



# Clarion

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*Juice*

*Yanking out  
handfuls of  
hair*

*Worshipping  
God Your  
Own Way*

*The fruit of the vine*





Cl. Stam

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# Juice

*In church life we see time and again that the exception easily becomes a norm*

From time to time every consistory receives a letter requesting that grape juice also be served at the Lord's Supper as an alternative to the wine. Sometimes I wonder why it has to be *grape juice*. It could really be any other kind of beverage, as long as it is not an alcoholic drink. The rationale for juice is probably that it *looks like wine*; we do want to keep up appearances.

This is not an unimportant matter and the question about what is proper in this respect has even risen to the level of the major assemblies. Synod Chatham, to mention only the last assembly dealing with this question, made the following consideration: "Since the confessions are normative in the churches, Synod considers that wine should be used at the Lord's Supper" (Acts, Art 109, 4.2). Synod added, "This does not exclude the possibility of making an exception."

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## *Replacing wine with juice is almost a pandemic*

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Such a two-pronged decision can easily be abused. I can imagine someone writing to a consistory: Synods Neerlandia and Chatham said that the use of grape juice is exceptional but legal. End of discussion: give us juice. But the Synod did not really say *that*.

Synod upheld the *norm* which is that wine be used. And then Synod allowed for an exception. Chatham said, "Allowing for an exception demonstrates Christian love and compassion for those with difficulties." But in church life we see time and again that the exception easily becomes a norm or is regarded as a right.

## **"The fruit of the vine"**

Those who would argue in favour of having grape juice always available at the Holy Supper sometimes point to the fact that our Lord does not refer to wine but speaks of "*this fruit of the vine*" (Matt 26:29) or "*the fruit of the vine*" (Luke 22:17). The fruit of the vine, it is said, does not necessarily mean wine, for juice is also a fruit of the vine (see also Acts, Chatham, Art 109, 3.3). The circle is round again.

So we have developed a divergent custom in our churches. Some serve only wine. Some would rather serve only juice. Others prefer to have both and to leave the decision to the individual members. We all want to show Christian love and compassion. The question is, however, how this love must be shown. Also, love must come from *both* sides.

The expression "the fruit of the vine" refers to wine. To conclude otherwise is to engage in exegetical destruction. Our Lord instituted the Supper at the *Passover*, where *wine* was used as drink. The holy catholic church has therefore always used wine in the Supper. Wine is an ecumenical symbol.

Please note also that our Lord at his last Passover during the institution of the Lord's Supper referred to Himself saying "I am the true vine..." (John 15:12). The word for "vine" (*ampelos*) also combined with the adjective "true" (*alethinos*) lead us to think of a vine that bears grapes *used for wine*.

## **Wine as festive drink**

We ought to remember that *wine* has a special character and function the Bible. Passover and the Supper which replaced it are called "festivals" (Exodus 12:14, 1 Cor 5:8) and wine is a drink which is in keeping with the festive nature of the feast.

The Lord has given wine to his children. There has been much *abuse* of this gift and the abuse has led to

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broken lives and families. But other gifts of God are also abused and we do not replace them.

In Psalm 104 we read about "wine that gladdens the heart of man." It is one of the special creation gifts that the Lord has given to his children. It is refreshing and invigorating.

Wine is a festive drink. We usually uncork a bottle of wine only when there is a special reason. I find it remarkable that the Lord Jesus' first miracle was to change water into wine at a wedding feast (John 2). Today many might say that was a wrong start. But our Lord made the best wine abundantly available, for the occasion demanded it.

The Lord Himself therefore assured us that He would not drink of the wine again until the day "when I drink it anew with you in the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt 26:29). What kind of a day will this be? In Revelation 19 we find that it is a great festival, the wedding of the Lamb. Christ will not drink wine until that great day. But then the occasion demands it.

Our Lord's Supper is an anticipation of that great wedding feast. Therefore wine is served and we receive it in the faith that one day we will drink it with Christ at the great wedding feast.

**What about alcoholism?**

Where is now my "Christian love and compassion"? There are people who because of the affliction of alcoholism cannot take even a drop of the wine. They want something else; grape juice comes to mind as suitable replacement.

What's wrong with a replacement? After all, neither wine nor juice contains any magical qualities. Someone wrote: we should "not cling to the outward symbols of bread and wine." So juice is okay.

But the believer is not encouraged to switch beverages. The "sursum corda" directs us all to heaven, where Christ is. It does not say that the symbols are only outward and hence easily interchangeable, but it says that we must get beyond the symbols of bread and wine!

It is my opinion that those who cannot take wine should abstain from using it. It is a necessary personal decision made in one's own responsibility. Abstaining has no bearing on one's salvation but shows forth the humility that is required of a Christian. If there is to be an exception a consistory must judge each case on its own merit and method.

Replacing wine with juice is almost a pandemic. I think it has more to do with the temperance league than the catholic church.

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# Yanking out handfuls of hair



**MATTHEW 13:52**

*“I pulled hair from my head and beard...” (Ezra 9:3)*

*“I pulled out their hair...” (Nehemiah 13:25)*

What different reactions to similar situations! Ezra yanked hair out of his own head; Nehemiah grabbed fistfuls out of the heads of others. What's up with all this?

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are about how God began to restore and rebuild the church in Jerusalem after the time of exile. In 586 BC, God had sent his idolatrous and unfaithful people into exile in Babylon. Some fifty years later God moved the hearts of the kings of the new Persian empire to allow the Jews to resettle Jerusalem.

The first group went back in 538 BC to re-erect the Temple. This was during the days of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

The second wave of people arrived in Jerusalem about sixty years later under the leadership of Ezra the priest. Ezra's task was to enforce the law of Moses. When he arrived he discovered a very shocking thing: many who had returned in the first wave had intermarried with heathen Canaanite people. Even many priests and Levites were guilty of intermarriage. They had mingled the holy race with the peoples around them (Ezra 9:2). How could the church be rebuilt if God's people intermarried with unbelievers?!

When Ezra heard this, he tore his clothes, pulled hair from his head and beard, and sat down appalled until the evening sacrifice. At the time of the evening sacrifice he prayed a very moving prayer of repentance on behalf of

the people (Ezra 9:6-15). He began his prayer by confessing his own shame and disgrace because of the sins of the people. He cast the whole prayer of confession and repentance in the first person plural. Ezra, the priest, identified with the people, took their sins upon himself, and even inflicted suffering upon himself because of the sins of God's people. Like the priests were to do, he prayed to God on the people's behalf upon the basis of the sacrifices offered to God at the temple.

A decade later Nehemiah arrived on the scene to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and serve as governor. Much to his dismay, he discovered that the sin of intermarriage had persevered in Jerusalem. Although the kingship was not restored in Jerusalem after the exile, Nehemiah functioned as a king. He applied strict discipline against the people. Nehemiah 13 sketches out his church-disciplinary actions. Among other measures, he publicly rebuked, cursed, and beat the men who had intermarried and he pulled out their hair.

Why this difference? Why did Ezra pull out his own hair while Nehemiah pulled out the hair of the offenders? The reason for the different responses to the same sin lies in their offices. Nehemiah, filling the royal office, applied discipline to the offenders. Ezra, a priest, took the sin of others upon himself and accepted the consequences.

Our Lord Jesus Christ bears both offices. When He chased the

moneychangers and livestock dealers out of the temple with a rope whip, He acted as king. When He took our sins upon Himself and allowed Himself to be beaten and spat upon, He proved Himself the priest.

In one of the suffering servant songs the servant laments: "I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting" (Isa 50:6).

These songs in the prophecies of Isaiah are about the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the priest who took our sins upon Himself, who suffered the humiliation of the punishment we deserved. He let them yank out his hair because of our sin. Like Ezra the priest, He suffered for the sins of the people.

But He is also king. Today church discipline is exercised in the name of Christ against church members who persist in unbelief and rebellion. No, elders do not yank hair out of unbelieving and rebellious church members. In this dispensation, church discipline is purely spiritual. But when Christ returns He will come as king. Like Nehemiah the "king," He will deal physically with rebels and unbelievers. Getting one's hair yanked out will seem to be a trivial punishment compared to the measures King Jesus will take against rebels and unbelievers.

All praise to Jesus who let his hair get yanked out for our sins so that we may never experience the wrath of God!





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# A Lesson in History: The Baptism of '44 (Part 2 of 3)

*The war in which our parents and grandparents were embroiled sixty years ago, we learned last time, placed specific and sensitive questions on their table. As their little ones fell victim to the ravages of war, could our parents and grandparents be sure of their salvation? Were these little ones truly God's children or not? Synod's answer gave but cold comfort.*

## Teaching of Scripture

So our fathers turned to Scripture to glean from there its comforting teaching. They read Genesis 17, where God spoke to Abraham of his decision to establish his covenant with the man Abraham and with his offspring: "And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you in their generations. . . , to be God to you and your descendants after you" (v 7). Our fathers noticed that God mentions no assumptions here, no maybes or ifs. God's covenant is established not with *some* descendants but with *all*. And it's not different kinds of covenants that God makes with different children of Abraham; rather, "I establish my covenant [there is only one] between me and you and your descendants [all of them, not only some]. . . , to be God to you and [all] your descendants after you." That text already gave the lie to the comfortless teaching of the Synod of 1943.

But our grandparents knew of more texts in Scripture. Peter on the day of Pentecost reminded the people of Israel of the promise of the covenant mentioned in Genesis 17. Said Peter: "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off. . ." (Acts 2:39). Here too, our parents noticed, are no assumptions, no maybes. The promise of the covenant belongs not just to some children of believers, but to all. They also read what Paul wrote to the Corinthians, that church of Greeks where many families had but one believing parent (for the other had not [yet] come to faith). Despite the tension that may result in marriage from one person becoming a believer, Paul was insistent that the Christian partner should not move out or divorce the unbelieving partner. For, says Paul, "the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy" (1 Cor 7:14). You hear that: "Now they are holy." Paul does not say that the children of a believing parent are *assumed* to be holy; rather, the Apostle is moved by God's Holy Spirit to be categorical: the children of a believing parent *are* holy. And what does it mean to be holy? To be holy means that there is a relation to God, that one is claimed by God to be his.

## Teaching of the church

These texts on which the fathers built their opposition to the teaching of the Synod: what did it all come down to? To say it with the words of the Catechism, "Infants as well as adults *belong* to God's covenant and congregation" (LD 27). They belong, for God's covenant is fully for adults *and* for children, for believers *and* for their seed. So "through Christ's blood the redemption from sin and the Holy Spirit. . . are promised to [infants] no less than to adults." Whatever comfort there is in the fact that we adults are baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is just as real and true for our children. Children are part of God's covenant, fully and truly, with all the rights and privileges attached thereto, are part of that covenant *without assumptions*, and they should be baptized not on the *assumption* that they belong, not on the assumption that God is their Father who cares for them and that the Son has washed their sins away and that the Holy Spirit lives in their hearts, but baptized rather because they *do* belong, they *have* a Father, Christ is their Saviour, the Holy Spirit is their Renewer. It's what the Form for the Baptism of Infants says:

Although our children do not understand all this, we may not therefore exclude them from

baptism. Just as they share without their knowledge in the condemnation of Adam, so are they, without their knowledge, received into grace in Christ. For the Lord spoke to Abraham, the father of all believers, and thus also speaks to us and our children, saying, *I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.* Peter also testifies to this when he says, *For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Him.* Therefore in the old dispensation God commanded that infants be circumcised. This circumcision was a seal of the covenant and of the righteousness of faith. Christ also took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them. In the new dispensation baptism has replaced circumcision. Therefore, infants must be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God and of his covenant; and as they grow up, their parents have the duty to instruct them in these things. (p 585)

Notice that there is no doubt, no assumptions, no mention of an internal and an external covenant; here is only *certainty*. That is the glorious teaching of Scripture about the children God gives to believing parents!

And exactly because their children *belonged*, exactly because God had claimed our grandparents' children to be his children, did our grandparents not have to be concerned about whether God cared for their little ones in the course of the years of the war, nor about where their little ones went when God took them

from this life. As God's children, their little ones were safe with God the Father, safe both in this life and in the life to come. And this wealth which our grandparents recovered again from Scripture was not something new; it was exactly what their fathers' generations before them had confessed. I think of the Canons of Dort:

We must judge concerning the will of God from his Word, which declares that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they are included with their parents. Therefore, God-fearing parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in their infancy. (I 17)

### The Problem at synod

It makes one wonder: if the material of Scripture and confession is so clear and is so rich, why could the brothers of Synod 1943 not see the point? That blindness was due to the fact that they did not *dare* to take God's Word at face value. Though that statement may sound bold, it is nevertheless where things were at. These men had learned to look *within oneself* to find certainty about whether or not one was a child of God; they'd grown up with that (Kamphuis, 27ff). So when the issue of the place of children in the covenant came to a head during the war, these fathers at the synod taught parents to find proof that their children belonged to God not in God's Word but rather *in the child itself*: was there faith in the child? And because the parents couldn't find evidence of faith until their child was mature, they had to assume faith was there, *assume* their child belonged to God.

But that, dear reader, is the key point: what is the proof that one's child belongs to God? Does the

proof lie in your child or in God? Of course, the proof lies in the God who claimed your child for Himself. How do you know He claimed your child? Because He said in his Word – we looked at the texts already – that He establishes his covenant with believers and their seed. And you are a believer, are you not? That is, you take God's Word at face value, do you not?

Think back to Abraham. When God said to Abraham that He made his covenant with all Abraham's descendants, was Abraham to take that promise as it stood? Or was he to doubt it until confirmation arose in the course of years when his offspring showed they were believers – and only *then* conclude that God had spoken the truth, yes, these descendants turned out to be children of God after all? That's the fine point of it all: can you take God's Word at face value? Our parents, by the grace of God, in the concrete circumstances in which they found themselves in the Second World War, answered that question positively; they said yes, you can take God's Word at face value, and therefore we believe that our little children belong to God, are safe in Father's mighty hands even as the war rages outside, that our little children have their sins washed away, have the assurance of God's Holy Spirit that He dwells in them. They took God's Word at face value and so embraced God's promises gladly and were comforted in their distresses and refused to let Synod take this comfort from them. So, when Synod tried to rob them of the comfort that belongs to taking God's word at face value and insisted that all parents had to confess that their infants were only *assumed* to be sanctified in Christ, our fathers liberated themselves from the errors of the synod and its lordship. Behold there the Liberation of 1944.



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# Worshipping God Your Own Way

There are two daily newspapers which intend to serve the Reformed Christian community in The Netherlands: *Nederlands Dagblad* which originated in the Liberated Reformed Churches and *Reformatorsch Dagblad* which originated among the Free Reformed Churches, The Netherlands Reformed Congregations and other similar churches. In the November 2, 2005 issue of *Reformatorsch Dagblad*, Rev. C.J. Meeuse of The Netherlands Congregation of Apeldoorn wrote an article entitled "Worshipping God Your Own Way" which I pass on to you complete and in my own translation.

In my time as minister in Rotterdam I visited a patient who was a member of my congregation in one of the hospitals there. After I had read the Bible and prayed with the ward, I visited with the other patients to greet and exchange some words with them.

One of the patients responded to my handshake in a friendly way by stating: "I believe too, Reverend, but not the same way as you do. You, of course, go to church, and you have to, otherwise you won't get paid. I don't go to church, but I worship God my own way."

I replied with a question: "And you think, of course, that I then also do that my own way?"

"Certainly," he said, "everyone does that his own way, doesn't he?"

"Still, there's a problem," I continued our conversation, "and that is the question of whether God is really pleased with it."

He looked at me enquiringly, so I gave him an example to explain what I had stated. "I think you're a nice man," I said, "and imagine that I wanted to show that by doing something nice for you. One day you happen to be away from home, so I get my spade out of the shed and go and completely dig up your garden, from back to front. That evening you come home and you have a fit. 'Who ruined my garden?' you shout. 'All my plants have been chopped up and turned over. My bulbs have been split and my tubers have been hacked to pieces!' I did that, and I thought I was doing a good thing for you. What did I do wrong?"

I didn't get a reply, so I answered that question myself. "I should have first asked you what you would really like and after that I would have done a nice thing by doing what you

wished. You need to give someone what he would really like to receive. I should have asked you what you wanted very much before doing something nice for you."

He already understood where the conversation was going. "That's also how it is with God. We shouldn't try to worship Him our own way. That doesn't please Him. We need to do it his way. And you read that in his Word, in the Bible. That counts for me and for all people."

There was also opportunity to talk with him about all those different churches and religions. He agreed with me, but found it annoying. "It's because everyone thinks they can worship God their own way," I said to him. "If only we'd all just inquire as to what God wants, it would be completely different. The answer to that question is often clearer than most people would admit."

Since then I use this incident when I have to explain to my catechism students what self-willed worship is, as it

comes to the fore in the second commandment. We're guiltier than we think of sin against this commandment, which forbids image worship. Let's always ask ourselves what the Holy God thinks of our worship.

Characteristic of self-willed worship is that by means of it

people feel themselves to be quite unique Christians. Characteristic of true worship is that with Paul you ask: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" Pride brings division. Humility unites.

Something for us to note in this day and age of self-willed worship! So

many today seek to satisfy their own feelings rather than seeking God's will in worship. The result is the man-centred, casual, and disorderly contemporary worship found in many churches today, rather than the orderly worship God seeks, for instance in 1 Corinthians 14:40.



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# An Unnatural Passing

For many years, the subject of suicide has been virtually taboo in our circles. It has happened that a person passes away and only many years later is it disclosed that he or she took their own life. Part of this has to do with what seems to be a left-over from Roman Catholic teaching, namely that suicide is an unforgivable sin. In our churches today, there are still people who doubt and question the salvation of one who has taken their own life. Being open about the fact of suicide inevitably means that the tactless will hurtfully air their doubts and questions. So, it is always easier to keep it quiet. But thankfully we live in times where depression (which is behind most suicides) is more commonly addressed and has fewer stigmas attached to it – as a

result, suicide is also being addressed more openly.

I have had personal experience with the fact of suicide. It is one of the most painful experiences of my life to think about. Having had a loved one take her own life has changed me forever. I had opportunity to think about this further when a quarterly magazine from Wycliffe Canada arrived in my mailbox.

The Spring 2004 issue of *WordAlive* features the story of David and Henny Thormoset, Wycliffe linguists who work in the African country of Cameroon. On a September morning they received the phone call which makes you fall over in grief. Their son, Andreas, had taken his own life. He was back in Calgary, struggling with depression, while they continued their work in Cameroon.

Suddenly their lives were turned upside down. Within hours they were on a plane back to Canada. Along the way they struggled with the same issues that everybody who experiences the suicide of a loved one does.

I would like to share with you those issues in a frank way. I would like to share with you the way that believers can support and encourage one another when a tragedy like this strikes. I would like to share what "suicide survivors" such as me have learned.

Family and friends who experience the suicide of a loved one feel many different emotions. The experience tears you apart. One of the most difficult aspects is the uncertainty. You are filled with doubts and questions, especially about the spiritual life of the



deceased. You ask yourself, "If he was a Christian, why would he do something like this?" Answers which focus on depression as a disease do not satisfy everybody. Everything is up in the air. Everything is uncertain.

Accompanying this uncertainty is sometimes a feeling of anger. You get angry at yourself: why didn't I see it coming? Why didn't I say things differently the last time I saw her? You get angry at other family members or friends: if only they had done this differently or said that! You get angry at the deceased: how could he do this to us? I thought she loved us! This is the most selfish thing that she could do!

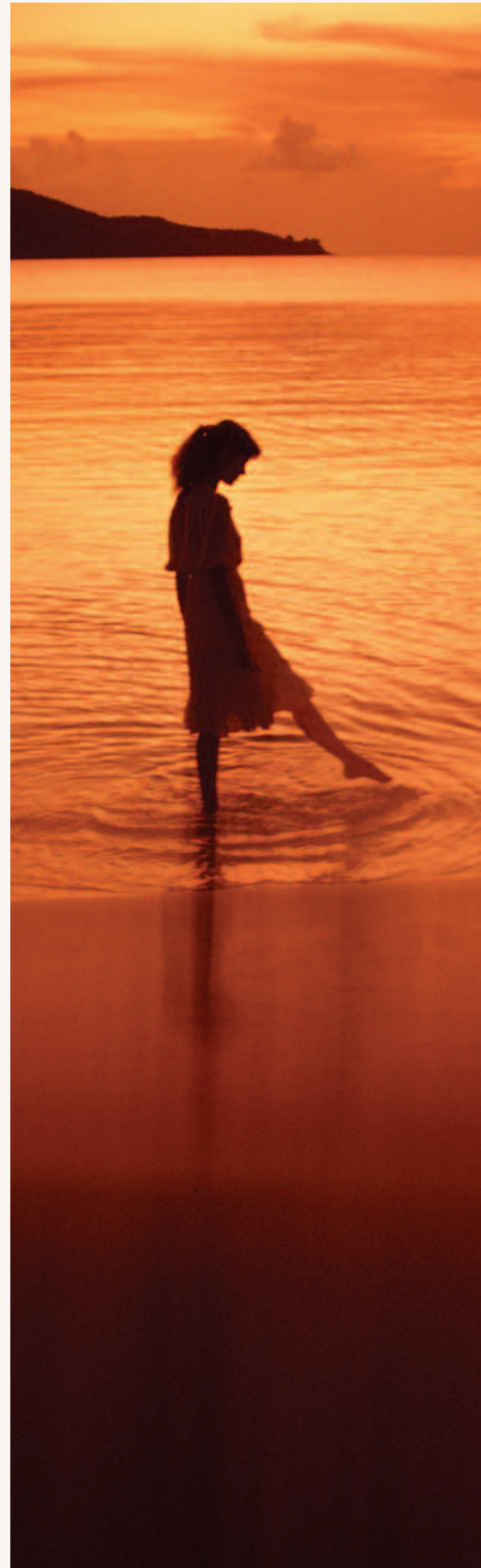
The anger and uncertainty are only compounded by a feeling of being misunderstood. Suicide is not the same as other deaths. When well-meaning people offer platitudes like, "Well, we know where she is and we can take comfort in that," you want to scream. Or when people pretend that the suicide is not real. . . . "She would never do something like that, how can you say that?" Being misunderstood and feeling alone are difficult aspects of grieving for the suicide victim.

In every way, a suicide is much different than a normal passing away. You cannot comfort the same way – any joy in the passing is hidden deeply behind a seemingly frowning providence. In fact, the best comfort you can offer, especially in the heat of the loss, is no comfort at all. The people who will be appreciated the most are those who say nothing and just listen. Those grieving a loved one lost to suicide do not need your

words – they need your presence. They need you to listen as you sound out your uncertainty, confusion, anger, sadness.

The Thormosets' experience with their son taught them to find comfort in God's power and strength. David Thormoset said, "Andreas' death abruptly brought me face to face with what I am – weak and dependent. Every day I need to lean heavily on Christ, to experience his power, rather than trying to work from my own minute strength." These are certainties upon which you are forced to rely in the midst of a loss due to suicide. You are forced to think about the things that you know for certain. You are forced to consider God's covenant promises and his overwhelming grace and mercy for sinners (even sinners who take their own life!). Rather than finding your comfort in what people have done, you have to think about who God is and rest in that. I have learned that my only peace and comfort are in God – I cannot find those things in weak and sinful man.

The Thormosets, other Christian "suicide survivors," and I have learned what it is to wrestle with God. When you lose a loved one to suicide there are no pat answers. There is a sense in which there is no closure – at least, not yet! It leaves you feeling that there has to be something more. There will be. . . at the end of the struggle our only conclusion can be to let God be God. As his infantile children, we have to rest in the undisputable biblical fact of the Father's goodness. There is nothing else to hold on to.



# Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration of the American Reformed Church, Dutton, MI, USA

The American Reformed Church at Grand Rapids was originally instituted on September 24, 1955. On the evening of November 4, 2005 we celebrated our fiftieth anniversary. The church was filled with members, former members, founding members, and guests.

Our present minister, Rev. J. Ludwig, opened the festivities with reading Proverbs 2:1-11, prayer, and a word of welcome. Rev. W. den Hollander, former principal of the school, served as guest speaker. Referring to Proverbs 2, he spoke about "the Lord's covenant faithfulness and mercy that should be central in our hearts and minds. We are to confess that He has



*Cake with picture of the congregation.*



*Teresa vanderVelde talking with Gerry Vellenga.  
Seated (l to r): Janet Kingma, Ria Riedstra, Mrs. P. Kingma (former member)*

gathered, preserved, and defended for Himself his church here in the unity of the true faith. After fifty years of her existence, the church at Grand Rapids also must confess and may rejoice in the faithfulness of the Lord."

Br. J. Kooistra presented a short history lesson of Grand Rapids and vicinity during the last fifty years, accompanied by a slide presentation shown by Br. T. Medemblik. Br. Kooistra also recalled some of the lighter moments that happened in the past fifty years.

Next, a short speech was read from charter member Br. W. Haan

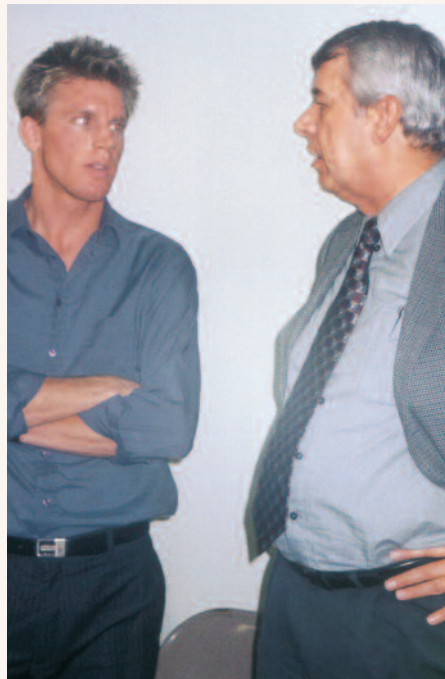




*Rev. Ludwig and Rev. vanderVelde*

explaining why there was a need to establish the American Reformed Church in 1955. He was the first elder installed when the church was instituted. Because he had recently suffered a stroke, he could not be present.

Further, a slide presentation provided a light-hearted look into



*Albert Gootjes and Rev. den Hollander*

the future at congregational life twenty-five years from now. In closing we sang "Great is Thy Faithfulness." Br. G. Vellenga



*Food station.*



*Some members and guests of the congregation.*

closed with prayer. Coffee and refreshments were served afterwards, giving us an opportunity to meet and reminisce with our many guests.

Our celebration began fifty years ago. As church of Jesus Christ today we continue to call forth from our lips the praise of God's glory. We as congregation can truly rejoice in God's faithfulness throughout the generations. In our fifty years as congregation we have witnessed time and again our Father's faithful hand in our personal lives and our life together in the body of Christ.





Peter Veenendaal

Peter Veenendaal is principal  
at Immanuel Christian School  
in Winnipeg.



# National Principals' Conference, September 26-28, 2005

"Sing to the Lord, a new song voicing" (Psalm 98) could well have been the theme of the national Conference of Reformed Principals held at Crieff Hills in Puslinch, Ontario from September 26-28, 2005. Many times during this conference the thankful voices of twenty-nine brothers and sisters could be heard resounding through the hills and valleys of this beautiful part of God's creation. The organizing committee of George Hofsink, Jane Holtvluwer and Henk Plug are to be commended for putting together a well-balanced program of speakers and workshops which will be remembered in classrooms, staff meetings, and hallways during years to come.

Formal discussions/sessions ranged from the topics of appreciation for what our forefathers worked so hard for in those early 1950s to the challenges which Reformed schools face in the twenty-first century.

## Dr. Mike Goheen

Leading off the slate of well-qualified speakers was Dr. Mike Goheen, formerly a professor at Redeemer College and now Geneva Professor of Worldview and Religious studies at Trinity Western University in Langley, BC. Throughout his approximately five hours of interaction with

convention participants, he invited discussion on the topic of "Christian Education at the Crossroads of Two Stories." Yes, we are called to live in two mega-stories. The one is the biblical story. It is the story of how God works with his people concerning his plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. The other one is the story of our culture today. We are called to live and work in this world and therefore cannot help but be influenced by the humanist story that plays such a huge role in shaping our culture.

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*It takes a fierce and  
lifelong battle to combat  
the evils of the story of  
today's culture*

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Goheen urged the principals, "Don't allow your schools, leadership, curriculum, and subjects to be conformed to the humanistic culture which has been around us since the Enlightenment." We are blessed in that the Bible gives us an unfolding account of the whole world, starting with creation. It is a given, though, that this can only be useful to us if we are very familiar

with our culture and clearly understand the Scriptures. We must recognize the Bible as a universal history – a grand story which ultimately includes everyone and everything.

Both of these previously mentioned stories are religious; both are communal; both are comprehensive. One of them will shape our lives and hence our education. It is our responsibility to see that it is the right one. Our students must be taught how to form a contrasting community which is ready to challenge the story of idolatry, which is a selfish gospel. All of our life in the kingdom of God must be based on a theme of self-giving love. The size and complexity of this task can sometimes seem insurmountable and never-ending; indeed, it takes a fierce and lifelong battle to combat the evils of the story of today's culture, but in faith we must make this a community effort.

## Mr. Ron Morrish

Mr. Ron Morrish operates his own consulting company and spends his time helping both public and independent schools build effective school discipline. Morrish has recognized that many schools struggle with this issue and, although he does not present his ideas from a Christian

perspective, his ideas concerning appropriate discipline and teamwork skills struck many of us as being common sense and worthy of implementation in our schools. He warned principals not to jump on every behaviourist bandwagon that presents itself as the solution to all discipline problems. Students should be taught "this is what we expect," not "if you do this, then this will happen." Choices should only be given to students who are ready to make them and that means a lot of teaching has to take place first. Repetition and routines are keys to having effective discipline. Morrish has books and videos available from Woodstream Publishing in Ontario.

### **Dr. Reimer Faber**

Dr. Reimer Faber, whose name is quite familiar to *Clarion* readers, is presently Associate Professor in the Department of Classical Studies at the University of Waterloo in Ontario. He entitled his presentation, "The Intersection of Reformed and Evangelical Principles of Education." Its thesis was that an emphasis on the conjunction of religious and academic instruction is a feature of the historic Reformed faith that has not received sufficient attention in the twentieth century. Dr. Faber first outlined instances in which Reformed ecclesiastical bodies in past centuries have made decisions and pronouncements which clearly showed that the church and its office bearers had a much larger interest in the spiritual nurturing of our children than they do today. As early as 1578, the national Synod of Dort pronounced that "effort shall be made in directing

the children towards the preaching." As recently as the mid 1950s several of our Canadian Reformed ministers were members of a local school board or education committee. At least one Reformed denomination still insists that several ordained elders are also members of the local school board. Would a return to more direct involvement by consistories in our schools strengthen the home/church/school triangle, or would that lead to unnecessary interference by the church in parental matters? If the former is correct, in how far should the church be involved? Most likely, this topic will be revisited in the future.

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*Would a return to more direct involvement by consistories in our schools strengthen the home/church/school triangle?*

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### **Mr. Kevin Hutchinson**

Mr. Kevin Hutchinson introduced the topic of the relationships between board, administration, and educators. He showed us how our forefathers received Canadian Reformed schools as a gift of God's grace. Together we recounted situations in which parents started Saturday schools, before regular day schools were possible. He explained how the first school boards were often compared to consistories. The board chair had a vision which he was expected to put in place.

Financial matters, government intervention, curriculum development, and discipline issues are all issues that received much attention over the years. As a long-time parent of students and a board chairman at one of our schools, Mr. Hutchinson showed himself well-qualified to address the topics of this presentation.

Besides these formal sessions enjoyed by the leaders of our Reformed schools, several informal gatherings brought everyone up to date on what was happening in the various schools. Concerns regarding government interventions in our schools and how we deal with them were mentioned several times and will continue to be matters of concern for us.

Our school communities have their work cut out for them and those who participated in this principals' conference realized when they left that there was much work awaiting them when they returned home. But the tone in the farewells was one of thankfulness for what we had received in this conference and for what we continue to receive in our Reformed schools. May God continue to bless our efforts in educating the children He has entrusted to our care.

*The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman [obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us](mailto:obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us)*

## Letter to the Editor



### Letter to the Editor

Re: How are we doing?

I have been following with interest the discussion about church membership statistics.

The discussion reminded me of two people in the Bible who also dabbled in statistics. They were both severely reprimanded for their unfaithfulness and distrust: King David (2 Sam 24) and Elijah (1 Kgs 19). Though both had different motives for their reasoning yet God reprimanded them for not placing

their trust in Him that He would take care of his people.

Here on earth the church brings the gospel, but it is ultimately God who knows his elect and when that number is full.

*Keith Bruning, Armadale, West Australia*

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*

## Press Release

### **Press Release of the meeting of the combined committees of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches to propose a common church order, held March 13-16, 2006 at the United Reformed Church of Dutton, MI**

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, and Rev. Raymond Sikkema representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). Mr. Harry VanGurp representing the URCNA was unable to attend due to illness.

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Galatians chapter 1 and prayer.

The minutes of the November 1-3, 2005 meeting were reviewed and approved, as were the agenda and timetable for the next three days.

Correspondence was received from five URCNA and CanRC churches and individuals interacting with the committee's reports and press releases. Feedback from the churches is much appreciated. Comments will be taken into consideration when the committee deals with the relevant articles. Requests for copies of the proposed Joint Church Order (JCO) as completed thus far cannot be accommodated. The work to this point is not a completed product. It remains open to further evaluation and revision. At each meeting the committee has returned to various articles and made changes reflecting concerns communicated to the committee by the churches. Again at this meeting various changes were made. Foundational Principles 5, 6, and 10

were revised to improve logical clarity and now reads:

FP 5: In its subjection to its heavenly Head, the universal church is governed by Christ from heaven by means of his Word and Spirit with the keys of the kingdom, which He has given to the local church for that purpose. Therefore, no church may lord it over another church.

Matthew 16:19; 23:8; John 20:22-23; Acts 14:23; 20:28-32

FP 6: The offices of minister, elder, and deacon are local in authority and function. The Lord gave no permanent universal, national, or regional offices to his church by which the churches are to be governed. Therefore, no office-bearer may lord it over another office-bearer.

Acts 14:23; 16:4; 20:17, 28; Ephesians 4:11-16; Titus 1:5

FP 10: Member churches meet together in broader assemblies to manifest ecclesiastical unity,



to guard against human imperfections, and to benefit from the wisdom of many counselors. The decisions of such assemblies are settled and binding among the churches unless they are contrary to Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the commonly adopted Church Order.

Proverbs 11:14; Acts 15:1-35;  
1 Corinthians 13:9-10; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

The phrase "commonly adopted" is important to show that the Church Order is not imposed, but is commonly accepted.

Broad Divisions and JCO Article 1 were combined and revised for the sake of clarity, consistency, and structural improvement as follows:

1. Article re: Purpose and Divisions of the Church Order

For maintaining proper ecclesiastical order (1 Cor 14:40), the Church Order must regulate the offices; the assemblies; the supervision of doctrine, worship, sacraments, and ceremonies; and the discipline. Therefore, we order our ecclesiastical relations and activities under the following divisions:

I. Offices (Articles 2 - )

II. Assemblies (Articles )

III. Worship, Sacraments, and Ceremonies (Articles )

IV. Discipline (Articles )

Minor changes in grammar and styling were made to a number of articles without changing the substance in any way. More thought will be given to the article regarding churches with a small number of office-bearers and to what extent the deacons may be involved in work that belongs to the office of elder.

The article regarding the reconciliation of a member was revised. The reconciliation of a member, whose sin is public or has become public because the admonition of the church was despised, shall take place only upon evidence of genuine repentance, and in a manner which best promotes the edification of the church. The consistory shall determine whether, for the welfare of the congregation and the sinner, the member shall be required to confess the sin publicly.

Matters left over from the previous meeting were reviewed. Two brothers have been found willing to edit the proposed church order for style and clarity.

One of the committee members was asked to correlate the proposed church order with the church order of Dort. This document can later be changed to form a three or four column document for usage by the churches in reviewing the JCO.

Regarding Dort Article 18 it was decided to not include reference to Professors of Theology in our Church Order.

A discussion on whether elders and deacons who have served before are installed or ordained resulted in the understanding that the responsibility and authority of office do not extend beyond a term of ordination. Therefore an elder and deacon are always ordained again upon subsequent entry to office. The title and body of the relevant article were changed accordingly.

Dort Article 26 dealing with the involvement of deacons in institutions established for the care of the poor and Article 45 regarding

written records and minutes of broader assemblies were deemed outdated and not necessary in a new church order.

Regarding Dort 57 requiring a father to present his child for baptism, it was decided that an equivalent article is not needed in the JCO. It is neither in the URCNA or CanRC church order. The background for the stipulation of Dort 57 is not male headship, but rather that in the Reformed churches the Roman Catholic practice of using god-parents or sponsors, who acted as spiritual fathers and mothers for the children, could be found (cf. VanDellen and Monsma, 1941 ed., p 239-240). The article dealing with the baptism of covenant children was amended to incorporate the responsibility of parents to present their children for baptism as soon as feasible.

The article about admission to the pulpit once again received considerable attention. After extensive deliberation the following was adopted as an article regarding admission to the pulpit.

Consistories shall permit men to administer the Word and sacraments only according to the following stipulations:

- A. The consistory must give its consent before any minister may preach the Word or administer the sacraments in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to ministers of churches within the federation and to ministers of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship.
- B. The consistory must give its consent before any licentiate or

# Church News

Declined the call to Houston,  
British Columbia:

**Rev. D.W. Vandeburgt**  
of Glanbrook, Ontario.

Declined the call to the  
Reformed Church (Restored) of  
Berkel & Rodenrijs/  
Bergschenhoek, Netherlands:

**Rev. J. Huijgen**  
of Burlington-Waterdown, Ontario.

candidate may exhort in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to licentiates and candidates within the federation and to licentiates and candidates of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship.

- C. Any exception to either of these requirements shall be granted only occasionally, only to ministers, licentiates, and candidates who faithfully subscribe to the Reformed Confessions, and only with prior approbation of classis.

The committee could complete the proposed wording for an article dealing with the receiving and leaving of members:

## A. The Reception of Members

Members from churches within the federation or churches with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall be received under the spiritual care of the consistory upon the receipt of a testimony attesting their soundness in doctrine and life. Others shall be admitted only after the consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. In such cases the consistory shall determine whether a public profession of faith shall be required.

## B. The Departure of Members

1. Members departing to a church within the federation or a church with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall submit a written request to the consistory which shall send a letter to such church requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care.

2. Members withdrawing to affiliate with a church with which the federation has no ecclesiastical fellowship shall submit a written request to the consistory. Having urged them to maintain unity in the truth and love of the gospel, the consistory shall acquiesce to their withdrawal.
3. Members resigning from the church shall be warned against this sin. If they persist by giving a signed statement of their resignation, the consistory shall acquiesce to their resignation.

Also an article dealing with property was finalized subject to review by a legal professional.

- A. All property, whether real or personal, held by a local church for the benefit of that local church, shall remain the property of that local church in accordance with its own by-laws or regulations and the governing laws of the jurisdiction in which the church is located.
- B. All property, whether real or personal, held for the benefit of the federation by a local church, a classis or synod or a committee, trustee or trustees thereof, or otherwise, shall be held in trust as property in common of all of the churches within the federation, in accordance with the rules and regulations adopted by classes or synods of the federation. In the event a local church withdraws from the federation, unless the rules and regulations

- of the federation provide otherwise, the withdrawing church shall cease to have any benefit in such property.
- C. Notwithstanding the laws of the jurisdiction in which a local church is located, the final authority for any acquisition or disposition of property by a local church, whether real or personal, shall be the council of that church in accordance with the church's own by-laws or regulations, regardless of how the property is held.
- D. Any appeals to broader assemblies with respect to property shall be governed by this article.

Regarding the church's mission calling the committee proposes that each church shall fulfill its mission calling, which is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted at home and abroad with the goal of establishing churches. This shall be carried out by missionaries who are ministers of the Word set apart for this labour by being called, supported, and supervised by their consistories for this task. Such missionaries shall proclaim the Word of God and administer the sacraments to those who have come to faith. They shall also institute church offices according to the provisions of the Church Order. The consistory shall

promote the involvement of church members in labour and service that assist fulfilling this mission calling. If necessary, a calling church shall invite churches within its classis or regional synod to cooperate by agreement regarding the field, support, and oversight of the mission work.

The committee also proposes an article regarding the church's evangelism calling. Each church shall fulfill its evangelism calling according to the Word of God and relying on the Holy Spirit, which is to make known the good news of Jesus Christ to those within its area of life and influence. It shall seek to persuade those who do not know God or are estranged from God and his service to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, which necessarily includes affiliating with his church through profession of faith.

Agreement was also reached for the article on marriage. Scripture

teaches that marriage is to be a lifelong monogamous union between a man and a woman. Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care who are considering marriage to marry only in the Lord. The minister, as authorized by the consistory, shall solemnize only marriages that accord with Scripture using the form for the solemnization of marriage adopted by general synod.

The article dealing with the observance and revision of the Church Order was formulated as follows: These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, having been drafted in accord with the Foundational Principles and adopted by common consent, shall be observed diligently. Only when the good order and welfare of the churches make it necessary, shall this church order be revised. Any

revision of the church order can be adopted only by a general synod.

Wording of various ordination examinations was also agreed upon.

The last hour of the third day was used to review the agenda for the next meeting. The next meeting will take place D.V. August 22-24, 2006 at the Dutton United Reformed Church, MI.

Appreciation was expressed to the Dutton URC for its hospitality and the assistance received from the church's secretary, Beth Bouman. Dr. Kloosterman, in his closing remarks, stated his thankfulness to the Lord for the brotherly manner in which the committee could proceed with its labours and the amount of work that could be accomplished. To God be the praise and glory.

*For the committee,  
Gerard J. Nordeman*

