

Clarion

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



When Fellowship Feels Frightening

Kevin Hoogstad

Dead to Sin: Part 3

Rob Schouten

Witness at Work: Stan Leyenhorst

John Siebenga

What's Inside

The decisions of General Synod 2025 are currently being studied carefully by councils and church members across the federation—which is excellent! Engaged churches who test everything against Scripture as well as the agreement we’ve made with each other in the Church Order makes for—under God’s blessing—a faithful and strong federation. To that end we welcome the guest editorial by Clarence VanderVelde and the two different perspectives shared by letter writers on decisions of GS 2025.

Social anxiety seems to be a rising phenomenon which affects also Christians and so *Clarion* asked counselor Kevin Hoogstad to give us insight into what this is like for members of our churches and what others can do to help.

Do you find yourself quick to think poorly of others? Wes Bredenhof’s piece will give some encouraging guidance. Should church discipline continue when someone withdraws? Rob Schouten tackles that age-old question while also, in a separate article, finishing his series on what it means to be “dead to sin.” What is happening in the Anglican Church in Canada? Eric Kampen’s next instalment of *Outside the PARC* brings us clarity. Beyond these thoughtful articles we have an update on mission work in Mexico and a *Witness at Work* entry from John Siebenga featuring Mr. Stan Leyenhorst and his specialized labour in the Lord’s kingdom.

Mariah Tamminga is back with another podcast review and for the first time *Clarion* reviews a book that looks like the comics! The work at our seminary continues apace with a recent conference as well as another bi-annual board meeting, both of which are reported on inside these pages. Laura Veenendaal returns with an answer to a youngster’s tough question while Rachel Vis introduces us to another of our special needs brothers and sisters in *Ray of Sunshine*. Enjoy your reading!

Peter Holtvliuwer

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Trust Matters

A young person who gets a driver's license and has been entrusted with the keys to the family car has to show that he or she can handle driving Mom and Dad's car responsibly. Mom and Dad may have some anxiety as their child exercises this newfound freedom, but as time goes on and responsibility is demonstrated the parental concern fades. As the child demonstrates trustworthiness, parental trust grows.

GENERAL SYNOD DECISION

The recent General Synod Aldergrove 2025 made some watershed decisions, perhaps most notably the decision to give some license to local churches to choose their own songs for worship. This involved a revision of Church Order Article 55 so that it now reads: "The 150 Psalms of the Bible are foundational to the church's worship and are to be sung frequently in the worship services. General synod shall adopt metrical versions of the Psalms and shall approve hymns for inclusion in a song book which shall, as a rule, have the principal place in the worship of the church. The consistory may also approve the singing of alternate settings of the Psalms and additional hymns, provided they are in harmony with the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity" (*Acts GS 2025*, Art. 115, pp. 115–116).

I agree with this decision to allow some freedom for local churches to choose their own songs for worship. But with this newfound freedom comes the obligation on the part of the churches to demonstrate trustworthiness.

What does this look like in practice? The 150 Psalms are to be sung frequently in the worship services. As a rule, the *Book of Praise* is to have the principal place in the worship of the church. Additional hymns approved by the consistory are to be in harmony with the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity. In other words, abiding by the stipulations of Church Order Article 55 will demonstrate trustworthiness.

Judging by the submissions to GS 2025, not all the churches will be happy with this decision, and some may very well be preparing to write appeals to the next general synod. There may be some—perhaps even considerable—anxiety in the federation of churches about how this decision will play out in the life of the churches. Churches will be watching one another. Some speak of a culture of suspicion.

BUILDING TRUST

This is where trust and trustworthiness come into the picture. GS 2025 showed trust in the churches by giving some local freedom regarding what is sung, and now the churches should show that they are trustworthy and can handle this freedom. Between now and the next general synod—and beyond—the churches should build trust among one another by proving to be trustworthy. When this freedom is used responsibly, concern fades—and with it the basis for possible appeals urging removal of this freedom.

A federation of churches cannot function without trust... Without trust and trustworthiness, the relationship falters.

This is about *trust* matters. And this is about the fact that trust *matters*. A federation of churches is built on trust. We are together in this federation because we trust one another. Let trust toward one another be uppermost in the mind of local churches, not suspicion. Follow the example of GS 2025 in this respect. A federation of churches cannot function without trust. Furthermore, as in any relationship, we have to work at maintaining trust by acting in a trustworthy manner. Without trust and trustworthiness, the relationship falters.

I once read this saying: "The only way to make a man trustworthy is to trust him." It means that people must be given the opportunity to show that they can be trusted. The decision of GS 2025 to give local churches some licence in choosing songs for worship arises from trust. Like the young person who has just received a driver's license and the keys to the family car must demonstrate trustworthiness, let the churches also show that they are trustworthy in using their freedom well. 



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Church Discipline, Withdrawal, & the Limits of Ecclesiastical Authority

A Biblical and Pastoral Reflection

The question of church withdrawals—especially in the context of ecclesiastical discipline—is a vexing issue in some parts of the Reformed world. Some withdrawals come from members already under discipline, others from members in good standing. Some come from professing believers leaving the Reformed church to join a broadly evangelical congregation or a different Reformed church body. Others arise from a complete departure from the Christian faith.

In what follows, I am focusing on the proper ecclesiastical response in situations when members withdraw *while they are under the Christian discipline of the church*. I will argue that although such withdrawals are a matter of deep spiritual concern, formal ecclesiastical discipline should not continue once someone has withdrawn. That is not because withdrawal is legitimate but because the purpose and process of discipline—as given in Scripture—presumes the continuing presence and profession of the person involved. The key, then, is to clarify the purpose and function of church discipline, as revealed in God’s Word.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE—FOR WHOM?

The Heidelberg Catechism gives a clear summary in Q&A 85: “According to the command of Christ, those who, though called Christians, profess unchristian doctrine or live unchristian lives are, after repeated brotherly admonitions, excluded from the Christian congregation by the elders.”

This definition is not only confessional—it is biblical. Church discipline is applied to those who still *call themselves Christians* but contradict that confession in life or doctrine. In other words, discipline is for the one who remains *within* and wishes to be identified with the church, claiming the name of Christ while denying him in belief or behavior.

But when someone no longer professes the name of Christ, or no longer wishes to be identified with the church, that framework collapses. A person who renounces the faith or severs their ties

with the church has placed himself or herself outside the context in which church discipline is carried out. The church may grieve, warn, and pray, but it no longer has a biblical mandate to continue a disciplinary process.

PROTECTING GOD’S NAME

One of the central reasons for discipline is to guard the honor of God’s name. When sin is tolerated within the church, God’s name is publicly dishonored. Paul writes, “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Rom 2:24) and “All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God’s name and our teaching may not be slandered” (1 Tim 6:1–2).

But when an unrepentant person leaves the church while under Christian discipline, the dynamic changes. The church is no longer condoning their sin by continued association. The damage to God’s name caused by inaction has been removed. The person is no longer part of the body and no longer represents the church publicly. This diminishes, though it does not eliminate, the scandal of sin. The church should still speak clearly—but discipline has already accomplished its core protective aim.

PRESERVING THE CHURCH’S PURITY

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul warns: “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? . . . Purge the evil person from among you.” The danger is clear: persistent sin, left unchecked, spreads. The command is to remove the unrepentant sinner from the body.

But what if the person removes themselves? In that case, the intended effect of discipline—separation from the body—has already occurred. The leaven is no longer in the lump. The fellowship is no longer polluted by ongoing public sin. What church discipline would have accomplished has already come to pass. It would be



redundant to proceed with a formal act of excommunication when the individual is no longer a member.

WITHDRAWAL = LEAVING

1 John 2:19 offers crucial insight: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.” John gives no indication of a process of discipline. The going out itself is the sign of departure and apostasy. In any case, it is treated as a *visible break with the church community*.

Although John’s wording reveals that their departure exposed a deeper spiritual reality (“they were not of us”), his pastoral point is simple: they left. The “antichrists” of 1 John do not submit to church process—they abandon the church. Their withdrawal makes their status clear. By abandoning the church, they show that they were never truly part of it.

LIMITED JURISDICTION

The church cannot hold people against their will. The Belgic Confession rightly states: “We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers” (Art. 27). When someone no longer professes faith, no longer submits to instruction or oversight, and declares their intent to depart, the church may urge repentance and pray for return, but it may not pretend the person is still under its authority. They are now outside. And as Paul says plainly in 1 Corinthians 5:13: “God judges those outside.” The church must accept this biblical boundary.

To continue formal church discipline against someone who has withdrawn misunderstands what excommunication is. Excommunication is the act of removing someone from the fellowship of the church. Therefore, if someone has already walked away, excommunication is not the answer. To excommunicate under such conditions turns the church into something it was never meant to be—a coercive institution. We cannot hold on to people as members against their will.

To say that someone has placed themselves outside the church is not to say that they are outside God’s sight or God’s covenantal dealings. God’s judgment and mercy continue beyond the reach of the church. Repentance may still occur. Divine discipline may

still unfold. And the church may continue to reach out pastorally, with prayers, calls, letters, or visits. But the formal authority of the church, as exercised in discipline, ends when a person renounces their profession and severs their connection with the congregation.

WHAT ABOUT THE COVENANT?

Some have argued that withdrawal should not interrupt the process of church discipline because of the nature of covenant membership. This perspective holds that once someone has been baptized and brought into the covenant community, their membership is not something they can revoke on their own initiative. From this view, only the church—acting on Christ’s behalf—can formally declare someone outside. As long as that has not happened, the church must proceed with discipline.

This argument takes seriously the weight of covenant identity, and rightly so. But it risks conflating God’s enduring claim with the church’s limited authority. The covenant is not abolished when someone walks away. But the jurisdiction of the church is tied to profession, presence, and accountability. When those vanish, the framework for discipline vanishes too. The elders no longer oversee the individual. The church is no longer called to purge the leaven—because the leaven has left. The person remains under God’s judgment, but no longer under the church’s discipline.

ROOTED IN SCRIPTURE

Church discipline is a sacred task. Its purpose and procedure must be shaped by Scripture, not by theological deduction. The covenant is a central biblical theme. But when our church discipline procedures are driven by inferences from covenant theology rather than by explicit teaching, we go in the wrong direction. Let us hold fast to the covenant as revealed in Scripture—and let us exercise church discipline in obedience to the commands of that same Word. “Are you not to judge those inside? God judges those outside” (1 Cor 5:12–13). 



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When Fellowship Feels Frightening:

Understanding Social Anxiety in the Church

KEVIN HOOGSTAD



God's children have always struggled and suffered under the effects of the Fall. There is not a single reader who makes it through this sin-steeped world without hardship. This article seeks to shed light on the pain and struggle of social anxiety, specifically as it affects believers who desire deeper communal worship and fellowship, but who for a season find it difficult to be around others.

Some readers have never suffered from the confusing, oppressive weight of anxiety. If that is you, thank you for taking time to understand your spiritual family members who struggle with anxiety. Your willingness to learn, listen deeply, love faithfully, and encourage the disheartened is a gift to the body of Christ. When one part suffers, the whole body suffers (1 Cor 12:26).

Other readers have struggled, or are currently struggling, with varying degrees of anxiety. You may yearn for fellowship yet feel overwhelmed when passing through the church doors. I hope this article gives accurate language to your experience and offers freedom to come to Christ and his people as loved and accepted, as God's "walking wounded" children.

This article is divided into three sections: (1) what social anxiety can feel like as a Christ follower; (2) exploring the different root causes of anxiety without oversimplifying; and (3) practical ways to support anxious believers as they desire to be more present, secure, protected, and authentic within the church.

WHAT SOCIAL ANXIETY FEELS LIKE

The statistics of those who struggle with anxiety vary slightly, but Canadian data indicates that about 13% of people are diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.¹ Furthermore, Generalized Anxiety Disorders have doubled since 2012.² According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, social anxiety affects over 7% of the population.³ In other words, when you look around church on a Sunday, there are a certainly a number of people quietly carrying the burden of anxiety.

When clients describe their most anxious days, there is a strong sense of overwhelm, fear, panic, dread, worry, and shame. Anxiety did not begin today or yesterday; most Christians struggle for years before seeking help. Mental and spiritual battles arise: What is happening in my mind, body, and soul? How do the promises in Scripture align with my experience? Why does the "joy of salvation" feel far away? And perhaps the most painful: If I share this with others, will I only receive shame, being seen as "not strong enough" as a believer?

For some, anxiety starts to build on Saturday afternoon. The mind starts rehearsing strategies for Sunday: where to sit, who to talk to (or avoid), how long to hide in the washroom, how to quickly leave after the benediction to find refuge in a vehicle. There is internal conflict that going to church should be enjoyable, but is filled with dread; wanting fellowship with spiritual siblings but fearful that they may judge; knowing the social norms of talking to others but hesitant because they might ask "how are you today?"—and you not knowing how to respond without feeling exposed.

The mind can feel busy. Distracted. Riddled with guilt. Knowing the truths of Scripture yet not feeling peace. The body feels restless. Racing heart, sweating, nausea, trembling, feeling trapped. The soul struggles to grasp the promised rest of the gospel preached each

¹ Canadian Mental Health Association: <https://cmha.ca/find-info/mental-health/general-info/fast-facts/>

² Statistics Canada: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230922/dq230922b-eng.htm>

³ ADAA: <https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/facts-statistics>

week, the comfort falling through the hands like sand. No anxious person *wants* to be anxious. It is often an awful torment leading to feeling distant from yourself, from others, and even from God. A feeling of being disconnected and unsafe, even when logically you are loved and safe.

Take heart! Wrestling with fear or anxiety is not an indicator of weak faith. The Psalms are full of earthly fears, anxiety and distress (see Psalms 6, 22, 55, and many other lament Psalms). We would not conclude that David or the other psalmists had a weak faith because fear was present. On the contrary, those that wrestle with anxiety display a remarkably strong faith! They continuously seek God while their entire being is screaming out “*danger!*” Being a faithful wrestler means giving an honest expression to fear and pain, bringing it into the light, and continuously asking the Lord for help. Sometimes this wrestling goes on silently for months or years, creating a spiritually and physically exhausted Christian.

Encouragement is the life-giving nurturance that is needed for the exhausted believer. Let us strive to be a people filled with hope and a good word that can gladden the heart (Prov 12:25), to encourage weary believers through openness, non-judgmentalism, and prayer (James 5:16).

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is a normal response to an unsafe situation, whether the danger is real or perceived. Imagine a child stands at the top of the stairs to the basement and expresses their fear of monsters. An adult can say, “Don’t worry, there are no monsters.” Logically, a child may believe the adult, but they may still tremble and shake, refusing to go down.

Anxiety is different than a healthy stress response. Many have felt a healthy stress response while giving a book review in English class or learning to drive or interviewing for a job. This is healthy stress that encourages our mind, body, and soul to focus attention, to not make mistakes, to use our gifts and talents well to honour God.

Anxiety is when the healthy stress response to an abnormal situation becomes a normal response to a normal situation. The body stays on high alert for any potential problem, real or perceived. Psychologists call it the “fight-flight-freeze-fawn” response. Simply telling someone to “relax” rarely helps. They already know they are not relaxed. They know the fear is disproportionate for the situation, but the body and the mind are not cooperating.

The church has an opportunity to reflect Christ’s gentleness here. Jesus repeatedly meets fearful disciples with his presence and peace: “Peace be with you” (John 20:19–21). He does not shame them for being afraid; he draws near, then leads them forward. In the same

way, anxious believers often need closeness, compassion, and patient, gradual steps—not judgment, pressure, or hurried fixes.

It is helpful to remember that anxiety impacts the whole person: body, mind, and soul. Depending on our training and experience, we tend to focus on one area. A family doctor may focus more on the bodily aspect by prescribing medication, vitamins, or other physiological interventions. A Christian counsellor may focus more on the mind by helping to create new thought patterns or coping strategies. Those in a church context may focus more on the soul aspect of anxiety, to root out sin, seek repentance, and encourage prayer. My hope is that anxiety is viewed as involving the body, mind, and soul and that God’s people pursue holistic care.

ROOTS AND CAUSES

It is my regular practice in formal speeches and informal conversations with clients, caregivers, church leadership, and church families to explain that suffering in general, and anxiety specifically, has many overlapping causes. I have found that social anxiety is often a result of trauma (significant pain from the past that is impacting the present), stress and grief, relational wounds, or a genetic susceptibility as a result of living in a sin-infected world. Many people easily identify grief, trauma, or other relatives who experience anxiety.

Fear is the first emotion Adam and Eve express after the fall: “I was afraid” (Gen 3:10). As a result of the Fall, humans sin against each other, causing lasting harm (for example, Saul’s violence toward David in 1 Samuel 19, or Amnon’s assault of his sister in 2 Samuel 13). Such terrible experiences can alter a person’s sense of safety. At other times, emotional pain can be tied to natural consequences (Gal 6:7, Num 20). At other times, God allows trials for growth and sanctification (Heb 12:6).

Here is my caution: do not quickly accuse a suffering brother or sister of sin unless you bear firsthand knowledge of their sins and are carefully following Matthew 18:15–17. Do not quickly jump to the comfort of Romans 8:28 without first taking time to understand the pain. Do not pass judgment, discourage and dishearten another, putting an unnecessary barrier between you and the sufferer.

Assume, at least as a starting point, that the person is suffering as a result of the effects of living in a fallen world. Consider using the same response given to a brother or sister that is newly diagnosed with cancer: compassion, empathy, and presence. Assume the person struggling needs a good word of encouragement (Prov 12:25).

LISTENING AS AN ACT OF LOVE

How could a good word be given if we do not first listen? Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in *Life Together*: “The first service that one owes

to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to his Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that he not only gives us his Word but also lends us his ear." Listening is not passive; it is an act of love.

Be quick to listen (James 1:19). Listen deeply. Listen at great length. Listen to hear, not to speak. Listen to empathize. Listen to show you care. I have witnessed much healing just by listening, not in talking or advising. The Psalms are filled with cries to be heard. To be listened to is the greatest gift you will ever give. Listen with curiosity. Listen without judgment. Listen with kindness. Listen with love. Listen with patience. Listen with the fruit of the Spirit.

Most people are intelligent and do not primarily need advice; they need presence. Job's friends were a comfort before they opened their mouths (Job 2:11–17). The heart of the anxious sufferer has been thinking about the anxiety for thousands of hours and may have deeper insight than anyone else. So be curious and ask good questions to learn about their wisdom, insight, struggle, and hope.

HELPING THE STRUGGLING

What follows are practical strategies for individuals, caregivers, and church communities to create more open, trustworthy, and protected places for anxious faithful wrestlers. This is not an exhaustive list, nor will every strategy fit in your specific context. Often, the best strategies will come from the anxious believer themselves.

Move toward

If you have a relationship with someone that is struggling, or you are gifted with a compassionate heart, move toward them. As you move toward, be compassionate and offer a greeting that provides choice, reducing the pressure to give a full report. For example, "Good morning. I'm glad you are here. Would it be ok if I asked how you have been doing lately, or would you rather talk about something else?"

When someone is in a deep struggle, getting to church may be all they can manage. They may not have capacity for a deep conversation in that moment. At other times with more clarity, there may be a desire to share. Be compassionate with those who struggle with doubt (Jude 22).

Pray publicly & privately

When church leadership is as open about mental illness as they are about physical ailments, it creates a place that is easier for others to be open. Anxiety prefers isolation, so let us not encourage silence, but community and prayer. For those faithful wrestlers that are brave enough, ask your pastor to pray for you explicitly off the pulpit, in the same manner churches often pray for physical illness. It reminds us that the church is more akin to a hospital for weary souls than an art museum of perfectly curated lives.

Provide flexibility in participation

Sitting in the back corner, or near the exit or an aisle seat may be the safest place to be that day. Physical space impacts perceived safety. Avoid forcing everyone to sit in one area if it is a large building with a small congregation. Physical space

Most people are intelligent and do not primarily need advice; they need presence. Job's friends were a comfort before they opened their mouths (Job 2:11–17).

may be helpful to feel more at ease. During intense moments of anxiety, the act of standing can change blood pressure and intensify symptoms. Sometimes it is helpful to listen to others sing and not sing yourself, allowing the voice of the congregation to be raised by others. If someone steps out briefly, allow them to use this as a healthy coping strategy.

Be mindful of sensory load

Some people greatly benefit from ear plugs that reduce noise (i.e. Loop or Calmer earplugs). Additional noise increases the physical responses and agitation from anxiety. This can also be helpful for those that struggle with autism or ADHD and who are easily overstimulated by sounds like shuffling of feet, opening bags of peppermints, coat hangers clanging, etc. Small accommodations reduce the physical response enough to remain present without distraction.

Watch your language

View the anxious believer with the same compassion as a brother in a wheelchair. It would not be prudent to tell the wheelchair-bound brother to “just pray more” or ask, “Have you tried Jesus,” or “Do you have sin in your heart?” Yet well-meaning believers have said these things to those struggling with mental illness. The response I hear from clients is, “Yes, I pray all the time!” and “Yes, I believe in Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for me,” and “Yes, I have sin in my heart—we all do!” Do not equate stronger faith with a guaranteed cure for anxiety. There are times God heals the infirmities of life and other times he allows them to exist for our benefit (2 Cor 12:5–10).

Resources

Have trusted books about anxiety and mental illness in the church library. Provide local mental health resources in the bulletin, the church bulletin board, or on the church website. This displays that church leadership is supportive. One Christian mental health speaker I know encourages these resources to lower barriers and reduce the burden on pastors or elders to be gatekeepers of mental health support. In an urgent physical crisis, we call immediately for help. Reduce the barriers and wait times for people to take the first step toward support.

For example, in Southern Ontario there are over 50 churches that have a packaged contract with Christian Counselling Centre, allowing any church member to come for counselling for up to six sessions without needing to either pay for the session or seek permission from the church. This allows individuals to seek support knowing that long-term problems will have the church body brought in as a support. I recognize that many readers live in other places,

so please find resources in your local area, or refer them to the CCC website to book an online session.

TO THE ANXIOUS FAITHFUL WRESTLERS

Your struggle is not a result of spiritual immaturity; it is a result of the deep impact of sin in this world. Be courageous and speak to at least one trusted person in your church community. Perhaps it is an older, gentle woman that radiates compassion, grace, and kindness. Perhaps it is a trusted friend, elder, neighbour, or Christian counsellor. Perhaps there is a fellow congregant that you know has historically struggled with anxiety. The point is this: start small, talk to at least one safe person. God’s comfort often comes through fellow believers (2 Cor 7:5–7).

Furthermore, repeat the truths of Scripture to yourself. Find short verses and use them as breath prayers:

Inhale: “Lord, you are with me.”

Exhale: “Calm my anxious heart.”

As truths of Scripture are repeated, they slowly take root deeper in our hearts and minds. This is part of the process of sanctification. One Christian author noted their journey with anxiety has positively impacted their faith life, but it can take months or years to see the change.

Anxiety is a treatable mental illness. Consider speaking with your doctor and get basic bloodwork done because low iron, low B12, thyroid problems, or low vitamin D can contribute to anxiety symptoms. If you are not yet ready for medication, talk to a Christian counsellor to develop strategies to reduce the negative impact of anxiety. Engage in physical activity, a natural release to the pent-up energy. Remember the mind, the body, and the soul. Take action to steward every part of yourself.

CONCLUSION

Let us learn to be comfortable sitting in sorrow, listening deeply to pain, so that we can slowly walk with one another towards hope. Christ came into this world to deal with sin at its root, and he will come again to eradicate the effects of sin completely. There are real ways to reduce the impact of anxiety, and there is also certain hope: in the new heaven and new earth, there will be no more fear. Until that day, may the Lord make us a people who bear burdens gently, speak good words wisely, and make it easier for the weary to belong. 

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Why Do I Find It So Easy to Think the Worst?

The importance of Christian charity was first impressed upon me in university by a friend named James. He was the older brother of a close friend, doing graduate studies in history. We were involved together in an evangelism project on our university campus. I don't remember the context anymore, but he once gently chided me for thinking the worst of someone. James told me that, as Christians, we should strive to be charitable. Little things said a long time ago sometimes stick with you.

BEWARE OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS

When I was in seminary, one of my professors told a story from a congregation he'd once served in the Netherlands. It was in a small town where everyone watched everyone else. There was a poor widow everyone knew was receiving help from the deacons. One day she was seen around town wearing a brand-new coat, one which was obviously far beyond her means. The tongues began wagging about how she was abusing the help she was getting from the church. She was judged harshly in the court of public opinion. As it turned out, the coat had been a generous gift, but of course, a falsehood travels round the world while the truth is still pulling up its pants.

Ed Welch tells a similar story:

I once met with a man who appeared teachable, yet he seemed resistant to counsel. I had asked him to read a chapter in the Bible that I was confident would be very helpful for him. Yet each time we met he confessed, with what I thought was feigned embarrassment, that he had not yet read it. I was about to stop meeting with the man when I thought I would try one more thing—we would read the chapter together. It was then that I discovered that his 'obstinance' was actually something else. The man could not read (*Blame It on the Brain*, pp. 56–57).

Other examples could be added: the divorced person who lives under a cloud because "it always takes two to tango," the person falling asleep in church who is adjusting to a new medication, or the newcomer to church who is gossiped about for shopping on Sunday but has never been taught that it's wrong. Many are the ways to be uncharitable in our thoughts or words.

THE ROOT OF JUDGMENTALISM

It's easier to be uncharitable than the reverse. But why? In general terms, you could just say that it's easier to sin than it is to do righteousness. That's too broad to be helpful. I think we should ask what's at the root of our lack of charity. If I dig down deep, I have to admit that it's my pride. I think I know someone's situation. I don't have the humility to admit that I'm not omniscient.

Moreover, I actually want other people to be bad. It succours my conscience when I know other people are bad. I can even rationalize this by mentally appealing to the Reformed doctrine of pervasive depravity. People are sinful, that person is sinful, therefore I must be uncharitable to them. Grace comes from Christ to me, but it can't flow onward from me to them.

That's really the heart of the matter. Christ told the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18 to impress upon us the need for grace to flow on towards others. A servant who owed millions was forgiven by his master, but then refused to forgive the debt of someone who owed him dozens. The point: if we have been shown much grace—and we have—we ought to be gracious. That happens in forgiveness, but also in daily charity.

If we would be consistently "kind to one another, tender-hearted" (Eph 4:32), we would be charitable always. If we would be thinking of ourselves "with sober judgment" (Rom 12:3), we wouldn't be jumping to unkind conclusions about others. If we had the love which "does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth" (1 Cor 13:6), we wouldn't be so inclined to automatically think the worst of someone else.

If you and I would become more charitable Christians, we will need more of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We will have to pray for God to give us hearts that are less judgmental and more inclined to believe the best. We will have to look to Jesus not only for grace to cover our mean ill-will, not only for his charitable obedience to satisfy God's law, but also for his strength to think, speak, and act kindly. ☐

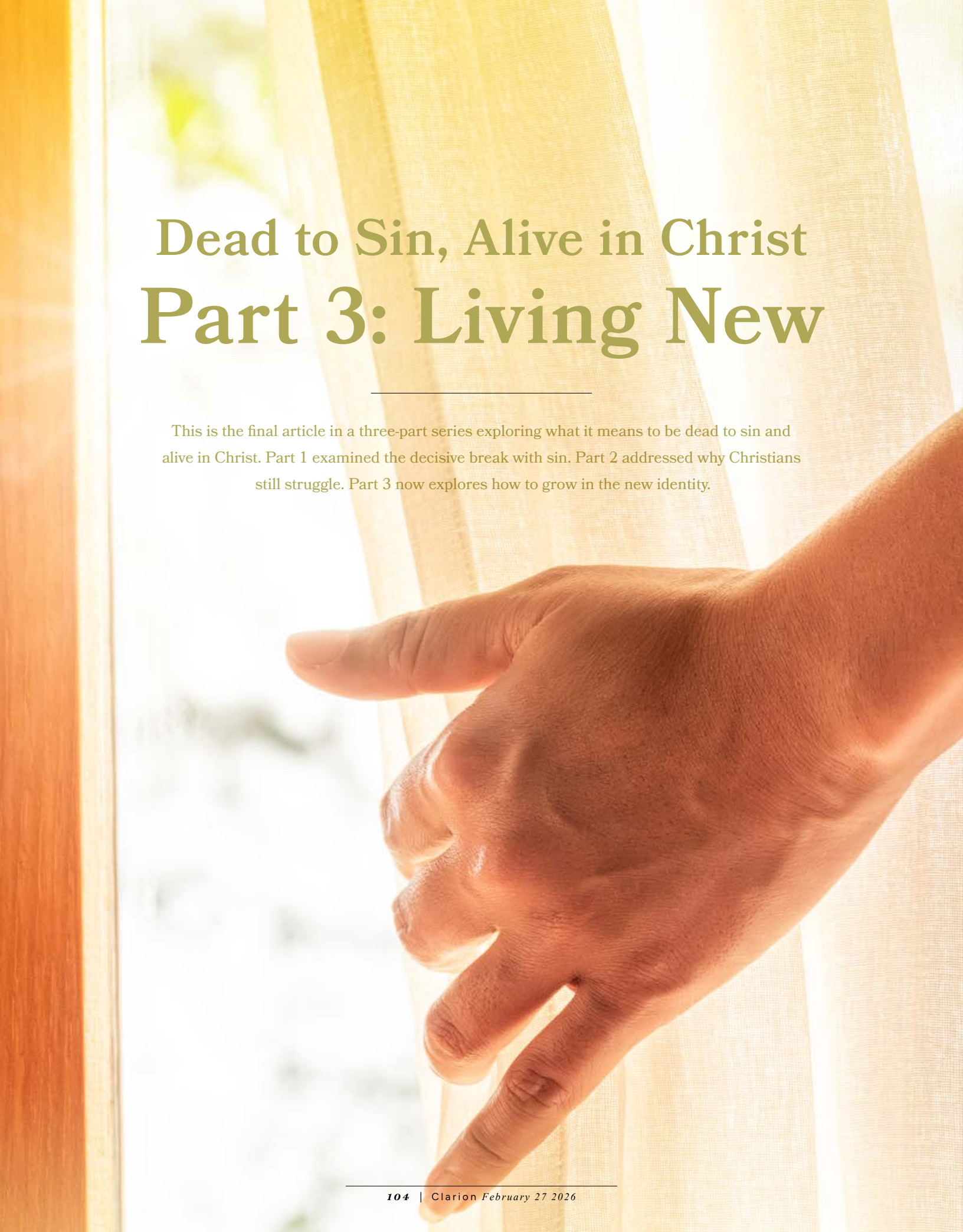


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Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ

Part 3: Living New

This is the final article in a three-part series exploring what it means to be dead to sin and alive in Christ. Part 1 examined the decisive break with sin. Part 2 addressed why Christians still struggle. Part 3 now explores how to grow in the new identity.

Having seen in Part 2 that the Christian's struggle is real—but not hopeless—we now turn to the practical question: How do we grow in the new life Christ has given us?

LIVING NEW

The Christian life begins with a definitive break: being made dead to sin and alive to God. This is not a goal that we slowly work toward. It is a reality we receive the moment we are united to Christ. However, if this break with sin is real, and if the new life is truly ours, then a vital question naturally arises: How should we live in light of that reality?

Too many Christians approach sanctification as a wearying grind—a treadmill of failure, guilt, and endless new resolutions. They see it as endless effort that yields little progress. Others, fearing legalism or misunderstanding grace, conclude that they must be passive and simply wait for the Spirit to change them. Both these approaches fall into serious error.

Scripture offers us a better way. Growth in holiness is neither passive nor powered by sheer will and self-effort. It is a form of active dependence—the new self deliberately living out what God has already made true.

The starting point for sanctification is identity. Paul does not command Christians to *become* new. He tells them that they already *are* new. “You have put off the old self . . . and have put on the new self” (Col 3:9–10). “Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:11). Sanctification, then, is not about striving to become something we are not. It is about growing into what we already are.

The old self has been crucified. The new self has come. The Christian life is not about building a new identity from scratch. Instead, it is about living from the new identity we have already received in Christ.

GROWTH IS TRAINING

If our foundation is our identity, then the pattern for growth is training. The habits of sin run deep. They do not simply disappear the moment our status before God changes. These habits must be unlearned. New patterns must be developed in their place. The Bible calls this process renewal. Paul writes: “Be renewed in the spirit of your minds” (Eph 4:23) and “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2). Renewal is not automatic. It requires deliberate, Spirit-empowered training.

God has not left us to stumble through the Christian life blindly. He has given us tools for growth—what the Reformed tradition calls the *means of grace*. These are not just helpful supports. Scripture, prayer, the sacraments, and fellowship are God's appointed instruments by which the Spirit nourishes, strengthens, and trains believers.

- **Scripture**

God's Word renews our minds. It confronts old thought patterns and reshapes us with the truth. Sanctification is impossible without regular, intentional exposure to the Word.

- **Prayer**

Prayer is not a mystical technique or a magic ritual. It is communion with God. Through prayer, we align our desires with his will, draw strength for the fight, and receive mercy and grace in our time of need.

- **Sacraments**

Baptism and the Lord's supper are not empty rituals. They are visible signs and seals of the grace we possess in Christ. They anchor us to realities we cannot see, yet that we desperately need to remember.

- **Fellowship**

Christian growth is not a solo endeavor. We are meant to grow in community—encouraging one another, bearing each other's burdens, confessing sins, and building each other up. Isolation weakens us. Fellowship strengthens us.

In a world of endless spiritual shortcuts, we must not neglect God's appointed way. The means of grace are not optional!

The presence of spiritual struggle is not a sign of failure. It does not prove that we are half old and half new. It simply confirms that we are alive in Christ and engaged in the ordinary Christian life.

The new self battles against the remnants of sin. This battle is evidence of spiritual life, not the absence of it. Paul's realism about this is encouraging: “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you” (Col 3:5); “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16).

YOU ARE ALIVE IN CHRIST

To be a Christian is to live from a new reality. In Christ, we are not gradually escaping the grip of sin—we have already died to it. We are not striving to attain new life—we have already been raised. Though the remnants of sin still resist us, they no longer define us. Though the struggle continues, it is not the struggle of a slave seeking freedom, but of a free person learning to walk well.

By the Spirit, through the means of grace, we grow into what God has already made us to be. This is the heart of sanctification: not a desperate climb toward acceptance, but a Spirit-led walk in the freedom of the children of God. So then, consider yourself dead to sin, alive to God in Christ Jesus, and live accordingly. 



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**From Christ the whole body, joined and held together
by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself
up in love, as each part does its work.**

Ephesians 4:16



**Christ For All Ministry
Report from Chairman**
Naeem Zafar

Dear brothers and sisters,

We are truly thankful for your faithful support of CFAM. God has blessed us with many opportunities, and we are actively preparing new Sunday schools and new projects to share the Gospel.

Our main goal has not changed: to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, bring people closer to God, and help them be reconciled with Him. As Jesus commanded, we continue to help poor Christians and support our persecuted brothers and sisters who suffer because of their faith in Christ. We are called to proclaim the name of the Lord among the nations.

Serving in Muslim-majority countries like Pakistan is not easy. There are many challenges, but we trust that God protects His people for His name's sake. Our team faces difficulties while working in different areas of Punjab, yet they faithfully continue visiting Sunday school centers and Christian villages. Despite many struggles, God continues to provide for our team and the work.

We would also like to share about our team in Thailand. They are facing great hardship as they serve God's people by providing food and help with rent. Many of the families are illegal refugees and cannot safely go outside to receive aid. Recently, some families were arrested by local police and sent to the International Detention Center (IDC). Because of this, we have decided to deliver food packages directly to their apartments or rooms whenever possible. We continue to pray for these families and especially for their children.

We are also very thankful for our team members in Canada, who are working hard to reach churches and raise awareness about Christ For All Ministry. If you feel called to volunteer and serve in your church, please contact us at naeem@christforallministry.com or call **604-600-8851**. Your support is vital for us to continue serving and standing with our Christian brothers and sisters in Pakistan and Thailand. May God bless you for being part of this mission. **All praises to Jesus Christ.**



This year, we produced sweaters bearing a Gospel message and distributed them to Sunday schools.



Requests for Bricklin Sunday Schools are increasing across our communities. Your generous support enables these children to receive biblical teaching, spiritual growth, and encouragement in their faith.



We thank Brother Samson for leading the Bible study seminar at the local church, where believers gathered on the rooftop to listen to God's Word together.



Throughout the year, our team continues regular visits to Bricklin and local churches to encourage and strengthen believers.

**Message from CFAM Treasurer,
Josh Poppe**

2025 has been an exciting and busy year for Christ For All Ministry. God has blessed CFAM in many different ways. We were able to continue on with our core work from the past years: Our teams were busy travelling to various communities in Punjab, many of them rural and remote, to conduct weekly Sunday schools with more than **700 children being impacted** every week. We added more mobile Sunday schools, and we were able to continue and expand our youth discipleship programs. **The book of Genesis and the book of John** were shared in booklet form with many people this year. The audio Bible program expanded this year and was a blessing to many who cannot read. The sewing center we launched last year was a success, and we hope to open a second one in 2026.

In the past year, we also had the privilege of being able to work alongside the CRWRF in Thailand. We distributed food and rent money to over **60 Pakistani refugee families** who are living undocumented in Thailand. We plan to keep this program going into 2026. Our team also leads Bible studies among these refugees, many who have been there for more than a decade.

In the past year, **God has answered our prayers and provided for our ministry financially.** As we look forward to 2026, we have plans for growth in increasing Sunday schools, discipleship programs, and Bible studies, opening up a second sewing center, and **expanding the Bible project**, where we supply Bibles and audio Bibles. We are also actively planning a study center to be used for many different ministry functions and as offices. This will involve purchasing land and then building on this land.

As we continue with these projects, our mission remains focused on evangelizing and reconciling people to God. In 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, we are reminded of God's call for us to be reconciled to Him and to be His ambassadors of Christ's reconciliation to others.

We kindly ask for your prayers for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Pakistan and Thailand. Please prayerfully consider how you can support CFAM. With God's blessing, we aim to make a lasting impact on the lives of these families and individuals. May God bless you for your prayers and support.



We are grateful for your prayers and support, through which we are able to continue providing audio Bibles to those in need and help extend the Kingdom of God.

Project Thailand: Bringing Hope and Support



We thank God for the opportunity to partner with CRWRF, enabling us to distribute food packages and rent assistance to over 60 families in Thailand.

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 Ph: 6046008851, 6048076415



Children joyfully receiving new shoes



Receiving Sweaters with a Gospel Message



Mehwish Tahseen
CFAM Director

The work done again this year for these families has deeply encouraged my heart, and I am truly thankful for the opportunity to serve with CFAM. It is a great honor to serve God by serving His people.

During my last mission trip, a mother shared a touching testimony about the ongoing work of Christ For All Ministry. She told me that in 2023 her young son had no shoes for the winter. When CFAM provided him with a pair, it became a great blessing for their entire family. This year, when those shoes finally wore out, she shared that she was waiting once again for December, hoping that CFAM would help her son with another pair to face the cold season.

Stories like this remind us why we serve year after year. Many children and families wait every Christmas for warm shoes and basic winter needs. As Scripture reminds us, "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done" Proverbs 19:17. And again, "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" 1 John 3:17.

We are grateful that God allows us to serve these families in practical ways again and again. It is all by the grace of God. Please continue to pray that the needs of our brothers and sisters will be met, for "we are the body of Christ, and each one of us is a part of it" 1 Corinthians 12:27.



Andre Luiten
Advisor to Board CFAM

I have served with CFAM for several years, helping to connect people, churches, and Christian businesses to advance CFAM's God-given mission of reconciliation and evangelism.

I would welcome the opportunity to connect with you to explain our work, how we serve, and how funds are allocated, and to encourage your support of CFAM. If you are a Christian business, I especially invite you to contact me at 6043283577 email: andreluiten47@gmail.com



Our team visits homes and delivers food packages door to door to serve and encourage the Bricklin Christian community in Pakistan.



Sunday school children presented a Christmas skit

Sunday school Bible story time



Thanks to God's blessing, our pilot sewing center project was successful, and we plan to open a new center this year to serve more people.



CFAM held annual fundraising dinner



Ken Bulhuis
Director CFAM

CFAM Fundraising Dinner – October 24, 2025 Recap

CFAM held its second annual fundraising dinner on October 24, 2025 in the Langley Canadian Reformed Church fellowship hall. By all accounts it was a success!

Doors opened at 6 pm and dinner started at 6:30. Approximately 65 people were in attendance. After opening devotions and singing, accompanied by the musical talents of Heres and Nathalie Snijder (who also played during dinner), we enjoyed a wonderful catered meal. We were entertained with a Bible trivia game led by Naeem and Mehwish's children Ximon and Neriah. Our guest speaker Pastor Doug Vandeburgt encouraged us to persevere despite our relatively small organization. Naeem provided an update of the current work being done in Pakistan and Thailand as well as initiatives planned for 2026. Josh provided a financial stewardship report, highlighting the positive impact that the financial contributions of our donors is having on the lives of Christians in those countries, and invited those in attendance to consider a donation to CFAM.

We also viewed a short YouTube video that provides graphic insight into how Christians in Pakistan suffer for their faith. The video can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mATdRtRCCuM>

After question period and dessert, Pastor Jack Visscher closed in prayer and the evening wrapped up at 8:30 pm. Thanks again to all who attended. We look forward to the next dinner meeting planned for 2026 and hope for even more attendees and support!



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.



We organize two local events each year and ask for your support and participation. Your presence helps make an impact and allows you to see firsthand the work we are doing.



Last year, floods caused great hardship for many Christians in Pakistan. By God's grace, we were able to support them through our Emergency Relief Fund, supplying clean water, food, and other essential items to those in need. All glory to God!

Prayer Request: Pray for persecuted families in Pakistan and Thailand, asking for God's protection and provision. We welcome volunteers from your church to serve as CFAM representatives. Please contact one of us and prayerfully consider supporting this work.



Mission in Mexico

As Mission in Mexico approaches our seventh year with boots on the ground in Mexico, we are entering into a new phase of the work in two ways. First, we are moving from a stage where our main focus was evangelism and outreach to a stage where our work now includes the varied activities of planting a church. Second, with the anticipated arrival of Marc and Hannah Vermeulen, we are moving from one missionary family to two. Both of these developments are causes to rejoice in evidence of growth, by God's grace.

WORK

The Apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 3:6 "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." Indeed, any growth we are blessed to see is due to God. Yet, God's usual way of growing new things is to work *through* his church—through believers who go out to do the planting and watering. This reminds us that while everything depends on God, we are called to pull on our boots, get our hands dirty, and do the work.

Church planting is not just about finding a place to rent and opening the doors for all the many people eagerly seeking God—at least that has not been the case in our context. Rather, it has been about praying, moving outside our comfort zones, walking the streets, talking to neighbours, handing out flyers, organizing events, helping the needy, etc. All that must then be followed by more prayer. As the old Benedictine slogan goes: *Ora et labora* (pray and work).

Yet, there are also times when God decides to do the work with very little contribution of our own, such as when a family showed up to our church service about half a year ago. The mom was looking for a church and heard about our church plant at Walmart from a mutual acquaintance who works there. Her husband is emotionally and often physically absent, and her two children have special needs. She had been to church in the past but had stopped going. Now, she and her two children have not stopped coming to church and are currently taking our new members' class. God is at work.

JOY

The group of believers and guests that meet with us on Sundays is not large. Even so, there is growth, and that growth necessitates taking the next steps toward establishing a healthy, organized church. At present, we are working on formally receiving members. This involves teaching new members' classes and then having professions of faith and baptisms. Most of those taking the new members' classes come from a Christian background and, in that sense, we still have a lot of work to do to reach more unbelievers. Yet, it is growth.

It is also joyful work, especially considering the diverse group taking the classes. Some are from a Baptist or Evangelical background, one from a Pentecostal church, and one from the Roman Catholic church, although she is still unsure of the differences. We have a couple with three young children, a mom with two older children (mentioned above), a mom with two young kids, and two widows. Some can hardly read and others have their own business. Among the group we also have an older man in a wheelchair, a young man with autism, and a young lady with epilepsy. Added to the mix are Duane and Maribel Visscher and Davin and Stephania Post who serve at Esperanza Para Ti children's home.

Only God's grace brings together such a wide variety of people, and it is a joy to be able to open the Scriptures with them and instruct them in the doctrines of grace.

FRAGILE

As I mentioned, the group taking the classes is not large, about seven people. There is no guarantee that all become members or are persuaded by Reformed doctrine. We've already seen a few people come and go. We also lack mature men, and men in general. Furthermore, the population we are working among is entrenched in Roman Catholic-inspired traditions and are certainly not seeking to switch their allegiance to Christ. They need to be won for Christ and Satan does not give up ground easily.

New growth is fragile. Not everything we plant or water takes root and grows. For all the prayers answered, it can feel like many more remain unanswered. There is much work to do and limited time and abilities. But we take heart, remembering that God's grace is more than sufficient and his power is made perfect in our limitations.

CO-LABOURERS

We also remember and give thanks that God has answered our prayers for a co-worker on the field. Marc and Hannah, with their two young boys, are expected to arrive in the summer of this year and then begin an extended time of language learning, cultural immersion, and internships. After that, they will begin planting and watering alongside us.

This is an exciting bit of growth for Mission in Mexico and for ourselves on the field. It will be good to share the joys and burdens of the church plant, and will enable us to keep focusing on reaching our community with the gospel. Having co-labourers will also ensure that work will be able to continue on the foundation that has been laid, and that by God's grace we will be able to see yet more growth as his Word goes out to gather his people. 🇲🇽

Scott Bredenhof

Missionary
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PRAYER POINTS

1. Pray for a blessing over the membership classes and that God would give good understanding and strong faith to all who are taking the class.
2. Pray for the hearts of our neighbours to be softened and transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.
3. Pray for Marc and Hannah Vermeulen during this time of transition and pray that God would equip them with all they need for their life and ministry in Mexico.

Fellowship meal after Sunday service



Sunday service



Outreach English Camp





The Anglican Church of Canada

ERIC KAMPEN

As in the previous two installments of this column, which dealt with Baptist Churches and the United Church of Canada, it may appear that by focussing on the Anglican Church we are again venturing quite far from the PARC. However, the Anglican Church merits our attention. It has roots in the Reformation of the sixteenth century. It is a significant presence on the Canadian church scene, with a membership of about 500,000 in 1700 parishes (congregations). It is part of a worldwide communion of churches with a membership of 85 million people in 165 countries. Most likely, many readers of this column will know and have benefited from books by Anglican authors such as J.I. Packer (e.g., *Knowing God*), John Stott (e.g., commentaries on Acts and many letters of Paul), as well as P. E. Hughes (e.g., commentaries on Hebrews and Revelation). It merits considering whether they could be candidates for joining the churches in the PARC. As has been done with other church groups, first there will be a historical review, followed by a look at the state of the church today, and then some reflections.

ENGLISH ROOTS

When one considers the name, it will not be surprising that for the history of the Anglican Church one must go to England. There, however, it is not known as the Anglican Church, but as the Church of England.

Its origin as a distinct church group goes back to the reign of King Henry VIII, when he declared the church in England independent from the authority of the Pope. This came about because the Pope

would not cooperate with Henry's desire to divorce his wife and marry his mistress. The leaders in the church, like Thomas Cranmer who had been influenced by Luther's writings, used the situation to promote the reformation of doctrine, embracing the key teachings of the Reformation. Subsequently, they were also influenced by the writings of John Calvin and others. The Reformed doctrine was eventually expressed in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, which parallels the Belgic Confession in structure and content.

Another key component of the efforts to reform the church was the Book of Common Prayer. It contains many prayers for church and family use, a Psalter, a catechism, and liturgical forms. Readers of this column will recall that the *Prayer for the Church Universal* in this book has been used as a concluding prayer for many of the PARC articles.

While the Church of England reformed its doctrine, it did not change its form of church government, maintaining what is called an episcopal system with its hierarchical structure. The key change was that the King of England was seen as the head of the Church of England, with the Archbishop of Canterbury as the main spiritual leader, rather than the Pope. One of the consequences of this was that, while there were some changes in liturgy to simplify it in comparison to Rome's practices, compared to Reformed practices the liturgy is far more elaborate, evident in the rituals of worship and the garments worn by the priests.

The affinity with the Reformed wing of the Reformation is evident in how, in 1618, the organizers for the Synod of Dort invited the

Church of England to send delegates to the Synod. This invitation shows that the Church of England was considered a member of the family of Reformed churches in Europe, despite the drastic difference in the form of church polity.

REFORMING INFLUENCES

Scanning the history of the Church of England from the age of the Reformation to the present, there are similarities to developments in other churches on the European continent. In the seventeenth century, there was an effort to further purify the church in terms of doctrine and life. Those who sought to further purify the church have become known as the Puritans. This was resisted by the church leadership, leading to the establishment of Congregational and Baptist Churches. Many people with these persuasions, unwelcome in England, ended up settling in North America.

There was also what could be called a tug-of-war between the desire by some to submit again to the authority of the Pope and the desire of others to hold on to the doctrines as expressed in the Thirty-Nine Articles. This has led to the use of the terms High Anglican, leaning more to Rome, and Low Anglican, leaning more to the Reformation.

In the eighteenth century, the nominal Christianity in the church was countered by attempts at revival. Led by men like John Wesley and George Whitfield, this resulted in the establishment of Methodist churches. At the same time, many remained within the Church of England, encouraging spiritual renewal and faithfulness.

As England was one of the main nations settling in North America, it is not surprising that the Church of England was established there. In the USA after the American Revolution, it became known as the Episcopal Church, the name reflecting its hierarchical system of government. In Canada, it is known as the Anglican Church. When it was first established in Canada, it sought the same favoured status it had in England. The reality of life in the colonies, with the wide variety of church groups, led to the decision that no church should be given special status, but all be treated equally.

While this historical review shows connections with Reformed churches in the past, to see if that connection is still there one needs to look at where the Anglican Church is at in doctrine and practice today.

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH TODAY

In our internet age, the first place one looks for information about an organization is its website. This is also true for churches. The website for the Anglican Church of Canada (anglican.ca) was

not helpful in learning what the Church stands for. A more helpful website was that of the Diocese of Toronto (toronto.anglican.ca). It states that Anglicans have been influenced by the Protestant and Catholic traditions and that they:

- embrace the Holy Scriptures as a primary source of authority
- accept the Apostles' and Nicene creeds as a sufficient statement of the Christian faith
- practise the two sacraments ordained by Christ: baptism and the Eucharist
- continue the tradition of the Historic Episcopate (having bishops whose ministry has been handed down from the first Apostles)

It is noteworthy that only the Nicene Creed is mentioned as a statement of faith, not the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. On the anglican.ca website it is stated that these articles are “not formally adopted as a binding confession of faith in the Anglican Communion.” They do, however, “serve as a window onto the theological concerns of the reformed English church and the development of Anglican thought.”¹

It is also said that the best way to get to know the Anglican Church is to worship with them. For membership, all one has to do is regularly attend worship services and contribute to the life and work of the church. Anyone baptized into the name of the Triune God can request to be admitted into membership.

Under the tab “Diocesan Life,” it can be seen that the Anglican Church is involved in many social issues, including Truth and Reconciliation, Creation Care, and Social Justice Advocacy. Of these, the matter of Truth and Reconciliation receives much attention, and there is evidence of effort to tie in with Indigenous expressions of spirituality, such as “Honouring the Four Directions,” which is a prayer offering “structured intercession facing East, South, West and North, calling the community to seek the Spirit’s wisdom, courage and gentleness in the work of justice and right relationship.”

In 2001, the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada formalized a full communion relationship. In 2023, the Moravian Church of Canada joined this full communion.

In previous articles, attention has been given to a church’s position on women in office and human sexuality. The Anglican Church has women serving in positions of leadership. As for human sexuality, its position is not prominently displayed on the website, unlike, for example the United Church of Canada. There are diverse stances on the question of the worldwide Anglican communion. The Anglican Church of Canada, however, does accept same-sex relationships.

¹ <https://www.anglican.ca/resources/articles-of-religion/>

In these emphases, we see a similarity to what was seen in the Presbyterian Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada, with extensive description of all the social causes in which the Church is involved.

CHURCH SPLIT

There has been concern by many leaders about the direction of the worldwide Anglican Communion. This led to the formation in 2008 of an organization called the *Global Anglican Future Conference* (GAFCON – gafcon.org). The aim of GAFCON was to bring the Anglican Communion back to its biblical foundations.

The situation came to a head when, in 2025, the Church of England appointed a woman as the new Archbishop of Canterbury who also voted in favour of introducing blessings of same-sex marriages. The GAFCON Communique dated Oct. 3, 2025, states that the “majority of the Anglican Communion still believes that the Bible requires a male-only episcopacy. Therefore, her appointment will make it impossible for the Archbishop of Canterbury to serve as a focus of unity within the Communion.” Further, by not opposing same-sex marriage, she failed to uphold her consecration vows.

As a result of that decision, GAFCON members gathered on Oct. 16, 2025, to reform the Anglican Communion on the basis of the Holy Bible, no longer recognizing the Archbishop of Canterbury. They see themselves as the true continuation of the Anglican Communion.

Within Canada, there is a group of churches associated with GAFCON known as the Anglican Diocese of Canada.² They trace their beginnings back to the mid-1990s, desiring to go back to the essentials of the Anglican expression of the Christian faith. In 2005, it was organized as the Anglican Network in Canada and became part of GAFCON. In 2009, it joined with others to constitute the Anglican Church in North America and changed its name to the Anglican Diocese of Canada in 2024. The website shows that currently there are about 70 congregations in Canada. It has a seminary called Packer College, located in St. John’s, NL. It acknowledges that

there are two divergent opinions on the ordination of women, but both opinions co-exist within the church.

REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Based on the review of the history of the Anglican Church, an invitation to attend NAPARC is not realistic. The basis on which they could be invited to the Synod of Dort has faded into the background. In practice, it has gone the direction of other mainline churches, more concerned about addressing social issues than clearly communicating the gospel message. It has also drifted away from faithfulness to Scripture in ordination of women, as well as in views on gender and sexuality.

At the same time, what was said about GAFCON and the Anglican Diocese of Canada indicates that there are many within the Anglican Church in Canada, as well as in the Anglican Communion worldwide, who desire to be true to God’s Word. The issue of the ordination of women, however, would be an obstacle to these churches being invited to NAPARC.

Still, we remember that where the Word is, the Spirit is working. In the end, we do well to once more conclude with the prayer for the Church Universal found in the Anglican *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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Meet Stan Leyenhorst

JOHN SIEBENGA

(LYN METZLAR-LEYENHORST)





Sixteen years ago, my wife and I built a house in Houston, BC. We worked to make the first floor completely wheelchair accessible, both for our own needs and so that we could be hospitable to those who needed the accessibility. As we planned and built, we often called a good friend who uses a wheelchair. We had many questions for him, and he had many suggestions about practical design that we hadn't thought about or had taken for granted. In this issue of *Clarion*, I want you to meet my friend Stan Leyenhorst, accessibility consultant with Universal Access Design.

Stan, what qualifies you to give me—or anyone else—advice about accessibility?

When you look at me, it's obvious that I might know a few things about accessibility. I have 48 years of lived experience using a wheelchair. A diving injury at sixteen left me a C5/C6 quadriplegic, with no feeling or movement from mid-chest down, limited use of my arms, and almost no use of my hands or fingers. For the first 35 years I used a manual wheelchair but since then I have used a power wheelchair.

Everyone who uses a wheelchair quickly learns about accessibility related to mobility, but there's so much more. About ten years ago I worked with the Rick Hansen Foundation, helping to develop a rating system to assess the accessibility of the built environment

based on multiple disabilities, not only mobility. Around the same time, I completed an online course on Universal Design through the Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access at the University of Buffalo.

How is Universal Design different from accessibility?

They are very much related, but Universal Design is much more comprehensive. It's a method to create diverse and inclusive communities, much like the Christian concept of "one body, different parts." The basic premise behind Universal Design is that places and objects should be designed in a way that they can be easily and comfortably used by the widest range of people, regardless of their age or ability.

Think about doors into buildings. If there is no power door, only someone who can physically open that door can independently enter the building. Add a power door with a small push-button and many more people can enter, but still, only those who can reach and push the button. Newer power door controls are vertical bars that start just above the ground and extend to about one meter high; someone using a walker could just tap that with their walker without having to let go and risk a fall. But true Universal Design for doors would be those that are sensor operated and open when you approach them,



regardless of who you are or what you can do: me in my wheelchair, a grandma using a walker, a mom with a stroller and a bag full of

As we say, everyone is really only temporarily able-bodied!

library books, or the high school football player who happens to have a broken leg and is using crutches. As we say, everyone is really only temporarily able-bodied!

Tell us about your company.

In 2017, I began a company called Universal Access Design (UAD) with the goal of helping others find solutions related to accessibility. It is never my goal to identify and whine about problems; solutions are what is needed. Generally, we use the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Rating Survey to identify strengths and weaknesses in the sites we assess. We then write a report showing existing conditions and give recommendations on how to make a site more universally accessible.

Over the past eight years, we've completed assessments and recommendations for over 270 BC Provincial Parks and 400 Canada Post buildings across the country. We've worked with cities such as Lethbridge to develop an Accessibility Master Plan and we've assessed city-owned buildings (rec centres, libraries, etc.) for many municipalities in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

In addition, I have been part of the planning teams for several hospital renovations and new builds, and I work with Vancouver International Airport on a regular basis. We also provide accessibility awareness training for companies and have created a video series of training modules for airports that is used at various airports across Canada. Although I can no longer comfortably travel, I subcontract the on-site assessment work to other members of my team.

So, that's the last ten years. Can you tell us a little about how you got to this point?

I was born and raised in a large farming family right here in BC. Like most farm kids, I was a hard worker, and by my early teens I was a big and strong kid who was often mistaken for being much older. Over time, this got me into trouble by putting me in situations where I was drinking and doing drugs with guys who were a lot older than me. Although I had a Christian home and attended church and

Christian schools, I was not living a very Christian life. But God is good; while my trauma and SCI (spinal cord injury) may look like a disastrous thing—and it was!—it also was part of the process of bringing me back to God, although that didn't happen as quickly as one might have thought.

During the years between my SCI and starting UAD, I spent some time in university and community college, I started several companies with varying success, and I worked for others in a variety of fields. While that may sound like a life with no focus, in hindsight I can see that God used all those experiences to get me ready for what I'm doing now. I started UAD at an age when others are retiring, but it was God's right time: in my life, in our family's economic situation, and in society's readiness to deal with accessibility.

You're not young, as you mentioned. And you live with a serious disability. And, in the past few years, you've had several "near death" experiences. How do you do everything you do?

Not at all in my own strength! God enables me to get up and continue every day. In 2009, I had a serious vehicle accident; my front tire exploded, my van rolled, and I ended up in the hospital with two broken femurs. I did not want to live, nor did I have the desire to go through another recovery. But I survived, and I recovered. If you can come that close to death on a Saturday night going to grab a pizza with your wife, you have to rethink your life. Since then, whenever God puts something in my mind or in my heart, I just do it. That drive has lessened in the years since then, but it's still the basic way I head into each day.

But physically, how do I do it? I've always had a good team behind me. For the first fifteen years after my injury, my mom helped me with personal care routines. I had learned how to be completely independent in rehab, but by the time I was dressed and out of bed in the morning . . . well, the morning was over, and it was time to start thinking about getting back to bed. There was no time or energy left to actually live life. I opted instead to have others help with routine things so that I could go to work.

In the early 1990s, I married Lyn Metzlar, who I'd first met in university, but who was also a member of a Canadian Reformed Church. Over the years, as I've aged, she takes on a greater role in keeping me alive and functioning productively. And, as she also ages, we rely on home care workers to come and get me up every morning. At work, my colleague Ingrid travels with me for any work-related activities, assisting with a wide range of personal and professional things that I can't physically do myself.

I understand UAD recently won a Clovie Award (Cloverdale's Business Excellence Award) in the DEI category. As a Christian, doesn't that feel a bit awkward?

Not at all. We should remember that diversity, equality, and inclusion—done right—is a very Christian concept, one which our unchristian culture has turned into something very different. In Galatians 3:28 it says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." It was a radical concept at the time, but it was diversity, equality, and inclusion in the truest sense.

As we finish up, any thoughts as to what the CanRef community could be doing in the area of accessibility and universal design?

There are so many things we are already doing well, but there are a few things I think people should consider. In Hebrews 12:13 it says, "'Make level paths for your feet,' so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed" (NIV). The implication here is that it is the unlevel path, or the obstacles, that cause someone to be disabled. We should be trying to remove obstacles, and not create unnecessary ones, to allow people to participate fully in our church communities.

Let me give you some examples. The senior brother who complains about the sound system is often just seen as a whiner, but if we are truly people of the Word, and if the sermon is indeed the central part of our worship services, we should do what we can to ensure everyone can hear it. Invest in a good sound system and a hearing loop and ensure that the seniors who need it actually know how to use it. Have portable hearing enhancement equipment to use in the Bible study room. For people with limited or low vision, consider the font style we use in our bulletin or on the song board or PowerPoint. Consider (and research) the effect of colour contrasting on PowerPoints and even within the building, the colours we use on floors, walls, seating. If you regularly turn your power door operator off because kids play with it, teach them not to play with it! If they were playing with light switches, we would deal with that.

There's a common saying in this field of accessibility: Just ask, just listen. If you're making changes, ask the people it will affect if these are the changes they want and need. And if they're not sure... ask me! 🗣️

Josh Siebenga

Chilliwack
(With Lyn Metzlar-Leyenhorst)

CLARION KIDS ASK!

Why do people go to different churches?

- Nolan, Grade 1

Hello Nolan,

There are lots of reasons why people might go to different churches—let's talk about a few of the reasons.

Maybe people go to different churches because they live in different places. So the churches are really the same except for where they are. You and I might both be members of a Canadian Reformed church but in different cities. It is important to know that God sees churches in different places (and different times in history!) as his *one* church.

But maybe you are asking about people that go to a church that is not a Canadian Reformed church. This means that in their church they might believe something different. Or it might mean that their church formed in a different way and they have some different traditions than your church but believe the same Bible as you.

Here are some good questions to ask to know if a church believes the same thing that your church does:

1. Does the minister preach sermons that agree with the Bible, or does he preach things that are his own opinion?
2. Does the church have baptism and Lord's supper in a similar way to your church?
3. Does the church believe that people are all sinners who need Jesus Christ to save them?
4. Does the church have elders that lead the church to help people understand their sin and believe in God's forgiveness?

Those are really big questions to ask about a church, and it takes lots of talking and listening to know what a church believes and teaches. It is great to talk to other people about what they believe and why they go to church!

Till next time,

Mrs. Veenendaal

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



TINIELLE

Hi—my name is Tinielle, and this March I will be 30 years old! God has been good to me, and I am happy to share a little about my story.

I joined my family when I was 8 years old. While I came from a large birth family, I moved to another large family. I have seven brothers and sisters and almost twelve nephews and nieces! I also have a large extended family. We moved to Dunnville in 2020 and love living here. I moved out of my parents' home nine years ago into a home from Community Living Haldimand. I live right in town which means I am close to my parents and some of my siblings. I spend lots of time visiting my parents and also the Beacon Home in Dunnville. I am very thankful for that. I love family gatherings but often need to leave after a couple of hours because I don't do great with long noisy visits.

I go to a day program in town three days a week and generally spend Sunday with my parents and visit them several times throughout the week. I go out with Passport Supports along with my sister and mom, but I really am not a great traveller! I love being home the most.

I belong to Dunnville West Canadian Reformed Church and recently became part of Secret Sisters, which has been fun. I have a hard time going to church but every so often I try again. It's hard for me to concentrate and I tend to walk out and it's hard for me to change my mind. I make people smile when I'm in church because I am the only one who says "Amen" when the minister is done. My church family remembers me in different ways throughout the year.

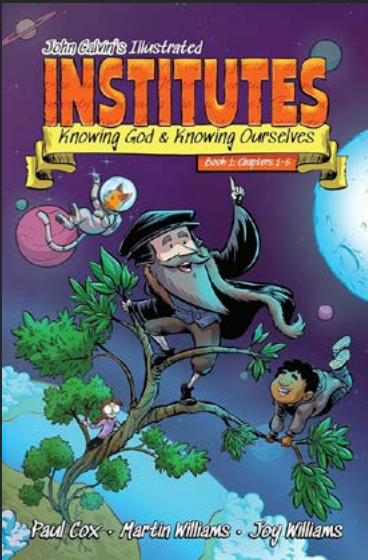
One of the great things about *Ray of Sunshine* is the amount of birthday cards I get! My parents love witnessing what this says about the body of Christ for my staff, who are part of a secular organization. So, feel free to send cards for my birthday but also throughout the year! Consider it a good "home" mission project.

You might ask why I don't live at the Beacon Home—it's because I am a bit of a challenge to live with. We are all very thankful that we were able to find a care home in my community and that we have a great working relationship with them.

Anyhow, I hope you enjoyed reading a little about me and I look forward to getting my annual birthday mail!!

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>3 Trevor Hofsink will be 48
14407 McQueen Road
Edmonton, AB
T5N 3L3</p> | <p>14 Tineille VanRootselaar will be 30
219 Lock St W
Dunville, ON
N1A 1V2</p> | <p>15 Jim VanderHeiden will be 67
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8</p> |
| <p>9 David Rawson will be 64
c/o The Landing
75 Law Drive
Guelph, ON
N1E 7J6</p> | <p>14 Lisa Alkema will be 45
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON
L9B 2K3
email: lhalkema@gmail.com</p> | <p>23 Brent Baartman will be 37
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road
Grimsby, ON
L3M 0L1</p> |
| <p>13 John VanWyngaarden will be 48
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8</p> | | |



All Calvin and No Hobbes: A Graphic Encounter with the Institutes

John Calvin's Illustrated Institutes: Knowing God and Knowing Ourselves,
Paul Cox, Martin Williams, and Joy Williams. Phillipsburg: P & R, 2025. Softcover, 81 pages, \$16.18 CDN.

I don't think I've ever reviewed a comic book before—but then again, I've never read one that deals with as serious a subject matter as this one. I called it a “comic,” but it's probably better described as a graphic edition of one of the greatest works of theology ever penned, John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Have you ever tried reading the *Institutes* from cover to cover? I've done it and I can confirm that it's an arduous, yet worthwhile, journey. There are portions that even a seminary-educated pastor is going to struggle through. That's why it's great that we have this graphic edition, simplifying everything, making it accessible to a broader audience, including early teens. It's not going to replace the *Institutes*, but it can serve as an introduction to the most important ideas it contains. It may even stir some readers on to the original.

The illustrator, Paul Cox, is well-known as the pen behind RefToons. He has long been illustrating theological quotes from famous figures. Martin Williams is a professor at the Reformed Theological College in Melbourne, Australia and his wife Joy is trained in theology and mentors women at the RTC. They're a well-qualified team for bringing Calvin to a new audience.

The original content in every chapter isn't captured exhaustively, but its *essence* is expressed faithfully. Some of the examples go beyond Calvin's original context but make the point better for it.

For example, on page 64, Calvin is pictured sitting in a sports car with his shades on, asking whether true happiness might be found in the latest tech. In the next frame, he explodes back into his Genevan garb and exclaims, “No! True happiness is found in knowing God and enjoying him forever.”

Each of the five chapters concludes with a summary and ten discussion questions. Here's one from chapter 3: “What evidence does Calvin provide to support his claim that every person has a natural awareness of God? How do you see this play out in today's world?”

This instalment is only chapters 1–5 of Book 1, dealing with the knowledge of God and ourselves. It appears that the plan is eventually to publish the other 75 chapters in instalments. If this first taste is any indication, it'll be worth the wait. Recommended for teenagers and teenagers at heart who want to get better acquainted with John Calvin. 📖



Wes Bredenhof

Minister

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THINGS UNSEEN

With Sinclair B. Ferguson

As a producer of a long-form podcast, I think I am required to say that I am a fan of this kind of content. But if I am honest, sometimes I don't have the time, willpower, or even the desire to get through a 90-minute episode. Life is busy, distractions abound, and even as adults, our attention spans are shorter than we like to admit.

Although developing our attention spans is important, so often what we need is a brief but weighty word that is full of biblical truth and encouragement. We need to constantly be reminded of the realities that reorient our hearts back to our eternal purpose, "to glorify God and enjoy him forever." *Things Unseen*, a podcast produced by Ligonier Ministries, offers exactly that.

SCOTTISH WARMTH

Hosted by beloved Scottish preacher and pastor Sinclair Ferguson, *Things Unseen* is a weekday devotional podcast. Like much of what Ligonier Ministries produces, *Things Unseen* is beautiful, thoughtful, and created with excellence.

Things Unseen cuts above the noise of our daily lives, and for about five to seven minutes, listeners are brought to a place of calm and solace. This may be due, partially, to Ferguson's calming accent and warm tone. He has no need to get animated or raise his voice to make his point or to express the profundity of the topics or texts he's expounding. Ferguson's humble attitude and wisdom display his deep desire to see listeners grow in love for Christ.

Even more beautiful than the production is the content. Each week, *Things Unseen* reflects on a specific scriptural theme that relates to the Christian's personal relationship with God. If you are familiar with Ligonier, you know they, like their founder, R.C. Sproul, seek to bridge the gap between seminary and Sunday school by making complex truths simple, and this is no different with *Things Unseen*. Ferguson takes deep theological concepts and makes them personal and applicable to everyday life. Themes include the providence of God, the Ten Commandments, the fruit of the Spirit, worship, the sacraments, the Church, and so much more. These thoughtful

reflections help keep the listener's gaze heavenward as *Things Unseen* reminds us "to look beyond this momentary life to understand its eternal significance, walking by faith rather than by sight."

RE-ORIENTING ON CHRIST

As Christians living in the 21st century, distraction and devastation seem to be all around us as we are exposed to breaking news, often the moment it happens. We are prone to wander and get caught in the reactionary attitude of our social media-driven culture. It doesn't take much to become discouraged or lose heart by the things we see every day. Yet, the Apostle Paul tells us, "the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). In order to live with hope and joy in the day-to-day of this broken world, we have to reorient our perspective according to the eternal truths of Scripture again and again.

Although the new year is already well underway, it's never too late to start a new daily habit, especially one as simple as listening to a daily devotional. And that's the beauty of thematic weekly podcasts: start on Monday, and you will be edified all week long. And if you want to catch up, go back and listen in succession. Most theological short-form podcasts range around 25 minutes, but given *Things Unseen*'s even shorter format, it provides listeners (especially commuters) with the time to intentionally meditate on and pray on what was heard. These spiritual disciplines, paired with rich biblical teaching, are a beautiful way to start every day.

Ligonier has also made *Things Unseen* into a daily devotional book, so you can still be edified and encouraged if you prefer paper over headphones. You can find *Things Unseen* by searching for it on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, YouTube or Ligonier.org. You can find the *Things Unseen* book by going to reformedbookservices.ca. 

mariahtamminga24@hotmail.com

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

Pressing On: Spiritual Care for Pilgrims

The 2026 CRTS Conference

On January 9–10, 2026, the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) hosted its twelfth (now triennial) conference in the familiar venue of the Rehoboth-Ebenezer church building in Burlington, Ontario. The conference took its theme from the words of Philippians 3:12–14, seeking to address how believers—individually and corporately, as office-bearers and as fellow pilgrims—are to press on toward the New Jerusalem in faith.

Since the CRTS conferences are intended to connect with and give back to our supporting churches, we were encouraged to see people from all walks of life attend—pastors, office-bearers, and counsellors, but also university students, retired folk, and many others in between. We also welcomed a sizable group of prospective seminary students who had visited the CRTS campus earlier in the week. Altogether, more than 200 people from across Canada (and beyond!) joined us for the daytime sessions, with many more attending the public lecture on Friday evening.

This year, we welcomed three keynote speakers: Dr. Tim Lane, an author, counsellor, and PCA minister; Dr. Mark Jones, an author and PCA pastor; and CRTS’s own Dr. Reuben Bredenhof. Over the course of two speeches, Dr. Lane used James 4:1–12 and Matthew 18:21–35 to address the practical questions of how Christians ought to deal with conflict and how they can pursue and offer forgiveness. Dr. Jones, in a speech aptly titled “Don’t Stop Believing,” examined the symptoms and causes of backsliding in the Christian life before pointing us to the transforming power of Christ’s glory as the way to continued faithfulness. And Dr. Bredenhof showed us that God’s perfections, far from being abstract doctrines, provide rich resources for pastoral work, demonstrating with a close look at God’s faithfulness. In addition to the keynote speeches, the conference featured two panel discussions and some excellent Q&A sessions.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS

Of course, the value of a conference is not limited to its formal program. Attendees also prize the informal social time, and this

year was no exception. During the breaks, the building was filled with conversation: new acquaintances discussing the speeches, old acquaintances catching up, and close friends encouraging one another or laughing about some inside joke. There is great joy in simply being together with so many fellow Christians, speaking together, eating together, and singing together. If you have not yet come to a CRTS conference, we hope you will join us next time to experience it for yourself.

The joy of being together is also germane to the conference theme. By the end of the conference, it struck me how important it is, and wonderful, that we press on in the Christian life together, as one body. Our pilgrimage to the New Jerusalem is filled with hazards, trials, and difficulties. But, as the New Testament makes clear, God has given us brothers and sisters to help us arrive at the goal: to call us back when we are backsliding, to keep our heads above water when we are drowning in grief, to point us to the light of Christ when the darkness of the world threatens to overwhelm us.

So let us not grow weary in doing good—in praying for one another, in encouraging one another, in reproving one another. Let us press on, together, to the heavenly city whose foundations are secure. 

For those who were not able to come, the sessions are available through the seminary’s website:

canadianreformedseminary.ca/resources/

Raoul Kingma

Teaching Assistant at CRTS

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CRTS Board of Governors

Press Release January 7, 2026

OPENING

The chairman, Rev. Jeff Temple, led in opening devotions. All the governors were present along with the administrative assistant, Mrs. Leanne Kuizenga, who was present to take the minutes of the meeting.

Information was shared about the personal circumstances of the emeriti professors Drs. de Visser, Van Dam, and Visscher and their wives. Sr. Gootjes is also doing well and the chairman will contact sr. DeJong and sr. Deddens in the near future.

The agenda for the meeting was established. The minutes of the regular meeting held on September 4, 2025 were approved. Correspondence and outstanding matters on the action log were reviewed.

CORRESPONDENCE & DECISIONS

The Board received confirmation from the CRA that the amended bylaws for the seminary have been filed.

1. The board decided to adopt the following updated wording for the Core Values
 - i. Uphold gospel truths
 - ii. Foster spiritual maturity
 - iii. Cultivate pastoral effectiveness
 - iv. Pursue academic excellence
 - v. Serve supporting churches
 - vi. Promote the Reformed faith
2. After considering the outcomes of the September 2025 strategic planning day, the board decided to pursue the following initiatives:
 - a. Uphold faithful integrity in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI), equipping the CRTS community to avoid the pitfalls of AI usage and to deal responsibly

with AI by focusing on spiritual maturity and integrity for lifelong ministry. Within this main thrust, two initiatives were approved:

- i. the senate and staff will work together to determine an effective way to equip faculty and staff concerning AI;
 - ii. the staff will explore ways to incorporate training on the responsible use of AI within the curricular and co-curricular programs at CRTS
 - b. In an effort to ensure a high degree of preparation for ministry among CRTS graduates, the Board tasked a committee with investigating how the PTP and other program modules could be used to further cultivate an aptitude for ministry.
 - c. In an effort to strengthen preparation for potential mission service, both domestically and abroad, the Board tasked a committee with reviewing, and potentially revising, the requirements and guidelines for the Diploma of Missiology.
3. The board approved proposals (1) to ensure a smooth transition as the appointments of executive members come to an end and new governors are appointed; (2) to optimize the timing of strategic planning to ensure that the work remains sustainable.
 4. The board reviewed a discussion paper dealing with the question of the relationship between the CRTS professors and the church holding their ministerial credentials. The paper noted that whereas the credentials of professors who come from other federations are held by their new home church in the Hamilton area, the credentials of professors who come from Canadian Reformed churches remain with the last CanRef church they served which may or may not be their home church in the Hamilton area. The board decided to study

the matter further in case it is a good idea to have more consistency on this matter.

5. The Board received the November 13, 2025 and January 5, 2026 minutes from the Academic Committee, as well as a very positive report on lecture visits to the CRTS (Fall 2025).
6. The Board approved the Advanced Theological Studies Assistance (ATSA) Bursary application guide for prospective applicants and the internal guidelines for applications. This bursary exists to support recent graduates of the CRTS who intend to pursue advanced theological studies prior to entering the ministry in the Canadian Reformed churches.
7. The Board received the October 21 minutes from the Finance and Property Committee and noted their ongoing faithful work with thankfulness.
8. The Board received very positive feedback from the Association of Theological Schools concerning the work CRTS recently did to update and improve our bylaws and policy documents as well as our plan for keeping them current in the future.

9. The Board approved a policy concerning annual staff visits.
10. Dr. Van Vliet presented his principal's report, and the board joins him in giving thanks to the Lord for the ongoing work of the seminary.
11. The Board received reports from Dr. William den Hollander about his visit to the churches in Manitoba, and Dr. Van Vliet about his participation at the Evangelical Theological Society Conference.

CLOSING

The next Academic Committee meeting is scheduled for September 8, 2026 , and the next Board meeting is scheduled for September 10, 2026. Rev. Jeff Temple closed the meeting with prayer. 🙏

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

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»	MY FRIEND
»	MY BROTHER
»	MY CHILD
»	MY GRANDCHILD
»	MY NEIGHBOUR



Dear Editor,

Dear Editor,

I have recently read your article in *Clarion* on reflections on General Synod 2025. I am particularly concerned about Article 184 of the Acts of General Synod. This is close to my heart, as I recently spent a considerable amount of time instructing a new member in the Three Forms of Unity. With thankfulness to our heavenly Father, this person was able to make a public profession of his faith in June 2025. This process has led me to a greater appreciation on what a treasure we have in the Three Forms of Unity.

I can appreciate that it was “not the intention to loosen the commitment of members to the Three Forms of Unity.” However, I do not think I fully understand what the intention was. Without further information, this decision appears on the surface to create at least a risk of loosening the commitment expected of members to the Three Forms of Unity based on what is written in the forms. A general synod needs to think not just of today, but also 10, 20, or 30 years from now.

The previous wording has stood the Canadian Reformed Churches well for many years, and I could find no evidence in what was presented that the wording was wrong. The overture claims that confessional membership was wrong, but I could not find any support of why confessional membership is considered wrong either in the original overture or in the Acts of General Synod.

I also could not find evidence of this decision interacting with the decisions made by previous general synods. And I could not find out what the “new grounds” were for making this decision, as per Article 33 of the Church Order. Without further information, I am concerned that GS 2025 may be lording it over other general synods.

Further, did GS 2025 consider that this could be perceived as a change in definition of what “professing the reformed faith” means? If professing the Reformed faith means believing the Apostles’ Creed only, then according to Article 61 of the Church Order, doesn’t this open up Lord’s supper participation to anyone who only believes the Apostles’ Creed and might not have any knowledge of the Three Forms of Unity? I could not find any evidence of this being considered by General Synod.

In addition, “confessional membership” has been listed as one of the “divergencies” between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches (OPC) for many years. It appears that with this change, this “divergency” has now been eliminated—not because the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has changed, but because the Canadian Reformed Churches have changed.

I am concerned that this decision could contribute to moving the Canadian Reformed Churches on a path of deformation, as the confessions appear to be under attack. The confessions are what makes us Reformed. This came up a lot in my instruction of the new member (who had a Roman Catholic background). And the new member also came to appreciate our confessions.

Out of concern for the Canadian Reformed Churches,
Kevin Vantil
Edmonton

Dear Editor,

Dear Editor,

I appreciated reading the Reflections on General Synod 2025 by Reverends Peter Holtvlüwer and Hilmer Jagersma in the year-end 2025 issue of *Clarion*. Their insights were encouraging, yet I was disappointed by Rev. Holtvlüwer's comments about the changes to the questions in the Baptism and Profession of Faith forms.

While he accepts the changes, Holtvlüwer does not believe that the revised wording brings significant practical change to our churches. This perspective appears to stem from a view that the 1983 revision did not materially alter the meaning of the questions. At several subsequent synods (1986, 1989, 1992, 1998), appeals against this change were denied on the grounds that it was merely a linguistic adjustment. The updated wording—confessing that “the doctrine of the Old and New Testaments, summarized in the Confessions and taught here in this Christian church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation”—was deemed equivalent to the earlier Reformation formula, which was based on the Heidelberg Catechism's explanation of what a Christian must believe: “All that is promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith teach us in a summary” (HC Q&A 22).

The General Synod of 1986 interpreted the new formula to mean that affirming the questions in the forms signified pledging unequivocal allegiance to the Three Forms of Unity and asserted that the forms had always intended this meaning. This implied that all communicant members would need to have an adequate knowledge of the confessions. Rev. Holtvlüwer acknowledges that the level of knowledge may differ among candidates, but notes that, ultimately, all delegates at synod agreed that all members must remain subject to the teaching of the Three Forms of Unity.

However, the first question in the forms is not about the candidate's level of knowledge nor is it a promise to remain subject to the Three Forms of Unity. Rather, the first question is about believing the covenant promises of God, made to the candidate and sealed by God in the sacrament of baptism. I recall making my profession of faith in 1975 under the guidance of the late Rev. J. Mulder, who taught me that my profession was a response to my baptism. This was before the changes implemented in 1983. Prior to that year, both baptism and profession of faith reflected my response to God's promises: “I believe God's promises.” After 1983, the focus shifted to my promise to God: “I promise that I pledge allegiance to the confessions.” This seems to me to be a baptistic view of church membership.

Personally, I am thankful to the Lord of the church that this baptistic view has been removed from our forms. I do, however, wish to assure readers that this does not diminish the vital role the confessions play in the lives of its members. Upon making a public profession of faith, all members accept the authority of the elders to exercise discipline over them, should they become delinquent in doctrine or life. Delinquency in doctrine is defined as promoting teaching that falls outside the boundaries of the Three Forms of Unity.

Fraternally,

John Van Popta

Minister Emeritus

Fellowship Church (Burlington)

