

Clarion

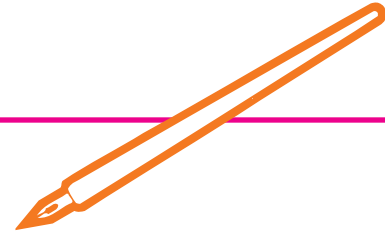
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Lest we forget



By R. Aasman



A Moment's Silence

It was a bitterly cold November morning with the temperature hovering around minus thirty degrees. The sky was grey. Snow was falling and adding to several inches already on the ground. Feet were shuffling and stamping in an effort to stay warm. Within an hour, most would start to feel the pain of the cold in their feet, hands and ears. But then they would head back to their cars and heaters and their warm homes. They would be fine with their hot chocolates and coffees and the assurance that our country enjoyed peace and prosperity.

There have been other November mornings where things were not as fine and peaceful as what we enjoy today. During the two great world wars of this century and the Korean War, our countrymen have found themselves on foreign beaches, fields and forests, trenches and swamps, engaged in battle. Many have experienced the bitter cold of winter and the snow under their feet. But they had no warm car to go to or a home where they could sip a warm beverage. They looked over landscapes which had been bombed out and looked like wastelands. They were constantly wet and cold and hungry. They listened to their comrades crying out in pain and dying. They knew that raising their heads would make them a target for a sniper's bullet. They killed and they were killed. In the sights of their rifles and machine guns they saw the faces of unknown men and boys – someone's father, someone's husband, someone's son. And they lived with the haunting image of killing that father or husband or son. Many of our countrymen had gone to war with enthusiasm. Some were bored with their lives at home and were looking for adventure. Some genuinely believed that it was important that they fight against the tyranny of a monster like Adolf Hitler. They learned just how horrible war could be and they sealed that horror with their own blood.

More than 1,500,000 Canadians served overseas during the wars of this century. More than 110,000 Canadian men and women gave their lives. That is about ten percent of Canada's total population as it stood at the beginning of the Second World War. Their graves can be found in seventy-four different countries around the world. Their lives and their futures were cut short in order to secure the peace and safety of others.

Every year on November 11, Canadians across this land gather together in some special place – a room, a memorial or a cenotaph. They gather together to remember those who have served and given their lives during the First World War (1914-1918), the Second World War (1939-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953). In my own community, there is a formal program at the local cenotaph. In spite of the bitter No-

vember cold in this Northern Alberta community and the falling snow, people come out in large numbers. They come out in respectful silence. Poppies which speak so deeply and eloquently are fixed to their coats. Since schools have the day off, a lot of school children are present as well. I see the principal of our Christian School across the road standing there with his wife and with another teacher and his wife. We nod a hello to each other. Quite a number of families from our church are present. Some fathers have obviously taken the morning off from work in order to take their entire family to this memorial. It is good to see that so many people still take very seriously the need to remember those who served and died in the fight to maintain peace for our country and our world.

In front of the cenotaph tributes and prayers are delivered, and there is the laying of wreaths. An elderly woman lays a wreath at the cenotaph. Very possibly she is a widow whose husband served in war and paid the ultimate price which was his death. A young child also lays a wreath at the cenotaph. Very possibly his great-grandfather died in war. A bugler plays the reveille and the *Last Post*. We sing *O Canada* and


God Save the Queen. A local minister reads Scripture and presents a meditation on the Scripture passage. I look around at the hundreds of people gathered there. I marvel that in our day and age where God and his Word are not granted the honour which is deserved, that God's Word is read out loud in the main street of the community. People are listening and they are respectful. Clearly when reflecting

*In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

over tyranny, war, death and peace, people are impressed with the fact that life is hopelessly empty when one does not reckon with Almighty God who upholds and governs all things. One hopes and prays that the opening of Scripture will make an impression on all those who hear and draw them to the faithful preaching of the Word every Sunday and the call to embrace Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Saviour. For only then will they know true peace.

The message at the Remembrance Day memorial is that the peace and freedom we enjoy today was served by so many people long ago. These are people whose names and faces we may not know. They went to war. Many were killed, wounded or imprisoned. It was not their choice or desire to experience such things, but they did it to stop the tyranny of the enemy and to secure peace for their country. They did that for other countries as well. As God's children, we clearly see the hand of God in this. We confess in Lord's Day 10 of our Heidelberg Catechism: "God's providence is his almighty and ever present power, whereby, as with his hand, He still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures,

and so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand." The wars of this century did not come about by chance but by God's fatherly hand. One way or another they even served his plan for the gathering, defending and preserving of his Church. We also see and give thanks to God that He used Canadian men and women to put to an end the tyranny of a man like Adolf Hitler and to restore peace. We have peace and freedom in our country. That is God's gift which allows us the freedom to live openly as God's children, to gather as the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, to have our own Christian schools and to evangelize without threat of arrest or imprisonment. That freedom is not found everywhere in the world. We may thank God that we have freedom and peace. We should make the most of the opportunity to serve God with our whole life and to share the gospel with those who have forgotten or never really heard the good news of Jesus Christ, the true and ultimate peacemaker.

On November 11, at 11 a.m., there is a moment of silence throughout the land: a moment of silence to remember those who served and died in war. We remember the horrors that many endured and the peace which they secured. That moment of silence should translate into an entire year of giving thanks to our heavenly Father who in Jesus Christ holds our lives securely in his hands so that we may enjoy the peace which passes all understanding – the peace of the cross of Golgotha. The greatest war of all has been fought and won. It is the war against Satan, sin and death. It is the war which was won through Christ's death and resurrection. He gave his life so that we might live. 

What's inside?

The old men are getting older, frailer, weaker. And yet every year on November 11th, they don the sixty-, even eighty-year old, uniforms and proudly display freshly polished medals. And they march. Some shuffle. Some need help. Some are pushed in wheelchairs. And yet they march. From the legion hall to the cenotaph. And there they remember. They remember friends and comrades who did not make it. Young men who died in the mud and the misery of Europe and Asia in two world wars and other fights for freedom. Who does not get a lump in his throat and a tear in the eye when he hears the "Last Post" and the "Reveille"? *Lest we forget... Je me souviens....* In this issue, both Rev. Richard Aasman in the editorial and Mr. John Smith in the meditation reflect upon Remembrance Day.

In our congregations are brothers and sisters, and especially the latter, who lead difficult, broken lives because of abuse suffered in their youth. They need our love, support and encouragement. In this issue you will find an article on this topic which is painful but necessary to speak and write about.

Rev. G.H. Visscher writes a review article about two books on the topic of divorce and remarriage. Divorce, another unpleasant topic, but one that needs to be written about.

For the rest, you'll find a Hiliter from the keyboard of the Rev. J. de Gelder, a Ray of Sunshine written by Mrs. Ravensbergen, and some press releases.

GVP



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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: C. Van Dam
 Managing Editor: G.Ph. van Popta
 Language Editor: J.L. van Popta
 Coeditors: R. Aasman, J. De Jong, J. Geertsema,
 N.H. Gootjes, G.Ph. van Popta

ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION
 46 Sulphur Springs Road, Ancaster, ON L9G 1L8
 Fax: (905) 304-4951 E-Mail: clarion@compuserve.com

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS: (subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
 One Beghin Avenue
 Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
 Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202
 Email: clarion@premier.mb.ca
 World Wide Web address: <premier.mb.ca/clarion.html>

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By John Smith

Remembrance Day

“... a time to be born and a time to die, ... a time for war and a time for peace.” (Eccl 3:2, 8)

November 11 is a day on which to reflect and to remember. Remembrance Day is a day that pushes us beyond the small Reformed communities to which we belong and reminds us that we shine as lights in a big universe. It is a day that jolts us out of our daily routines, and it reminds us that life is a lot bigger than our personal deadlines and plans. Remembrance Day reminds us that there is a time to be born and a time to die, a time for war and a time for peace: we forget that sometimes.

We will forget it much more easily than the old and stiff veterans, clad in their precious berets, blazers, and bits of uniform, decorated with medals. That's because those berets once had mud on them, the uniforms once had bloodstains, and each of the medals has a memory attached to it. The veterans know the price of the peace which we enjoy, the peace for which they fought, because they had comrades die beside them on the battlefield. It's a time which the marching veterans will never forget, and it's a time that the spectators do not remember. Isn't it ironic that the veterans put so much effort into the memorial ceremony, while so many pay so little attention? After all, we need Remembrance Day so much more than they do: they'll never forget, but we might.

How can we remember something which many of us have never experienced? Well, the survivors of war helped us to remember by taking symbols of the war and attaching meaning to them. But if we forget what the symbols mean, then Remembrance Day loses its effect, and we watch a ceremony which we do not understand. So let's remember.

One symbolic aspect of Remembrance Day is the date: November 11. At 5:10 a.m., on Nov. 11, 1918, 3 days of negotiations between the Allies under Field Marshal Foch and the German military leaders under Matthias Erzberger came to an end when the latter signed an armistice. As soon as the Germans left the negotiating table, Field Marshal

Foch dispatched a message by radio and telephone to the Commanders-in-Chief of every Allied battlefield, a message which began with the words: "Hostilities will cease on the entire front on 11 November, at 11 a.m. French time." The 11th of November was dubbed Armistice Day: it signalled the end of the First World War. And ever since that first Armistice Day, Canadians have set aside a day to commemorate those who lost their lives in the fight for freedom. From 1921 to 1931, Armistice Day was merged with Thanksgiving. It was not until 1970 that it was officially called "Remembrance Day."

Remembrance Day is a time to laugh, to rejoice in freedom and peace; it's a time to weep, to mourn those who died in the fight for peace. It's a time to keep silence, for 2 minutes. The cus-

In a military camp, the "Reveille" signals the beginning of the day; on Remembrance Day it is a reminder that the memory of the dead lives on; it symbolizes life.

tom of observing a moment of silence was started in 1919 at the suggestion of King George V of England. The king asked his people to observe 3 minutes' silence at 11 o'clock on the morning of November 11 in memory of the victims of the war and the declaration of peace. That first anniversary of the armistice found most people in the countries that had been involved in the war bowing their heads in reverent silence. Everyone dropped what they were doing and everything came to a standstill – trains halted in their tracks, cars and trucks stopped, and even ships at sea cut their engines. Since that time, 2 or 3 minutes' silence has always been observed on Remembrance Day. A few minutes of silence, to remember a time when in the sky the larks, still bravely singing, were scarce heard amid the guns below. A

few minutes of silence in which we appreciate how good it is just to be able to breathe freely, to stand up without getting shot at, to see a sunset in the sky, to hear birds sing.

Just before the two minutes of silence at every cenotaph, a lone bugler plays the "Last Post." In a military camp, the "Last Post" signals the end of the day; on Remembrance Day it symbolizes death. Just after the two minutes of silence, at every cenotaph, the lone bugler plays the "Reveille." In a military camp, the "Reveille" signals the beginning of the day; on Remembrance Day it is a reminder that the memory of the dead lives on; it symbolizes life.

Each November, some ten million bright red poppies burst into bloom, on the lapels of the men, women, and children of Canada. But did you know that the real thing blooms in the spring? In Flanders fields? During the First World War, some of the fiercest fighting took place in Flanders, Belgium, at a place called Ypres. The soldiers who did not know how to pronounce the name of the place called it "Wipers," "Bloody Wipers." Here the lush green fields were quickly turned into barren black wastes. But every spring the soldiers fighting in the trenches saw something wonderful: the black wastelands of battle would sprout vast stretches of scarlet: the poppies of Flanders' fields. Lt. Col. John McCrae, a Canadian artillery officer and military doctor, had just arrived in the middle of a fierce battle in the spring of 1915. For 17 days he worked without relief, with no time to bathe or change his clothes, and with only the briefest snatches of sleep. On one of those days, a special day, May 3, the enemy used poison gas: dead bodies lay everywhere. During a lull in the fighting, John McCrae was sitting in the back of an ambulance. He could see the growing cemetery where each grave was marked with a white cross, where the ground was covered with red poppies, and where his best friend had been buried the day before. And in the back of that ambulance, in the space of 20

minutes, he composed an unforgettable poem:

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*

This poem was published that same year and became famous the world round. Soon poppies gathered from the battlefields of Flanders were sold in Britain to support war expenses. The poppy became a symbol of the Allied war effort and of the soldiers who had died. After the war, the Canadian and American Legions adopted the poppy as a symbol of remembrance and of sacrifice. Yes, the poppies we buy each No-

vember were inspired by that famous poem of John McCrae.

And yet I fear that even the poppy is not as meaningful as once it was. Those who do not take the time to reflect will wear poppies for one shallow reason alone: lest they forget – that it's Remembrance Day.

We are looking towards a time when those who survived the wars are no different from those who fell in battle, when both alike are dead. We are looking towards a time when the berets,

**Like grass that withers, the
poppy fades, but the Word of
our God will stand forever.**

once spattered with mud, the bits of uniform, once stained with blood, and the rows of medals, each with a memory attached, will no longer be worn by veterans but will be tucked away in museums. And when the veterans are gone, who will remind our society of the horrors of war and the value of peace?

We can, and we must. Even though many of us do not have personal memories of war, we will never forget. Because we remember with the Word of God, which is much more enduring

than the symbols and leftover relics of war. We have more than a poppy. Poppies are bright and beautiful for the first two weeks of November, only to be discarded in the third. Like grass that withers, the poppy fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever. We point beyond the white crosses of the soldiers whose blood was shed in Flanders fields, who died not knowing the outcome of the war. We point to the cross of Christ whose blood was shed on Golgotha and who died knowing that He had won the victory. The dead who died in the Lord will hear much more than the Reveille of the lone bugler: they will hear the great trumpet blast of the archangel, and they will rise from the dead.

We observe Remembrance Day lest we forget the horrors of war, the miseries of sin. But we are not people who remember on Thursday and forget again on Friday. Because we do not pay homage to our glorious dead, but to our glorious God.

Mr. John Smith, a member of the Church in Burlington-Waterdown and graduate of the Theological College, is pursuing a doctoral degree at the University of Toronto.



Please, just listen!

By G. Ph. van Popta

Upon invitation I attended a Safe group meeting, not to speak but to listen. To go somewhere just to listen is not so easy for a preacher. Preachers tend to speak. But I was invited to listen. Listen, I did – listened and learned, and was moved to tears.

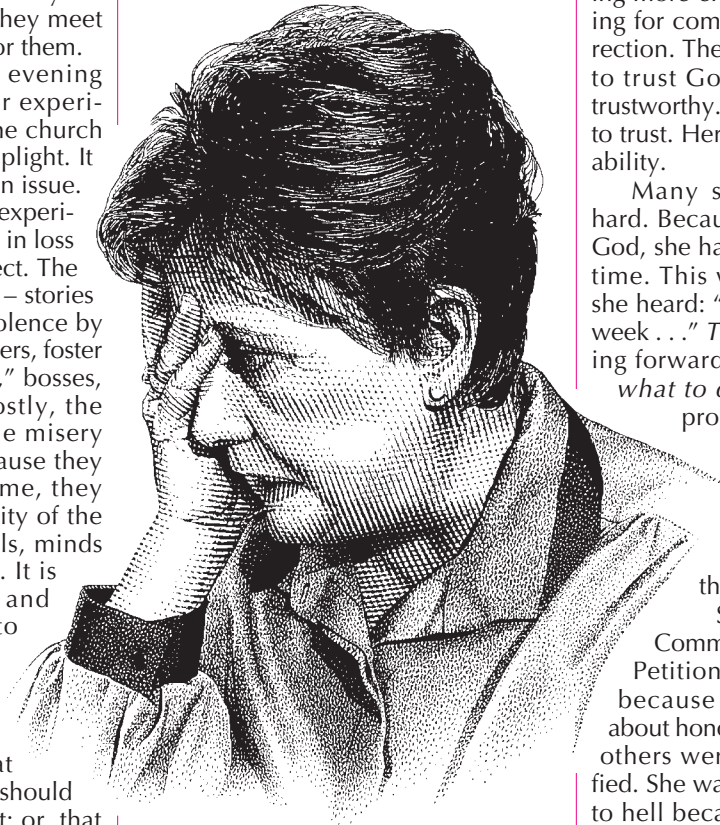
Safe is a group of sisters in the Lord who regularly meet together in the Golden Horseshoe region to support and encourage each other. What our sisters have in common is that they are victims of sexual abuse. As they meet bi-weekly, Safe is a life-line for them.

The women there that evening spoke about their past, their experiences, and the response of the church and its office bearers to their plight. It is not that they want to raise an issue. These our sisters in the Lord experience pain and lasting damage in loss of relationships and self-respect. The stories were heart-wrenching – stories of sexual abuse and other violence by grandfathers, fathers, step-fathers, foster parents, neighbours, “friends,” bosses, colleagues, and others. Mostly, the women had experienced the misery when they were young. Because they were still children at the time, they could not handle the enormity of the pain and betrayal. Their souls, minds and psyches were damaged. It is haunting them to this day, and they find it very difficult to speak about it with office bearers whom they see as “authority figures.”

A number of the woman spoke about office bearers at home visits telling them they should not talk about things like that; or, that they had to forgive whomever had hurt them. And this after working up the nerve for perhaps a year to speak about it! They also spoke about compassionate office bearers who listened, came back to visit, and did their best to help. However, very sadly, often they are ignored, not taken seriously, misunderstood, not receiving the help and support they so desperately need and want.

A sad story

To put it into focus, let me tell the story of one of the women. She has been struggling for years with the emotional, psychological and spiritual effects of incest. Her ability to trust had been ruined through an incestuous relationship imposed by her father. She did not know what trust was anymore. The abuse had taught her not to trust. Although she made an external profes-



sion of faith, she did not trust God. She did not know *how* to trust. It was an unfamiliar concept. She did not realize that she was incapable of trusting. She *thought* she trusted God. She had learned to become whom she was told to be, not the person God had created her to be. She did not know the difference, or even that there is a difference.

When, many years later, she learned the difference and that she actually in truth did not trust God, the new awareness was shocking and frightening.

Her father faithfully took the family to church. She was told to listen to the minister because he preached God's Word. The hypocrisy was not lost on the young lass as she sat in the pew and saw her dad in the elders' bench.

As she got older, she started listening more closely to the sermons, looking for comfort, help, answers and direction. The minister said that we have to trust God. Indeed we do. God is trustworthy. But, she did not know how to trust. Her dad had robbed her of the ability.

Many sermons came across as hard. Because she was unable to trust God, she hadn't prayed for quite some time. This worried her greatly. Then she heard: "If you haven't prayed for a week . . ." *That's me*, she thought, leaning forward. *Yes, then what? Tell me what to do!* ". . . then you have a problem . . . *Yes, I know! But what should I DO!?*" . . .

and God is not pleased with you." This statement left her reeling, feeling like she'd been hit over the head with a baseball bat.

Sermons on LD 39 (Fifth Commandment) and LD 51 (Fifth Petition) were especially difficult because often blanket statements about honouring parents and forgiving others were made and left unqualified. She was convinced she was going to hell because she could not forgive her dad for a lifetime of pain and a broken soul.

Even the comforting words of LD 1 were gut-wrenching for her: *I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.* She called it the "B-word." *Belong.* To her, belonging to someone meant annihilation. She had *belonged* to her dad. He could do with

her as he wished. It was a lie that had become truth for her when she was just a little girl. Her father had stolen her body and soul and used them at his sick pleasure. He would say, "You belong to me." She was her dad's property to be used and abused. When she heard from the pulpit that she belonged to Jesus body and soul, she would retch. Was she just a piece of property? Because of incest, that which our catechism puts forward as our only comfort in life in death made the young girl heave.

These childhood lessons were deeply ingrained and internalized. Because they were taught by a father, they were not easily unlearned. This dear sister, now in her forties, is still busy unlearning them. She grew up with a ruined psyche, her soul tampered with, and emotionally crippled. She is still unlearning – learning to replace lies with truth.

The costs are uncountable. There is the cost of lost relationships; the cost of always feeling less, knowing that she will never be what she would have been had her youth been healthy; the financial costs of years of counselling, as well as the thousands of hours "lost" by this.

Despite the pain that will never go away, her story has a pretty happy ending. God used years of thorough counselling from a skilled psychologist to teach her to trust again. Daily, she is learning to trust God more. She is happy to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. She now knows the difference between belonging to her Saviour and "belonging" to her dad, although this concept alone took three to four years of intensive work to perceive and internalize. She walks with the Lord and is very happy to do so. Yes, a pretty happy ending! But we need to realize that such happy endings are very rare. Many abuse victims go lost – lost to family, to the church, to the Lord. It's to weep!

The story of this courageous survivor and godly woman ends with a plea. She asks that the church, in its preaching and pastoral work, realize that there are always those who, because of abuse, don't feel part of the "We." Among us we have those who, because of stories like hers, cannot trust and cannot pray. In their struggle they feel alienated from the rest of the congregation. Blanket WE-statements about how we are the covenant people; about how we know where our



help is while the world doesn't; we trust in God; we believe in and have the truth – such blanket WE-statements don't do much to help them. She pleads that we ministers, in our preaching, also address with encouragement those who are struggling and who don't feel part of the "We."

To her, belonging to someone meant annihilation.

She also pleads for understanding and patience. She did not know where to turn when her spiritual confusion was at its ugliest. If she had told an office bearer about how the "B" word made her want to vomit, would there have been any understanding? If she had said that she did not want to belong to Jesus Christ, would the response have been a compassionate, "Why do you say that?" or a judgmental, "You shouldn't say that!" She pleads for the presence of those who can listen, pray and comfort without judging or telling one what to think or how to feel. She knows of others in our churches who live a very fragile existence, who are in constant mental pain, who struggle to live, to live with the Lord, and who are trying to make sense out of a big mess. She pleads for obvious understanding and compassion that we may be the healing community we are called to be.

Ways to help

How can we help sisters or brothers in our churches who have been sexually abused? First, we need to listen and believe. It takes huge amounts of courage for victims to speak about what they have gone through. They are burdened with guilt and shame. When they begin to speak about the abuse, just listen. Don't say too much.

Take them seriously. It is not ours to judge the case. Investigations of alleged crimes are the business of the police and the law courts, not ministers and elders. It is our task to listen, to comfort, and to point to the cross, the source of all comfort and healing. As we point to the only hope, realize that, for them, it is almost impossible to perceive it.

Pray in the public prayers for victims and for abusers. Pray that abuse may stop. Let it be addressed in sermons. Realize that every congregation has those who are struggling, who don't feel part of the community, who carry a lot of pain and feel alienated.

Deal firmly and pastorally with perpetrators. Insist that they learn to know the damage they have done. There are courses available for sexual offenders that leave them with little doubt about what they have done. For reconciliation to take place between offender and victim, the offender first needs to understand what he has broken.

Sometimes abuse victims are unable to speak about their experiences. Suggest to them to write about it. A

SOME HELPFUL LITERATURE

- *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse*, by Dan. B. Allender. NavPress, 1990, rev. ed., 1995.
- *When Child Abuse Comes to Church*, by Bill Anderson. Bethany House, 1992.
- *More Than One: An Inside Look at Multiple Personality Disorder*, by Terri A. Clark. Thomas Nelson, 1993.
- *Silencing the Voices: One Woman's Triumph Over Multiple Personality Disorder*, by Jean Darby Cline. Berkely Books, 1997.
- *Eros Redeemed: Breaking the Stranglehold of Sexual Sin*, by John White. IVP, 1993.
- *Sexual Offending and Restoration*, by Mark Yantzi. Harold Press, 1998.
- *A Handbook for a Counselling Services Network*. Counselling Services Network Committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches, 1998 [Contact E. Vaisanen @ (905) 945-0975]

colleague of mine receives letters from a parishioner who cannot speak about her past but can pour her heart out on paper. Regularly, he finds letters in his mail box. Writing the letters, mailing them, and knowing that her minister is reading them is very helpful for her.

Be understanding and sympathetic when faced with the more severe possible results of abuse. Some abuse victims cut themselves. Don't tell them they should not do that. They already know that! Ask why they are cutting themselves? The answer you will probably get is because then they feel something. After years of being dulled and broken, and not feeling anything, the feel of pain is better than nothing. Some make suicidal threats, gestures or attempts. Do not be judgmental. These are attempts to escape flashbacks, the pain and misery. Always, they are cries for help.

Do not give a list of things they have to do. To an abuse victim, unasked-for advice is like judging. Very likely the victim will not be able to do what you tell her to do anyway.

Realize that Dissociative Identity Disorder (or Multiple Personality Disorder) is a real phenomenon. It is an adaptation often caused by extreme physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse suffered in early childhood. Since children are not equipped to deal with severe trauma, in order to keep living, other identities are "created" to hold the memory. It is a coping mechanism. The alter identities stay with

the person into adulthood. During the evening I visited Safe, I saw instances of switching from one identity to another. This "disorder" (probably better called "adaptation") is responsive to treatment. Qualified mental health providers will need to be involved, and

**The abuse had
taught her
not to trust.**

be involved in the process. But abuse and how ministers, elders and deacons can best help. They will speak candidly about past experiences of home visits and other pastoral contacts – good and bad – and shed invaluable light for office bearers.

Duty to report

The Child and Family Services Act of Ontario (every province has a similar act) states that any person who believes on reasonable grounds that a child is or may be in need of protec-

tion must report the belief to the authorities. One who deals with children on a professional basis is subject to a \$1,000 fine for not reporting. Again, it is not the duty of church office bearers to investigate the case. The Lord has not empowered the church to do that. He has empowered the state to investigate. The church has been given the power of the gospel, and it must work with that to comfort the wounded and call the sinner to repentance. The great thing about letting the state do its God-given task of investigation, trial and punishing is that the church then has the room to minister appropriately to both victim and offender.

Let the message be heard that there is no refuge in the church for the abuser. Oh yes, there is refuge for the repentant – also the repentant abuser. No doubt! But let them not find refuge in the church while they continue to perpetrate their evil and destruction. Let the church stand by the victim. Men and women, girls and boys who have been abused need to know that the church stands by them, and not by the abuser.

Let the abuser repent – truly repent. Let him come to a good and full understanding of what he has done. Let him admit it, fully, unconditionally, without at all trying to wiggle out of any of the blame. *Then* forgiveness can be extended and reconciliation can begin to take place. For we can and do find each other at the foot of the cross. That is our hope, our comfort, and the only place for healing.

Anyone wanting to contact Safe can phone me, George van Popta, at (905) 304-4952.

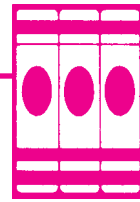


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Remarriage after Divorce?

By G.H. Visscher

Arthur van Delden, *For as Long as You Both Shall Live: A Scriptural and Historical Study of Remarriage and Divorce* (Kelmescott, West Australia: Pro Ecclesia Publishing, 1998) 175 pages (paperback, no price); David J. Engelsma: *Marriage: the Mystery of Christ and the Church: The Covenant-Bond in Scripture and History* (Grandville, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1998) 239 pages (hardcover, \$ 24.95).

Does the Lord ever allow divorce? Are any divorced persons ever allowed to remarry? Anyone who has done any research into these matters knows that these are some of the most controversial and difficult ethical issues of our day. Hence, the Revs. Arthur van Delden and David J. Engelsma are to be commended for their courage to enter into areas where others fear to tread, for their determination to defend what they believe to be the Scriptural view on these matters, and their willingness to oppose so many within Reformed circles. The two books are similar in that they both take the position that whereas divorce is permitted in certain cases, remarriage is always forbidden. Whether divorce is a choice made by oneself or one's spouse, in their judgement a divorced person is not permitted to marry again. Only death can possibly end a marriage, they maintain.

It should be mentioned that, rather than being limited to only these questions, the book by Rev. D. J. Engelsma is considerably wider in scope. He has included chapters on the institution of marriage in general, on the roles of husband and wife, sex and children in marriage, and on the question of believers marrying unbelievers; in these chapters he has much to say that is Scriptural and noteworthy. Nevertheless, about half of his book is dedicated to questions of divorce and remarriage, and the whole second section is dedicated to the history of this question.

Turning first to Rev. A. Van Delden's book, one of his major arguments is that there is a "perfect paradigm" for all our relationships in the relationship be-

tween God and his people, for while there are statements in the Old Testament to the effect that God divorced his people, other statements show that God did not annul the covenant but repeatedly sought reconciliation. By deduction then, it is argued, marriages today must follow the same process. Regarding the two central New Testament texts (Matt 5:32, "*But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery*"; Matthew 19:9 "*I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery*"), Rev. van Delden argues that they do not settle the remarriage question since in his

The Lord Jesus is saying, contrary to the practices of his day: you are not free to divorce and remarry except in the case of sexual immorality.

judgment the "exception clause" has to do with the first clause about divorce and not the second about remarriage.¹ In his judgement, Paul too opposes all remarriage of divorced persons; Paul's comment in 1 Corinthians 7 that if an unbeliever leaves, the believer is "not bound in such circumstances" does not mean that the person is not bound to the marriage; he or she is simply not bound anymore to the *obligations* of that marriage. Van Delden seeks then to strengthen his position with references from the church fathers who shared this position; subsequently the Reformers are subjected to criticism for having been too influenced by Erasmus, and for having allowed divorce (and remarriage) for too many reasons. In his final chapter, Van Delden addresses pastoral issues. While he is not of the opinion that those who remarry cannot be members of the church, he does maintain that they must acknowledge, confess, and repent of their sin. This argument appears to lead to the conclusion that failure to

do so must ultimately lead then to excommunication.

The reasoning of Rev. D. J. Engelsma is remarkably similar. In his estimation too, the exception clause applies only to divorce, not to remarriage. Similar to Van Delden's "perfect paradigm," Engelsma often speaks about "the unbreakable marriage bond." Again there is an argument by deduction here; just as God's covenant with his people is unbreakable, so is the marriage covenant. From the historical review that he provides, we learn that these were the views developed by Prof. Herman Hoeksema who after working out his views on covenant, reanalyzed his views on marriage.² In his estimation, this bond is "absolutely indissoluble. . . . No more than the union between Christ and his church can be dissolved, no more can the marriage tie ever be severed."³ Hence, according to Hoeksema and Engelsma, the woman who is the innocent party in a divorce never has the right to remarry because "this woman is yet always bound before God to the living husband."⁴ After reviewing Hoeksema's views, the views of the church fathers on this point are similarly applauded, those of the Reformers deplored, and the church is called to abandon the "contemporary lawlessness" by adopting this Protestant Reformed view.

Now I take no joy in criticizing the views of Reformed men, especially when one of them is a friend and colleague. Moreover, when one realizes that the motive behind these writings is a godly concern about declining morality and the need for the church to speak the Scriptural truth in such a world, who wants to be critical of such voices? I share with them the belief that in many situations the church needs to say unequivocally that divorce and/or remarriage is disobedience to God and his Word. But at the same time, I believe that these writers go too far in maintaining that it is *always* wrong and disobedient. Ultimately, the question is whether they have proven that theirs is the position of Scripture, and that the path the Reformed church has taken thus far is not in accordance with the

Word of God. I, for one, am not convinced at all.

Why not? First of all, despite what is written about “the perfect paradigm” and the supposed “unbreakable covenant,” it needs to be maintained that the deduction that the marriage covenant is exactly the same as God’s covenant in this regard can only be maintained if the New Testament Scriptures themselves work with this deduction. And it is questionable whether the New Testament does so. Do Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 not suggest that what God Himself does not do, He does allow in the instance of *porneia* (NIV: marital unfaithfulness; NKJV: sexual immorality)? Does the word of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 19:6 (“Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”) not presume that this union can be broken? The Lord Jesus says: we should not do what can be done!

Furthermore, I would maintain that these Matthew passages are much clearer than Van Delden and Engelsma suggest, and the exception clause applies to both the matter of divorce and remarriage. Perhaps if other words are substituted somewhat this would become evident; if one said “I tell you that anyone who assaults his wife, except for reasons of self-defense, and kills her, commits murder” everyone would understand that the exception clause applies to the whole sentence and that one who defends himself is not guilty of murder.⁵ So too here, the Lord Jesus is saying that if there is a situation of sexual immorality, then the other person may depart and possibly later marry someone else.

Moreover, what leads them to take the position that all remarriage is forbidden? For one thing, the failure to study the background adequately. Van Delden actually reduces the significance of the divorce act by redefining a bill of divorce; he suggests that “this bill of divorce was an attestation of the woman’s chastity. She was put away though she had not committed adultery. It also protected the woman from any on-going demands which her former husband might impose upon her”(35). Regrettably, Van Delden does not supply the sources for these remarks. More regrettably, this redefinition of a bill of divorce is entirely out of line with everything that we know about the bill of divorce as it existed in Biblical times. Rev. Van Delden ignores the most central aspect of the divorce bill. As one respected authority suggests “The bill of divorce was really no more than the husband’s announcement that he had divorced his wife and that she was therefore free to marry any other man.”⁶ Apparently the Jewish divorce bill

contained the clause “You are free to marry again.”⁷ In this respect, a section of the *Mishnah* is important reading; this rich source of knowledge regarding Jewish practices contains a whole section on divorce called “Gittin.” At one point it reads: “The essential formula in the bill of divorce is, ‘Lo, thou art free to marry any man.’”⁸ When one takes note of this background, one understands that the Lord Jesus is saying, contrary to the practices of his day: you are not free to divorce and remarry except in the case of sexual immorality.

It needs to be remembered that the world in which the Lord Jesus lived did not know of a right to divorce which did not include a right to remarry. As Craig S. Keener, an expert in background studies, points out: “a valid divorce by standard ancient definition implied the right to remarry. . . . No ancient Jewish reader would have read Matthew otherwise . . . the exception clause would have little practical value if the divorced person could not remarry.”⁹

**No officebearer may
require of any one something
that God does not require.**

Rev. Van Delden repeatedly makes the statement that Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 are referring to the matter of “remarriage after illegitimate divorce”; this, he says, is the primary focus of these passages (175). The problem here is that, at least in the case of 19:9, he has lost sight of the original question of the Pharisees in 19:3: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” When it is remembered that the whole passage concentrates on this question, then it is clear that the primary focus is *not* remarriage after divorce but it is *whether divorce* (and consequently, possibly remarriage) *is permitted for any and every reason*. To this the Lord answers with an emphatic “no,” except in the case of sexual immorality.

Rev. Van Delden also argues that the Mark and Luke passages, in which there are no exception clauses, are clearer than the Matthew passages above. Hence, says Van Delden, we need to follow the good Reformed principle “to read the more difficult text in the light of the texts which shed a clearer light”(65). Engelsma does something similar when he claims to be “interpreting Scripture with Scripture.” While these are valid principles of Biblical interpretation, there is another significant hermeneutical principle which is forgotten, namely, one which maintains that we should allow the writings of each of the Gospel writers to stand on

their own without blending them together.¹⁰ The ultimate result of Van Delden’s approach is that the words of our Lord as recorded by Matthew are reduced in their force. I would maintain instead that all Gospel writers speak about the rule that the Lord puts forth, but that Matthew perhaps because of the context in which he writes includes one exception to that rule.¹¹

The position has also generally been accepted¹² in Reformed circles that Paul adds another exception, namely desertion, when he says in 1 Corinthians 7:15 “if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances . . .” Van Delden however argues that the phrase “not bound” here is unique and only applies to not being bound to the obligations of this marriage. Engelsma argues that this woman “is not enslaved by sin’s guilt” but “free from all fear and worry that stem from sinning against God’s marriage word.”¹³ Contrary to these views however, others would argue that the word is interchangeable with the more usual word.¹⁴ Keener, in fact, makes the good suggestion that the word “bound” needs to be read in light of the divorce bill’s phrase “you are free to remarry . . .”; “being ‘bound’ would mean that she was still married in God’s sight; not being ‘bound,’ or being ‘free,’ meant that she was free to remarry.”¹⁵

Engelsma and Van Delden attempt to bolster their argumentation with quotations from the church fathers who generally take a united stand against all divorce and remarriage. While this is interesting, the problem is that there is a context here which is not adequately taken into account. There were a number of things happening in that period with regard to marriage; on the one hand the church fathers were often “burdened by a less than enthusiastic view of marriage”¹⁶ (thus singleness was elevated) and yet the church was moving towards a position which made marriage a sacrament (thus divorce forbidden and marriage elevated!).¹⁷ While the Reformers were not unanimous on this issue and certainly did not solve all the questions, the greater exegetical skill of men like John Calvin and the context in which they did their work needs to be appreciated more. Before even coming to these questions, the Reformers had to come to a better understanding of singleness, of marriage, and a more careful understanding of the Matthean texts. It would seem to me that, especially on this point, a Reformed church would rather build on the work of the Reformers, than on the unclear voices of the church fathers caught between the two precipices of

asceticism and sacramentalism. I for one would rather continue to work out an approach along the lines of the Reformation (as J. Douma, C. Van Dam, and others are doing), than the line of W. Heth, G. J. Wenham, A. Cornes,¹⁸ H. Hoeksema, and now D. J. Engelsma and A. Van Delden. The Reformed Churches also chose to go in the former line at the synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in 1923.¹⁹

As we turn to pastoral aspects of the whole issue, the fact is that every officebearer will in the course of his work come across those for whom neither divorce nor remarriage is a Scriptural option. Officebearers must dare then to say so and to say it in no uncertain terms. In the words of the Lord Jesus, "what God has joined together, let man not separate." Perhaps the voices of Van Delden and Engelsma will serve as reminders to let that message be heard. But at the same time, almost every officebearer will come across those in their congregations who are the "innocent parties" in a divorce. They will readily admit that they may not be entirely blameless, but they were not the ones who committed adultery, who deserted their spouses, and subsequently took a hardened position. The question is then: must I and other Reformed pastors tell such persons that the Lord *forbids* them to remarry? That they *sin* if they do so? Engelsma and Van Delden would say 'yes.' Rather than agreeing, I am deeply convinced that then we are laying a burden upon them that Scripture does not teach and God does not require. And no officebearer may require of anyone something that God does not require.

Moreover, it would seem to me that if we are going to declare to anyone that they are sinning, we would need a clearer basis and more unanimity to do so. It should say something to us that in every other instance wherein Reformed churches take recourse to disciplinary action, there is no doubt that the truth of the Word of God is at stake. Do Reformed pastors dare to suggest that this is sin when even men like John Calvin and many others after him have argued that it is not? The fact is that marital breakdown is already complex enough without Reformed churches adding to the complexity with faulty exegesis and bad pastoral practice.

In the final analysis, it must be said that there are other guides to this difficult issue that are much more reliable. One works on a much more solid and Scriptural basis when the writings of Dr. J. Douma and Dr. C. Van Dam are used instead. We must conclude with much regret that these books by Rev. A. Van

Delden and Rev. D. J. Engelsma are *not* recommended.

G.H. Visscher is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church of Burlington-Waterdown, Ontario.

¹Van Delden also argues extensively that Matthew 19:9 is not really an exception clause because instead of using the word "except" it literally says "whoever divorces his wife *not on account of sexual immorality* . . ."; however, commentators have shown that notwithstanding the difference this phrase is equivalent to the one in Matthew 5:32. see D. A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1984) VIII, 415, W. D. Davies, Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew* (T. & T. Clark, 1997) III, 16, and D. A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28* (Word, 1995) 549.

²On the discussion between H. Hoeksema and K. Schilder on this point, see J. Faber *American Secession Theologians on Covenant and Baptism* (Inheritance Publications, 1996) 42 - 52. Dr. J. Faber points out that "Hoeksema's doctrine of the covenant is dominated by his conception of God's double predestination" (43); rather than Hoeksema's "unbreakable covenant," Schilder preferred to speak about the covenant as one-sided in origin but two-sided in its existence (48).

³H. Hoeksema as quoted by Engelsma, p.153.

⁴H. Hoeksema as quoted by Engelsma, p.151.

⁵J. Douma uses this line of argumentation in his book *The Ten Commandments: A Manual for the Christian Life* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996) 274. It should be noted that while Van Delden (61, n 59) cites J. van Bruggen's commentary on Matthew for support for his position, a more careful reading of all of what Dr. Van Bruggen says in his Commentary (*Matteüs: Het evangelie voor Israël* [Kok, 1990] 360-363) and in his discussion in *Het Huwelijk Gewogen* (Ton Bolland, 1979) 45-62) would lead him in a different direction. Dr. Van Bruggen suggests that the Lord Jesus phrases matters as He does here because divorce and remarriage do not necessarily have to follow adultery; at the same time though it is not forbidden when adultery has broken the marriage. In the latter case, he says, the advice of Paul applies: it is good to remain unmarried, but one who marries does not sin (*Het Huwelijk Gewogen*, 62).

⁶S. Safrai, "Home and Family," *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions*. Section One, Volume two in the series *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* (Van Gorcum, 1976) 790. See on this point also David Werner Amram, *The Jewish Law of Divorce* (1896).

⁷W. D. Davies, Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew* (T. & T. Clark, 1997) III, p.17.

⁸m.Gittin, 9.3. See H. Danby, ed. *The Mishnah*. (Oxford, 1985) 319.

⁹*And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Hendrickson, 1991) 44.

¹⁰As some have stated this principle: "Interpretation of a given passage in the Gospels

should stress the particular emphases of the Gospel in which the passage occurs, rather than blurring its distinctives by immediately combining it with other parallels. God chose to inspire not a harmony of the Gospels but four distinct ones, and we should respect his choice rather than undermine it by our interpretation," W.W. Klein, C.L. Blomberg, R.L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Word, 1993) 328.

¹¹Some have suggested that Matthew's exception has to do with the specifically Jewish background of his gospel (see, J. van Bruggen, *Huwelijk Gewogen*, 57-62; J. B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* [Zondervan, 1981] 104).

¹²See J. Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, 275 and C. van Dam, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 35-38.

¹³Engelsma, 126.

¹⁴See, e.g. Craig S. Keener, *And Marries Another*, 171 n 83; cf pp. 61-2.

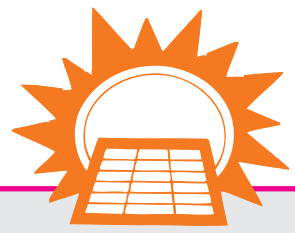
¹⁵Craig S. Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary* (IVP, 1993) 467.

¹⁶W. C. Davies & D. C. Allison, *Op. cit.*, 17.

¹⁷C. Van Dam in *Divorce and Remarriage* (44) has also referred to the influence of asceticism in the early church, the degree to which the unmarried state was overrated, and marriage was sacramentalized. Van Delden responds by quoting from the editors of the Oxford Library who put forth Augustine's tractate *On the Good of Marriage* (95). But precisely this tractate underlines Van Dam's point, for this work of Augustine shows that for Augustine, marriage was viewed as a sacrament and its indissoluble nature rested in its sacramental character. Van Delden later attempts to put Augustine's position in a more positive light (107-108), arguing that sacramentalism of marriage is a much later development (1200-1400's); Engelsma argues in this vein as well. This is highly debatable however; the tractate *On the Good of Marriage* illustrates that Augustine's opposition to divorce and remarriage is already rooted in sacramentalism. (See, for example, where Augustine's comments on Matt 19:9 in paragraph 6: "To such a degree is that marriage compact entered upon a matter of a certain sacrament, that it is not made void even by separation itself, since, so long as her husband lives, even by whom she hath been left, she commits adultery, in case she be married to another: and he who hath left her, is the cause of this evil." Cf. paragraph 7. *The Nicene and Post-nicene Fathers* First Series, III, 402). One can compare here also Augustine's "On Marriage and Concupiscence" where he refers to marriage as "the sacrament of an inseparable union" (*The Nicene and Post-nicene Fathers* First Series, V, chapter 23, 273).

¹⁸It is apparent from the footnotes to his book that Rev. Van Delden relies heavily on the works of these three men who are generally in the more Anglican/Episcopal line (W. A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham *Jesus and Divorce: The Problem with the Evangelical Consensus* (Nelson, 1984); A. Cornes, *Divorce & Remarriage: Biblical Principles & Pastoral Advice* (Eerdmans, 1993)). A helpful critique of their approach is Craig S. Keener's *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Hendrickson, 1991).

¹⁹See C. Van Dam, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 48 and J. Douma, *Echtscheiding*, 79-80. 



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Phil. 4:6,7

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Why are some people always cheerful and laughing, and when we try to be like that it does not seem to work? Some people are always the center of the attention and make others listen to them and laugh. But nobody listens to us; people do not even look at us, or they walk away while we are trying to tell them something. What makes people so different? Is it happiness that makes someone popular, or shyness that makes someone dull?

It is hard to find an answer to these questions. It is not necessary either. We do not have to compare ourselves to what other people are or do. Do not get deceived. Some people can put up a very happy front, while deep inside they are not happy at all. It is just their way to hide their inmost feelings. What we have to do is live our own lives. We have to be sincere and honest, for we are responsible to the Lord for what we do or not do.

Yes, we have to give an account to the Lord for everything we do. The Lord is the One Who made us. He is the One who gave us certain challenges in our lives. He wants us to live with those challenges. If we accept our lives from Him without grudging, and try, through prayer, to make the best of it, then the Lord will give us happiness.

I want to conclude this with the following poem, written by Helen Steiner Rice, out of her book: *Poems of Faith*:

A Recipe for Happiness

*Happiness is something
We create in our mind,
It's not something you search for
And so seldom find –
It's just waking up
And beginning the day
By counting our blessings
And kneeling to pray –
It's giving up thoughts
That breed discontent
And accepting what comes
As a "gift heaven-sent" –
It's giving up wishing
For things we have not
And making the best of
Whatever we've got –
It's knowing that life
Is determined for us,
And pursuing our tasks
Without fret or fuss –
For it's by completing
What God gives us to do
That we find real contentment
And happiness, too.*

That this may help us to live our lives in obedience to Him, and with hearts full of thankfulness for the gift of his Son. Through Him, we all may look forward to a life without sin, and of perfect bliss.

*But the Lord will send salvation,
And by day his love provide.
He shall be my exultation,
And my song at eventide.
On his praise e'en in the night
I will ponder with delight,
And in prayer, transcending distance,
Seek the God of my existence.*

Psalms 42:5

Birthdays in December:

1: MARTEN JANSEN

98 Morgandale Crescent
Orangeville, ON L9W 3C7

It will be Martin's 10th birthday. Happy Birthday to you, Martin.

The parents of Rose Malda thank everyone who sent Rose a card for her birthday. Those cards are much appreciated by Rose and her family members.

Until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Reg. Road 20, RR 1
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0
Tel: 905-957-3007
E-mail: RWRavens@netcom.ca



THE HI-LITER

News from Here and There

By J. de Gelder

Albany

In the Church Bulletin of Free Reformed Churches of Albany and West Albany I read a piece that could be of interest for all of us. I am sure the problems referred to occur just as much in Canada as in Australia:

From time to time most (if not all) of us have heard some comment about the use of drugs by our young people. Today, many of our young people are daily being confronted with the ready availability and abuse of drugs at school, on the bus, in the neighbourhood or in the workforce. Add to this the growing drug problem in the society around us and then it becomes clear that we do well not to keep our heads in the sand. . . . In order to investigate this matter more fully the Albany and West Albany consistories have set up a committee. This committee includes one elder from each consistory and one representative from the school.

Then follows quite an extensive mandate for this committee. But you may ask: Is this a consistory matter? It definitely is! Listen to reasons they give for the direct involvement of the consistories in dealing with this problem.

The Bible teaches that there is only one way of life (Ps 1 and Prov 1), and not choosing this way means to live as a fool and to perish.

Another important aspect is that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6). Our bodies are not ours to do with as we please.

Thirdly, eventually a lifestyle involving substance abuse will lead to poverty and destruction. A lifestyle that involves drugs puts both the body and soul in danger of hellfire.

The Church does well to be aware of its responsibility towards its members. It does well to remind itself often that God requires the blood of those who perish from those who fail to speak and act.

Some may remember that a while ago I informed our readers about a decision of the Albany consistory regarding the use of non-alcoholic wine at the Lord's Supper table. It is then also good to be aware of what happened next. The Consistory wrote:

A number of members of the congregation have written to consistory to review this decision. Consistory has decided to study this matter further and therefore to wait with implementation of this decision.

Byford

The celebration of the Holy Supper also received the attention of the consistory in Byford:

Consistory revised its earlier decision of the short sermon held before the celebration of the holy supper, and deems the "sermonette" unnecessary. It is decided to dis-

continue the sermon in the morning service when holy supper is celebrated. The minister may rather give a short explanation of the Bible passages chosen.

One aspect that always strikes me is that our beautiful Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper functions as a very relevant sermon in those worship services.

Coaldale

We go to Canada and in Coaldale they discussed the fact that many young people like to sit together in church, rather than with their families, and preferably as far away from the pulpit as possible. This is a trend in more congregations, so we can all benefit from what was written in the Coaldale and Taber Bulletin.

The congregation is built up of families, not of different groups of people, young people, men, women, rich people, poor people, all sitting together separately in groups. Sitting together as a sub group places the wrong accent. It distracts from the nature of worship as meeting together as congregation with the Lord. As a result of this distraction, it will not help the young people to give undivided attention to the worship service (hearing the word, responding in prayer and praise). It will also show up in the tendency to forget that the offering (collection) is part of the worship service, and not an intermission with the freedom to do one's own thing.

Carman

Early in the summer Rev. Moesker wrote in the Manitoba Church Bulletin:

July 4th DV Manitoba will have a fourth Canadian Reformed Church, and there will be two churches in Carman. We are thankful that the Lord who gave Himself for his church has so blessed us with growth in Carman, that this institution became a necessity and possibility. It will be strange for many who have always belonged to the church of Carman to now think in terms of two churches and not to worship on Sundays with brothers and sisters with whom they have been worshipping for many, many years. But even though there is a separation, that doesn't take away from the deep unity we still have in Jesus Christ. May that always bind "mother" and "daughter" together even though there is parting of ways now.

In the meantime this split has become reality and for several months now the brothers and sisters in Carman are getting used to separate congregational life.

Winnipeg

In neighbouring Winnipeg the new *Redeemer* Canadian Reformed Churches is ahead of the new church in Carman.

They are in the process of getting their own minister, and building their own facilities. However,

It seems as if a building project always runs into delays once you have to deal with the bureaucracy of government agencies. It is both frustrating and time consuming when you have, for example, three different interpretations of some requirement from three different people in the same department.

Hard work, perseverance, and a lot of patience – that’s what you seem to need (besides the money) if you want to build a church.

Orangeville

Somewhat more to the east we find Orangeville, and there the consistory decided:

A linguistic revision of Classis Northern Ontario’s subscription form for ministers is presented. This proposal will be presented to Classis Northern Ontario September 1999. D.V. Orangeville will ask Classis to standardize the subscription forms for the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. Grounds were presented and a proposal will be submitted to Classis.

I don’t think a Classis can do this for the whole federation, not even a Classis Northern Ontario. But other than that there is much to say for this proposal. It would be interesting to investigate the history of these forms. The historical development has probably been something like this: The immigrants brought with them the Dutch subscription forms, most likely going back to the form adopted at the Synod of Dort. After some time they were translated by different people, perhaps the ministers, in the local congregations, and over time several churches and classes produced linguistically revised editions. The result is that today we see a variety of subscription forms, many of them with slight differences. The history of the church teaches how important the exact formulation of the subscription form is, especially in view of the unity of the church.

Toronto

At the occasion of the ordination of new office bearers, Rev. den Hollander wrote about the fact that our elders and deacons serve only for a limited term.

Although the aspect of “terms” cannot be derived from Scripture directly, the church of the Reformation introduced a wise arrangement. Of course, for any believer the command applies to employ our gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members. That is a calling for life, indeed. The special gifts for which we look in regards to our office bearers will continue to function when they are no longer in special office. So, indirectly, with their gifts they are office bearers for life. However, for more reasons than one (the possibility of selection, the opportunity of termination, the prevention of creating another permanent “clergy,” etc.) it was wise when the church chose for the form of term-elder- (deacon)ship. This way an opportunity has been created for more of our men to share those special gifts. This way the brothers may also have some years in which to concentrate on shepherding their own families. Besides, in our demanding times there is a continuous need for further development through the study of the Scriptures.

Although I have never heard an elder or deacon who wanted to serve as a special office bearer all his life, there are defi-

nately arguments in favour of this concept. At the ICRC of 1989 in Langley, BC Dr. C. Van Dam held a speech, “The Elder as Preserver and Nurturer of Life in the Covenant” (Proceedings ICRC 1989, p.277-298), which provides challenging food for thought with regard to this matter. Especially since the churches of the Reformation are not so unified in this as suggested by Rev. den Hollander.

Burlington Ebenezer

Another challenge was presented in the Burlington Ebenezer Bulletin:

Although most congregations have not been successful at tackling this challenge this should not be seen as an excuse to not even try. Here’s the challenge. How do we do a better job of increasing the communication and interaction between the various age groups within our congregation. We can probably learn from each other and develop a better understanding and appreciation for each other’s needs. Most of all we will strengthen the bonds within our congregation. In order for this to work we all have to accept this challenge. Let’s not wait for someone else to make the first move. Go for it!

Ancaster

There seems to be a growing awareness among us about the need, as well as the possibilities to speak up as Reformed Christians and address openly the moral issues in our society. In the Ancaster Bulletin I read

Many Christians have already given up on secular society. There is so much evil out there that it is tempting to withdraw into our shells and merely try to shield our own families from the immoral influences. But most MPs receive only one letter and a few phone calls a day on issues they are addressing in Ottawa. So let’s take advantage of this silence and communicate biblical opinions to our elected officials. Let’s do it. Let’s have a local group in our congregation that will keep everyone else informed about current political and social issues. This group will provide addresses to write to, phone numbers to call, and petitions to sign.

Let us make use of the freedom the Lord grants us.

Kerwood

Another encouraging development is that slowly but surely, if I may put it that way, there seem to be increasingly positive contacts between local United Reformed and Canadian Reformed Churches. Rev. VanWoudenberg wrote in the Kerwood Bulletin *The Messenger*:

The consistories of Wyoming and Kerwood again experienced a very positive meeting. We discussed practices and procedures followed for baptism, discipline, and examination of students who wish to speak an edifying Word in the churches. Based on this discussion we will be able to add to our memorandum of agreement regarding Lord’s Supper. More work is still needed here, and we will be getting to that, the Lord willing, in due time. . . . It is very gratifying to see these contacts progress the way they are.

Finally, I don’t know why, but there are a few that still try to send the bulletins to my (very) old address in Smithville. Please take note of the change to

7 Mercury Road, RR#1, Freulton, ON, L0R 1K0





Press Release for Classis Northern Ontario convened on September 24th at the Owen Sound Canadian Reformed Church

On behalf of the convening church of Owen Sound, Rev. P.G. Feenstra opened the meeting. He read Acts 2:37-47 and afterwards spoke about the work of Classis in view of the characteristics of Christ's church. He led in prayer and asked all present to join in the singing of Hymn 1A. The guests were welcomed including the children of the Owen Sound Canadian Reformed School. Rev. J. Louwse was also welcomed since this was the first Classis he attended since becoming the minister of the church at Fergus. The form of Subscription was signed by Rev. Louwse.

Since the credentials, as examined by the church at Orangeville, were found to be in good order, Classis was constituted. The following officers were appointed to serve Classis: Chairman Rev. A.J. Pol, vice-chairman Rev. P.G. Feenstra, clerk Rev. B.J. Berends.

In his opening remarks Rev. Pol thanked the convening church for the work done in preparation of Classis. He reiterated words of welcome to Rev. Louwse, mentioned that Rev. Slaa declined a call he received to the church at Houston, and welcomed Rev. P. Vellenga who arrived as observer from the United Reformed Churches.

After a number of items were added, the proposed agenda for Classis was adopted. The following reports were received:

- A church visitation report to the church at Elora was read and received with gratitude.
- From the Classical Treasurer (Fred Hoekstra). A recommendation that there be no assessment for the year 2000 was adopted.
- From the church at Grand Valley auditing the Books of the Classical Treasurer.
- From the Church of Fergus auditing the books of the Fund for Needy Churches.
- From the Church at Guelph regarding Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry. Classis adopted their recommendation that every church be assessed 2.34 per communicant member to replenish the fund.
- From the church at Fergus regarding the auditing of the books of the fund

for financial aid to students for the ministry.

- From the church at Orangeville regarding the inspection of the archives of Classis Northern Ontario.

The above-mentioned reports were received with gratitude. A verbal report was given on the work of Committee for Needy Churches. The Committee for Needy Churches will be asked to supply a written report to the next Classis. The church at Owen Sound requested that they be given permission to purchase a fireproof filing cabinet for the keeping of the archives of Classis. This request was granted.

Question period according to Article 44 of the Church Order was held. The church of Elora requested advice regarding a matter in which they needed the assistance of Classis. Advice was given.

Several proposals by the church at Elora and Owen Sound re: updating the Classical regulations were adopted.

A proposal of the church at Guelph was declared inadmissible since it deals with a matter that should be directed to Regional Synod East.

The observer from the United Reformed Churches, Rev. Vellenga, was given the opportunity to address Classis. He passed on greetings and expressed the desire that we be of the same mind submitting to the Word of God (Phil. 2). The chairman thanked Rev. P. Vellenga for his words of encouragement.

A letter from the clerk of Classis Central Ontario March 12, 1999 pertaining to a decision they made regarding the fund for needy churches was received for information. Appointments:

- Rev. Louwse was appointed examiner in ethics
- The church at Owen Sound appointed to audit the books of the Treasurer
- All other appointments remained the same

The church at Brampton was appointed convening church for the next Classis to be convened December 17, 1999 in Brampton at 9:00 a.m. The suggested officers for the next Classis: Chairman Rev. R. Pot; vice-chairman Rev. A.J. Pol; clerk Rev. P.G. Feenstra

The following ministers were appointed as delegates to Regional Synod East November 10, 1999: Rev. P.G. Feenstra, Rev. A.J. Pol, Rev. R. Pot. As

alternates Rev. B.J. Berends, Rev. J.G. Slaa and Rev. P. Aasman (in that order)

The following elders were appointed as delegates to Regional Synod East November 10, 1999: G. Bos, J. Jonker, F. Westrik. Alternates K. Sikkema, J. Kamphuis, K. Knol.

The mileage for Classis was set at \$.25 per km.

Question period was held. The chairman thanked the convening church for hosting Classis and the ladies for serving.

Censure According to Art. 34 C.O. was not necessary.

The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved.

The members of Classis were requested to sing Hymn 64:3,4 after which Rev. Pol closed in prayer.

PRESS RELEASE: Classis Pacific West of October 5, 1999 held at Cloverdale, BC

Opening

On behalf of the convening Church, the Church at Smithers, br. R. Klaver called the meeting to order. After the singing of Psalm 19:1, 4 he read Psalm 19 and led in prayer. A welcome was extended to all present and appreciation was expressed to the Church at Cloverdale for hosting this meeting. A special welcome was extended to the deputies of Regional Synod West, the Revs. B. Tiggelaar of Barrhead, AB and R. Schouten of Abbotsford, BC. The memorabilia of the Churches are reviewed. Special mention is made of the fact that the Lord took home unto Himself the Rev. D. VanderBoom on Oct. 2.

Credentials were examined by the delegates of the Church at Langley. All Churches are duly represented. Two alternates replace the primary delegates. The officers suggested by the last classis took their places: Chairman – Rev. J. Huijgen, Vice-chairman – Rev. C. Van Spronsen and clerk – Rev. J. Visscher. The agenda is adopted after some minor alterations.

The Church at Surrey requested a *peremptory examination* of Cand. K. Wieske and the approbation of the call extended to him for the work of mission in Brazil. The documents of the call

to Cand. Wieske have been provided and are found to be in good order.

Cand. K. Wieske presents his sermon proposal on 2 Kings 2:23 – 25. This is followed by an evaluation of this sermon by the delegates in closed session. It is decided to proceed with the examination. He was examined in the following subjects by the following examiners: Exegesis N. T. – Rev. C. Van Spronsen, Knowledge of Scriptures – Rev. J. Huijgen, Doctrine and Creeds – Rev. J. Visscher, Exegesis O. T. – Rev. E. Kampen, Church History – Rev. J. Visscher, Ethics – Rev. J. Huijgen, Church Polity – Rev. E. Kampen and Diaconiology – Rev. J. Huijgen.

Classis met in closed session to evaluate the examination. After due consideration the meeting concluded that there was no objection to admit Cand. Wieske to the ministry of the Word. The deputies of Regional Synod West gave their concurring advice. Cand. Wieske was informed of this decision. The chairman read the Subscription Form and br. Wieske expressed his agreement to it and confirmed this with his signature.

The chairman then read 1 Tim 6:11 – 16, requested all to sing Hymn 64 and lead in thanksgiving prayer. During a short break the opportunity was given to congratulate Cand. Wieske and his wife.

Pulpit supply is granted to the vacant Churches of Houston and Smithers once every three weeks with the understanding that two services will be conducted in the one congregation and one in the other alternately.

No reports were available.

During the *Question Period* acc. to art. 44 the Church at Langley asks for and receives advice in a matter of discipline.

Appointments

Convening Church for next Classis: Surrey. Date: Dec. 8 (altern. April 4). Suggested Officers: Chairman – Rev. C. Van Spronsen, Vice-chairman – Rev. J. Visscher, Clerk – Rev. E. Kampen.

Delegates Regional Synod West of November 23: The ministers J. Visscher, C. Van Spronsen and E. Kampen with J. Huijgen as alternate. The elders J. VanVeen, H. Hoogstra and F. Hofsink with P. DeBoer and J.H. Knol as alternates.

Representative of Classis at Ordination of K. Wieske: Rev. J. Huijgen.

Question Period

A question is asked about the position of the “pastoral assistant” in the Church at Langley. It is explained that

this is Langley’s way of addressing the increasing workload of the minister and the elders.

Censure ad art. 34 was not needed.

Acts of this meeting are read and adopted and the Press Release is read and approved. After the singing of Psalm 90:1, 8, Rev. C. Van Spronsen leads in thanksgiving prayer. The chairman closes the meeting.

Vice-chairman e.t., C. Van Spronsen

Press Release of Classis Alberta-Manitoba, October 7, 1999 in Winnipeg, Manitoba

Opening

On behalf of the convening church, the Emmanuel Church of Denver, CO, Rev. D. Vandeburgt opened the meeting by reading II Peter 1, inviting the assembly to worship God by singing Psalm 119:40, and leading in opening prayer. He welcomed the delegates and the visitors, especially Candidate Ted VanRaalte and his wife Christine, and the Deputies of Regional Synod, Revs. R. Schouten and C. Van Spronsen.

Under memorabilia words of encouragement were offered to Rev. J. van Popta with respect to the serious illness of his son, Julian, condolences were expressed to Rev. R. Aasman on the death of his mother, the newly instituted church of Carman West was welcomed into the classical resort and this new church was encouraged in the light of their present vacancy, and the Winnipeg Grace Church was thanked for hosting classis. It was noted that Rev. Aasman had declined the call to Smithville. Thankfulness was expressed that the Lord recently opened the way for Minister-elect Ken Wieske to be ordained on the coming Sunday as missionary to Brazil for the Maranatha Church of Surrey, BC, since he has sustained his classical examination, and likewise for Candidate Peter Holtvluwer so that the way was opened for him to be ordained as minister of the Word in the church of Aldergrove, BC. Finally, it was remembered that Rev. D. VanderBoom entered into the joy of his Master last week, after living nearly fourscore and four years by reason of the strength that the Lord gave Him.

Constitution of Classis

Rev. Vandeburgt declared classis constituted, and invited forward the duly appointed moderamen: Rev. J. van Popta, chairman, Rev. Th. Lodder, vice-chairman, and Rev. J. Moesker, clerk.

Adoption of Agenda

The provisional agenda was adopted after a number of minor revisions.

Peremptory Examination of Candidate VanRaalte

The documents for peremptory examination were judged to be in good order. Brother VanRaalte was invited to present his sermon proposal on II Timothy 3:14-17. After hearing the sermon, classis decided in closed session to proceed with the examination. After the candidate was informed and a brief coffee break, the examination resumed.

The high school students and teachers of Immanuel Christian School were welcomed to witness the peremptory examination. Rev. Aasman examined Candidate Van Raalte in Old Testament Exegesis. Next was the New Testament Exegesis examination, conducted by Rev. G. Snip. He was then tested in his knowledge of Scripture by Rev. Lodder. After a short break, Rev. W. Slomp led the examination in Dogmatics.

The assembly then paused for lunch.

After reconvening and role call, Candidate VanRaalte was given his Church History examination by Rev. E. Tiggelaar. After the chairman welcomed the students and teachers of Immanuel Christian School the examination in Ethics was conducted by Rev. R. Eikelboom. Church polity was the next exam, conducted by Rev. K. Jonker. Revs. Moesker and Vandeburgt conducted the examination in Diaconiology jointly. After each examination, opportunity was given for the other delegates to ask questions.

The guests, except for ordained office-bearers, were excused so that the assembly could deliberate in closed session.

Candidate VanRaalte, his wife and the other visitors were welcomed back shortly thereafter. The chairman congratulated the candidate upon the successful completion of his examination, and invited the assembly to rejoice together by singing Psalm 71:8,10. An opportunity was given for the assembly to extend personal congratulations to Brother VanRaalte and his wife, Christine.

After refreshments, the call to Minister-elect VanRaalte was approbated on the condition that announcements will be made in the Redeemer congregation on two consecutive Sundays before the ordination takes place. Brother VanRaalte promised to abide by the form of subscription for classis, and to sign it at the next meeting of classis.

The deputies of Regional Synod were thanked.

Reports

In closed session the church visitors offered a report which was thankfully received.

The report from the Committee for Aid to Needy Churches was adopted as presented

As a result of the passing into glory of Brother A. Hamoen and the pending retirement of Brother C. Veldkamp from the Committee for Financial Aid to Needy Students, Brothers A. Leffers and J. Moedt, having indicated their willingness to serve on this committee, were appointed by the assembly, upon the recommendation of the church of Coaldale. Brother W. Vogelzang also requested that he be released from his position on the committee because of distance. Since Brother M. Tams had agreed to sit on this committee, he was appointed by classis. The clerk was instructed to send letters of thanks to the retiring brothers for their long years of dedicated service to the churches through this committee.

The Report of Observer of Presbytery of Dakotas was received by the assembly and the floor was opened for discussion. After some discussion, a motion was carried to receive this report as amended and to append it to the acts.

Proposals/Instructions from Churches (Article 33 of the Church Order)

The floor was opened for a discussion on an overture from the church of Coaldale regarding Article 49 of the Church Order, concerning the number of delegates to Regional Synod, following the lead of Classis Pacific East, March 25-26, 1999. After an amendment, the assembly decided to overture Regional Synod West to change Article 49 to read: "Each Synod shall delegate to this synod six ministers and six elders" on the grounds that "the number of churches in the federation continues to increase. An increase in delegation would allow the material to be dealt with more efficiently."

An instruction from the church of Carman East, proposing to the assembly to appoint a committee to look into the matter of splitting classis, was carried after due discussion.

A request from the church of Carman West, to appoint Rev. Moesker as their counselor, was granted.

With respect to the instruction from the Grace Church in Winnipeg, a request for advice on how to go forward in unity talks with the Providence United Reformed Church of Winnipeg, the assembly advised the church to consult the Committee for the Promo-

tion of Ecclesiastical Unity, appointed for that purpose.

Question Period (Article 44 of the Church Order)

Every church answered the respective questions, and was responded to as necessary.

Appointments

A committee of three brothers, Revs. J. Moesker and W. Slomp, and Elder T. Bergsma, was appointed to look into the matter of dividing classis.

The Immanuel Church of Edmonton was appointed as the convening church of the next classis, to be hosted by the church of Calgary, on January 25, 2000, the Lord willing, with the alternate date set as April 11, 2000.

The suggested officers for next classis are Rev. Vandeburgt, chairman, Rev. van Popta, vice-chairman, and Rev. Lodder, clerk.

As church visitors, Revs. Aasman, Jonker, Moesker, Slomp, Snip and Tiggelaar were duly authorized.

Rev. Lodder was re-appointed as Observer to the Presbytery of the Dakotas.

As delegates to Regional Synod West on November 23, 1999, Revs. Jonker, Moesker and van Popta were appointed as primary delegates, with Revs. Eikelboom, Lodder and Snip as alternates, in that order, and Elders A. Poppe, C. Veldkamp and W. Vogelzang, with Elders D. Tietsma, J. Kuik and J. Bareman as alternates, in that order.

Rev. K. Jonker was appointed to represent the churches of classis to speak words of encouragement and congratulations at the ordination of Minister-elect T. Van Raalte.

Personal Question Period

Thanks was expressed by the needy churches for the support given. Words of brotherly encouragement and congratulations were expressed.

Brotherly Censure (Art 44 CO)


The chairman thanked the assembly for the good cooperation that was evident throughout the meeting.

Adoption of Acts and Press Release

The Acts and Press Release were read, amended as needed and adopted.

Closing

The chairman invited the assembly to sing Hymn 58, and closed in prayer.

Th. E. Lodder,
vice-chairman e.t. 



NEW ADDRESS (As of Oct 18, '99)

Rev. Peter and Erica Holtvluwer

30928 Gardner Avenue
Abbotsford, BC V2T 5E4
Home: (604) 855-9808
Study: (604) 855-9951
Fax: (604) 855-9705

The following student was examined by Classis Alberta-Manitoba on October 7, 1999 and successfully completed his peremptory examination:

Cand. Ted Van Raalte

Cand. Van Raalte hopes to be ordained on October 24, D.V., in the church at Winnipeg (Redeemer), MB.

The following student was examined by Classis Pacific West on October 5, and successfully completed his peremptory examination:

Cand. Ken Wieske

Rev. Wieske was ordained on October 10, in the church at Surrey, BC, where he will serve as missionary in Brazil.

The following student was examined by Classis Pacific East on September 30th and successfully completed his peremptory examination:

Cand. Peter H. Holtvluwer

Candidate Holtvluwer hopes to be ordained on October 24, D.V., in the church of Aldergrove, BC.

DECLINED the call to the church of Houston, BC

Rev. C. J. VanderVelde

of Yarrow, BC

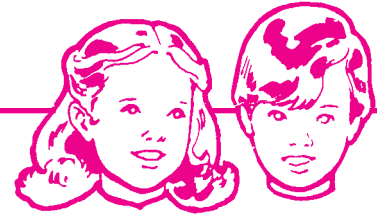
CALLED to the church at Carman West

Rev. J. VanWoudenberg

of Kerwood, ON

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers

Having a holiday is a wonderful thing to do, don't you think? Especially when you go out with your family or with some friends and can do things that can't be done when you have to go to school. Even having a sleepout on your own backyard is great fun. When I was young, we used to go camping a real lot, and always had so many things to do, and there was always so much to see. Especially when you have to travel a long way to get to your camping spot, makes it more exciting, because then you have to imagine what kind of camping spot you will have – will it be beside a river, or under a large tree, or down by the sea?

But, then you have to go to school again, and you start to forget about what you have done and where you have been. But often your Mom or Dad has been taking lots of photos of everything you have done, of things you or your brothers and sisters have done and then you can remember them for many years. Even when you get older, and you look at those photos again, you may remember something about that holiday.

Now you're back at school. Are you enjoying it? Does your teacher give you lots of fun things to do, or does he or she make you work really hard? Well, remember that in whatever you have to do, or even in whatever you would like to do, the Lord is watching you. Remember that He loves you and would like you to do things that are not bad, or if you are disobeying your Mom or Dad or your teacher. You have to listen to them at all times, okay!

Lots of love, Aunt Betty

This is a very interesting puzzle from *Korinda, Joel and Derek Bruning* from Western Australia. They have made it up with the names of the animal and then given us a clue as to what type of animal it actually is. After all, we don't know many of the Australian animals, but they should know more, don't you think.

S A P V F F V Q P O N E F V C
 R H D Q N U M B A T T O R M H
 B K I B D N F D J T N K I E U
 S A B N J N D U G O N G L T D
 Y T L G G E S U P R B U L I I
 M O E C I L D C H I A X N G T
 G O R N C W E V L T I P E U C
 C A P K Z E D B T W Y I C D H
 U S N O T B Y I A A E Y K G U
 R N Y G K W P E I C H N L R W
 L U Z L G E B R P F K U I I N
 E W O M B A T P A B Q B Z D Y
 W E F J E X N S N C A G A O A
 C G H M H A U G Z J M X R E G
 B O X J E L L Y F I S H D Y L

Find:

- Shingleback (Lizard)
- Funnelweb (Spider)
- Frill Neck Lizard
- Dugite (Snake)
- Mopoke (Bird)
- Bunyip (Mythical creature)
- Jabiru (Bird)
- Gang Gang (Bird)
- Pitta (Bird)
- Curlew (Bird)
- Bilby (Hopping Mouse)
- Chuditch (Native Cat)
- Wombat (Burrowing Mammal)
- Dugong (Similar to Matinee)
- Dibler (Small Mammal)
- Box Jelly Fish

UNSCRAMBLE THE FRUIT

By Busy Beaver Brianne Tamminga

- YBERBLERU _____
- ERYRSBRTWA _____
- YBREPARSR _____
- PRGAE _____
- CENTRONIE _____
- IIWK _____
- ANAANB _____
- PLPEA _____
- CHEPA _____
- MULP _____
- REAP _____