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TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

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Clarion

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what's inside

Sermons are something we hear every Sunday—even twice! But are we hearing well? And are the ministers preaching with the right desire? Dathan Pleiter addresses the latter while Calvin Vanderlinde tackles the former. Jason Van Vliet's editorial brings together listener and preacher in a plea to have us seek not "iPreachers" but faithful preachers of God's Word. All three together help us sharpen our weekly worship.

What's going on across our federation? Read *Service Snapshots* to learn about the special work of River's Edge, catch up with recent newsletters from MERF and CFAM, learn about a recent meeting of worldwide seminary reps, see what the Board of Governors of CRTS has been up to, and take in the highlights of the recent classes across the land. It's good to know what the rest of our church family is busy with so we can support each other in prayer, word, and deed.

And still there is more! Ben Schoof's meditation in *Treasures* shows us the gospel of the Old Testament passage of Zelophahad's daughters—very encouraging! Ilse Vandermeulen gives us another *Witness at Work* feature while Mariah Tamminga introduces us to Pastor Chris Gordon and AGR in *Podcast Review*. Eric Kampen outlines the history and teaching of the United Church of Canada while Keith Sikkema delves again into church history and brings us to the institution of the Adewert Abbey. Jake Torenvliet keeps the hope-filled drumbeat of advent tapping in our ears with a meditation on Lamentations 3. Finally, Bill Slomp highlights the Lord's provision for our churches in the faithful servant Rev. Jack Moesker, whom the Lord called home in late August.

A few other gems I'll leave for you to discover! May your reading be enjoyable and refreshing.

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:

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

iPREACHER?

iMacs, iPads, and iPhones. What does the "i" stand for? Originally, "i" stood for "internet." A seamless online connection in all your devices—that was the idea. But the idea grew. For many the "i" in Apple products also means innovate, inspire, and *individualize*.

So, what does this have to do with preachers? On the one hand, each preacher must strive to grow in clarity and courage, in balancing his choice of texts, and in crafting sermons that are faithful to Scripture *and* meet his congregation's needs. He should also be humble enough to receive constructive criticism graciously. On the other hand, what about us, the hearers? Are we looking for an iPreacher?

Admittedly, that's an odd question. Let's take a closer look.

THE POWER OF PERSONALIZATION

We all appreciate the ability to personalize our devices. Please let *me* pick the picture on my home screen and the position of my icons. Of course, this desire to personalize reaches far beyond electronic devices. If we go to Subway, we enjoy tailoring that Italian sub with our preferred veggies and sauces. In fact, customization even stretches into modern education theory. Child-centred education recommends that students should choose the pace and the style of learning that best suits their personal needs.

The main line here seems to be that life will be better if things conform to my needs and preferences. This is partially true. Small letters may be just fine for many people, but if your eyes are aging, you *should* be able to make them bigger. After all, a software engineer at Samsung cannot be expected to know the zoom level that *you* need to read a text message.

But this power to personalize also contains a risk, especially as we settle into our pew on Sunday. Yes, we know our personal needs better than Samsung, but do we know our needs better than our Saviour? "God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (1 John 3:20).

GOD'S MOUTH AND OUR EARS

Holy Scripture, from which faithful preachers preach, comes from God's own mouth. "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Tim 3:16). This Word from the mouth of the all-knowing God feeds our souls with all the necessary nutrients in just the right balance (Matt 4:4). God provides "sound teaching" (2 Tim 4:3), instruction that promotes and sustains spiritual health. Sadly, we do not always appreciate God's carefully crafted diet as much as we should. Our ears can develop an itch.

The apostle Paul warns, "The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions" (2 Tim 4:3). Let's do an honest self-assessment. Do we have itching ears?

Notice where the itch comes from. *Our own* passions cause the itch that craves the scratch. In other words, that not-so-little "i" starts walking toward the centre of the stage. True, not all passions are bad. One Sunday I may crave comfort in the preaching. "After all, it's been a rough week; I really need it." But the preaching that day, *though faithful to the text*, does more to convict me of my sin than settle my soul. I may conclude that my preacher is "too heavy." Or, after a week of frustration with my own hypocrisy, I may feel the preaching, *though faithful to the text*, pampers parishioners far too much. I conclude my pastor is "too light." Added to that, we prefer to hear a certain style or tone in our preacher.

Over time, we may want to customize our Sunday sermons like our ring tones. And if we don't like the sound, we can always switch up the preacher, right? Wrong. Our Saviour calls us to listen like the Thessalonian congregation: "when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in your believers" (1 Thess 2:13).

So, when we find our pew on Sunday, we may have an iPhone in our pocket, but we do not have an iPreacher on our pulpit. Let's substitute itching ears for open hearts. Remember: during the preaching, no one less than the Spirit of God is renovating our lives.

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God Guarantees our Inheritance

Then drew near the daughters of Zelophehad . . . Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah
Numbers 27:1–11

Do you sometimes struggle with how to apply Old Testament events and writings to our modern times and daily lives? As we read through the laws in Leviticus, or the lives of the Judges, we can wonder: how does this profit, teach, or correct us today? One story that may at first *not* seem so difficult to apply is the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27.

Five women come to Moses and tell him their story: "Our father died for his own sin. And he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away?" Israel had just been counted in the census of the second generation, after the first generation all died in the wilderness. Each man's family that was counted will get their own inheritance. Zelophehad, though, died without leaving any male heirs. So, according to the system in Israel, his family would get no land, even though he had five daughters. This is not right! The daughters make their request: "Give to us a possession among our father's brothers."

We can easily see the application for today. "Women are people too! They should be allowed to inherit land just as men can." You can find many articles and sermons praising the daughters of Zelophehad as the first feminists, fighting for women's rights and gender equality in a patriarchal Israelite society. And they succeed! The Lord says, "The daughters of Zelophehad are right. You shall give them possession of an inheritance." So today women should stand up for their rights.

Now the Bible does teach that women and men are equal in worth and in dignity in God's sight (Gen 1:27; Prov 31; Gal 3:28). Scripture lists the five daughters of Zelophehad by name five times: "Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah." They, like each one of God's children, truly matter to the Lord.

But the Bible also teaches that men and women have differing gifts and different roles in the family. Ordinarily men are leaders, and so the family line and inheritance passes down through them. Male inheritance is not because women lack the ability to manage land, but because of their place in the family. So, the daughters of Zelophehad may inherit. However, this is not because of gender equality and women's rights at all. This is about inheritance.

The issue is that, without any sons, Zelophehad's inheritance will disappear from his family. Someone else will absorb it. And that is a problem. The Lord instructs Israel that such a thing must never happen, not even if the cause is human sinfulness like Zelophehad's. Land inheritance must stay with a family. If there are no sons, daughters can inherit. If there are no daughters, an uncle or the nearest kinsman must inherit.

Why is keeping inheritance so important? It points ahead to the New Testament where, like the Israelites, each one of God's people is promised an inheritance. "You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry 'Abba! Father!'. . . We are children of God, and if children, then heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:15–17).

And what is our inheritance? "The redemption of our bodies"—resurrection from the dead, freedom and glory, and eternal life on a new creation set free from its bondage to corruption.

Can this inheritance be lost? No! That's the promise of Numbers 27. When God promises an inheritance, it is certain. It cannot be lost despite how difficult and uncertain this life is, despite human sin and weakness, despite the groans and sufferings of this life, whether male of female. Glory is your inheritance.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, you are adopted as a child of God and so made an heir with Christ. Our inheritance and a place on the new earth with God is certain. God guarantees it, and he makes sure that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. That is certain! C

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING:

Romans 8:9–30; 1 Peter 1:3–9

QUESTIONS:

1. We often talk and think about heaven. But do you ever meditate on what our final inheritance— the new heavens and new earth—will be like?
2. What comfort do we have from knowing that our inheritance is secure through sin and suffering?

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A PRAISEWORTHY SERMON OR THE *Praiseworthy Christ?*

When it comes to preaching, it is all to the praise of God in Christ. Preaching is about exalting Christ, being enthralled by his beauty. As we gaze upon him, we come to know the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4.6). However, when I am writing a sermon, I often need to ask myself this question: what is the goal? As people return home from the service, what do I want them to say? Do I want them to say, "Wow, what a sermon!" or "Wow, what a Saviour!"? You might be thinking, how is that even a question? Obviously, you want people to say, "Wow, what a Saviour!" But that's the battle that rages in my heart as I prepare, write, and preach God's Word.

Maybe this reveals more about me than about preachers in general. But I suspect your pastor wrestles with the same temptations. It's the temptation of the garden, except in the study. Satan exchanges the tree branches for bookshelves, slithering his way into the preacher's heart. Every week I hear that hissing voice redirecting my focus from God's glory to vain glory. This is why I greatly appreciated Rev. Calvin Vanderlinde's encouragement to *pray for your pastor* (Vol 74.10, p 391). In his article, Vanderlinde encourages readers to pray for the preaching ministry of their pastor.

PRAYER NEEDED

A minister of the gospel is called to be an ambassador for Christ, proclaiming the good news of the gospel and expounding the riches of God's inspired Word. This means that, if we are to rightly handle the word of truth, Jesus Christ is key. Christ tells us that all of Scripture speaks to him. In John 5, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for searching the Scriptures with the thought that in them is eternal life. As our Lord says, "it is they that bear witness about me." Of course, we would all love to have been the proverbial fly on the wall when, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] interpreted to them in *all* the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Lk 24:27, emphasis added). Every preacher, therefore, carries this burden to exalt Christ before the eyes of their people.

This is where your pastor needs prayer. You've probably heard it said that God is not a vending machine. Treating God as a vending machine is going to him for what he dispenses, for what he gives. I'm afraid that's the temptation in the study. It's tempting to go to Christ for what he gives—in this case, a praiseworthy sermon because of our good Christology—instead of for who he is, our all-sufficient Saviour. Do we want people enthralled with the one preaching, or enthralled with the One who is preached? It's a fine line, but it's a battle line.

Therefore, pray for your pastor. Pray that he would not use Christ as a means to get to his ultimate end (praise for being a good preacher—the one who preaches Christ) but that Christ would simply be his ultimate end. Pray that your pastor would pursue Christ in the text so that both the pastor and his people walk away saying, "Christ is amazing," not "His sermon was amazing." Pray that the Spirit would convict your pastor when his sermon writing is serving an ulterior motive other than the advancement of God's glory in Christ.

Pray for this because this is the kind of preaching that is transformative. This is the kind of preaching that leads to gospel change in our lives. Beholding Christ never leaves us the same—preachers and congregants alike. No, beholding Christ changes us into his image, from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). Pray that we may exalt his name together.

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ACTIVATING ACTIVE LISTENING

Whoever coined the term "active listening" surely saw a good and necessary reason for the modifier "active." Presumably they experienced too many instances where interactions were plagued by inattentiveness, disengagement, or absent-mindedness thinly disguised as true listening. Perhaps they merely witnessed a set of airline passengers "listen" to the customary flight instructions. Judging by the fact that the term "active listening" has stuck and become a familiar phrase, it is evidently a worthwhile classification to differentiate true listening from what is not.

The term "active listening" is commonly used to describe a communication skill that goes beyond merely hearing audible sounds. It involves deeper concentration which processes what is being communicated verbally and nonverbally for the purpose of understanding, so that an appropriate response may be given. The primary intent of active listening is to *understand*, not to formulate a reply.

WHY WE NEED THIS SKILL

Active listening is a simple act of love that can be applied by anyone in any setting. But it is Christians, of all people, who have the greatest reason and ought to have the greatest concern to show such love and care in listening, especially in corporate worship. We know that the great God of the universe has spoken into this world and still speaks to us today through the preached Word. Paul so understood the important link between hearing and believing that he said, "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" (Rom 10:13–15.)

Some have claimed that we live in an age of shortened attention spans. But is that really true? When someone's interest is piqued by a movie or book or some kind of sporting event, they will not soon pack up and walk away before the end. While this pertains to the world of entertainment, which is in no way parallel to the church, there is in reality nothing more gripping than to hear the voice of God speaking from the pages of Scripture.

In our digital media age, there is an abundance of edifying content readily available to our ears through podcasts and audiobooks. Digital devices now accompany us almost everywhere we go, enabling us to fill almost every quiet moment with something to listen to. Many media platforms even have adjustable playback controls to slow down a speedy talker or increase the tempo to take in content in less time than it took to record. Given how commonly these controls are adjusted, its effects on our ability to listen would make for a fascinating study.

Living in such an environment, it is crucial to consider how to maximize concentration when it comes to the most important message this world has ever known: the Gospel of Jesus Christ that the church is called to proclaim week after week.

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO USE THIS SKILL

It is well understood that a preacher must exert and expend himself before, during, and after the glorious task of preaching,

attending to his spiritual life and spending many hours in study and reflection when preparing his sermons, all the while seeking God's blessing on it. Every congregation deserves that and has the right to expect that. But what about the listeners? What responsibility do they have?

Here a baseball analogy may be useful. The relationship between preacher and listener may be compared to a pitcher and catcher working in unison. Both the pitcher and the catcher have important roles to play in every pitch delivered. It is not the pitcher's sole responsibility to locate the catcher's glove when throwing the ball. A catcher must be ready in a receptive posture, always maintaining concentration on the ball, and then move his glove wherever the pitch is heading. The game will quickly turn disastrous if the catcher is lackadaisical and inattentive.

Relating that to preaching, the activity is not only to be on the preacher's side while listeners remain passive. If preaching is to have maximum benefit, listeners must also exert and expend themselves. This is certainly one of the takeaways from Christ's parable of the sower and the soils. For the seed of the Word to be successfully planted into receptive hearts, the ground must be well-prepared, plowed, harrowed, turned over, and the clods broken up. This requires hard work. Perhaps this explains why the good soil is so rare.

In addition to that, while there are plenty of resources a preacher can use to train and equip himself to become a better preacher—from books to courses to conferences—there are far fewer resources for those who want to equip themselves to become better listeners. This is quite remarkable considering that the number of listeners far exceeds the number of preachers. The Bible also has more to say about the listener's responsibility to hear and obey the Word of God than it does about the preacher's responsibility to explain and apply the Word of God. Certainly, God is greatly concerned with how preachers preach but based on the sheer number of biblical references to hearing and listening, he is as much, if not more, concerned with how listeners listen. Throughout Scripture, there are verses and passages that address the vital necessity of hearing and obeying God's Word, issuing impassioned pleas such as Hebrews 2:1, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it."

HOW TO ACTIVATE THIS SKILL

There are many practical things a person can do to activate active listening. First and foremost, we must remember that it is the Most High God who speaks to us through his Word. Therefore, we must pray beforehand that God would send his Spirit to make our hearts open and receptive.

Wisdom also dictates that we get a good rest on Saturday night and remove any distractions or mitigate potential distractions by arriving to worship services on time, choosing carefully where to sit, settling our minds and hearts, and silencing our phone if it somehow made its way in with us.

Perhaps the most effective way to maintain concentration and maximize overall retention is to take notes. This discipline goes the extra mile and enhances one's ability to track with a sermon from beginning to end. Even in the event that one's attention is diverted, notes will help to overcome distraction and get back on track with greater ease. Of course, there are many who can listen well without taking notes. No one should feel obligated to take notes just for the sake of taking notes. That would only create a new distraction! That said, taking notes presents a real advantage to listeners. When someone takes notes, they cover the material they hear three times just while sitting there. This happens in very rapid fashion, so it is helpful to see this in slow-motion and frame by frame. First, one hears the words spoken. Secondly, what is heard is put into one's own words as the mind turns it over. Finally, those words travel through the hands and fingertips as they are written down. Even if the notes are thrown away and never read again, listening in such a way will be triply more productive than without taking notes. Any review and study of those notes is just an added bonus.

Of course, with this commendation it is essential to issue a caution. Sermons are not lectures. The concern of preaching and the practice of active listening is not that people understand biblical truth or even better retain it. The greater goal is that its truth is pressed onto their lives. The aim of a sermon is not to pass on information but to foster transformation, to give those who hear a sense that they have met with the almighty, holy, glorious, gracious God and that they have heard from his timeless Word a timely word. The value of God's Word demands nothing less than that we, by God's grace, do everything in our power to listen in a way that will accomplish that end to the utmost effect.

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RIVER'S EDGE *Haven of Hope*

Set along a beautiful stretch of the Grand River shoreline in Dunnville, Ontario is River's Edge Haven of Hope. River's Edge is a Reformed faith-based ministry that focuses on one-on-one mentoring with children and youths aged 6–18. River's Edge provides a safe and fun farm environment where children can come and simply be children, free from the stresses and distractions of the world, a place to disconnect from screens and use their imaginations, as they enjoy God's creation.

As a charitable, not-for-profit organization, River's Edge relies heavily on the prayers, time, and generosity of supporters. Volunteers work behind the scenes and on the ground to make sure as many children as possible can be mentored, free of charge. Our mentees are predominantly from the greater community. Mentees are paired with staff and volunteer mentors who are required to sign our statement of faith and demonstrate the lifestyle of a Christian witness. It is our goal to pair mentees with adult mentors who share similar interests and experiences, which gives a "leg up" in the relationship-building process. Mentoring is not counselling; we and our volunteers simply spend intentional time with children and youth, taking the opportunities God provides to speak truth and love into their lives.

While our focus is on mentoring, we are blessed to also host other groups, including curriculum-related school visitors, partner organizations such as Streetlight Ministries and the Dunnville Youth Impact Centre, and weekly visits from our friends at the Anchor association.

BUSY SUMMERS

Summer is the busiest time of the year at River's Edge. While we scale down our mentoring program to one day a week, we give greater attention to group activities. Over the summer of 2025, we were blessed to host over 350 youths! For the fifth consecutive year, Streetlight Ministries visited the farm with over 100 participants, leaders, and volunteers to spend three days with us for their Bright Hope Camp. Our local friends and partner organization, the Dunnville Youth Impact Centre, visited the farm every Monday for their "Mission *Possible*" camp. In between, we hosted our own activity day camps and volunteer days.

The farm can get messy and disorganized with all the activity, but this summer we managed well thanks to the ten high school students who joined us for our weekly volunteer day. Together, they contributed over 300 hours of volunteer time! We were truly blessed by that fun and energetic group.

Our Scripture theme for the summer was 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18, with a focus on "Rejoice always, pray continually, and be thankful in all circumstances." With both our activity camp participants and youth volunteers, we discussed the difference between being happy and being joyful. We reflected on "what if we woke up tomorrow with only the things we thanked God for today," and explored the concept of what it means to be a "glass half full or half empty" kind of person. With the older youth volunteers, we dug a little deeper into the topic of anxiety by comparing the parallel text we find in Philippians 4, where we're told, "Do not be anxious about anything." We were able to discuss things that can cause stress or anxiety, and how, by bringing those concerns to God in prayer, he will give us "the peace that transcends understanding."

REJOICE ALWAYS!

Twice a week over the summer, we were reminded by our theme text to "Rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances." This text was a providential choice for a theme and was instrumental in helping us navigate some difficult challenges that have taken place at River's Edge over a short span of time. We are humbled when we look back at all the things we worried and stressed about. We are now blessed to see that God's love and protection over this ministry remains constant; he is in control.

This fall we have started a new season of mentoring, and God has blessed River's Edge with six dedicated volunteers to mentor nineteen children in our fall program. Ten of these children are new to River's Edge, and all of them come from outside our church community. This is unprecedented, as we usually have a mix of children from both inside and outside the church. It's both exciting and nerve-wracking, as it gives us a chance to not only impact the children but also their families with the message of hope and love in Christ.

With the blessings of renewed enthusiasm and positivity, and a firm desire to trust in God's plan, we move forward in God's strength and not our own. Please pray for the ministry at River's Edge, that God will bless the work and continue to provide the workers, all to his glory. C

Jackie Nordeman
For the Board of River's Edge Haven of Hope

www.merf.org

MERF News

October 2025

Middle East Reformed Fellowship—"Declaring the Whole Counsel of God"

"Faithful, Fruitful and Cost-Effective Indigenous Missions!"

Ministering in Indonesia

by Pastor Timothy Burden, MERF Augustine Program Coordinator

Pastor Tim Burden teaching in Lakoka, Sumba island, Indonesia

A few weeks ago, my wife, Rosalind and I flew to the city of Makassar, on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi to serve at MERF's Training Center there. Through the following week about 25 people from across South Sulawesi joined MERF staff for biblical training at the Center. I introduced the 4 Units of the Augustine Program, looking in more detail at some of the studies. MERF's Augustine Program is designed to equip church leaders for service. It has served effectively over 20 years to prepare South Sudanese and other East African church leaders in 3-month, intensive courses at MERF's Ministry Center in Lokichoggio, Kenya. Now the Augustine Program is being introduced for biblical training in Indonesia. In my final sessions we also looked at the Five Solas of the Reformation.

Separately, Rosalind taught local children and ladies from the book of Esther. She also shared insights into children's ministry with children's workers. Participants greatly enjoyed these sessions. We are thankful for the great kindness and generosity of the MERF team at Makassar.

Questions raised during training indicated problems Indonesian churches face and the strong need for much deeper biblical knowledge and understanding:

- *Is it right for a preacher to bring a 'Word from the Lord' rather than open a passage of Scripture?*
- *Has the Church replaced Israel?*
- *How were people saved before Christ came?*
- *How can I read the Bible in a more beneficial way?*
- *Did Christ descend to Hell to preach the Gospel?*
- *Who should hold office in the Church?*

The Lord's help was clearly needed for answering these and other questions.

Electronic Communication

In one session on the Church and its mission, those present divided into five groups to answer different questions. An AI app was successfully used to immediately translate the questions from my English PowerPoint to the Indonesian language. Each group reported back well. Early one morning we joined the MERF teams across several Indonesian islands for their regular online Zoom prayer meetings. This may be a format MERF supporters could also use.

Prayer Request

When visiting the GKII Talitakumi Church, where I preached on Sunday, it was good to meet Zakaria from

the island of Buton. He is a trainee pastor. *His church has met opposition from some local Muslims over the proposed erection of a church building on land purchased for that purpose. Please keep this in your prayers.*

Sumba Island

From Makassar we flew to Jakarta, where we were met by the Jakarta team and flew the next day to the island of Sumba. Sumba island is culturally Christian (Roman Catholic and Protestant) with very few Muslims. We visited three areas: GKS Pahala church in south west Sumba, GKS Lakoka in central Sumba and the GKS Seminary at Lewa in east Sumba regency. After a long drive along a forest track, we came to the first, Pahala church. It seemed to be in the middle of nowhere, yet, like other churches of its kind, it has five satellite congregations serving about two thousand forest dwelling people.

There is a great need for Bibles, which MERF Indonesia endeavours to supply. Some areas are accessible only by motorbike, so it can take three days to deliver them.

Parents may not be able to read but their children read the Scriptures to them. At the request of church leaders, here and at Lakoka, the Five Solas of the Reformation were taught to gatherings of between thirty and fifty. This gave rise to probing questions regarding Roman Catholic beliefs such as the Mass. Some asked the way Christians should react to Muslim violence against them, such as had occurred recently in Jakarta.

At each place the welcome was warm, but at Lakoka we were greeted with an extraordinary "Opening of the Gate" ceremony, which included dialogues, drums, shouts and dancing with swords being waved.

The GKS Seminary at Lewa prepares young people aged 18 and up to become teachers, church workers or ordained pastors. About two hundred gathered each day there to receive teaching. The main sessions focused on the Five Solas. The translator was clearly in awe at the teaching she was translating. Rosalind led a further session on parenting. This raised many questions. Family life presents great challenges. The need for teaching on Christian marriage was obvious. The principal and staff were enthusiastic about using the Augustine Program material and earnestly requested a return visit.

The young people studying to become teachers, church workers or ordained pastors at GKS Seminary Lewa, Sumba showed great interest and had many questions

Jakarta Community

Back in Jakarta, we joined MERF's team and their local community in celebrations of 80 years of independence from the Netherlands before flying back to the UK. It was delightful to see Muslims and Christians living and working happily alongside each other in community life. The respect of the community for MERF's team was evident. Their involvement in the community requires much wisdom. They do not shut themselves off from their Muslim neighbors; rather, they engage with them in genuine cooperative friendship. We are challenged to pray for them and for the gospel witness across Indonesia to the Muslim majority. *They carefully speak of God's saving grace to their neighbors, not only face to face but also over local radio and the internet. Such engagement is aimed at leading many to faith in Christ even as they receive answers to questions about the way of salvation.*

Thank you for your partnership and prayers.

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"The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory."

— Psalms 97:6

Blooming in the Garden Business

ILSE VANDERMEULEN

Editor's note: Clarion is interviewing various professionals in our Reformed community to highlight how they are serving the Lord in their particular industry or calling. Charis Siebenga is CEO of blüm Luxury Gardens in the Fraser Valley.

MEET CHARIS

Charis Siebenga (38) is the CEO of blüm Luxury Gardens, a boutique landscaping service company that is transforming high-end properties across British Columbia's Lower Mainland. Charis loves flowers and plants—but even more, she loves watching her people blossom in their roles through their daily work.

Charis graduated in 2004 from Credo Christian High School and obtained her Floral Design Diploma in 2013 from the University of the Fraser Valley. She lives in Abbotsford, BC, where she attends the Abbotsford Canadian Reformed Church. When she is not running her business, Charis enjoys all that the Pacific province of BC has to offer, including mountain biking, skiing, and backcountry snowboarding. She also loves rockhounding and always keeps an eye open for the next gem for her collection.

HOW DID YOU BECOME A BUSINESS OWNER?

In high school, I started working for a flower bulb wholesale company with sales through all of Canada. Every summer, I'd go to the Netherlands for four weeks to check orders and monitor product quality. I worked there for thirteen years. During that time, I did the floral design course. I knew I was creative, and working with plants was always something I enjoyed. When the company changed ownership, I decided it was time to move on. By then, I had gained a lot of knowledge in horticulture, and it had always been a dream to start my own company.

I like to jump in with both feet. I first bought a lawn-cutting franchise, so I could have the winters off and have flexibility to travel. I love to travel, but the funny thing is, it never came to that! I ran that company for a year and a half, then started this business in 2018 and so now my winters are always busy planning for the next year. We now have 13 full-time employees and several students during the summer, and I love seeing them grow and thrive in their roles.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU AS A BUSINESS OWNER AND LEADER AT BLÜM?

I've spent a lot of time thinking about how people can build a life and a future in landscaping. I try to create meaningful full-time careers for my employees. For many people, landscaping is seasonal work, but I wanted to build a business model that provided stability for my staff year-round. We think of our employees and their families, and their kids' futures.

With this in mind, we rebranded the company to focus on high-end clients, including golf courses. We handle seasonal planting of annuals and ongoing planting and maintenance of perennials, annuals, and other landscaping. We see ourselves as an extension of their teams, as a "head gardener" that is involved year-round in keeping these places looking their best. Our crews are well organized and professional. We stand out in our eye-catching fuchsia pink trucks. Our team always looks good!

I am most energized by watching people blossom, by finding ways to help them use their full potential and gifts. This year, our focus is on developing our team, engaging with the community, building relationships, and learning from others in our industry. A key achievement has been our leadership team's mentorship of our staff, demonstrating their passion and excitement for blüm's future. We are always working to build friendship, trust, and respect in our company.

I think leadership is understanding that everyone is different. As we grow, it is challenging to connect with every team member, but we train our leadership team to listen to and support employees. It's about coming alongside people, hearing their stories, and understanding where they are coming from. I'm an introvert, but I like one-on-one contact with people and to see them thrive. I love figuring out what makes people tick and how they work best within the company.

HOW DOES YOUR FAITH INFLUENCE YOUR WORK?

I love self-reflecting. If I don't grow, I can't help others to grow. My personal motto is that I always want to be better. As Christians, we can't be content with staying the same—there is always room for growth.

When I was growing up, my friend's dad used to say: "You need to have JOY." He meant the acronym: **J**esus first, **O**thers second, and **Y**ourself last. That really stuck with me. For me, it's about glorifying God first. I do that by helping my people thrive, helping them to be their best. And I do that by taking care of his creation, making it look beautiful through our landscaping.

It is a joy to be a light in this world to people who might not know the gospel. I have been through tough things in my life, and I enjoy connecting with clients and being able to come alongside them when they go through struggles. Again, we are not just a maintenance company—we're often much more than that to our clients.

WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES FOR YOU AS BUSINESS OWNER?

Time management—lack of time is definitely number one! One of the hardest things in my role is that I'm always "on." I need to keep the momentum going in order to move forward. I'm constantly thinking: what's next? How are my people doing? Who needs support? If they fail, I feel like *I* failed, because I didn't support them in the way they needed. I'm probably too hard on myself, but I want everyone to feel motivated and supported.

I do like challenges, and I like to find solutions for problems. They don't really scare me. Doing business comes with taking risks. It's good to have a business coach to support me and I've hired good people around me. I'm driven by the numbers too. We set ambitious goals and meet weekly to track our progress.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY?

I am motivated by the growth of the company, seeing us develop into something bigger than I imagined when I started. This year has been challenging, with a lot of changes, but also fun and exciting. I hired an account manager, and we are pushing for extra growth. We challenge our staff and expect a lot from them, but then they have ownership too and they get excited and take pride in their work. I love flowers, but more than that, I love watching my people do well!

I'm the youngest of six, and while my path has looked a little different than that of my siblings, I'm grateful for where God has placed me. I get to run a business I'm passionate about and lead an incredible team of people. This feels like my calling for now—using my gifts to grow others, serve my clients, and care for God's creation. I'm thankful for the journey I'm on and excited for what's ahead.

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blom

The UNITED CHURCH *of* CANADA[1]

ERIC KAMPEN

In the previous installment on *Churches Outside the PARC*, at first it appeared that we ventured quite far away from the PARC. With a few historical brush strokes, however, it became clear how the Baptist churches trace their roots to the Reformation in England. At the same time, developments over the past 400 years have put the Baptists at a considerable distance from the PARC.

The same can be said for the church under consideration in this installment, the United Church of Canada (UCC). Though it is, humanly speaking, unlikely that the UCC will ever be represented at NAPARC, they are worthy of some attention. It is said to be the largest Protestant denomination in Canada. As Canadian Reformed Churches, we celebrate 75 years in Canada, but the UCC celebrates 100 years, with roots extending even further back in Canadian history. A review will bring out some disconcerting developments as well as reason for self-examination.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of the Christian church in Canada started as a mirror of the history of the Christian church in Britain and France. Where the French influence was dominant, Roman Catholicism became prominent. Where the British influence was dominant, Protestant churches were dominant. It is necessary to speak of churches in the plural. Immigrants from Scotland took along their Presbyterian ways. Those from England brought along Anglican, Congregational, Baptist, and Methodist ways. The latter three all had roots in the Anglican church but dissented on points of doctrine as well as polity. The latter three groups also frequently dissented among themselves, resulting in many further divisions.

The immigrants transplanted their divided church life into their new country. In the nineteenth century, there were at least eight different Methodist bodies, four different Congregational assemblies, and at least sixteen different Presbyterian groups.

The nineteenth century saw a remarkable development. By 1875, nearly all the Presbyterians had united into one church, forming the largest Protestant body in Canada. By 1884, all the Methodists had united into one church. By 1906, the Congregationalists had united into one church. It had proven unsustainable to maintain all the old divisions in this vast new country. This problem was especially evident as the West opened up. In some communities, the settlers organized Union Churches, setting aside their differences to make church life feasible. There was also a desire to coordinate overseas missions.

In the early 1900s, efforts began to get underway to officially unite these three church bodies. The efforts came to fruition in the Union of 1925, when the Methodists, Congregationalists, and about 70% of the Presbyterians joined together to form the United Church of Canada. At its founding, the UCC had about 600,000 members. Membership peaked in 1964 at about 1.1 million. The statistics for 2023 indicate that, while there were over 804,000 people under pastoral care, the actual membership stood at 325,315, with average weekly attendance at just over 110,000 in 2451 local congregations, putting the claim to be the largest Protestant denomination in Canada into question. The numbers show the UCC has experienced the same precipitous decline in membership as experienced in other mainline Protestant Churches in Canada and the U.S.A.

[1] Most of the information for this article has been gleaned from the official website of the United Church of Canada https://united-church.ca/

SHIFTING DOCTRINES

The Union of 1925 was a remarkable achievement when one considers it was a merger of Methodists, who had strong Arminian leanings, and Presbyterians, who held to the Westminster Standards. The Congregationalists leaned more to the Presbyterian side in doctrine. The *Twenty Articles of Doctrine*, which formed the basis for this union, brings out that this was done by downplaying Reformed emphases, such as God's sovereign election, as well as Arminian emphases, such as man's free will. The articles cover doctrines from Theology (Trinity) to the Consummation (return of Christ).

Its brevity in comparison to, for example, the Westminster Standards, is understandable considering the two theological traditions it sought to unite. The focus is on what unites, and that calls for saying less rather than more. There are many statements that capture the heart of the gospel message and, if read with a spirit of charity, can be appreciated.

Some aspects, however, merit highlighting in anticipation of future developments. In the article on "Revelation" (2), it is said "that God has revealed himself in nature, in history, and in the heart of man." Of the Scriptures it is said that they were "given by inspiration of God, as containing the only infallible rule of faith and life, a faithful record of God's gracious revelations, and as the sure witness of Christ."

In the article "Of the Ministry" (17), it is stated that Christ "calls men and women to these ministries," indicating an openness to women in the offices in the church. The UCC ordained its first woman to the office of minister in 1936.

Article 20 speaks of "Christian Service and the Final Triumph," stressing a Christian's duty "to do good unto all men, to maintain the public and private worship of God, to hallow the Lord's Day, to preserve the inviolability of marriage and the sanctity of the family," as well as spreading the gospel, and that "all Christ's enemies shall finally be overcome and the kingdoms of this world be made the kingdom of our God and of his Christ."

The UCC adopted a second *Statement of Faith* in 1940. This was not to replace the *Twenty Articles of Doctrine*. This new statement was based on the conviction that "Christians of each new generation are called to state [their faith] afresh in terms of the thought of their own age and with the emphasis their age needs." From this document, it merits mentioning how in the article on "The Holy Scriptures" (9), it states that "we acknowledge in Holy Scripture the true witness to God's Word and the sure guide to Christian faith and conduct." What stands out is the way Scripture is the witness "*to* God's Word," which is not the same as saying it *is* God's Word.

A third statement of faith was published in 1968 called *A New Creed*. It is written as a poem and is very minimalistic. It acknowledges God, Father and Spirit, but gives about equal space to the church's calling to celebrate God's presence, living with respect in Creation, serving others, and proclaiming Jesus.

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

The next statement of faith was published in 2006, called *A Song of Faith*. It is also written in poetic form and is about seven pages in length. In the Preamble, it states that "This statement of faith seeks to provide a verbal picture of what the United Church of Canada understands its faith to be in its current historical, political, social, and theological context at the beginning of the 21st century." It "attempts to reflect the spirit of the United Church of Canada and to respond to the various defining elements in our social, political, and historical context, including the place of the church in society, the cultural and intellectual setting in which we find ourselves, the meaning of 'truth', the impact of the market economy on our daily lives, and the growing issue of the meaning of 'security.'" These are further explored in four appendices.

This collection of documents related to the *Song of Faith* gives a clear indication of how far the UCC has drifted from its roots. The *Song* starts off by describing God as "Holy Mystery." God is also described as "Mother." This is done deliberately because "[t]he use of exclusively male language and metaphors to refer to God distorts our understanding of a divine being who transcends the human categories of gender" (Appendix B). It is said that acknowledging God as 'Mystery'

> . . . throws into question any human claims to absolute truth. Recognizing that the Spirit challenges us to celebrate the Holy "not only in what is familiar, but also in that which seems foreign," the church does well to respect "other ways that speak faithfully of the One on whom our hearts rely" (Appendix C).

Appendix C also elaborates on how the *Song of Faith* addresses the Market Economy, the Climate of Terror, and our Home, the Earth.

The final Appendix (D) mentions how the UCC, as a Protestant Church, speaks of God and Jesus Christ. It then states that its distinctive qualities come out in "its approach to the interpretation of Scripture, its affection for the concept of inclusivity, and its passion for social justice." There is mention of the origins of the UCC being linked to the Social Gospel Movement, and how the UCC has always seen itself as an advocate for justice in society and in the world. It also sees itself as an inclusive church, which includes sexual orientation. This is very evident on the UCC website, where one is greeted with the call to "Support

Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel," as well as a picture of a rainbow being painted on the path leading to the front door of a church building. Further, the second tab on the menu bar is "Social Action." Clicking on this bar shows the many social causes the church advocates for.

With respect to Scripture, the UCC exhibits an approach that seeks to take the Bible seriously but not literally. Biblical study and interpretation in the United Church often take into consideration Scripture's historical context, its literary value and function, the diversity of voices and perspectives being represented, and the voices not being represented. The statement of faith recognizes Scripture as testaments of "human experiences and cultural assumptions," but also as a source of revelation, a "faithful witness," and "our song for the journey."

The fourth appendix concludes by referring to Individual Freedom and Institutional Authority. What this means is that the *Song of Faith* may represent the general ideas of the institution, but everyone is left free to believe what they wish. This was also mentioned in Appendix A, which spelled out that this *Song of Faith* is not a condition for membership. The UCC sees itself as a big tent, with room for many views.

REFLECTION AND PRAYER

In the introduction, it was mentioned that a review of the UCC would bring out something disconcerting as well give cause for self-examination. The disconcerting thing is the way the UCC has drifted far from its beginnings. As it speaks of God as Holy Mystery, it no longer speaks clearly about the Triune God. Scripture is no longer seen as the Word of God to man but man's words about God. The Christian faith seems to be just one of various ways to the truth.

The UCC has come a long way from promoting the Christian life articulated in Art. 20 of its founding *Articles of Doctrine*. The focus is more on social action. In the way it promotes the causes of the age, including LGBTQ2S+ and abortion, it is evident that history and culture are a more important source of revelation than Scripture. The list of causes seems to mirror those found on the website of the New Democratic Party. It has been said that the United Church is essentially the NDP at prayer. In all this, the gospel message is well hidden.

The precipitous decline of membership over the years, where weekly attendance is around 110,000, seems to indicate the UCC does not have a convincing message for people. To promote the causes they do, there are many other organizations one can join.

At the same time, there is also reason for self-examination. First, there is the need to examine ourselves to see whether we remain true to Scripture or whether we too have begun a precipitous slide. Every church is prone to deformation. This is to be noted especially in connection with the concern for justice and righteousness in society. To be sure, Christians should desire justice and righteousness. Thankfully, there are efforts within the Reformed community to let a truly scriptural Christian voice be heard on the issues of the day. The church must be careful, however, that it does not become known as a conservative political party at prayer or, even more disconcerting, become identified with extremist voices by the issues it emphasizes, if not institutionally then perhaps through other social media posts and actions. This obscures and discredits the gospel. The church collectively and believers individually should be known for proclaiming the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, what calls for self-examination is the drive towards unity that led to the formation of the United Church of Canada. One could argue that each must have compromised their principles to make it work, especially when the union crossed traditional denominational boundaries. At the same time, seeing especially the unions that consolidated the three founding bodies, there was a drive to unify in the face of the challenges of so many small churches in so vast a country. It gives reason to ask why the various Reformed Churches have not been able to find each other when there is far more uniting us than the three groups that formed the United Church. What will it take to come to a truly United *Reformed* Church in Canada?

At the same time, it has been said before that where the Word is, the Spirit is working. The Word seems to be obscured under many layers in the UCC, but it is still there. All this brings to mind again the prayer *For the Church Universal* found in the Book of Common Prayer:

> *Most* gracious God, we humbly beseech thee for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth; in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where any thing is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen and confirm it; where it is in want, furnish it; where it is divided and rent asunder, make it whole again; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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ICRC Theological Education Conference participants

ICRC: Seminarians from Around the World Meet Together

DR. GERHARD H. VISSCHER

In June 2025, about 40 people representing about 12 different seminaries and 14 different denominations from around the world met in Grand Rapids, Michigan to discuss common and pressing aspects of seminary life. What constitutes a seminary? How can we do this better? How can we maintain and improve the necessary standards? These questions and more were addressed on the fine campus of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS) in Grand Rapids. They were exhausting days, but ever so good.

The conference was organized and sponsored by the Theological Education Committee of the International Conference of Reformed Churches. The members of this committee are Dr. Douw Breed (South Africa), Mr. Jim Beeke (Canada), Dr. Gerhard Visscher (Canada), Dr. Tony Curto (USA), Dr. Matthew Ebenezer (India), Dr. Jae Youn Kim (Korea), and Dr. Philip Scheepers (Australia).

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The conference started with keynote speaker Dr. Davi Gomes, International Director of the World Reformed Fellowship, addressing the topic "The Challenges of Reformed Education in the Twenty-First Century." In his estimation, probably the biggest challenge of the century will be that posed by artificial intelligence (AI). How do we in this age protect ourselves from a new onslaught of the evil one posed by computer intelligence?

Dr. Gomes referenced the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, which needed to deal with probably the biggest identity crisis in the early

Christian church, namely, how to move forward as a church that had always been Jewish but now had all these Gentiles gaining access. Gomes pointed out that, in order to address the issues, the council needed to consider the matter from normative, situational, and existential perspectives with an overriding eschatological motive, prioritizing love for the church. The same approach will be needed again. Using pizza as an example (something which comes in different forms around the world with different toppings, etc. but is still recognized as pizza!), he explained how seminaries will be different around the world on many points, but each will be recognized as a seminary because of its universally appealing message, basic structure, loving roots, missional manner, recognizable love, and eschatological motive.

TOPIC 1: EDUCATION

The undersigned presented a brief address on "Key Elements of Theological Education," briefly outlining the various subject matters addressed by the theological departments of every seminary. Attention was paid to the need for practical aspects of church life to be added to the core curriculum and how eventually also the matter of spiritual formation became highlighted in North America and around the world. There certainly was agreement in the room about the need for these various aspects. What occupied our attention the rest of the day was how all of this would and could be contextualized around the world. These issues were explored by way of a panel discussion and breakout groups.

Dr. Gerhard Visscher with two CRTS graduates: Pila Njuka of Indonesia and Sung Min Hong of Korea

The next morning the discussion continued in much the same vein, but now Dr. Adriaan Neele and Dr. Brian DeVries described how both PRTS of Grand Rapids and Mukhanyo College of South Africa had managed to effectively multiply themselves and their institutions in many areas of the world and continent by partnering with other schools as well as satellite campuses. It was very gratifying to hear about how Reformed education can proliferate into other areas. A wonderful presentation was then made by Ms. Laura Ludwig, a librarian at PRTS, about the many digital resources available around the world. During this session, Dr Phil Scheepers of the Reformed Theological College in Melbourne, Australia and Dr. Brian de Vries from Mukhanyo Seminary of South Africa also spoke, both about contextualization challenges in different areas of the world.

TOPIC 2: ACCREDITATION

What are the common standards seminaries need to maintain? How can they monitor and improve these? In addressing this issue, reference was made to the way in which most North American seminaries are accredited through the Association of Theological Schools. ATS puts seminaries through a rigorous process which circles around the questions of what constitutes a seminary and what does an M.Div. degree consist of?[1] Not surprisingly, there was unanimity in the room, but it became clear that accreditation happens in different ways and through different means (sometimes governmental) in different areas of the world. The degree to which the Theological Education Committee of the ICRC might be helpful or involved in this area was discussed to some extent.

During this session, Dr. Phil Scheepers and Dr. Jonathan Beeke from PRTS also spoke regarding different accreditation models. Then, as an effective bridge to the next topic, Dr. Maarten Kater from Apeldoorn TU spoke about the use of heart (adaptive) language throughout the curriculum. One of Kater's main points was that not only chapels and sermons but also seminary lectures should and can be more devotional in nature.

TOPIC 3: FORMATION

"Spiritual formation" has become a popular term in this century in the seminary world. ATS, for example, has done a convincing job of showing us that, in order for students to graduate with a suitable pastoral disposition and approach, more is needed than just an extensive knowledge of books and facts. The student needs to consider from the outset of the program which kind of challenges, weaknesses, and difficulties might hinder him from becoming an effective and fruitful minister of the Word. In most seminaries, a mentorship program is set up to assist the students on a personal basis to identify and address issues.[2]

On the last day, Dr. Albert Coetzee of South Africa addressed us on this issue of spiritual formation. Again, unanimity was met also when different models were discussed. It was also agreed that more work needs to be done and thought given to the area of leadership formation. An appropriate pastoral character and approach alone do not necessarily make for good leadership. How do we specifically assist young men to become effective and blessed leaders in the churches they serve?

All in all, during these three days we were blessed beyond measure. One evening, we enjoyed a meal together at the Prince Center along with a devotional message from Dr. Joel Beeke. We would be remiss if we did not thank Dr. Douw Breed, the chair of the TEC, for his able leadership, and PRTS for permitting us to use their facilities at no charge, and for freely providing so many services (schedules, recording, name tags . . . many families also billeted conference attendees). The sharing and fellowship, the presentations on significant topics, the international contacts and fellowship we enjoyed, all meant that we returned to our respective homes charged up and ready to continue to serve in the Kingdom with new energy, enthusiasm, and vigor. We laid a foundation for much more contact, partnership, and dialogue. Our hope was that especially smaller, struggling seminaries in difficult areas of the world would be encouraged to persevere; the result was that we were all encouraged. To God be the glory and the praise.

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[1] For more on this, see G. H. Visscher "The ATS Accreditation of the Seminary" in *Your Word is our Light: Celebrating Fifty Years of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary.* (Edited by C. Van Dam and J. Van Vliet. 2019. 372-399.

[2] See T.G. Van Raalte, "Training through Mentorship" in *Ibid.*, 276-297.

The Genevan Psalter:

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

WILLIAM HELDER

It is a sad reality that if dubious assertions are repeated often enough, they are soon assumed to be established facts. A case in point is the claim that the Canadian Reformed Churches ended up with an exclusively Genevan Psalter because the synod-appointed deputies that produced the first complete edition of the *Book of Praise* willfully ignored their mandate and foisted upon the churches a songbook they didn't want. I first heard this claim vigorously promoted five years ago in a popular podcast and have since then discovered that many unquestioningly accept it as valid. It even made its way to General Synod (GS) Aldergrove 2025, where it formed part of the documentation setting the stage for the decision to alter Article 55 of the Church Order.

OUR PSALTER'S ORIGINS

In order to defend the honour and reputation of those who now stand accused, I feel compelled to set the record straight. Those whose legacies have been tarnished are Rev. G. VanDooren and Mr. M. M. de Groot, who spearheaded the project leading to the publication of the first complete edition of the *Book of Praise* from its start in 1954 to its finish in 1972, Mr. J. J. Knegt and Rev. F. Kouwenhoven, who were appointed in 1958 and served as deputies for about a decade, and Rev. D. VanderBoom, who was appointed in 1965.

The following statements, quoted verbatim from the *Acts* of GS 2025, therefore call for a close and objective scrutiny:

- GS 1965 specifically stated that the deputies for an English Calvinistic Psalter "not be restricted to Genevan tunes but be authorized to use other melodies..."
- In their report to GS 1968, the deputies responded by stating that they had chosen not to avail themselves of the freedom given by GS 1965 to consider non-Genevan melodies.
- Despite the repeated concerns raised by subsequent synods, the deputies were determined to press forward with an exclusive[ly] Genevan Psalter. A reference to the synod held in 1962 is included in an additional observation:

A reference to the synod held in 1962 is included in an additional observation:

- GS 1962 and GS 1965 mandated the deputies for an English Psalter not to restrict themselves to the Genevan melodies.[1]

The decisions of the synods in question tell a rather different story. GS 1962 stated that the deputies did "not have to confine themselves" to Genevan psalmody (Art. 118). GS 1965 put it this way: "With regard to the melodies of the Psalms they do not have to limit themselves [*zich niet hebben te beperken*] to the Genevan tunes but can also use other modes of song that are in conformity with the purpose of congregational singing in the worship service" (Art. 192). In other words, the 1962 and 1965 synods both indicated that the deputies were indeed *permitted* to include Psalms with non-Genevan tunes but not that they were *required*.

[1] See Art. 115, where the bulleted items here appear as 3.2.4.3–3.2.4.5 and 3.9.5.3.

The decisions to allow for the possible adoption of non-Genevan Psalms could leave one with the impression that the two synods were at odds with the deputies in this matter; however, the deputies themselves were the ones who first proposed the use of texts and tunes from other sources.[2] They had been appointed by the National Synod of Homewood 1954 with the broad mandate "to study the whole matter of singing Psalms in an English rhyming."

ASSESSING EXISTING PSALTERS

One of the first steps they took was to engage in an open-minded assessment of the material available in the early psalters of the Presbyterians and Puritans, as well as in more recent publications. The way they approached their assignment is reflected in the following quotations from the report they submitted to the next synod[3] held in 1958:

- [I]f possible, we do wish to align ourselves with what is sung in the English-speaking churches.
- Although Deputies have already repeatedly recommended the Genevan tunes, this does not mean, as this list [of twelve tunes of Scottish, English, and German origin] confirms, that they are opposed to introducing any other melodies.
- Deputies are of the opinion that in principle it would be responsible also to include other melodies in the Psalter, provided that they conform to the established norms.

On the one hand, the deputies felt obliged to recommend the adoption of whatever suitable psalter might be available in the English-speaking world. It was never their intention to come up with a peculiarly Canadian Reformed songbook. Besides, their mandate did not ask for this. In the old country, they had been accustomed for centuries to sharing the Genevan Psalter with numerous other Reformed church groups. The deputies made an honest attempt to find a psalter they could recommend, but their exhaustive investigation forced them to conclude that the available collections either used excessively antiquated language or were insufficiently faithful to the biblical text. In all this they were truly ecumenical in their approach.[4]

LOVE FOR GENEVAN MELODIES

On the other hand, it is also clear throughout their report that they were greatly attached to the melodies of the Genevan Psalter as developed under the watch of John Calvin. In an extensive aside they cite the lavish praise heaped on this psalter by the founders of the Hymn Society of America at its inauguration and they adopted as their own these words of one of the speakers: "Let us be grateful that it is our high privilege to re-introduce them (the Book of Psalms with the Genevan tunes) to contemporary congregations."

Their high regard for the Genevan Psalter is obvious from these fragments also found here and there in their report:

- For the time being it will have to be sufficient to express the wish that among us may arise someone like an 'Adriaan van Boven,' who in the Netherlands produced such beautiful rhymings to the no less beautiful Genevan melodies...
- In [our own] versifying it was taken into account, and actually also counted on, that in our churches the Psalms will again be sung to the original tunes... Deputies are of the opinion that only in this way can the full beauty of psalm singing flourish among us. Then the demand for something different (and undesirable) will vanish.
- It goes without saying that a complete collection with Genevan tunes would be ideal. But Deputies realize how lofty an ideal this is. If a choice has to be made, certain melodies should definitely be preserved.

Thus, a complete English-language Genevan Psalter represented the deputies' ideal, but they did not expect that it could ever become reality.

They became more hopeful when they were able to engage the services of Mr. Dewey Westra, the versifier of more than half of 34 mostly Genevan Psalms and canticles included in the 1934 edition of the Psalter Hymnal, the songbook of the Christian Reformed Church.

EARLY SONG BOOKS

In the early 1950s, there were members of our churches who must have been pleased to discover these songs, and before any

[2] A clarification is in order here. For the sake of continuity in the process of developing an English-language psalter, successive synods as much as possible kept appointing the same deputies. Those appointed in the 1950s and 60s functioned as a single body with mostly the same membership and always under the leadership of Rev. VanDooren as chairman. Thus, they can properly be referred to throughout as "the deputies."

[3] Titled *Op weg naar een Engelse Reformatorische psalmbundel*, it was recently translated as *Towards an English Reformational Psalter*. It has not been published but is available in the CRTS library.

[4] In the 1950s, the field of psalmody was rather barren terrain in the English-speaking world. Surprisingly, at that time the Canadian Reformed deputies were the innovating pioneers. In those days, orthodox denominations tended to resist any textual revision of lyrics using antiquated language. According to one source cited by the deputies, the devotion of, for example, the Church of Scotland to the old lyrics amounted "almost to idolatry." In North America, The *Book of Psalms for Singing*, the songbook of the RPCNA, was first published in 1973. *Sing Psalms*, the new psalter of the Free Church of Scotland, finally appeared in 2003. *The Trinity Hymnal*, for decades the songbook of the OPC and later the PCA, was published in 1961, the same year in which the first partial edition of the *Book of Praise* appeared, but it was more a hymnal than a psalter.

Canadian Reformed ecclesiastical assembly had dealt with the choice of English-language songs for corporate worship, a private initiative resulted in the publication of all 34 in what was called *het groene boekje* [the green booklet]. Printed on thin paper and measuring only 8.5 by 12 cm, it was small enough to be inserted within the covers of a Bible or the Dutch *psalmboek* that continued to be the primary source of songs in church services. It did not include musical notation. Neither the printer nor the source were identified, and copyright considerations were not taken into account. Synod Homewood 1954 decided to leave its use "at the liberty of the churches" until a definite choice could be made.

In 1961, the first edition of the *Book of Praise* could be published. It contained 82 psalms and 14 hymns. Fifty-seven of these songs were the work of Dewey Westra. Forty of them were new rhymings he had written at the request of the deputies. Initially they were very grateful for Westra's contribution; however, before long, their enthusiasm began to wane. The churches also expressed growing concerns, as can be deduced from the stipulation in the *Acts* of GS 1962 that the deputies did not "have to confine themselves... to the Psalms put to rhyme by Mr. Westra" (Art. 118).

From the *Acts* of GS 1965 it becomes even more apparent that some of the lyrics written for the 1961 partial edition were found wanting. In a letter addressed to synod, the church of Toronto expressed as its desire "that we should as much as possible try to get a Psalter that speaks as much the language of our neighbours as is possible without losing our Reformed character" (Art. 192). This was an understandable reaction to such lines as "He burgeons like a green and noble tree" (Ps. 1:2) and "Their longings shall be satisfied / With feshets [misprint for "freshets"] of Thy pleasure" (Ps. 36:2), or to Westra's fondness for such words as "froward," " joyance," "umbrage," and "forsooth." Thus we read in the *Acts* of GS 1965 that synod instructed the deputies "to try to retain in the *Book of Praise* the Psalms put to rhyme by Mr. D. Westra that are at present included in it, provided that Mr. D. Westra is willing and able to make improvements deemed necessary by deputies and no significantly better rhymings become available before the next edition of the *Book of Praise*;... for the development of the Psalm collection not to restrict themselves to Psalms rhymed by Mr. Westra but to make all possible use of other 'sources' so that a complete Psalm collection may become ready in the foreseeable future" (Art. 192).

A NEW POET

The deputies were able to take the concerns of GS 1965 into account as they prepared for the publication in 1967 of a Supplement containing 34 more psalms and 19 more hymns. They reported to GS Orangeville 1968 that this "did not create any insurmountable problems" because "the publication of the Psalm section was greatly facilitated by the contribution from one of our church members" (*Acts*, p. 101). In their report to Synod Homewood-Carman 1958, deputies expressed the fervent wish (quoted above) that someone like the Dutch poet who went by the pseudonym Adriaan van Boven would arise to produce in English the kind of rhymings to the Genevan tunes they so greatly admired.

It so happened that while they were occupied with their mandate in Ontario, Adriaan van Boven himself (whose real name was Wolter [later Walter] van der Kamp) immigrated to British Columbia to take up his position as the first principal of the William of Orange School in 1955. About ten years later, he was ready to produce in English the kind of lyrics they were hoping for. Unidentified at the time, he contributed 19 Genevan Psalm versifications and four hymns to the supplement published in 1967. The deputies were very happy with his work. Now they viewed it as within the realm of possibility to realize the "lofty ideal" of producing a *Book of Praise* containing a complete exclusively Genevan Psalter.

Being able to take advantage of the new possibilities that had unexpectedly arisen, the deputies were pleased to state in their report to GS 1968: "The ultimate aim of Deputies is to present to the Churches a complete Psalter comprising all 150 Psalms on the Genevan tunes." They added that this implied they would "no longer avail themselves of the opportunity offered by the Edmonton Synod (1965), namely that they did not have to limit themselves to the Genevan tunes" (*Acts*, p. 102).[5]

AGREEMENT ON GENEVAN TUNES

The proposal to aim for an exclusively Genevan Psalter met with some initial resistance at GS 1968, which was "of the opinion that our Churches need a *Book of Praise* which can be sung by old and young, and is used in school as well as church, at the campfire as well as in the meetings of our societies" (*Acts*, p. 107). To allay any fear that the final *Book of Praise* would perpetuate the use of the ornate and unfamiliar language still found in the edition published in 1961, synod mandated the deputies to delete from a

[5] In their proposal to aim for an exclusively Genevan Psalter they further commented: "Deputies, however, are convinced that many non-Genevan tunes are of a priceless value . . . and they would like to suggest to insert these tunes in the Hymn section of the *Book of Praise*" (Acts, p. 103). From the very start they had strongly recommended the inclusion of an extensive collection of Scripture-based paraphrases with good non-Genevan tunes.

new edition of the *Book of Praise* "those rhymed versions which lack… the simplicity and clarity of expression required for the songs of the covenant, if revision is not possible" (Art. 87). In their report to synod, the deputies themselves had already expressed the "intention to submit these versifications to a close scrutiny before presenting the Churches with a complete Psalter," adding that they hoped to "ensure that all rhymed versions are faithful to the original text and are rendered in idiomatic English" (*Acts*, p. 103).

Synod 1968 approved of what the deputies had proposed and agreed to "give preference to the Genevan tunes as melodies for the rhymed Psalms" (Art. 87). Judging by what was quoted above from the *Acts* of GS Aldergrove 2025, one would have expected synod to raise concerns about an exclusively Genevan Psalter. But it did not do so. The kind of songbook proposed in 1968 was obviously deemed to meet all the criteria that preceding synods had insisted on, including singability and musical quality, for Reformed churches had sung from an exclusively Genevan Psalter throughout four centuries. As for the Canadian Reformed Churches, they had done so from their inception and would keep doing so in the Dutch-language worship services that would continue to be conducted well into the 1970s.

Published by order of GS New Westminster 1971, the first complete *Book of Praise* came off the press in 1972. It contained all 150 Psalms with Genevan tunes, plus 62 hymns. The new edition, with its exclusively Genevan Psalter, was well received. It is my personal recollection that people were very pleased that the seemingly impossible had been achieved and widely welcomed it as a dream come true. At GS Toronto 1974 it was noted "with thankfulness that all 150 Psalms have been rhymed in [an] English metrical version that can be sung to [the] Genevan melodies of the sixteenth century." Synod's advisory committee expressed "its appreciation for the fact that they are closer to the original text than those in the previous edition." Significantly, it also reported that "not any criticism [had] been submitted by the Churches with respect to the Psalm-Section" (Art. 159).

UNFOUNDED ACCUSATION

As Rev. VanDooren pointed out when he officially presented the completed *Book of Praise* to this synod, it was still only a provisional edition and as such would benefit from continued efforts to improve it. Following this advice, synod therefore instructed the deputies to remain diligent in this regard. In the meantime, the deputies had already taken the initiative to begin this process and by 1980 had essentially completed the revision that culminated in the publication of an improved edition in 1984.[6]

In the most egregious claim publicized in the *Acts* of GS 2025 the deputies are accused of having been "determined to press forward" with an exclusively Genevan Psalter "despite the repeated concerns raised by subsequent synods," i.e., synods subsequent to GS 1968. This accusation is totally unfounded. The deputies did no such thing, nor could they have. No concerns were ever raised or repeated by any of the synods throughout the entire half century following GS 1968. Only once during all those years did a synod even make any mention of Genevan psalmody in its deliberations. This occurred when GS Smithers 2007 responded to music-related requests from two different congregations by noting that these submissions concerned matters which the (since disbanded) Common Songbook Committee was dealing with at the time (Art. 148).

Instead of being publicly maligned, the deputies who laid the groundwork for the completion of the 1972 *Book of Praise* deserve to be posthumously commended for faithfully fulfilling the mandate our first synods entrusted to them.[7]

William Helder
Hamilton
Former member of the Committee for the Church Book (later: SCBP)

[6] In 1980, when the task to which they had devoted themselves for so many years had been brought to completion, Rev. G. VanDooren and Mr. M. M. de Groot retired as deputies. First appointed by Synod Homewood 1954, they had been re-appointed by each subsequent synod.

[7] For a brief history of the *Book of Praise* that aligns with the account provided above, see the address in which Rev. George van Popta presented the third edition to GS Dunnville 2016. Included as Appendix 13 in the *Acts* of this synod (pp. 153–55), it is accessible on the website of the Canadian Reformed Churches. For more information about the Genevan Psalter and evidence of how it was then generally perceived in our circles, see the June 22, 2012, issue of *Clarion*, in which 25 pages are devoted to the 450th anniversary of the original complete collection of Genevan Psalms and the fortieth anniversary of the *Book of Praise* (accessible at clarionmagazine.ca/archive).

THE CHRONICLE

Citeaux to Aduard to Clairvaux (Part IV)

KEITH SIKKEMA

Editor's note: *This is the fourth in a series of stories sketching the history of certain monasteries in the Middle Ages. The author tells some of this history by way of fictional stories based on known facts. These stories link to a previous series on Cluny and earlier monasteries by the same author (see Clarion Vol. 74, Issues 4 & 5).*

THE CHRONICLE

The Abbots' Chronicle[1] reports on the monks' holiness, devotion, and cooperation for building up the abbey over the centuries. Miracles are mentioned often during the 13th to 15th century. After this, a different tone prevails. It begins:

> In the year of the Lord 1192, in Frisia, on the ninth of July, which is the feast-day of St. Boniface, bishop and martyr, with his companions, the St. Bernard Abbey was founded in Adewert[2] in the diocese of Münster, being the second daughter of Klaarkamp, in the thirty-eighth year after the death of St. Bernardus of Clairvaux.
>
> The reason for establishing it was that many lights had often appeared there during the night, which, according to devout conviction, was a prediction of what was to come. That is why the believers, set on fire by devotion, worked harmoniously to build the monastery, hoping that their labour would please God Almighty, who, with great clarity, had shown the location beforehand. Indeed, very holy men lived at this place, as is clear from its records. They spared neither cost nor trouble to prepare a worthy home for God. Even when they were building the walls, they did not abandon their holy *mores*. In fact, they themselves often suffered deprivation to feed the poor.

THE START

By June 5, 1192, Wibrandus and Albertus had returned to Adewert with eleven devout companions. Lay brothers pushed two-wheeled carts loaded with carpentry and other tools, barrels filled with books, beer, food, garden supplies, and cooking materials. They chanted[3] as they approached Suderhorn, stirring up the locals to join them on the way to Adewert.

Wibrandus led in thanksgiving when they arrived. "This abbey will be a holy place dedicated to God, Our Lady Mary, St. Benedict of Nursia, and *Ad sanctum Bernardum* or St. Bernard. We vow to uphold Cistercian rules, prayers, and devotions." He encouraged those who had joined them along the way to come back and help again.

The next day, Wibrandus explained and divided the manual and spiritual tasks. The monks would uphold the tides for prayer. Others went to scout for sources of clear water for beer and washing, peat for fuel, and clay for bricks. The creek's water was

[1] Using oral traditions and extant notes, it was first written in 1485 and later updated.

[2] The chronicle has "Adwerth". Spelling varied. The "h" was silent.

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OiPTT9-UKA

fresh and clear, and emptied into a tidal river a little further north. Locals showed them clay to the west, and peat south of Adewert. A garden could be started on the wert. Others started clearing debris, weeds, and other growth, and collecting driftwood from saltmarshes to the north. They had heard about Albertus' mishap and took care not to slip. When the tide came in, the water of the creek rose, but the saltmarshes close to Adewert remained dry. They would be good for livestock now, and for cropland later, when flooding could be controlled.

Cut and dried peat

PROJECTS

Over the next several weeks, garden plots were prepared and seeded for fall harvest. Wet peat was cut, brought in on the carts, and stacked up to dry for fuel. Driftwood was sorted and cut for usable lumber or firewood. Locals also brought building supplies. When they noticed that some of the shelter's sod walls were sagging, and that the sod-and-thatch roof had holes, some set to work repairing them. They added eaves to keep walls dry and strong and to fill water barrels.[4] They fixed its large west-end entrance. Some ten feet from its east end they added a door on the south. They made an altar, benches, and a simple wooden cross. After cleaning, the shelter was ready as a temporary chapel.

The chieftain's old house stood across the main path, opposite the shelter. It was renovated to serve as sleeping quarters for monks. Eaves were added. Amongst shrubbery behind it, a simple privy was set up, connecting its discharge to a small creek below.

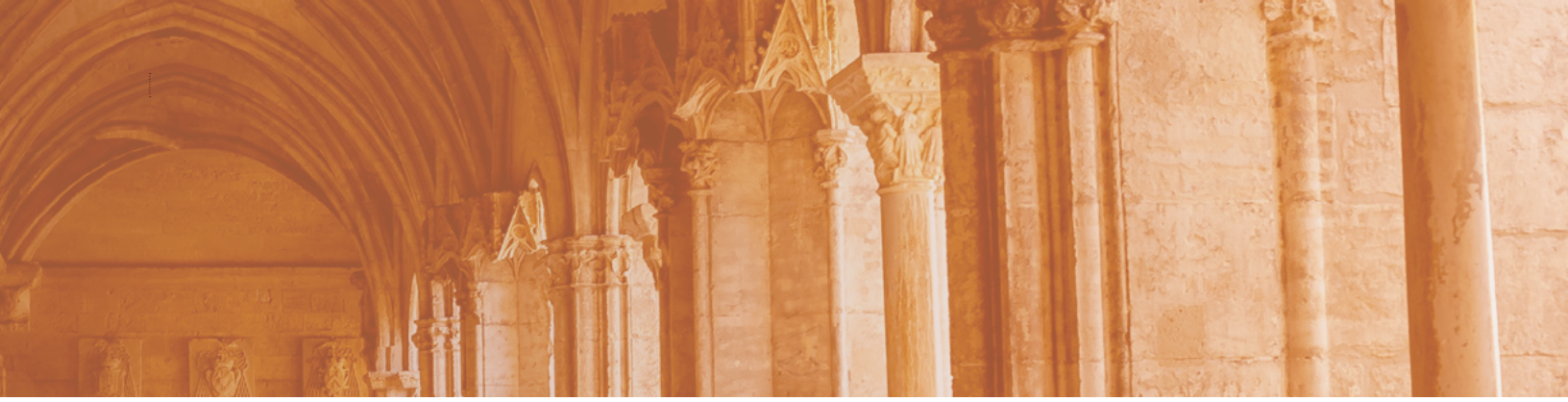
The main path was improved for road access to Suderhorn, Groningen, and the southern peat fields. Using old materials, fresh-cut lumber, and sod, they prepared one structure for cooking, washing, eating, and the brewery. The lay brothers could sleep upstairs. There was enough peat for one warm room and the gardens produced well for winter. Meanwhile, Wibrandus and Albertus and some of the monks returned to Klaarkamp to prepare for the consecration.[5]

With two monks keeping the tides, the crew kept preparing the buildings and a "just-in-case" dike around them[6]. In the spring, they planted gardens and set up for the ceremony. They

[4] Cistern and piping systems were installed later.

[5] Wibrandus became abbot in 1193.

[6] Later, a brick wall replaced it.



worked hard, and with support from the priest, the chieftain, and local volunteers, they were ready when dandelions bloomed on the wert and gull and tern chicks hatched in the saltmarshes.

JUNE 1193

On a sunlit day with a fine westerly breeze, people gathered for the consecration of the Adewert Cistercian community. Bishop Hermann II von Katzen-Elnbogen of Münster and a delegate of the bishop of Utrecht had come out. The chieftain and priest of Suderhorn, Abbot Siardus of Klaarkamp with several lay brothers, and Wibrandus and Albertus with their eleven volunteer monks and the winter crew were also there.

Early in the morning, after mass, locals came and peeked through the chapel's main entrance. The altar stood against its eastern wall, with a burning beeswax candle on each of its ends and a simple cross in the middle. On a square linen cloth before the cross stood a wooden communion plate and chalice. The observers crossed themselves when they realized the pieces held unleavened bread and diluted wine. They were simple people but knew the rituals. The altar had a simple bench to its left and its right. Starting from the side door to the main entrance at the west end, many similar benches were arranged in two rows with a centre aisle. At both doors, a lavabo was set up for ritual handwashing.

When they heard chanting of Psalm 24, the people turned to look and saw two columns of white-robed monks stepping deliberately from the house to the chapel's side door, forming a pathway between them. The bishop of Münster and Utrecht's representative in their colourful vestments proceeded on the pathway, used the lavabo, crossed themselves, and entered the chapel. They sat down on the right side of the altar.

Abbot Siardus, holding his abbatial staff, the priest of Suderhorn, and the chieftain in his formal blue linen tunic, woollen trousers, leg wraps, and shoes took their seats on the left bench. The monks chanted Psalm 122[7] when Wigboldus and Albertus also came in, followed by all the other monks. They took their seats near the front. The lay brothers and other volunteers, coming in now through the main entrance, filled the seats behind the monks. All used the lavabo and crossed themselves when they entered.

CONSECRATION RITUAL

Bishop Hermann II of Katzen-Elnbogen stood up and asked the chieftain to read the abbey's foundation charter with its rights and obligations, and to confirm his patronship. He then led in Latin prayer for the Lord's blessing on the property and invited all to follow him around the grounds and buildings. He sprinkled holy water as he went and blessed them, saying, "*Consecramus hoc ad honorem Dei et usum sacrum.*"[8]

Re-entering the chapel, after all sat down, the bishop consecrated the altar and everything on it and led a regular mass—again in Latin. He spoke about Luke 19, the abbot's task, and how everyone should serve God's people. He explained how the Virgin Mary and Bernard of Clairvaux were models, just like Zacchaeus served God with his minas. He prayed for the Holy Spirit to descend on Wibrandus to guide him with love and wisdom for his spiritual and abbatial tasks. Few understood what he said.

Abbot Siardus and Wibrandus then stepped forward for Wibrandus to kneel for the laying-on of hands of blessing and receiving authority and responsibility. Abbot Siardus gave him a copy of the Cistercian rules and an abbatial staff. In closing, the bishop chanted the Veni Creator Spiritus[9] hymn as a ritual prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Finally, all enjoyed a good Cistercian meal, and returned to their homes and tasks. It was a day to remember, and to thank God and the saints for.

Keith Sikkema
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[7] Ps. 122: youtube.com/watch?v=i_wJPBT0Y2g

[8] "We consecrate this to the honor of God and sacred use." Ez. 36:25.

[9] "Come, Creator Spirit": youtube.com/watch?v=BkAx4mDmeJc

ABOUNDING GRACE RADIO

Do you find yourself wanting to dig deeper into your understanding of theology, but don't know where to start? The *Abounding Grace Radio* (*AGR*) podcast might be the resource you've been looking for. Hosted by United Reformed Pastor Chris Gordon, *AGR* is committed to "making known the riches of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins to the nations."

Born out of the Abounding Grace Radio program, with stations in the Western US and BC, *AGR* received the opportunity in May 2023 to extend its reach truly to the "ends of the earth" through podcasting and videocasting. Over two years later, with more than 120 episodes, *AGR* is a wealth of information helpful for understanding theology, doctrine, the current cultural moment, and even the in-house debates within the various Reformed traditions.

Rev. Chris Gordon serves as the Preaching Pastor at Escondido United Reformed Church in California, located close to Westminster Theological Seminary. Solidly Reformed, gospel-centered, and pastoral in his approach, Chris can be trusted to guide the listener through conversations that can sometimes be lofty or difficult to understand. Often joined by co-host Rev. Dan Borvan of Christ Reformed Church, Chris makes conversations on serious topics enjoyable to listen to with his easy-going personality and pastoral heart. It is evident that his and Dan's desire is for Christians to know and love God more deeply.

AGR tackles theological issues such as covenant theology, election, preaching, and eschatology, while also covering practical topics, including confronting sin, masculinity, church order, and what it truly means to be Reformed. *AGR* is also not afraid to wade into the waters of current controversial topics. One of their most popular episodes is a three-hour debate with Pastor Doug Wilson and Jared Longshore on the topics of Christian Nationalism, Federal Vision, and Post-millennialism. These are terms you might encounter on various Christian websites. If you find yourself unsure about what to think when it comes to these (and many other) topics, *AGR* is a helpful place to start, as they are wholly committed to the Reformed biblical view, especially as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity.

TWO NOTES

I don't have a specific criticism but would like to note a couple of things. At first glance, it may seem that *AGR* is often geared toward ministers, given that its hosts and guests are almost solely pastors and preachers. However, their insights into Christian ministry, exposition of Scripture, and applications to daily life will be applicable to all listeners in some way.

Secondly, given their locale, many of their discussions are geared toward topics arising out of California and more broadly the United States. Although this may first seem out of touch for Canadian listeners, the difference between the north and south isn't as wide as we may think. The issues being addressed in the American church are often the same problems we encounter in the Canadian church. Since the URCNA is deeply connected to Canada, Canadian audiences may recognize guests like Rev. Joel Dykstra of Wellandport URC, Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer of Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church, and other notable names, such as Christopher Yuan and Ligonier's Dr. Robert Godfrey.

AGR is another wonderful podcast to add to your playlist. Every Wednesday, it will provide you with solid theological answers that you can trust as you seek to grow in your understanding of God's Word and how to live that out in every area of your life. You can find *AGR* by searching "Abounding Grace Radio" on Spotify, YouTube, or by going to agradio.org.

Mariah Tamminga
Mariah Tamminga serves as the producer of the Real Talk Podcast and is a graduate of Reformation Bible College.
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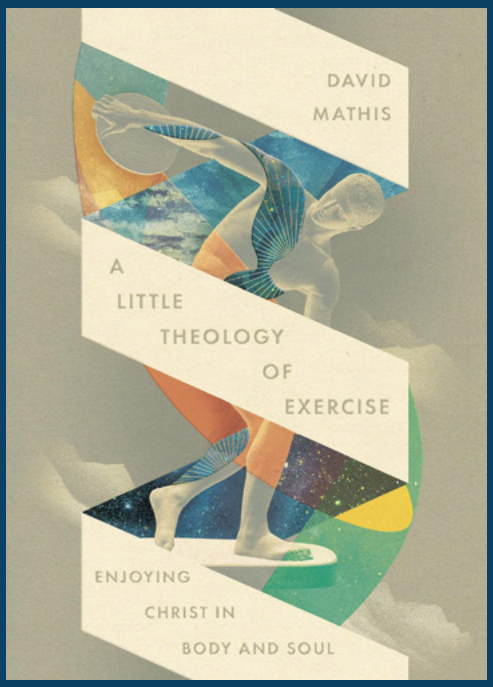
BOOK REVIEW



FITNESS FOR FAITH

A Little Theology of Exercise: Enjoying Christ in Body and Soul, David Mathis. Crossway, 2025, Paperback, 108 pages, $17.95 CDN

A number of years ago, I enjoyed David Mathis' book *Habits of Grace*. His recently released smaller booklet on the significance of exercise in the Christian life is a natural compendium to his earlier writing. Mathis, a pastor and teacher, is affiliated with *Desiring God* ministry, and is a protégé of John Piper. Piper's well-known discourse on Christian hedonism (God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him) provides the footing for this venture in tying our physical activity more closely to our spiritual health. I found it easy to read, encouraging, humbly proffered, and thought provoking.

Mathis is not providing a Christian exercise manual, or a step-by-step program for self-improvement. Instead, he explores the relationship between body and soul in the Bible, with a particular focus on the writings of the apostle Paul. He pursues the apostle's encouragement to Timothy that "physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise both for the present life and the life to come" (1 Tim 4:8).

For Mathis, that does not simply mean that the one is more important than the other, but that physical health serves to support spiritual health. God has created body and soul to work interconnectedly. With this approach, he challenges the reader to examine physical activity or inactivity in relation to spiritual wellness and growth. Comparing our bodies to an affable donkey, he acknowledges that at times we may need a carrot or a stick to get ourselves moving in a beneficial way.

The short study includes some scientific research into how the body and brain work together, and how one stimulates the other. Tied to this is the importance of the healthy beating of our hearts, elevated under the stress of activity, that challenges us beyond sedentary living. While Mathis acknowledges that this will look different for each person, all will benefit from increased movement. He suggests that exercise can have a five-fold spiritual effect: for God, for the mind, for the will, for joy, and for love's sake. A personal challenge for your physical well-being can have a spill-over benefit for yourself, your relationships, and your service of God in church and community.

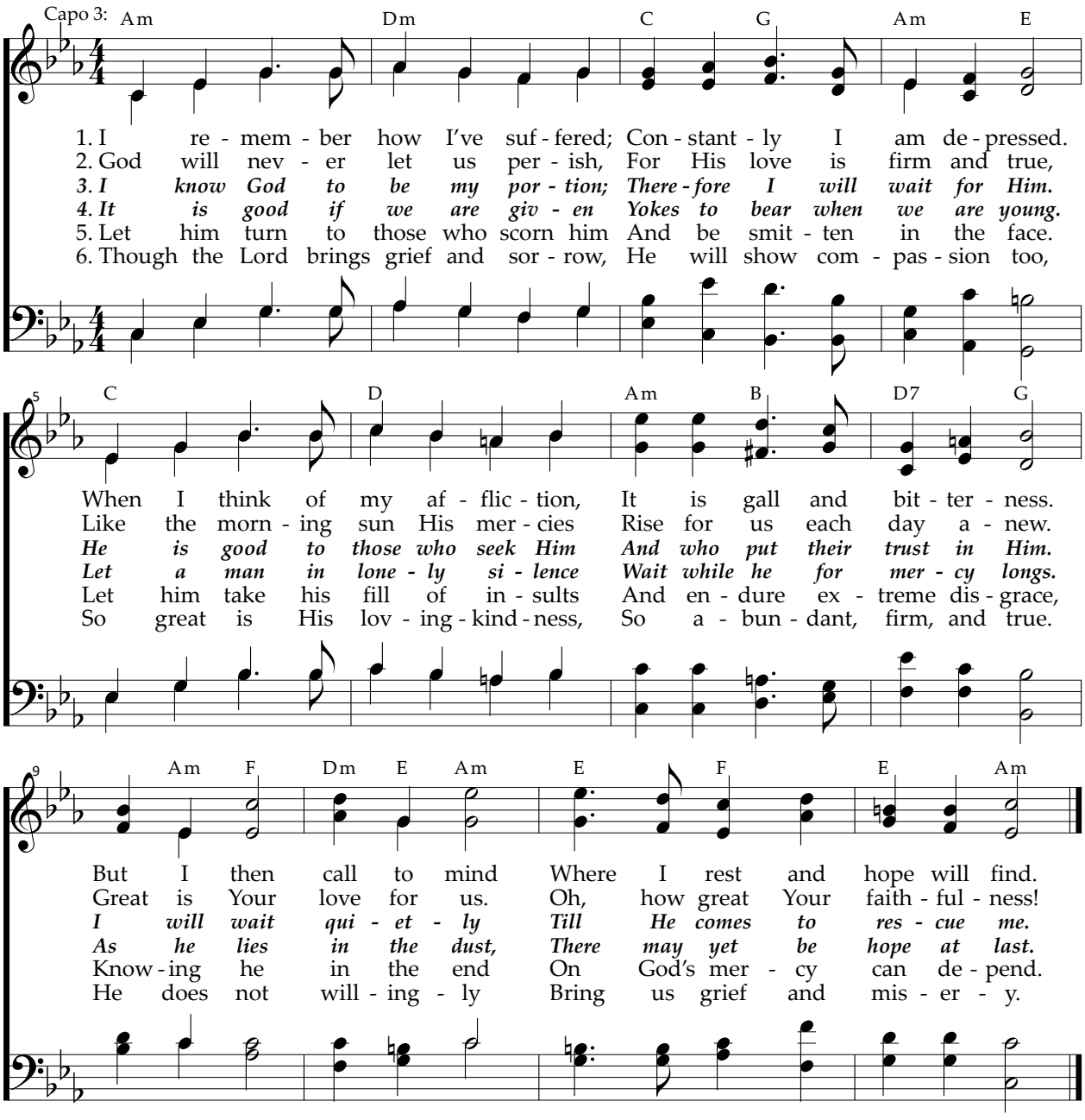
Whether you're feeling like you could use a little boost to get yourself moving, or you find yourself religiously obsessed with your physical fitness, or you are bobbing somewhere in between, this little book may help you ground yourself to find greater joy in relationship with your Maker as you lace up your running shoes and set out to meet him in your daily exercise. Well-recommended.

Rick Ludwig
Streetlight Christian Church, Hamilton
rludwig@kitchingsteepeandludwig.com

Jeremiah's Confession of Faith

Based on Lamentations 3:19–33

Guitar chords do not match vocals.

Capo 3:

Music: David Emlyn Evans (1843–1913)

Text: William Helder, 2025 © 2025, wllmhldr@gmail.com

DEVETIA

8 7. 8 7. 3 3 7.

George van Popta

Minister Emeritus

Jubilee Canadian Reformed Church, Ottawa

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Lamentations 3: THE GOD AT ROCK BOTTOM

Editor's note: This is the third in a series of advent reflections on the book of Lamentations. The Lord willing, one reflection will appear in each issue of Clarion leading up to Christmas.

As we journey through Advent, a season marked by anticipation and hope, we often reflect on the themes of waiting, longing, and renewal. In this spirit, we turn to the poignant words of Lamentations 3, a passage that resonates deeply in times of suffering and despair. While many Christians may recognize the famous lines proclaiming God's faithfulness—"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam 3:22–23)—the context of these verses often eludes us.

Lamentations, written by the prophet Jeremiah after the destruction of Jerusalem, unfolds like a deep lament for a shattered city and a grieving people. Chapter 3 stands out structurally, with its triplet acrostic form serving as the emotional and theological center of the book. Here, Jeremiah shifts from raw cries

of despair to a profound declaration of hope. This chapter isn't merely a bright moment in darkness; it is the very essence of how believers can navigate suffering with faith.

THE DECISION TO HOPE

Verse 21 presents a pivotal moment: "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope." Here, Jeremiah makes a conscious decision to remember God's faithfulness. It's crucial to note that nothing has changed externally. The rubble of Jerusalem still lies in ruins; despair hangs heavy in the air. Yet, in this stark reality, Jeremiah chooses to shift his focus. He recalls the character of God, and in doing so, he finds a glimmer of hope.

For many of us, this decision may feel monumental. When faced with our darkest moments—loss, heartache, or uncertainty—hope can seem elusive. Yet, Jeremiah's words remind us that hope is often an act of the will. It is choosing, by faith, to engage with the truth of God's character rather than being overwhelmed by our circumstances. In the silence of our pain, we must preach to ourselves the truth of who God is.

THE BEDROCK OF HOPE

Verses 22–24 are a beautiful declaration of God's unfailing love: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end." This covenant love, rooted in God's very nature, is not contingent upon our circumstances. It is as if Jeremiah is saying, "Even now, God's love is a constant."

In the depth of suffering, these verses challenge us to remember that God's mercy is new each day. We may feel consumed by our pain, but God's love assures us that we are not forsaken. The light of God's compassion breaks through the darkest nights, and we can hold onto the truth that he is with us. The declaration "The LORD is my portion" (v. 24) encapsulates a profound truth: God himself is enough for our souls. This realization can transform our perspective during seasons of waiting and uncertainty.

THE STILLNESS OF HOPE

The next verses invite us to embrace stillness: "It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD " (v. 26). Waiting is a difficult posture, especially in our fast-paced world. Yet, in our waiting, we learn to rely on God's timing rather than our own. Waiting allows God to mold us, teaching us to trust in his plans, even when we cannot see them.

Jeremiah encourages us to bear our burdens with humility. This is not a call to silence our voices in despair, but rather to find moments of quiet where we can reflect on God's goodness. In the stillness, we often discover that hope is not merely the absence of despair, but the presence of God's unwavering love.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF HOPE

As we approach the heart of Lamentations, verses 31–33 reveal the nature of God's relationship with us: "For the LORD will not cast off forever; though he cause grief, he will have compassion" (vv. 31–32). These verses remind us that even in our suffering, God's love remains steadfast. His compassion is rooted in his very being.

God does not take pleasure in our pain; his heart is one of loving kindness. This revelation shifts our understanding of suffering. We are invited to trust in a God who is not indifferent to our plight but actively working for our restoration and redemption.

CONCLUSION: A CALL TO HOPE

As we reflect on Lamentations 3, we find an invitation to embrace hope, even in despair. Jeremiah's journey from lament to hope teaches us that our circumstances do not define God's faithfulness. Instead, it is our active choice to remember his character and trust in his promises that shapes our experience.

This Advent, may we be reminded that hope is a Spirit empowered decision of faith—a decision to trust in the God whose mercies are new every morning. Let us dare to hope, for in Christ we find our greatest promise. Come, Lord Jesus.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. What current struggles in your life challenge your sense of hope? How might you bring these to God in prayer?
2. In what ways can you actively choose to remember God's faithfulness, even when circumstances seem bleak?
3. How does understanding God's compassion and love impact your perspective on your own suffering and the suffering of others?

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CHRIST FOR ALL
MINISTRY

September 2025

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
Ephesians 2:10

Christ For All Ministry Report from Chairman

Naeem Zafar

Reaching Hearts, Transforming Lives
Ministry Update – Pakistan & Thailand

Through God's provision and the faithful prayers of our partners, Christ For All Ministry (CFAM) has seen remarkable growth this past year. Our mission to share the Gospel, disciple believers, and support vulnerable families has expanded into new areas, blessing hundreds of lives in both Pakistan and Thailand.

Raising the Next Generation – Sunday Schools & Discipleship.

I am thankful for our team, who are faithfully taking the Word of God from street to street, house to house, and family to family. They are helping people learn the Scriptures and reaching elders who have never been able to read the Bible but can now hear it through our Audio Bible project.

I am thankful for the Clarion readers, churches, businesses, and congregations across Canada whose support has enabled us to begin working toward a greater vision — expanding CFAM into other regions. Your generosity and partnership make this possible. Thank you!

After the success of our pilot project, young girls in Bricklin have requested three new sewing centers. Please consider prayerfully supporting this project.

Partnership with Local Churches Helps Sunday School Attendance Grow

We are grateful to our Sunday School teachers for visiting Bricklin and faithfully teaching the Word of God to the children there.

We are thankful to Brother Samson for leading the Bible study on the book of Genesis

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CHRIST FOR ALL
MINISTRY

September 2025

Our team is conducting outreach meetings with parents, encouraging them to support their children in learning God's Word and participating in the local church.

Pastor Waseem continues meeting with parents, encouraging them to support their children in learning God's Word and attending the local church.

Our team delivers food packages door to door by motorcycle, as refugees live in fear of police arrest since they are not recognized as legal.

Audio Bible Project

Let the people of Pakistan hear the Word of God through the Audio Bible

We are deeply thankful to our CFAM members for their faithful support. Your generosity makes it possible for us to continue the mission of spreading the Word of God through our various projects.

Our Thailand project continues to grow, reaching more refugees in need of food. Hundreds of families have fled persecution, and with your support, we can continue to serve our brothers and sisters. Please remember them, as well as our team in Thailand, in your prayers.

Donations are accepted via: Cheque, E-transfer or Secure online donation.
Make cheques payable to Christ For All Ministry and mail them to 26929 16 Ave, Aldergrove, BC. V4W 2S3,
E-transfer to donate@christforallministry.com
Secure online donation via our website: www.christforallministry.com

Prayer Request:
Pray for persecuted families in Pakistan and Thailand, asking for God's protection and provision over them.
Pray for Pakistani Christians Suffering in the Floods

CRTS BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING

OPENING AND ROLL CALL

The principal, Dr. Jason Van Vliet, led in opening devotions. All the governors were present, including the new governors appointed by General Synod 2025, held in Aldergrove, BC: Mr. Mike Bork, Mr. Paul Broekema, Rev. Carl Van Dam, Rev. Doug Vandeburgt, and Rev. Ian Wildeboer. It was noted that prior to the board meeting the previous chairman of the board and the principal conducted an orientation session for the new governors. The administrative assistant, Mrs. Leanne Kuizenga, was present to take the minutes of the meeting. Rev. S. 't Hart was present as a special guest representing the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

MEMORABILIA

Information was shared about the personal circumstances of the emeriti professors Dr. de Visser, Dr. Van Dam, and Dr. Visscher, as well as the widows of former professors, sr. Deddens, sr. DeJong and sr. Gootjes.

ELECTION AND CONFIRMATION OF OFFICERS

The new governors were welcomed and signed the compliance documentation. All returning governors gave verbal agreement to the life and conduct policy of the board. The following offices were (re) appointed, after voting took place for a new chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary:

1. Chairman: Rev. Jeff Temple
2. Vice-Chairman/Corresponding Secretary/Chairman of the Academic Committee (AC): Rev. Julius Van Spronsen
3. Secretary/Secretary of the AC: Rev. Carl Van Dam
4. Treasurer: Mr. Mike Bork
5. Finance and Property (F&P) Chairman: Mr. Paul Broekema
6. F&P Secretary: Mr. Herman Post
7. Governance Committee: Rev. Jeff Temple, Mr. Paul Broekema
8. Faber-Holwerda Committee: Mr. Mike Bork
9. Convocation Committee: Mr. Alan Datema, Rev. Clarence VanderVelde
10. Library Committee: Mr. Alan Datema
11. Publication Committee: Rev. Ian Wildeboer
12. Foreign Student Bursary Fund Committee: Mr. Mike Bork

Gratitude was expressed for the service of the outgoing governors: Mr. Peter Vandersluis, Rev. John Louwerse, Rev. Joe Poppe, Rev. James Slaa and Mr. Kasper Van Veen. A thank-you letter will be sent to each of them.

MINUTES AND AGENDA

The agenda for the meeting was established. The minutes of the regular meeting held on January 9, 2025 were approved. Correspondence and outstanding matters on the action log were reviewed.

DECISIONS, REPORTS, AGENDA ITEMS

1. The board received a signed copy of the memorandum of understanding with the Asia Mission Board, a report on lecture visits to CRTS (March 2025), and minutes from the August 28 Academic Committee meeting.
2. A written report from Dr. R. Bredenhof confirmed that the work he needs to do as PTP director is manageable. The board will continue to monitor the PTP director's workload.
3. The governance committee is tasked with updating the handbook to reflect the decision to have a member of the F&P present for annual staff visits.
4. The board responded to the decisions of General Synod 2025 (Article 154, *Acts*), by appointing Dr. Van Vliet as Principal for the academic years 2025–2028, noting that GS approved the changes to the bylaws described in the report, directing the corresponding secretary to write a letter of gratitude to the FRCA, and forming an *ad hoc* committee to prepare a proposal for both selection criteria and a set of

interview guidelines for the Bursary Fund for Graduating Students Pursuing Advanced Studies.

5. The conclusions from the Strategic Planning meeting on September 3 were discussed and the Board appointed the Governance Committee to bring a polished proposal to the January 2026 meeting.
6. The Finance and Property (F&P) Committee submitted the annual report of their activities and the minutes of recent meetings. Phase 2 of the renovation project was completed before the beginning of the 2024–2025 academic year. The F&P is developing a long-term plan for building projects that were not completed during the renovations. Fundraising for the renovation has come to an end. Overall, between the two phases, the campaign was approximately $98,000 short, and this shortfall has come out of the seminary's reserve fund. The proposed Health and Safety Policy was approved by the Board.
7. The Board approved the 2024 financial statements and CRTS annual budget for 2026 and expresses deep gratitude for the ongoing substantial support of our sister churches in Australia. The assessment for 2025 was set at $101/cm. The assessment will be raised to $103/CM for the 2026 fiscal year.
8. The board approved a report to be sent to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) concerning the work CRTS recently did to update and improve our bylaws and policy documents and to outline a plan for how we will keep them current in the future.
9. The assessment coordinator, Mrs. Margaret Alkema, submitted the annual assessment report, minutes from the Assessment Day 2025, the Annual Metrics Report 2025, and the Alumni Survey.
10. As part of our commitments to ATS, the board agreed to go through its handbook and review all the policies and procedures of CRTS. The board approved policies concerning reporting relationships, mature students, academic regulations, document retention, sexual or gender harassment, and disability services.
11. Dr. Van Vliet presented his principal's report, noting the graduation of 10 MDiv students and 1 DipThSt student, the largest graduating class ever. The school year will begin with 25 students, including 5 new students from Canada, the Philippines, South Africa, and Brazil. The faculty and staff are doing well. The principal's report highlighted the refreshed website which was also augmented with a sizeable "Considering the Ministry" section, the completion of a refreshed, streamlined and augmented handbook, the plans for a conference and prospective student days in January, and the many faculty publications.
12. The board received sabbatical reports from Dr. J. Smith and Dr. T. VanRaalte, and approved Dr. William den Hollander's sabbatical proposal for 2026. The following annual reports were received with thankfulness: coursework report, registrar's report, library report, website report, convocation committee report, Faber-Holwerda bursary report, publication foundation report, foreign student bursary report, and the lecture schedule for 2022–23. Dr. de Visser reported on his visit to churches in Korea and Dr. Van Vliet reported on his visit to churches in the Philippines and Singapore. Dr. Bredenhof and Dr. den Hollander reported on their attendance at the Timothy Trust Conference in Toronto. These reports were received with thankfulness.

FRCA DELEGATE REV. STEPHEN 'T HART

Rev. 't Hart addressed the Board to express gratitude for the excellent cooperation between CRTS and the FRCA, and the warm "Canadian embrace" the students from Australia receive both in the local churches they attend and in the churches where the students complete their Pastoral Training Programs and internships. In addition, Rev. 't Hart provided a brief update on the efforts of the Australian churches towards a possible future Australian seminary. The principal responded with appreciation for the ongoing support of the FRCA and acknowledged the valuable contributions Australian students make to CRTS and to the Canadian churches. He also noted that work is underway to clarify the ATS requirements concerning affiliate institutions. Appreciation was expressed for the letter received from the Deputies.

PRESS RELEASE AND CLOSING

The next Academic Committee meetings were scheduled for November 6, 2025 and January 5, 2026, and the next Board meeting is scheduled for January 7, 2026. The completion of the press release was delegated to the vice-chairman in consultation with the executive and the principal. Rev. Jeff Temple closed the meeting with prayer.

On behalf of the Board of Governors,
Rev. Julius VanSpronsen (Vice-chairman)

CLASSIS CLIPPINGS

Editor's note: What follows are clippings from the press releases of recent classes across the federation, for the interest of our readers. Each press release can be found in full at canrc.org.

CLASSIS PACIFIC WEST – OCTOBER 2, 2025

The meeting proceeded with a sermon examination. Candidate Reese Gaillard presented his sermon on Psalm 67. After meeting in closed session, classis decided to continue the exam. After giving short testimony on his motivation for seeking ministry, the candidate was examined by the assigned ministers in the areas of Old Testament, New Testament, Knowledge of Scripture, Doctrine and Creeds, Church History, Church Polity, Ethics, and Pastoral Theology. The order of subjects was adjusted so that the examination on Knowledge of Scripture took place first, as a group of Grade 12 students had been invited to observe this portion. Classis judged that Candidate Gaillard had sufficiently sustained the examination, and the deputies of regional synod concurred with this decision.

Rev. DeBoer from the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church extended fraternal greetings on behalf of the ARPC. He shared some news from among their churches and also brought some updates regarding the ARPC's relationships with other denominations in North America and abroad.

The following delegates were appointed to regional synod west: ministers Rev. D. Vandeburgt, Rev R. Vanderhorst (with alternates Rev H. Alkema, Rev. K. Janssen); elders G. Gunnink, H. Moes (with alternates K. Dykstra, R. Gelderman).

CLASSIS PACIFIC EAST – SEPTEMBER 25, 2025

J. van der Linden, missionary of the church at Johannesburg, addressed classis. He passed on greetings from the sister churches in South Africa (FRCSA) and gave information about the sister churches, as well as the work with which he is particularly involved at the Reformational Study Center; he concluded with words of encouragement from John 21. The chairman responded with words of thanks and greeting.

A letter of greeting was received and read from J. Munive, the chairman of the Inter Church Relations Committee of the Western Classis of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS). Classis expressed thanks. The church at Nooksack Valley was tasked with sending a delegate or a letter of greeting to the next meeting of the Western Classis.

CLASSIS ALBERTA – SEPTEMBER 9, 2025

The church visitors gave a brief oral report on visits made in Neerlandia. The churches received reports from the treasurer and the church for inspection of the books of the treasurer. The committee for students of theology reported on its activities and drew the attention of the churches to the excellent upgrade to the CRTS website giving good guidance to those who are looking into the possibility of entering the ministry.

Calgary, Coaldale, and Providence requests for pulpit supply were granted. One church requested advice on a pastoral matter (Article 44 CO). In response, classis decided to strike an ad hoc committee to report to the next classis with a proposal for advice that takes into account the comments made by the delegates at this classis.

Brother René Barendregt, a fraternal delegate from the Bethel Free Reformed Church at Monarch, addressed the churches of Classis Alberta with words of encouragement. The chairman responded in kind.

Classis Alberta delegated the following to regional synod west (November 18, 2025) at Willoughby Heights CanRC: ministers Gerard Veurink and Ken Wieske (with alternates Julius

VanSpronsen and Cody Swaving) and elders Linden Kok and Ray Noot (with alternates Rob deJong and Morris Vogelzang).

CLASSIS ONTARIO WEST – (PART 1—SEPTEMBER 17, 2025)

Br. Damon Bosveld presented himself, with the required paperwork, for a preparatory examination. His sermon proposal was discussed and deemed sufficient. He was examined in Old Testament exegesis, New Testament exegesis and 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, classis deemed him eligible for call for a period of 3 years from the date of classis.

Fraternal delegates were invited to bring greetings. Classis was heartily encouraged by br. John Otten, who brought greetings from the Tillsonburg Heritage Reformed Church and Rev. Kline, who brought greetings from the Classis Michigan of the URCNA. Classis also received and read a letter of greeting from Classis Southwestern Ontario of the URCNA.

A proposal from Caledonia-Living Hope regarding the date for the examination of Br. Fred Struik was discussed. It was agreed that Classis Ontario West (September 17th) be reconvened on October 29th to complete the agenda with the peremptory exam of Br. Struik.

Delegates for regional synod east were appointed as follows: Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer and Rev. John VanWoudenberg with Rev. Timothy VanBeek and Rev. Jeff Temple as alternates; elders Bill Dokter and Ronn van Andel with Joel van Popta and Ted Schouten as alternates.

CLASSIS NORTHERN ONTARIO – SEPTEMBER 17, 2025

Minister Delegates to regional synod were appointed. Primary delegates are Rev. T. Vandergaag and Rev. B. Vanderhorst. Rev. VanderLinde and Rev. Vandevelde were appointed as alternates. Primary elder delegates are Br. Derek Reinink with an alternate of Br. Tristan Venema, and Br. Charles Groen with an alternate of Br. Micheal Cooperwhite.

CLASSIS CENTRAL ONTARIO – SEPTEMBER 12, 2025

Rev. Bryn MacPhail was then introduced to classis by Mr. Tom Zietsma who gave a brief summary of his background. Rev. MacPhail responded on why he was attracted to our federation which led to his interest in serving at Blessings.

Classis then considered the request from Blessings Christian Church that Rev. Bryn MacPhail be examined by classis in accordance with Article 13 of the Acts of Classis June 2025 so that he might be declared eligible for call in the CanRC. The request was granted. The examination was scheduled to be held on October 24, 2025.

Blessings also asked classis to approve occasional pulpit supply from ministers in non-sister churches. Classis decided to appoint a committee to present an amendment to the Regulations to handle such requests in the future.

Delegates for Regional Synod East: Ministers: Rev. Tony Roukema, Rev. Gerrit Bruintjes; Alternates: Rev. Winston Bosch and Rev. Ian Wildeboer. Elders: Rev. Paul Aasman, Mr. Cornelius Broersema; Alternates: Mr. Andrew Baartman, Mr. Paul den Hollander.

CLASSIS NIAGARA – SEPTEMBER 17, 2025

After the adoption of the agenda, the chairman read the Form of Subscription, which was signed by Rev. M. Jagt who recently was installed as pastor and teacher of the Vineyard Church in Lincoln.

Classis proceeded to the peremptory examination of brother Joshua Schouten. After ensuring that the proper documentation had been submitted, the brother presented his sermon proposal on Philippians 4:4-7 which classis, in closed session, judged sufficient to continue with the examination. Then he was examined in the areas of Old Testament, New Testament, Doctrine and Creeds, Church History, Scripture Knowledge, Ethics, Diaconiology, and Church Polity. With thankfulness, classis judged that Joshua Schouten had sustained his peremptory examination and the deputies of regional synod east concurred with this decision. In open session the chairman informed the brother that he had sustained his examination.

Upon review of the pertinent documents, classis officially approved the call from Dunnville West to brother Schouten. Classis appointed the church of Dunnville East to represent classis at the ordination of brother Schouten on October 5, 2025.

Rev. Jopie van der Linden from the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa was given the opportunity to pass on greetings and words of encouragement.

The following brothers were appointed as delegates to regional synod east in Attercliffe, November 19, 2025: Revs. Marc Jagt and Rodney Vermeulen as primary delegates and Revs. John Louwerse and Daniel Shin as alternate delegates. Elders Eric Nordeman and Brian Van Andel as primary delegates and elders Neil Devries and Will Dykema as alternate delegates.

Jacob "Jack" Moesker

September 23, 1950—August 27, 2025

Jack Moesker, born September 23, 1950, was welcomed into glory on August 27, 2025. On that day, at the age of 74, the Lord called Jack home. Jack was first and foremost a child of God, and he spent his life as a faithful servant of his Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Over 31 years of active ministry, Jack served five congregations with energy, warmth, and conviction. Even after retiring, he didn't stop—he continued to minister during ten years of emeritus status, encouraging people in their faith and pointing them to Christ.

Jack's story began in the Netherlands, though he was only two years old when his family immigrated to Canada in 1952. He didn't remember those early years, but he always felt a strong connection to his homeland. Part of that came through his wife, Christina, and part through his family and church background. He worked hard at learning Dutch, and his ties to the old country led him to serve on a special committee that maintained contact with the Dutch sister churches.

If you knew Jack, you no doubt knew his sense of humour. He had a way of turning an ordinary moment into something memorable with a quick comment, a funny twist, or a well-timed story. He could make people laugh in casual conversations, at church gatherings, and even at large synod meetings, where he sometimes had the whole room in stitches. His joy was infectious, and he used it to ease burdens and bring people closer together. But that humour was never superficial—it stemmed from the joy he found in the gospel and his deep love for the Reformed faith. That same love also brought him sorrow when he saw the Dutch sister churches drifting away from Scripture.

Jack and Christina were blessed with eight children, and by God's grace, all of them serve the Lord today. His daughter Marsha in particular held a very special place in his heart. Marsha was born with a severe form of autism and couldn't speak or manage her own life. Jack loved her deeply, not despite her limitations but because she showed him something profound about God's love. She reminded him every day that we are entirely dependent on God, that we bring nothing to him but our need. Jack would often reflect that if God could love someone like Marsha, then God could love anyone, regardless of their flaws, sins, or brokenness. She was one of his greatest teachers, and to him, she was like a walking sermon.

I had the privilege of knowing Jack for 45 years, ever since our seminary days. From the beginning, one thing stood out: his ability to connect with people. It didn't matter who you were, where you came from, or what you had been through. Jack would find common ground and start a meaningful conversation.

Jack was a sinful man, as he himself would have readily admitted, but he never stopped rejoicing in the truth of the gospel. He proclaimed it with both depth and clarity—sermons that were thoughtful, profound, and yet simple enough for everyone to understand.

Jack lived a life filled with faith, laughter, and love. He left a legacy of service, humour, strong conviction, and a family walking with the Lord. Above all, Jack pointed others to Christ, the source of his joy and the Saviour he trusted throughout his life. Though he is now with his Lord and Saviour, he will be deeply missed by those he left behind.

Willem "Bill" B. Slomp
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CLARION KIDS ASK!

Why do we have collection at church?

- Eden, Age 8

Hello Eden,

There are so many things we do every week in our church services, and it is very good to know why we do those things. We hear God's words in the Ten Commandments and in the Bible reading and also in the sermon—we hear about how God loves us! We praise God by singing and praying. We also have a collection every week.

When there is a collection, something special is happening in God's church. Because God loves us, we are so thankful and want to show love to others. One way to do that is to share the money God blesses us with to help care for the poor among God's people. The collected money goes to people who need it in your congregation or community. Sometimes it is sent to other parts of the world where God's love can be shown by helping those who may not have enough money to buy food, clothing, or medicine.

In the very first Christian churches, God made a special job that he gave to certain men in the church. Deacons make sure the collection money is shared to care for God's needy people in wise and loving ways.

When you see the collection at church, you can remember that God wants all of us to show love and kindness to each other.

Till next time,

Mrs. Veenendaal

Email your question to **editor@clarionmagazine.ca** and watch for the answer here in the *Clarion!*