

Clarion

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*Mission is the
great commission of the church*



Inside this issue

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- Thoughts on the Proposed Church Order





Cl. Stam

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“Missionary Go Home”

Mission is hard work which burns up a lot of energy and shows less result than one might expect

The title above this editorial should not be misconstrued as my own. Who am I that I would dare tell anyone, much less an ordained missionary, to go home? Besides, we ought rather to encourage our missionaries than tell them to throw in the towel.

This title “Missionary Go Home” comes from a video that has been circulating on YouTube and was also broadcast in The Netherlands by the Evangelical Broadcasting Corp (EO). The video caused quite a stir and is still being discussed and evaluated today. Even *Nederlands Dagblad*, a Reformed Dutch daily newspaper, devoted a lot of space to this video. So we should find out what all the excitement is about.

To keep it short and succinct, the video tells the story of a missionary and his family’s disillusionment with the work. The missionary was sent by one of our sister churches to Irian Jaya (Papua) to teach prospective ministers at a Bible school in Boma. But from the beginning the undertaking was fraught with opposition in Papua itself. The family decided that it was better to go home. During this process of decision-making their child had an accident and died. This added greatly to the sorrow and stress of the missionary and his wife. Having a child buried in the jungle made it even harder to leave. But they did leave.

The missionary later returned with a video team to report what had happened and to try to make some sense out of it. This film is titled, “*Missionary Go Home*.” It shows a deeply human side of mission work that is not often seen: the extreme stress endured by missionary families.

The cause of the breakdown

What caused the relations between the missionary and the Papuans to deteriorate so quickly and decisively? A large part of the reason lies in the specific task description for this missionary. He had to make clear that foreign (Dutch) financial aid was coming to an end. The churches of Papua had to become financially responsible and independent. No more “rice Christianity” for Papua.

From the beginning of his stay in Papua, the missionary felt the resistance of the people against this new arrangement. The students hammered the door of the school shut and accused the Dutch churches of dishonesty. There were droughts and forest fires which further impoverished the locals and there were disciplinary problems in the church.

The missionary found that one of the local church leaders was committing adultery and fraud. But when he admonished the culprit, he was himself beaten with a stick out of the church building. The man threatened to burn down the missionary’s house. The Dutch family no longer felt that their safety was ensured.

After the death of their child, the missionary couple hoped that the relations with the locals would improve. The Papuans insisted that the body be immediately buried. For the rest, they completely ignored the missionary and his wife. The missionary and his wife concluded that it was better to go home. They finally left and took up a new calling in one of the Dutch churches. They had been in Papua for nine years, had gained little, and lost much.



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Is there any solution?

How should the mission churches react to this sad affair? First, we should never think that any mission work anywhere is idyllic or romantic. Mission is hard work which burns up a lot of energy and shows less result than one might expect. The Dutch churches have been working in Papua for over fifty years and still the things described above happen.

But the people of Papua still need help. They still need to hear the gospel of salvation preached to them. That need has not diminished and will not disappear soon. The solution cannot be to abandon the project. Perhaps other churches who live closer by can take over for the Dutch, but someone must fill the void.

I can understand it that the Papuans are generally not pleased with the ceasing of foreign financial support. In the Third World it is hard to make a living. The gap between rich and poor grows all the time and with it the desperation of the locals increases dramatically. It is unfortunate that the missionary who went home received an impossible mandate. In the impoverished developing world, things need more time than affluent Westerners often appreciate.

What did the ICRC decide?

The ICRC is an international council of Reformed churches that meets every four years to discuss mutual work and concerns. Since 1985 this organization has also had a standing Missions Committee which may call together mission conferences in certain areas.

At the ICRC meeting in Langley (June 19-29, 1989) it was agreed that member churches should not conduct overlapping mission work in the same area. "When a member Church is considering a new sphere of work, it might be good for that Church to consider helping in the activities of another Church faced with an open door of opportunity that is not being exploited because of lack of personnel or resources, rather than initiating an entirely new work" (Page 93, Proceedings, report Missions Committee).

Churches closest to a mission field should conduct mission there. This makes involvement of the sending

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Church News

NEW ADDRESSES

Canadian Reformed Church at Calgary:

18 Hart Estates Boulevard NE,
Calgary, AB T1X 0L3

Tyndale Christian School:

28 Hart Estates Boulevard NE,
Calgary, AB T1X 0L3

Pastor Hans Kalkman:

38 Hart Estates Boulevard NE,
Calgary, AB T1X 0L3

churches easier and also cuts down on travel time and expense. In other words, churches in Ontario, Canada should not send a missionary to East Timor or Indonesia. Existing projects can continue, but no new projects should be undertaken by distant churches. That is what we agreed upon at the ICRC.

Sometimes I wonder why we bother to meet as conference with all the including costs, spend much time in discussions and decisions, and then conveniently forget the recommendations or continue as if there has never been a conference. If things stay as they are in this respect, the ICRC is a waste of time and money.

Churches closest to a mission field should conduct mission there

With respect to Papua this means that help should be given by the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Reformed Church of New Zealand, the Presbyterian Church of Korea, and other member churches in the vicinity. A mission conference of all the ICRC churches in the area should be held to discuss and resolve the rising problems in Papua.

As an additional note, I mention that the next ICRC, held at Zwolle, The Netherlands in 1993, decided that four regional mission conferences be held every second year after the ICRC, one in the West, one in Africa, one in the East, and one in Europe. Would it not be time for the ICRC mission conference of the East (Japan, Indonesia, Philippines, Taiwan, India, and Papua New Guinea) to meet and address the current situation in Papua? We are all in this together and need to consult each other. Otherwise the ICRC is luxurious humbug. Missionaries should not go home, but should lock arms.

Who is capable of these things?

This brings me to my final point for now. The Dutch churches sent a young, recently-married missionary to

Papua with a very difficult mandate. From the video I saw, I conclude that the stress was too much and the mandate was reaching too high. The poor man was blind-sided.

With the situation in the Third World rapidly deteriorating, is it not wiser to send older and experienced ministers into the field? Or to send those who have served in the mission field before and who know how to deal with the locals? Mission work is a tough business and requires seasoned men and women. Today, more than before, we need seasoned men.

I know that we send younger men because their children, if they have them, are still young. But this also means that the missionary has to worry about the safety of his wife and children. I'd rather see a young candidate first enter the ministry in an established church in his own country than send him basically unprepared into the jungle and the Stone Age. It takes time to learn the disciplines of the ministry and these should *not* be acquired abroad. While he is in his first congregation(s), the missionary-to-be can train himself and his family for the different work that lies ahead.

Mission work is a tough business and requires seasoned men and women

Much more can be said about this topic. But we'll leave it at this for now. If you have questions, please send them so that I can respond. I will respond because mission is the great commission of the church. We cannot suffice with saying: "Missionary, go home."



K.A. Kok

Prayers of Judgment



MATTHEW 13:52

“The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked. Then men will say, ‘Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth.’”

Psalm 58:10, 11

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We often overlook the amount of judgment in the Psalms. We know Psalm 137 blesses those who dash Babylon’s little ones against the rocks and Psalm 58 calls for God’s people to rejoice when they wash their feet in the blood of the wicked, but the whole Psalter is full of God’s judgment. Everybody’s favourite, Psalm 23, speaks of God preparing a table for David in the presence of his enemies. This means that David’s enemies will sit in chains while David is enthroned and passes judgment on them. As a result, C. S. Lewis concluded that Psalm 23 was “sub-Christian.” However, you cannot avoid God’s judgment against the wicked and the prayers of the righteous for judgment without eviscerating the Psalms.

Yet we have been able to do some eviscerating. Some metrical settings of the Psalms either tone down or simply remove these judgments. Even with a full metrical setting of all the Psalms, we can avoid these passages on judgment by the Psalms and stanzas we choose to sing. When was the last time you sang all of Psalm 137, or any of Psalm 58? We pick and choose our favourite Psalms to read and reflect on.

We even have theological evasions. The judgments, we tell ourselves, look to the final judgment, which is safely in the future. Or, as in the case of Psalm 137, the judgments are safely past; Babylon has already received its due. No wonder many people prefer hymns to Psalms. There are very few

imprecatory hymns; that is almost a contradiction in terms.

This is understandable. How can man deal with the judgment of God? The answer is: we can’t. Judgment is too hot for us to handle. We know our desire for vindication is often sinful, as we easily give in to the desire for revenge. Prayers for judgment may also give us an uneasy conscience: “Am I praying rightly?” But more than that, judgment reveals a side of our Lord we are uncomfortable with. It just isn’t nice to bless those who smash babies against rocks.

The problem is that we are reading the Psalms in a subjective way. We assume that the Psalms are all about us. They aren’t. The Psalms are all about the Messiah. We are not adequate to speak of the judgment of God, but He is. It takes God to write about his judgments. It requires the Holy Spirit, who inspired Scripture, to handle, to speak, and to sing properly of the judgments of God’s Son. Our God did not leave us to our own desires, either for getting revenge, or for downplaying judgment, but He gave us his song to sing. For He made his Messiah to be judge of all the earth.

When the church sings lustily the words of Psalm 55, or Psalm 69, or Psalm 137, she isn’t venting her spleen. She is confessing that the Father has committed all judgment to the Messiah. He judges those who live as fools, saying in their hearts that there is no God. Already his judgment falls on individuals, on nations, and on kings because of their denials of Him, because of

their lives apart from Him. No, when the church prays for judgment, she is saying that vengeance belongs to the Lord and that He will repay. We are to praise the Lord for his awesome work of judgment. Can we do any less?

To pray “Thy kingdom come” is to pray these Psalms: “Destroy the works of the devil, every power that raises itself against Thee, and every conspiracy against Thy holy Word” (HC, Q&A 123). That may not be as graphic as “O God, shatter the teeth in their mouth” (Ps 58:6), or “Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow” (Ps 109:9), but it is the same thing. You cannot sing of God’s salvation and love without singing of his judgment of the wicked. There is no salvation of Noah without the destruction of the world with the flood. There is no salvation of Israel without the death of the first-born of Egypt, without the destruction of Pharaoh and his host at the Red Sea. If Samson hadn’t killed the Philistines, he would not have delivered Israel. The work of Jesus Christ is of a piece with this. In his death and resurrection, He conquered sin and death and the kingdom of Satan. He judges the earth now and He will render his final verdict when He returns.

God’s judgment is a sober matter, but we may not avoid it. We must take up the words of all the Psalms as our words in Jesus Christ. We must see the crushing reality of his judgment and praise our Lord and King for its glory, by which we are saved.



Thoughts on the Proposed Church Order

Synod Smithers (2007) has invited the churches to discuss and evaluate the Proposed Church Order (PCO) for the united federation of the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) and the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). While there has been some discussion and evaluation of the work of the Songbook and Theological Education committees, there has been little discussion of the PCO. Regrettably, the Church Order comes a distant third in the consciousness of members in our churches, whereas it ought to garner the same amount of attention as the argument to the *Book of Praise* and the ownership of theological education.

I would like to draw readers' attention to two significant changes to the Church Order (CO) so as to prompt the discussion of the PCO requested by Synod Smithers well before 1 March 2009, when consistories are to submit their evaluation to the Church Order Committee. Both changes involve the introduction of extra-scriptural standards to the Church Order. A number of other elements of the PCO warrant closer attention and I will highlight two of these briefly in the conclusion.¹

Articles 21e and 55 PCO

One of the most important articles of the current CO in the history of the CanRC is Article

31. This article was the church-political basis upon which our Dutch sister churches liberated themselves from the imposition of extra-biblical doctrine on covenant and baptism. Article 31 is important in the CO for three reasons. First, because it describes the right of wronged parties to appeal decisions of major assemblies, a principle of justice repeatedly articulated in the Old Testament that has its ultimate source in the justice and mercy of God. Second, because it describes the collective submission of individual churches to the wisdom of the majority of churches in the federation. Third, because it describes the basis upon which all parties may determine whether decisions are properly made: a decision "shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order" (Art 31 CO).

One could say that these two provisions (Word of God and CO) relate to the content and process of decisions. Unless a decision can be demonstrated to contradict what the Bible teaches (doctrine) or to conflict with the orderly procedure agreed upon by churches in the federation (practice), it is considered settled or binding. In other words, one must prove on the basis of Scripture that a decision is false, heretical, or unbiblical; one must prove on the basis of the CO

that a decision was reached without due respect for the rules agreed upon for the orderly governance of the churches in the federation.

The PCO introduces a third element in the assessment of decisions made by major assemblies in Articles 21e and 55: "The judgment of the broader assembly shall be reached by majority vote, received with respect, and considered settled and binding unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the Church Order" (55 PCO). The introduction of "the Reformed Confessions" here confuses the clear distinction in Article 31 CO between doctrinal purity and procedural propriety: does this third element – an appeal to the Reformed Confessions – relate to doctrine or to procedure? Even if we were not to see the distinct roles of Scripture and CO in Article 31 in such terms, the insertion of "the Reformed Confessions" muddies the waters.

More significant than the possible misunderstanding of the *nature* of the Reformed confessions as basis of appeal, is the *authority* improperly granted to the Reformed confessions in this article. As faithful summaries of what Scripture teaches, the Reformed confessions have several uses and functions, serving as a hermeneutic guide for the

interpretation of Scripture, providing an apologetic response to questions and challenges, and forming the basis of unity among believers. But the churches of the Reformation have always maintained that man-made formulations of doctrine should not be the final arbiters of right doctrine. From the Reformation until now, Reformed believers rightly understand the role of tradition and the magisterium in the Roman Catholic Church as misappropriating the divine authority of Scripture for human teaching. Second-order summaries of Scripture are not to occupy a place of authority on par with first-order revelation.

One could argue that the insertion of “the Reformed Confessions” as a standard beside the Word of God is simply redundant. If a decision by a major assembly is demonstrably against the Reformed confessions, which are faithful summaries of Scripture, then the appellant should be able to demonstrate directly that the decision is against Scripture. A decision, therefore, cannot be against *either* Scripture or the Reformed confessions: if it is against the confessions, then it must also be against Scripture. But the more important reason for us to discuss the addition of the Reformed confessions as the basis of appeal in the PCO is the inordinate authority thereby granted to the confessions.

Article 58 PCO

A different sort of extra-scriptural standard is introduced in the final article when the PCO states: “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” (Art 58 PCO). This is the crucial article in the CO that relates

to the proper interpretation, application, and revision of the foregoing articles. While the CanRC is familiar with the latter (“by common consent”), the phrase “drafted in accord with the Foundational Principles” introduces a new standard by referring to the list of principles found in the introduction to the PCO.

Consistories are to submit their evaluation to the Church Order Committee

The introduction to the PCO is significantly different from that of our current CO in that the objective historical description has been replaced by a confessional summary of what the Bible teaches about church government. The introduction begins with a formulation typical of confessions (“We Reformed believers maintain. . .”), which signals a change of function for the introduction from a neutral account to a confessional statement. The introduction then summarizes what Reformed believers maintain in a list of statements: “The following list of foundational principles, though not exhaustive, provides a clear biblical basis for and source of our Church Order.” The list consists of eighteen statements, supported with texts from Scripture, which rephrase what the Reformed confessions already state in the Belgic Confession (Art 27-32), the Heidelberg Catechism (LD 19, 21, 31), and elsewhere. In other words, the list summarizes the introduction’s summary of what the Reformed confessions summarize.

The churches should consider carefully whether the CO ought to be prefaced by such a confessional

summary. Since the CO is not itself a confession-oriented document, but a governance-oriented document – one that spells out the practice of the orderly functioning of the churches locally and federally on the basis of Scripture as summarized by the Reformed confessions – the confessional tone and content of the introduction are inappropriate to the status and function of this document. As in the previous concern about granting inappropriate authority to the Reformed confessions, the concern here is the undue authority given the quasi-confessional “Foundational Principles” found in the introduction. Should the PCO wish to refer to the principles upon which it is drafted, it should refer beyond itself to the Bible: “Having been drafted in accord with the Word of God as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity.”

Two other items

The PCO departs from the current CO by including a number of appendices to spell out the procedures for implementing Articles 4, 5, 7, and 21. These articles deal with the examination and admission of men to the ministry and with the presentation of credentials by delegates at broader assemblies. The articles typically refer to the relevant appendix with a phrase such as “according to the regulations prescribed in Appendix X.”

By appending specific procedures for various articles, the PCO moves the CO toward a more bureaucratic function. There is a danger that the prescription of regulations to such a degree may create “proceduralism”: an undue reliance on the following of set procedures rather than a dynamic application of the principles of orderly governance set out in the CO. And then one wonders why these particular articles are

associated with required procedures and not others, such as classical church visitation (Art 26 PCO), ecumenical relations (Art 31 PCO), and approval of additional songs (Art 35 PCO). May one appeal a decision of a broader assembly (Art 21e, 55) on the grounds that the procedure required by an appendix was not followed to the letter?

Another item for consideration is the addition to the elder's task of promoting "confessionally-Reformed schooling at all levels" (Art 17 PCO). The current CO places the responsibility for Reformed education on the parents, with the consistory ensuring that

parents "have their children attend a school where the instruction given is in harmony with the Word of God as the church has summarized it in her confessions" (Art 58 CO). The placement of the article on Christian schooling indicates that education is seen in the sequence of the reception of infants as members by baptism (Art 57) to their being brought to maturity of faith and admission to the Lord's Supper (Art 60). Article 17 PCO moves the pastoral responsibility of the consistory as a whole from the context of sacraments and communicant membership to the specific duties of the elder. The task "to promote

confessionally-Reformed schooling at all levels" belongs to parents in school societies and cannot be deduced from Paul's instruction to Timothy and Titus as belonging to the specific calling of the elder. Promoting confessionally-Reformed schooling should not be included among the duties of the elder in Article 17 PCO nor as a matter for mutual oversight among churches (Article 25.d PCO).

¹ The Proposed Church Order is included in the Report from the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity, pp.15-72: <http://tinyurl.com/64lu5o>.

Book Review

Reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof

The Lost Soul of American Protestantism

D.G. Hart (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002).

Additional Information: Paperback, 197 pages, \$24.26 USD

For better or for worse, Canada's biggest economic trading partner is also a significant influence on the character of many of our churches. Particularly if you live near the border with the United States, you can be sure that American radio programming and other influences are having their impact. Because this is so, it's helpful for us to reflect on the history and character of American Protestantism. How did things get to be the way they are? This thought-provoking book by Orthodox Presbyterian historian D.G. Hart is a helpful guide for such reflection.

Most historians of American religion see a division between

evangelicalism and liberalism as the defining feature of Protestantism in the last century. Hart argues that this way of viewing the history of American Christianity fails to account for two other major factors: revivalistic pietism and confessional Protestantism. He argues further that both evangelicalism and liberalism are heirs of revivalistic pietism, with their anti-clerical, anti-confessional, and anti-liturgical prejudices. So, if there is a division in American Protestantism, Hart insists that it is actually between pietism and confessionalism, or between neo-Protestants and paleo-Protestants.

Hart makes his case looking at the struggles in a number of confessional, or previously confessional churches. He does this



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under the rubrics of confessions (Presbyterian), church government or polity (Reformed), and liturgy (Lutheran). In each case, there are profound lessons to learn.

This is an important book chiefly because it draws our attention again to the question of identity. Hart challenges us to consider the question freshly: what sorts of churches are we going to be? Are we going to be confessional churches, defined by our creeds, polity, and liturgy (all shaped by Scripture)? There are certain blessings we receive from our American neighbours, but careful thought is needed before accepting everything labelled "Christian" from below the forty-ninth (and, I would hasten to add, frequently from above too). We need to keep going back to our own confessional heritage, not because it's old and old must be good, but because that heritage keeps drawing us back to Scripture where we find the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

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What's New???

As this column has developed over the last year and a half, it has become more than simply an opportunity to pass on news from various congregations. It has also proven to be a way of sharing worthwhile comments and insights found in local bulletins. In that category I pass on what Rev. John Smith of Albany wrote in a pastoral column earlier this year. He wrote,


Older catechism students occasionally mention the issue of encountering blasphemy at school or at work. I've drafted some practical guidelines for dealing with blasphemy. Since this is an issue faced not only by the youth but by many of us, I've placed the guidelines in the bulletin. Perhaps they could be discussed in the family circle. May they serve to "equip the saints" for the edifying of the body of Christ.

A little further in the bulletin were the following Guidelines for Dealing with Blasphemy:

Christians who enter a secular environment are often bombarded with blasphemy. They know that "God is angry also with those who do not prevent and forbid it as much as they can" (Lord's Day 36, QA 100), but are not always sure how to deal with it. The following guidelines are intended to give practical assistance.

1. Realize that many people do not know that blasphemy is wrong/offensive. Kindly and calmly request them not to do it, with a brief explanation (1 Peter 3:15).
2. Persons in positions of authority (e.g. employers, teachers) ought to be addressed privately and humbly on the issue of blasphemy so that their honour and authority is not called into question. It might be possible to request an employer to make a policy forbidding employees to blaspheme.
3. It is better to be open about your stance on blasphemy from the start, e.g. from the first day you start working at a new job, because it's harder to start opposing it later if you have been silent at first.
4. Seek the support, advice, encouragement and prayers of fellow Christians, including peers, parents, and office bearers.
5. Be aware of the detrimental impact of repeated blasphemy on your own spiritual life, i.e. you may become desensitized to it. As much as possible, choose an environment free from blasphemy so that it retains shock value for you (Canons of Dort V, 2).
6. If people know your stance full well, but deliberately blaspheme to antagonize you, do not throw pearls before the swine (Matthew 7:6), but keep silent and cry out to the Lord to defend His name because you are no longer able to do so (2 Kings 18:28-19:4).
7. Don't use vulgar language as an alternative to blasphemy, for many consider the former more offensive than the latter, and it will discredit your testimony (see Ephesians 5:4).
8. Reacting to blasphemy should not be the extent of your witness for Christ. Let it be clear that your faith extends to all areas of your life by showing Christian character and godly conduct (1 Peter 2:11,12).
9. Acknowledge your weakness before God and ask Him constantly for His grace and Spirit to strengthen you (Lord's Day 45, QA 116).

Also of interest is what was found in the Short Report of June 23, 2008 of the Council of the Ebenezer Church in Burlington. It read, "A request by the Empress Apartments to use our parking lot for parking 50 to 75 vehicles during



the renovations of their underground parking garage during July through September was tabled. Because of an earlier decision to deny this request to others and also liability issues, council denies this request.”

The need for a decision like that reflects the times we live in. It may seem like a neighbourly gesture to grant such a request. Yet, churches need to be careful in how their facilities are being used. If a church allowed any of its facilities to be used for a function not necessarily against but also not fully in keeping with the purpose of the church, it may find itself charged with discrimination if it refuses the use of its facilities to organizations that actually contradict the purpose of the church. This all has to do with the fact that a church is a charity and falls under the rules and regulations pertaining to charities. In this respect it may be worthwhile to point out that churches cannot give preferential rates to members for private or family functions. The church as a charity does not belong to its members but is an entity on its own and is considered public property. This is immediately clear if one considers what would happen if a church would cease to exist. The assets could not be divided among the members but must go to another charity. Churches would do well to have a clearly defined



facilities usage policy and stick to it. It appears that the Council of the Ebenezer Church in Burlington has thought these things through carefully.

Perhaps in the same vein is what churches include in their local bulletins. Having perused numerous bulletins over the last two years, it has struck me how many bulletins include extensive information about the schools and other organizations in terms of press releases of board meetings, appeals for funds, and often extensive financial details. Beside these are items calling the members to political involvement. At times these various items can dominate local bulletins. As

various churches have adopted facility usage policies and as the latest general synod even modified the article pertaining to marriage in order to avoid potential legal problems, it may be time that churches have a good look at bulletin policies. The easiest solution would seem to be to let the various organizations promote their own cause via their own means of communication (newsletters; e-letters) and to let the church bulletins deal with matters that truly pertain to the life of the local congregation.

It would seem that this is sufficient food for thought till the next, “What’s New?”



Psalm 112 and 122

PSALM 112 (Geneva, 1562)

1. Come, praise the LORD! Let all revere Him.
How blessed is the man who fears Him,
Who in the LORD's commands takes pleasure.
His offspring, blest in equal measure,
Will be the mighty in the nation,
A truly upright generation.
2. Abundant riches fill his dwelling;
Firm stands his justice, never failing.
As after night comes morning brightness,
Light dawns for him who loves uprightness;
All gloom and darkness it displaces
For the compassionate and gracious.
3. All's well with him whose generous lending
Gives joy to those on him depending;
Who, his trustworthiness revealing,
Lets justice govern all his dealings.
The righteous one shall never waver;
His praises will be sung forever.
4. With steadfast heart in God confiding,
He has no fear of evil tidings;
He in the end with exultation
Will greet his foe's humiliation.
His gifts he on the poor will shower;
Great are his honour and his power.
5. The just will thrive in his endeavours;
His righteousness endures forever.
The wicked sees it with vexation;
His teeth he gnashes in frustration.
The schemes and hopes that he may cherish
Are sure to fail and doomed to perish.

PSALM 122 (Geneva, 1551)

1. My heart exulted! I was glad
When I heard eager voices call,
"Come, let us go now, one and all,
To Zion, to the house of God."
Our journey has been richly blest,
For, O Jerusalem, at last
Our feet within your gates are standing!
Jerusalem! We stood in awe
When we your strength and beauty saw
While to your citadels ascending.
2. Jerusalem, designed so well,
Is built as close-knit unity;
There flock together joyfully
The tribes and clans of Israel.
They to Jerusalem ascend,
According to the LORD's command,
To thank Him with their adoration.
For there are set the royal thrones
Of David's house, and there his sons
With righteous judgments rule the nation.
3. Pray that Jerusalem be blest:
"May peace prevail within your walls,
And safety in your citadels.
May those who love you there find rest."
Now for the sake of friends and kin,
Jerusalem, I say again:
"May lasting peace be yours to cherish."
And mindful that the God of grace
Has in your midst His dwelling place,
I pray that you may thrive and flourish.

Farewell to Rev. Julius Van Spronsen and family

In 1970, the Canadian Reformed Church of New Westminster (now the Maranatha church at Surrey, British Columbia) began missionary work in the country of Brazil. In September of that year, the congregation gathered to say farewell to Reverend C. Van Spronsen and his family, as they departed to begin their task in that work. Since then, a number of ministers have served (Revs. R.F. Boersema, P. K. Meijer, and E. Venema) and Rev. K. Wieske is still serving there. Now, thirty-eight years later, on April 6th, 2008, the Maranatha congregation, along with members of the supporting churches in the Fraser Valley, again gathered to send Rev. Van Spronsen to Brazil. This time it was Rev. J. Van Spronsen, the son of Maranatha's first missionary. The church building was filled to capacity.

The Chairman of the Maranatha Mission Board, Br. J. Vanderstoep, served as MC. He opened the evening by reading from 2 Corinthians 5:11-21. The congregation sang Hymn 29:1 and 2 and Br. Vanderstoep led in prayer.

After a brief word of welcome, Rev. Van Spronsen was asked to give a presentation on his preparatory studies for the mission work. He showed the gathering a

slide show of the various aspects of his preparation. The Van Spronsen family had packed up their bags, said farewell to the congregation in Smithers, and after some holidays and visiting with family, Rev. Van Spronsen was installed as Surrey's minister on August 19, 2008. Shortly thereafter the family headed for Ontario. Rev. Van Spronsen acknowledged the mercy of the Lord as they were provided with a house to live in and furniture and other household goods to use. A number of individuals were responsible for looking after this, but he made special mention of his wife's sister, Alisa Roukema, whose husband is enrolled at the Theological College, and his brother Ted, also at the College. Rev. Van Spronsen spoke about the Missiology course taken with Dr. de Visser at the Theological College, as well as the cross-cultural and language acquisition courses offered at MissionPrep in Toronto. He then went on to tell us of his travels to Holland to interact with and learn from several Dutch brothers experienced in missions. After approximately six months of training, the Van Spronsen family returned to the Lower Mainland for six weeks, where again they were well provided for due to the

generosity of various members of the churches. The presentation was interspersed with various pictures of the family in the various homes and activities during the time of preparation.

After an opportunity for questions by the assembled guests, Maranatha's choir, Jubilate Deo, sang a couple of songs, one of them in the Van Spronsen's new language of Portuguese. Sprinkled between various other presentations, a number of letters were read, sent to the Mission Board by supporting churches that were unable to attend the evening. Delegates of supporting churches that were able to attend also took their turn addressing the Van Spronsen family and wishing them God's blessing on their work in Brazil.

Maranatha's Thursday Morning Women's Bible Study Group, aided by a number of people from the audience, gave Rev. Van Spronsen a comical insight into what a typical day will be like for him in Brazil. Mission Aid Brazil, represented by its chairman, Br. Ed Louwerse, expressed its best wishes to the family. A slide presentation provided many pictures of the people, congregations and activities that await the Van Spronsens in Brazil.



The assembled audience then watched a video clip, sent by Rev. Wieske, Maranatha's other missionary in Brazil, expressing a warm welcome to the Van Spronsens and to tell them how much the Wieske family and the churches in Brazil are looking forward to their arrival.

Rev. C. Van Spronsen then went to the front of the church, to speak in a number of capacities: as Maranatha's first missionary, as Maranatha's minister emeritus, and lastly, as the father of

Maranatha's new missionary. He spoke of his own father's (also a J. M. Van Spronsen) desire to go into the ministry, specifically mission work. That was not possible, but now a third generation was about to leave for a foreign country for that very purpose.

Maranatha's minister, Rev. J. Van Vliet, then spoke on behalf of the council and congregation. Gifts were presented to the Van Spronsen children and the promise of a gift for Rev. and Mrs. Van

Spronsen once the family has settled into their new home.

This brought the formal part of the evening to a close. Psalm 134:1, 2, and 3 was sung, after which Rev. J. Van Spronsen closed in prayer. Everyone was then invited downstairs for the social part of the evening where the congregation and guests could personally say goodbye to the Van Spronsens.

The Van Spronsens left for Brazil the following Tuesday and took up their task in Brazil.



Peregrine Survey

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This is the first Peregrine Survey of the school year and it draws attention to milestones of God's grace, common struggles, some fresh ideas, and a few new programs. Some of you noticed that Education Matters appears less frequently than before. This is not because there is little left to say – education always develops – but we share the pages of *Clarion* with many others and are still receiving the same amount of space we had when we started eight years ago. It just happened that sometimes we got away with a little extra.

Maranatha Christian School in Fergus and Dufferin Area Christian School in Laurel completed their fortieth year of instruction this past June. If my information is correct, Dufferin Christian School in Carman and Eben Ezer Christian School in Chatham completed their thirty-fifth year of operation, and Credo Christian High School in Langley its thirtieth year. More details about the way this was or will be celebrated locally may be forthcoming, but at Maranatha it was done with an open house, a few brief presentations, the unveiling of a new school logo and sign, and the preparation of a time capsule. At DACS, it will be commemorated in conjunction with the opening of its latest building addition, a gym. We need not doubt that in all cases ample attention will be given to the incredible blessings of the Lord by which this unfunded or under-funded

education could come off the ground and be maintained.

Clarion continues to give evidence that not all teaching positions in our schools are easily filled. Some schools have had to piece full time positions together with the help of a number of part-time teachers, while others continue to look for full time or part-time staff. Among others, this underlines the value of our own teacher training institution, CCRTC in Hamilton. The shortage in BC has helped its College of Teachers to change certification requirements from a five-year post high-school degree to a four-year degree. The new degree must include at least forty-eight credit hours of education courses, including a government recognized practicum. CCRTC is introducing some changes to its practicums as well, with the biggest difference being that the last practicum on students in both the one- and the three-year programs will be extended from three to four weeks and be treated more as an induction in the teaching profession.

Last spring, one board chairman expressed unease about the recent election and appointment of office bearers. Although we recognize the magnitude and importance of the task of office-bearers, we also are faced with the hard reality that proficiency in the responsibilities involved with the school board takes time to develop. To have

those talents removed before the completion of a board members' term leaves a vacuum requiring time to restore. This chairman expressed a sentiment that was voiced in a number of other school bulletins as well. Although these comments may sound critical of local councils, they acknowledge that a board member may feel torn and forced to resign because of election and appointment to a special office. Aside from potential conflicts of interest generated by wearing multiple leadership hats, a function in both is just not feasible for most. The brother may have a family to care for, be employed full time, and needs to be able to rest on the Sabbath. Unlike school boards, who are not in the habit of nominating brothers who serve as elder or deacon – although they may do it when their term is nearly up – councils do occasionally nominate brothers still serving on school boards. Some boards have, at times, requested councils to at least consider not nominating such brothers. Councils may also give consideration to the need for a break after a term or two on council or board, special requirements at work or circumstances in the family, or the pursuit of further education. There also is the reality that personal overload leads to incomplete work on all counts, together with the associated sense of dissatisfaction and even guilt.

As church office is clearly instituted by God, and schools are

man-made and culturally developed institutions, it is easy to argue that a calling to church office should take precedence over school board membership. Both seek the type of person who is committed to the Lord and his people and who could best use their talents in leadership functions. For both, a longer term results in more experience and continuity and benefits the body on which they serve as well as its long-term cause and effectiveness. Article 58 of our Church Order does not explicitly say this, but the consistory's interest in the existence of good schools would support the notion that it should not undermine the school's proper function. For councils and consistories, Scripture is clear that these offices should be filled by men. For school board functions, however, an expectation that they be men may be a stance supported by tradition and community culture only. Perhaps it is time to consider whether we could use our ladies' leadership gifts for school boards, and to develop a longer-term leadership-needs perspective that allows some brothers to stick to council work.

If boards are looking at ways to replenish their membership with some fresh ideas, they may also want to check out http://www.scsbc.ca/link/may08_web.pdf. I quote:

Bringing a new member onto your board is like putting a catfish in a cod tank. Some boards can become so familiar with each other, they fall into sloppy patterns. A new player at the table often asks questions, challenges the status quo, and keeps everyone "on their toes." While it may create some discomfort, new inquiries and ideas provoke the board to reflect, to re-examine, and re-affirm. These are healthy steps toward governance excellence.

To fully get the "catfish in a cod tank" analogy, please go to the website. The article continues with a list of things one can do to find the people the board needs as directors, in which recruiting for specific skills or talents and experience stand out. It sure sounds more convincing, it seems, to be nominated for a board position if it is for specific talents one may have, than for a vague need for a warm body to fill a vacant position.

While most schools still start on the Tuesday after Labour Day, I noticed at least two calendars with a start the week before. In Ontario, the Ministry of Education regulations call for 950 hours of instruction and, for 2008-2009, identifies 194 potential days between Labour Day and the end of June on which to teach them. Of those 194 days, several may or should be used for professional activities such as curriculum development and conventions. It is not unusual for schools to schedule well beyond the 950 hours, especially in view of unscheduled missed days due to snow, ice, or fog.

Among the programs taught and considered at our schools, Apologetics has been getting some extra attention after the second International Conference for Reformed Education, held in Sumas, Washington, in September, 2007. At that time, an international body (with members from Australia, Canada, and The Netherlands) was established to develop course and resource materials for this purpose. This work is ongoing and may well result in some public elaboration in the course of this year. With some connection, early in 2008 CCRTC already hosted a number of conferences in which related aspects were discussed and teachers at Guido de Brès Christian High School in Hamilton will be addressing elements of the topic in staff development discussions.

Another new program is starting at Maranatha Christian School. It aims to get an after-school mentoring program off the ground this fall, which provides an opportunity for a student to meet with a mentor from the community once a week to assist him with various aspects of school, be it academics, study habits, or organizational skills. Recognizing that education of our children is a parent responsibility, the mentor will be seen as an assistant of both the parents and teacher, replacing neither. Students will not be assessed or evaluated in any way. The only long term goal we hope to notice is an increase in a student's confidence regarding their work and their enjoyment of school. We pray that the Lord will use members of our church community to assist one another in this task.

We are not finished resolving all the issues in education and its governance and as we find solutions to one challenge, another one may pop up. There are always things we can consult one another about, as bringing up the children the Lord gives us is a task that remains and will develop until He returns. It is essential that we keep our eyes focused on the purpose for which our schools were established and do the best we can. May we expect the blessings (and there are many, even in the challenges we face!) from the Lord only, who gave us this task in the first place.

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



Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Patricia Gelms

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such there is no law. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

Galatians 5:22, 23, 25

This month we have several birthdays to celebrate. From this magazine we extend to you our wishes. Congratulations to all of you. We are so thankful to the Lord that He has given you another year and we hope you have a wonderful day celebrating with family and friends. We also want you to know that your church family, from across Canada and the United States, keep you in their thoughts and prayers as well. We extend to you the wish that you will go forward in your walk as a Christian keeping in step with the Spirit.

Birthdays are a great time. They are the start of a new year, a new beginning. You go from being one age to the next. Something different and something new. Our lives as Christians are much the same. Through the work of the Spirit we are being renewed in God's image. Daily we put off our old, sinful self and put on our new, cleansed self. Paul says in Galatians that part of being a renewed person is being someone who is self controlled. Self-control means that as a new person we do not give in to our old sinful ways. Perhaps we have trouble with our temper? Or perhaps we like to gobble up too many baked goodies? Or perhaps we like to stay too long in our beds in the morning?

But it is not only in the sinful areas of life that we must control ourselves against, we must also be careful to control ourselves in things we are allowed to do. Sometimes with our mouths we can say words that encourage someone, but we can also lose control of our words and with them we hurt people's feelings. We must always be careful and control ourselves in every situation. As we are being renewed day by day, God's spirit will work this self-control in us. For the grace of God "teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:12-14).

*O may this bounteous God
Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
And blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in his grace,
And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills
Of this world in the next.*

Hymn 65:2

Birthdays in October:

- 3 JANELL DEBOER will be 18**
6311 Silver Street, RR #2, St. Ann's, ON L0R 1Y0
- 6 HENRY VANDER VLIET will be 41**
Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR # 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
- 12 LEONA BARENDREGT will be 25**
Box 2184, Smithers, BC V0J 2N0
- 13 NANCY SCHIPPER will be 52**
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8
- 17 ALAN BREUKELMAN will be 42**
225 – 19th Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4
- 22 NELENA HOF SINK will be 48**
Bethesda Clearbrook Home
32553 Willingdon Crescent, Clearbrook, BC V2T 1S2
- 28 MARY ANN DE WIT will be 52**
31126 Kingfisher Drive, Abbotsford, BC V2T 5K4

We hope you all have a wonderful day!
Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. P. Gelms
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Summary of Visit to the 177th Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

held in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania,

June 23-27, 2008

Hospitable spirit

As representatives of our Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA), Br. Jacob Kuik and I arrived in Beaver Falls in the early evening of Monday, June 23. Though we were too late to take in the formal opening of Synod, we nevertheless were warmly welcomed by delegates who saw us arrive. That warm and friendly spirit was something we felt continually throughout our visit and which we very much appreciated. By coincidence we bumped into Rev. Bruce Parnell, chairman of the Inter-church Relations Committee (IRC) of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) and he made us feel very much at home. He took the time to show us our accommodations and even took us out for dinner, all of which showed to us the value the RPCNA places on the developing relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC).

The synod experience

For the next two days, Br. Kuik and I sat in on the sessions of the 177th (annual) Synod of the RPCNA. It is markedly different from our

own general synods. Our general synod has twenty-four delegates, a handful of fraternal delegates, and a small crowd of observers. Though the RPCNA is smaller than our federation (some 6000 members in total spread over approximately seventy congregations), each church normally delegates a pastor and one elder. Add to that the theological students and fraternal delegates on hand to observe the proceedings and you find yourself in a room filled with over 130 men! This does not include the "gallery" of observers at the back of the room. It is a full room of delegates, which means that practically speaking, much of the detailed business of the synod is conducted off the floor in appointed committees. Plenary discussions are limited to comments about the basic direction of committee reports while most comments about finer issues are passed directly on to the committee. The moderator of the synod has a challenging task to keep the business of Synod flowing smoothly and in a timely fashion. Each issue is settled by oral vote of "Aye" or "Nay." When the sound is too difficult to distinguish, the moderator will call for a "division" and have all votes counted as

delegates stand up. For a body that size, it is an effective way to conduct the affairs of the church.

Synod is not all "business," however. Each day's session began with a devotional service involving the preaching of the Word. There is a prayer before each break. In addition, there were also specially designated times of intercessory prayer in which a list of items which Synod was dealing with would be the subject of prayer. These longer periods of prayer involved breaking up randomly into small groups of three or four sitting close together. Each person in the group would take an opportunity to address matters in prayer. At one point, after Synod heard from the fraternal and observing delegates, also the CanRC was prayed for! In addition to preaching and prayer there was also much singing of the Psalms without musical accompaniment, as is the practice in the RPCNA. One cannot leave without the feeling of a group of men sincerely committed to the worship of the Lord and the service of his church.

Topics under discussion

One of the biggest topics up for debate and discussion was the revision of the *Directory for*

Worship. Close behind that was the subject of the revision of the psalm lyrics and tunes in an effort to bring them up to date, accurate to the biblical text and in understandable language. As one might imagine, these were “hot” topics since they touch the week-to-week service of the church. It was encouraging to witness another psalm-loving church taking such care to preserve and promote the singing of the Psalms for the future by way of a careful revision. The vigorous debates over the best kinds of alterations to make both in the Directory and the Psalter showed that the regulative principle of worship mandated in the Westminster Standards (see also our Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 35) is alive and well.

The RPCNA also takes seriously the calling to witness to the world, both locally and abroad. They are involved in numerous church plants within North America and also have growing mission works in Japan, Cyprus, and Sudan. As well, they have become increasingly involved in the same far-eastern country as we have through our home missionary in the Fraser Valley. Discussions with delegates involved in that work showed an almost identical approach to the work there. They expressed an interest in discussing this work with our people who are on the front lines of it. I have since put them in touch with each other. This is a clear example of one potential area of cooperation with each other. At the very least, we can learn from each other and perhaps help each other avoid mistakes.

The RPCNA also has one pastor dedicated to serving within the US military as a chaplain. He made it clear that he has all the freedom to speak about the gospel of Jesus Christ in accordance with his Reformed convictions. This work is being done in coordination with the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) and one other Presbyterian church body. The military chaplain was on hand to address Synod and stressed how great an opportunity there is in the US military to witness for Christ. There are many lost and hungry people. It made me think that this may be an area the CanRC could investigate with respect to establishing a chaplaincy within the Canadian Armed Forces.

Addressing Synod

As one of the invited observers to Synod, I was called upon to briefly address the body and give some information as to life in the CanRC. I took the opportunity to inform the delegates about matters of mutual interest such as the state of our relationship with the URCNA, the growing mission work in Brazil, the present revision of psalm lyrics in the Anglo-Genevan Psalter as well as our recent application for membership in NAPARC.

With a view to developing our relationship, I suggested and encouraged the following areas for possible practical cooperation with each other: 1. Building ties between our local churches in Denver, Ottawa, and Guelph/Kitchener with a special eye toward covenantal Reformed education for school children; 2. Work together or share ideas in local evangelism

and church plants; 3. Share ideas and perhaps work together in the far-eastern country in which we each are currently busy. From comments afterward it appeared that the address was well-received and that there is a desire among the RPCNA to further get to know our federation.

Meetings of presbyteries

Since all churches are represented at Synod, delegates make the most of their time together by also meeting separately as local presbyteries. We were able to sit in on a couple of different meetings and were able to witness various stages of examination for men wishing to become ministers in the RPCNA. Some were at the beginning stage, seeking to be placed “under the care of presbytery,” and others were seeking to enter as full-fledged ministers from another denomination altogether. The range of questions asked during the portions of the exams we observed seemed to parallel the kinds of questions either a consistory or a classis might ask of aspiring students or candidates in our midst. I also heard a candidate present an Old Testament sermon that was Christ-centered, text-specific, and adroitly applied. What became clear is that in their system there is, right from the beginning, close involvement and scrutiny by the local session and presbytery with and over the student. This official involvement begins prior to the student’s formal education and continues until he sustains his final exam to become a minister (should the Lord grant that).

Meetings with the Inter-Church Relations Committee

We also had two very good meetings with the IRC of the RPCNA. We appreciated their openness and the frank discussions we could have. In accordance with our committee mandate from Synod Smithers 2007, we asked questions about exclusive psalmody, women in the office of deacon, and the position of their Testimony and some of its contents. They responded with clear answers based on exegesis of Scripture passages and referred to parts of the Testimony and the

Constitution for further clarification of their position on these matters. They in turn asked questions about the CanRC and our views on various items. Br. Kuik and I have reported extensively on these meetings in a separate account. The outcome of these and other discussions with the RPCNA will be published once our committee (CCCNA) has finished its report for General Synod 2010.

Conclusion

After taking our leave early on June 26, Brother Kuik and I could look back with much favour upon

our time at the RPCNA synod. Personal interactions in addition to all our observations were pleasant and informative. Many were genuinely interested in Canada and the CanRC. We felt essentially on the "same page" with these brethren and were very glad of that. Indeed it is good and pleasant when brothers dwell in unity! May the Lord continue to bless our relationship that we may be servants of one another in the mutual goal to advance Christ's kingdom and glorify our God!

Respectfully submitted,
Peter H. Holtvlüwer

