGRATULATIONS & FELLOWSHIP

Our chairman then gave an opportunity for neighbouring churches to come forward to speak words of congratulations and prayers for God's blessing. Letters were received and read from the churches which were not able to attend. We were also honoured to have both our provincial and federal government representatives in our midst for this special occasion. Mr. Glenn van Dijken, our MLA, conveyed greetings from our UCP government, and wished us God's blessing. Our MP in Ottawa, Mr. Arnold Viersen, is no stranger among us as he and his family are members of the Hope Canadian Reformed Church of Neerlandia. Brother Viersen spoke words of congratulations and expressed his hope that our new church may serve for the furthering of God's kingdom.

The evening was closed with a prayer of thanksgiving led by Rev. H. Kalkman. Coffee, cake, and fellowship were enjoyed by everyone in the beautiful, large foyer.

All praise be to God. 🇨🇦

By John Froma





Photo Credit: Kerri Hordyk

LOUWERSE FAMILY

Welcomed to Grassie

SEAN STEL

Covenant Canadian Reformed Church of Grassie, Ontario officially and heartily welcomed Rev. John and Annet Louwerse along with Joel, Liselle, and Annesa into our midst on February 25, 2024. For the installation service, Rev. Vermeulen preached on 2 Corinthians 5:18–20; Rev. Louwerse, as one himself reconciled, will bring us the gospel of reconciliation. Rev. Louwerse chose John 12:21 “Sir, we wish to see Jesus” as the text of his afternoon inaugural sermon, reminding us that his task is to let us see Jesus, the character of Jesus’s glory, and the call connected to that. Delegates from the surrounding churches welcomed the Louwerses and expressed great joy and thankfulness that God has provided Grassie with a faithful minister. We are grateful to Rev. Vermeulen for his work as counselor, and to the ministers who preached to us while Grassie was vacant.

WELCOME EVENING

On the evening of Friday March 22 a welcome evening was held for the Louwerse family. We summarize the events of that evening so that you may share in our joy.

Hannah Joosse organized the youngest children of the congregation to sing “Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep.” This went very smoothly, even when two little boys decided it was safer with mom than in the limelight and beat a hasty retreat halfway through. The children also presented the Louwerse family with some baking and a picture book to help them learn the children’s names. Out of the mouths of babes and infants God has established strength. It was good to see all those children that the Lord has blessed us with, and we pray that God will continue to entrust the families in our congregation with covenant children.

The first game was the Youth Group's test of Rev. Louwerse's ability to match children to parents. He was a model of efficiency, though the Gelms and Tenhages were a bit difficult to sort out. In the end he matched them all correctly except for mixing up the Tenhages, but this was understandable since we also find Tenhage cousins hard to tell apart too. Marty Schulenberg put our collective sentiment to words, giving his best wishes to all those who were taking home new kids.

Hardly a Sunday goes by without a post-afternoon service meeting of the informal Grassie choir to sing in four-part harmony around the piano, sometimes accompanied by the organ. The choir treated us to a few songs, including a beautiful setting of the Lord's prayer.

Next, the Kingdom Seekers Girls Club sang a song for us. Subsequently, the leaders of the Kingdom Seekers Girls Jury impaneled the young ladies to ask our minister some serious and difficult questions. The minister chose the scripted answers at random from a bucket, and they went something like this:

Prosecutor: "Do you get grumpy when other people win a game and you don't?"

Defendant: "As far as anyone knows, I'm a nice normal person."

Prosecutor: "Do you often drive over the speed limit?"

Defendant: "The answer is so obvious; I'm not going to answer."

Prosecutor: "Do you argue with your ward elders?"

Defendant: (*chuckles*) "If I can get away with it."



GAMES & HISTORY

Young Ezra Ravensbergen and his band conscripted some poor unfortunates to stick their heads through holes in a sheet, while making their best impressions of farm animal noises at appropriate moments during the congregation's singing of "Old MacDonald had a Farm." Ornamented by feeble excuses for animal sounds, this song provided a fine introduction to country living for the former denizens of Hamilton.

Every place has a history, though perhaps in this young country we don't often think of it. Sharon Vansyndenborgh treated us to a brief history of the settlement and development of Grassie (and Grimsby). Did you know that Grimsby had a fishing industry up to the 1960s? Or that a steamship ferry used to connect Grimsby beach and Toronto? I certainly didn't. The growing, processing, and storage of fruit has long been part of the bustle in Grimsby, as well as the manufacture of farm equipment. Within sight of the manse is a small airport, though regrettably the minister's stipend does not include a personal airplane. The landscape is graced with cultivated fields, parks, escarpment waterfalls, and nearby beaches. We hope that the Louwerses will soon become familiar and comfortable with their new surroundings.

The Grace Women's Society shared a thoughtful welcome poem, and the Affirm the Covenant Women's Bible Study challenged the Louwerses to a game of "Name that Name." The family did an excellent job, guessing nearly all the names before time ran out.

FUN & FELLOWSHIP

Suddenly we perceived a large collection of bald gentlemen marching down the aisle, identically dressed in white coveralls, green face wraps, and cheap sunglasses. The Louwerses were ordered to close their eyes while the men were seated facing the front of the church with their backs to the audience. Rev. Louwerse's assignment was to fix a nametag to each man's chair with his name and occupation. This he did while staying out of smelling distance. Meanwhile the men complained in falsetto voices about the heat and how the Rev was delaying the schedule. Thus labelled, the men trooped out, leaving the audience with the unsettling feeling that one of the Rev's first tasks might be to exorcize a strange cult from our midst.

At this point in the proceedings, as the boys in the audience were thinking longingly about the promised refreshments at the end of the program, Ben Helder took the stage, and announced that he had prepared a thirty-minute presentation. But alas, he had gone and lost it when he opened a virus email sent from Rev.



Louwerse's account (which had been hacked earlier that same week)! He gave us a brief synopsis and assured us that the full presentation would be published in the next bulletin installment.

The gifts presented to the Louwerses included a wooden sign with the words "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" laser engraved on it, words from the text of the inaugural sermon.

After these entertainments and gifts, we closed with words of welcome, thanksgiving, song, and prayer. To the tables we went, to eat, drink, and enjoy fellowship together. The food was glorious, prepared by skilled and eager hands, and worth the wait! We trust that the Louwerse family will both be blessed and be a blessing in our midst, and we pray that God will continue his church gathering work here in Grassie, building us up as living stones into his spiritual house. 

Sean Stel



www.merf.org



Heavenly Grace for the Arab World

By Remon Atef and Dany Gamal

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

— James 1:17



Buying Arabic bread

We are both full time members of MERF’s Arabic Media Team involved in digital audio and video productions. We joined MERF’s staff because MERF’s ministries are clearly based on biblical principles. It is committed to the historic teachings of the evangelical Reformation. This is very important because media

work can easily drift into man-centered strategies and methodologies. Also, it was clear that MERF ministry content and approach are very relevant to the younger generation of the Arab majority, our Muslim neighbors. They are our main, ministry target group. The Lord is blessing our team’s joint efforts with encouraging fruit.

24/7 Online & Daily Radio Gospel

Our Arabic media ministry team appreciates receiving expert training on reaching Muslims from our senior leader. We have learned a crucial biblical lesson -- Each episode or segment must prepare our Arabic online social media and radio program followers

to realize two important truths: First, they need to be carefully and thoughtfully confronted by the fact that humanity’s sinfulness makes all people unqualified to approach the Creator. No human effort, secular or religious, is good enough to make us acceptable to Holy, Almighty God. Second, they need to learn about God’s sav-



Judging a Case - Dardasha7 program

ing plan and initiative in Christ. In other words, the objective of our efforts is to effectively present the true message of the Bible about the immensity of our human sin and the sufficiency of God’s grace in Christ.

Telling The Old, Old Story

We prayerfully do much brain-storming together to find creative ideas to faithfully reach the Muslim communities better and better. The team’s work requires a careful choice of words

and terms. Muslims do not understand Christian church language, including basic words like “salvation,” “justification,” “redemption,” not even “sin” and “grace.” These words and many more do not mean much to Muslims, unless carefully and relevantly explained. So, we brain storm together, encouraging one another, inspired by God’s Word, to find new ways to present the gospel. Ideas from daily life are useful in presenting the message about human sin and Christ’s saving grace.

One-To-One Follow-Up

Our programs deal with everyday life social issues in the Arab family and society - in health, sickness, politics, sports, education, economics etc. The reality of sin is reflected in every part of human existence. We use a variety of formats, including group

discussions, drama, interviews, storytelling, documentaries, testimonies, questions and answers and more. Popular social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X, Soundcloud, WhatsApp, Viber, and Skype enable

Arabic-speakers from all over to hear the gospel truth and some connect privately. When they react or ask questions, trained staff and volunteers provide one-to-one follow-up with more in-depth biblical teaching and instruction about the Christian life.

Translations of sample Arabic messages:

K. Z. of Yemen: “...I am now convinced that God’s original creation for humanity was for harmony and love, and not for hatred, strife and wars...Any religion which promotes such

things is definitely not of God. Thank you for your teaching...”

Ahmad from Omdurman, Sudan, under the hardship of the ongoing civil war: “...I am very happy that we can still regularly listen to your radio programs. They provide me and many others here with much heavenly comfort and peace...”

Majid of Egypt responded to our online question -- “What is your most pressing wish?”: “...My important wish is to be delivered from eternal death...”

Bint El-Hajj of Arabia responded to our program entitled “Share your Story.” She tells about her relationship with her very religious Muslim father: “He sees everything in terms of what he says God doesn’t approve... what I wear, my looks, my voice... everything in me must be covered and silenced... I feel like I embody everything shameful... I have become very confused and totally exhausted...”

Thank you for your partnership through prayers and support.

MERF-Canada

Thank you for your faithful support! Please make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.

Online donations can be made to Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Canada) Inc. through

www.merf.org/support
e-transfers:
merfcanada@gmail.com



Remon Atif (left) and Danny Gamal (right) prepared the Arabic material for this update.

RAY OF SUNSHINE

Rachel Vis

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Happy Birthday to James, Jeffrey, Sarah, Charlie, Derrick, Joel, and Julie!

We all wish you the Lord's blessing in the coming year. May he be your guide and strength throughout this year. "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (PHIL 4:13).



When I reached out to Harbour Home to see if Edward would like to be featured in our column, I posed the question to Ed. He was very excited and immediately started practicing the poses and faces he would make for the picture. We decided to sit down, and I asked Ed what he thought was most important for people to know about him. Here is what he came up with.

EDWARD BULTJE

Ed moved to Harbour Home from his family home in Chatham, Ontario. The weather was very gloomy when he moved and at first, he was worried the sun never shone in Hamilton! Thankfully after a while the sun came out and Ed began to settle into his new city, church, and home. In Chatham, Ed has his Mom and Dad and “lots of sisters, lots of brothers, and lots of nieces and nephews.”

Edward loves to help in the sound booth at church—this was the number one bit of information he wanted to share. In his old church he was in the sound booth nearly every service and he’s a whiz with the equipment. Now that he’s moved to Hamilton, he’s doing his best to make friends with the whole sound team at

JULY BIRTHDAYS

church and learn to work their sound board and cameras. Ed is *really* good with technology and machines and he's an ace driver too! He's even helped land an airplane once.

When Ed's not at home, he goes to a day program called Adults in Motion. He really enjoys the busy schedule he has there—sports, volunteering, classes, exercise, and socializing out in the community. Ed loves to keep moving so AIM fits the bill.

One of Ed's favourite things to do is ride bikes. He often takes other Harbour Home residents or staff out for a spin on our tandem trike, or he goes with Harbour Home or AIM to try out all the adaptive bikes at Gage Park. Anything that Ed can do at full speed, he loves!

Ed likes to contribute to his community and values having a job. Currently, Ed volunteers with his boss, Lee, at Hamilton District Christian High School on Tuesday afternoons. Ed helps Lee with cleaning and maintenance.

In his downtime, Ed enjoys building things with his Lego, driving remote controlled cars, dressing up in costumes and making his staff and housemates laugh, and doing Ninja workout videos.

Ed would also like me to tell everyone that his birthday is coming up on June 16 and he is looking forward to presents and would like to go laser tagging with his friends.

We hope this quick snapshot of Ed will encourage others to get to know him better. Ed is a very fun, active, and interesting man. We are so happy that God brought Ed to Harbour Home and that we've been blessed to know him!

We welcome Ed to our list of names for the Ray of Sunshine. His birthday was shared in the June birthdays article, and now you all have the privilege to get to know him a little bit. Welcome Ed! If you want to be added to the list, or know of anyone who you think would like to be added, please contact me as we would love to grow our list of names for *Ray of Sunshine!*

4 James Buikema will be **63**

c/o R.Jager
627 Maple Ave
Burlington, ON
L7R 1M7

11 Jeffrey Jansema will be **27**

158 Lane Road
Dunnville, ON
N1A 2W1

14 Sarah Vandergugten will be **29**

23 Jane Street
Smithville, ON
L0R 2A0

20 Charlie Beintema will be **49**

64 Llydican Ave
Chatham, ON
N7L 2A9

20 Derrick VanderHorst will be **37**

c/o Twin Oaks
3217 Twin Oaks Cres
Burlington, ON
L7M 3A8
Email: derrickvanderhorst@gmail.com

25 Joel Slomp will be **39**

316 Church Rd
Apartment 102
Spruce Grove, AB
T7X 0G2
Email: joelrslomp@gmail.com

25 Julie Ostermeier will be **36**

484 Millen Rd, Unit 5
Stoney Creek, ON
L8E 6G4

CLARION KIDS LORD'S DAY 47

Lord's Day 47 begins by asking: "What is the first petition?" Do you know what a petition is? A petition is a respectful way to ask someone in authority to make a change. Often, this is done by a letter that many people sign. Now, God does not need to change. Instead, we need to ask him to change us! And so the first petition of the Lord's Prayer is "Hallowed be Your name." Hallowed is an old way to say "make holy." Jesus knew that the first thing we need is that God's name becomes more and more holy to us. But how can God's name be made more holy to us? When we learn more about him! The catechism calls this "knowing God rightly." Praising God in our singing and talking is another way to hallow God's name. These are very good things to do, aren't they? So, let's remember to ask God to hallow his name!

Take a *Book of Praise* and look up Lord's Days 47–52. The catechism explains each petition of the Lord's Prayer. Write only the petitions on the lines below. (Hint: the petitions are all the sentences we say in the Lord's Prayer.)

First Petition: _____

Second Petition: _____

Third Petition: _____

Fourth Petition: _____

Fifth Petition: _____

Sixth Petition: _____

Circle the ways that hallow God's name. Cross out the ways that do not hallow God's name.

Know God in the way we want to know him

Sing praises to God with our hearts

Sing without thinking about the words

Think about making all our words and actions pleasing to God

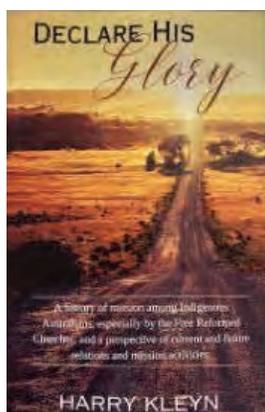
Know God rightly



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 and find your question and an answer in Clarion!

AMANDA DEBOER



DECLARE HIS GLORY

Declare His Glory: A history of mission among Indigenous Australians, especially by the Free Reformed Churches, and a perspective of current and future relations and mission activities, by Harry Kleyn. (Australia: IngramSpark, 2023). \$25.00 AUS.

With so many of those of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia who were involved in Indigenous Australian mission work being related to me by birth or marriage, I was always going to read Harry Kleyn's new book *Declare His Glory*. I'm glad I did, as the book exceeded all expectations. It gave me reason to reflect on our past and present missionary endeavours as well as thinking more deeply about the call to re-engage in mission work in Australia. In the introduction to his book, Kleyn writes,

Through this book, my hope is that the reader might gain a better understanding and empathy for our First Australians, and as a result be better equipped to guard against racism and discrimination. It is also my hope that an appreciation is gained of how God used past mission workers to bring the Gospel to the First Australians. Relating to the Free Reformed Church mission activities, what lessons can be learnt? How should mission activities in Australia be viewed at this present time? Is there still a calling here?

OVERVIEW

The book was written in the first place for members of the FRCA but there is much to be learned about Indigenous Australian history and mission practice which would be of interest and benefit to all. The book has three main sections. Part 1 is titled "The Early Years" and traces the history of Indigenous Australians, especially after colonisation, with a special look at early missionary endeavours. Part 2, the longest section of the book, carefully describes the missionary endeavours of the Free Reformed Churches, first in Roebourne and then the town of Pinjarra. In Part 3, Mr. Kleyn

describes the changing scene for Indigenous Australians, analysing the effects of government policy, as well as outlining contemporary missionary endeavours.

The book displays evidence of a deep level of research and understanding, with many footnotes and a helpful bibliography. I learned a lot from this mission history and gained a deeper appreciation for the work that was done. The mission workers in Pinjarra as well as Albany were unordained men with little formal training and were at the same time busy with young families and secular employment. Challenges included the effects of a troubled history of Aboriginal relations in Australia, the changing government policies that negatively affected Indigenous lives, and the proximity of Pinjarra to the sending church. However, they did so many things right, and their love for Christ, their love for their Indigenous neighbours, and their commitment for Christ to be preached brought them a very long way. The book also gets one to think about how one might bring the Reformed faith in different cultures and contexts even within the same country and how that diversity might look in practice.

Ultimately the work in Pinjarra was closed down, and Kleyn attributes that largely to the sending church's failure to work towards the institution of an Indigenous Australian church in Pinjarra. The expectation for those who came to faith in the Pinjarra mission hall to then be assimilated into the "white" church of Armadale was, for most of them, a bridge too far. At the same time the work was in no way a failure, and Mr. Kleyn outlines many of its fruits, detailing how it was received by those who were touched by it.

LESSONS

Most readers would be particularly interested in Part 2 of the book, the work done by FRCA, but I urge everyone to read the book in its entirety. This book is much more than a history lesson. Through the work of those who went before us, Harry Kleyn gives his own message to the church today. In his concluding chapter, he quoted from a letter to Synod 1983 by mission worker Br. Peter 't Hart in which he “implore[d] Synod to consider our mission task within Australia.” Mr. 't Hart wrote, “Mission work here was started in the sixties because the Churches were convinced that we have a task to bring the Gospel to the Aboriginal people in Australia. It should follow that the closure now of one Mission field in a small part of this vast country cannot mean the end of our task here in Australia” (p. 201). Responding to this, Kleyn ended the main part of his book by writing, “His letter, also recalling the past commitments and focus from the 1960s, fell on deaf ears. The logic appears to have been—we tried and it failed and now the Lord has directed us elsewhere. After nearly 40 years, and with so many more available resources, can that logic still be maintained?” That’s a question that still needs an answer, and it’s a question that might also be asked in places such as Canada and the United States.

The closing down of the work amongst Indigenous Australians opened the way for the FRCA to concentrate more on Papua New Guinea. By God’s providence, I read this book while in PNG, witnessing the ordination of office bearers in the village where my family lived for quite some years. In this way the work has gone on, and God has blessed it. While we do not do it for ourselves, there is much we can learn about ourselves and the gospel through the work of ministry among indigenous cultures. Harry Kleyn’s *Declare His Glory* helps us see both the value and the calling of this work. May his book be the catalyst to start or continue the conversation as to what’s next for Reformed mission work amongst First Nations people. 🇺🇸



Stephan 't Hart

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Melville, AU

pastor@melvillechurch.org.au

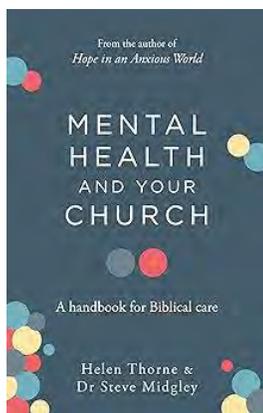
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| | |
|----|---------------|
| >> | MY FRIEND |
| >> | MY BROTHER |
| >> | MY CHILD |
| >> | MY GRANDCHILD |
| >> | MY NEIGHBOUR |





A WISE GUIDE TO THE MENTAL HEALTH MINEFIELD

Mental Health and Your Church: A Handbook for Biblical Care, by Helen Thorne & Dr. Steve Midgley. (Charlotte: The Good Book Company, 2023). Paperback. 191 pages. \$23.49 CDN.

The area of mental health can seem like a dangerous minefield. There are dangers to the left and to the right. And churches don't always lead their members safely through. For example, there are those who believe mental illness is a myth. Medication is just a get-rich-quick scheme for Big Pharma. All we need is in the Bible. But on the other side, there are those who believe the Bible has little or nothing to offer to those suffering from mental illness. They only need medical help, or they only need what various therapies can offer. *Mental Health and Your Church* was written to guide churches through the complexities associated with mental illness.

CONTENTS

The authors write that the aim of their book is “not to turn you into mental-health professionals but to equip you with knowledge and wisdom, and to help grow that attitude of love and compassion towards those who struggle” (p. 17). To achieve this aim, the book is broken down into three sections: Understanding Mental Illness, What Can We Do?, and Caring in Practice. Woven through the book are the stories of five people. Chi struggles with severe anxiety, Andy with clinical depression, Siobhan with addictions/substance abuse, Ben with psychosis, and Kelly is trying to help her anorexic daughter. Each chapter finishes with Questions for Reflection and it also includes a section of Further Resources at the back of the book.

Mental Health and Your Church has several strengths leading me to recommend it. One is a clear commitment to the Word of God as our ultimate authority. Another is a solid understanding of how the gospel relates to mental illness. But the authors also help us understand the complicated nature of mental illness. There is always a spiritual component to every struggle in this broken world, but often the way forward is more than a spiritual solution. Christians may make use of the insights of modern medicine and psychology. When it comes to the latter, Thorne and Midgley note

that “secular therapies can offer vital help for people in distress. What may be wise, however, is that those receiving such therapy find a godly Christian friend to help them reflect on the help they are getting” (p. 63).

BENEFITS

Additionally, I really appreciate the way the authors discuss trauma. This cannot be overlooked in discussions about mental health. So many Christians have experienced traumatic events like childhood sexual abuse or family violence. Sadly, well-intentioned church leaders have sometimes retraumatized struggling members. The authors write, “Trauma is a complex area. It would be deeply unwise for the average pastor or congregation member to encourage someone to relive a traumatic event to try to address flashbacks” (p. 105). They insist (rightly) that trauma needs to be addressed by “someone with significant training and relevant experience” (p. 106).

These authors bring a heap of knowledge and experience to their readers. Steve Midgley is currently a pastor, but previously worked as a medical doctor in psychiatry. His co-author Helen Thorne is a counsellor. Together they've written a great book with many helpful nuggets of wisdom for church leaders and members alike. It's not a technical, scholarly sort of book—it's just written for everyday Christians. If you want to learn how better to support brothers and sisters struggling with mental illness, helping rather than hurting, this practical guide would be a fantastic start. 

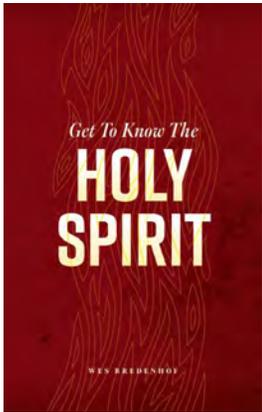


Wes Bredenhof

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Launceston

bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca



COME PRAISE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Get To Know The Holy Spirit, by Wes Bredenhof. (Neerlandia: Providence Books & Press, 2023).
Paperback. 139 pages. \$18.00 CDN.

Understanding and describing the triune God, as revealed in the Scriptures, took up a lot of time and energy in the first centuries after Christ's ascension to heaven. The development and adoption of the early creeds (Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian) went a long way to help the church have a more solid footing to explain this supernatural reality. And yet, many centuries later, members of the church can still struggle with understanding how to worship this one God who exists co-equally as Father, Son, and Spirit. Pastor Wes Bredenhof's latest book opens the door to the conversation that this confusion is often connected with an anxiety or aversion to worshipping the Holy Spirit. God the Father as Creator, yes. God the Son as Redeemer, understandable. But God the Spirit seems to lurk in the shadows more as a force and facilitator, indifferent to our worship and praise. The Pentecostal insistence on the continuation of the outpouring of the Spirit in tongues and miracles likely contributes to this hesitation around worshipping the Spirit. Inspired by a sermon series he heard from a more experienced co-pastor in his early years in ministry, and further explored in his own preaching series more recently, Bredenhof offers this twice-sifted work as a way for God's people to move past just *knowing about* the Holy Spirit to *knowing* him personally as holy God in a worshipful and meaningful relationship.

The book is written in a conversational tone, combining scriptural teaching with pastoral observations and anecdotes alongside clear explanations and encouragements for daily life and worship. It also draws from a variety of Reformed confessions as well as the works of early church fathers. If you have read any of Bredenhof's other books or articles you will recognize his signature blend of a breadth of study accompanied by bold exposition laced with pastoral care and concern for Christ's church relayed in a direct yet personal way. The book is divided into seven chapters, addressing the Holy Spirit as he is revealed in Scripture, in his relationships, and in his works. A four-part appendix helps to go a little deeper into theological distinctions about the Spirit; it also addresses

praying and singing to the Spirit, the outpouring of the Spirit and missions, and blasphemy against the Spirit. A lot is packed into a relatively short book!

The highlight for me was dwelling upon the creedal description of the Spirit as "the Lord and Giver of life." Bredenhof describes the Holy Spirit's role in the creation of the world, and more particularly as the life-giving Spirit for Adam in the beginning. He is also the mysterious partner in the miraculous conception of Jesus in Mary's womb, leading to the birth of the second Adam and ultimately also to his resurrection from the dead. The Spirit is also the prime mover in our own rebirth, regeneration, and resurrection. He is intrinsically involved in the marvelous creative and redemptive works of God! He continues to work in our lives in a very intimate and extraordinary way by means of word and sacrament in the maternal embrace of Christ's church, preparing us for kingdom work. He is most worthy to be praised!

This book reminded me of a sermon I heard in my youth delivered by the late Rev. G. Van Dooren under the theme "Do you love the Holy Spirit?" It also made me reflect that my wife has always been more cognizant of the importance of a relationship with the Holy Spirit than I have. She has often questioned if I had left room for the Spirit, if I was following the Spirit's leading, or commented that the application of a particular sermon was impossible without the Holy Spirit, yet he was not mentioned. Perhaps knowing the Holy Spirit takes greater spiritual sensitivity! *Get To Know the Holy Spirit* can be a great boost and enhancement to your own worship of God and will also serve as a good resource for sharing, discussion, and prayer for a family, a small group, or a Bible study fellowship. Why not celebrate Pentecost this year by treating yourself to this enlightening and encouraging book? 📖



Rick Ludwig
Streetlight Christian Church
rludwig@kitchingsteepandludwig.com

