



Clarion

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what's inside

Issue 11 finds us deep into the summer months here in the northern hemisphere. I hope that as you rest on your holiday you may also be spiritually refreshed with the encouragement offered in the meditative pieces, “The Ministry of Small Things” and “Tired of Being Alone.” Jason Van Vliet’s editorial encourages us to re-think both the wonder and the benefit of worship on the day of rest. And if you want to enjoy some pleasant news read Dick Wynia’s overview of what took place at the CRCNA’s Synod 2024—something unexpected from the Lord’s hand.

Encouragement is needed because life is a struggle, no matter who you are. Young adults feeling uncertain about their life’s calling will benefit from a book reviewed by Wes Bredenhof. Mothers (and fathers) who’ve endured the agony of a child dying will want to look at the book reviewed by Gloria Faber. Eric Onderwater introduces us to Life Renewal, a program any struggler can take to learn how to examine the sins of one’s heart and find renewal in the blood and Spirit of Christ. We can certainly all pray for fellow Christians in situations of oppression, like those who live in Eritrea as relayed to us in Andrew Douma’s *Persecution of Christians*.

Educating ourselves in how church life works is also a beneficial thing and Jan DeGelder’s article on “attestations” may give you a new understanding of what such documents are all about. Tim Schouten enlightens us on the multi-variegated tasks of a pastor-missionary as he experiences them in Prince George. Did you know that there’s a new congregation in Caledonia? You can read all about it plus catch three interactions from various readers, clippings from classis press releases, and another Lord’s Day lesson for the kids.

September busyness will be here soon, so with *Clarion* in hand may you enjoy some rest and refreshment!

Peter Holtvlüwer

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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:

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

ONCEING HALVING

Sometimes we make up words. Dr. Seuss, the author of many children’s books, had a knack for this. For example, in *Hunches in Bunches*, we read this classic line: “That mind of yours . . . is frightfully ga-fluppted.” What exactly does “ga-fluppted” mean? It doesn’t sound very good.

Some made-up words take on a life of their own. “Onceing” is such a term. I could not find “onceing” in a dictionary. The closest was “oncer,” a person who does something once. In church life, though, onceing refers to the habit of attending one worship service instead of two on Sunday. According to one source, in North American congregations that have two worship services, on average only 50% of their members attend both. Hopefully, the attendance numbers for afternoon worship services in our Reformed churches are not that low. But they certainly could be better!

In part seeing less people in the pews on Sunday afternoon is understandable. Babies need to nap, and some elderly may no longer have the necessary stamina. If we are honest with ourselves, though, much more is going on here. Too many church members are content with coming to worship in the morning and then spending the rest of the Lord’s Day on leisure or laundry. Why? Many factors may play a role, but insufficient zeal for the Lord and for worshipping him is often part of the mix. Without downplaying that sinful attitude in any way, I am suggesting that our made-up word “onceing” is not helping either. Let’s swap it out for a real word that aligns better with God’s Holy Word.

HALF DAY

If “onceing” means going to the *first* worship service, people begin to ask, “Why do we even have a *second* worship service? Where does the Bible speak about going to church *twice*?” Children may wonder, “When we eat a meal, we don’t have to have seconds. So why do we have to have a second worship service?” Or perhaps we assume that having two worship services is nothing more a (Canadian) Reformed custom.

But much more is at stake here than church culture or history. Let’s take a closer look at God’s Word. The Holy Spirit speaks consistently and repeatedly about the *day* of rest, the Sabbath *day*, the holy *day*, the first *day*, and the Lord’s *Day* (Gen 2:3, Lev 23:3, Neh 13:19, Acts 20:7, 1 Cor 16:2, Rev 1:10, and many more). Not

surprisingly, then, Lord’s Day 38 of our catechism teaches us that “especially on the *day* of rest, I diligently attend the church of God.”

Each week again one day of rest and worship stands in contrast to six days of labour. The fourth commandment is clear: “Six days you shall labour . . . but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.” The prophet Isaiah adds that this holy day is not for our pleasures and pursuits but a day to delight in the LORD (58:13).

But consider the irony here. If you go into work only for Friday morning, do you say, “I’m onceing”? No, you say, “I’m putting in a *half day* on Friday.” For the six workdays, we all understand: the norm is a day, morning and afternoon; the exception is a half-day. Yet when it comes to the one worship day, something flips in our minds, and all too easily we begin thinking that a morning worship service is the norm, and the second one is a bonus. Talking about onceing is not helping; it may even reinforce the faulty thinking.

Whether we worship or work, a day is a day. If we only show up for the morning, frankly speaking, we are just putting in a half day. We are halving. (By the way, “halving” is in the dictionary.) Unless you have a legitimate reason, showing up to work for just a half day will upset your boss, and rightly so. Will our heavenly Father be pleased if we only show up to worship for a half day?

WHOLE FEAST

In Leviticus 23 the LORD calls the day of rest one of “my appointed feasts” (v. 2). What generosity our God extends to us: one whole feast day every week!

If your earthly parents invite you to celebrate, let’s say, their fiftieth wedding anniversary, it would be rude to respond, “Sure, Dad and Mom, I’ll show up for a while. I’ll halve your feast.” On the Lord’s Day we commemorate an event far grander than a wedding anniversary. We celebrate the resurrection of our Saviour, the full forgiveness of all our sins, our adoption as God’s dear children and heirs, and the hope of eternal glory. Why halve that? Enjoy the whole feast! 



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TIRED OF BEING ALONE

*There is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me;
no one cares for my soul*

– PSALM 142:4

In the alley way behind my house there is a suicide note scrawled in black marker on white brick. It is a final, resolute message from a despairing young man. The note declares his intentions, and then ends with these words: *I have not one single reason to want to live right now. By 12:00 AM I will be dead. Tired of being alone. Goodbye.*

Tired of being alone. Those words grab me by the throat every time I read them. Who was this young man? Why was he so alone? Did no one see him? Did no one care for him? Suicide always leaves a wake of unanswerable questions.

You may or may not be familiar with suicidal ideation, but you probably know what it is like to be lonely. Maybe you have few friends. Maybe your family doesn't seem to understand you. You can feel alone even when sitting in a full church pew, or when lying in bed next to your spouse. We aren't all scrawling last words in back alleys, but many of us are *tired of being alone*.

David, the author of Psalm 142, knew what that was like. (Maybe you want to pause and read the whole psalm before continuing.) The psalm's title says he was hiding in a cave when he wrote this song. Lonely lyrics etched in the darkness. He is in trouble (v. 2) of some sort and his spirit is fainting (v. 3). He is feeling very low (v. 6). His enemies (probably King Saul's henchmen) are out to get him, and they are stronger than he is (vv. 3, 6). But here is the worst of it: David looks around and sees that there is no one who is paying any attention to him. No one cares for him, he has nowhere to go for safety, no one to be his refuge. *Tired of being alone.*

What do you do when you are tired of being alone? We each need to figure out how we can spend time with other people, especially fellow believers who can encourage us. David hopes for the day when "the righteous will surround me" (v. 7). And if you have been thinking about suicide, you certainly need to talk to someone

as soon as possible. If you don't have anyone you can trust, and you live in Canada, you can call 9-8-8 to talk to a Crisis Helpline.

Prayer is a crisis hotline of a spiritual sort. David pens a pleading psalm as a heart cry to the LORD, telling God everything that is going on. Take the time to detail your loneliness to the LORD, to let it all out. Scrawl out your loneliness, not in black marker on white brick, but with spoken words on bent knees. Don't write a last message, pray another prayer. He will hear you.

I'm not naively saying that a single prayer will fix all your loneliness. But it is where the fixing will start. We can see that right in this psalm. David looked around in the lonely darkness and said, "No refuge remains to me" (v. 4) and his spirit fainted toward death. But then in prayer he looked up to the Lord of light and life and said: "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living" (v. 5).

Are you living in a dark cave? Are you wandering the back alleys of despair? Are you tired of being alone? Things can get better. There is someone who takes notice of you. There is someone who is a refuge for you. There is someone who cares for your soul. 

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Read Psalm 142, imagining it on the lips of Jesus. What does this teach you?
2. Read 1 Peter 5:6-7 and answer these questions: What must you do? Why? What will be the result?
3. Look up and read the hymn: *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*.



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The Need For Life Renewal

ERIC ONDERWATER

In Canadian Reformed churches across the country, you will find quite a few Life Renewal programs. Many of our congregations contain a growing number of Life Renewal graduates, facilitators, and coordinators—as hundreds, if not thousands of our members have taken the course or are involved in it.



LIFE RENEWAL

For those of you who aren't familiar with Life Renewal, the program is an adapted form of Freedom Sessions, a 28-week course created by a man named Ken Dyck with the help of his wife Bonnie. Over many years Ken and Bonnie built the course up as part of their ministry at a church near Vancouver, BC. The course is based on the twelve-step methodology of Alcoholics Anonymous. However, while AA tries to operate without any reference to Christianity, Freedom Sessions/Life Renewal recovers the original Christian ethos of the twelve steps. The course argues that one must have a relationship with Jesus Christ to find true healing, and the course is filled with Bible teaching and references.

Given the spread of the course in our churches, it's good to think through why this course is so attractive, and why so many benefit from it. This question is important, as some of us do have lingering questions about the course. For example: Is this course biblical and/or Reformed? Does the course take responsibility away from the office bearers and risk becoming a church within the church? Does the course risk taking on therapeutic categories, unwittingly taking on liberal Christian categories?

MY JOURNEY IN THE COURSE

I can say the course has been a blessing to me personally. I took the course in fourth year seminary at the Brantford location. At the time, I was dangerously close to burnout. My wife and I were about to have our fourth child in four years, I had been preaching every weekend in a different church, classis exams were on

the horizon, and various churches had been reaching out with call inquiries, etc. And school was already a full-time occupation.

It all imploded in September that year and I developed a strange burning sensation in my head, called paresthesia. When Dr. Smith, my faculty mentor, heard of it, he had me immediately cancel everything extracurricular, and do nothing except school and family life. I'm still deeply grateful for his decisive action, as it brought me back from the brink.

But pulling back was not enough. That was only a band-aid. What I needed was a complete reassessment of what my life was about. That's where Life Renewal came in. In Life Renewal I discovered my idols. Deep down, I believed I could do everything in my own power. My own intelligence, hard work, and skill would accomplish what God asked of me, I thought. This made me perfectionistic, intolerant, and proud. Oddly, I also had a problem with avoidance, as I avoided doing anything that I couldn't "win" or "succeed" at (by my own twisted standards).

I believed in Jesus Christ, but I did not believe that I needed Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit in my daily life. Of course, in that way of thinking, prayer and personal time with Christ was also irrelevant, because I didn't really need God on a daily basis. I already had what I needed in myself.

One can only imagine how deadly such beliefs would be in ministry. And how could someone make it through seminary with

You may have lingering questions about Life Renewal

such a twisted worldview? It's an example of how easily we avoid repentance and change as Christians, and how easily we rationalize how everything is OK, even when it is not.

That's not to say that Life Renewal solved the problem. These patterns are still a struggle in life today, even after almost five years of ministry. But Life Renewal revealed the problem and the patterns so that I could at least begin the battle. And it showed me the utter bankruptcy of trying to fix anything in our own strength. Nothing true and lasting can be done apart from Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Whatever is done apart from him is human and but vapour.

REAL CHANGE

Now, you might argue that I could have realized these things apart from Life Renewal. Perhaps. But it is so tempting for us sinful humans to avoid true repentance and change. Our capacity for self-delusion is enormous.

Life Renewal, however, is set up to box us in with the gospel such that we cannot escape Christ and our need for repentance. It is a relentless 28-week journey, week after week. Every session begins with an hour or longer video of teaching—teaching that is so practical that the participant cannot avoid applying it to oneself. The session continues with small group, in which it is necessary to be vulnerable with other struggling participants, as you explain how you are (or are not) applying the teaching. And yes, there is homework, and significant work is required in doing an “inventory” of your life and so on.

It takes superhuman hardness of heart to try to survive the course without meeting Jesus Christ for the first time, or intensively renewing one's relationship with him, repenting before him, and learning to forgive. It is a testament to the power of sin that some graduate without changing, but most of us humble Christians aren't hardened enough to succeed at that. Most participants break down and let Jesus into the details of their life, and therefore find the healing sought for so many years.

THE PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

Plenty more can be said about the course. It is not Reformed, if by Reformed you mean confessional. But it is thoroughly biblical,

which means it is implicitly Reformed, even if there are some interpretations of the Bible that could use more work. That said, the Life Renewal board has done good work on improving those things. The course is not a ministry of the church, officially, although members of the church run it and attend it, so in that sense it is a ministry of the church. Also, the course is not guaranteed to succeed—participants only gain what they put in.

The value of the course, however, is that it confronts you, through Scripture, with King Jesus. It preaches him into even the smallest details of your life. It brings together struggling Christians to walk alongside you in the journey. And it does all of this while costing you very little money, and without requiring years of expensive counselling from a professional (which, to be sure, may be needed for some—also or instead). It offers you *the chance to give as you heal, as you walk alongside others*. This is not to be overlooked—to give as you heal helps one avoid the trap of a victim mentality. Even though there isn't supposed to be any “crosstalk”—healing others—there very much is an aspect of walking alongside one another in the small group.

The point, as always, is that we need Jesus Christ. And that is what the course does its utmost to give. Anything that gives us Christ is something we should be hungry and thirsty for. *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied*.

Therefore, the course can be of benefit to any person, as a means of discipleship. It is not only for those who are struggling, or for those with so-called big problems. In Brampton we try to have all our office bearers take the course before serving in office. The best preparation for an office bearer is to intensively renew his commitment to Christ, in such a way that all of life is inventoried and a thorough clean up is conducted. And isn't that what elders and deacons need most—healing for their own souls? One can only give what one has.

To finish, Life Renewal is not a cure-all, nor is it perfect. It is simply a way of renewing one's relationship with Christ and growing in him. It is not a substitute for preaching, church membership, or prayer, but a valuable supplement. And if used to help foster what we all need in life—*growth in Christ*—then we should and ought to use it with benefit. 📖



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The Ministry of

SMALL THINGS

REUBEN BREDENHOF

It has become a Christian motto: “Attempt great things for God.” Some folks are even surprised that this saying isn’t in the Bible! As disciples of Christ, we’ve been encouraged to aim high. We should be ambitious builders of God’s kingdom and bold wreckers of Satan’s strongholds. Go on a mission trip. Give away your fortune. Become a street evangelist.

There is something commendable about wanting to rise above the comfortable and predictable: “I want to do something *big* for God.” It is far better than making an idol of our personal comfort and ease. But we don’t have to be notable and do notable things. In the pursuit of meaningful service for the Lord, oftentimes the little things are the big things. I’d like to illustrate that with a reflection on pastoral ministry.



THE DEPARTING MINISTER

My wife and I and our family have had the burden of saying farewell to three congregations over the past twenty years. After a period of ministry in one city or another, God led our path somewhere new. The many joys of the bond between a pastor (and his family) and a congregation are substituted for the sharp pains of parting: tears, hugs, sadness—but also words of mutual love and appreciation.

Reflecting on these farewells, it has struck me that for many people, it's the little things that stand out. The congregation wants to say thank you for the work done over the past five or eight years, and what are things they mention?

"Thanks for checking in on me."

"Thanks for always remembering my birthday."

"I liked how you took me out for coffee."

"You took the time to answer our questions in Catechism class."

"Thanks for baptizing our boys."

"You preached for us, week after week."

"Thanks for listening."

It doesn't sound like much. It's texting someone to see how they're doing since their knee operation. It's showing up when there's a family crisis, and praying together, and reading a psalm. It's spending an hour with a young person to hear about their life. It's putting in the work on your two sermons, and then preaching them on Sunday. It's asking the right question on a pastoral visit.

There is nothing too exciting or extraordinary about these things. In my estimation, most of these things aren't that hard to do. Not that I did them flawlessly, of course, or always cheerfully, but I did them consistently. Even so, don't I want to be remembered for more?

AN ORDINARY MINISTRY

Like the rest of us, pastors aren't immune to the temptations of pride. So, at the end of our ministry in a congregation, we'd like to be appreciated for the impressive works where we felt that our skill was really on display: "Thank you for that brilliant sermon four years ago on the Prodigal Son—I'll remember that message for the rest of my life." Or, "It was your article on evangelism that

God uses our apparently insignificant acts of care and our relatively minor moments of service in order to bless and help his church

inspired me to go to seminary to become a missionary.” “Your book on gratitude was probably the best book I’ve ever read.” It’s humbling, but it turns out that it’s not these kind of works that have the greatest impact.

You could call it “the ministry of small things.” Our apparently insignificant acts of care and our relatively minor moments of service—these are what God loves to use in order to bless and help his church.

You open Scripture and read a brief passage with someone in order to counsel them: it seems like a small thing, but it’s not. You spend time with an elderly sister as she pours out her sorrows, mostly just listening and offering a few words to encourage: it seems like a small thing, but it’s not. You pray with a family, bringing their worries and sadnesses before the throne of God: it seems like a small thing, but it’s not. You reach out to say hello to a lonely brother, to assure him that you’re praying for him (because you are, right?), and to offer a meal prepared by your wife: these seem like small things, but they’re not. Somehow, this is what endures: the faithful ministering of Christ’s love and Christ’s Word to Christ’s people.

FAITHFUL IN A VERY LITTLE

The “ministry of small things” is consistent with how the Bible teaches us to think about God’s kingdom. God has always been accomplishing a lot with a little. For instance, in his parable of the yeast, Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven starts with something as modest as a dash of leaven. Yeast is practically invisible, and you don’t see it working, yet as it slowly permeates the dough, it has a formidable impact (Matt 13:22). Our little works, patiently and consistently done, can bring about something big.

Even Jesus himself didn’t look like much (Isa 53:2), and his gospel doesn’t sound like much (1 Cor 1:18), nor are most of his people remarkable by worldly standards (1 Cor 1:26). Yet God has changed the course of world history through the person and work of his Son, and even through the words and deeds of his church.

This scriptural pattern gives a different outlook on our work. God calls us to faithfulness in whatever labours he has assigned,

whether apparently significant or seemingly small. In fact, it’s our diligence in the small things that speaks to our readiness to take on something more; Jesus said, “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much” (Luke 16:10).

IMPLICATIONS

So, what should we learn from this? There are implications here for each of us, whether ministers or not, office bearers or not.

But let me start with the elders and deacons. They have a ministry among the Lord’s people. Sometimes their ministry is marked by profound joy and satisfaction, and other times this work knows untold stress, frustration, and sadness. You don’t know what to say in this visit, the next step isn’t at all clear, and you feel utterly inadequate. But instead of feeling the pressure to say it perfectly, or trying to meet a person’s deepest needs, be sure that God can definitely use something little, someone weak. You might only drop in for a half-hour visit and pray together, but you can have confidence that God will use this. If you have read the word of Christ, shared the love of Christ, something good can happen.

It’s applicable to others too. You might not have a “ministry” in the normal use of the term, but you do have a task from the Lord. He has put you where you are—at school, in your church, in your home, in your neighborhood and workplace—for the purpose of worshiping and serving. Your calling is to love God with your whole heart, and to love other people sincerely. So, show up. Work well. Take the time to listen to someone and to love someone. See where God is working.

The regular rounds of life aren’t very exciting. Most of our days are filled with the mundane: another tedious work meeting, more laundry to fold, four more hours volunteering, another two dozen children to teach about Confederation. It’s a lot of little things, but this is what God has put in front of us today. By doing it with all our heart, we show that it’s the Lord Christ we are serving.

It’s an act of faith, believing he can use our time and love and service for a purpose that is bigger than us—believing, and then going out and doing. Through our ministry of small things, God can do something great. 



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CRTS

IS GOING TO NEED NEW

Professors

JOE POPPE

The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary continues to receive many blessings from the hands of the Lord. In the past number of years, the seminary has had to deal with the health concerns of one of our professors, COVID-19 disruptions, and the need to vacate our premises for a building renovation. In contrast, the 2023-24 academic year was quiet and gave opportunity to settle into the regular tasks of teaching and learning. For some years the Board of Governors has been quite concerned about student enrollment numbers, but the Lord has continued to bless us with men eager to prepare themselves for service in his kingdom. God is good, and we are grateful for his abiding care over us!

FACULTY NEEDS

Yet, as seminary we are facing a new challenge. In about a decade, we will require men to serve as professors at our seminary. If the Lord gives health and strength and allows our current faculty to teach until retirement age, we will need replacements for three of our professors in 2035/36. That sounds like it's a long time away, but when you consider that men serving as professors need to undergo further studies, we don't have a long lead time to prepare. And, of course, retirements will continue at regular intervals after that. The need for new professors is occasional but ongoing, and critically important for the service of our seminary to the churches.

To serve as faculty at our seminary a person needs to meet certain requirements. A professor needs to be a member in good standing of one of the Canadian Reformed Churches or of a church with whom we maintain ecclesiastical fellowship. Generally, they are expected to have a doctoral degree in the particular area of biblical or theological studies in which they would teach. Above all they need to be godly and faithful men in whom the fruit of the Spirit is evident. They need to have the ability to study and an aptitude to teach the next generation of gospel ministers. Other qualifications to be considered include the candidate's character, his knowledge of the subjects to be taught, and his experience in the ministry of the Word. Since it takes much time and effort to be properly qualified to serve as a professor at our seminary, the Board of Governors prefers to nominate men under the age of 50 to serve as professors.

ENCOURAGEMENT & SUPPORT

As Board of Governors, we have sent letters to each of our church councils, asking them to consider if their minister, or a minister that they know well, might be suited to serve one day as a professor at our seminary. If so, we encouraged church councils to have a discussion with such a minister to encourage him to consider this. Pursuing a doctoral degree takes years of study, and if we as churches don't actively promote this, we could be in a very difficult situation sooner than we think.

We recognize that encouraging and supporting your local minister in pursuing further studies comes with a cost. He will need time to do so, and some of that time will inevitably come from fulfilling his current responsibilities in the local church where he serves. One of the reasons for writing this article is to help give church members some understanding about why a local church council may support their minister in further studies, despite the cost to the local congregation. The simple fact is that if no one pursues further studies to get an advanced degree, CRTS will not be able to continue to train men to serve in the ministry.

If there are ministers who are pursuing further studies, it may be possible for the churches in the local classis to provide some support to the local church whose minister is studying. Perhaps there is opportunity to relieve such a minister of some of the extra classical responsibilities, or to be willing to engage in some extra pulpit exchanges to make time available for study.

Upon graduating from seminary, some of our students have gone directly into further studies for an advanced degree. As such, they do not have the support of a local church. As churches it would be good to consider whether it might be possible to call such men to serve in a half-time position in the ministry while they complete

their studies. Some of our churches have needs that are difficult for their current pastor to meet, but do not require a second pastor fulltime. For men studying for an advanced degree, the opportunity to continue with their studies while gaining valuable experience in the ministry could be a win-win situation.

Pursuing further studies also comes with financial expenses. The Board's finance and property committee has had a brief discussion on the wisdom of establishing a bursary fund that churches can apply to for support in helping their minister to pursue further studies (if necessary). Such a fund could also be used to support students who pursue an advanced degree after completing their Master of Divinity degree (before entering the ministry). The Board has solicited feedback on the merits of establishing such a bursary fund from the church councils. They have also sought input on how such a fund should be supported (assessments, deacons, (classical) needy student fund(s), and/or other donations). These matters are still under consideration, but it is good to be aware that there are financial costs to pursuing further studies.

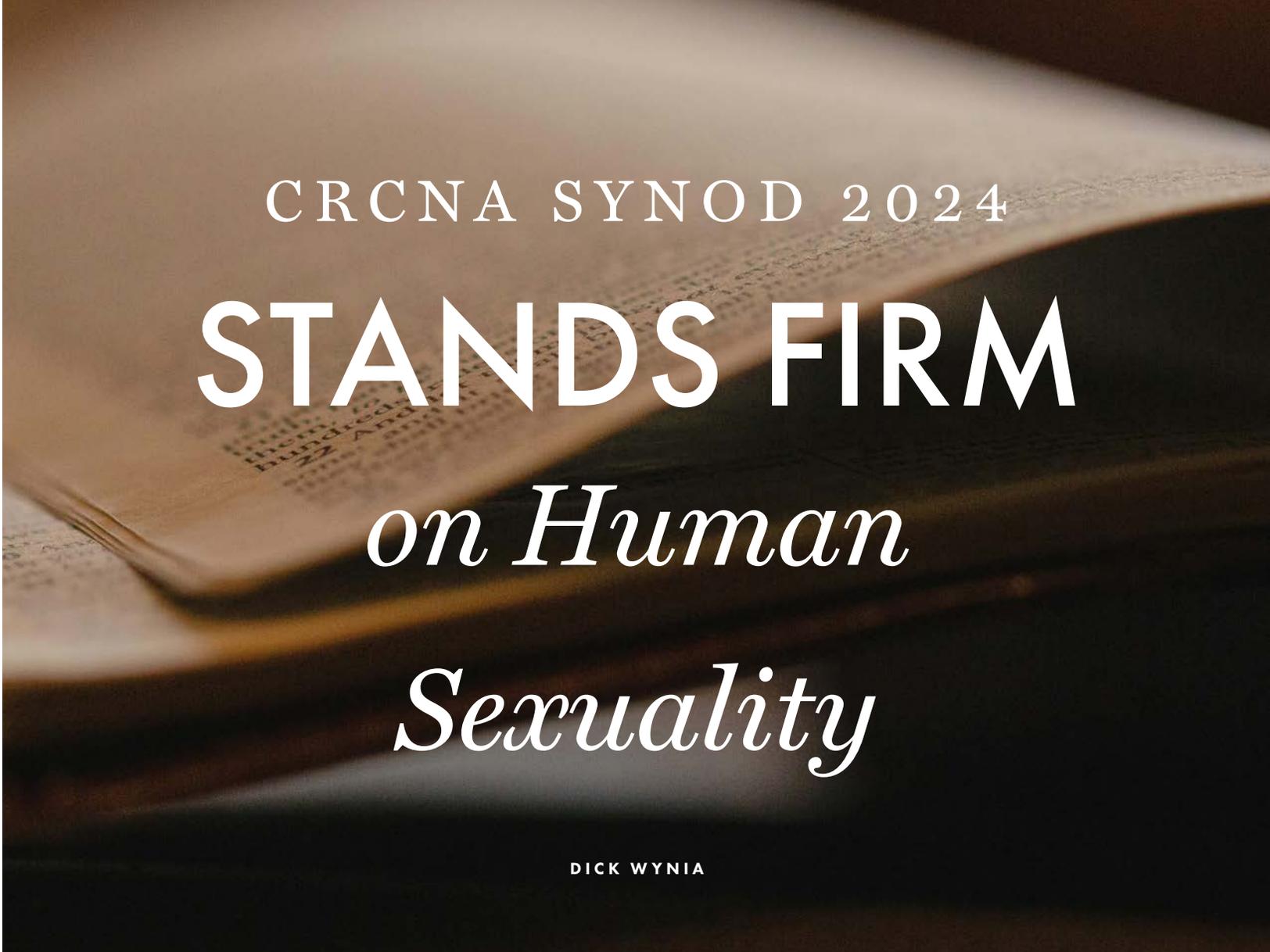
There is one final thing that should be noted as we consider having men study for an advanced degree, with a goal of being available to serve as a professor at CRTS. The successful completion of an advanced degree does not guarantee that one will be appointed as a faculty member at CRTS. There are times when there is more than one candidate available for a particular vacancy that needs to be filled. If someone has specialized in Old Testament studies, they may not be suitable to fill a vacancy for a New Testament professor. We need to remain humble. We can plan, but ultimately God directs our steps.

Please continue to pray for the ongoing work at CRTS. If you know a minister who you think might be well suited for further studies with the potential of teaching at our seminary, encourage him to consider this. We trust that the Lord will continue to provide his churches with gospel preachers, and with men to equip them for that glorious task. 

On behalf of the Board of Governors,
Joe Poppe (secretary)



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CRCNA SYNOD 2024

STANDS FIRM

on Human Sexuality

DICK WYNIA

Like so many mainline churches in the West today, the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) has been grappling with issues relating to human sexuality, and especially with those related to homosexual sex and transgenderism. Since the CRCNA has been moving steadily in a “progressive” direction in the last forty years or so, the expectation of many was that the denomination would follow the trend seen among the mainline churches which allow and even bless members’ living in same sex relationships. The CRCNA synod of 2022, however, took a surprising stand on the issue, declaring homosexual sex to be sin against the seventh commandment, something upheld by the synod of 2023 (the CRCNA holds a general synod annually in June). All eyes were on the recent 2024 synod to see if there would be any change in course but Synod 2024 stood firm in upholding the biblical teaching on human sexuality. Along the way the CRCNA has also reaffirmed its commitment to confessional subscription

for office bearers. As Canadian Reformed believers it is good to take notice of these developments and reflect on what can be learned from them.

BACKGROUND TO SYNOD 2024

Synod 2016 had appointed a study committee which was mandated to “articulate a foundation-laying biblical theology of human sexuality that pays particular attention to biblical conceptions of gender and sexuality.” That synod expressed the hope that the report would ultimately provide the denomination with “guidance that explains how the gospel provides redemptive affirmation and hope for those experiencing sexual questioning, temptation, and sin.”¹ The committee’s findings were published in November 2020 as *The Human Sexuality Report* and affirmed the scriptural basis of the church’s historical teaching on sexual sin, including premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography,

¹ <https://www.thebanner.org/news/2016/06/synod-2016-appoints-a-committee-to-study-human-sexuality>



and homosexual sex. Reactions have been strong, particularly in response to what the report says about homosexual sex and what the church's position on homosexual practice should be.

Because Synod 2021 was canceled due to COVID-19, the report was taken up by Synod 2022, which adopted almost all of its recommendations. The synod agreed that homosexual sex is among the practices characterized as "unchastity" in answer 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism and declared that "the church's teaching on premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography and homosexual sex . . . has confessional status."² Although the committee had also recommended that a footnote be added to question and answer 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism making that explicit, the synod did not adopt that recommendation.

Previous synods (1973, 2002, and 2016) had made decisions about homosexuality and same sex marriage, but those decisions "were recommended to the churches as pastoral advice." Those decisions were to be considered settled and binding, but "the nature and authority of those decisions and the measure of agreement expected were defined by synod itself as pastoral advice or pastoral guidance." According to a document published by Synod 2022, its own decision "raises the level of agreement expected on this

matter by identifying it as an interpretation of a confession that has confessional status."³

IMPLICATIONS FOR OFFICE BEARERS

Office bearers in the CRCNA are required to sign the "Covenant for Officebearers" (i.e. the Form of Subscription), which says among other things: "We also affirm three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, whose doctrines fully agree with the Word of God. these confessions continue to define the way we understand Scripture, direct the way we live in response to the gospel, and locate us within the larger body of Christ. Grateful for these expressions of faith, we promise to be formed and governed by them. We heartily believe and will promote and defend their doctrines faithfully, conforming our preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living to them."⁴

Since the denomination's adopted position on homosexual practice has confessional status, Synod 2022's decision has significant implications for office bearers who disagree with it. Disagreement with that position constitutes disagreement with the church's confessions, and renders those who disagree with it

² https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/summary_human_sexuality_report_2020.pdf

³ <https://www.crcna.org/synod/hsr-faq>

⁴ <https://www.crcna.org/resources/church-resources/liturgical-forms/ordination-installation/covenant-officebearers>

ineligible to serve in church offices. There are also churches in the denomination which identify themselves as “affirming” (i.e. they accept those in same sex relationships as members in good standing). Some churches have ordained members who are living in same-sex relationships. The decisions of Synod 2022 raised questions about whether such churches can continue as congregations of the CRCNA.

Synod 2023 received numerous overtures in response to the decisions of Synod 2022. Many of the overtures asked synod to reverse the decisions that homosexuality is “unchastity” according to answer 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism, and that the church’s position on homosexuality therefore has confessional status. Twenty-one overtures were deferred to Synod 2024, in order to ensure that there was plenty of time to consider them carefully. Some of them “ask about seating delegates at classis and synod meetings. Some raise questions concerning discipline of office-bearers, councils, and classes unwilling to comply with synodical decisions.”⁵ Some of the overtures argued that *gravamina* (plural of *gravamen*, a Latin word which means complaint or accusation) provided a mechanism by which members who disagreed with the church’s position could nonetheless be allowed to be ordained, or continue in office. Thus, much of the discussion at Synod 2024 centred on the consideration of these overtures, and especially on the intent and function of *gravamina*.

WHAT IS A “GRAVAMEN”?

The Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government says, “When a person presents a difficulty with or an objection to some aspect of the creedal standards, that is called a *gravamen*.” It states that the CRCNA Synod of 1976 identified two basic types of *gravamina*. First, there is a “*confessional-difficulty gravamen*: a gravamen in which a subscriber expresses his personal difficulty with the confessions, but does not call for a revision of the confessions,” and second, there is a “*confessional-revision gravamen*: a gravamen in which a subscriber makes a specific recommendation for revision of the confessions.”⁶

The position taken in some of the overtures was that once a member had informed the consistory of their personal difficulty with the confession’s condemnation of homosexual sex as unchastity, the consistory had the freedom to allow them to continue to serve as office bearers. Rev. Aaron Vriesman in a recent article in

Christian Renewal labeled this the “*gravamen* loophole.”⁷ Indeed, as Synod 2024 opened, when delegates were asked to stand to indicate their agreement with the confessions of the church, a number of delegates did not stand, due to their objection to the confession’s teaching on homosexual practice. They believed that their status as office bearers and as delegates to the synod was protected by the provision for *gravamina*.

The synod therefore had to deal with this thorny question in its opening days. After considering the function of the *gravamen* in the CRCNA, the committee of pre-advice appointed by synod concluded that the intent of the confessional-difficulty *gravamen* was to provide an opportunity for an office bearer who disagreed with some teaching of the confessions to express his difficulty to the church assemblies, which would then “examine and judge” his difficulty, in order to determine whether it falls “within or outside of confessional subscription.” If the assembly determines that the office bearer’s belief on that point is not in line with the confessions, the office bearer in question is not eligible to serve in ordained office.

The committee concluded, “Examination and judgment’ cannot mean determining whether or not the office bearer’s difficulty is a tolerable disagreement with the confessions, as that would contradict the church’s understanding of confessional subscription.” It recommended therefore, among other things, “That synod affirm that confessional-difficulty *gravamina* are not meant, nor should be used as an exception to the confessions.” The committee also made various recommendations that relevant provisions in the Church Order Supplement be amended to clarify the purpose and function of *gravamina*, as well as the process by which *gravamina* are to be dealt with.

Ultimately, synod agreed with the committee, and judged that a confessional-difficulty *gravamen* is meant to be resolved in one of three ways: by the office bearer’s views being brought into line with the confessions, by the office bearer presenting a “confession-revision” *gravamen* to the broader assemblies, or, by the office bearer being removed from his office. Synod adopted a process by which office bearers’ difficulties with teachings of the confessions are to be dealt with. The process begins with the ministry of their councils, possibly with advice from church visitors. When necessary, the member or the council may seek the “examination and judgment” of the broader assemblies.⁸

⁵ <https://www.crcna.org/synod-2023-faq-document>

⁶ Church, C. R., Brink, W. P., & De Ridder, R. (1987). *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*. Faith Alive Christian Resources. p. 52

⁷ “The CRC Synod 2024 – Closing the Door on Dissent,” *Christian Renewal* July 20, 2024: page 28

⁸ <https://www.crcna.org/synod/documents>

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCHES

Synod 2024 also took a very clear position with respect to “non-compliant churches.” It decided that at the conclusion of the synod, “all office bearers from churches in non-compliance . . . be placed on a limited suspension,”⁹ and called on those churches which have acted or are acting contrary to the teachings of the church “to repent and to honor their covenant commitment to the CRCNA.” “Acting contrary to the teachings of the church” includes teaching or preaching or speaking contrary to the church’s decisions, whether publicly or privately, ordaining people in same sex relationships or marriages, officiating at or blessing or in any way recognizing same sex marriages as “ecclesiastically valid,” blessing a baptismal rite, and serving in organizations whose purpose it is to advocate against the teachings and confessions of the CRCNA.¹⁰

“Synod made this decision, recognizing, per its advisory committee report: “There is no category in Church Order for members, officebearers, councils, or classes to be “in protest” regarding settled and binding synodical decisions concerning confessional matters, or to add “metaphorical asterisks” by their names.”¹¹ “Officebearers facing limited suspension post-synod will lose the ability to be delegated to CRCNA assemblies, synod said. The General Secretary office was tasked to develop resources by Nov. 29, 2024, aiding classes and churches in either repentance and restoration or in a disaffiliation process if they don’t demonstrate ‘continued momentum towards repentance and restoration.’”¹²

The intent of the “limited suspension” of the office bearers of churches that will not comply with the decision of the synod is to start a process that leads to the repentance and restoration of those churches to full fellowship in the denomination, or to those churches separating themselves from the CRCNA. Synod imposed a time limit on the process: “This process is to be completed in one year from the beginning of the limited suspension. A classis may lengthen the suspension for up to one additional year provided the church is participating in the process. The entire process may not exceed two years.”¹³

CONCLUSION

As a former member and minister in the CRCNA, I have been pleasantly surprised—I might even say, shocked—by the fact that the CRCNA has taken this stand, upholding the biblical teaching on sexuality, and that it has stood firm in its position in response to the pressure from those who disagree. It is no small thing for a synod to make a decision knowing that it will in all likelihood result in serious conflict and division in the denomination. Nor is it a small thing for the CRCNA, being what it is, to reject the path that is being followed by many mainline churches in North America and Europe, and to break from the trajectory that it had been following for more than four decades. These decisions also have significant implications for the future of the denomination.

There are still many important questions to be answered such as: How will the decisions of Synod 2024 with respect to office bearers and churches that are not in compliance be “enforced”? Does this mean that there is a reformation taking place in the CRCNA? Might past synodical decisions, e.g., permitting the ordination of women to all of the church offices and approving a critical view of Scripture, at some point be reviewed and possibly rescinded? How the CRCNA answers those questions remains to be seen, of course. I hope in a future article to put these and other questions to a couple of CRCNA pastors in an effort to help Canadian Reformed believers to get a perspective on what has taken place and how it happened, as well as some of the hurdles that the CRCNA faces in working out its decisions. The CRCNA is known to us from our past and there was a time when our federation tried earnestly to work toward a relationship with them. We can only be thankful to God for this development and hope and pray that in his mercy he is indeed bringing about a genuine change of heart and change of course in the CRCNA. 



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⁹ <https://www.thebanner.org/news/2024/06/synod-sets-a-course-of-discipline-for-crc-churches-acting-contrary-to-crc-teachings>

¹⁰ <https://www.crcna.org/synod/documents>

¹¹ <https://www.thebanner.org/news/2024/06/synod-2024-declared-disciplinary-measures-for-those-in-protest>

¹² <https://www.thebanner.org/news/2024/06/synod-sets-a-course-of-discipline-for-crc-churches-acting-contrary-to-crc-teachings>

¹³ <https://www.crcna.org/synod/documents>

WELCOME HIM

in the Lord

JAN DEGELDER

Most of our readers will be familiar with the practice our churches have agreed upon in Article 62 of the Church Order. Br. X is going to move from A to B, and so he says to the clerk of the church in A: “I’ll be moving soon, and I’ll need my attestation.” After he has handed it in, he might say: “I now have my attestation in the church in B.” Or he just wants to leave, and says: “Can I get my attestation back?” However—there is no such thing as “my attestation.” It suggests that somewhere the consistory has a pile of membership certificates of all the church members, called “attestations.” You hand it in when you come and get it back when you leave. However, it is good to have a critical look at our terminology here.

An attestation is not a membership certificate or a notice of transfer. It is a testimony. The consistory that issues it testifies to your spiritual faithfulness in what you believe and how you live your Christian life at that time. The purpose of such a testimony

is that it supports your request for membership in the church you want to join. After you have been received as a new member there, this testimony no longer functions. It can be destroyed.

WHOSE TESTIMONY?

The practice of testifying to the faith of people who move or travel and asking other churches to welcome them in the Lord is found in Scripture (Acts 18:27; Rom 16:1–2; 2 Cor 8:16–24; Phil 1:26–30; Col 4:7–9). In the following centuries, letters of recommendation were very important for the growth, spread, and development of the Christian church (*The Function of Christian Letters of Recommendation; from Paul to Julian*, Jason File). Early in the Reformation people were often accepted on the basis of their own verbal testimony about themselves. Refugees fleeing persecution had lost everything and needed support wherever they came. But it quickly became clear that this was not sufficient. Soon tramps

and scoundrels abused the generosity of the churches. Looking for money, they would travel from church to church and with sad and pious stories gain the trust of the believers.

Starting with the first synod (Emden 1571), successive synods stressed the need for a written testimony in order to be accepted as members and to qualify for support. For centuries this became, with minor modifications, the rule in Article 82 of the Reformed church order: “To those who depart from the congregation, an attestation or testimony concerning their profession and conduct shall be given by the consistory, signed by two, or in the case of attestations given under the seal of the church, signed by one.”

In our current church order (as revised in 1983) it has become Article 62. In the process, the “seal of the church” has disappeared,

which is okay. Churches don’t use seals anymore. New is the provision that attestations shall be given “after previous announcements to the congregation.” It has been said that this allows the congregation to raise objections. Some church members may know more than the elders do. But then—even if that is the case, what is a consistory going to do with that information, as they prepare to write their testimony? Rev. Van Oene clarifies why such a requirement is problematic (*With Common Consent*, p. 283–4). Also, whereas old Article 82 speaks about “an attestation or testimony,” our Article 62 uses only “attestation” and eliminated the word “testimony.” That’s unfortunate. For reasons I mentioned earlier, it would have been helpful if it was done the other way round: that we had retained the word “testimony” instead of “attestation.”



MUTUAL TRUST

Working with such testimonies when people move from one church to another within the same federation, or among sister churches, reflects two important principles when it comes to the church. It stresses that our churches are not just local chapters of one national church, but that we are a federation of autonomous local churches. And it also confirms what we confess in Article 28 of the Belgic Confession, that each and every believer is personally responsible for joining the (local) church in the place where he lives. Because of this, our churches do not simply transfer membership directly from one church to another. The one who departs must ask for the testimony of Article 62. The consistory does not even have the authority to do this unsolicited but can only issue it upon request. And then it must be given to the person who asked for it, because it is his responsibility to present it together with his request to be admitted as member of the church he wants to join. And finally, whether he is then going to be admitted or not is the decision of the consistory of that church, after reviewing the testimony.

The usual expectation of anyone (not currently a member in any sister church) who asks to become a member of a (local) church is that he is willing to make profession of the Reformed faith and has shown that he leads a godly life, in line with Article 61 of the Church Order. But that's different than when someone comes from a church within the same federation or a sister church. This is not to say that the requirements for membership are different, or that the receiving consistory does not have to make a decision in response to the request to be admitted as a new member. But as sister churches we have agreed to trust each other's testimonies and admit those who present such a testimony without re-examining their godly life and have them repeat profession of faith (similar to the churches' agreement to acknowledge each other's examination of ministers). This is possible because our relationship of trust as churches is built on the unity of faith, expressed in our confessions and confirmed in the fact that all office bearers have signed the Form of Subscription (Art. 26 CO).

A TRUTHFUL PICTURE

All of this makes it an important question: what should a consistory put in such a testimony? I think that in practice almost all attestations come with the general formula that someone is sound in doctrine and leads a god-fearing life. There is nothing wrong with that, but it does not give the elders of the receiving church much to go by as shepherds of God's flock. Given the character and purpose of an attestation as a testimony, it would be much better to get away from an identical fit-for-all formula and provide

relevant information which the elders of the receiving church can work with and build on in their pastoral care for this person or family. This also implies that such a testimony must give a truthful and honest picture. That can be positive or negative.

Perhaps the elders have noticed special evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in how people have served. Or they can point at church activities the person(s) has been involved in.

But nowhere does it say that it always has to be a positive testimony. There can be serious concerns about someone's doctrine or lifestyle. Perhaps there is the fact that he or she is under discipline. This way of preparing a personalized testimony for members who are moving to a sister church is extra work for the office bearers, but it does more justice to the intention of such a testimony. It also requires more pastoral wisdom than filling in and signing the one-liner mentioned above.

Therefore, it is important to remember two things to watch out for:

1. A testimony is not a judgment on someone's regeneration, personal piety, or spiritual status before God. He might be a hypocrite. Those things ministers and elders cannot judge. That is for God alone. The testimony that Article 62 speaks of must be about factual information and verifiable observations.

2. Such a testimony should never contain information the person is not aware of. And especially if it is negative or critical it should contain nothing the elders have not addressed with him or her. An attestation should always be given in an open envelope, with no surprises for the persons involved. They have the right to know what the consistory testifies about them. There is nothing to hide here.

There are a number of questions about issuing and receiving attestations/testimonies that come up regularly. I would like to interact with some of those, but since the length of this piece is already close to the maximum word count for this column, I plan to come back to those next time.

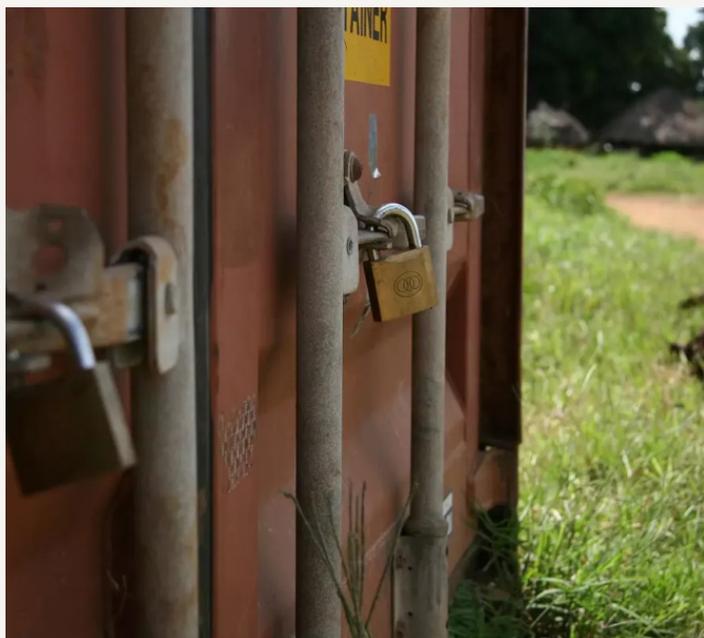
In the meantime, for the interested reader—many aspects of the matter of attestations are extensively dealt with by the late Rev. G. VanDooren in a series of three articles in *Clarion* (Vol. 26, p.199, 204–205; 226–228; 242–243 [1977]); available at clarion-magazine.ca. 



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ERITREA

The World's Largest Prison



Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim waiting for my God
– Psalm 69:1–3

Eritrea is a small, unfamiliar east African country, about one-tenth the size of the province of Ontario, with approximately four million citizens. It sits on the west coast of the Red Sea and shares borders with Sudan, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. Eritrea is a country where scarcely a foothold to progress exists. If you are born in Eritrea, you will live in poverty and there's not much you can do about it (see opendoorscanada.org). The government controls everything to the nth degree, even deciding who is and is not allowed to have a SIM card for a mobile phone. We likely have brothers and sisters in Eritrea who cry out under the burden of repressive restrictions while their eyes grow dim waiting for God. At least, this is how I imagine I'd feel if I lived there.



Historically, Eritrea was a colony of Italy. Post WWII, during the UN redistribution of land, Eritrea became a part of Ethiopia. Following a twenty-year resistance for independence, Eritrea was finally recognized as a sovereign, independent country in April of 1993, naming their first President, Isaias Afewerki. Initially Afewerki sought to portray Eritrea as different from the typical African dictatorship. The name of his political party—The People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ)—suggests it promotes democracy and justice, and Eritrea’s constitution of 1994 even speaks of elections and freedoms. In fact, then-US President Bill Clinton referred to Afewerki as a “renaissance African leader.”¹

However, it soon became clear that Afewerki was anything but democratic. He canceled every scheduled election, banned all other political parties, made all media agents of the state, heavily restricted religion, and introduced a mandatory military conscription which commenced at age 18. Life is so untenable in Eritrea that one international media source referred to it as “the world’s largest prison.”²

Military conscription is one of the most oppressive Eritrean policies, partly because its length is not defined. Service may last anywhere from a couple of years to an entire lifetime. If you flee the country to avoid service, one of the surrounding countries may extradite you back to obtain a reward or the family you left behind in Eritrea will be badly mistreated until you return home.

Conscripts are heavily indoctrinated that the interests of the state are paramount and override any personal conscience or belief one may have. Anyone who doesn’t display loyalty to Eritrea or the government is imprisoned and regularly beaten until they show a change of heart. Given this reality, it is no surprise that many young women are motivated to be married before age 18, since married women are exempted from conscription.

RELIGION IN ERITREA

Although several religions existed at the time of Eritrea’s independence, President Afewerki has since curtailed religious freedom by permitting only four religions: Islam and three variations of Catholicism. He did this in 2002 by calling together leaders from all churches and declaring all Protestant churches to be enemies of the state. Consequently, all property from Protestant churches was expropriated and church gatherings forbidden. Of course, this didn’t stop the faithful from meeting in each other’s homes.

After working in small house churches for a couple of years, two Eritrean pastors from the Full Gospel Church of Eritrea (FGCE) were arrested on July 22, 2004. Pastor Haile Naizghi and Dr. Kiflu Gebremeskel remain in prison to this day. The founder of FGCE, Rev. Ghirmay Araya, died in prison on May 24, 2024. It is estimated that some 400 Christians are presently imprisoned for their love of Jesus. To be arrested in Eritrea means to disappear from existence. There are no charges, no trials, no rights, not even a defined sentence for you or your family to anticipate. Reports of prison conditions come from the rare detainee who is released or even escapes. From them we learn of prisons which are sometimes nothing more than shipping containers. Beatings and torture are common, as is being bound in unnatural positions for days on end.

Considering the corrupt and oppressive authorities in Eritrea, the imprecations of Psalm 69 take on a deeper meaning. “Let their own table before them become a snare; and when they are at peace, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see, and make their loins tremble continually. Pour out your indignation upon them, and let your burning anger overtake them” (v. 22–24).



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¹ www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2009/06/04/from-renaissance-leader-to-pariah

² www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/apr/17/eritrea-human-rights



WHAT DOES A *Missionary Do?*

TIM SCHOUTEN

On a sunny and warm January morning, I was driving around with a man named Lloyd as he shared with me something of his life. During the conversation, he asked me a question that I've been asked a few times before: "I'm kind of curious, what do you actually do as a pastor?" A fair question, especially when it's asked of a guy who gets paid to drive around listening to someone talk on a sunny and warm January morning.

Later that day, as I looked at the list of tasks in front of me, one of them was: "Write a report for *Clarion*." But what shall I write about? As I considered that question, the conversation with Lloyd earlier in the day came to mind, and it seemed good to try answer it.

Often my wife and I have talked about the difficulty of writing a missionary report. So much of the work that gets done here is not "reportable." It is personal, confidential, spiritual, and it does not involve statistics or visible church growth. The church plant in Prince George is just a small church in northern BC that is in many ways like other Canadian Reformed churches. As pastors in these other churches can't report on many of the details of their work in many respects, so it is the same with me.

But after considering it further, I thought it was worth a try. What *does* a pastor do, and what does a *missionary* pastor do in a small church plant in a northern Canadian context? I'm sure the answer would be somewhat different for a different personality in the same position, but what follows is a little bit of a window into my work. The role of pastor and missionary are very hard to separate, but I'll generally separate things into pastoral work and missionary work. And even with that distinction, much of the second category will be common to my pastoral colleagues across the county.

PASTORAL WORK

Much of what I do is the same as any other pastor. This means, first of all, that the weekly preaching is central to my calling. Typically, I preach twice a Sunday. One out of every six services are led by local men. In addition, I have an exchange with a minister in the Bulkley Valley approximately every other month. It's hard to put a number to it, but my guess is that the average weekly sermon preparation time is about twenty hours for both sermons. That's a lot of hours, but we believe that the preaching of the Word of God is powerful and effective. It is the primary means of grace and it needs to remain central.

Related to the preaching of the Word, I also administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Most of the baptisms are infant baptisms, of which there have been quite a few in the last few years (eleven girls in a row). I wish I could report that we regularly have adult baptisms, but this has only happened once so far. There have been a number of adult professions of faith of people who were previously baptized but came to the Lord, or the church, later in life. With respect to the Lord's Supper, we celebrate once every month.

We also have catechism classes once a week. These are different than what I grew up with. Students from ages 6 to 14 are all in the same class. I inherited this from Pastor Jim Witteveen, the former missionary here, and I've maintained it ever since. The Catechism material is almost always linked to the Sunday preaching material. Currently we are meeting at 3 pm every Tuesday. I very much enjoy teaching this class and believe that the young students generally learn more than we give them credit for. Our students are all from homeschooling families at this point, and so this is also a great opportunity for them to get classroom instruction in a different setting than in the home.

Part of my work over the past couple of months has been doing a marriage preparation course for an engaged couple. I've had the privilege of doing this quite a few times now. Thankfully, many years ago I received exceptional materials from my uncle, Pastor Rob Schouten, so my preparation is quite minimal.

Included in my work is some of the pastoral care of the congregation. We have two ordained elders in addition to myself, so my ward is about one third of the congregation, including regular guests. Because we're a small congregation and I've been here the longest, there tend to be relationships of trust in which people come to speak with me. I also find that most newcomers are much more comfortable talking with the pastor rather than talking with elders, and so I'm the first person they call. The pastoral care has a great variety, of course, and is a great privilege.

MISSIONARY WORK

Part of the role of a missionary, as described in the Form for the Ordination of Missionaries, is ordaining elders and deacons as soon as is feasible. Over the past three to four years, this has been a big part of my work. By the grace of God, in January 2022 we ordained our first elders and deacons. Currently, we have two elders and two deacons, and they are functioning very well together. This also means that we have council meetings, or as we call them, *provisional* council meetings (our elders and deacons are still under the supervision of the sending church in Smithers). We meet once a month for consistory and council matters, and each meeting takes approximately three hours. Last year I was clerk and this year I'm chairman. I think the meetings are shorter this year (just kidding, Mr. Siebenga!).

There are many practical and scheduling matters to deal with, and this means a lot of communication. This means, for example, that I send and receive a lot of emails. Sometimes I get tired of this (I'm sure everyone does), but it's an important part of the work. A missionary tends to be the person in the middle of all the communication between the sending church and what's happening on the ground in the church plant. In addition, because things are still growing, there is not as much that can be taken for granted as in an established church. This can be challenging for me because organization and details are not my natural strengths.

Another task of the missionary pastor is preparing people for membership. How does membership happen? At this point in my ministry, I've approached these situations individually as each person is at a different place and instruction can take various forms. However, we currently have quite a number of people interested in membership, or at least willing to enter into the conversation. I am considering ways in which to make this process more efficient.

As a missionary, it's important to note visitors to our services and to try to connect with them. Last week we had a new visitor and it appeared from our conversation that the Lord was really working in his life. We scheduled a visit in my office, but he did not show up. I'm still hopeful we can make it happen. On a more encouraging note, on the same day I was able to meet with a first-time contact who reached out to me looking for pastoral care in the context of a difficult family separation.

Lately, I've received a phone call about once a week from a farmer north of the city. A few years ago, he completely changed his lifestyle. He listens to Jordan Peterson, amongst others, and is rethinking everything, trying to rebuild his life. In the meantime, he has been listening to our livestream for quite a while and is now including me on his journey as he tries to make sense of life. God willing, I'll visit him at his place sometime soon.

OTHER OUTREACH

As I mentioned at the beginning, I was on a drive with Lloyd on a beautiful January morning. The reason I was on a drive with Lloyd is because Lloyd lives in a men's transition home, Sonrise New Directions. This home is a place where men typically live after going through a drug or alcohol rehabilitation program. It's intended to be a safe and structured environment where the residents begin to enter into the routines of regular life.

Most of the men who live there are very open to the Christian faith (if not already Christians), and they're at a point in their life where they are ready to think about the grace and power of God. For the past four years it's been a great privilege to be regularly present in the home. Over the past two years I've been leading morning devotions four mornings a week. For the most part, we simply read through books of the Bible and discuss them. The past six months have been exceptional in terms of discussion and our time slot has gone from half an hour to a full hour. Lloyd has been a big part of that.

There are certainly ups and downs working in a transition home. There are relapses, various kinds of drama, and last year one of the residents passed away in his room from an overdose. But there are also many joys, and it's a great privilege to bring the Word of God in that setting. Sonrise is directly down the road from a Baptist church and so, although it is a non-denominational organization, all of the men attend that church. Although I work there, I do not anticipate it directly resulting in membership in our congregation.

The morning devotions at Sonrise also result in relationships. Lloyd is one. Another one is Brandon, a man who came into Sonrise four years ago as a very angry and morose man. His father was an abuser, his mother went missing on the "Highway of Tears," and he went through dozens of foster homes. From the ages of 14 to 24 he was involved in crime and hard drugs. Finally, he went to prison, and then, miraculously, from prison to Sonrise. When he arrived, he might have been voted the least likely person to become a warm, kind, generous Christian. And yet, four years later, that is exactly what he is. He and I have become good friends, and he comes over to our house for supper regularly. Currently he's studying to become a social worker at the College of New Caledonia.

One evening a few years ago, I was asked by a Sonrise resident to have a chat. As a result of our conversation, he made the commitment to get rid of his tablet. We drove down to the Fraser River, and there, under a starlit sky, he placed his tablet on the shore and smashed it with rocks. With the last rock, the tablet caught on fire. A flame whooshed out the side and seemed to disappear in the night like a demonic spirit. Perhaps it was. The man was trembling and fearful and happy all at the same time. Sadly, after a few very good months, he relapsed once again and is now doing poorly. The battle with addiction is so immensely

powerful and it takes a wholehearted, single minded commitment to God. It takes a complete throwing oneself upon the grace of God in order to be victorious. It is a vivid picture of what we all need to do in our own challenges, which may be sometimes less visible.

Another avenue of ministry that has recently opened up to us is the opportunity to sing and speak at a care home in Prince George. In God's providence, the events coordinator happened to be walking by the front steps of our church building just as I stepped out the door. We ended up in conversation, and this resulted in an invitation. We are just in the beginnings of growing into this opportunity. This takes commitment on the part of members and occurs in daytime hours, so we need to evaluate if we have the capacity to make a long-term commitment. There is certainly huge opportunity to minister to the elderly who are often neglected.

Over the past couple of years there have been many opportunities to show kindness to the homeless population. My wife Linnet put together care packages with basic supplies such as socks, Band-Aids, and water. These have been very helpful. There are many homeless people in Prince George, and they often spend time around our church building. Sometimes this has caused problems, such as fires endangering the building. One fire burned a hole right through our wheelchair ramp, only a foot away from the main building. On many other occasions we have had opportunity to minister to the helpless and dejected.

Recently, I had a couple in the building for a few visits, Michael and Saya. Michael played on the piano and we chatted and ate a meal together. After the fourth or fifth visit he told me they keep coming back because it is encouraging for them. They have allowed me to pray for them and were moved emotionally by the Word of God. However, they are deeply in addiction and the accompanying lifestyle, and to them a way out seems impossible. I encouraged them to commit their ways to the Lord, as well as to make use of the many services that are available in Prince George.

As a missionary, my home life is quite tied in with my work life and I'm thankful that my wife has embraced the biblical calling of hospitality. This has been difficult over the past couple of years with the pregnancy and birth of our youngest daughter Lillian. In addition, Linnet is homeschooling the children, and as the children grow up this has become a bigger task. As a result, hospitality has slowed down. In general, however, over the past eight years we've been able to welcome many, many people into our home, and this provides a very nice context for getting comfortable with people and for welcoming them into our daily devotions.

REFLECTIONS ON MY CALLING

Perhaps this all sounds like a lot of work for me, but it all it all adds up to a regular number of weekly hours. Speaking personally,

I am not a person with boundless energy and about a decade ago I learned the hard way that I have to work within my limitations. However, there are times where I'm frustrated by my limitations. There is indeed more work than can really be done. There are more opportunities than can actually be followed up on, and much of our congregation is in the same boat, with young families and busy lives.

Recently, I've had opportunity to reflect on my calling as a missionary and what it means in the Canadian context. I've concluded that it means, at least in part, that the missionary needs to do what he can to encourage and equip the congregation to intentionally develop relationships with outsiders. It's a cliché, but a true cliché, that "it's about relationships." In a world where everyone is being sold something, it takes time and intentionality to break through defenses, so that people really begin to see that love is present. A missionary can only have so many relationships, but the congregation cumulatively can have many. In this light, we are planning to implement a congregational book study. We've purchased sets of three different books, one of which number will be shared with every household. This will in turn be followed up by a discussion of some kind, still to be determined. Thankfully I can report that this will simply be a complement to what is already happening. We're blessed with many members of the congregation who intentionally reach out to newcomers and develop relationships with them.

The work of missionary or church planter is, in a way, the process of trying to work yourself out of a job. This is especially on my mind when it comes to the practical functioning of the church. The missionary has to "build" something that lasts longer than himself (by the grace of God). There needs to be practical strength as well as spiritual strength. Therefore, many of the tasks that by default end up on the missionary's desk need to, over time, be handed off to other people. It has not been hard to do so. We can thank God for many willing and capable minds and hands that are doing many, many things.

There is a great variety to my work. In some ways this is not ideal. There is something to be said for coalescing, for having a focus. Having too many things on the go can lead to loose ends. I have to keep thinking about how to "make the best use of the time" (Eph 5:16). On the other hand, I also have to recognize the leading of God. When he simply places situations in front of me, or simply brings people into our services, then those are the people he means for us to work with.

AN INVITATION TO REFLECT

It seems to me that most of my work is not exclusive to the role of ordained missionary and does not require a seminary education. Because I was ordained as a missionary, I have had to be very intentional about being mission-oriented, or outward looking, and this has led to opportunities in various places and at various times. My encouragement to every reader would be to be just as intentional.

Of course, I need to qualify this. In the first place, I have the luxury of calling my intentionality "work." It's part of my job description. There's an added layer of calling, and of opportunity. I also have the advantage of introducing myself as a pastor, and this naturally leads into a certain kind of conversation. Further, the material that I learned at seminary, combined with a life of biblical study, does give additional ability to interact with difficult questions. But yet, I would maintain that most of my missionary work is possible, to some degree or another, for everyone reading this. And I know it is happening! More than I know! "But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more" (1 Thess 4:10).

As I reflect on the goal of the congregation to bring the gospel to our neighbors, it seems clear that we could use an individual or a couple or a family, or even a few of them, to join us. In particular, we could use people who are perhaps in their mid 50s to mid-60s—those who are called by God to instruct the younger members and be examples (see Titus 2:4). If you're reading this, perhaps you could consider moving to Prince George yourself. Or perhaps you know somebody that you could share this with, who might consider it. You might not think you have much to offer, but just being in that age bracket and having a willingness to serve God, you might be surprised at what a difference you can make to a small congregation like ours.

It's a great privilege to serve as missionary here, and it's a great privilege to share with you something of what I do. May God bless you all in your respective callings. 🇨



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NEW CANRC IN *Caledonia*

BY TILSE VANDERMEULEN

With gratefulness to the Lord Jesus Christ who gathers, defends, and preserves his church, brothers and sisters in the Caledonia area of Ontario witnessed the institution of a new Canadian Reformed Church.

The story starts with Trinity CanRC in Glanbrook which not too long ago finished a building project to facilitate growth in the Binbrook and Caledonia area. On August 14, 2022, the congregation first used their new building, the same Sunday their new minister, John VanWoudenburg, was installed.

After the new building opened growth continued. In conversation with their elders, a group of church members decided to form a grassroots initiative to pursue the possibility of instituting a new church in Caledonia, a mere fifteen kilometers away.

It was in November 2022 that the group began meeting regularly to discuss this plan with a special focus on outreach. Members living in Haldimand, within which the town of Caledonia is situated, joined the conversation. In 2023, the council of Trinity church appointed a new committee with office bearers, members of the grassroots group, and local church members from Caledonia.

Their mandate was to work concretely towards the institution of a Canadian Reformed Church in Caledonia by preparing material that could be presented to classis, including budgets, financial viability, and the availability of office bearers.

The committee reached out to new congregations in Arthur and Grimsby. Like Arthur, the new group decided to ask a few current office-bearers who would be part of the new church to form a provisional council to prepare the institution. While this provisional council was careful not to make long-range decisions since they were not yet installed for Caledonia officially, they did play a key role in making short-term decisions in advance of the inaugural Sunday.

The Grimsby church inspired the new congregation to tackle questions of vision and mission after institution, involving and including the whole congregation. During the planning stage, many logistical and practical details were discussed, but now that Caledonia is instituted, the congregation will be able to pursue broader questions about their future together.



By January 2024 it was clear that Trinity was ready to present the documentation to Classis Ontario West, seeking their concurring advice for the institution of the new church. Given the fact that Trinity had continued to grow to over 560 members, it was decided that the institution would happen relatively quickly, on April 28.

INSTITUTION

The new office bearers—six elders and three deacons—were ordained in the morning service at Trinity Church. Dr. William den Hollander led the first service for Caledonia that afternoon with a sermon on Isaiah 12:3: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” He emphasized the fulfillment of that prophecy in the coming of Christ. It is the free offer of the gospel that is held out to thirsty inhabitants of Caledonia. Jesus calls: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!” (Isa 55:1)

Finding a place to worship has proven to be a significant challenge so far. The new church uses the gym at Bellstone Christian School for now and hopes to strike a new committee soon to find a physical home. Until a minister is called, student Fred Struik has been willing to lead the worship services. He just finished his third year at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. His

final internship was completed last year in Grimsby and he was found willing to serve the vacant church with the help of local ministers and professors.

While the church in Caledonia is “new” in the sense that it has only recently been instituted, the church of Jesus Christ is not new in this world. The church, through the ages, has regularly confessed Christ’s vision revealed in his Word: that everyone lost in sin and separated from God may find him and see their lives restored. The town of Caledonia is growing rapidly and welcomes many recent immigrants, including Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. Caledonia Canadian Reformed Church is eager to see how God will work through them in their community. 

This article was written with contributions from Mark Aasman, member in Caledonia CanRC.



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CLARION Kids LORD'S DAY 50

The fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer is "give us this day our daily bread." Now, one thing we are asking is that God will give us everything that our bodies need to live. Can you think of some things our bodies need to live? If you thought of air, water, and food, you are right! But there is more. Think a little bit harder now. In this petition we are also asking God to make us believe that he is the only one who gives us good things. Yes, Dad works hard so that there is money to buy food. But we know that God is the one who made sure that Dad has a job! That is why your family might sometimes thank God for Dad's job. And that is why we pray to God asking him to give us everything we need to live.

You eat many different kinds of food each day. Write down as many of them as you can on the lines below:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Below there is a verse that talks about God being the giver of all good. Decode the missing words to complete the verse.

James 1:17

Every and every gift is from above, coming

7 15 15 4 16 5 18 6 5 3 20

down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

- | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1=A | 2=B | 3=C | 4=D | 5=E | 6=F | 7=G | 8=H | 9=I | 10=J | 11=K | 12=L | 13=M |
| 14=N | 15=O | 16=P | 17=Q | 18=R | 19=S | 20=T | 21=U | 22=V | 23=W | 24=X | 25=Y | 26=Z |

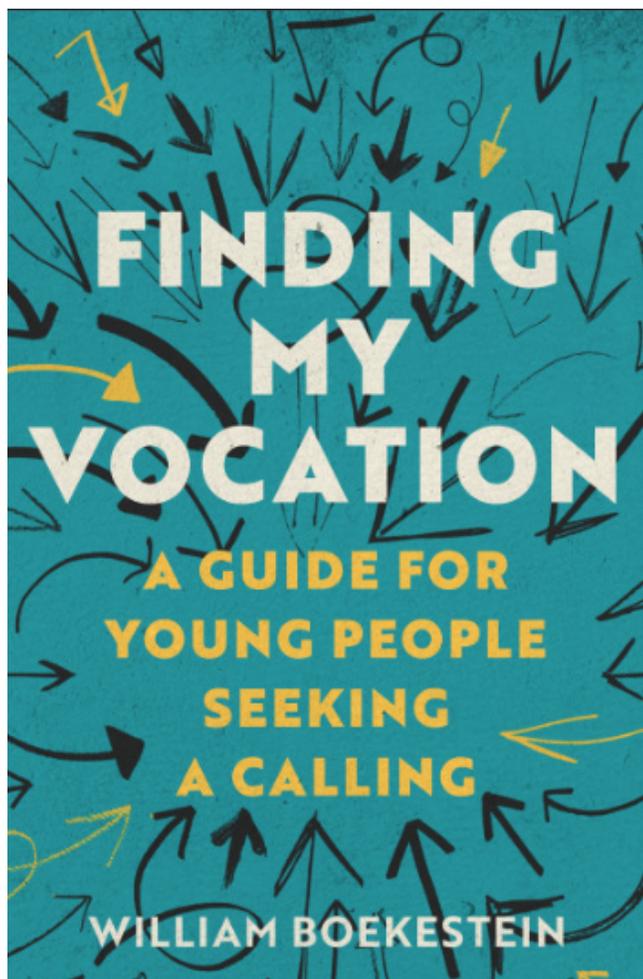


HEY KIDS! Do you have questions about something you have read in the Bible or heard in a sermon? Maybe you are wondering about something you have read in a Lord's Day. We have a new column coming called KIDS' QUESTIONS. We warmly invite you to ask Mrs. DeBoer your question! With your parent's permission,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

AMANDA DEBOER

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO WITH YOUR LIFE?

Finding My Vocation: A Guide for Young People Seeking a Calling,
by William Boekestein. (Grandville: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2024).
Paperback. \$15.41 USD.



If you're of the same vintage as me, you may remember hearing the question in the title of this review from time to time in the mid-1980s, perhaps on CBC's weekday afternoon show "Video Hits." If you don't remember, don't worry about it; we're all getting old. Regardless, it's a perennial question young people face. William Boekestein has written a practical and biblically informed guide for young people who might not have any idea what they're going to do with their life. It may also be a helpful guide for those who do have some kind of ambition but might want to give it a second thought.

William Boekestein is a United Reformed pastor serving Immanuel Fellowship Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He's written several other books including books for children on each of the Three Forms of Unity. His articles have appeared on The Gospel Coalition website and elsewhere.

Says the author in the Introduction: "This book is meant to be a guide for young people trying to figure out what to do with their lives. This means it is also for the parents of young people" (p. 6). It comes in three parts: Pondering Vocation, Preparing for Your Vocation, and Practicing Vocation. Throughout, Boekestein applies traditional Protestant thinking about vocation to modern questions facing our youth. With each chapter, there's also a real-life story of a Christian in the workforce, bringing it home.

Finding My Vocation answers many common work-related questions. For example, what about evangelism in the workplace? Boekestein writes, "The way you work must open rather than close

doors to speak about Jesus. It is wrong to evangelize in place of working; stealing your employer's time under the banner of religion does not 'adorn the doctrine of God our Savior' (Titus 2:10)" (p. 22). Or what about moving away from your faithful church for the sake of a job? What about changing jobs regularly? Should a mother work outside the home? What kind of work might I do on the Lord's Day? On that last question, let me tantalize you with this tidbit: "We might actually profane the Lord's Day, and miss the rest God wants for us, through laziness!" (p. 72)

The book also continues five appendices dealing with other questions:

- What if I hate my job?
- Is my work compromised by sin? (E.g., can you stock shelves with harmful products?)
- Should I go to college? (College in US = university in Canada/Australia)
- Is military service a good option for me?
- Am I called to the ministry?

By the end, it really felt as if the author left nothing unaddressed. It's a concise book but still rather comprehensive in its scope.

Finding My Vocation would be a great book for parents to buy for their teenaged children. It could also be helpful for guidance counselors to have on hand in Christian high schools. It might not be the miracle cure for teenage vocational indecision, but it'll certainly point those with it in the right direction. **C**



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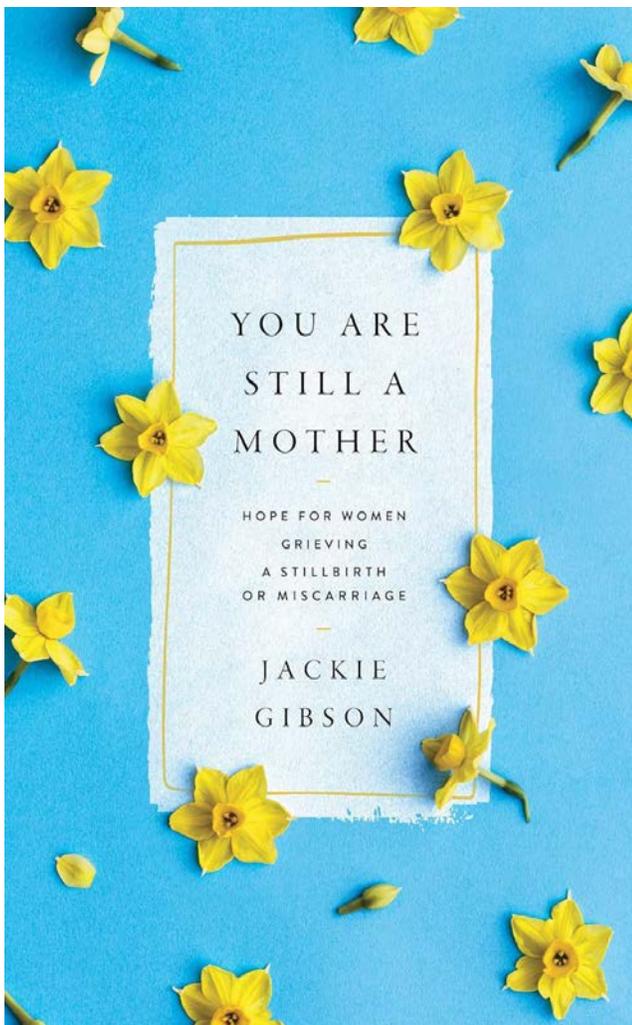
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>>	MY FRIEND
>>	MY BROTHER
>>	MY CHILD
>>	MY GRANDCHILD
>>	MY NEIGHBOUR



COMFORT FOR EARLY INFANT LOSS

You Are Still a Mother: Hope for Women Grieving a Stillbirth or Miscarriage, by Jackie Gibson. (Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2023). Paperback. 77 pages. \$18.58 CDN.



As I was in the stinky hospital washroom all by myself, I felt my body being torn, I was weak and alone. Then it happened, and I felt God's presence as never before and I felt pulled into another world. What? That may sound like too much yoga or drugs but let me assure you it was neither. It was a peace that passes all understanding and a bright light shone in the darkness of my fear. It was then that I felt our baby's final life line release and immediately I knew that the relentless bleeding would stop. I had survived, but our baby had not. The pain of our child's death was something that would take months for me to process but it was mixed like cement with the comfort of having walked so close to God. This was now our third of eight babies to go to heaven.

About six months later, I went for lunch with my beloved nursing professor, Anne Marie. She shared with me her experience of losing her 16-year-old daughter to diabetes and how God had rescued her from a dark hole of grief. At the end of her story, my 24-year-old eyes searched her wise spectacled blues for answers, and I dared to ask: "It's been six months since our miscarriage and I'm a complete mess, what do you think is wrong with *me*?" I'll never forget her non-judgmental, pro-life answer. "Gloria, you lost a child, it makes sense that you are a mess!" She didn't compare her pain to mine or downplay our loss. Instead, she walked beside me and held my hand. For the first time, I was able to truly see my grief when I had been downplaying it all along.

SMALL BUT POWERFUL

Jackie Gibson packs a lot into this small book of 77 pages. She is the wise professor that will hold your hand. She will not tell you that your pain was too little or that hers was more traumatic; she

will walk beside you and show you God's love and plan. Along with the bright cover page of the spring daffodils that bear hope and joy into a grieving heart, one will find love and affirmation throughout this book. It's short but sweet to the grieving soul searching for answers, wanting to believe that God is still good.

She starts off by sharing her story of her daughter Leila's life that ended in the womb about one week before her due date. It's a heart wrenching story where she is not scared to tell you how she really felt. She states, "When Leila died, I entered a very low place where my feelings threatened to override my faith." She wanted answers to those difficult questions about where God was and why this could have happened to them. Slowly, Jackie brings the reader to the cross for these questions. In Chapter 3 she reminds us of Jesus's grief and his lifetime of sorrows, how he was acquainted with it and went through it all for us. His ways are not our ways, his will needs to become our will, and he is good even when it doesn't feel like it.

I like how Jackie uses her experience to show that her feelings were there. She acknowledged they existed, but she did not give way to them or say they were more important than her knowledge of God. They were not always telling her the truth and she would fall back on her knowledge of who God is to guide her back to a place of comfort. She shows this in chapter 5 where she writes: "How could a good God ordain for my daughter Leila to die? I don't know. Like Job, I must be willing not to understand and to leave it in the hands of a God who does, A God who is 'righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works' (Psalm 145:17)."

Gibson's explanation of life in the womb being precious and biblical no less helps heal a hurting heart. Babies such as Moses, Samson, David, Jacob, and John the Baptist are all examples of God loving life in the womb and ordaining these babies for his purposes.

FOR MOTHERS AND FATHERS

Gibson spends a whole chapter on the fact that, even though you have lost a child, you are still a mother. I suspect that truth will be the most comforting and sweet thing for any mother suffering loss to read. She goes on to describe her own journey with PTSD. Sadly, it is very relatable and yet I am sure her and I are not the only ones to have suffered panic attacks, hypochondria, and insomnia. For those new to this experience, this chapter will allow someone to take a step back and see the broad picture of their healing and yet not feel alone in it.

Although this book is written especially for women, I would like to acknowledge that there are men who are still fathers through a loss as well. This book is for both mothers and fathers who will never raise children on this earth. Perhaps the idea that they are still parents will lead them to think more about adopting or perhaps being godly mentors to other children in their lives?

Towards the end, the best advice Gibson has to give us is to share and to not stop sharing as the pain really does lessen with time. It's probably the best way to support others, to give affirmation to your own story and pass on God's love.

Finally, her greatest comfort is the hope we have that our loved ones are in heaven and how we live in an upside-down world of God's Kingdom, waiting for the finally resurrection of our bodies and the return of Christ. These theological truths are the right way to end a heavy topic. As Gibson quotes from John Brown at the beginning of chapter 12, "Their bodies will come forth out of their graves to meet them, incorruptible, immortal, powerful, glorious, and all death-divided Christian friends shall meet to part no more."

What a scene to look forward to! 

Gloria Faber

READ AND SEARCH OLD VOLUMES

of **Clarion**

clarionmagazine.ca/archive

Re: “With Voices United”

Dear Editor,

The articles about psalm singing in corporate worship (Vol 73, No. 6, 7) are timely as this topic lives in the churches. Following br. Ludwig’s recent response (letter in Vol 73, No. 9), I would like to offer some reflections.

A common argument against psalm singing is that the Psalms are songs of the Old Testament. Therefore br. Ludwig suggested the need for “new covenant songs of praise.” However, the New Testament commands us to sing psalms. After all, the Psalms were completed as one of the last books of the Old Testament, compiled for New Testament worship. Old Testament people did not know the book of Psalms as we do today.

Paul seems to enlarge the scope of the songs. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are all explicit references to the Psalms, but in Colossians and Ephesians, Paul mentions “the word of Christ” and “being filled with the Spirit,” expanding the scope to all of Scripture. Luther’s hymns were primarily paraphrases of Scripture, including the Psalms, Isaiah, the gospels, Revelation, the Decalogue, and the Nicene Creed. Similarly, Calvin published the Decalogue, the Song of Simeon, and the Apostles’ Creed in the first edition of his songbook.

It is essential to distinguish the “free hymns,” as they have different sources than Psalms and Canticles, resulting in different rankings. I do not believe that br. Ludwig’s references to *free-for-all worship*, *free thinking*, and *free will* are relevant. Rev. Holtvlüwer explained the term “free hymns” (Vol 73, No 6) while Hughes Oliphant Old and other authors identify “free hymns” simply as “hymns of human composure.”

Today, North American churches no longer sing psalms, and we can easily follow suit. Psalm singing characterizes the Canadian Reformed Churches, uniting our federation. Not regulating the predominance of Psalm singing will eventually eliminate the Psalms from corporate worship. May our churches see wisdom in continuing to sing God’s Word, since wisdom, knowledge, and understanding are from him (Prov 2:6). 

In his service,

Frank Ezinga

Langley, BC

Subversive Questions

Dear Editor,

With appreciation I read the recent articles *Church in Canadian Reformed History* (Vol 73, No 6, 7) which also made me recall an earlier article, *Why Are We Canadian Reformed In Canada Today?* (Vol 69, No 14). All three articles provide some historical context for the development of the CanRC, particularly the Dutch Reformed church evolution over a number of centuries and its carry over to Canada in the mass immigration experience. These succinct articles postulated two related questions:

1. *How can the CanRC optimally be for others the blessing the Lord would want us to be?*
2. *Do many of the CanRC members today share the early church fathers' concern about the Kuyperian pluriformity concept?*

The first question was answered in the article with the thought that we can observe God's hand in bringing the Dutch church heritage through the CanRC as a witness to the nations in multicultural Canada. The Dutch do well to provide the Canadian church landscape with a particular historical Reformed gospel aroma, predominantly embedded in the *Book of Praise*.

The answer to the second question was only implied; many CanRC members today are less concerned about the confusion of the pluriformity concept than our forefathers, possibly to the church's detriment.

My contemplation of these articles caught me subverting the text and stumbling upon two different questions:

1. *Did God's hand direct the Dutch to multicultural Canada in the CanRC to help us better understand, experience, and embrace the reality of a gospel for all nations and all that it entails?*
2. *Could a church federation, founded on the heels of a pluriformity concept debate, be overly preoccupied with the topic serving as a liability for developing church unity where possible? ☐*

*With brotherly curiosity,
Rick Ludwig
Waterdown, ON*

Dear Editor,

Rev. Van Luik's recent series of articles on reconciliation encourages a helpful and necessary discussion. I felt compelled to write because I question if peace is not a periphery issue in the call to reconcile. Shouldn't care for our brother or sister living an unrepentant life be the primary focus? The church at Ephesus was commended for not tolerating sin but was called out because they had lost their first love, neglecting the call to repentance. Jesus said working to reconcile our lives to God and neighbour can sadly cost us everything, including our life.

Are we and the church's watchmen focused and thorough enough in dealing with sin and the consequent broken relationships (Ezek 33)? We can be tempted to think that serious sin has an expiry date; to let sleeping dogs lie. We can evade fruitful discussions by engaging in cunning and deceptive deflections, practicing a form of sophism like the Pharisees (Eph 4). We can "heal wounds lightly" (Jer 8:11). Is this not why men in history thought there was a need for greater support to the churches and compiled a Church Order, and why we have even cut ties with churches? John the Baptist said "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Inheriting the kingdom of heaven obligates us to reconcile our hearts and minds to live thankful lives with each other. The catechism asks, "How do I know my sin and misery?" and answers: "Out of the law of God."

Without this standard, today's mainstream evangelical churches discourage mutual discipline or church discipline and accept the sinner as the victim of sin. Such churches are drifting from their commission, tolerating the unrepentant and ungodly sinner, and thus profaning the covenant of God (Lord's Day 30).

Deuteronomy 29 speaks to the terms of the covenant, which include a promise, an obligation, and a threat. It exposes the true "root of bitterness" when it describes a person whose heart turns from God and invokes a blessing on himself, thinking, "I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way." Colossians 3:5-6 says: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these the wrath of God is coming."

REPENTANCE REQUIRED

A faithful shepherd taught me that the caring words Jesus prayed for those who crucified him reflects Job's prayer for his friends in Job 42 when they accused him of sinning. God was angry with them because they had not spoken the truth about him. The friends had to confess their sin, repent, and ask Job for forgiveness; then a sacrifice had to be made, because "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:22).

Relationships break down when we show disrespect for the life and dignity of another person created in God's image. What lies at the root of this disrespect? A thorough discussion should be had about the God-given boundaries of another. The catechism says "they must show real amendment" to again be rooted and grounded in love.

If even our Saviour had to learn obedience, how much more wouldn't we? Office bearers holding the keys of the kingdom are mandated to bring members to repentance. Wouldn't this begin with an expectation to name sin rightly, confess it, show remorse, and in love truly recognize and acknowledge the wounds? They need to be aware that abusers prey on victims who do not have the ability to defend themselves much less the authority to expect change. We may not refuse to reconcile, but without true repentance may the church expect forgiveness and reconciliation?

In David's kingdom, having repented himself, he gave several men time to repent of their wrongs, but in 1 Kings 2 he asked Solomon to deal with those who wouldn't. Someone greater than Solomon is here whose throne is established on justice and righteousness. When you feel like God has forgotten you, Psalm 73 says, I would have become bitter (gone my own way), until I entered the house of the LORD and saw what would be their end.

Living in the covenant community, we covenant together by the vows we are required to make. May we not see ourselves as victims but obedient servants, praying for and working toward the repentance of those hardened in sin. "We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end" (Heb 3:14). **C**

Sincerely,
Christina VanderZyl

EDITOR'S NOTE: Rev. Van Luik has read the above letter and wishes to express his full agreement with its sentiment and that he plans to address the issue further in an upcoming article.

CLASSIS CLIPPINGS

What follows are clippings from the press releases of recent classes across the federation. They have been culled by the editor for the interest of our readers. Each press release can be found in full at canrc.org.

CLASSIS PACIFIC WEST JUNE 27, 2024

The delegates from Refuge examined the credentials and found them to be in good order, noting instructions from two churches. It was noted that Maranatha delegated student Jakob Mars. After some discussion, it was decided to not seat student Mars as a delegate. Classis was declared constituted, and Rev. D. Vandeburgt was appointed as chairman, Rev. R. Visscher as vice chairman, and Rev. R. Vanderhorst as clerk.

Rev. R. Vanderhorst signed the form of subscription.

Classis proceeded to the examination of student Z. Vanderploeg after ensuring all the proper documentation was in order. Student Vanderploeg then presented a sermon on Psalm 67 which was sustained. Having spoken of his personal motivations in pursuing pastoral ministry, Student Vanderploeg was then examined in Old Testament Exegesis (2 Chr 13:13–22), New Testament Exegesis (Mark 2:1–12), and on Doctrines and Creeds (Doctrine of the Word of God and Creation with a focus on the image of God). Classis judged that he had sustained his exam and the chairman prayed for him. Candidate Z. Vanderploeg is now eligible for call in the churches for one year.

Rev. A. Plug was delegated to attend a presbytery meeting of the OPC NorthWest Presbytery in Kennewick, Washington in September.

Church visitation reports for all the churches in the classis (as well as Prince George) were received with gratitude. Delegates had opportunity to ask questions and receive answers regarding the reports.

Classis then discussed a report from the CPW Regulations Study Committee as well as a number of submitted interactions from the churches regarding the Study Committee's report. The report was accepted with some changes that arose from the interactions. The Committee was thanked for its work.

Classis received a report from the Committee for Financial Aid to Needy Churches and number of submitted interactions

from the churches. The report was received with gratitude. The proposal contained within the report was adopted with some minor amendments.

CLASSIS PACIFIC EAST JUNE 6, 2024

Classis examined br. Taylor Bredenhof, a graduate of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary seeking candidacy in the churches. After judging his sermon sufficient to proceed with the exam, he was examined in Old Testament Exegesis, New Testament Exegesis, as well as Doctrine and Creeds. These were also judged sufficient. After promising not to preach or teach anything contrary to God's Word as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity, he was declared eligible for call, as well as being granted permission to speak an edifying word in the churches. This is valid for one year.

Two letters were received regarding an appeal. Classis dealt with the appeal in closed session.

A letter was received from Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church regarding an overture to change Church Order Article 55. The proposal was adopted after interaction and will be forwarded to the next regional synod west.

A letter was received from Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church regarding a proposed revision of the Form for the Baptism of Infants. The proposal was adopted after interaction and will be forwarded to the next regional synod west.

CLASSIS ALBERTA JUNE 20, 2024

Student Josh Peters presented himself for a preparatory examination, supplying the necessary paperwork. He presented his sermon proposal on 1 John 2:15–17, which was judged to be sufficient. He was then examined in Old and New Testament exegesis, and in Doctrine and Creeds. In closed session, Classis determined that he did not sustain the exam. He was informed of the decision and the delegates prayed for br. Peters and his family.

The Form of Subscription was signed by Revs. F. Emadjeu and C. Kos.

The church visitors reported on their visits to the churches of St. Albert, Taber, Coaldale, Hope (Neerlandia), Neerlandia, Calgary, and Devon.

Calgary requests a church counselor for their time of vacancy; Classis appoints Rev. K. Wieske. Coaldale also requests a church counselor for their time of vacancy. Classis appoints Rev. J. Van Spronsen.

CLASSIS ONTARIO WEST, MAY 22 & JUNE 5, 2024

Four theological students presented themselves, with the required paperwork, to be examined for permission to speak an edifying word (Art. 21 CO). Their sermon proposals were discussed and deemed sufficient. They were each examined in doctrine and creeds. After sustaining these exams and promising not to preach or teach anything contrary to the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity, the following brothers were granted permission to speak an edifying word for three years: Jonatan Boon, Klaas Cho, Jerrell Lemos, and Marco van Renssen.

The chairman asked the questions set out in Article 44 CO. All the churches answered that the ministry of the office-bearers is being maintained and that the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. Upon their request, the Caledonia church received Rev. VanWoudenberg as their counselor per Article 45 CO.

An overture from Trinity (Glanbrook) to establish an appeals committee in Classis Ontario West was discussed. The task of this committee is to help appellants bring their cases to the classis, and to ensure that all relevant materials are available to the assembly. An ad-hoc committee was appointed to finalize the proposal and to report to the next classis.

The classis received the documents required (per Art. 9 CO) for the acceptance of Rev. Steve VanLeeuwen from Calgary CanRC to Kerwood. Classis approved the installation of Rev. VanLeeuwen in Kerwood with gratefulness (set for July 14, 2024, DV).

Adam Werkman, who intends to pursue further theological studies, requested an extension of his permission to speak an edifying word for a period of one year. This extension was granted.

The report of the inspection of the classical archives was received. With thankfulness, Classis received encouraging reports from the church visitors.

The classis was reconvened on June 5 and opened in the name of the Lord. Several alternates had taken the place of the primi delegates.

Two brothers, Jacob Baijal and Tony Zheng, who have completed their studies at CRTS, presented themselves, with the required paperwork, for preparatory examinations (Art. 4.B.1 CO). The sermon proposal of brother Jacob Baijal was evaluated and found to be sufficient. He was then examined in Old and New Testament exegesis, and in Doctrines and Creeds. Classis determined that br. Baijal had sustained his examination. After he promised not to preach or teach anything contrary to the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity, Classis granted him a certificate of candidacy for the ministry, lasting for a three-year period.

The sermon proposal of brother Tony Zheng was found insufficient to continue the examination; he did not sustain his preparatory exam at this time.

Rev. Peter Vellenga addressed the classis on behalf of Classis Ontario Southwest of the United Reformed Churches. The chairman led the assembly in prayer for these sister churches.

With thankfulness the classis received the treasurer's report and the auditor's report. Rev. VanBeek reported on the work of the Lighthouse collaboration, and specifically the London church, in their growing relationship with a group of Congolese Christian immigrants.

CLASSIS CENTRAL ONTARIO JUNE 7, 2024

The delegates from the churches were asked, according to Article 44, C.O., whether the ministry of the office bearers is being continued, whether the decisions of the major assemblies were being honoured, and whether there is any matter in which the consistories need the help of classis. All churches answered yes, yes, and no, respectively.

A proposal from Redemption to change Article 49 of the Church Order was discussed. Classis suggests that Redemption revise their proposal.

Correspondence from CER to CCO requesting communications on interchurch relations. Classis agrees to send this information. 

