

Clarion

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



The Empty Tomb

John van Popta

Freedom in Worship

Rob Schouten

Brothers in Training

Ilse Vandermeulen

What's Inside

Let me start in the middle of the issue this time. Lots of churches seem to be feeling the need to help younger men prepare for office and so we are pleased to present a report by Ilse Vandermeulen on just such an effort in Classis Northern Ontario which they are calling “Brothers in Training.” This is coupled with an article by pastor emeritus Douwe Agema who led the first session. May the Lord multiply such efforts across the federation and bless them richly.

In “Fresh Eyes,” Pastor Kwangyoung Park shares his impressions of our federation as someone relatively new and who grew up in a very different context—thanks for sharing! We celebrate with Niverville and Winnipeg (Redeemer) the ordination of their new missionary pastor Adrian Tams—what a blessing! More cause for rejoicing in God’s faithfulness is related in the report on the 75th anniversary of the founding of Surrey (Marantha)—congratulations! Rob Schouten provides a timely guest editorial about naming our individual congregations and later also an article concerning the guided freedom we have to worship in our new covenant context.

With respect to meditative pieces, Arjen Vreugdenhil helps us think through the suffering of the good Shepherd who was struck for us, while John van Popta shows us the profound glory of our Saviour’s empty tomb. We welcome as a regular contributor Mrs. Lyn Metzlar Leyenhorst of Cloverdale who will be joining Ilse Vandermeulen in writing *Witness at Work* and perhaps other columns that focus on people and events out West—good to have you join us! Her first solo piece is found inside these pages.

What else do we have to offer you inside? Two book reviews, one Service Snapshot (re: Campfire!), and another song from Bill Helder. We are grateful for all contributors! May the Lord bless your reading.

Peter Holtvliüwer

Contents

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 186 | What's Inside
<i>Peter Holtvliüwer</i> |
| 187 | Editorial
<i>Rob Schouten</i> |
| 188 | Treasures, New & Old
<i>Arjen Vreugdenhil</i> |
| 189 | Song: God's plan for salvation
<i>William Helder</i> |
| 190 | The Empty Tomb
<i>John van Popta</i> |
| 193 | Fresh Eyes: What a new pastor sees in the CanRC
<i>Kwangyoung Park</i> |
| 196 | Freedom in Worship
<i>Rob Schouten</i> |
| 198 | Brothers in Training
<i>Ilse Vandermeulen</i> |
| 200 | Elders and Deacons
<i>Douwe Agema</i> |
| 204 | A New Ambassador for Niverville
<i>Henry van Delden</i> |
| 206 | Maranatha Celebrates 75 Years |
| 210 | Witness at Work
<i>Lyn Metzlar Leyenhorst</i> |
| 212 | Campfire!
<i>Richard Tomlin</i> |
| 214 | Book Review
<i>Wes Bredenhof</i> |
| 215 | Book Review
<i>Rick Ludwig</i> |

CLARION (ISSN 0383-0438) is published 16 times per year (tri-weekly) by Premier Printing Ltd., 1 Beghin Ave, Winnipeg MB R2J 3X5.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor in Chief: Peter Holtvliüwer
E: editorinchief@clarionmagazine.ca
Managing Editor: Anna Nienhuis
Contributing Editors: Eric Kampen, Jason Van Vliet, Matthew VanLuik, Calvin Vanderlinde

CONTENT INQUIRIES

E: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADMINISTRATIVE INQUIRIES

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

ARCHIVE

Search and read past volumes online at clarionmagazine.ca/archive

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

E: letters@clarionmagazine.ca
 Letters to the Editor must not exceed 300 words and are to be written in a Christian manner.

See clarionmagazine.ca for guidelines.

SUBMIT AN ARTICLE

E: submissions@clarionmagazine.ca
 Only articles which agree with Clarion's guidelines will be considered for publication.

See clarionmagazine.ca for guidelines.

SUBMIT A BOOK REVIEW

Book Review Editor: Wes Bredenhof
E: bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca
 Reviews should be 600-700 words and concern books which fit with Clarion's purpose.

See clarionmagazine.ca for more.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

clarionmagazine.ca/subscriptions

	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada	\$ 59	\$ 104
USA (USD)	\$ 74	\$ 134
International	\$ 104	\$ 178
Digital	\$ 40	

Digital can be added to print subscription at no cost.

Taxes extra for Canadian subscribers.

Subscription renewals will be invoiced unless written subscription cancellation is received.

ADVERTISEMENTS

W: clarionmagazine.ca/advertisements
E: ads@clarionmagazine.ca
 Full page \$434 | ½ \$234 | ¼ \$119 | ⅛ \$64
 We reserve the right to refuse ads.

Keep the Name

There is something revealing about the way we name ourselves. Names tell stories. When churches once called *Canadian Reformed* rebrand themselves as *Anchor Christian Church*, *Christ Community Church*, or *Grace Fellowship Church* (fictional examples only), this reflects a desire to reach new people and express the gospel in accessible ways. Yet it also raises an important question: in doing so, are we setting aside something essential to who we are—the story of the Reformed faith, the Canadian context, and the federation that binds us together?

OUR NAME'S MEANING

Let's begin with the word *Reformed*. This name anchors us in the great recovery of the gospel that swept through Europe in the sixteenth century, when the church rediscovered that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone. To be Reformed is to stand in continuity with that confession. It means that our worship and life are governed by Scripture and guided by the work of God in our specific history. It means that our faith is not a private spirituality or local invention, but part of a centuries-long witness to the truth of God's Word.

And then the word *Canadian*. While we confess one Lord with believers around the world, we do so here in Canada, among the people and places God has given us. Nearly every historic denomination bears a geographical name: the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Reformed Church in Japan, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. The point is not nationalism but honesty: we are a church that lives and serves in *this* land. To be *Canadian Reformed* is to be both catholic in faith and local in calling.

Behind the current trend toward more neutral naming lies, at times, a kind of ecclesiastical embarrassment—a reluctance to appear too bound to our history and our denominational particularities. The thought seems to be that if we remove the specifics of our tradition or our European past, we will better reach a post-Christian culture. But the attempt to plant or rebrand a church as though it were untainted by history, as though it sprang into existence *ex nihilo*, is naïve. No church is a blank slate. Every congregation stands on foundations laid by others, inherits patterns of thought and worship, and bears the marks of its confession. The question is not whether we will have a particular history and identity, but whether we will be honest about it.

OUR NAME'S QUALITIES

Being explicitly Canadian Reformed is not a barrier to outreach. In fact, it can be an invitation. Many seekers are not looking for generic community churches; they are looking for something sturdy, rooted, and recognizably Protestant and Reformed. Some come from evangelical backgrounds longing for doctrinal depth. Others come from Roman Catholic or Pentecostal settings seeking doctrinal clarity and depth together with liturgical simplicity. In a restless and fragmented religious landscape, “Reformed” is not a liability—it is a mark of stability and seriousness.

Of course, many visitors will come with no Christian background at all. But that does not require us to hide who we are for their sake. When people marry, they join a family—with its history, traditions, and stories. Bride and groom learn to love not only their spouse but the family that has shaped their beloved. The same is true when people join the church: they are entering a family of faith with a history and identity. To welcome new believers is not to erase our family name but to invite them to share in it.

Our federation's name bears witness to identity and connection. It reminds us that we are a communion of churches that share confession, history, accountability and mutual care. It tells our neighbours that the gospel has taken durable form in real communities across this country. To keep the name *Canadian Reformed* is not nostalgia or pride. It is gratitude and truthfulness.

This is not meant as a criticism of any particular church but as a personal plea—a reflection on what we might lose if we set aside our name too lightly. We honour our fathers and mothers in the faith by carrying forward their confession with gratitude and conviction.

So let us keep the name—on our signboards and on our hearts. Let's do so not because we idolize our past, but because we honour what God has done through it. We are Canadian, because God has placed us here. We are Reformed, because he has restored his church through his Word. And we remain both, because our identity and witness are gifts to be cherished. 🍷



Rob Schouten

Minister

Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church
robert.a.schouten@proton.me

Stricken Shepherd, Scattered Sheep

“For it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered”— Mark 14:27

The Lord Jesus had celebrated the Passover with his disciples. They went outside to take a walk to the Mount of Olives. Jesus knew that he would be arrested, the beginning of the day of intense suffering. His disciples didn't know; Jesus didn't give them any details except that disturbing riddle: “You will all fall away. For it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” The disciples may have recognized this quote from Zechariah 13:7. But what did it mean?

Looking back on this event, we recognize how appropriate this quote was. Over the next 24 hours, Jesus was struck, and his band of disciples fled. In that sense it is easy to see how this prophecy from Zechariah was fulfilled. But is there more to it? Does this quote from the Old Testament shed additional light on the suffering of the Christ for the sake of his people?

Chapters 9-13 of Zechariah are quoted four times in the gospel, but they are not easy to understand unless we look back at the original context. In Zechariah, the LORD complains about bad shepherds, unfaithful leaders of his people. Zechariah must bring this message in a highly dramatic fashion, by becoming a shepherd who would be rejected by his colleagues and even by his flock. This, of course, was a prophecy of the coming of the great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, who would be rejected by his own. Zechariah 12 and 13 then announce judgment: there must be a reckoning for the abuses of the bad shepherds, and for the rejection of the good Shepherd.

But how strange, then, is Zechariah 13:7, where the LORD says that he himself will lift his sword against his own Shepherd, against the Man who is close to him! What a remarkable Old Testament glimpse into that deep mystery of God's love, of the Father abandoning the Son so that together, they may save us, sinners. As Isaiah 53:10 says, “It was the will of the LORD to crush him.”

The good Shepherd, the only hope for the sheep, was himself slaughtered. And when the Shepherd was struck, the sheep were scattered. Vulnerable animals, without guidance, now completely lost. Even Peter, the alpha-male in the flock, with his boast that he would never leave Jesus's side—even he lost his way and was faced with his weakness when he denied the Lord three times.

It was not just the disciples that were scattered. God's people had collectively destroyed the only hope they had, the only truly good

Shepherd. This was a judgment over all God's people. Zechariah 13 says: “In the whole land, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive.” The majority of sheep would be slaughtered, in spite of the work of the good Shepherd.

But thankfully, there is still that minority. Shepherd Jesus had been stricken, his sheep were in deep trouble, yet a remnant would remain. The prophecy of Zechariah 13 ends with a beautiful reaffirmation of God's grace and help: “They will call upon my name, and I will answer them” (v. 9).

Back to the gospel narrative in Mark 14. The Lord Jesus knew that he, the Shepherd, would be struck, and his sheep scattered, but the reference he gives to Zechariah 13 held hope. That hope was confirmed by what he said next: “But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” The good Shepherd would not abandon his sheep. Not even death could stop him.

His work continues today. It is only of God's mercy that we, who are the sheep of his flock, have not been scattered and slaughtered, but find our guidance and rest in our good Shepherd. 

FURTHER READING:

Zechariah 11:4–17; 13:7–9

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. How much do you think the disciples knew about what would happen to their Lord and Master?
2. Zechariah 13:9 says that the one third of the flock that survives will be put into the fire to be tested. What does that mean? (Consider also 1 Pet 1:7.)
3. What covenant language is used in Zechariah 13:9? What light does this shed on the importance of the meeting of the risen Lord with his disciples in Galilee? (See Matt 28:16ff; John 21.)



Arjen Vreugdenhil

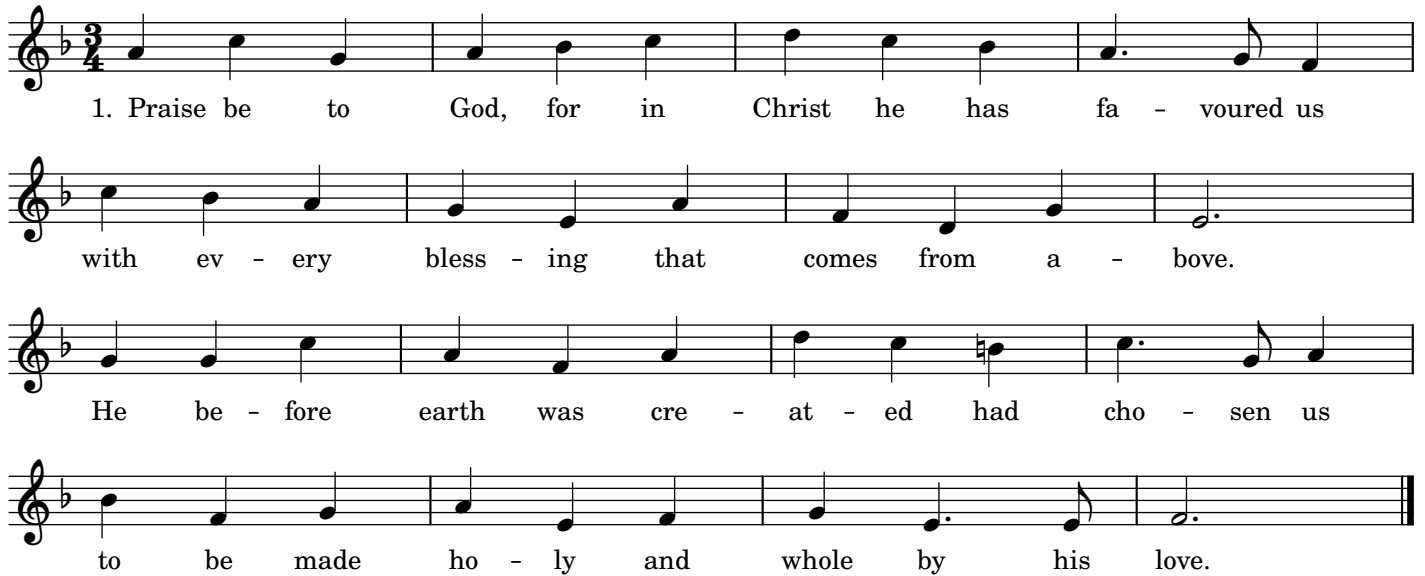
Minister

Eben-Ezer Canadian Reformed Church, Chatham

pastorarjen@gmail.com

God's Plan of Salvation

Based on Ephesians 1: 3-14



1. Praise be to God, for in Christ he has fa - voured us
with ev - ery bless - ing that comes from a - bove.
He be - fore earth was cre - at - ed had cho - sen us
to be made ho - ly and whole by his love.

2. In his good pleasure he freely predestined us
to be adopted as his very own—
all to the praise of the grace he bestowed on us
in the Beloved, Christ Jesus his Son.
3. Christ has redeemed us. Our sins are forgiven us,
for with his blood he has paid the full price.
Rich is the grace that he lavishly granted us.
God to his mercy has opened our eyes.
4. His hidden purposes God has revealed to us,
made known the plan he in Christ had set forth,
that through his Son he, fulfilling his promises,
would under him unite heaven and earth.
5. We have in him now received an inheritance,
all in accord with God's purpose and aim,
so that we, having in Christ placed our confidence,
might offer praise to his glorious name.
6. When you believed the good news that he rescued you,
trusting in him who has saved you from sin,
you, too, were sealed with the Spirit he promised you,
marked as forever belonging to him.
7. We have been given the Spirit as guarantee
that we'll receive what for us lies in store.
He is the pledge of the full freedom promised us.
To God be glory and praise evermore.

Text: William Helder, 2025

Tune: MOREDUN – Henry Thomas Smart (1813–1879)



The Empty Tomb

JOHN VAN POPTA

SUGGESTED READING: JOHN 20:1–9

The King was dead. All Jesus’s disciples had fled except for John who identifies himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” several women, and two secret followers—Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. As discussed in the previous article, these two were prominent members of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council which had condemned Jesus to death. However, these two men disapproved of the council’s actions and verdict. Formerly secret and timid about identifying as followers of Jesus, they had boldly gone to Pilate and asked for Jesus’s body. These two then prepared the Lord’s body for a royal funeral. Jesus was executed as a rebel among criminals but was laid in a tomb as a king.

The King’s body was wrapped in a linen shroud. Inside that shroud were 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes, an amount fit for a king. The mixture of spices would have had the consistency of flour and honey and were meant to mask the smell of decay. Jesus’s body was wrapped in the shroud with a separate linen napkin about a metre square draped over his head. The shroud and the separate napkin were held in place by strips of linen.

Near the place of execution was a garden and in the garden was a new tomb cut into the rock, with shelf-like places to lay the dead. They placed Jesus’s wrapped body there. And thus the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ was completely hidden. Those who buried him did not know it. All their dreams and hopes were shattered. The Messiah they had expected had been crucified. A large stone was rolled in front of the tomb’s opening, hiding the body in the dark as it lay on cold, hard stone.

PREPARATION DAY

As the sun set in the West, its long shadows stretched over Jerusalem. At its setting, the Sabbath will begin. The mournful group left the garden and returned to the city. In the previous chapter, John tells us that this will be the high Sabbath that follows the Day of Preparation. On the sixth day, the Passover lamb was to be prepared, foreshadowing the crucified Messiah as our Passover Lamb.

But the evangelist John hints at something else—something more! It is the Day of Preparation. Tomorrow, on the high Sabbath, God will prepare something new—the resurrection from the dead! The



King is dead. But there is hope. As Solomon writes in Psalm 72, “Long may he live! Long live the King!”

THE OPEN TOMB

It is early, and the first hint of the coming dawn is touching the eastern horizons. Mary Magdalene hurries through the darkened streets to the garden tomb where the dead Messiah, the King, had been laid by his friends Nicodemus and Joseph Arimathea, and the women who were with them.

The other Gospels tell us that the women saw Jesus’s lifeless body lying in the tomb on Friday afternoon. Mary had also seen the large stone rolled in front of the grave. However, early Sunday morning when Mary arrives at the garden tomb, she sees that the stone had been taken away.

The stone was not neatly rolled back along its track; the stone had been lifted away! Something very powerful had happened. The stone had been removed in an extraordinary fashion. John describes its removal as permanent. The tomb is open and will remain so. Mary, seeing the open tomb, assumes the worst—that somebody stole the body—and runs back to Jerusalem.

GRAVE ROBBERS

So, as the sun rises over the holy city, not knowing that the Son of God had already risen, Mary races back through the early dawn light. She finds Peter and John and breathlessly tells them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have laid him!” (John 20:2.) For her, the open tomb means only one thing: grave robbers.

Mary loves her Lord and is devoted to him. It was a terrible thing for her and the others that the rabbi had been executed, nailed to a cross. The bottom had fallen out of her world, and she had gone to sit vigil at the tomb. But now even that has been taken from her. We can’t imagine the grief, the sorrow, the despair she felt. There is only one thing to do: share the bad news with Peter and John.

The startling news prods them into action. They want to see for themselves. And so off they run together. From subsequent church history, we can learn that the apostle John lived well into the 90s of the first century. That would be 60 years after the resurrection of the Lord. So John was a young man, likely in his late teens or early 20s. Peter was older, but John was faster and got there first. He sees what Mary saw: the garden tomb, with the stone lifted away. He

The stone wasn't thrown aside to let the risen Lord out but to let us in, along with Peter and John, so that we too may see and believe.

stoops and looks inside. Mary hadn't done that. But he stoops and, we might translate literally, he peeks inside. He's being guarded. He must be thinking, "Now's not the time for bravery, but for caution." Mary has reported a grave robbery. Of course, the only thing of value in the tomb would have been the spices. John takes a peek, and he sees the strips of linen lying there.

THE EMPTY SHROUD

We don't know how long it was before Peter got there, but it seems only moments. Peter—impetuous Peter—doesn't wait; he ducks his head and goes right into the tomb. Something remarkable has happened. The tomb is empty! In the dark and gloomy grave, he saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus's head.

Imagine how on Friday the linen strips had been wrapped around the body of the Lord Jesus with 75 pounds (35 kg) of spices tightly tied inside the shroud. But now the body of the Lord is no longer in the shroud. It would've been like a loosely filled bag, still maintaining a semi-solid shape, but obviously the body is gone. The napkin around the head, about a meter by a meter with a linen strip to go under the chin and around the neck, is there, folded neatly. The tomb had not been ransacked.

Myrrh is a sticky gum, a product made from a tree sap. John Chrysostom, a great preacher of the fourth century who knew about myrrh, said it would have glued the linen to the body. What did Peter see? The shroud folded in upon itself, full of sticky spices. The headcloth, collapsed and empty. There is no body inside the shroud—the tomb is empty!

SEEING AND BELIEVING

It's remarkable that in these few verses the apostle John has three different words for "to see." In verse 1 Mary *saw* that the stone had been removed. In verse 6 Peter *saw* the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head, and wondered. Finally, in verse 8 John *saw* that the body of the Lord was not there and he believed.

Perhaps we should translate that Mary *noticed*, Peter *looked*, and John *saw*. Mary noticed and ran. Peter looked and wondered. John saw and believed.

No burial fasteners, linen strips, or sealed tomb could prevent the resurrection; Jesus's glorified body left the grave, leaving only the grave clothes behind. The stone wasn't thrown aside to let the

risen Lord out but to let us in, along with Peter and John, so that we too may see and believe.

Nowhere in the Scriptures do we have a description of the actual event of the resurrection, yet the resurrection is proclaimed far and wide and is testified to throughout the New Testament. Scripture does not say that the Lord sat up, like the little girl he raised from the dead, or that he walked out of the tomb, as Lazarus did when Jesus called him back to life, or like the widow's son who came to life on his funeral bier at the touch of Jesus. No, we have the testimony of an empty shroud and an empty tomb, and the testimony of the Scriptures.

Until that moment, the disciples had not understood that the Messiah had to rise from the dead. Mary noticed the open tomb and thought the worst. Peter surveyed the empty tomb and wondered. John saw the empty shroud and believed—he believed the testimony of the Scriptures.

There is something profoundly important to learn here for our own bodies. The empty shroud teaches us that the body that lay in the grave was intimately and essentially the foundation of Jesus's resurrection body. The disappearance of his body is exactly the proof of the resurrection of his body. Though the Lord's mortal body had disappeared, the shroud remained behind, teaching us that the buried body is connected to the raised body. This teaches us that we should, with hope and respect, lay our loved ones in the grave anticipating the resurrection of their bodies. The funerals we plan and attend are confessions of faith. Since the Scripture teaches us that Christ's resurrection body is a model of what ours is to be, we can know that there is continuity—in some mysterious way—between the bodies we lay in the ground and the resurrection bodies we anticipate. Jesus died and rose again and so we can with hope look to the future, to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world come.

What will you do when death approaches? Do you believe the Scriptures? The trumpet will sound! The dead will be raised! And all those who believe will be raised by the power of Jesus to an incorruptible life. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus. Hasten the day of your coming! 🕊



John van Popta

Minister Emeritus
Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church, Burlington
j.vanpopta@gmail.com



Fresh Eyes:

What a New Pastor Sees in the Canadian Reformed Churches

KWANGYOUNG PARK

At a Canadian Reformed pastors' symposium this past January, I was invited to reflect on the Canadian Reformed Churches with what was described as "fresh eyes." At forty-three, I am not sure how fresh my eyes truly are. Yet in another sense, much of life and ministry in the CanRC still feels new to me. I did not grow up in the CanRC, nor did I graduate from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. As a result, many aspects of this federation continue to strike me as both distinctive and instructive.

I am thankful for the opportunity to share these observations also now in *Clarion*—not as an outsider looking in, but as a brother among brothers. It is a privilege to reflect on what the Lord has given to this federation, and to do so with gratitude and humility.

BACKGROUND

I was born and raised in South Korea as the son of a pastor in the Kosin Church. I completed my seminary education there and was

ordained in that denomination. The Kosin Church has been deeply influenced by the continental Reformed tradition, particularly by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt*—GKv). Dr. Gootjes, who was sent by the GKv and later taught at CRTS, served as a professor at our Kosin seminary in the 1980s. While I did not study under him personally, many of my teachers were shaped by his work, especially in redemptive-historical preaching. I sometimes joke that I am his theological "grandson."

In 2019, I came to Canada to pursue doctoral studies with no intention of serving in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Yet, in God's providence, I received a call from Toronto Bethel CanRC in 2022 and now serve there as a minister. I am convinced that the Lord had his reasons for bringing me here, and I am thankful to stand alongside fellow workers and fellow soldiers in the gospel within this federation.

BLESSINGS TO APPRECIATE

Trusting the ordinary means of grace

One of the first things I noticed in the Canadian Reformed Churches is a deep trust in the ordinary means of grace. In many churches today, that trust has weakened. There is often a growing emphasis on extraordinary spiritual experiences, creative innovations, or emotional and experiential elements as the primary ways through which grace is expected to work, particularly in the context of evangelism. When ministry becomes dominated by questions such as “How do we move people?” or “How do we make grace felt?” it quickly becomes exhausting. When the burden of ministry rests primarily on human creativity or effort, discouragement easily follows.

What struck me in the CanRC was a markedly different posture: a quiet confidence that Christ himself works through the ordinary means of grace—the faithful preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and prayer.

In my work as a missions pastor at Bethel, I have seen unbelievers drawn to faith not through emotionally driven special programs, but through the steady ministry of the Word, persistent prayer, and sincere Christian fellowship. This reflects a deep trust in the sovereignty of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Grace does not depend on our ingenuity, but on God’s faithfulness to his promises.

Covenant consciousness

If I were to name one word I have heard most frequently since entering the CanRC, it would be “covenant.” The covenant is not treated merely as a theological concept, but as a living reality—God’s faithful promise to his people—known, confessed, and cherished. This covenantal emphasis shapes the entire life of the church: infant baptism, catechism instruction, preaching, the sacraments, congregational singing, and the work of council and consistory. It is one of the great strengths of our federation.

This covenant perspective has also deeply shaped my understanding of mission. When I meet with newcomers for Bible study, I teach the gospel through the lens of the covenant. Evangelism is not the presentation of certain formulas, but the proclamation of God’s sovereign faithfulness—his promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ, from creation to the new heavens and the new earth.

I have heard repeatedly from newcomers—both those from other church backgrounds and new believers—how meaningful and grounding this covenantal understanding has been for them. Many have expressed gratitude for coming to the Canadian Reformed Churches, having tasted the peace and rest that the covenant brings.

Intergenerational faithfulness

A third blessing is the way the CanRC has sought to pass on the covenant faithfully across generations. The well-known “three-legged stool” of family, church, and school is not a theoretical ideal, but a lived reality in many congregations. There are few church federations where these three institutions stand together so intentionally, shaped by the same theological convictions and bearing shared responsibility for covenant instruction.

In many parts of the world, churches are deeply concerned about losing the next generation. Scripture, especially Deuteronomy 6, calls parents to teach their children to love the LORD in every aspect of life. Yet without the support of church and school walking alongside the family, this calling becomes exceedingly difficult.

Faithful Christian schools, a teachers’ college, catechism instruction, and deeply rooted practices of instruction within the home are profound blessings in our federation. My prayer is that the CanRC would continue to strengthen this inheritance, even in an increasingly secular society and in an age shaped by rapid technological change.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

The richness of these gifts does not mean that they come without tension, fatigue, or failure. We know well that preserving and passing on this heritage is often costly and demanding. With that in mind, it is worth asking together where the Lord may be calling us to grow.

Guarding a distinctive Reformed heritage

As someone who did not grow up within the CanRC, I have been struck by how rare and precious its living Reformed heritage is. Many churches today confess Reformed theology, but far fewer live within an integrated Reformed culture that shapes worship, education, family life, and daily rhythms of faith. No tradition should ever be idolized, and everything must be tested by Scripture. Yet this heritage has often served as a protective framework for faithful belief and covenant life. I hope we will be careful not to set it aside simply because of cultural pressure or a desire to resemble other churches.

Those who have grown up within the CanRC may not always realize how unusual and valuable this inheritance is. My hope is that it will be guarded—not out of fear or nostalgia, but out of gratitude and faithfulness, refined by the Word of God, and passed on to future generations and to those whom the Lord brings into our communities. This calls for careful discernment, patient teaching, and a renewed confidence in the value of what has been entrusted to us.

Carrying the heritage across cultures

The Canadian Reformed Churches were shaped largely by Dutch immigrants, and through them God preserved a rich Reformed

faith and heritage. This has been a great gift. Yet the Reformed faith itself is not bound to any single culture. It is not a “Dutch faith,” but the gospel of Jesus Christ confessed and lived within a Reformed confession.

Today, God is gathering his people into the Canadian Reformed Churches from many cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This invites us to ask an important question: are we carrying forward a Reformed faith that is confined within inherited Dutch cultural forms, or a Reformed faith that can be faithfully shared and embraced across cultures?

Over the past four years at Bethel, a growing number of people from non-Dutch backgrounds have come to faith, received baptism, and embraced the Reformed confession. This has not required fundamental changes to worship, liturgy, or church life. Believers from diverse cultural backgrounds have joyfully received the Reformed confession as their own. This, I am convinced, is the work of God’s sovereign grace through the power of his Word and sacraments. Our task is to walk together across cultural differences with sincere love, concrete fellowship, patient teaching, and a shared willingness to grow in faith.

The opportunity before us, then, is not to preserve a culturally enclosed version of the Reformed faith, but to cultivate a truly Reformed culture in Canada—one that is confessional and rooted, yet able to be shared and owned by believers from many backgrounds. Such a church bears witness to the power of the gospel: uniting diverse people in one faith, one Lord, and one confession. This will require intentional discipleship, long-term patience, and a willingness to learn from one another under the authority of Scripture.

Moving from welcome to belonging

Finally, we must ask an important and searching question: do those who come from different cultural backgrounds experience not only a warm welcome among us, but also true sense of *belonging*?

Welcoming is something we can do, but belonging is something God creates. Acts 13 offers a striking picture of such belonging, as the church in Antioch—marked by remarkably diverse leadership—listened together to the Holy Spirit and was shaped into one

body. The New Testament church was deeply multicultural, and in Christ, God created one new humanity. Belonging was no longer grounded in shared heritage, language, or custom, but in union with Christ.

For the church today, moving from welcome to belonging requires more than hospitality. It calls for a willingness to receive those from other cultures as full members of Christ’s body, to engage in genuine dialogue, to listen and learn, and to recognize and cultivate leadership among them. This process requires sensitivity, humility, and at times real sacrifice—especially from those who form the cultural majority.

Encouragingly, as more pastors, elders, and deacons come from diverse backgrounds, a growing sense of belonging is being experienced among those from non-Dutch backgrounds within the Canadian Reformed Churches. When a church walks in step with the Holy Spirit—patiently, prayerfully, and obediently—it becomes a living testimony to the gospel: one body in Christ, diverse yet united, bearing witness to the reconciling power of God’s grace. Such belonging does not emerge automatically, but through prayerful obedience to the Spirit over time.

GROWING TOGETHER

I remain deeply thankful to belong to the Canadian Reformed Churches and to learn alongside brothers who have walked this path faithfully for many years. Despite differences in background, language, or appearance, we are brothers in Christ, called by the same Lord. May the Lord grant us grace to cherish, preserve, and pass on the precious heritage he has entrusted to us—across generations and cultures—and to carry out our shared calling faithfully. I am deeply eager to see what the Canadian Reformed Churches will look like ten years from now, as the Holy Spirit continues to shape and form his church according to his will. 



Kwangyoung Park

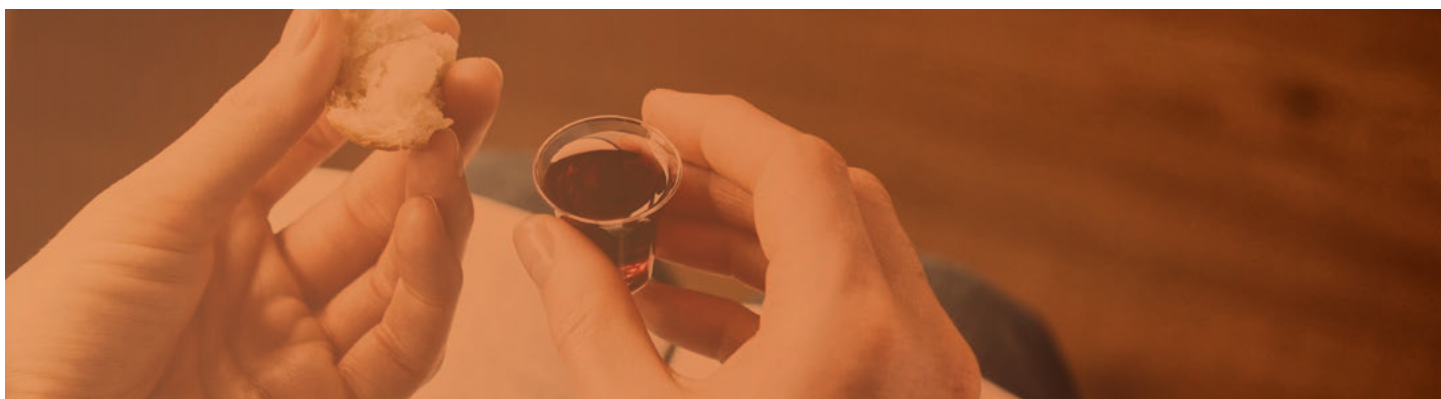
Minister

Bethel Canadian Reformed Church, Toronto

kwangyoung.park@canrc.org



From Precision to Freedom: Worship Under the Old and New Covenants



Anyone who has read Exodus, Leviticus, or Numbers knows how detailed God's worship instructions were. The tabernacle had to be built to exact measurements (Exod 25–31). The priests' clothing was carefully prescribed, right down to colour and fabric (Exod 28). Sacrifices had precise rules about how to slaughter the animal, what parts to burn, where to sprinkle the blood, and how to dispose of what remained (Lev 1–7). Even the altar fire had to be handled exactly as commanded—Nadab and Abihu learned this the hard way (Lev 10:1–2). The story of Uzzah reinforces the point. When he reached out to steady the ark, “God struck him down” for touching what was holy (2 Sam 6:6–7).

The law warned again and again that anyone who unlawfully entered or even approached the sanctuary would die (Num 3:10; 18:7). Under the old covenant, strict boundaries protected access to God. His holiness demanded distance, mediation, and ritual purity.

Why was God so particular? Because he designed every part of Israel's worship to point forward to Christ. Each sacrifice, garment, and ritual was a symbol in a great pattern that prefigured his

priesthood and sacrifice. If the pattern was altered, the picture of the gospel was distorted. Every regulation was a brushstroke in a painting that revealed Christ before he came. The precision mattered because it was about Christ.

FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

When Christ came, the shadows gave way to the substance. The elaborate, indeed exhaustive, prescriptions of the law—its sacrifices, priesthood, festivals, and purity regulations—had served their purpose and were brought to an end in him. Hebrews says the old covenant was “a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves” (Heb 10:1). With Christ's coming, “He abolishes the first in order to establish the second” (Heb 10:9). The former regulation has been set aside because a better hope has arrived, through which we draw near to God (Heb 7:18–19).

Paul teaches the same truth in Ephesians 2: “For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of

Reformed churches have always insisted that we include in worship only what Christ has commanded or what the New Testament clearly exemplifies: the reading and preaching of Scripture, prayer, the sacraments, and congregational song.

commandments and regulations” (vv. 14–15). What once separated Jew from Gentile, clean from unclean, and priest from people has been removed. The apostle says it again in Colossians 2: “Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a festival, a new moon, or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (vv. 16–17).

The ceremonial system of worship had served its time and has been fulfilled in the reality of the Son. Through Christ we now have access to our heavenly Father. We “have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus” (Heb 10:19) and may “approach the throne of grace with boldness” (Heb 4:16). “Through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Eph 2:18). The temple curtain has been torn. The way to God lies open.

Because of this, the New Testament does not give step-by-step rules for worship which have to be followed precisely at risk of death for transgressing. The main rule for worship is to ensure that everything is Christ-centred and God-glorifying.

FREEDOM AND BOUNDARIES

Christian freedom in worship is not without boundaries. We are freed from the old covenant’s rituals, not from God’s will. We live under the “law of Christ” (Gal 6:2); his Word still governs our worship.

The New Testament shows a simple, Spirit-given pattern: believers gathered to hear Scripture and preaching (1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:2), to pray (Acts 2:42), to sing (Col 3:16), to celebrate baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:41; 1 Cor 11), and to build one another up in love (1 Cor 14). That is why the Reformed churches have always insisted that we include in worship only what Christ has commanded or what the New Testament clearly exemplifies: the reading and preaching of Scripture, prayer, the sacraments, and congregational song.

Within those biblical boundaries, God grants the church genuine and joyful freedom. We are free to arrange the order of worship, to compose new hymns faithful to Scripture, and to accompany our singing with organ, piano, percussion, or strings—whatever best serves congregational song. We are free to decide how best to begin the service, whether with a call to worship, an invocation, a Psalm or all three. We are free to end our worship with a benediction or a doxology or an Amen. We are free to read the Ten Words every week or to read them periodically. We are free to compose creeds and confessions for use in worship. We are free to celebrate the Lord’s

Supper weekly or monthly; free to meet in a simple hall or a cathedral or even in a cave, because God’s holiness no longer resides in a place or in architecture but in Christ’s presence among his people.

The old priestly system prescribed every garment, vessel, and detail. The new covenant entrusts such matters to Spirit-led wisdom under the rule of Christ’s Word. This is why a Reformed order of worship can vary from Langley to Winnipeg and from CanRC to ARP to OPC to PCA and still be obedient to the same biblical pattern. Within our federation of churches, we voluntarily restrict our worship freedom in accordance with the Church Order and the decisions of the major assemblies. However, many of these restrictions are not biblical in an absolute sense but rather ecclesiastical—a matter of mutual agreement for good order.

REVERENCE AND AWE

If the old covenant emphasized precision and caution, the new emphasizes the privilege of joyful approach to God. Because of Christ, we “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22), yet still worship “with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:28–29).

Reverence, of course, is not gloom or a heavy feeling. The same chapter that calls for awe also describes worship as a “festal gathering” in the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22). The Psalms teach us to tremble with joy—fear joined to gladness. True reverence is radiant. God’s holiness has not changed. However, our access has changed due to the cleansing blood of Christ. So, Christian worship should be weighty, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled—and glad and free.

Old covenant worship was “fussy” because it was filled with symbols and foreshadowing. New covenant worship is freer because Christ, the reality, has come. God still directs our worship and cares for its faithfulness, but now his concern centers not on ritual precision but on Christ-shaped simplicity. So, when we gather, the question is not whether we have checked every possible box, but whether Christ is at the centre—his Word preached, his promises sealed, his people praying and praising, together rejoicing before God in the liberty of the Spirit. 



Rob Schouten

Minister

Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church
robert.a.schouten@proton.me



Brothers in Training (BRIT): Preparing men for office

On a snowy Saturday morning, more than seventy men of all ages park their work trucks and family vans in the church parking lot of Fergus North, Ontario, and head inside. At 9:00 a.m., their voices rise together in song as the morning opens with praise. This is the fourth session of Brothers in Training (BRIT), a program organized for all men of the churches in Classis Northern Ontario to equip them for service as office bearers.

In his editorial *Leadership Training*, Rev. P. Holtvluwer recently asked how well equipped our younger men feel to lead in their homes, in the school community, and in the church.¹ He encouraged prayer for young men, the use of good reading materials, short courses, and even opportunities for younger men to accompany experienced office bearers on visits. That call for training has been taken seriously in Ontario.

The need was felt particularly in the Arthur Canadian Reformed Church, a congregation established only four years ago and made up largely of young families. Brian Niezen, having served as an elder and seeing the value in thoughtful preparation, took the initiative to begin office bearers' training using the Council Handbook by Rev. Douwe Agema. Rev. Agema, now living in Elora, began writing the material in the 1990s and completed the handbook in 2006.²

At the same time, in the neighbouring Fergus North congregation, elder Butch Medemblik was also searching for solid resources and training materials. The three men joined forces, and Brothers in Training was born. Each session contains a short introduction after which the participants are split up into smaller groups to discuss questions and their experiences in office.

"We were looking for an interactive format," Niezen explains. "Life itself is training, and having the opportunity to grow and learn from each other is important. That's why discussion plays such a central role."

A SHARED PROPOSAL

In the spring of 2025, a letter outlining a three-year training proposal—with fifteen sessions and a request for topics—was sent to all consistories in Classis Northern Ontario for feedback. The plan was to hold five sessions a year on Saturday mornings, from 9 – 11 am. The response from consistories was overwhelmingly positive and each church in the classis donated \$250 to cover the costs.

In the fall of 2025, the first three sessions were held at the Fergus North church building. Rev. Agema led the first session under the theme "Be all with one accord faithful in your offices."³ Brian Niezen introduced the topic "Building Relationships: Loving Your Neighbour as Yourself" during the second session, while Dr. Reuben Bredenhof addressed the role of counselling in the church on the third Saturday. Now in early 2026, Rev. Marc Jagt from Lincoln introduced the topic "Evangelism and the Local Church."

LEARNING ACROSS GENERATIONS

During the coffee break that follows the discussion period, I had the opportunity to talk to several of the participants. Spencer Westrik from Guelph appreciates the intergenerational aspect of the sessions. "It's very interesting to sit in a group with older men—some currently in office, others not—and just listen and learn from them," he says.

¹ *Clarion*, Vol 74.13, 2025

² This handbook is available at www.officebearers.com under the "Library" menu option.

³ You can find Rev. Agema's article on Elders and Deacons elsewhere in this issue.

Jayden Kroezen from Fergus values the broader perspective the program offers. “It’s very helpful to be here with men from different congregations and to hear how one consistory handles this issue or another.”

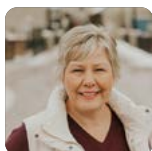
Gary Vis Jr. from Owen Sound has attended every session so far. “The discussion really levelled the playing field,” he says. “You realize that one day you could be an elder or deacon too, just like the men around the table. It’s great to hear their stories—how they started, or what they still struggle with.”

His father, Gary Vis Sr., echoes that appreciation. “The first time I came into office, I was terrified,” he admits. “I wondered what I really knew and what skills I had to visit others and do this work. These discussion sessions give you a taste of what serving in office is like and help you grow. I’m not much of a reader, and I’m not a theologian, but these sessions put you ‘in the trenches,’ so to speak.”

The organizers report receiving similar feedback from many participants. “Our goal,” says Niezen, “is to inspire men to go home, dig deeper into these topics, and feel better equipped to lead—both in their homes and in the church.” They have received requests from other churches to share their materials and they are happy to see the concept being used elsewhere.

Events like these provide men with important opportunities for intergenerational connection, encouragement, and guidance. By sharing joys, struggles, wisdom, and perspective, by God’s grace we will continue to see our federation filled with confident, godly leaders in both the home and the church community. 📺

For more information on the training, contact brit@fergusnorth.ca



Ilse VanderMeulen

Elora, Ontario

ilsevandermeulen@hotmail.com



“BE ALL WITH ONE ACCORD FAITHFUL IN YOUR OFFICES”

DOUWE G. J. AGEMA





The title of this article comes from the *Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons*. It is part of the charge given to elders and deacons. They are charged not only to serve the Lord faithfully in their offices, but also to work together as they serve in their respective offices. The latter is essential for the good progress of the work of the Lord in the congregation. When office bearers are working against each other or do not trust each other, the congregation and thus the work of the Lord will suffer. Many consistories and councils recognize this and have it as a regular item on their agendas in one form or another.

The need for cooperation is clear, but does it always function as it should? What should elders tell deacons about their work and the other way around? What do we do when there are misunderstandings between elders and deacons, or worse, distrust? How can this be addressed and resolved?

UNITY

The Word of God is very clear that one of the characteristics of the church is unity. Just think of Psalm 133 and how we sing about the beauty of this unity. What makes this unity so special is that the church was bought with a very high price, the sacrifice of God's only Son.

The church's unity is a gift from the Lord, but then also a calling from the Lord. We are called to deal with each other in light of his amazing gift. As Philippians 2:1–7 makes clear, we are to have the mindset of the Lord Jesus and think of others as better than ourselves. The goal is not to establish our own reputation or build our own kingdom, but to serve others in love. The Lord Jesus made this clear in John 13 when he washed the feet of his disciples. To refer to one more passage, in Galatians 5:13 we read: "For you were

called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

What applies to all the members certainly applies to office-bearers. Office-bearers need to exemplify this attitude. This mindset of the Lord Jesus must govern the way the offices function in the church. The requirements for office given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 imply an attitude of willingness to cooperate and serve the well-being of the congregation together.

COOPERATION

It comes as no surprise, then, that we see this willingness to work together displayed in Scripture, though at times the Lord had to use crises to teach this. Moses needed helpers in his leadership of Israel and the LORD provided many men to support him (Exod 18 & Numb 11). The apostles had to be reminded that they could not do it all by themselves in the early church, and they were quite willing to have others support them (Acts 6). As Acts 6:7 indicates, it benefited the church. It is also wonderful to read in Paul's letters how he valued others who worked with him, calling them co-workers (e.g. Phil 1:7, Col 4:7–11). And it is always encouraging to read Romans 16 and see how Paul valued so many others.

The apostles worked with the lessons taught by their master in Luke 9:46 and 22:26: no bickering about who is the greatest but humbly serving others. The conclusion is clear: the charge to work together as office-bearers is fully based on Scripture.

How does this work itself out? How do elders and deacons work together? Their callings connect, even overlap. They serve the same members of the church, even at times deal with the same situations. A financial need can also indicate a



spiritual need, and at times financial help will not solve the problems but admonition or even discipline may be needed. How do we then work together as office-bearers? My purpose is not so much to deal with specific situations. That is not possible in a short article, as each situation is unique. Rather, I would like to point out two guiding principles which I believe are helpful in this regard. Because these guiding principles involve two basic elements, we will consider them first.

TWO BASIC ELEMENTS

The first basic element is to know what the office is all about. It is a specific task given to a person called by the Lord for this purpose in order to take care of the congregation. An office includes a calling, a mandate, and service. The office-bearers recognize and accept this when they are ordained. The Lord himself calls them, and he is the one to whom they will have to give account. For this reason, they pledge faithfulness to his Word. God gives this task for the sake of his congregation, so that the flock he bought may flourish in the joy of salvation and be protected against the threats that can attack this joy.

The office includes a clear task description. It is not up to the individual office-bearer to fill in what he wants to do, but the Lord who calls also gives the task. This mandate is spelled out in the charge given to the office-bearers and in the Church Order. The Church Order also stipulates that office-bearers may not lord it over others (CO Art. 74) and must stay within their mandate. In fact, to intrude upon the office of another office-bearer is a “serious and gross sin” (CO Art. 72).

This leads to a second basic element, the supervision over the office-bearers. Who supervises them? Yes, they are responsible to the Lord Jesus, the head of the Church. But he rules through the body of elders. When ordained, each office-bearer accepts this when giving his pledge in public and signing the Form for Subscription. This means that an

office-bearer does his work under the supervision of the consistory, the body of elders. The elders together have to make sure that those who serve do so in accordance with the mandate given by the Lord. For this reason, for example, the preaching and teaching of the minister are discussed by the elders and the minister reports on his work to the elders. The same applies to elders. They report on their visits so that the body of elders can supervise their work. The consistory can instruct an office-bearer to convey a certain message to members. Supervising does not mean that the elders do the work of the minister or of the other elders, but to ensure that all things are done properly.

What applies to the elders also applies to deacons. They too have to give account of their labours, as Article 42 of the Church Order indicates. This does not mean that the elders do the work of the deacons, but that the elders ensure that what is done by the deacons is within the mandate given. It goes without saying that this supervision implies communication; it functions well when there is mutual trust.

TWO GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Having considered these two basic elements, we come now to two guiding principles, which are important for elders and deacons to be able to work together. The first principle is that elders and deacons need to be aware of what they have in common. The second is that they need to respect that their offices are distinct. These two guiding principles are intertwined like a cord. Let’s look at them in more detail.

When it comes to the first principle, what do elders and deacons have in common? Much. They are called by the same Lord and serve the same congregation. They are involved in the same work of the Lord, namely to present his Bride, whom he loves, spotless before the Father. To keep this in mind is a healthy antidote to selfishness or a territorial attitude. The goal is not to establish your own kingdom or

to satisfy like-minded friends, but to serve together the same Lord who loves his church.

It is helpful for office-bearers to be reminded of this and reflect on this on a regular basis. Together we are living out of the same grace and longing for the same goal. Faith, hope, and love unite office-bearers. This also means that one office is not higher than the other. To be more specific, deacons are not junior elders, serving on a trial basis. In this regard it is wonderful that we have one form for ordaining both elders and deacons. The first part of the form, describing the importance of office, applies to both, emphasizing what they have in common.

This leads to the second guiding principle, that both elders and deacons need to be well aware that each office is distinct. As mentioned earlier, we are not allowed to intrude upon the office of another (CO Art. 72). The elders are not called to do the work of the deacons, nor the deacons the work of the elders. This distinction between offices is given by the Lord and therefore needs to be respected, which has implications for confidentiality. Yes, there are connections, even overlap in certain situations, but each office has to function according to its own mandate. When elders notice that there is a need for the ministry of mercy, they do well to give that over, and the other way around as well.

As indicated earlier, these two guidelines are intertwined like a cord. The strength of this cord is the love and grace of our Lord, his blood. When this is understood, then working together is not a balancing act on a tightrope, but a joyful serving in humility and trust, which will be a blessing for the whole congregation.

CHRISTIAN CENSURE

What if this harmony is not present? We have to be realistic and admit that at times the cooperation doesn't function well. Then we need to address this properly. In fact, the churches have recognized that this can happen and therefore we have a helpful way to deal with this in Article 73 of the Church Order, regarding Christian censure. It goes beyond the scope of this article to delve deeply into this, but this censure is very important for the functioning of the office bearers as a body. It is a means by which distrust or misunderstanding can be addressed and resolved. It is a way in which the office-bearers can, if need be, admonish one another with regard to the execution of their office. When used properly, this censure is a blessing not only for the office-bearers but also for the congregation.

Working together with one accord, being faithful in our offices, is a wonderful gift. Together we may stand in awe of the grace and goodness of our Lord and Saviour in caring for his church through his people and long for the day when he will present his Bride before his Father. 📖



Douwe G. J. Agema

Minister Emeritus

Living Word Canadian Reformed Church, Guelph
agemad@gmail.com

This article is based on a presentation by the author at the first Brothers in Training (BRIT) session in Fergus.¹ This session included the following questions for breakout group discussions:

1. What do the offices of elder and deacon have in common and how are they different? Why is this important and what can we do to build up this understanding?
2. How can we promote the thought that difference in task/calling does not mean a higher or lower rank? (Are deacons junior elders? Are visits by ministers more important than visits by deacons or elders?)
3. How much should deacons know of the work of the elders in their ward and the other way around? How much should elders know about the work of deacons in their ward?
4. Suggest some practical ways in which communication between elders and deacons can be promoted.
5. If elders or deacons feel that there is a communication problem, what would be a helpful way of addressing this?

¹ See article by Ilse VanderMeulen on BRIT elsewhere in this issue.

A New Ambassador for Niverville



On Sunday, November 23, 2025, the Redeemer (Winnipeg) and Ambassador (Niverville) congregations, together with guests from across Classis Manitoba, worshipped together in the Niverville High School gymnasium. The occasion was the ordination and installation of Adrian Tams to the ministry of the Word, where he has been called to serve as church planter and pastor for the non-instituted congregation in Niverville.

WELCOME AND ORDINATION

Before the ordination and installation, the Ambassador congregation and guests involved in the church planting work gathered for a special evening with the Tams family. It was a time of fellowship, introductions, and thanksgiving, marking the beginning of a new chapter together in the Lord's service. This occasion underscored

not only the calling of a man to office, but the Lord's continued faithfulness in sustaining and advancing his church-planting work in Manitoba.

The church-planting work in Niverville is spearheaded by the Redeemer congregation and supported by the other Canadian Reformed churches in Classis Manitoba. Begun in 2018, the project experienced significant challenges, including disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the loss of its original missionary several years ago. Yet through these trials, the Lord preserved the work and prepared the way for a renewed beginning, now marked by the ordination of a new minister to labour in this field.

In the morning service, Rev. Joe Poppe preached from 2 Timothy 4:1–8 under the theme, "Fulfill your ministry in all faithfulness." This passage contains the apostle Paul's final charge to his spiritual



son Timothy, spoken in the shadow of Paul’s impending death and in the light of Christ’s return. Having nearly finished his own race, Paul passes the gospel baton to the next generation of servants.

Paul begins with a solemn reminder that ministry is carried out before the face of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead. Gospel ministry is never merely human work; it is exercised *coram Deo*, under the searching gaze of the coming King. This reality gives gravity and urgency to everything the minister is called to do.

At the heart of Paul’s charge stands a single, defining command: “Preach the Word.” Timothy is not sent to innovate according to cultural tastes, but to herald the message of Christ crucified and risen. He must preach persistently, whether the message is welcomed or resisted, “in season and out of season.” Such preaching, Paul explains, includes reproof, rebuke, and exhortation, all carried out with great patience. The Word must expose sin, call sinners to repentance, and comfort God’s people with the gospel. Gospel ministry involves hardship and spiritual struggle, yet Paul directs Timothy’s eyes to the finish line, where a crown of righteousness awaits all who love Christ’s appearing.

INAUGURAL SERMON

In the afternoon service, the newly ordained Rev. Adrian Tams preached his inaugural sermon on Psalm 46, with the theme, “The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.” This psalm set before the congregation the unshakable foundation of all

ministry: God himself is our refuge, strength, and ever-present help in trouble. Through his Spirit, Christ nourishes and preserves his church. The psalm concludes with the divine command, “Be still, and know that I am God,” a call to trust in God’s sovereign rule and to rest in the certainty that the success of his kingdom does not depend on human strength.

The two sermons formed a unified message for the day. Psalm 46 proclaims who God is for his people—their refuge and mighty fortress—while 2 Timothy 4 declares what God calls his servants to do within that security: preach the Word and fulfill the call of ministry. One sermon emphasized defense, the other faithful advance. Because the LORD of hosts is with his church, the minister may labour boldly and endure hardship without fear.

These sermons spoke not only to the newly ordained minister, but to the churches of Classis Manitoba as a whole. The calling to preach the Word is inseparably joined to the calling of the churches to support that work through prayer, encouragement, and tangible assistance. Church planting and mission work is not the task of one congregation alone, but a shared responsibility entrusted to the communion of churches. In a world that continues to shake, the Lord of hosts is with us. Therefore, let the churches pray earnestly, support this work faithfully, and entrust both minister and mission to the sovereign care of God, to the glory of his name. 📖

Henry van Delden

Winnipeg, MB



Celebrating 75 Years of God's Grace: 1950–2025

The Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church of Surrey celebrated their 75th anniversary on Saturday, November 22, 2025. After months of planning and much anticipation, we were delighted to welcome many former members and guests from the surrounding community to a program remembering God's faithfulness to us over 75 years.

Our current pastor, Taylor Bredenhof, opened the gathering with prayer and a reflection on Acts 20:28. He reminded us that Maranatha is God's church, purchased with Jesus's blood, and that we are connected to the church of all ages and places by the ancient gospel. We thank God for his grace throughout the years, not with pride but with humility, celebrating his work, by which he protected and

upheld us with his fatherly love and kindness. We pray for God's continuing mercy into the future, always relying on him.

SIX THEMES

The program had six themes, interspersed with singing and PowerPoint presentations. Theme 1 was titled "A Church is Planted," and reflected on the early years that began with a few families meeting in homes, to when the New Westminster Canadian Reformed Church was officially instituted on Dec 17, 1950. Soon after institution, the congregation rented Dreamland Dance Hall for a meeting place. As the congregation grew, they were able to purchase a movie theatre and convert it into their place of worship.



6 Themes:

1. A Church is Planted
2. A School is Established
3. The Church is Relocated
4. God's Faithfulness through Trying Times
5. Outreach and Fellowship
6. The Church Today

The attendees enjoyed videos of memories from long-term members and photographs of old locations and church events.

Theme 2, "A School is Established," gave a brief outline of the establishment of the William of Orange school, a venture which was quickly undertaken by the young and growing congregation. Many in the audience enjoyed reuniting with former classmates since the history of the church and school were closely intertwined.

"The Church is Relocated" was Theme 3. The congregation worshipped as the New Westminster Canadian Reformed Church for 25 years, then moved south of the Fraser River into the City of Surrey in 1975. The church was renamed Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church. A building was erected on newly purchased property, with the construction accomplished by skilled tradesmen and many volunteers; most of the work was done on Saturdays when the men had a day off to help. The ladies served soup and buns and treats to keep the workers well fed. It was truly a community effort! The history of our pipe organ was also related by our organist. It had been purchased for the New Westminster location, then was dismantled and rebuilt with additions from another organ.

We could recount and acknowledge how our ever-faithful God sustained and preserved the congregation with Theme 4, "God's Faithfulness through Trying Times." Theme 5 was titled "Outreach and Fellowship" and included photos about Brazil Mission, Coffee Break, Vacation Bible School, Christmas and Easter Day Camps, church picnics, etc. The work of evangelism and outreach continues and by God's grace we are blessed to have many visitors, seekers, and new members from various nations joining us in worship.

The final theme focused on "The Church Today." It was inspiring to hear from some of our newer members about how they found Maranatha and their vision for the future of their church. We were blessed via video presentation to have many former pastors provide

recollections about their time spent among us and give us words of encouragement. Two of our former ministers were able to be with us in-person for our celebration. We enjoyed a speech from Pastor Ben Schoof recalling his time among us and our retired pastor, who also was also our first missionary to Brazil, Rev. C. Van Spronsen and his wife Joanna, travelled across the Rockies from Coaldale, Alberta to join in the celebrations.

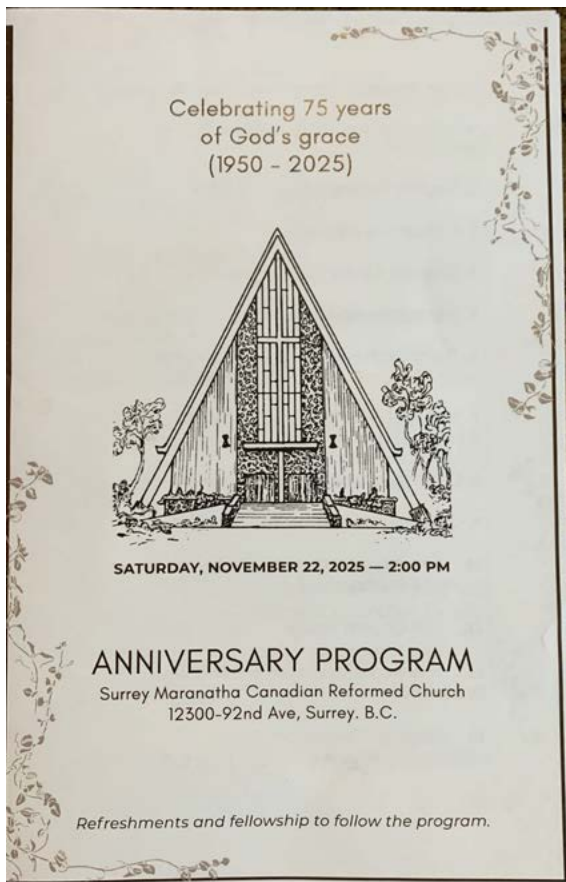
TO GOD'S HONOUR

The program was concluded with a prayer of thanksgiving and the singing of *Come Lord Jesus, Maranatha*. Many accepted the invitation to join us for a social time after the program. The fellowship hall was lined with posters, pictures, and displays of all kinds of memorabilia from the past 75 years, as well as an ongoing PowerPoint highlighting various activities, people, and events throughout the years. A wonderful time of fellowship and refreshments was enjoyed by all.

Finally, we want to acknowledge and repeat the dedication that Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene, Maranatha's first minister, had printed in his book *Inheritance Preserved*: "In memory of those who have completed their course. For the encouragement of those who are still running their course. To the honour of him who awaits us at the end of the course." *Soli Deo Gloria!* 

Corrie Faber, Phil Struik, and Renée van de Kamp
Surrey, BC

Please note that the program can be viewed in the archives on the Maranatha website (maranatha-canrc.org) or on our YouTube channel (date of event: Nov 22, 2025).



Making Kingdom Profits as a CPA

Even those of us who seldom think about accountants tend to do so as tax season comes upon us. When preparing to file personal or corporate taxes, some of us enjoy the mysteries and challenges of understanding, conquering, and filing taxes for another season; most of us, however, would just prefer to hand it all over to someone else. That's where Kevin van Delden, Chartered Professional Accountant, comes into the picture.

Kevin is the owner and CPA at K. van Delden & Associates in Surrey, BC. He has been an accountant since 2007, running his own accounting firm since 2012. His firm was voted Cloverdale's #1 accounting firm for seven years in a row. Kevin has been married to Kandy for 33 years, and they have two sons, two daughters-in-law, and five grandchildren. He and Kandy live in Aldergrove, BC and have been members of the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church for over 25 years.

What are some of the joys and rewards of your work?

People think that accountants just work with numbers all day, but behind all those numbers are people, and the biggest joy of my work is dealing with people, both Christian and non-Christian clients. Honesty and integrity are kind of important in filing taxes, so it's an easy opening



Kevin van Delden



2025 Brazil trip in Caraguatatuba



4 generations of family

to talk about my Christian worldview in the context of work. When else can you just talk to someone about how they earn their money, what they do with it, and whether they're content with what they earn? Those conversations can lead to the bigger pictures of life.

Every year I write a year-end letter to all my clients, and in the middle of that letter I like to add a little "pebble in the shoe." This past year it was about finding contentment or joy, and that it can't be found without Christ. My non-Christian clients all read it too, and some will comment on it. I probably got ten emails that said they appreciated what I had written, also in relation to the political situation in Canada.

How did we suddenly jump to politics?

Taxes—corporate or personal—are all political. We complain about government and we complain about taxes, and some people think a change of government will be the answer to our problems, but at the end of the day, our salvation is not in the government, whether liberal or conservative—it's in God. And I have opportunities to express that to the people I work with. Psalm 2 always comes to mind: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed." Our leaders think they're their own little gods, but God both *laughs* and *holds them in derision*. God is in control; he's already won! Paying taxes to the government is annoying, but we just have to do it. It's legitimate to find ways to save money on taxes, but as Christians we do have to be honest about it.

So, what makes you different from the non-Christian accountant across the street?

Christianity is built into everything I do. Talking about taxes gives you the chance to talk about so many different Christian concepts, with both Christian and non-Christian clients. Do you report all your income or are you okay with being paid under the table? What are the repercussions of that dishonesty? What causes do you donate to, or how much of your income do you donate? People think there should be extra taxes on the rich, but that's basically another way of coveting, being jealous of what my neighbour has. We can talk about how rich people (basically anyone who makes more than we do!) have so much money, but forget that they're also the ones who provide others with jobs, who support causes. So, I can speak to that too, as it all flows through my work. My beliefs are not segmented from my job. I'm not preaching to people, but it's there, underlying everything. And it's a two-edged sword: every time I discuss these things with my clients it's a reminder to ask myself how I am doing in that regard as well.

You were a teacher for several years. Is there cross-over between teaching elementary school and accounting?

So much of accounting is helping people understand their finances. Teaching is still part of my job, just teaching adults about their finances and taxes instead of teaching kids. People have told me that I do a good job of providing clarity, and the experience of teaching in the classroom is helpful in that. I can tell when the person sitting across from me hasn't understood, so I can explain in a different way.

Any thoughts or advice for young people considering entering the field of accounting? Or for those who might not want to pursue it because it has a reputation of being somewhat boring?

It doesn't matter what job you have, but young people—especially young men—have to consider being a provider, not just to support their families, but also to support the church and the greater community. Accounting is a job that can give you the means to do that. But it's not only the income; accounting is an important job within the church community. Churches, schools, and other organizations all need accountants for their boards, so it certainly opens the door to a lot of opportunities to serve within the community. One of my greatest joys was being the treasurer of the Aldergrove Mission Board for eight years, and then the chairman for six years; having a CPA behind my name is what gave me that opportunity.

As for accounting being boring, some aspects can be boring. You might start out working at a big firm sitting at your cubicle for a year, but that's probably the same for any entry level job. The beginner usually gets the repetitive, mundane tasks. An accountant might also be managing finances for a large company, regularly travelling overseas; there are lots of different things you can do within the field of accounting. What's important is not necessarily which profession you choose, but rather that you follow the advice of 1 Corinthians 10:31 so that "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." 

Lyn Metzlar Leyenhorst

Cloverdale, BC
lmllanguagearts@gmail.com



Campfire: Setting Hearts Ablaze

Every summer parents are faced with the same question: what should we do with the kids while school is out? There are plenty of options: sports camps, day programs, vacations, road trips, and of course, the ever-present temptation for kids to spend far too much time indoors staring at screens. But every now and then there is an opportunity that offers something deeper than simply keeping children busy for a week. For many families, Campfire Bible Camp has become exactly that kind of place.

Campfire! is not simply a summer camp with a few Bible lessons added into the schedule. From the beginning, the goal of Campfire! has been to get kids outside, into God's creation, and into the Word of God. Everything else that happens during the week grows out of that foundation.

FAITH & FRIENDSHIPS

One of the things that stands out immediately about Campfire! is that its purpose is very clear. The camp exists to share the gospel and to encourage young people to grow in their relationship with Christ. That focus shapes the rhythm of each day at camp. There are times of singing, chapel messages, Cabin Pack devotions, and discussions. These are not treated as interruptions to the "fun" parts of camp—they are an integral part of the life of the camp. For many campers, the singing times are especially memorable. There is something about standing outdoors together and singing praise to God that leaves a lasting impression.

When children spend a week surrounded by leaders who genuinely love the Lord and enjoy spending time in his Word, faith becomes something that is central and cherished. Removed from the distractions of everyday life, children often find it easier to listen,

ask questions, and think about what it means to follow Christ. For parents, that alone is reason enough to consider sending their children to Campfire! It is not just a vacation or a week with no screens. It is an experience that allows all campers to pay special attention to the most important area of their lives—their faith in Christ and relationship with God.

Another thing that quickly becomes apparent at Campfire! is the sense of community. A week at camp brings together children from different churches and different towns, but by the end of the week those differences have faded. What remains is the connections that have been made while being in an environment of faith where prayer is frequent and Christ's name has been upheld. Those are core memories that last a lifetime. Campers share cabins, eat meals together, play games, and encourage each other. It doesn't take long before friendships begin to form.

KEEPING CAMP AFFORDABLE

Anyone who has looked into overnight camps recently has probably noticed that the cost can be quite high. Even though Campfire! remains one of the least expensive overnight camps in Ontario, for many families, sending a child to camp can feel out of reach. The Campfire Board considers this to be one of their top priorities and is constantly looking for ways to keep camp affordable. The goal has always been to make sure that as many children as possible have the opportunity to experience camp, hear the gospel, and build friendships that encourage their faith.

Of course, running a camp still comes with expenses. Food, maintenance, insurance, and staffing all add up. The only reason Campfire! can keep its fees where they are is because of the generosity of the

community that supports it. Many people volunteer their time, others participate in fundraising events like the annual charity golf tournament, and some choose to support the camp financially through donations. Because of that support, families continue to have access to a summer experience that might otherwise be out of reach.

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

Campfire! is not only a place where children grow. It is also a place where teenagers and young adults learn what it means to serve. Each summer, a team of staff and volunteers give their time and energy to care for the campers. Leading a Cabin Pack, spending a week as a chaplain, helping with meals, or simply being present to listen and encourage younger campers can be both challenging and rewarding. For many young people, working at camp becomes a turning point in their faith. Serving others, leading devotions, and watching younger campers grow spiritually has a profound impact. Just as campers are encouraged to grow in their relationship with Christ, staff members and volunteers find that the experience deepens their own faith as well.

LOOKING AHEAD TO SUMMER

When parents send their child to Campfire!, they are not simply signing up for a week of activities. They are placing their child in a community that values faith in Christ, friendship, and the simple joys of childhood. Children go home with stories about swimming, games, and new friends. But they will also go with something more important: a deeper familiarity with God's Word, a clearer understanding of who their Creator is, and hopefully a closer relationship with Christ.

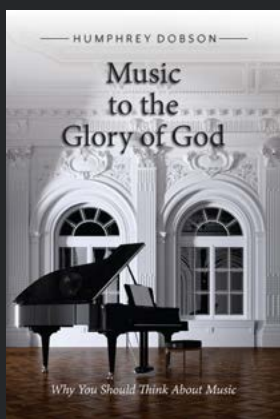
For a week, life slows down a little. The noise of everyday distractions fades into the background. Kids spend their days outside in creation, surrounded by leaders who care about them and friends who are sharing the same experience. They sing. They laugh. They pray. They ask questions about faith and life. And in the middle of all that, the Word of God has the opportunity to take root in their hearts.

There are many ways to spend a summer week, but there are not many places where kids can spend the week outside, surrounded by friends, learning about the God who made them and the Saviour who loves them. That is a campfire worth gathering around! 🕯️

Richard Tomlin

Dunnville, ON





Thinking Critically About Music

Music to the Glory of God: Why You Should Think About Music, Humphrey Dobson.
Wapwallopen: Shepherd Press, 2024. Softcover, 256 pages. \$24 CDN.

Every now and then I ask my catechism students about their favourite music. Over the years, I've been surprised that there are always a couple of students who say they don't know because they never listen to music. I can't imagine life without music. It's been part of my daily life for decades. Since I also believe it's important to acknowledge God in all my ways (Prov 3:6), this book by Humphrey Dobson caught my eye right away. Given the author's Orthodox Presbyterian background and training in music, I was hoping for a well-reasoned Christian treatment of the subject. Sadly, it didn't live up to my expectations.

UNCONVINCING REASONING

We're told from the start that "this book contends that there is objectively good-quality music and bad-quality music, and that music in some forms is being corrupted in our day. Music is not neutral" (p. 19). It sounds like a promising thesis. However, its execution falters on several key points. All of them exhibit fallacious reasoning.

The author's starting point is that there are four transcendent norms of beauty: proportion, harmony, simplicity, and complexity. By these norms, he writes, music can be judged as to whether it is objectively beautiful. What is the argument for these norms? Western civilization has recognized them. Yes, Christians "recognize these norms to flow from the character of God" (pp 39–40), but the argument for these norms is that people have declared them to be such. This is a fallacy of relevance, specifically appeal to tradition, in this case the tradition of "Western civilization."

Later in the book, Dobson appeals to the authority of architect Quinlan Terry. He argued that "these principles of beauty derived originally from the biblical Tabernacle and Temple and were later copied by surrounding nations." However, there is no way to prove such a highly speculative thesis. To the contrary, there's plenty of evidence in Greek literature to disprove this thesis.

Dobson goes on to quote another erroneous notion of Quinlan Terry, this one about the meaning of the Greek word "architecture." It allegedly "describes that way of building which is not only great and important but also originated at the beginning of time" (p 99). But there is no Greek word "architecture." There is *architecton*, 'architect,' and *architektoneo*,

'to be the architect.' In both of those words, *archi* refers to someone being the chief or head builder. It has nothing to do with the beginning of time. This is an etymological fallacy.

Another fallacy committed several times is the hasty generalization. Consider three examples. Dobson writes that the words of rock music "constantly celebrate sexual immorality, impurity, and blasphemy" (p 135). Is there rock music which does this? Yes, who would deny it? But "constantly"? You'd have to listen to every rock song ever created to be able to argue that. He quotes philosopher Allan Bloom, "Rock music has one appeal only, a barbaric appeal to sexual desire" (p 137). How did Bloom know that there is only this one appeal to everyone? This claim is logically impossible to verify.

Finally, the author himself argues about pop music: "none of it is high quality music according to the objective principles of beauty." Notice "none of it." Did Humphrey Dobson listen to every pop song from every sub-genre? Such arrogant overgeneralizations might have rhetorical or polemical value, but they don't get us closer to thinking soundly about music.

A CLASSICAL PERSUASION

I did appreciate the chapter surveying various classical composers. Even though the included musical notation was lost on me, I appreciated the information about these men and their music. Dobson did help me value classical music more. For example, he introduced me to Beethoven's arrangements of Scottish, Welsh, and Irish folksongs. My concern is that he elevates this genre above others without solid reasoning.

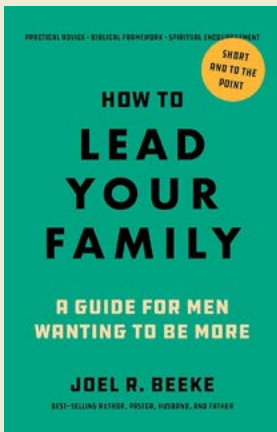
I'm all in favour of thinking critically about the music to which we listen. However, part of that is using sound reasoning. Because this book fails on that score, it leaves the impression of an elitist, prejudiced argument against popular music and for classical music. Those who already agree might find it persuasive, but I didn't. 



Wes Bredenhof

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Launceston, AU
bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca



More or Less

How To Lead Your Family: A guide for men wanting to be more by Joel R. Beeke.
2025, Reformation Heritage Books, 73 pages, \$12 CDN.

Writing a *how-to* book about Christian life skills is a challenging task. It puts the author in the delicate position of potentially over-inserting themselves into the text as they claim expertise on a topic. Joel Beeke, an author, pastor, husband, and father, avoids personal anecdotes and mainly relies on Scripture, confessions, and other commentators in this little booklet. It doesn't take long to detect the Puritan influences on the topic, accentuated by the use of the Authorized Version (KJV) for all the references. The gold button on the cover declares that it is written "short and to the point." Indeed, you can easily read it in an evening.

In the introduction, Beeke explains that he has penned the booklet for Christian men. He warns that it will confuse and condemn you if your faith is lacking, but if your faith is alive, it will help you prayerfully grow in your divinely bestowed responsibilities. I want to be a godly leader and exhibit a living faith, but I found myself tripping over this teaching.

FAMILIAR GROUND

If you have been schooled in the Heidelberg Catechism, you will be familiar with Beeke's launching point of the threefold office of the believer as the outworking of a Christian's identity. The calling to be prophet, priest, and king is a reflection of Christ's holy offices. As men, we obtain this calling by being members of Christ by faith. So far, so good.

The logical next step for Beeke is that we are *representatives* of God to the world and to our families. As a father you bear God's image to your children, as a husband you bear Christ's image to your wife. By extension, in leading a Christian family you display the image of Christ's bride to the world. There is no doubt that, in rising to this challenge as a man, you will need to be more. **Much more.**

Beeke follows this up with a chapter dedicated to each office and how it plays out in the home. These chapters are filled with direction and encouragements in a spirit of love and care, grounded in God's grace and fueled by the outpouring of the Spirit. Unfortunately, in places it feels paternalistic, and even comes across at times as patronizing. Initially I thought it may be due to the imbalance of only addressing men, but as I read on, I was unconvinced. There is more at play. Placing the mantle of

Christ's offices on the man as leader in the home without acknowledging the office of *all* believers (women and children too) gives a bent and expectation that tends toward being overbearing and ultimately can't be adequately met. There is a big difference between leading your wife and family to Christ and actually representing him to them.

STEP ASIDE

This all came together and fell apart for me in the conclusion of the book. Beeke summarizes that, whatever the father and husband does in the home, he is displaying truth about Christ. In other words, he writes, you are a picture of Christ to others in what you do. In your daily actions you communicate Christ to your wife and children and that communication rests on your excellence in carrying out your three-fold office. Christ is more or less to them based on what you do, and you will be held to account for your representation.

This crosses a fine line for me. An ambassador conveys a message from one who is greater and, as such, represents him, but he always remains only a messenger. There is no confusion between the messenger and the one who sends him. Let Christ only be Christ! Let his Word define his beauty, love, compassion, glory, etc. Better that a husband and father become less, humble himself like his Saviour, and step aside and bend his knee alongside his family to let Christ alone shine. Any attempt to do more than that will only provide a shadow that diminishes the reality.

Reading a *how-to* book about Christian life skills may be as difficult as writing one. A lot of self-scrutiny needs to be done in assessing how its message lands and why. There is a possibility that the reader can over-insert themselves and miss the author's intended meaning or become too self-absorbed in the text and project too much. Why don't you be the judge? 📖



Rick Ludwig

rludwig@kitchingsteepeandludwig.com

