

*Confessional  
Membership?*

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*Failure in the  
Face of Evil*

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*Our Coming  
(and Present)  
Ministerial  
Challenge*



*Grand Valley's Farewell to Rev. Aasman*





J. Visscher

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# Confessional Membership?

*Whenever such an action is contemplated or implemented it is surely a matter of wisdom that it be studied, discussed and properly defined*

Quite some time ago I received a letter from a colleague in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). He is well-known to some of you and his name is the Rev. G. I. Williamson. Apparently he had promised a delegate to one of our synods that he was willing to debate some of the issues on which the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) and the OPC appear to differ. The first issue that he chose to discuss was this one on confessional membership.

## The issue

So what is this issue all about? It has to do with the relationship of the members of the church to the confessions of the church. G. I. Williamson paints the differences between our respective churches in the following manner: "As I understand it, the CanRC says that those who make a public profession of faith in their churches do, by that act, explicitly subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity. In the OPC, on the other hand, public profession of faith has never been seen as equivalent to full subscription to the Westminster Standards." Furthermore, he writes that while communicant members in the OPC have a relationship to the church's confessional standards, it is more "implicit" than "explicit."

Having described the differences in this way, he then goes on to pose two questions. The first asks "is it scriptural?" and the second asks "is it honest?" In other words, may the church require the same of its members as it does of its office bearers? In addition, is it proper and honest to require this of church members who may have doubts about certain points of doctrine?

## Some history

Before I go into the matter as such, a little history lesson is necessary. Historically, as far as I can determine from the documents available to me, the CanRC did not start to speak about "confessional membership" until 1986. It was at the Synod of Burlington 1986 that the Committee for Contact with the OPC received this matter as part of its mandate.

Where did it come from? The *Acts 1986* reveal that it arose from the Classis Ontario South of March 5, 1986, which addressed General Synod and requested to include it in the Committee's mandate.

Why did this classis tender this request? It had to do with the entrance of the Church at Blue Bell into the federation of the CanRC. Prior to this Blue Bell had been part of the OPC but then, due to a series of controversies, it severed that connection and asked to be received into the CanRC. That request was granted by Classis Ontario South.

Now, one of the controversies in the Blue Bell – OPC conflict had to do with what became known as "confessional membership." (For more information see: *Acts 1986*, p.128.)

Hence the matter went from Blue Bell to Classis Ontario South to General Synod 1986 and it has been an agenda item at our General Synods ever since.

## Comments

Still, it has to be said that all of this does call for a number of comments. The first has to do with the term "confessional membership." When I think back to my seminary training I can not remember this term being used for church membership. There was spoken about "baptized" and "communicant" members, or more



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
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accurately yet, “non-communicant” and “communicant” members.

Also, when I call into play my limited knowledge of the Dutch language, I am not aware of this distinction being made in Reformed circles. It is customary to speak of “doopleden” (baptized members) and “belijdendeleden” (confessing or communicant members) but not of “belijdend lidmaatschap” (confessional membership).

So really what we have here, as far as I can determine, is a new term or designation that has been introduced into the life of the CanRC.

Is there anything against that as such? No.

Nevertheless, whenever such an action is contemplated or implemented it is surely a matter of wisdom that it be studied, discussed and properly defined first. Has that ever been done? I have searched high and low for the evidence of this but I can not find anywhere in the Acts of our general synods a clear definition of “confessional membership” and what its implications are for church membership.

For example, what is now the correct relationship of members to the creeds and confessions of the church? To what extent must they know and be familiar with them in order to qualify for church membership? What is the difference between being a member of the church and an office bearer in the church? Is there a difference vis-à-vis their relationship to the confessions or not? Why does the one sign the Form of Subscription and not the other?

Where have these questions and the like been researched, reported on, and answered? If I am correct (and I stand to be corrected) that we have not done so, then the result is that new terminology has been introduced into our churches without proper study and definition.

**Williamson’s comments and questions**

All of this brings me back to the comments and questions of my OPC colleague. In his opening paragraph he draws the conclusion that members in the CanRC “subscribe” to the Three Forms of Unity. My answer is that while members in the CanRC recognize and agree with the confessions, they do not

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as such “subscribe” to them. Only the offices bearers in the CanRC do that. It is only the elders, deacons, ministers, missionaries, and professors of theology who sign the Form of Subscription. This is not required of members at large.

Furthermore, the Rev. Williamson asks whether it is “scriptural” to require “subscription” of those who wish to become members of the church. In that connection he cites the case of the Philippian jailer and his family and asks how “subscription” would ever have been possible in their case?

Now, it has to be said that he makes a good point here. It would be rather extreme to insist that the jailer and his family first need to “subscribe” before they can join the church. There was no time for that and perhaps no ability for it either. But would it be demanding too much to ask them to express agreement with the Apostles’ Creed (or with “the articles of the Christian faith” see: *Book of Praise*, 1972, p. 499) or perhaps even with what is “taught here in this Christian church” (*Book of Praise*, 2004, p. 587)? The latter would be the CanRC approach – not subscription but assent.

In addition, the Rev. Williamson asks about honesty and cites the case of a pastor who “encounters an adult member of his congregation who has doubts about the propriety of infant baptism.” What would we do as CanRC and would this differ from the OPC approach? I rather doubt it. Having been a life-long member of the CanRC and an office bearer for many years, I would not hesitate to state that many, if not all, local CanRC would deal pastorally with such a member. If such a member expresses his doubts privately and is open to further instruction, they would not discipline him but rather teach him. On the other hand, if he is vocal, disruptive, and obstinate in his opinions, they would admonish him. Only if he persists in not heeding the admonitions of the office bearers would it become a matter for further church discipline.

### Further comment

Is there then no difference between our respective approaches? While our differences in the end may not be basic, I do sense, also from what the Rev.

Williamson writes, that the OPC may be more willing than would the CanRC to receive people as members before they have been fully instructed.

The CanRC approach is to rejoice at every request for membership but at the same time to insist that before such a membership can become effective there should be a time of instruction. The length and extent of that instruction would be determined by the elders who in turn would ascertain what the applicant’s knows about the Reformed faith and still needs to learn about it. In some cases the time of formal instruction may be brief; whereas, in other cases it may be longer. In the process the aim is always to insure that the applicant for membership is fully able, according to his ability, to answer “I do” to the question “do you confess that the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation?” (*Book of Praise*, p. 586)

### How far apart?

So just how far apart are we? My conclusion is that in principle and practice we both distinguish between what is required of office bearers and what is required of members. Also in both cases we aim for a membership that knows, adheres, and respects the creeds and confessions of the church. Being confessionally Reformed is an aim we share. If we differ, it may be in the area of what we require of new members. Just how high should the bar really be?

## Special Event Submissions

Submissions covering special events should be sent to the Copy Manager within two months of the event’s date; there is a maximum length of 1000 words. If pictures of the event are available, please submit them with the article.



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# Failure in the Face of Evil



**MATTHEW 13:52**

*“This kind can come out  
only by prayer.”*

**Mark 9:29**

Failure. It is something we have all experienced in our lives. Sometimes it is something that happens at school. Sometimes it is something that happens at work. Sometimes it is something that happens in relationships, our relationships with others as well as our relationship with the Lord. We look at a job that failed or a marriage that failed and we ask the question, “Why?” We look at our failure in the battle against sin and evil and we ask the question, “Why?”

Failure. It is something that the disciples of Jesus experienced when they could not drive out the evil spirit from the boy whose father had brought him to Jesus. The father said to Jesus, “I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not” (Mark 9:18). Their failure was highlighted all the more when Jesus came along and drove the spirit out. He had the strength to do it, but apparently they did not.

Failure. It leads the disciples of Jesus to ask the question, “Why?” On previous occasions they had driven out demons. So it is all the more frustrating to them that on this occasion they could not. The answer of Jesus is, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

From the words “*this kind*” we learn that demons have varying degrees of strength. This particular demon had a strong grip. We know this for a number of

reasons. First of all, we know the strong grip of this evil spirit because he had possessed this boy from childhood. Second of all, we know the strong grip of this spirit because on many occasions it exercised power over him, seeking to kill him. Finally, we know the strong grip of this spirit because when it heeded Jesus’ command to come out of the boy it left him for dead. The disciples had underestimated the power of evil and so they had failed in the face of it.

Why? They failed in the face of evil because they had not prayed. What is Jesus teaching his disciples here? What is He teaching you? At first glance one might say He is teaching us about the power of prayer. Maybe you have heard that phrase before. But He is not teaching us about the power of prayer. He is teaching us about the practice of prayer, which connects you to the power of God!

When you look back to the earlier part of the story you see this power of God at work in Jesus. He drove out the evil spirit from that boy. The demon’s grip was deep and strong. But Jesus by his divine power drove that evil spirit out of the boy with the command, “Come out of him and never enter him again.” And the demon obeyed. Likewise, the Lord Jesus has the power to drive out the evil that has a grip on your heart. For you to be redeemed from the grip

of evil by the power of the Lord Jesus is not a matter of “can.” It is a matter of faith. Jesus says in Mark 9:23, “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

The person who knows that everything is possible for him who believes is the person who prays. The practice of prayer that Jesus teaches us is the prayer of faith. In prayer you are reaching out to God, believing that He has the power to act in your life. The disciples failed. We fail too. We fail when we seek to live in our own strength. We fail when we seek to do battle with sin and evil in our own power. We fail when we underestimate what power “this kind” of evil has in our lives.

The answer to such failure is not prayer on its own. You can’t pray enough to overcome evil. That is why with these words of the Lord Jesus we are not led to speak about the power of prayer. You can’t pray hard enough, often enough, or well enough to overcome evil. But you can reach out to the one who has overcome evil through his suffering and death on the cross. That is the practice of prayer. It is reaching out to the Lord Jesus whose power in the face of evil is beyond question. His power can overcome evil in your life so that you do not fail. You need only ask for his help.

**roadside assistance**

**the magazine for Reformed young people**

How can a young man keep his way pure?  
By living according to your word. Ps 119:9

Roadside Assistance is a bimonthly magazine for and by Reformed youth. It aims to provide a forum for stimulating discussion about faith issues, encouraging each other in the fight of faith, passing on Bible knowledge, building and expressing identity as Christians, sharpening hearts and minds through Biblical reflection, stimulating reading on Biblical issues, and educating one another. As a way of spreading the excitement around the world, we will occasionally be publishing one of our articles as a column in Clarion. We hope you'll enjoy the magazine, and perhaps you'll even consider contributing.

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# Love Your Self

**Abel Pol**

If you're anything like the rest of us, odds are that you sometimes look in the mirror and hate yourself. You look at your friends who are all better looking and more talented than you are and you just wish you could be like them. This is a problem. Think about it. Jesus commands us, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt 22:37-39). How can you love your neighbour if you can't even love yourself?

It would be easy to love yourself if there was something lovable there to begin with. If you always said the right thing at the right time, if you were smarter, if you were more generous to people ... would you love yourself more? Probably not. As a matter of fact, the Apostle Paul lists these very qualities in 1 Corinthians 13, before he goes on to say that they don't mean a thing without love. Clearly love is something completely separate. Paul then goes on to describe the various qualities of

love. One of the key qualities is that love is not self-seeking. This makes things complicated. How can you love yourself without being self-seeking?

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*John Calvin (1509 – 1564) was only 26 when he wrote the Institutes of the Christian Religion. The Institutes were meant to be a handbook on Christian living as well as a summary and explanation of Reformed thought. They remain among the most important Christian books of all time, and are as gripping and relevant today as they were five centuries ago.*

---

## Selfish?

Maybe this would be a good time to take a step back. How do you look at yourself? What comes to mind when you think about yourself? Your work? Your music? Your friends?

The Heidelberg Catechism puts the question and answer in very simple terms. "Why are you called a Christian? Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus share in His anointing..." (Q/A 32). Our identity, first and foremost, is that we are Christians. We're called to discard whatever else we may think our identity is and to put on something that Paul calls "the new self" (Eph 4:22-24). What does this new self look like? Shocking as it might sound, this new self looks a lot like ... God. God loves us so much that He wants us to become like Him. Our self is his gift. A gift! This new self is the only lovable thing about us, and only because it is a reflection of God. Are you beginning to see how important it is to love yourself?

God is love. His love is glorious. Since your main calling in life is to

reflect the glory of God, and since you do so by visibly carrying his image through the world, anything that makes that image grow and reflect God's glory is good. Success is pointless unless it makes God's image grow in you. On the other hand, even failure can be helpful if it makes you grow. Life becomes a lot more relaxed when you look at it from that perspective. At the same time, sin becomes much more painful because it detracts from God's glory, which directly impacts your own identity. Not just your feelings, not just your self-esteem, but your identity.

### Loving your neighbour

If you're called to love the image of God within yourself, it follows that you're also called to love that image in your neighbour (see Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vii.6). Not because your neighbour is so lovable, but because both of you bear something of the image of God and you're called to love that

image. As a matter of fact, if you can't love the pale reflection of God in your neighbour, you won't be able to love God Himself either (1 John 4:20).

What if your neighbour is not a Christian? If you're a mirror reflecting God's image, then your unsaved neighbour is a shattered mirror. There may be some shards that suggest an outline, but the overall image is missing. Isn't that heart-breaking? You may be intimidated by unbelievers who can make it through life without needing God, but the truth of the matter is that they're walking around with an incomplete self.

In the course of your life you'll come across many situations in which you can't seem to find that image in your neighbour, no matter how hard you try. In times like these, it's important to realize that you love your neighbour because you carry the image of God, even if your neighbour doesn't seem to. God loved you before you loved

Him (Rom 5:8). By loving your neighbour, you reflect that attribute of God in your own life. Loving your neighbour will always make God's image grow in you, even if it doesn't do so in your neighbour.

Now that you're done reading this article, you'll probably put it down and be frustrated because you know it works on paper, but you can't make it work for you. That's missing the whole point. Love is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). The work of the Spirit is a gift. You have to pray for it regularly. Learning to love yourself takes time, as it takes time to learn loving your neighbour. Once you know what to look for, it becomes exciting. As Paul says at the end of 1 Corinthians 13, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."





## What's New???

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When perusing the various bulletins, it becomes clear there are few things that are truly new in the sense that we have not heard of them before. In many cases, it is just like with buying a used vehicle or other used item, namely, it is new to the buyer. So it is with the various things happening in the congregations. Most events are new to the congregation involved. That does not take away that it is of interest and benefit to others to know about these events.

We see this in the decision of the consistory of the Church at Smithville to implement an Ascension Day worship service. It was explained that "the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ is the only event of those mentioned in article 53 of the Church Order, which we don't celebrate on the day itself but on the Sunday thereafter. That may give the impression that this event is less important and that would be totally wrong. Therefore Consistory decided to commemorate the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ in a worship service on the day that is marked on the Christian calendars as Ascension day, instead of on the Sunday thereafter." By doing this, Smithville joins a small number of

other churches that have this extra service. Overall, this practice has not found wide support. I wonder when this practice is considered in the broader Christian context whether such a practice is an ecclesiastical "Dutchism." That does not make it wrong as such, but it does reflect our ecclesiastical background.

A second example pertains to plans for instituting new congregations. In the church at Rockingham in Australia, the consistory "received a proposal from the 'Baldivis Group' to form their own church-congregation." The consistory endorsed the plan and would take the matter to the next classis. The planned date of institution is July 1. On the other hand, the plans to institute another congregation in the Smithville area did not materialize as the support for institution was short of the required 75%. In one case, undoubtedly there was happiness to be able to establish another congregation while in the other, at least among a number, disappointment.

Another common experience is how congregations change names when they put up new worship facilities. Should someone have

plans to travel to Australia, it will be good to be aware of the fact the church of West Kelmscott has undergone a name change in connection with their new building. Effective April 1, they are known as the Free Reformed Church of Southern River.

It appears that there are constantly new developments in terms of churches becoming involved in helping Sudanese Christians, not only in Canada but also in the Sudan. A previous "What's New?" column mentioned the efforts of the Providence Church in Edmonton. The Fellowship Church at Burlington adopted a comprehensive proposal to adopt the Sudanese Christian Fellowship as an official evangelistic / mission work of Fellowship Church. The proposal included: supervision of the preaching and teaching in an official way; visitation to regular attendees in their homes; diaconal assistance to aid with Christian education; appointment of an oversight, planning and priorities committee to review progress and report every six months. The church at Abbotsford is busy investigating the possibility of sending a missionary to Sudan.



They also are seeking the assistance of other churches in Western Canada in this work. For both these congregations, it is heading out on new ground. Their work serves as a reminder of the catholicity of the church.

Finally, there were some interesting remarks in the Attercliffe congregational news of March 4, 2007. It read, "Council also has the following request for members who have a matter they want to bring before the whole

Congregation via a letter or article. Do not put this in the members' mailboxes. First bring this matter before council, that is the orderly manner to deal with issues or concerns. We trust each other to deal fairly with all matters pertaining to the life of the congregation. As a side note, just a reminder as to the purpose of the mailboxes: they are not a vehicle to be used to pay debts you owe to someone else in the congregation either. Remember

the Sabbath Day and keep it holy!" One does not need to know the specifics that led to the remarks in order to add, "Good point!"

With this it is time to conclude another "What's New???" but not without an invitation to those churches that have not yet started sending local bulletins to do so. This column is a way to learn about and from each other. Till next time.



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# Our Coming (and Present) Ministerial Challenge

The December 2006 issue of the OPC magazine *New Horizons* featured an article by Ross W. Graham entitled "The OPC's Coming Ministerial Challenge." In this article, Graham describes the reality that between 2005 and 2015, the number of people reaching retirement age in the US will increase by ten million. In the next decade, ninety-eight active ministers in the OPC will reach the age of sixty-six. The impending retirement of the baby-boomers is going to present a major challenge to the OPC.

The same is true for the Canadian Reformed churches. In the next ten years, eleven of our active ministers and professors will reach the age of sixty-five. That number represents over twenty percent of

our ministers. Since we frequently give and receive ministers also from "Down Under," it's also worth noting that there are four ministers in Australia who are also expected to reach sixty-five – thirty-six percent of their pastors.

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## *We have reason for prayerful concern*

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Now when we combine those numbers with our present level of vacancies, we have reason for prayerful concern. At the moment, including missionaries, we have eleven vacancies. That represents approximately eighteen percent of the available ministerial positions.

It is true that there are some variables in these numbers. For instance, it is not a given that all ministers will retire at sixty-five. But history indicates that most (if not all) will. And even if that is proven wrong, there are also variables on the other side of the equation. For instance, over the last decade our church federation has typically grown by one congregation per year. If that continues to hold true, we would have another ten vacancies. Additionally, some congregations are exploring the possibility of calling missionaries. Moreover, one can never be certain about the health of each and every minister. Some brothers may very well end up having to take early retirement even though they are some years

## Church News

Declined the call to the church of Hamilton, Ontario:

**Rev. R. Aasman**

of Edmonton (Providence) Alberta.

Accepted the call from the church of Surrey, BC to serve as missionary in Brazil:

**Rev. J.M. Van Spronsen**

of Smithers, British Columbia.

away from sixty-five. Finally, though we hate to mention it (and may the Lord prevent it), not every minister remains a minister.

Some might read these figures and wonder whether there is really any reason for concern. After all, we're told that the classrooms are full at the Theological College. While we can certainly be thankful for that, we should not let that lull us into a false sense of security. In 1996, when I started studying at the College in Hamilton, there were five vacancies in our church federation. Given that there were some dozen students in the years ahead of me, I was genuinely concerned that I would graduate and there would be no place to serve. It looked like all the vacancies in our churches would be filled in short order. But what happened? By the time I graduated in 2000, there were six vacancies! New churches had been added to our federation, some ministers had left, one had died, some students had decided to do further studies, and so on. The lesson? One cannot look at the number of students at the College and expect the churches to have all the vacancies filled in the near future.

So, where does that leave us as a church federation? Just as always, and perhaps even more than ever, we need ministers! We need faithful men who will

administer the Word and sacraments for our congregations. We need men who will bring the gospel, both from the pulpit and in our homes. Given all the above, it appears that this will continue to be a pressing issue in our churches.

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### *This will continue to be a pressing issue in our churches*

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There are three things we need to do in the face of this. First of all, let us have faith in the Great Shepherd of our churches. Even in the worst-case scenario, He is still the sovereign God who cares for his people. Congregations often experience vacancies as a sort of trial, but it is through trials that God often works growth in our lives.

Second, let us encourage suitable young men to consider the ministry. This is something that first of all falls into the laps of parents. You know your sons better than anyone else. Do they have the gifts for the ministry? Encourage them to consider it! It also falls to the office bearers. The ministers and elders should keep their eyes open for young men with potential and encourage them wherever and however possible. We should also

not forget about the teachers in our schools. They're familiar with the gifts and potentials of our young men. Keep an eye out for potential preachers and plant the seed in their minds. Finally, it also falls to all of us as fellow believers. As a general rule, we look for the work of the Holy Spirit in our brothers and sisters (and rejoice when we see it!). Perhaps you see that the Spirit has given the rudimentary gifts needed for the ministry, such as an aptitude for languages and an ability to speak clearly. Encourage and support these young men and give them an added push.

Last, and definitely not least, let us pray. As we do so, we will ask the Lord to provide faithful men to be heralds of the gospel. We will express our trust in Him that He will care for his flocks, whether they have a pastor or not. We'll also pray for the work of our Theological College, that God would bless the instruction given there so that men would be prepared and further equipped for ministry.

So, while the next decade holds out challenges for our federation, we need not fear or become alarmist. God remains in control. Christ will remain the head of his church. He who started a good work in us will bring it to completion at his great day (Phil 1:6).





# Farewell to the Aasman Family

## Farewell evening

The congregation of Grand Valley gathered together in the gymnasium of the Maranatha/Emmanuel school in Fergus on September 10, 2006, to say farewell to Rev. Paul Aasman, his wife Evelyn, and their five children, Josh, Mark, Amber, Leah, and Reuben. The Aasman family had been members of our congregation since May 28, 1989, over seventeen years. While the years seem to have passed rather quickly, they are full of events that will forever remain in our memories.

Rev. Aasman arrived to be a shepherd to his first congregation; he was also the first minister for the newly instituted church at Grand Valley. Over the years, the Aasman family has grown by three children. Rev. Aasman had a very serious automobile accident in which we are all very thankful that God spared his life. There have been many other happenings like a broken collar bone for Josh and a serious eye injury for Reuben. Other than recuperating from his automobile accident for several months, there was only one other time that Rev. Aasman could not physically preach. Not to be out done by his son, Rev. Aasman dislocated his shoulder during a hockey game. Rumour has it he forgot to take off his skate guards but we have been unable to confirm that story. We are thankful that we could be a part of the many good times as well as the trying times that this family has endured in our midst.

*Words of  
farewell from  
Rev. and  
Mrs. Aasman*



Our evening was opened in prayer and Bible reading by our M.C. for the evening, Br. Andrew Wildeboer. Very fitting, as he is a son of one of the founding members of the Grand Valley congregation. According to Andrew, it was also very fitting because he was "almost a minister" himself, or at least the closest person we had to a minister since he had a brother that was a minister. What would Rev. Ian Wildeboer have to say about this? Br. Wildeboer talked of some significant historical events that have occurred in our little town of Grand Valley.

During the years that the Aasman family has been here, the Grand Valley church has grown quite significantly. Br. Wildeboer's PowerPoint presentation showed a picture of the entire Grand Valley congregation at the time the present church was built. Many of these members have gone on to other places and many others have come to Grand Valley to join us. On the Sunday of Rev. Aasman's farewell, we had another picture

taken in front of the church building. God has truly blessed us with great growth.

As a farewell gift to the Aasmans, the women's societies presented them with a scrapbook on behalf of the congregation. It was a beautiful reminder of the large part they played in our lives here in Grand Valley. In addition, all of the women came with small gifts covering each letter of "Grand Valley." Rev. Aasman's suit jacket was even retired, complete with his name stitched across the back. In addition, a framed map of the area with each member's home marked on it was given to them with directions to all of our homes, just in case they forget where we live.

Br. Clarence van Raalte, also a founding member, spoke on behalf of Council. We were reminded of a few of the special things which happened in the Aasman family while in Grand Valley, but also how Rev. Aasman loved to see growth and worked very hard at tending the flock so that growth could continue. He also loved to see

growth of garden plants and trees. Rev. Aasman had a hand in planting several sugar maple trees on the church property and had said that he hoped to tap them some day for maple syrup when they grew big enough. Since the family is now moving away this would become somewhat difficult. Therefore, on behalf of council the family was presented with an eight foot, nursery grown sugar maple tree to plant in their new back yard.

The evening was very enjoyable for all. Many people worked very hard to prepare this night for the Aasmans and they will not soon forget what they meant to us. We were entertained by many of the societies and the talented musicians in our midst. There were a few skits, of course, and humorous songs and also some beautiful music as well. We all sang and laughed and ate.

The end of the evening brought the minister and his wife to the stage. Rev. Aasman thanked us all for the support he received throughout his stay here. He was thankful also for the opportunity to teach us and our children for the past seventeen years. Even though leaving Grand Valley was a sad time, it was also an exciting time for them. God is leading them on new roads and if we all listen to what God says, our paths will all lead to the same place where we will ultimately be together again.

### **Farewell sermon**

We gathered together on October 1 in the afternoon to hear one of God's shepherds proclaim his Word as he had so often done before. For his farewell address, Rev. Aasman chose the Scripture reading from Luke 1:5-25 and the text was from John 3:22-30. The theme for the service was: "As the ministry of John ends, the

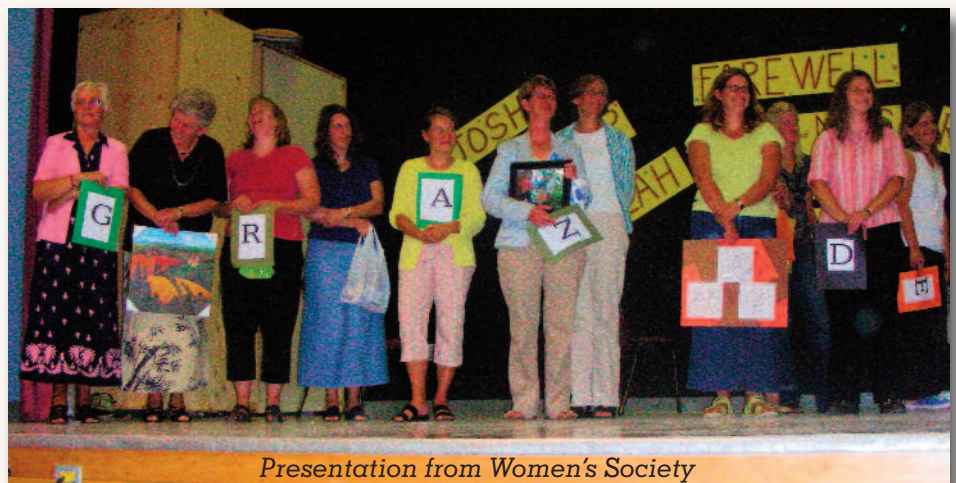
ministry of God's grace continues." Rev. Aasman showed us how man competes for the glory of the ministry and also how God triumphs in glory through the ministry.

When John the Baptist was preaching, many people really listened and were changed because they really needed to hear the truth again. John ceremoniously washed many Israelites in the Jordan River. This baptism was one of repentance in order to bring them back to the fundamentals of true religion. We can't truly appreciate our salvation unless we know how sinful we are. Because John had the privilege to minister in such a rich way, the people really loved John the Baptist. A minister can not touch people more deeply than to touch their spirit and fill them spiritually. They forgot *Sola Deo Gloria* - to God belongs the glory. Unknowingly, John's disciples had transferred their allegiance from God to John, even though Jesus was the fulfillment of everything that John preached. Without realizing it, we often do the same thing; we transfer our allegiance to a man rather than keeping it with God.

People may change, but the office remains the same. John the Baptist remembered that all things come from God, that his office was given to him from heaven above and that the glory and honour that John received from this office was also given to God where it belonged.

John had prepared the way for the Saviour, our Messiah. Jesus must increase, so John must decrease. John steps down willingly and rejoices in it, for he knows what Jesus was sent on earth to do. The church is safe in Jesus' hands. It is good when earthly leaders diminish within a congregation, that we do not give our allegiance to men rather than God. The ministry of Jesus Christ continues on uninterrupted, even in Grand Valley.

Immediately after the service, we went outside for fellowship and refreshments. A picture of the congregation was taken in front of the church as we are today. Wow, how we have grown. God has richly blessed our congregation and will surely continue to do so. May the Lord also richly bless the work of Rev. Aasman in his new calling with Streetlight Ministries, just as he was a blessing to the congregation in Grand Valley.



*Presentation from Women's Society*



## Further Discussion

### Principle or Practice: can we scripturally defend our position on the Theological Seminary issue?

In the proposed church order, Article 4a *Theological Training* states, "Competent men shall be encouraged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man aspiring to the ministry must be a member of a church in the federation and must evidence genuine godliness to his consistory, who shall ensure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. The council of his church shall see to it that his financial needs are met, if necessary with the assistance of the churches of classis." In appendix 2 it states that he must have graduated from an approved seminary.

There are several foundational principles preceding the proposed church order that state:

Because the church is Christ's possession and He is its head, the principles governing the church are determined not by human preference, but by biblical teaching. (3)

The Scriptures require that ministers, elders and deacons be properly qualified for the suitable discharge of their respective offices. (13)

Since the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, it is called through its teaching ministry to build up the people of God in faith. (15)

In the article, "Why Do the Canadian Reformed Churches Have Their Own Seminary?" the principal question is asked,

"Whose responsibility is the training for ministers of the Word? The church's or an organization which is independent of the church it seeks to serve and over which the church has no direct supervision or responsibility?" The article then works out the position that it is the churches' responsibility, based on the key passage of 2 Timothy 2:2 and several other passages. It then comes to the further conclusion that not only is it the churches' responsibility to train its ministers, but that the churches must have their own seminary under the direct control and supervision of the churches. Unfortunately, they did not consider any other possible manner in which the churches could maintain this principle but yet not have direct control and supervision.

When reading the fundamental principles and the proposed Article 4a, it is evident that there is no disagreement between the two federations seeking federative unity in the principle that it is the churches' responsibility to train its ministers. However, there is a difference in how this is to be worked out, a difference in process. Some would argue that it is necessary for the federation of churches to have its own seminary under its own direct control and supervision while others argue against the necessity of such an institution (although they may agree to the value of having such an institution). The difference in views is based on different interpretations of 2 Timothy 2:2.

It is interesting to note that 2 Timothy 2:2 is not quoted in the

form for the ordination of ministers, but it is specifically mentioned in the form for the ordination for missionaries.

Third, as soon as it becomes feasible, he [the missionary] shall, in good order, ordain overseers and deacons, according to the charge and example of the apostle Paul; so that they, as faithful men who are able to teach others also, may guide the flock of the Lord, which He obtained with the blood of His Son. He shall, however, not be hasty in the laying on of hands, according to the warning of Paul to Timothy. (pp 625 and 626, *Book of Praise*)

The first part of this paragraph is taken from 2 Timothy 2:2 that reads, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." The last sentence is taken from 1 Timothy 5:22, "Do not be hasty in the laying of hands...."

In 1 Timothy 3:1, 2 we read that "if anyone desires to be an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be ... able to teach." This requirement is applicable to both the teaching elder (the minister) and the ruling elder. Titus, another young minister who was left in Crete by Paul, had the charge to appoint elders who could "hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it had been taught, so that he [the elder] can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:5).

It is clear that the context of 2 Timothy 2:2 is not a scriptural requirement that Timothy must

establish a theological seminary but simply that the men who are to hold the offices of the church must be adequately prepared to undertake the responsibilities of their offices. The authors of "Why Do the Canadian Reformed Churches Have Their Own Seminary?" correctly state this as they acknowledge, "The principle appears to be that those holding office in the church must train office bearers for the church. Office bearers ordained by the church work on behalf of the church."

The proposed church order agrees with this same principle as it states this scriptural requirement in Articles 4a and 13 for the offices of the elder and the deacon. Article 13 of the proposed church order states "that the council [of the church] shall provide adequate preparation of elders and deacons by means of instruction and training regarding the duties of each office."

However, the authors of the article "Why Do the Canadian Reformed Churches Have Their Own Seminary?" claim that this is evidence to support their principle position for a theological school control and supervised by the churches. If this is correct, then the theological school must also train elders and deacons and is failing in this regard for, as they state, "This, then, may be considered as the earliest trace of the formation of a theological school – a school which has for its object not merely the instruction of the ignorant, but the protection and maintenance of a definite body of doctrine." It is the responsibility of the elders, or overseers, to take heed of the flock in which the Holy Spirit had made them guardians, defending the sheep against dangers that threatened them, to watch that the sacraments are not profaned, and they are charged with the supervision over the conduct of the other office bearers including that of the minister so that no strange

teaching or wolves enter the sheepfold of the Good Shepherd.

I don't doubt that there are benefits to having a theological seminary under the direct control and supervision of the churches. Some would argue there is strength in diversity, but others, in federations that do not have their own seminary, see this diversity as a hindrance to unity within the church. Both sides may have arguments with merit. As well, having a theological seminary under the direct control of the churches has not always been successful as evident from the "church controlled" theological seminary in Kampen that had to be re-established after the "Vrijmaking."

It may be argued that the churches do not have direct control and supervision of its seminary but that this control and supervision is via general synod. This was made very evident in the proposal that the governors of the Theological College are presenting to General Synod 2007 regarding the merits of appointing a fifth professor. The "local" churches received only a summary of the proposal, but yet are requested to provide input on this proposal to Synod.

At the beginning of this article I wrote that the position of the authors of the article "Why Do the Canadian Reformed Churches Have Their Own Seminary?" did not discuss any other manner in how the church processes its responsibility over the training of its ministers. On page 12 of their article they do state that "Synod also decided that to be admitted to the ecclesiastical examinations candidates shall provide proof that they have completed their studies at our own Theological College ... it can be noted that although Synod clearly expected future ministers to be trained at the school of the churches, it nevertheless left the door open for the possibility that a student study

elsewhere." If their position is a principle, as they argue, then this decision of Synod severely undermines their position. If their position is a practice, then it is not a principle that must be adhered to but a good process.

In reading the arguments put forth by the authors of this article as well as two articles in *Christian Renewal* (pp 12 and 13 January 31, 2007 and pp 8 and 9 March 14, 2007) that were written in response to an earlier article written last fall in *Clarion* by Prof. C. Van Dam, I have come to the conclusion that the argumentation for a federation to have its own theological seminary is not a scriptural requirement, but having a seminary under the control and supervision of the churches has certainly proven beneficial to the church.

There are consequences to holding this position. We are scripturally called to come together as one church federation. This is well laid out in the foundational principles 7, 8, 9, and 10 of the proposed church order. The churches are scripturally required to train the office bearers of the church. The churches however, are not scripturally required to establish a theological seminary under the direct control and supervision of the churches. We dare not insist upon a personal stipulation on top of what God requires as a condition for unity. Having said this, we do need to find a way to convince others of the benefits of having theological seminaries directly controlled and supervised by the churches in comparison to other seminaries not directly controlled and supervised by the churches.

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*From time to time Clarion will publish longer responses to articles received. The decision as to which responses to publish will rest with the Editor.*





## **Short Report of the Annual General Meeting of the Board of Governors of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College held on February 8 and 9, 2007**

Br. Peter Vandersluis, Chairman, opened the meeting in the usual Christian manner and welcomed all present: Peter Aikema, Gerrit Bos, Sherry Boyko, Martha de Gelder, Arthur DeLeeuw, Thea Heyink, Sharon Hofsink, Eric Jans, Debby Lodder, Len Lodder, Butch Medemblik, Harry Moes, Dave Pruijm, Peter Ravensbergen, Steve Spencer, and Anthony Vis. Also in attendance from time to time were the full-time faculty members: Allard Gunnink, Judy Kingma, and Christine van Halen-Faber, as well as Eleanor Boeringa, librarian, and Fred Lodder, comptroller. The college secretary, Donna Van Huisstede, attended to record the minutes.

Following a brief word of introduction from each governor, Sr. Heyink was given the opportunity to present the newly prepared PowerPoint presentation. The Finance and Fundraising Committee was thanked for its work. Each governor received a copy to be used at a local level to promote Covenant College.

### **Incoming/outgoing mail**

Nine items of mail were tabled. Among these was a request from Maranatha Christian School (Fergus, ON) requesting a series of in-service workshops in July 2007 regarding the teaching of Bible from a Reformed perspective. A letter and cheque were also received regarding the final disbursement of a bequest.

### **Secretarial report**

Sr. Hofsink elaborated on the report in which highlights of the past year were detailed. It was noted that the executive positions and committee liaisons have once again been filled, with the exception of the League.

### **Governance and Handbook Committee**

Sr. de Gelder elaborated on the report provided and, for the sake of those who were new around the table, outlined the history behind the establishment of this committee. A brief description of the new board structure was given and the concept of membership explained. Each committee liaison was asked for feedback regarding the implementation of the new governance model. It was agreed that this model has resulted in improvements in the way our organization functions at both board and committee levels.

### **Course presentation**

In following with the tradition in which one of the faculty member introduces a course to the governors, Br. Gunnink chose to focus on the Social Studies Methods course. A course outline was provided and elaborated upon. Allard explained how the four signifiers of Reformed education function within the teachings of this course.

### **Library report**

Sr. Boeringa elaborated on the report provided. Over the next year Eleanor, together with Sr. Vandervelde, librarian at the Theological College, plans to continue her investigation of new software programs.

### **Salary proposal**

Br. Bos presented the report on behalf of the Executive Committee. He indicated that the matter of establishing a salary proposal was mandated by the 2006 AGM. After some discussion, a motion to accept the proposal was made, seconded, and passed.

### **Financial report**

Br. Medemblik elaborated on the report provided. Included were motions regarding tuition, direct debit, and a recommended amount for annual donations. After some discussion, each was passed.

### **Program and Personnel Committee**

Sr. de Gelder elaborated on the report provided. She noted that the faculty remains strong in their commitment to the college and the cause of Reformed education. Discussion followed, particularly on the point of distance education. Together with the Information Technology Committee, the committee was mandated to investigate the logistics of providing a distance education program and to present a final report and action plan to the 2008 Annual General Meeting. The proposal to continue with researching the implications of adding a fourth year to the *Diploma of Teaching* program was adopted.

### **Faculty report**

Sr. van Halen presented her report. Once again, a heartfelt thank you was expressed to the many associate teachers and school boards who participated in the practicum component of our programs over the past year. Faculty presence in the schools

and communities has provided opportunity for a variety of local presentations.

### **Accreditation Committee**

It was reported that the committee continues to be in contact with Redeemer University College regarding the possibility of seeking to come to an Articulation Agreement. Sr. van Halen reported that a number of our graduates who have sought credit hours for the courses taken at Covenant College have had varying degrees of success. On the whole, these developments have been encouraging and other options will be pursued in the future.

### **Western governors' report**

Over the past year, the governors from British Columbia and Lynden, WA have joined to form a local committee. They intend to continue to work together to promote the cause of the college in their communities. A twenty-fifth anniversary celebration is being planned for May 2007 in conjunction with their participation in the final practicum session of this academic year.

### **Building Committee report**

Br. Ravensbergen reviewed the committee's activities over the past year.

### **Public Relations Committee**

Sr. Hofsink presented the report as provided. Input was given in regards to newsletter publication.

### **Information Technology Committee**

Br. Bos elaborated on the committee's first report to the AGM. To date, the focus has been on tending to the operational aspect of the college's technological needs.

### **Visitation report**

Br. Moes reported on several classroom visits made in the past week. He noted that the experience was a positive one.

### **Executive Committee report**

Sr. Hofsink, secretary, elaborated on the short report of the most recent meeting. Some disappointment was expressed over the fact that no replies had been received in response to the invitation that was extended to non-member school societies to attend this special twenty-fifth anniversary Annual General Meeting.

### **Women's Savings Action (W.A.T.C.H.) report**

The report prepared by Sr. Robin Westrik was reviewed. It was noted that quite a number of congregations do not appear to have an active representative. Each governor was instructed to check what the status of W.A.T.C.H. is at his or her local level.

### **Anniversary Committee report**

Sr. de Gelder provided a verbal report on behalf of the committee. All were encouraged to attend the symposium and open house planned for Saturday, February 10.

It was determined that at the end of this event, the committee has fulfilled its mandate. Thanks were expressed for the enthusiasm and commitment to task.

### **Financial report – budget**

With the completion of all other committee reports, attention was once again turned to matters of finance. Following some discussion and budget revision, the revised budget was adopted.

### **Fundraising Committee**

Discussion ensued regarding the necessity to increase our donor base significantly to meet the current budget. The committee is mandated to identify the trends and sources of our income as well as that of similar institutions. Direct deposit is to be in place by June. It is emphasized that all governors must be proactive at a local level, not just to solicit funds but also to promote the college for what it is and stands for.

### **Ratification**

Following proper procedure all actions of the Executive Committee and of the Board of Governors from February 24, 2006 to February 7, 2007 were ratified.

After each governor was given the opportunity to provide a local report/update, a date was established for the next directors' meeting. Br. Vandersluis thanked all in attendance for their participation. Following closing devotions, our chairman adjourned the meeting.

*S. Hofsink,  
Board Secretary*

