

Clarion

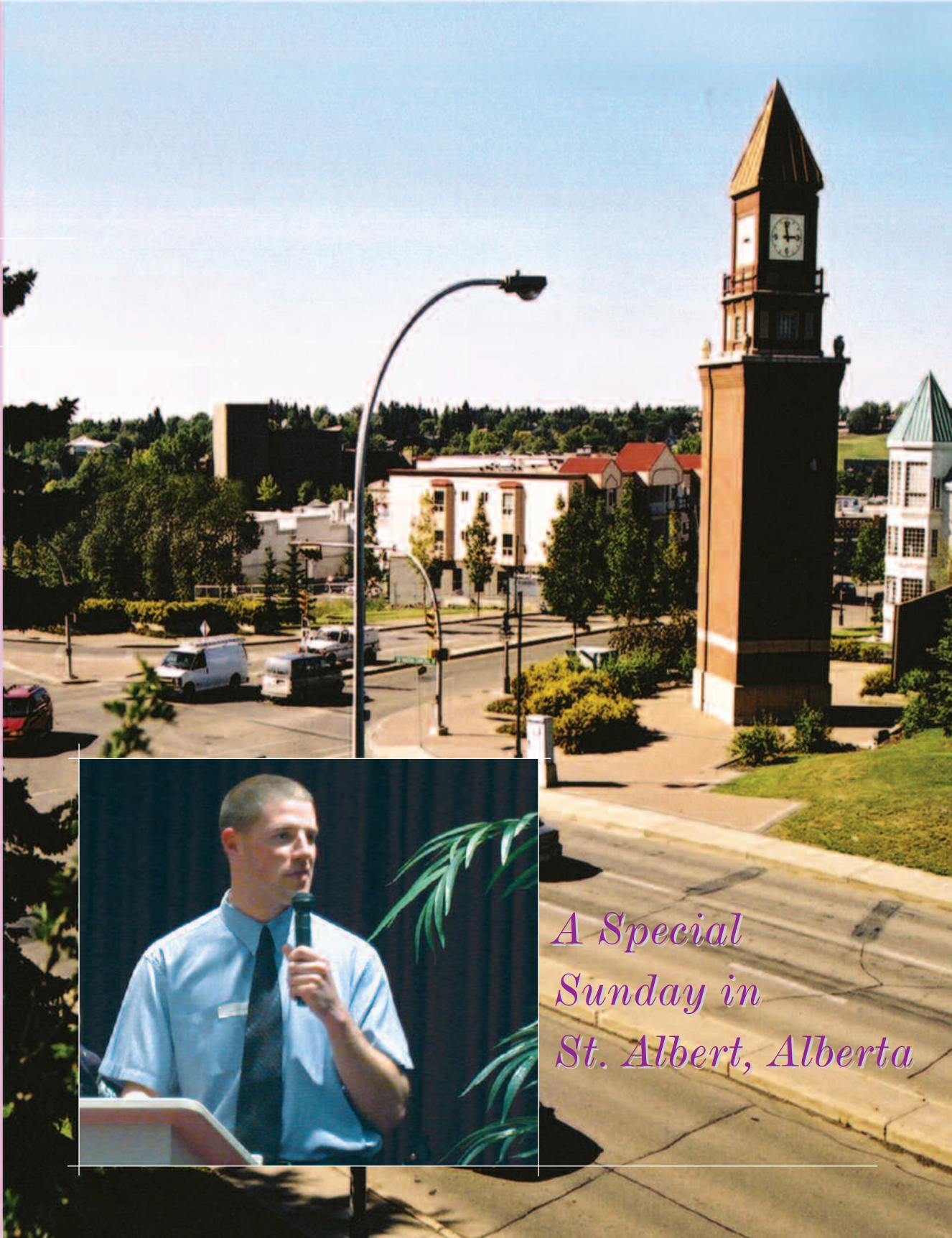
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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*What Shall We
Sing?*

*The Coming of
Christ*

*The
Martyrdom of
Guido de Brès*



*A Special
Sunday in
St. Albert, Alberta*



J. Visscher

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What Shall We Sing?

Music in worship is meant to be a positive unifying force in the life of God's people.

Confusion

One of the issues that continues to cause a considerable amount of controversy today in any number of churches has to do with the question: "what shall we sing?" For the longest time this was a non-issue. Each church had its own psalter or hymn book and it was a given that it contained the songs that were to be sung in worship. Few questions were asked and very little discussion took place. There was consensus.

Often confusion reigns and controversy erupts.

Nevertheless, this is no longer the case. Many churches may still have hymnals in their pews but other songs have seized the day. And there are a great many of them. Why, it seems at times as if an endless river of new songs is flowing into the church. On a regular basis the congregation is requested to listen to the worship band, look up and read or sing along as another new composition is projected on the overhead screen.

Quite obviously from a liturgical perspective things have changed in many churches. The organ is gone. The choir gowns are collecting dust. The piano is surrounded and accompanied by other musical instruments. The way we make music in worship is different. But even more, the songs that are sung are different; so different, that often confusion reigns and controversy erupts.

Critique

What are some of the criticisms of modern worship music? Some take aim at the kind of tunes being composed and say that a lot of them are musically inferior and artistically lacking. Others express frustration with the inclusion of choruses that

go on and on, as repetition appears to be the order of the day. But perhaps the heaviest guns are aimed at the lyrics. They are said to be devoid of real content and substance. They are accused of promoting bad theology. They are dismissed as trite, shallow, and repetitious.

Are all of these criticisms fair? Probably not. In and of itself a new song is not necessarily a bad song. At the same time it is gratifying to see that quite a number of new songs are all about praise and glory to God. They have turned away from the subjectivism of the past and embraced a more theocentric approach.

In any case, the debate over what shall we sing in worship rages on. And that is surely a most regrettable thing. Music in worship is meant to praise and to glorify God, to encourage and to edify the believers, to lift one's spirits and to raise one's voice. It is meant to be a positive unifying force in the life of God's people.

What's wrong?

So what has gone wrong? In part some have lost their biblical and historical moorings. This has caused them to look outside of the Christian musical tradition and to import the world into the church. The result is that at times it becomes hard to distinguish what is called "Christian" music from the hard rock that dominates the daily airwaves of the nation. The instruments are similar, the volume is just as high, and the soloists sing in much the same manner. Only the lyrics, if you can hear them, are different. But on closer inspection, even they are not free from some serious criticisms.

The way ahead: back to the Psalms

What does all of this mean? Where should one go with this? May I be so bold as to suggest that to some extent the way ahead is the way back. I mean specifically back to the rich heritage of Christian music in general and to the Psalms in particular.



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The Psalms? Why the Psalms? Many of our readers will not be surprised by this answer; however, it may be beneficial to have a reminder as to why the Psalms should form the heart and center of the church's music ministry.

There are any number of reasons that come to mind. The first has to do with the simple fact that the Psalms are biblical. When they are sung we are not singing simply the songs of men but the songs of men inspired by the Spirit of God. Of course, when they are put to rhyme and sung to a certain tune, there is human involvement; however, if these Psalms are rendered faithfully, they are the songs of God. They express the will of God. They rejoice in the salvation of God.

When people cut themselves off from their roots, they often become aimless and unfocused.

The second reason for singing the Psalms is that they celebrate the mighty deeds of the Lord. In them and through them you can sing about God's great acts in creating the world, governing creation, rescuing Israel, defeating her enemies, sending the Redeemer King, and saving his people. They are not in the first place about us but about God and his wondrous works.

Naturally, someone may remark that so many of these deeds are past and old, so why sing about them? They need to be sung redemptive-historically, which means you need to identify the lines and draw them through into the New Testament and into today. For example, when the Psalmist writes about our God as "the God of Jacob" he is not just writing about an old guy lost in time. No, he is reminding us that if our God is Jacob's God then He must be a God of great grace, a grace that still shapes and transforms our lives today.

The third reason for singing the Psalms has to do with their human comprehensiveness. In them you will find every human mood, need, longing, hunger, joy, and thought expressed. As more than one author has said, "These are songs for every season of life." Here you can see how believers cope with good days and bad, with oppression, persecution, slander, guilt, depression, and so forth. It is all here.

Personally I was reminded of that most pointedly after the events of September 11. Before this so many of the Psalmist's words about enemies, haters, and lawless men seemed antiquated and far removed. But then, after those horrific events of several years ago, they suddenly took on a new

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relevancy. Singing about God dealing with our enemies seemed quite fitting and entirely appropriate.

The fourth reason for singing the Psalms has to do with the fact that the Psalter has been for so long at the heart and center of the church's worship. The Old Testament church sang these songs as the notations above them so often tell us. The Lord Jesus and his followers sang them. The New Testament church sang them as well. The apostle Paul even commends the singing of "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" on more than one occasion (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). As to whether or not these represent three separate categories of songs or refer to three different types of psalms, there is one thing that is not in doubt, and that is that Paul is promoting psalm singing.

One can also add to this the history of the early Christian church, the monasteries, the Reformers, and even most of the history of the church in North America. The overriding conclusion is that the church throughout the ages has been a predominantly psalm singing church.

Departure

What has caused this to change? The scholars are a divided lot, but many fingers are being pointed in the direction of European pietism, American revivalism, and modern Pentecostalism. The first brought into the music of the church a deep form of introspection and a pre-occupation with the human soul. The second ushered in a heavy emphasis on conversion as if it were the pre-eminent Christian doctrine. The third looked to the Spirit and his gifts in such a way that spiritual optimism and triumphalism were considered to be the norm.

In our day these developments, plus the involvement of music companies both religious and secular, have led to a great

proliferation of other songs. Indeed, in many churches the advent of new song singing has led to the demise and death of psalm singing. Countless churches have completely cut themselves off from their own musical and liturgical heritage. When people cut themselves off from their roots, they often become aimless and unfocused. Has the same happened to churches? Have they become liturgically lost?

What's best?

Lately the evidence seems to indicate that some serious reconsideration is taking place. Postmodernism is having an impact and forcing churches to reflect on their past, in some cases identifying, selecting, and bringing what was best into the present. That may be beneficial, especially if it leads to a return to robust psalm singing. Indeed, let there be a widespread return to the singing of the Psalms! In this age of so much shallow spirituality, it is sorely needed. In this regard it would be instructive for people to read what David T. Koyzis, a professor at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario, has posted on his website, especially his long essay entitled, "Introduction to the Genevan Psalter." You can find it at www.redeemer.on.ca/academics/polisci/psalter_intro. In it he aptly calls the Psalms "the chief liturgical book of God's people."

Now, in recommending the Genevan Psalter, or the psalm section of *The Book of Praise*, I am not saying that this is the only way that God's people can sing the Psalms. I am not an absolutist. Perhaps that reveals a certain musical ignorance or a lack of liturgical purity on my part. I happen to believe that the Psalms can be sung and sung well to different tunes. I learned that on a number of trips to Scotland. So while I may have a preference, it is not an exclusive preference.

The Psalms should form the heart and center of the church's music ministry.

In this connection I also wish the Song Book Committee set up by our Canadian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches every help and blessing as they garner together the best music for the Psalms, both Genevan and otherwise. May it make a rich contribution to the spiritual health and well-being of a new and united church.

In the meantime, the words of the apostle Paul as inspired by the Spirit come to mind, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:19, 20).

The Coming of Christ



MATTHEW 13:52

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

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In the previous verses Paul comforts his readers by pointing to the day when the effects of death, the devastating results, and the sorrowful consequences will be removed. We must know what future the dead are heading for with the Lord Jesus Christ. They are on their way to the return of Christ, to the complete victory over death! It is in terms of this anticipated victory that the apostle Paul now depicts Christ's return. For the Thessalonians the return of a victorious army conjured up a vivid picture in their mind. They would hear the command, and give their full attention! The trumpets would be blown as signal of victory. The whole town would be awakened by them, drawn away from their daily busyness.

This is how it will be when Christ returns. One of the archangels of God will blow the final trumpet call of God. That will be our sign that our King has returned. It will wake us all up. Yes, indeed, those who have fallen asleep in Christ will also hear the signal. Even though human voices could not reach them anymore, they will hear this signal. They will go the way of the Lord, the way from death to life, the way from the grave to their glorious resurrection. This is the first thing that will happen at the return of the King, before anything else. All the traces of death will be removed! They will arise, and they will go out to meet the victorious King.

The most vivid description of a triumphant entry will not suffice to imagine the reception that our Lord and King will receive. He will come in the greatest glory, riding on the clouds, surrounded by his hosts of angels. We, his people, will go out to Him to share in his glory, also riding on the clouds. The Spirit of Christ will catch us up, together with those who have fallen asleep. No longer will death separate us; no longer will death show in any way. This is what the apostle Paul holds up. Paul is not concerned with some kind of “rapture” of the congregation, which all of a sudden disappears from the earth. Paul doesn't have some chiliastic or pre-millennial fantasies in mind about a people who run away with their Lord. No, Christ's people will go out to welcome Him, the way the wise virgins went out at the cry announcing the coming of the bridegroom. A joyous people go out to share in his triumphal entry, then to come back with Him in glorious procession!

As you may be aware, many Christians use this passage as the basis for their expectation of a sudden “rapture” of the believers. Before a seven year tribulation will be ushered in, the anti-Christ will be revealed, and a thousand year reign of Christ will be established. Meanwhile, the church must be evacuated to heaven. Years ago, the books of Hal Lindsey, and more recently some novels by Tim LaHay (*Left Behind*

and *Tribulation Force*) introduce this event in the most vivid description. Besides the most spectacular disappearances of believers from their cars, planes, offices, college halls, or bedrooms to be with Christ and spare them the tribulation, they predict a second chance for those who are left behind to repent and believe and be saved by the Lord. People who have neglected to take the Word seriously the first time around, but now see the evidence of its truth and the dramatic developments, are forced to take faith seriously. What an unscriptural notion that is! As if there will be a time that there will be no church on earth or that Christ won't be gathering Himself a church till the end. Its fallacy is almost worse and more deceiving than the Roman Catholic theory of purgatory! However, these ideas are nothing new; neither are they fruit of careful exegesis of the Scriptures.

These verses in Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians are a case in point and clearly show how erroneous they are: we will see Christ come from above, descending from heaven. We will meet Him, but not to be caught up, abducted, or evacuated to heaven. No, believers, those who are raised from the dead together with those who are still alive, will go out to meet our victorious Saviour and then return to the earth together! It's true, the passage doesn't speak about the raising of the unbelievers;



neither does Paul speak about the life that the believers who died in the Lord enjoy already with Christ (even though it is implied in the fact that God will bring them *with Jesus*, and in the expression that they had fallen asleep *in Him*). Those unbelievers do come into the picture though, namely in 5:3. Paul writes concerning them that they will not escape. Evidently, Paul is speaking about the last trumpet, of the return of Christ to judge the living and the dead, and of the triumphal entry into eternal glory!

These verses simply don't include all the details regarding the end of time. Those details are not Paul's primary concern in the comfort he proclaims to his readers. Paul's message of comfort isn't just about a heaven for the souls of those who are Christ's, but it's the gospel of the new world, for complete people with body and soul. He proclaims the return of the King, the ruler of life, who gives life perfectly without end! "And so we will be with the Lord forever." We who are still alive

and our loved ones who have passed away, together with all who love Him, will always be with the Lord. What a comfort that gives here and now, when there doesn't seem to be anything else but that empty place, that nagging feeling of loss, and that constant pain of separation. Death does not have the last say; the grave is not the end! The day is coming, and it will be an everlasting day, in which there won't be a trace of death! Therefore, encourage each other with these words!



Children's Catechism

J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 30

Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.



Do you remember we talked about that picture of your grandfather? You do not say that it is only his picture. You simply say, "That is my grandfather." In the same way, the Lord Jesus said of the piece of bread, "This is my body," and with the wine, "This is my blood."

The bread of the Supper remains bread, and the wine is still wine. But they point to Jesus' death on the cross.

Now, what does the Roman Catholic Church say? They think that the bread is no longer bread, but that it becomes the body of Christ. And they think that the wine really becomes Christ's blood, even though you cannot see it change. That is why they are afraid that a little crumb may fall. Imagine dropping a little piece of Jesus on the floor! And spilling some of the wine would be just as serious. They see bread and wine as something divine. They even bow to the bread and wine. They make them into an idol.

Do you know what is just as wrong? They call the Lord's Supper a holy mass. And they mean that Christ's death on the cross is not enough. They say that Jesus must be sacrificed time and again through the bread and the wine. That is why bread and wine are placed on an altar. They say that is the only way all sins can really be forgiven. But we don't want to go on talking about the mass of the Roman Catholics. We want to say more about the Lord's Supper in our church.

Imagine if your little sister would eat and drink at the Lord's Supper just like your father and mother do. Would you not be afraid that she would say, "Why is there no jam or peanut butter on the bread?" She might even say, "I don't like wine, I'd rather have pop." You can only eat and drink the bread and the wine when you have learned what the Lord's Supper means, and when you believe it yourself. You should also be old enough to know your own heart. There are more

sins in your heart than can be seen from the outside. But you only see that clearly when you have grown up some more.

You go to school for many years before you can get a job. In the same way you also must learn much from the Bible and in catechism class before you can do profession of faith. Then you will also have learned how to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

But – in the meantime you can watch, and that makes you glad. You know it for yourself: the Lord is kind to me, because my sins have been forgiven.

Are people who hardly think about God and who ignore the Ten Commandments allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper? Of course not. For them, the door is closed. You could say that they are locked out. The door will again be opened for them when they live a better life. Next time, you will hear more about that.



The Martyrdom of Guido de Brès

Most of us should be familiar with the name of the author of the Belgic Confession, Guido (or Guy) de Brès. We probably remember from church history or catechism classes that de Brès was martyred for his faith. Recently, I came across an eyewitness account of that martyrdom which took place on May 31, 1567. De Brès was hung for his faith after spending several weeks in the lowest part of a prison called Brunain in Valenciennes, which today is part of France. De Brès' cell was the place where the prison sewage ended up. Keeping that in mind, this letter speaks powerfully of the grace of God in the life of this saint and, for that reason, it's worth sharing with you. Here is a translation of a reprint contained in *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica (Volume 8)*:

"The death of these two servants of God, ministers of the Reformed church of Valenciennes, namely M. Guy, and M. De la Grange, and other prisoners executed on the same day for the same cause, has all been faithfully recorded in the letter which follows:

Dear brothers,

We wish to inform you of the happy end of our two brothers and ministers, namely, Guy de Brès, and Peregrin De la Grange, who after having been held prisoners since the eleventh of April, 1567, until the last of May of the same year, were finally condemned to death, to be hung in the market place in front of the city hall.

During the time of their imprisonment they were happy in their

bonds, not changing even at the end. For, when on the last Saturday of May, the provost came to tell them that at about three o'clock, so that they might prepare themselves for death at about six o'clock or there about, these servants of the Gospel began to praise God. They thanked the provost for the good news which he had brought to them.

As Christians living in a time of relative freedom, we may sometimes be missing something of their passionate conviction.

Soon after this, they rose, and M. Guy went into the front court to say good day to the other prisoners. He testified to them of his joy when he spoke to them in this way: "My brothers, I am condemned to death today for the doctrine of the Son of God, praise be to Him. I would never have thought that God would have given me such an honour. I feel the grace of God flowing in me more and more. It strengthens me from moment to moment, and my heart leaps within me for joy." Then exhorting the prisoners to be of good courage, he declared that death was nothing. He quoted a passage of Revelation, the exclamation, "Oh, happy are the dead who die in the Lord! They now rest from their labours." He prayed the prisoners to remain firm and constant in the doctrine of the Son of

God which he had preached to them, saying that it was the pure truth of God. "As also," he said, "I have maintained before the bishop of Arras, and many others. I shall answer for it before the face of my God. Take care that you do nothing against what your conscience dictates, for the enemies of the Gospel will try to make you go against your conscience. Watch out for this, for you will then have a tormentor who will feed on your consciences, which will be a continual hell. Oh, my brothers, how good it is to keep a good conscience."

Then the prisoners asked him if he had finished a certain writing that he had begun. He said that he had not, and that he was not going to work any more, because he was soon to be at rest in heaven. He said, "The time of my departure has come. I am going to reap in heaven that which I have sown on earth. I have fought a good fight. I have run my course, keeping the faith of my captain. The crown of glory, which the Lord and Just Judge will give me, is waiting for me. It seems [this he said with a joyous and smiling face] that my soul will have wings to soar to heaven where it is going today to the marriage feast of my Lord, the Son of my God."

And as he spoke, the provost came into the court. And putting his hand to his cap, he saluted him. And again, Guy thanked him for the good news which he brought. The provost answered, "It grieves me that such a thing is to happen." At which Guy joyously said to him, "You are my friend, I love you with all my heart." Then taking leave of the prisoners, he was brought back to the cell. . . .

... Shortly afterward, these two servants of God were led to the city hall, to receive the sentence of death, namely, to be hung and strangled for having acted contrary to the command of the Regent. They did so in having celebrated the Lord's Supper against his order, not mentioning the doctrine which they preached. For not having upheld this doctrine were they condemned. Both were victorious over their enemies even unto death. As M. De la Grange was led to the execution, he announced in a loud voice from the step that he was dying for no other cause than for having upheld the truth of God before the people. Thus passed this faithful servant from this life to eternal life.

A little while later they led M. Guy, who prostrated himself, wishing to pray at the bottom of the step. This they would not allow him to do, and lifting him up, they made him mount the steps quickly. Reaching the top, he exhorted them to have respect for the magistrate, who was doing that which was required of him. He begged of them to persevere in the doctrine which he had proclaimed to them, protesting that he had never preached anything but the truth of God. He had not finished his words when the commissioner made a sign to the officer to hurry. This he did. But as soon as the ladder was taken away, there began such a disturbance among the armed soldiers that they began to run about, discharging their guns at those whom they encountered, Papists as well as others, even killing those of their own number.

All this happened without any apparent reason. The Captains could not recall their own men, so that they had difficulty in preventing those who started to pillage the shops. We can think only that God had sent this terror as a sign of his just judgment. The men were so seized with fright that they were overwhelmed."

The letter goes on to relate that the bodies were left hanging on the gallows for some time, but were later taken down and placed in shallow graves. However, "the beasts of the field" managed to mutilate them; not a new thing, says the author of the letter, if we pay attention to Psalm 74.

Some thoughts on the letter

Such was the end of a remarkable figure in the history of the Reformed churches. Let's take a brief look at some elements of the account. First, notice the great joy that filled de Brès as he faced death for his faith. De Brès and De la Grange were consumed with the vision of what waited them. A part of the letter that I didn't quote mentioned that De la Grange even polished his shoes, "giving as his reason that he was going to the marriage feast, and to the eternal feast of the Lamb." These men were totally assured of their vindication in glory. As Christians living in a time of relative freedom, we may sometimes be missing something of their passionate conviction.

Second, notice that de Brès, even in the hours before his death, cared deeply about others. He cared for his fellow prisoners. This letter and others make clear that de Brès spent many of his hours in prison witnessing to his neighbours. While in prison, he had preached to them "the doctrine of the Son of God." Further, notice Guy's love and compassion for the provost or prison warden when he says, "You are my friend, I love you with all my heart." What a powerful testimony of the grace of God in the life of this man! Could we do the same if we were faced with jail and execution for our faith?

Our principles are based on Scripture and must never be compromised.

The final thing that is striking is the manner in which de Brès goes to the scaffold. In particular, notice the way that he exhorts the people to respect the government. Despite the persecution he endured, the author of Belgic Confession Article 36 maintained his principles: "Moreover, everyone – no matter of what quality, condition, or rank – ought to be subject to the civil officers, pay taxes, hold them in honour and respect, and obey them in all things which do not disagree with the Word of God." I mentioned that we live in a time of



Church News

Called by the church of Cloverdale, British Columbia:

Rev. T. Lodder
of Taber, Alberta.

Called to the church of Orangeville, Ontario:

Rev. W. Bredenhof
home missionary of Smithers, British Columbia.

On February 10th, 2005, emeritus

Prof. Dr. K. Deddens
of the Netherlands, passed away to be with Christ, his Saviour. He served as Professor of Diaconology and Ecclesiology at the Theological College from 1984-1990. He was also minister emeritus of the church at Hamilton, Ontario. The funeral took place on February 15, 2005 in the Netherlands.

relative freedom. However, this could very well change and it seems to be changing before our eyes. Nevertheless, our principles are based on Scripture and must never be compromised. Should it happen, and may God prevent it, that we are hunted down for our faith, we must continue to respect those over us. In this, de Brès gives us a powerful example to follow.

Today martyrdom and persecution continue to be unpleasant facts for many believers around the world. Despite the great evil perpetrated, God still turns these terrible things for the good of his people. We can read and hear about contemporary accounts of martyrs and be greatly encouraged in our walk with God. But we can still look back to the 1560s, a terrible time of bloodshed, and be equally encouraged by the testimony of our fathers. Indeed, praise God for his faithful servant Guido de Brès and countless others like him!





Streetlight Ministries

September 2004

From the Board

September 16 saw a significant meeting convened at the Streetlight Ministries Centre. Upon invitation, two delegates of the eight other Bay Area United and Canadian Reformed Churches met with representatives of Ancaster council and the Streetlight Ministries mission board. The churches represented were the United Reformed Churches of Hamilton and Sheffield, the three Canadian Reformed Churches of Burlington, and the Canadian Reformed Churches of Flamborough, Hamilton and Glanbrook. The agenda consisted of discussion of the calling of a home missionary.

This past spring, representatives of council and board visited each of these churches to discuss with their councils the need for a home missionary. The churches were asked to consider supporting us at the amount of \$70 per communicant member. This delegates meeting was meant to help us determine the level of support we can expect from the churches.

What became clear is that we have strong moral support from our neighbouring sister churches. No one considers the work we are doing unimportant. Thankfulness to the Lord was expressed for the fruit already borne. However, at the same time, references were made to local budgetary concerns and stresses.

The meeting was very positive and encouraging. The delegates were asked to go back to their respective councils and request that we be given a firm answer as soon as possible as to level of support. Once we know those answers, we will be able to take succeeding steps towards the calling of a home missionary.

In the mean time, the many activities of Streetlight Ministries have resumed after the summer break. The children's

and youth clubs are gearing up to start again. The Bible studies and teaching have begun again. The ministry centre is a hive of activity. We wish Brother Richard strength as he plunges into the work once again. We also wish Tracy Lynn Hoeksema the Lord's blessing as she manages the many contacts we have with children and youth.

In many respects, the backbone of Streetlight Ministries is made up of the countless volunteers. So many are involved in leading Bible studies and clubs. The board is very thankful for the enthusiastic and tireless work of scores of willing workers. May the Lord bless you all and reward you for your faithfulness.

May God bless us as we continue to be a people who have resolved to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor 2:2), the only source of hope for our time.

Rev. G. van Popta

Streetbeat from our Evangelist

As the summer is winding down and the different outreach activities are starting up again, I would like to tell you a little about what went on this past summer. Although the main outreach activities of Kids' Club, Girls' Club, Floor Hockey, and the Ladies' Tea Break were on hold, a lot was still going on.

The Tuesday night adult Bible study continued, although we did have a few weeks off here and there. Many of the regulars told me and the other leaders that they really needed the mid-week Bible study to get them through the week. With little other Christian influence and many temptations both within themselves and their environments to turn back to an old way of life, they said they needed the Bible study and Christian fellowship in the middle of the week to

keep going on the straight and narrow way. The few weeks we did have off not only tested them but also tested us as leaders. Would we trust that God would hold them fast as they held on to the teachings and the faith we were speaking to them about? It was great to see that they did. They could experience the truth that God holds on to those who confess his name. It was hard for me and the other volunteers to be out of their lives for a few weeks. Sometimes we can fall into the trap of thinking those we minister to need us or they will fail in their faith. The time away from them, for me, anyway, helped me to see again that God is the one holding them up so they can stand faithfully in his promises in the midst of a crooked and depraved world. We also had a picnic for those who are regulars to this study group. Although our time together was a little hectic and busy, it was great to see the group huddle together not only to eat and drink but to sing and listen to a short meditation in the middle of a park packed with people milling about. We very much looked like a distinct group of people held together by the Word of God.

During the summer I was able to make a few more visits, and longer ones, than I usually have time for. Although some visits caused grief in learning about someone's lack of concern for following God's Word in thankfulness, most of the visits were a joy. One visit in particular brought both joy and sadness. In visiting the family of a young girl who has attended our Kids' Club for 4 years followed by 2 years of Girls' Club, I learned much. The mother explained that her daughter always tells her that she should turn to God and believe the Bible and not the foolishness of evolution. When I asked the daughter why she did this, she told me she knew that if her



Richard Bultje

mother did not turn to God from her unbelief she would go to hell and she did not want this for her mother. When I talked to the mother about this, she admitted that she had gone to church when she was young and knew what her daughter was talking about. She said she believed in a god, but thought this world was on its own and we had to believe in something that brought us happiness. When I asked her if she had happiness, she admitted she did not. After some more talking she also admitted that she was not taught much when she was a child going to church and so did not know much of the Bible. I offered her a small easy-to-read book on who Jesus is and why He came to this earth and that what the Bible says about Jesus is trustworthy. Thankfully she took it. I hope and pray that she will read it and that I will be able to discuss the book with her in the future some time. Pray that her daughter will not go the same route in life that her mother has gone so far.

Through the summer the Sunday night outreach service, with the help of many faithful volunteers, continued with no interruptions. Although it was often very hot in the building, God's promises and demands continued to ring out each week to a full or near full auditorium. One thing that has become very evident is that the 35 or so regulars are growing in their understanding and desire to know what it means to be faithful to the Lord. In the last number of months we have gone through the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, pointing out how God wants his people to live in a thankful relationship with Him.

It was again a great pleasure to send children and young people to Campfire this past summer. Seeing the eagerness in

the kids to go and hearing about the great times they had is a great delight to me. But it is especially great to see the enthusiasm in the children and young people when they come back from camp. They seem much more eager to attend the Sunday night service and the Kids' Club or Girls' Club. With little to no encouragement at home, these children and young people seem to get a big lift out of going to camp. Another good thing that came from Campfire this past summer was their Service week. For the third year a group of older teenagers under the leadership of Campfire staff came to the Streetlight Christian Centre to serve in cleaning the building and hosting a barbecue. They not only left us with a cleaner building but gave many people downtown the feeling that people care for them and that God wants them to know Him as a loving God who cares for people.

The Fellowship Church of Burlington South helped us host our second Children's Summer Bible School. The first was hosted by Hamilton last year. Once again we had a number of children from around the Streetlight Christian Centre participate in crafts, songs, and, most importantly, learn more about our heavenly Father as the creator of the universe, the One we all should serve as Lord and only can do so through Jesus Christ. The leaders of the Bible School put much work into setting up and teaching the material. Many of the children expressed their hope that this can continue to be a yearly event.

Although this is not all that went on this past summer, you can see that it has again been a busy time with many people helping out, so that God's Word could continue to ring out in the downtown core of Hamilton. Pray this will continue to be a reality.

*In His Service,
Richard*

Prison Ministry

Some time ago, in the early '90s, I joined "Prison Fellowship," an organization started by Chuck Colson. At the Barton Street Jail (more properly, the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre), I work with many

other volunteers in this organization: men and women, pastors and elders. In case you don't know, a person remanded in custody for less than two years enters a facility of the Ontario Ministry of Corrections Services. For sentences of two years or more, offenders are transferred to an appropriate federal penitentiary.

My visits are scheduled by the local "Prison Fellowship" director, usually for the fourth Sunday of the month. The Sunday service includes prayer, singing, Bible reading, and a short message on the Scripture passage, followed by discussion and prayer. On Monday evenings, we have another session which is more like a Bible study than a service time. We usually have a group of 10-12 people, most with some Bible background and/or who have been baptized. I have letters from some of these people expressing thanks to us for giving them a clear insight into the Word of God. It is all from the Lord.

Our visits are so appreciated. Most visitors have to speak through a phone with a glass between them and the detained person, but we are given a room where we can welcome them with a firm handshake and a straight look.

For some time now, I have been teaming up with Richard on Wednesday evenings. We use a Bible especially for prison ministry. It is called "Free on the Inside." Over the last few years, more inmates have become interested and the guards more helpful and friendly. Some of them are Christians.

I am happy that we have Streetlight Ministries downtown because Richard and I can refer the inmates to it after their release from the detention centre. May it grow under the Lord's blessing. And if we get discouraged, we should remember that Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matt 25:40).

John Hutten

Streetlight Ministries is a ministry of the Ancaster and Fellowship Canadian Reformed Churches. Please direct donations and correspondence to: Streetlight Ministries, P.O. Box 78001, Westcliffe Postal Outlet, Hamilton ON, L9C 7N5 rjbultje@attglobal.net



The Ordination, Inaugural Sermon and Welcome evening of Rev. R. Bredenhof

A special Sunday in St. Albert

A beautiful sunny October 31, 2004 will be remembered as an extra special Sunday for the Canadian Reformed Church of St. Albert, Alberta. There was a tangible air of anticipation, even excitement, as the congregation and guests quickly filled the sanctuary. It would be a Sunday of many "firsts". Not only would Rev. R. Bredenhof become the first minister of our fairly recently instituted (June 2003) church, but St. Albert would also be Rev. and Mrs. Bredenhof's first congregation. It would also be the first time for many members to witness the ordination of a graduate of the Theological College. We could hear Brother Bredenhof's promise to, in God's grace, faithfully serve and shepherd the congregation and we could also witness the laying on of hands by the presiding minister, Rev. R. Aasman, and two elders.

Rev. Aasman chose as text Romans 1:16-17. The theme of his sermon was "the gospel is the power of God to salvation". He would further expand on this text by explaining what this power of salvation really is and how this power is received.

With October 31 also being Reformation Day, it was a most fitting text. These verses have been described as Martin Luther's "conversion text", a text that gave birth to the great Reformation



Thank you by Rev. Bredenhof with Rebecca and Abigail

of the sixteenth century of which the Canadian Reformed Church of St. Albert and Brother Bredenhof is a product.

The power of salvation is Christ's righteousness. When we believe in Christ, his perfect righteousness is imputed to us; that is the good news of the gospel! This news must be preached faithfully and powerfully to God's people. A preacher who loves and lives the Word of God will never run out of things to say, he will never exhaust God's Word! The preacher must also remind his listeners to do the will of God. We are saved by grace, but God wants thankful and faithful servants. We cannot earn God's grace, his free gift of love.

Therefore we should humbly respond with gratitude, praise and joy.

The Lord gathers his church by the ministry of men, therefore the congregation was also charged to receive Rev. Bredenhof with joy as an ambassador of the Lord. We must pray for our new minister, that the Holy Spirit equips him with all things needful to faithfully shepherd the flock. We must also pray for his wife, Rebecca, that she may be able to support and assist her husband in his calling.

The form for the ordination was then read by Rev. Aasman with the accompanying questions to which Brother Bredenhof responded, "I do, with



The program was led by MCs
Darren Muis and John Dehaas

all my heart.” After the concluding hymn and benediction, words of congratulations were received and read from various churches of Classis Alberta. The congregation was then able to congratulate Rev. and Mrs. Bredenhof, together also with their parents and even several grandparents who had all traveled from East and West to be present.

The service had also included a baptism; Mya Joanne Veenendaal, the first grandchild for Rev. and Mrs. Aasman. Everyone present therefore could celebrate, both in the ordination of a new, young minister and in the sacrament of baptism to our newest member – God’s covenantal faithfulness throughout the generations!

Rev. Bredenhof’s inaugural sermon

After a coffee fellowship hour, the whole congregation continued to stay and enjoy lunch together. Soon it was time for another service and Rev. Bredenhof’s inaugural sermon. The text he chose was Psalm 40:9-10.

Psalm 40 is a psalm of David, celebrating the grace of God after being rescued from great danger. We know David experienced very personally the power and protection of God. As a shepherd boy, an opponent of Goliath,

running from King Saul and later his own son Absalom, fighting with the Philistines, God continued to hear the cry of his child and come to his aid. But David also realized that sin sucks us into the deep mire of the pit of which Psalm 40 speaks. Our sins and guilt also need our cry of deliverance. Outside are the evil dangers, inside is our evil heart, yet David speaks in the unshakeable confidence of one who knows the Lord of unfailing mercy. After being saved by God, David has many words of thanks that must be said. Rev. Bredenhof’s theme was “the grateful servant is compelled to proclaim the Word of salvation.” This Word would be spoken in the assembly, in its fullness, and in the Lord’s service.

The good news of the gospel must be preached faithfully and powerfully to God’s people.

Throughout the ages, God’s servants must continue to proclaim to those whom God loves that through Christ our enemies are vanquished and our sins are forgiven. It must also be told in

fullness, the righteousness of God cannot be hidden. What God has done in Christ and given us in scripture is so rich and varied that a lifetime of sermons and study will still not exhaust it. Also, it is God who must be served in the work of preaching, pastoring, and teaching. This involves humbly seeking the glory of the Lord and loving the good of his church. God has given us all different tasks but we are all summoned to serve. Not in our own strength, lest we boast, but as we read in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, “The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”

An evening of celebration

The evening of November 2 again brought the congregation together, this time in a most relaxed manner. “Lots of fun” best describes this evening! Also “lots of participation,” as was evident in the many acknowledgements on the program that the organizing committee had used each member’s particular interests and talents. Everyone baked, everyone submitted photos, everyone sang and laughed, and everyone felt thankful for a joy filled evening of Christian fellowship.

The program was led by MCs John Dehaas and Darren Muis. After the singing of Hymn 38, they led us in prayer and bible reading.

Historian Martin Hooimeyer (St. Albert’s only, and just-recently-turned-senior-citizen) introduced Rev. and Mrs. Bredenhof and told some details of where each had been born, raised, and educated.

Then, for the benefit of baby Abigail, a long line (12!) of mothers carrying infants born since St. Albert’s institution were introduced. Their names and photos appeared on an overhead screen. An

The children sang several selections enjoyed by all



infant sled was presented to Abigail from all her peers in the church nursery!

A “welcome album”, beautifully made by several ardent scrapbookers, with photos and short write-ups of each family/member was also presented to the Bredenhofs, giving them a wonderful pictorial view of the congregation.

All through the evening the MCs provided interesting trivia (i.e. did you know that the tray used on the Lord’s Supper Table was purchased on e-bay? or... did you know that the average age of the St. Albert’s pianists is about 17.5 years?)

Three of the young pianists provided accompaniment for the singing selections of the evening. They also presented Rev. and Mrs. Bredenhof with tickets to the Edmonton Winspear Center for a special music evening of their choice.

Next Rev. Bredenhof was invited to participate in a matching father/daughter game. Not only did he make the correct

pairs, but even the correct names! (Well... only once there was a small mistake in a name and even then his punishment of 5 push-ups inflicted by Colin Veldkamp, our high school basketball coach, was completed by our new pastor with ease!)

God must be served in the work of preaching, pastoring, and teaching.

The young adults’ bible study also made a presentation, a laminated map of St. Albert complete with markers showing where congregation members lived; certainly a handy tool for any new minister and his family.

A children’s choir, led by Alyson Bosch, sang several selections enjoyed by all.

A power point presentation entitled “These are a Few of my Favourite Things” was a beautiful end to the program. It showed many members engaged in various outdoor activities in St. Albert. That too, helped the Bredenhofs to know the congregation and the city a bit better!

Rev. and Mrs. Bredenhof then took the opportunity to speak words of thanks to the council and the congregation. They had been very encouraged by the warm welcome and all the preparations that had been made for their arrival. They also assured us that the gift, which had come in an envelope from us all, would be spent on something very special!

The evening was closed with a prayer of thankfulness by Brother Joe Bosch. May the Lord bless the work of Rev. and Mrs. Bredenhof in our midst and may we also be a blessing for them.



After the service

R. Faber

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High School Expansion Plans in Classis Ontario-North



As this column has reported on previous efforts by the school society of Fergus-Guelph and district to expand the high school program, it would be fitting to pass along the latest developments. Readers may recall that since early 2003 the society has been investigating ways to increase the grades offered, to include 11 and 12. At a recent meeting, the society approved a plan that will allow this goal to be realized.

Drawing from models of organization used by sister institutions, the plan calls for the formation of two school societies by July 2005, and envisages a regional high school, supported by several elementary feeder schools. In effect, a new high school society will be started, which will take responsibility for Reformed education from grades 9-12. Until suitable property and building is acquired for the regional high school, the current location, where grades 9 and 10 (Emmanuel School) are already housed, will be used.

The governance of the new high school will require board members from the churches in this area of Classis Ontario-North and from the supporting elementary schools, Dufferin Area Christian School (Orangeville) and Maranatha Christian School (Fergus). Thus the high school will remain connected to its supporting church

communities and to the feeder schools; the financial structure is also premised upon support from members of the churches in the area.

Plans of this sort often expose ongoing challenges. As the advertising section of this magazine reveals, one challenge will be to obtain the four additional teachers needed to mount the planned program; may more young men and women see it as their calling to teach in Reformed schools. Even greater cooperation among school boards and staff within the League (and within Reformed churches generally) would reduce duplication of work, and provide the cluster-groups that produce results in governance and education more efficiently and effectively. One could go on to mention the need for systemic



support of teacher training, for a revision of the pseudo-ecclesiastical structure of the local boards and their relationship to the League, for the cultivation of a more collaborative attitude regarding interaction with the various Ministries of Education and other relevant government organizations, for renewed commitment to curriculum development that would serve schools across the country, and, more broadly, the need for a clear expression of the necessity of Reformed education in the twenty-first century.

An unrelated development that is equally worthy of note is the society's decision to extend full membership to those who are members in good standing in churches with which the Canadian Reformed Churches maintain a sister-church relationship. One consideration was that our schools should stay current with the progress towards union with the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). This was not an academic question: a small number of families in the URCNA have been

sending their children to the Maranatha-Emmanuel schools, and there are currently two URCNA congregations in the area. Thus the alteration of the constitution provided the society the opportunity to articulate the Reformed understanding of the nuanced relationship between church and school.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone willing to respond or interact to an article or anyone willing to write an article for us is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman (bouwman@surepost.net).



Press Release

Press Release from the delegate meeting of the Niagara area Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches held on January 18, 2005

On January 18, 2005, 72 men from the Niagara area Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) and United Reformed Churches (URCNA) gathered in the Lincoln Canadian Reformed Church in Beamsville, Ontario for the Annual Meeting of Delegates. The purpose of this meeting was to hear presentations on the song books of our federations and to discuss topics of mutual interest relating to the ongoing growth toward full unity of these two federations.

Our chairman, Brother N. Vandenoever, directed us to singing Psalm 105, reading Philippians 2, and to prayer. Following a brief introduction and explanation, Rev. D. Royall from the London United Reformed Church was introduced to speak on "An Introduction to the *Psalter Hymnal*." Rev. Royall related some of the history and character of the *Psalter Hymnal* and gave an update of the ongoing work of the joint song book committee, of which he is a member. He said the committee is working well together and making progress. They plan to meet again in the spring. Rev. Royall

gave further insight to the *Guidelines for Selecting Songs*, written by the joint committee and approved by the synods of both churches.

Brother B. Stulp read a message on "An Introduction to the *Book of Praise*" prepared by Rev. G.Ph. van Popta. Among other interesting points, he noted that the history of the formation of the *Book of Praise* shows that in the past the CanRC was not always committed to using only Genevan tunes. However, the committee formed from the synod of 1965 was committed, resulting in the present form with the Psalms in their entirety and 65 hymns. The URCNA delegates were informed of the Canadian Reformed members' deep bond with the *Book of Praise* and the timeless character and universal use of the Genevan tunes.

A limited discussion on membership transfers and participation of the Lord's Supper reaffirmed previous discussions and decisions. Members would be transferred only if there was mutual agreement between the two respective churches and individual members "shopping" for a church they liked would be reminded of their obligations to worship in their home church. Members would be accepted to the Lord's Supper using the practice of that church. Canadian Reformed members would be

expected to affirm their faith and good standing in their home church. The United Reformed church where they participated would inform the home church of that event. URCNA members would be required to present a letter of attestation (good standing) from their own consistory to the Canadian Reformed church.

Plans were also made for future meetings. Dunnville Canadian Reformed Church and Wellandport ORC will organize an office bearers conference for late spring of 2005. Trinity ORC and Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Church will organize the panel discussion Unity Meeting, open to all members, for the fall of 2005. Dunnville United Reformed Church and Smithville Canadian Reformed Church will look after next year's delegate meeting. After singing the doxology together, Rev. J. Dykstra closed in prayer.

The spirit of the meeting was very cordial. There appeared to this writer to be a sincere desire to be faithful to the call of Scripture for unity, to understand each other, and to be willing to accommodate each other's interests.

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