

A black and white photograph of a mountain landscape. In the foreground, there are dark evergreen trees. A calm lake reflects the sky and the surrounding mountains. In the background, a range of mountains is visible, with some peaks covered in snow or light-colored rock. The overall scene is serene and natural.

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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A Christian Attitude Toward Sport₂

By J.E. Ludwig

IV. Purpose of Sport

A. GENERAL

To what extent may a Christian participate in sport as defined and described in the previous issue? What must his/her attitude be toward sport? Does God's Word give guidelines on this subject which can still be applied today? Is competition in itself unbiblical? For what purpose(s) may a Christian participate in sport? Why do we play? Perhaps it would be best to begin with the last question since it is an important element that has not yet been addressed.

Sport psychologists have busied themselves in trying to decipher why people play the sports they do. These are some of the reasons given:³⁰

- 1) sport restores man: it regenerates energy, replaces fatigue from work and thus makes him willing and fit for his daily labour
- 2) it allows for the discharge of excess energy
- 3) as a cathartic release of aggressive behaviour, frustrations and pressures³¹
- 4) opportunity for escape from the tedium of work; relaxation
- 5) competitive drive: man likes to test himself, to pit his strength against others
- 6) self-actualization and enrichment of life: to achieve, to win approval, to experience the thrill of accomplishment
- 7) for social interaction
- 8) out of fun: sheer pleasure in the game
- 9) for prestige and status
- 10) primal instinct to play

B. UTILITARIAN?

Protestants (especially the Puritans) have in the past stressed the utilitarian function of sport in particular (#1 above) and of recreation in general. Sport was viewed as a means to an end. You could only participate in sports in order to be revived and refreshed and thus able to perform better the daily work to which God had called you. So recreation then was strictly subservient to health and work. The same reasoning is found in the report of a synodical committee of the Christian Reformed Churches (CRC) entitled "Worldly Amusements in the Light of Scripture."³² One of the principles expounded in relation to the welfare of man reads: "There is a legitimate place in life for such amusements



which are recreative for body and mind." This is further explained: "Both body and mind suffer when the tension inseparable from the discharge of one's obligations is not periodically relaxed. All men need recreation....Their function [amusements: sports, games] is to keep us fit for the joyful and zestful performance of our task."³³ The report gives as biblical proof: 1 Tim. 4:8 and the fact that Jesus took part in social functions. This, however, amounts to no proof at all. That Jesus attended weddings and dinners says nothing about sports. If anything this reveals something of the humanity of Christ and His ability to understand our situations and needs. In 1 Tim. 4:8 Paul is concerned with asceticism, not athleticism or sport as we know it today. Following the exegesis of Douma (p. 26ff.), we can see that Paul is confronting a way of life in which men required certain bodily exercises of themselves in order to be as good a servant of Jesus Christ as possible. The context (1 Tim. 4:3; 5:23) and the variant Greek reading in 4:10 ("suffer reproach") militate against the interpretation that sees here athletic exercises. Indirectly these verses in Timothy do have a bearing on our topic. They reveal the principle that "bodily training" (be it asceticism here) has value but that we must be aware of the severe limitation. It is "godliness that has value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life AND for the life to come." This is also true for athleticism.

The utilitarian function of sport is evident in the definition that van Asch gives of sport: "The exercise and the measuring of human fitness, which are carried out in a joyful manner and which have been chosen out of free will FOR RELAXATION, whereby, however, a correct behaviour is unconditionally required."³⁴ For many, sport is indeed a means of relaxation and does give them renewed energy for their work. At the same time sport is more than the desire to stay healthy, to maintain one's cardiorespiratory efficiency, strength, and endurance. One does not play tennis to keep the body healthy. If so, why is it that the one loves tennis and cannot stand playing soccer or for that matter any other sport? I, for example, find golf the most boring and unappealing sport. For me golf is a sport in which a small white ball is chased by men too old to chase anything else!!

If sport is only to keep fit for work why not take up jogging? At least that activity is much cheaper than playing hockey with its expensive equipment, arena and referee fees! The point is we play a certain sport simply because we love the game. It is a matter of fun. It gives us intense pleasure to participate. That is why we play a certain sport and not another. The issue of the utilitarian versus pleasure aspect of sport is connected to the view we have of work and leisure/play. Are we perhaps influenced by a "Weberian"³⁵ conception of the Protestant work ethic which idealizes work and frowns on sports and games, on leisure in general? Are God's blessings measured in proportion to the success we have in our occupation? Do we justify sports then only because we know that it will make us work more efficiently and successfully?

C. WORK AND LEISURE

The Reformed response to this is that work and leisure are both gifts given to us by God. The one is not set over against the other, nor may we see either of them as ends in themselves. Work may not be glorified nor sport idealized. No workaholics, no sport fanatics. It goes contrary to God's Word to live only for the pleasure of leisure and to see your job as oppressive and boring. Qoheleth offers wisdom on this subject: "It is God's gift to man that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil" (Eccl. 3:13; cf. 2:24; 3:22; 4:8; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:9). We must do our work with pleasure knowing that it is a gift from God. Without wanting to oppose work and play, we can say that in light of the first chapters of Genesis the emphasis is upon work. The Lord put man in the Garden to "till it and keep it" (2:5b; 2:15).³⁶ After the fall the same command to work remained, only now the earth was cursed so that it would bring forth thorns and thistles, and man was punished: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" (3:17-19). By the same token the cultural mandate (1:28) conveys the command to work, the command for self-development and self-cultivation, that is, the development of those abilities with which God has blessed us so that we, as vice-regents of God, as his office-bearers, can best fulfil the task which God has given us on this earth.³⁷

D. BIBLICAL BASIS

What about leisure, recreation, sport? We cannot expect from the Bible direct answers to the specific questions concerning sports today. To even think that way would be biblicistic. I agree with Douma that the Old Testament texts on running (2 Sam. 15:1), dancing (1 Sam. 18:6), archery (1 Sam. 20:36), when studied in their respective contexts, of-



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fer no guidelines for sports today. The same can be said for passages where Paul uses imagery from the athletic world of his time (1 Cor. 9:4ff.; Phil. 3:12ff.; 1 Tim. 6:12; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Gal. 5:7, etc.). Entire theses have been written on the above texts with the conclusion that Paul must have been a great athlete or at least a sports fan!

The incarnation of Christ also says little for our discussion of sports. It is usually in connection with the incarnation that one finds a discussion of the biblical view of man, as a unity, as body and soul. Time constraints do not permit an in-depth treatment on this aspect of anthropology. In short, Scripture does not allow us to see the body as something secondary or inferior to the soul – as a prison of the soul (body-soul dualism). God specially formed man out of the dust of the earth. He did not call him into being out of nothing as He did for the rest of creation. The apostle Paul calls the body of the believer a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19). The body does not belong to an evil material world (it was created good; the corruption of sin stems from the heart, Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Mt. 15:19) so that our conclusion should be that we ought to shun any bodily enjoyments and seek only to be “spiritually fit.” We also reject the Cartesian dualism of mind and body which places intellectual pursuits on an exalted place above the physical. Our society has, anyway, shifted from Desecrates’ maxim, “I think therefore I am” to “I exercise therefore I am!”

All this means that we must focus on the general aspect of leisure and recreation.³⁸ What does Scripture teach us in this respect? The utilitarian philosophy that to be worthwhile something must be directly useful is nowhere advocated or even implied in Scripture. The Scripture proof, arranged from the weaker to stronger, is as follows:

i) The words of Qoheleth are helpful:

– 6:3: “If a man begets a hundred children, and lives many years...but does not enjoy life’s good things, and also has no burial, I say that an untimely birth is better than he.”

– 8:15: “And I commend enjoyment, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat, and drink, and enjoy himself, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of life which God gives him under the sun.”

– 9:7, 9: “Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart....Enjoy life with the wife whom you love....”

ii) Compare this with what Paul writes in 1 Tim. 6:17: “As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God *who richly furnishes US with everything to enjoy.*” God is the giver. He gives all things for our enjoyment (also leisure). We abuse these gifts if we set our hopes on them.

iii) Lastly we must emphasize the creation account. God did not create a purely utilitarian world. He created a world in which much exists for the sake of beauty and delight. God made provisions for the quality of human life, not simply its survival. The garden that God planted for Adam and Eve was not strictly utilitarian. We read that “out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is *pleasant to the sight* and good for food” (Gen. 2:9). In Ps. 104 we read that God gives bread to strengthen man, but he also makes the earth bring forth wine to gladden the heart of man and oil to make his face shine.

To place sport in the context of what we have discussed about leisure we can conclude that we may indeed participate in sports out of fun and pleasure. In our enjoyment we must acknowledge that it is God who grants us the free

time and the ability to engage in competitive games. All the while we acknowledge that we may never negate our original life-long office. Whether we play or whether we work we do so as divinely appointed office-bearers (Gen. 1:26-28) whose chief purpose in life is to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31; Westminster Smaller Catechism, Q. & A. 1). This three-fold office of prophet, priest and king (Lord’s Day 12) embraces the whole of life: leisure (and therefore sport), Sunday worship, work, and other necessary activities. None of our acts are ever to be neutral. They are to be official acts done in God’s service.³⁹

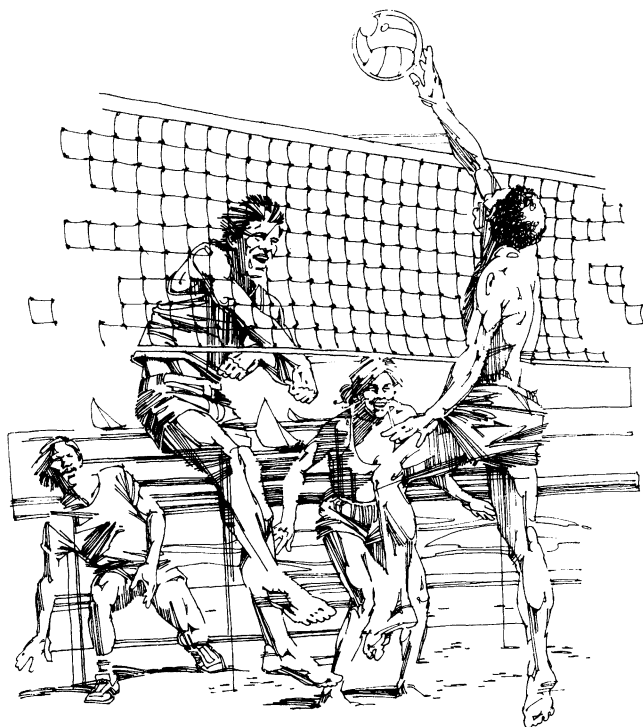
An awareness of our original office and calling will determine our approach to and our involvement in a competitive sport. Then we will not engage in sports for the sake of sports. The “play element” in sport does NOT mean that one can “lose himself in a sport” or that sport has its aim in itself, separate from anything in ordinary life. Professor K. Schilder correctly criticized this assertion of Huizinga:

The cultivation of a cultural instrument in itself and for its own sake is nothing but idolatry....So this world is destroyed not by sports, the cinema, etc., but by their being isolated as goods-in-themselves....The anti-Christian fun-fair of the Serious Game, in honour of Homo Ludens, that idol, shall be the last spasmodic effort of man...to put over against God’s *coetus* an anti-congregation.⁴⁰

V. Competitiveness

Can a Christian, aware of his office in life, still desire to compete and win? Certainly, for to take away the competitive element from sport is take away its very essence. The spoilsport who does not try his best (i.e. try to win) steals the heart of the game.⁴¹ However, the Christian will not make winning the central goal in his life. He will not sacrifice other priorities (e.g., time for personal prayer and Scripture study; visiting widows and orphans; participation in congregational and school society meetings; recreational activities with wife and children; etc.) for a consuming passion to win a match or strive for a trophy. In our own circles it is not uncommon for families to rarely sit down together around a table for proper communion in the summer months because Johnny has to be rushed to a soccer game on Monday night, Susan has T-ball on Wednesday, Dad has baseball on Thursdays and Saturdays. The husband and wife, parent and children relationships become strained to say the least.

The Christian will not despair when he loses a game, or begin to vent his temper, or play maliciously against his opponents, or drown post-game sorrows (or joys) in boozing it up. The temptation is very real for teenagers and married men to regularly frequent a favourite sports bar after games and practices. Just ask the wives and the parents waiting up at home until the late hours of the evening. The fruits of the Spirit must also be shown on the field⁴² and off the field: patience, kindness, self-control, etc. (cf. Gal. 5:22, 23). A Christian retains the desire to win but it is circumscribed by the thankfulness and joy toward God that he is blessed with the health and ability to engage in games of physical activity, and that he is given the time and opportunity to play. This type of healthy competitiveness can replace the “tooth-and-claw” competitiveness, the “killer instinct” that is incalculated by a “victory-at-all-costs” mentality. The concern for God’s honour as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier plus genuine love for the neighbour must be the leaven of our leisure and labour.



VI. Some suggestions

Perhaps because our society idolizes sports, the setting of records, the accompanying prestige of victory, we ought to encourage the youth to become involved in team sports rather than track and field events. On a team one can teach an outstanding athlete to use the limited abilities of his fellow team mates, and to play as one member of a whole rather than for his own glory and prestige. Other possibilities would be to strive to include the whole family in a sport. Parents should attend games to monitor their son's behaviour towards opponents, referees and fans, and to hear whether the coach uses abusive and blasphemous language. We may not share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders (Lord's Day 36). That in itself may prompt parents to pull their child off a team and enter him on a different team – one that has a respectable coach. Parents themselves can set an example by not yelling and screaming against the referee when he makes a "bad call" against their child or his team. This is not something immune to Canadian Reformed people. Just attend one of their "rivalry" hockey games.

If played in a Christian spirit, sport can be not only a pleasurable experience but also an educational one. It enables you to come to grips with the limits and possibilities of your created body. Since it involves you in active interpersonal relationships it raises questions of mutual assistance, respect for others, submission to rules, cooperation, and sharing.⁴³

VII. Professional sports?

Although much more could be said allow me to conclude with a strong injunction against seeking an occupation as a professional sports player. The following arguments weigh heavily against it:⁴⁴

a) Most professional sports are played on Sunday and therefore would bring one in conflict with the fourth commandment. Often travelling and practices are scheduled for the Lord's Day as well. Even if all the games were played

on Saturdays the idolization of sport and of professional sports heroes⁴⁵ should make one very cautious about considering sport as a job.

b) These sports demand all one's time in rigorous training and the body is "spent" at the age of thirty.

c) Sports heroes are used as a means for politicians and governments to promote the honour of the nation (nationalism), rather than the honour of God.

d) The illegal use of doping is a powerful temptation at this level in sport.

VIII. The eschatological perspective

Another perspective that overarches all our work and leisure is the eschatological one. Jesus Christ is coming to take unto Himself all those who are His into heavenly bliss and eternal glory thanks to His redemptive work. He renews and redeems back for God what God created in the beginning so that this (re-)created life agrees again, in principle, with God's goal for our life. This ought also to be in our mind as we compete in sport during the recreational time that God grants us on this earth. Whatever awards, ribbons, trophies we may have lost or won in earthly competitions, if we live according to the norms of His Word we will all receive a crown of eternal glory, and our bodies will be raised and made like the glorious body of our Lord (Phil. 3:21).

In the new heaven and the new earth our bodies will be temples of God's Spirit in an eternal, unbroken and unblemished way.

³⁰Gleaned from Dorothy V. Harris, *Involvement in Sport: A Somatopsychic Rationale for Physical Activity* (Philadelphia, 1973), pp. 13ff. This list does not purport to be exhaustive.

³¹Evidence exists which indicates that expression of aggressive acts is the best way to increase the frequency of aggressive behaviour, not reduce it. Aggression against an individual (or a group) if viewed as a successful means for attaining goals, may lead to repeated aggressive acts.

³²Presented to Synod in 1928. Written by E.J. Tuuk, H.J. Kuiper, R.B. Kuiper, H. Schultze, and H. Hekman. I am citing from an unofficial pamphlet, though an exact reprint of the report by J. De Haan (Grand Rapids, 1931).

³³CRC report, p. 8.

³⁴van Asch, p. 31.

³⁵The view of Max Weber, a German sociologist, who asserted this in his classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1920).

³⁶This must be kept in the balanced perspective of Proverbs 23:4: "Do not toil to acquire wealth, be wise enough to desist" and 24:33ff.: "A little sleep, a little slumber...and poverty will come upon you like a robber..."

³⁷K. Schilder, *Christ and Culture*. Translated from the Dutch by G. Van Rongen and W. Helder (Winnipeg, 1977).

³⁸Since the Sabbath ordinance is completely separate from our discussion, we may not argue from the rest and relaxation commanded by this day to recreation in general.

³⁹K. Sietsma, *The Idea of Office*. Translated from the Dutch by H. Vander Goot (Jordan Station, 1985), pp. 28-9.

⁴⁰Schilder, pp. 60-62.

⁴¹S.J. Hoffman, "The Sanctification of Sport," *Christianity Today*, XXX, No. 6 (1986), p. 21.

⁴²One hears the remark even from players in our own hockey league: "So-and-so is a great guy, but get him on the ice and he turns animal."

⁴³T. Ryan, "Whatever Happened to the 'play' in Sports?" *NCW* 229 (1986), p. 170.

⁴⁴Based on Douma, p. 38.

⁴⁵Even when they acquire AIDS due to their immoral lifestyle. Consider the adulation that Magic Johnson still has. **C**

Installation of Rev. T. Hoogsteen

June 14th, 1992 was a very special day for the Rockway Canadian Reformed Church. On this day our interim pastor was installed as our first minister. The Rockway Church was instituted on Dec. 31, 1990, and has been vacant until this time. Although Rev. Hoogsteen has been preaching and administering the sacraments at the Rockway Church for the past 6 months, the installation was cause for rejoicing as he became a minister in the Federation of Canadian Reformed Churches. The installation service was conducted by our counsellor, Prof. J. Geertsema. He chose as text 2 Tim. 3:16 and 17. The theme and the three points of the sermon:

The inspired Scripture is useful for equipping minister and congregation in the struggle against apostacy in the last days.

Our text shows

- 1) the basis for this usefulness;
- 2) the reason of this usefulness;
- 3) the purpose of this usefulness.

The basis for the usefulness of Scripture is the fact that it is inspired. The Greek word means "God breathed" or, paraphrased, "given by God through His Spirit." Scripture, at that moment still only the Old Testament, was received by Christ, His apostles, and the church, as God's Word. This truth was already clearly expressed in the Old Testament itself. We find it, e.g., in Zechariah 7:12 where the prophet, after the Babylonian captivity, writes that the stubborn Israelites before this captivity refused to listen to "the words which the LORD of Hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets." It is a great comfort to know in the struggle of faith against apostacy that we have the Scriptures, of both the Old and the New Testament, as the inspired, reliable Word of our faithful, loving, and caring Father in heaven through Christ Jesus.

Because it is inspired, Scripture is useful, first of all, for teaching. Teaching is instruction in the sound, true doctrine. This doctrine is the truth about the

triune God as our God in what He is for us as His people. In his letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul speaks very often about this teaching of the sound doctrine, in opposition to false teachings. Scripture is also profitable for reproof, i.e., for pointing out to people in and outside of the church what their sins are, in order that they acknowledge and confess their sins and turn away from them to God through faith in Christ. In the third place, Scripture is good for correction. This is a straightening out of that which is wrong in God's eyes. In the fourth place, Scripture is also useful for training us in righteousness. The word for "training" is the usual word for the upbringing of children and includes discipline. Paul calls it training in righteousness. Righteousness is here faithfulness to God and the neighbour according to God's revealed will, in obedient love.

The purpose of this teaching, reproof, correction and training in right-

eousness by means of the inspired Word of God is that first the minister of God's Word, and then also the whole congregation, will be well-prepared and fully equipped for their task and calling in this life as children of God and as, together, His congregation. They will live in accordance with what is expected of them by the Lord. They will live a life that is characterized by good works. The New Testament shows that doing good works, works of love for God and neighbour, is the purpose of Christ's work of salvation. Christ says that His disciples have to let their light shine so that people see their good works. Paul writes to the Ephesians that they, as church, are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. Good works are an honour for the Lord. They show also the faithfulness of the church over against a devouring apostacy. They show the work of the LORD through His inspired Word in those who love Him.

In his inaugural sermon in the afternoon Rev. Hoogsteen chose as his text Galatians 1:8 and 9.

He characterized the message of his text with the words "The Gospel and the gospels" and summarized his sermon with the following head and points:

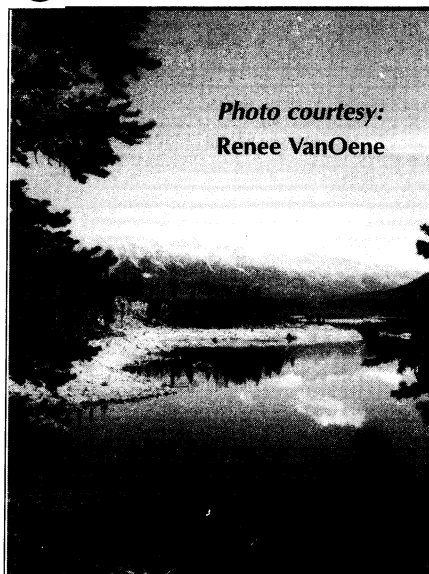
Paul proclaimed that *the Gospel is perfect and permanent for all times and places.*

For administering the Word we address:

- 1) The perfection of the Good News;
- 2) The perversion of the Good News;
- 3) The persuasion of the Good News.

The apostle Paul is, in fact, fighting the work of wolves in sheep's clothing, who distort the Gospel and, by so doing, destroy the church. It is not just a theological dispute between two or more learned men. Paul draws the antithesis

OUR COVER



*Photo courtesy:
Renee VanOene*

between truth and falsehood, between eternal life and eternal death. The Gospel is the Gospel of complete salvation in Christ only and totally. This is the perfectness of the Gospel. This Gospel was revealed to Paul by the Lord Himself. For this reason Paul, and we today, have the calling and duty to keep the Gospel pure and undistorted, to the glory of Christ and the salvation of His church. The proclamation of this perfect Gospel is and remains the duty and office of all ministers of the Gospel.

This Gospel of total salvation in Christ only was attacked and perverted by the false teachers. In 2 Cor. 11:5 the apostle named these wolves superlative apostles, disguising themselves as messengers of Christ. This is the reason why the apostle speaks in such strong terms of accursedness. To be stricken with the anathema, the most terrible of banns, was and is not too terrible for the false teachers, because they seek to turn

the churches of Christ into synagogues of Satan. When we listen to Paul here, there comes the awareness of the many religions and the many so-called gospels which are no gospels since they proclaim, in one way or another, that man has to save himself. These so-called gospels are congenial to the flesh. Perhaps one can ask: so what if a minister leans a little to one or the other of these spurious gospels? They attract disenchanted people. It is always pleasant to hear a gospel in which man remains in control. However, he who brings a gospel different from what Paul proclaimed is accursed.

But here is not only the calling of ministers of the Word. Here is also the calling of the church. Paul assures that he is accursed who preaches a gospel contrary to that which the churches received. They received from Paul the perfect Gospel. This places great responsibility on the churches. They are

to hold on to what they received. They are to continue making this true Gospel their own possession as the Gospel of Christ Jesus as only and total Saviour which they know thoroughly. Thus they can keep and guard it, and abide in Christ.

Following the service the chairman of the consistory Br. R.J. Oosterhoff spoke a few words of appreciation to our counsellor for the advise and help he gave us during our vacancy. Delegates from the neighbouring churches of Ancaster, Lincoln and Smithville were present and extended best wishes to our pastor and congregation. At the coffee social everyone was given the opportunity to speak with and congratulate Rev. and Mrs. Hoogsteen.

We thank our heavenly Father for giving us this day of rejoicing and we remember all the blessings He has bestowed on this young congregation.



NEWS MEDLEY

By W.W.J. VanOene



It does not happen all that often that I mention particulars about ministers. Let this time an exception be made. I am referring now to the sudden visit to Canada by the Rev. R. Boersema. He needed an eye operation and, although the operation itself could be done in Brazil, certain ingredients needed were not available there. Since the operation was necessary, he came to Canada, was admitted to the hospital in an amazingly short time, and has since undergone the surgery. Let me quote from the Church News: "All seems to be going well. Rev. Boersema will need to stay here for at least another week, in order for the gas in his eye to be absorbed to the point where he can travel by air. We pray that the Lord will grant speedy recovery and that in due time Rev. Boersema will be able fully to take up his duties again."

I shall not repeat the particulars that I heard about the operation, but we are thankful for the knowledge and skill the Lord has given to those in the medical profession as well as for the possibility that we, His children, may benefit from all this.

More news from Maranatha Surrey. Perhaps our readers will recall that there are three vacant lots at the back of the property on which the churchbuilding is located, belonging

to the church. For some time suggestions to sell these lots have been pondered. It would be good if they were sold and houses were built on them. This would also prevent that several young people use the parkinglot as a thoroughfare, for the owners of the homes built there would not permit such through traffic.

The Committee of Administration proposed "to sell the rear part of the church property." This proposal was accepted, but the consistory also set the rules for the use of the money:

"a. moveable partition walls in the basement for more meeting room.

b. repairing and possible repaving of the parking lot.

c. the bulk of the money to be used to pay off the mortgage on the manse, thereby reducing or eliminating the interest payments, and thus generating more funds on an annual basis. These extra funds can then be used to increase annual contributions to mission work."

In the meantime several offers have been received for the lots.

Port Kells has been trying to have the fire department decide to change the time at which they let the siren wail.

The church would like to see the morning services start at 9:30, but it is not very edifying when either the congregation is singing or the minister has just started to deliver his sermon and we have to stop because of the overpowering sound coming from the roof next door. Now the church received a letter from the fire chief denying the request, since activating the siren at 10:00 o'clock on Sunday mornings has been a standing tradition since the 1930's.

In nearby Langley the Committee of Administration recommended to the consistory to accept a quotation "which would see the existing organ refurbished for approximately \$38,000.00 plus taxes." This proposal was accepted in principle, and after the congregation had been heard on this point, the consistory with the deacons approved the proposed action definitively.

At the Chilliwack consistory "the matter of individual cups at the Lord's Supper celebration is discussed. The consistory decided not to introduce any changes."

Although it does not affect me, I am happy with this decision. I have never yet been asked to administer the Lord's Supper in a congregation where they do use individual cups, and I hope that I shall never be asked to do so either. I don't even think I would accept an invitation to conduct that service. Retired ministers do have some privileges and possibilities.

Coaldale must be using their new church building by now. After many talks back and forth, the matter of water and sewer connections has finally been laid to rest by the acceptance of a motion "to accept Town Council's final offer for the additional \$15,000.00." The consistory voted "in favour of the motion taking into consideration that service costs for the town service should be less costly and there is also an annual insurance savings of \$1,200.00."

Even the press made mention of the case. "Council voted Monday to provide water and sewer services to the Canadian Reformed Church, provided the church pay 75 per cent of the cost of a loop between fire hydrants to guarantee sufficient water pressure in case of fire. Council agreed to pay 25 per cent of the cost of the loop and offered financial assistance to the church to pay its share." It is important to remember what we have stated in our Church Order, that the office-bearers should "endeavour by due respect and communication to secure the favour of the authorities towards the church."

The consistory of the Providence Church in Edmonton received a "letter from the Immanuel Church stating they agree with the idea of a combined bulletin. We suggest that the details be worked out between the bulletin committees."

"In respect to a question raised at a previous meeting, 'Should we not do something to approach the concerned members of other "reformed" churches?' " the consistory appointed a committee.

From the Burlington West bulletin we quote a few points as well.

We mentioned the singing in the park before. This year, too, this activity is being continued. "We tried to get permission from the City of Burlington for six evenings, but they allowed us only three Sunday evenings. We expect to have a working amplifier, since we received permission to use the City's electricity (!)" The dates set were August 2, 9, and 16. The intended starting time had to be changed somewhat due to interference caused by a nearby Salvation Army gathering.

Some time ago I was approached by one of our Abbotsford members who asked me what the reason was why the same speeches were broadcast via "The Voice of the Church"

that he heard before. I could not answer this question, because I no longer receive any reports and suchlike documents. I had an inkling, though, what the reason might be, and now I found the answer in the Burlington West bulletin.

From a meeting of the broadcasting committee we learn the following.

"Although we always have had a good response from listeners, A. expressed the difficulties of keeping up-to-date messages. Last minute cancellations or lack of participation from our ministers forces him to use previously aired messages."

The committee expressed its concern about this, and I join with them in this. They also pondered another question. "One of the questions is whether there is support to call a broadcast minister at some time. This is a long road ahead, but in my opinion, the only solution. It will be interesting to see the response."

I may add to this that, undoubtedly just like my colleagues, so I received a letter from the Canadian Reformed Broadcast Association, in which the same concerns were expressed. One of the questions in that letter was whether I would think that remuneration could be an incentive for contribution to "The Voice of the Church." No, I don't think so. The only way in which improvement can be achieved is when the importance of the work is seen and when promises to cooperate are kept.

In the early days (perhaps "ancient days" even) there were no computers or church secretaries, there were no modems, and even an electric typewriter was out of reach for most of our ministers. Yet there was no lack of sermons for the sermon series and I cannot recall that we had any problems with getting a sufficient number of speeches for the broadcasting.

What has changed since those days? Are our ministers burdened with too many things that do not belong to their immediate task? Is too much demanded of them, so that they are unable to cooperate in this important work? Or is the cause to be sought with the ministers themselves? I do not know and I do not point any finger into any direction. But there must be a cause.

When I look in our Yearbook, I see a respectable list of ministers in active service. Is it now really unreasonable to expect that each of those ministers in active service prepares four speeches once every two-and-a-half years? In my opinion, a "radio minister" is not the solution. It is too big and too high a concept for us, at least I don't think we should even contemplate such an enterprise within the foreseeable future.

Let's go on. "Despite our disappointment," Burlington South wrote when a call extended by them was declined, "we can certainly respect his decision, and be glad for and with the church at London who, after a long vacancy, and after having fourteen calls declined, have now again received a pastor for their congregation." I hope that they receive a "pastor and teacher," not just a "pastor."

Hamilton's bulletin told me something about Ancaster which I pass on. "A reminder that the Ancaster congregation will most likely begin building before the end of the year." It is a long time ago that I heard something about Ancaster and their building plans. Has the matter of the property finally been solved?

Something will be done in the Fergus and Orangeville areas about the training of the congregations to sing "unfamiliar tunes." The "unfamiliar tunes" meant here are the Psalm tunes. One of the reasons why they are "unfamiliar"

is, of course, that the ministers do not request the congregations to sing them.

In connection with this topic, I want to remark that I read Rev. VanDooren's article about the Book of Praise with interest and, for the largest part, with agreement. It "bugs" me, too, when there is a meeting at which we are invited to sing a song or songs that may be nice, but that take the place of Psalm singing. We have 150 Psalms in our Book of Praise and 65 Hymns. In my view, too, there is no need to introduce various songs that may be dear to the heart of all sorts of groups all around us, but do not add anything new to nor provide anything that is lacking in our own Book of Praise.

There is one point which I want to highlight from Rev. VanDooren's article. It is the line that "there are for us no other 'metrical Psalms' than those versified on the meters of the Genevan melodies." There is absolutely no need to change our Church Order and to include the provision that the Genevan melodies shall be used. The reason for my rejection of this suggestion is not that it comes from someone who is not a member of one of the churches. Even outside suggestions may be worth to be considered. The reason is that it is clear to every one who studies up on the history of our Book of Praise, that the Genevan tunes are the only ones that are to be used. It is also clear that, since the rhymings have been adopted by our broadest assemblies, rhymings that were made to fit the Genevan tunes, these tunes are the only ones to be used. And I don't think that there is any consistory among us that would even consider an alternate tune for one of the Psalms, if it were suggested by a member.

To my knowledge, the Reformed Churches have never considered it necessary to insert a provision regarding the tunes in their Church Order. Why should it have become necessary now all of a sudden? Forget about it! Besides, even a provision about tunes would not prevent the use of all sorts of outside songs at our society gatherings. The latter is a matter of wanting to continue the line chosen in the church or of not caring about that line. No provision could ever regulate that. It is a matter of the heart.

Yes, about those "unfamiliar tunes," remember? Well then, in Orangeville "the Organ Committee is to advise the organists to begin, in the Fall, with instructional sessions prior to the afternoon service regarding these psalms and hymns." In Fergus, "for the singing of unfamiliar tunes a committee is appointed to organize a sing-song evening."

Also from Fergus comes the following. "It is not the first time that this issue is raised and the very same rule is still in force: No Smoking on the premises of the Church. Actually it does not make a difference whether you agree or not, the rule is there and therefore to be obeyed."

It is a sad thing that there are always members who think that rules do not apply to them and that they are free to follow their own pattern and desire. Recently there was a fire in the barkmulch around the churchbuilding in Abbotsford. Apparently it was caused by a smouldering cigarette butt. One of the neighbours put it out and told one of the church members later on. "Yes," he is reported to have remarked, "there are a lot of your people smoking around the church."

These things should not happen, dear readers. When a consistory has decided that there shall be no smoking on the church premises, no one should act as if it does not apply to him or her. We are to obey those in authority over us, aren't we? This applies not in the last place to the office-bearers in Christ's church. It is also evident that the neigh-

bours and passers-by notice. This is not to the honour of the Lord or to the benefit of the reputation of the church.

The Brampton bulletin mentioned the action which is being conducted to get government grants for the independent schools.

"You may have seen some reports in the 'popular' press about the court case that is taking place relating to private schools. There are actually two separate actions: The first dealing with funding has been argued and is awaiting a decision. In this action the appellants were and are supported by the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools. The Alliance is also supporting the second case, which will deal with Bible credits for Christian High Schools."

I know too little about the second case to have a firm opinion about it, but my initial impression is that this action should not have been supported, but I may be wrong and shall await arguments in favour of the action, arguments which we could support, if there are any. For the time being I think that it is fine when we have a separate course teaching "Bible," but I do not think that we have the right to demand that this course shall be included in the credits that give a generally recognized High School Diploma. As an additional credit: fine. As a credit included in total number of those required for a diploma: no.

Boundary problems are everywhere, except in the Fraser Valley, although Port Kells has asked for a meeting with delegates from the neighbouring consistories to speak about a "catchment area," a euphemism for real or suggested boundaries. Here trouble could start.

In Western Australia efforts are evident to finally solve something. The Kelmscott consistory report enlightens us somewhat. "A proposal is tabled to come to a permanent arrangement with the Bedforddale congregation whereby we leave it up to the individual members to stay with their current congregation or not when they move to a different address. Once a commitment has been made by requesting an attestation, or by not requesting one at the time of moving, this will be regarded as binding. This would also hold for those arriving from a different congregation; once they have made their choice, it will be regarded as binding."

"These changes," Bedforddale wrote, "were prompted by the fact that Bedforddale's church building lies just within the boundaries of the Kelmscott congregation, with the result that some who live on the back door step of our church building were, according to the boundaries, members of Kelmscott. With the changes, our building is now within our own boundaries."

I think that I may perceive how some light from the Fraser Valley has finally filtered down to Western Australia: Free to change or not to change when you move and to choose the one and not the other when you move in from elsewhere, but once the choice has been made, this is firm and stands. This prevents a lot of trouble and heartache.

As for the developments in the Rockingham area: "I understand that there are now nearly 140 persons in the Rockingham ward. As the Press Release of the Consistory meeting will show, the date for the institution of the Rockingham church is set for Sept. 6." This is what Rev. Bouwman wrote in the Byford portion of the District Bulletin.

Of the same church we pass on that "the meeting is pleased with the fact that the total income for 1991/1992 would be so close to the budgeted figure and that all necessary expenditures could be met." Many a church bulletin contains a litany on the ever-increasing discrepancy be-



50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

CASEY AND MIEN LEYENHORST (nee Vandeburgt)

hope to celebrate, the Lord willing, their 50th Wedding Anniversary on September 23, 1992. They emigrated in 1948 with three daughters from Amersfoort, Holland to Pitt Meadows, BC; nine more children were received from the Lord. They are now retired from the dairy business and live in Surrey, BC.

Mom and Dad are in good health and enjoy their 49 grandchildren and 9 great-grandchildren.

Open House is on September 26, 1992 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the annex of Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church, 17473 - 60 Avenue, Cloverdale, BC.

Home address:
19329 - 32 Avenue, RR 2
Surrey, BC V4P 1M5

tween the budgeted amount and the actual income. It is refreshing when one can read of a congregation where the budget is almost or completely met. There are, and I mention this with joy and gratitude, more congregations of which the same can be reported.

Something I did not quite understand and which I actually consider to be sort of silly is that at the consistory meeting in Byford "concern is expressed over the fact that the ministers in the Metro Area have organized post-confession classes. This should be done by the consistories, not by the ministers."

A consistory may express the wish that the minister might find time to organize a post-confession class, but I cannot see any reason at all why the consistory should organize this. It is to be praised in the minister(s) when he (they) can find the time to prepare for such classes and to conduct them, but it is a riddle to me why they should not be allowed to do so on their own initiative. And how could a consistory ever organize such classes for members of various congregations? Strange.

The churches in South Africa apparently had a synod, too. The Pretoria bulletin states that a decision was made "to compose a booklet with Hymns for use in the worship services." They opted for a number of fifty to start with. A ques-

tion that was pondered was whether the training of ministers can be done in South Africa. And a third point I pass on the question whether there is room for the office of "evangelist."

We know very little about the life of our South African sister churches, and therefore I do not know whether they are trying to discuss again things that were discussed amply before. In any case, our readers know now some of the things going on there.

For the life of the churches there it would be beneficial if the question whether it is desirable to split the church at Pretoria into two autonomous churches were answered in the affirmative. For the benefit of churches in Canada I mention five arguments brought to the fore why it is not advisable to continue with two sections as is the situation right now but why splitting is advocated

1. The mutual interest in each other and supervision over each other does not function well;
2. the consistory is too large and the work is too extensive, so that too much emphasis is put on meetings and too little attention is given to the section;
3. the ministers are too much involved with the whole congregation and too little with their own section;
4. the one large church building keeps the congregation together and slows down the process of splitting;
5. the federation of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa is expanded."

Our readers will be familiar with the name "Palmetto." For several years it has been tried to come to some permanent "set-up" in Florida, but until now nothing has materialized. It is an impossibility to appoint elders to have the oversight over people who spend a limited time in Florida and who remain members of the church where their domicile is. No church has the right to do this, let alone a broader assembly.

"In time we hope to institute an American Reformed Church in Palmetto, Florida, U.S.A.," we read in a News Bulletin, Vol. 1, No 1. An ambitious program has been drawn up for a meeting scheduled for September 3rd in Burlington. From the points to be discussed we quote the following:

"to establish a capital fund of \$20,000.00 U.S. from interest-free loans of \$500 and \$1000 or by donations.

to purchase a home preferably in Coach House Park, Palmetto, to accommodate guest ministers.

to name the group AMERICAN REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, PALMETTO, FLORIDA.

to rent a Post Office Box as permanent mailing address.

to publish a Newsletter in the months of September through June.

to invite the retired ministers and professors, with free accommodation only.


to request the church at Grand Rapids and the one at Burlington East to accept contributions for the American Reformed Fellowship and to issue formal tax receipts."

As our readers will realize, choice of the above points out of a total of twenty is arbitrary, but it gives you a picture of what is being planned.

Herewith I have to take leave of you for this time. Once again I am not certain that this medley can be published in its entirety in one issue; if not, you have something to look forward in the next issue of our beloved *Clarion*.

So long then, the Lord willing.

Yours truly

VO 

Some Counter Remarks

By J.D. Wielenga

Prof. Geertsema added "Some Remarks" in critical comment on my article of April 8, 1992 (published in *Clarion*, Vol. 41, No. 11, June 5, 1992) under the title "Answer to a good question." I would like to make some counter remarks, to keep the discussion going.

Much good to say

Prof. Geertsema writes that I am "in conflict with the intentions and decisions, as well with the way of speaking of our major assemblies." In his opinion I have "rather sharp criticism" of our synods, and have "not much good to say about the way they deal with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church."

Initially, his verdict surprised me not a little. I thought I went out of my way to defend the integrity of our synods in this matter. In fact, I have always been thankful that they stayed the course set in 1977, in spite of considerable pressure out of the churches to terminate the Ecclesiastical contact with the OPC and to rescind the decision of 1977 "to recognize the OPC as a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ as confessed in Art. 29 of the Belgic Confession" (*Acts 1977*, Art. 91, II, page 41). I had much positive to say about our synods, just like Classis AB/MB which in positive sense referred to the decisions of our synods and based on them its judgment on the Denver-request.

Second thoughts

I may have to rethink my position if the article by Prof. Geertsema is a true reflection of the real meaning of the synod decisions. He claims that I give a misinterpretation of their decisions according to my wishful thinking, instead of the correct interpretation according to their intentions and way of speaking. No wonder my article was positive and supportive of our synods!

ARTICLE 29

THE MARKS OF THE TRUE AND THE FALSE CHURCH

We believe that we ought to discern diligently and very carefully from the Word of God what is the true Church, for all sects which are in the world today claim for themselves the name of Church. We are not speaking here of the hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church along with the good and yet are not part of the Church, although they are outwardly in it. We are speaking of the body and the communion

However, I don't think I went by wishful thinking in my interpretation of our synods, but rather by the premise that they would of course not be ambiguous, confused and contradictory. An honourable assumption, I believe, but obviously naive, at least if Prof. Geertsema's article represents the correct interpretation of the way our churches deal with the OPC.

The terms in the debate

To prevent short-circuiting the debate, it may be good to clarify the terms we use. A point in case is Prof. Geertsema's contention that it is wishful thinking to claim that the churches in 1977 "established a sister church relationship with the OPC." That is a misrepresentation of what I wrote. I wrote that the Ecclesiastical Contact we established with the OPC was established with a "sister church in the confessional sense," with the aim to establish a "sister church relationship with the OPC in the church political sense." It was far from me to criticize 1977 for not having entered into a "sister church relationship in the church political sense" and to ascribe that failure to political machinations, "something dirty." It was not possible under the circumstances. My word-play on the term "church-political"

may have been unsuccessful and possibly out of place, but it clearly applied to the exclusion of "intercommunion and pulpit exchange" under the rules for Ecclesiastical Contact, not to the form of Contact itself. I wrote that I found those stipulations, at least concerning "intercommunion," somewhat meagre, confusing and unrealistic, given the fact that we recognize the OPC as a "sister church in the sense of the Confession."

I cannot understand that someone would deny the status of the OPC as a "sister church in the sense of our Confession." When our synod in 1977 recognized the OPC as "a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ as confessed in Art. 29 of the Belgic Confession," our synod recognized that the OPC is a lampstand (Rev. 1-3), just like the Canadian Reformed Churches. We said that the OPC belongs with us to the circle of churches in whose midst the Lord Jesus Christ walks. We said that the OPC belongs to the Catholic Church which the Son of God gathers in the unity of the true faith, just like the Canadian Reformed Churches Synod 1989 reaffirmed the "recognition of the fact that the Canadian Reformed Churches and the OPC share the common bond of faith" (*Acts 1989*, Art. 94, D. Cons.

l,3). Same synod deemed it necessary to remind one of the churches that Art. 27 B.C. applies to the OPC and that the words “with heart and will” in Art. 27 imply that “the willingness to unite is of primary importance in any relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship.”

If the OPC is a lampstand in the circle of the one Catholic Church to which also the Canadian Reformed churches belong, by the grace of God, then you have two lampstands, two sister lampstands, twin-sisters, even though not identical twins: we have different Confessional Standards and a different Church Polity; the sisters, so to speak, use a different cook-book and maintain different house-rules.

One can not leave it at that, however. The mutual recognition of churches that they together belong to the one circle of the Catholic Church, obliges them to *formalize* that recognition of one another in the form of a relationship of mutual support and joint action etc. “Christ shed His blood also for the *federation of churches*” (K. Schilder). “The willingness to unite is of primary importance in any relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship” (Synod 1989). “The will to unity is the primary mark of the true church” (K. Schilder). There is the obligation of “sister churches in the confessional sense” to seek a “sister church relationship in the church political sense.” The mutual recognition must be formalized. It must be given expression in church political form.

Our churches in 1977 immediately understood that obligation to give “expression [to the] fellowship with the OPC” (Art. 91, III, Cons. B. page 41). (Note by the way, that Synod 1977 and Synod 1989 are not afraid to speak of “fellowship” with the OPC; the rather sharp distinction Prof. Geertsema makes between “Fellowship” and “Contact” is not in accordance with the “way of speaking” of our synods; they use the words interchangeably.)

How now do you church politically formalize the mutual recognition as true churches? Historically the Reformed churches are familiar with two forms: Ecclesiastical Correspondence and Federative Unity. The first form was used to formalize the unity with true churches in foreign countries with whom there would be Federative Unity – the second form – if only they would be located in the same country. Such organic unity is ideal, for the best expression of fellowship is when the sisters together live in the same house, i.e. form one confederation of church-

es. It’s given with the “will to unity,” that mark of the true church.

Synod 1977 had the will and understood the obligation and logically was thinking in terms of “correspondence” in order to formalize church politically the recognition of the OPC as sister church in a foreign country. However, there was an impediment: the OPC found the “rules for correspondence” uncomfortable, too close for comfort. The OPC offered us a “Fraternal Relationship” instead. The impediment to that form was, that to us it was “too vaguely defined and too broad for use by our churches,” not close enough for comfort. So we established the temporary form of Ecclesiastical Contact with the purpose as yet to come to “full correspondence expressing the unity of the true faith.” We had recognized the unity in faith, we reaffirmed in 1989 that we share the common bond of faith, we had established that there was fellowship between both churches, but we could not yet express this fellowship in the desired form of “full correspondence,” let alone “federative unity,” organic unity. Note the adjective “full”: does “the way of speaking” of Synod 1977 not betray that our churches at that time understood the Ecclesiastical Contact as a lesser form of “correspondence” with a foreign sister church which we hoped to change into the form of “full” correspondence? It was a form of “correspondence,” only not yet “full correspondence.”

Confusion of terms

At this point I have to admit that in my thinking about the OPC I never distinguished properly between the two forms of church political sister church relationship with true churches. I too quickly assumed that we were aiming at organic unity in one federation, not just correspondence. The reason probably was that the “will to unity” requires the ideal form of Federative Unity, and cannot settle for Correspondence if there is no necessity by reason of distance. In my thinking, that necessity never existed. We have American churches in our federation. The Christian Reformed Churches are spread over two countries and yet form one federation. It is unnatural to let national borders dictate the form of unity between churches and unnecessarily prevent them from realizing the unity of the Catholic Church in federative unity. I think that was the form of unity for which Calvin was prepared to wade through seven oceans(!) to achieve. I

can imagine that he was nostalgic for the organic unity of the Unica Catholica in the world which the Reformation was unable to maintain or reestablish.

With that all, I was mistakenly under the impression that when our synods began to speak about “impediments to full correspondence,” I automatically understood them as impediments to Federative Unity. And if they did not mean it in that way, I still think they should have meant it in that way. For the following reasons.

Ground rules

There are ground rules for proper interpretation. Prof. Geertsema will recognize in his own profession, exegetics, that he is on the wrong track if his interpretation of a given text brings him into conflict with another text. Or take one of the ground rules in the Regulations for our Major Assemblies: “A motion to amend is not a proper amendment if it nullifies the main motion or is not germane to it.” Such a motion is not admissible. It is unlawful.

By this principle, any interpretation of the Ecclesiastical Contact and its rules which is not germane to or nullifies the “main motion,” namely the recognition of the status of the OPC as a true church, is unlawful and inadmissible. The rules for Contact must be understood in the light of the basis on which this Contact rests, and to which this Contact meant to give expression, namely the unity in faith and the fellowship we have with the OPC – that fellow lampstand in the Lord’s circle of churches.

After 1977 our synods began to speak of the confessional and church political divergencies as impediments to full correspondence. By the above principle, it is unlawful to interpret this as if the divergencies make the recognition of the OPC as true churches questionable and in fact suspend the decision of 1977.

In 1977 the divergencies were no impediment to correspondence. Something else was the impediment. Lawfully the divergencies can only be an impediment to the ideal form of fellowship, namely Federative Unity, a unity which requires the same confessional standards and church order. If the divergencies are not an impediment to the recognition of the OPC as a true church, they can only be an impediment to organic unity, not to correspondence. Otherwise we are saying that we cannot treat the true church as a true church, and in that case we are us-

ing the Contact in fact to find out if the recognition of the OPC was correct or not. Then the Contact in fact *suspends* that recognition of 1977 while 1977 itself says that that Contact *gives expression* to that recognition of the status of the OPC. Therefore, if Synod 1986 says that the divergencies are an impediment to come to full correspondence, the term Full Correspondence lawfully can only mean Federative Unity. Nobody is perfect in speaking. I take it that synod used unfortunate formulations. But that may be wishful thinking indeed.

In the same way I interpret the stipulations that the rules for Contact do not allow for intercommunion and pulpit exchange. It take it that our churches in their synods thereby said to their members: "Children, the Canadian Reformed Church is our house, and the OPC is our sister's house. Her house is a good house (Art. 29, a lampstand), but her house is not yet our house also. We hope to come to live under one roof one day, but as long as that has not been accomplished: you eat and sleep here, and our sister's children there. No intercommunion. And I cook your meals, and our sister cooks them for her children. No pulpit exchange. The OPC is a good house, and we have to respect that, but it is not ours yet, there is no organic unity yet, no Federative Unity."

I can live with this arrangement, although I find it a bit meagre, confusing and unrealistic, as I wrote. But at least it is an "amendment" that does not "nullify the main motion," the recognition of the OPC as a true church. It would be different, however, if I would have to interpret synods as saying: "Children, you may not eat and sleep in the OPC house, for it is not a good house. It is dangerous, it is unhealthy. And you can tell the OPC children that they are quite right if they leave their house and want to move in with us. Even give them a hand, facilitate their move as much as possible. They are very welcome and we will gladly take them in, and we seriously warn you never to move in with them. It is not a house with which we can have correspondence. It is not a good house according to the marks of a good house, according to Art. 29 B.C." In that case the "amendment" would nullify the "main motion" and not be "germane to it."

Double-talk?

Prof. Geertsema's article seems to imply that our synods must be read precisely in the second sense, the inadmissible sense, in my view. He begins

his article with a strong endorsement of the decision of 1977. It must be maintained, and the apparent weaknesses of the OPC are no argument against maintaining our recognition of the OPC as a true church as confessed in Art. 29 B.C. Our own churches also have their weaknesses. We also have weeds in our garden, cracks in our window and leaks in our roof. Both churches are true, and both churches have weaknesses. They are equally lampstands, blemishes and all.

So far so good. But towards the end of his article we hear different sounds: the ecclesiastical contact is meant to work towards a sister relation "both church politically and fully confessionally." Here he picks up the distinction I made between sister church in the church-political sense and sister church in the confessional sense. He says that neither has been established, church-politically not at all, and confessionally not fully. As he writes this in comment on the distinction I made between "sister church in the sense of the Confession" (Art. 29, a lampstand) and "sister church in the church-political sense" (either in the form of correspondence or in the form of organic unity), the conclusion can hardly be escaped that then the OPC is actually not "fully" a true church as confessed in Art. 29 B.C. In the end of his article Prof. Geertsema seems to take back what he maintained so emphatically in the beginning of his article.

The transition from "fully confessionally a true church" to "not fully confessionally a sister church" is made where he writes under remark 5 that "our churches have clearly stated that they view the matter of the fencing of the Lord's Supper not just a church-political matter but one of discipline and doctrine, which means: of confession."

I have no objection that our churches, alarmed by "new developments," restated the old fact that there are divergencies in church polity and confession between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the OPC, but I do object that Prof. Geertsema turns this into the statement that "fully confessionally" the OPC is not a sister church. After all, as recently as 1989 our churches have reaffirmed the common bond of faith with the OPC and applied Art. 27 B.C. to the OPC.

In the beginning of his article Prof. Geertsema fully honoured that fact: both churches are true churches, both churches have weaknesses. Weaknesses in showing the marks of the true



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Please be advised that the West Tamar Free Reformed Church has changed both its name and address as follows:

Free Reformed Church of Legana

PO Box 1176
Legana, Tasmania 7277
Australia

CHANGE OF ADDRESS:

Canadian Reformed Church of Coaldale, AB

929-20 Avenue
Coaldale, AB T1M 1B3

church do not negate those marks. But at the end of his article he seems to take this back. Does he say "yes" and "no" to the OPC at the same time, in one short article?

My fears in this respect are confirmed by the fact that Prof. Geertsema omits to address what for me is the heart of the matter in the Denver-request and therefore printed in italics in my article: "If it is a church of the Lord, then it is a work of the Lord, 'she is His own creation,' and one cannot ignore a creation of the Lord as not good enough to join or stay with, without insulting the Lord. That is the real reason...etc." Not addressing this central issue is an incomprehensible omission, unless indeed it was implicitly addressed: the OPC is not yet "fully" a work of the Lord, therefore the ordinances of the Lord confessed in Art. 28 do not fully apply yet.

Double standard?

Prof. Geertsema agrees with the Denver-church that Classis AB/MB used

a "different measure than the churches in general." The Denver-church complains that Classis asks of them what our churches in general do not ask of the Canadian Reformed Churches themselves and their members: the Canadian Reformed Churches do not enter into ecclesiastical unity with the OPC and they do not allow their members to have Holy Supper communion in the OPC, while Classis AB/MB sends the Denver church back to the OPC to do just that. A double standard.

But it wasn't, unless the churches in general meant the Contact to nullify the recognition of the OPC as true church, and used it as a vehicle to find out if the OPC is indeed a true church, contrary to the decision of 1977 which established the Contact as expression of and on the basis of the recognition of the OPC as true church to which Art. 27 through 29 B.C. apply. No double standard, unless our churches in general are guilty of double-talk. In that case Classis AB/MB rightly refused to follow the churches in general, and held the churches to their consistently maintained affirmation of the OPC as true church.

I want to hold Prof. Geertsema also to his emphatic affirmation of the status of the OPC as true church. He says that the OPC and the Canadian Reformed Churches are both true, and have both weaknesses which do not negate that status. If he wants this statement to be taken seriously, he must either say that the Denver brotherhood could not lawfully separate from the OPC on the ground of those weaknesses, or he must say that I can lawfully leave the Canadian Reformed Churches and lead the congregation of Coaldale out of the federation of churches on the ground of the weaknesses in our churches. Would he not admonish me with reference to the ordinance of God confessed in Art. 28? I expect him to be among the first to do that. But why is he then asking of Coaldale what he does not ask of Denver? Is that not a double standard? Or are both the OPC and the Canadian Reformed Churches only equal in the beginning of his article, but is one of them more equal in the end? It's either double talk or double standard.

Clarification needed

There is clearly no confusion about the recognition of the OPC as true church. All synods since 1977 have emphatically maintained it. Prof. Geertsema does too.

There seems to be confusion, though, about the "full correspondence" to which the divergencies may be an impediment. If wrongly understood, the terminology can easily lead to treating the OPC as no true church at all yet, in word and in deed. Maybe we must rescue our synods from their own confusing terminology in order to maintain the integrity of our churches in the world. We can do that by interpreting "full correspondence" as actually meaning for all intents and purposes "organic unity," or "federative unity." The best thing would be to have another look at the concept of "Fraternal Relations" and use that form of fellowship as a vehicle to discuss the divergencies with the ultimate aim to come to organic unity. I believe that Classis AB/MB, and now also Regional Synod West, have done their share to keep our churches honest.

Answer to new question

In the meantime Rev. Van Oene also reacted to my article, by replacing his original question with a new question, the "big question," namely: "Who is the one to decide whether a certain group can affiliate with a foreign federation? Is that not the group itself?"

Rev. Van Oene admits that we have the right to deny a request for affiliation with our federation if we disapprove of the reasons for the request. At the same time he denies us the right to tell the group which requests the affiliation that it should have affiliated with a federation of true churches at the place where they are.

The problem is that the reason for denying this particular request happened to be precisely the rejection of this group's reason not to affiliate with the true church at their place.

We do not only have the right, but we have the duty to tell the group the reasons for denying their request. We have the right and the duty to tell them that we can not receive them because on the ground of their own information and stated reasons, they belong according to our Confession in the OPC, and we cannot go against our own Confession and become co-responsible for going against the ordinance of God concerning the unity of His church.

I may be wrong, but I sense in Rev. Van Oene's remarks his distaste of everything that bears a slight likeness to hierarchy and lording it over others. That distaste must not turn into its opposite: the embrace of a slight likeness

to the freedoms and rights of the autonomous subject. The water is as wet and deep on the left side of the boat as it is on the right.

Lording it over the church

This brings us to a final counter remark at Prof. Geertsema's address. He is of the opinion that Classis AB/MB lorded it over the Denver church by denying it to adopt the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order of Dordt. Classis did not do such a thing. Since when is it allowed to break the unity of the church on the ground of weaknesses which in Prof. Geertsema's own words must not be placed in the "framework if Art. 29 of the Belgic Confession, therewith implying that that OPC is not a true church"? Besides, nobody said that the Denver church is not allowed to adopt for itself, next to the Westminster Standards, also the Three Forms of Unity. And as to Church Order: is it allowed to break the unity of the church for church-political reasons? Luther did not. He broke with the hierarchy only when the hierarchy persecuted him and did not allow him to confess the truth of Scripture. Was the Denver church persecuted for its Reformed convictions? The Presbytery urged "Mr. Pollock to lead the people of Christ Church under his pastorate to remain in the OPC and *help us to attain to a more perfect and reformed church*" (my emphasis). That is the language of Art. 28 B.C.: "...and serve the edification of the brothers and sisters, according to the talents which God has given them as members of the same body."

Prof. Geertsema's verdict on the decision of Classis AB/MB is, that it is "simplistic and not correct." What I miss in his article is that "normative speaking" about the church which he urged on us all during the eighties. That is what Classis AB/MB meant to do. It applied the norm of the Confession, which we believe is the norm of God to which we are all subject. Or is the Confession no longer allowed to lord it over us, and over the brothers in Denver? Classis AB/MB simply let the Lord lord it over its agenda, as the delegates had promised they would, in their credentials.

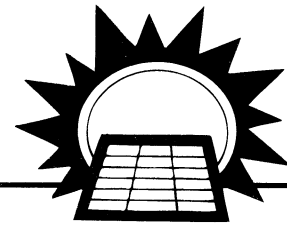
Simple, not simplistic. Correct, church-"politically correct."

A response to this article will be made in the next issue of Clarion.

The Editor



RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him.

James 1:12

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Many of us have heavy burdens to carry. It is not easy when you always depend on others because of a handicap. There are also illnesses, or loneliness, financial burdens, unemployment, and so many other difficulties in life. It sometimes makes you tired, and you don't see your way out anymore.

That is, unless we live as children of the Lord. yes, for when we belong to Him, then we can see our way out! The Lord tells us in His Word that all the difficulties in our lives are trials. A trial means, that God tests your faith. It means that God is busy with you. He does not leave you or forsake you, but He tries your faith! Even though that is difficult, very, very difficult at times, we still may know that the Lord is behind that trial.

The Lord wants to test our faith in Him. We can pass or fail a test. When we know we have to do a test, we prepare ourselves for it. We work, or practise, or study, so that we will be able to pass the test. The Lord makes us do the test of our faith in Him. He gives us illnesses, or handicaps, or persecution, or poor business, or other heavy burdens, so we can show to Him that we really believe in Him. When someone fails God's test, he moves away from the Lord. He is angry with Him because of a handicap, or he gives in to temptations by doing things that he is not allowed to do. He will live in darkness, and he will never be happy again, as long as he goes on in the darkness.

But we don't have to fail God's test. We can prepare ourselves for it. We can listen to God's Word every Sunday when we go to Church, we can pray, and sing, and read the Bible. When we do so, our faith will become stronger, it will grow. Then, through faith worked into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we will know that it is all God's grace in Jesus Christ that we may believe and belong to Him. We need difficulties – trials – to test our faith, so that it will grow. When there are no trials in our life, we may become too easygoing. We may forget to pray and to read the Bible. After a while we may not be prepared for the test of our faith anymore, for our faith will become very shallow. We may forget about the Lord, and we will be left all alone. Maybe we seem to have no difficulties, no trials, but there is no God in our life either. Therefore we can accept trials in thankfulness, for it shows that God is busy with us. We don't have to try to understand why certain things happen to us. We just have to remember that God is with us in our difficulties.

This does not mean that God accepts us only when we live without sin and live a perfect life. It only means that we put all our trust in God, and that we believe that out of grace, through Jesus Christ, we may

call upon the Lord. That means that we may live for Him, and to the honour of God, our Saviour. This feeling of dependency will give us rest and peace, even in difficult times. Our bodies may be sick, or deformed and imperfect. But our minds, our faith will be healthy, and we will be bearing fruits of our faith.

So, if we in faith endure trials while praising God and rejoicing in the work of our Saviour, we have passed, or "stood," God's test. Our faith then has been proven to be true. Then God has a promise for us, for to love God with all our heart leads to eternal life. This is the crown of life. It is not a reward that we have accomplished, but it is the victory of Jesus Christ in us.

*Whom do I have in heav'n but Thee?
Who shall on earth my refuge be?
Since I have Thee as rock and Saviour,
I seek no further wealth or favour.
Although my flesh and heart may fail,
God is my strength, I shall prevail,
For He, whose steadfast love is sure,
Will be my portion evermore.*

Psalm 73:8

Birthdays in October:

Alan Breukelman

Box 666

Coaldale, AB T0K 0L0

will celebrate his 26th birthday on October 17.

Nelena Hofsink

"Bethesda Clearbrook Home"

32553 Willingdon Crescent

Clearbrook, BC V2T 1S2

will be 32 on October 22.

John Feenstra

"ANCHOR" Home

30 Road, RR 2

Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

hopes to celebrate his 34th birthday on October 25.

Mary Ann De Wit

"Bethesda"

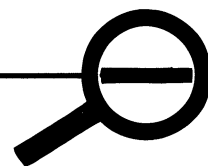
6705 Satchel Road, Box 40

Mount Lehman, BC V0X 1V0

Mary Ann's 36th birthday will be on October 28.

Congratulations with your birthday to all four of you.
Until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Hwy 20, RR 1
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0



What's happened to reading?

Under the above heading the editor of *The Banner*, Galen Meyer, a while back (March 16, 1992) wrote about the great decline in reading. This is a concern which I share. There is no reason to believe that the trend away from the printed page is all that different in our circles. If such a trend were to continue, it could have devastating effects on the health of the church and the ability of the people of God to withstand the evils of the day. G. Meyer writes many very worthwhile things respecting reading and I will be passing on a considerable amount. The headings are also his. What he writes speaks for itself.

The editor of *The Banner* starts off by relating a story of a pastor frustrated by the fact that people in his congregation, including office bearers do not read.

They say the cost is not the point. They will easily spend \$24 at a restaurant on occasion. But they do not customarily take the time to read - magazines, newspapers, or anything else. Help! What can be done?

I share this pastor's frustration, and I wish I could answer his question. It seems that, as a denomination, we are more and more reflecting the culture in which we live. Videos and movies are in; books and magazines are out. I dare say that most church libraries these days don't do very well. They are often squeezed into some basement room with a few dedicated volunteers who keep them open though business isn't particularly heavy. When it comes to setting aside money to buy new books, most church budgets don't include a sum big enough to cause a ripple at the annual congregation meeting. Some propose nothing at all. Why buy more books if people don't read them anyway?

These words get one thinking. How important are our church libraries to us? How many books do the study societies own. How about a personal home library?

The screen versus the page

G. Meyer continues by noting that attendance at public libraries is down and hours are being cut back. How different the world of video stores!

Some are open twenty-four hours a day. Watch all the people come and go for a while, young and old alike, and you'll begin to wonder what it means for the future that so many people fill their leisure time and feed their minds with little more than videos.

It is particularly distressing that young families are more inclined to stop at the video store than the library. They don't know what they are missing. Children raised on nothing more than a video diet never learn the power of words or develop an imagination of their own - which strikes me as an offense as serious as crimping their development as God's image-bearers. God is a God of speech and imagination, after all, and He made us like Himself: creatures designed to use words and create things. We treat these marvelous faculties far too lightly when we do little to develop them within ourselves or our children.

I don't mean to suggest that all videos are bad and that we ought to haul our VCRs to Goodwill. Many videos ought to be seen. There are sound classics among films too, just as there are among books. All I'm pleading for is a little balance.

When our own three kids were growing up, my wife and I kept no TV in the house...I enjoyed not having to act as television censor and constantly tell my kids what they couldn't watch and why. Besides, we didn't exactly leave them culturally deprived. They each received their own public library card at age five.

G. Meyer then touches an area that appears to be more and more neglected, namely, reading to our children.

Friends of ours read Victor Hugo's classic *Les Miserables*, a lengthy novel of sin and grace, to their two kids, both ele-

mentary school students at the time. Though the kids were often granted their plea for one more chapter, the book took months to finish. You can watch the best videos on the market with your kids, but the experience will never match that of this family. It is a treasure that will always remain with them.

Reformed and Not Reading? We Reformed people especially, it seems to me, ought to be avid readers. The Bible is God's authoritative Word for us, of course, but we wouldn't want to limit our reading to the Bible. We confess, after all, that God also speaks to use through the world around us. He made it all and directs it all somehow to display Himself. General revelation, we call it. But how can we understand it without reading the kind of books that engage it: history, biography, science, and even novels? A good novel holds up the mirror to life and reflects some truth about what it means to be human.

The American Booksellers Association recently published a study indicating that about 60 percent of American households did not buy a single book last year and that the average book buyer is graying rapidly. Two-thirds of all the books sold were popular fiction, nothing very challenging, in other words. The trend is rather sad.

Meyer ends by asking how many office bearers and study societies in the CRC took the trouble to read the Synod reports that were made available. With preparations for a fall synod in full swing, a similar question can be asked in our circles today. Let us be aware of losing the joy of reading and the apathy for many important issues of life that seems to go along with it. Let us stimulate the love for reading good books also in our children. The rewards are tremendous. **C**

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Hello Busy Beavers,

Thank you for your letters, and for all the puzzles, pictures and stories you sent to share with the other Busy Beavers.

It was great to hear from so many of you!
Keep up the good work!

SUMMER MEMORIES

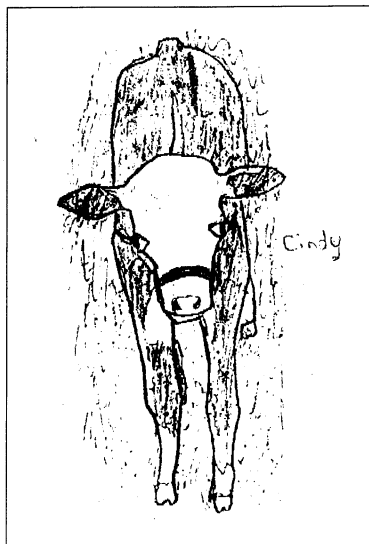
What Busy Beavers wrote about their holidays.

"So far over the holidays we went on a trip. First to Coaldale, then one day in Taber, and then we went to Kananaskis. We stayed in Kananaskis for six days. I liked it there, but it probably would have been better though if it wasn't raining the whole time. We did lots of hikes there, and saw lots of wildlife. The wildlife we did see was a badger, a porcupine, moose, deer, coyote, and lots of other things. It was great!"

by Busy Beaver *Jessica DeHaas*

"On a Friday in July we went to Wasaga Beach. We went to a cottage. We went to a zoo and fed fish, goats, and deer. And we went on a 30,000 Island boat cruise. We also went to the scenic caves. There was natural refrigeration. It was really cold in there. We also got frozen yogurt. We went on a bike ride. We had a campfire and we roasted marshmallows. We went to Chatsworth church on Sunday. We went to a Jesuit village. We went in the Jesuit part and the Indian part. We tasted some Indian cake. On the way home, Mom and Dad bought us some candies. I got an Indian doll for my collection.... When we got home we had Kentucky Fried Chicken for supper.

by Busy Beaver *Carrie Schuurman*



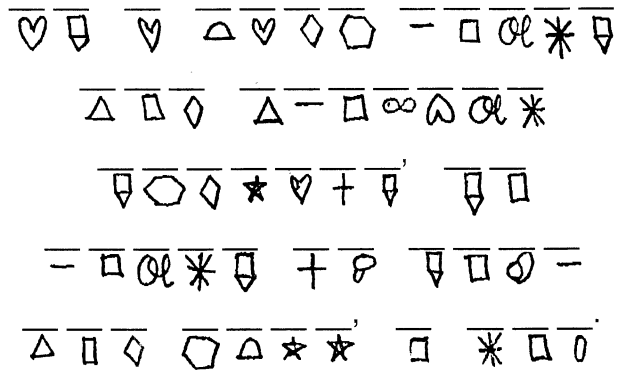
MY PET CALF

by Busy Beaver
Rachel Wierenga

Quiz Time!

a = ♥ h = △ o = □ w = ∞
d = ○ i = ♡ r = ◇ y = ♣
e = ★ l = - s = ▽
f = △ m = + t = ◊
g = * n = ℓ u = ∪

PICTURE CODE
by Busy Beaver
Andrea Vanderhorst



WHEN DID IT HAPPEN?

A challenging quiz
from Busy Beaver *Cheryl Van Anel*

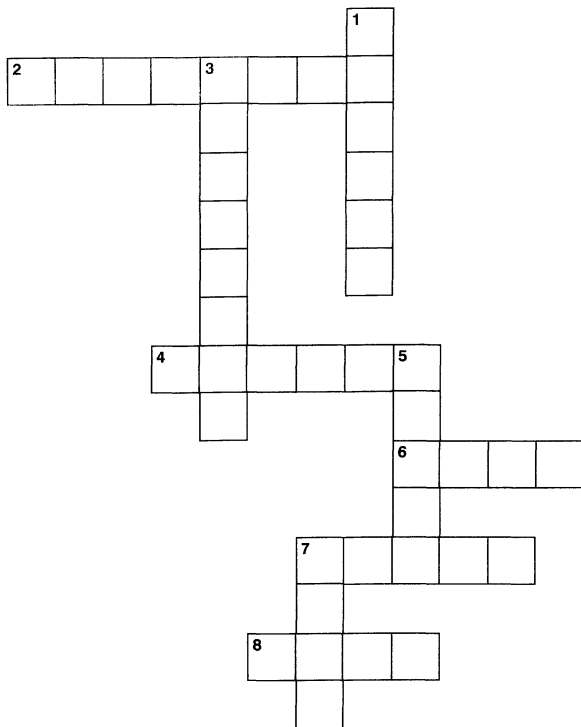
In each of these 3 groups are events that happened in Old Testament times. Read each group and number the events in the order in which they happened.

- A. _____ Abraham offers Isaac
_____ Joseph becomes ruler
_____ Crossing the Red Sea
_____ The great flood
_____ Jacob's dream
_____ God gives the Ten Commandments
- B. _____ Moses called from the burning bush
_____ The sun and moon stand still
_____ Baby Moses hidden
_____ Gideon lays down a fleece for a sign
_____ Samson and Delilah
- C. _____ Saul disobeys God
_____ Jonah preaches in Nineveh
_____ David kills Goliath
_____ Samuel anoints Saul
_____ Solomon becomes king

(See answers)

CAN YOU GET A HANDLE ON THIS?

from Busy Beaver Andrew Bos



Across

- Your name tag should be fastened to the handle of your _____.
- Find the knives and forks when you pull this handle.
- Get in or out using this handle.
- This handle is for a witch.
- Carry drinks and snacks easily using these handles.

Down

- This handle keeps you from burning your fingers.
- To find cups and saucers pull this handle.
- People carry these music makers from place to place so they need handles.
- Your bike has handles.

RIDDLE FUN FOR YOU

from Busy Beaver Amy Vanderhorst



- What do you say to a nasty bee?
- Why do bees have sticky hair?
- Why do bees hum?
- What time is it when a farmer looks at his bees?
- What insects write dictionaries?
- Why is the letter "A" like a flower?

(See answers)



From the Mailbox

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Sophie-Ann Ravensbergen*. We are happy to have you join us. Thank you for a pretty letter. I hope you will write again soon!

Welcome to the Club *Natasha Van Veen*. I see you are quite the collector!

Thank you for an interesting puzzle, *Natasha*. I know the Busy Beavers will enjoy it.

And a big welcome to you, too, *Jolena DeHaas*. I'm glad you had such a good time at Thunder Lake. Why do you think it has that name, *Jolena*?

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Andrew Bos*. I see you have been busy on your computer. Keep up the good work! Thanks for the puzzle, *Andrew*.

You have been keeping very busy, *Rachel Wierenga*! How is your calf doing now? Congratulations on your award, *Rachel*. We are all proud of you, I'm sure!

I'm happy to hear you had such a good summer *Andrea Vanderhorst*. Did you get a badge after your swimming lessons, *Andrea*? Bye for now.

Sounds to me as if you had a great summer, too, *Carrie Schuurman*. Would you like to write and tell us about your doll collection? I hope you get a pen pal soon, *Carrie*.

Your baby sister sounds fun to look after, *Tracy Lynn Malda*! I'm glad you had such a good trip this summer. You must have a great backyard, *Tracy Lynn*, with so much wildlife! I think the Busy Beavers would enjoy hearing more about it!

Hello, *Nicole Aasman*. It was good to hear from you again. How was your summer? How do you feel about being in school again?

Thank you for your entry in the Contest, *Tim Hordyk*. Keep up the good work!

I liked your letter *Alisha Hummel*. And thank you for the pictures, too. Did you do a lot of swimming this summer? Bye for now.

How did you do at swimming lessons, *Amy Vanderhorst*? I'm glad you had such a fun holiday! Thank you for sharing with the other Busy Beavers, *Amy*.

How was your summer *Breanne Meyer*? And how is school for you now? I hope you get a pen pal soon, *Breanne*.

You've been very busy, I see, *Cheryl Van Andel*! Thank you for the quiz. I do hope you had a good summer holiday, *Cheryl*.

How was your birthday, *Jessica DeHaas*? I see you had a very good holiday. Good for you! And thank you for your letter.

Hello *Anna Hordyk*. It was good to hear from you again. How was your summer? I'm looking forward to hearing from you again!

Answers

1. Buzz-off! 2. They have honey on their comb! 3. They don't know the words! 4. Hive o'clock 5. Spelling bees 6. A "B" always comes after the "A"!
C. 2, 5, 3, 1, 4
When did it happen? A. 2, 4, 5, 1, 3, 6 B. 2, 3, 1, 4, 5

Bye for now, Busy Beavers.

Hope to "see" you all next time!

Love to you all,
Aunt Betty

