

# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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*Our loyalty is not to this life  
and what it has to offer*



## Inside this issue

- Hard Times
- A Right Hand on Your Shoulder
- Reforming the Press Release







J. Visscher

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# Hard Times

*What lies deeper still is the problem of attitude and conduct*

The bad economic news just keeps on coming. Every day there are more reports of people being laid off, of companies reporting financial losses, of housing starts being down, of central banks almost desperately cutting interest rates, and of bailout packages being cobbled together.

## **The causes**

At the same time the causes for this economic debacle are being hotly debated and the finger is being pointed at a number of things. There is the sub-prime mortgage practice in the US through which people who actually could not afford to buy homes were given special low interest deals. As a waitress was heard to say in New Hampshire, "there is something wrong when a person like me making ten dollars an hour can qualify to buy a \$500,000.00 home."

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*Christian stewardship means that we recognize God as the ultimate owner of everything*

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As well there is the matter of excessive leverage by which companies worth a certain sum (say twenty-five billion US) could leverage their assets and borrow way beyond their means (to the tune of 650 billion US). There is also the creation of derivatives which were sold to banks in all parts of the world, thereby spreading the damage around the globe. In short, there is little doubt that highly suspect and irresponsible financial dealings lie at the bottom of much of the current economic crisis.

But there is more, for what lies deeper still is the problem of attitude and conduct. Many a consumer, home buyer, and businessman failed to learn from Joseph and his interpretation of the dream of Pharaoh to the effect that after seven years of plenty, seven bad years of want are sure to follow. Economies have always been like roller coasters in that they go up and down, expand and contract, create wealth and take it away again. Collectively, we are all guilty of being bad students of both the Bible and history. People bought, borrowed, and charged to their hearts content without proper respect for the approaching day of reckoning.

Yet if naivety shoulders some of the blame, more of it may need to fall on plain, old fashioned greed. One reads with utter amazement about the unheard of salaries and pensions being dished out to Wall Street executives. Meanwhile on Main Street it was evident that almost a whole population was swiping its credit cards with abandon and piling up debt to astronomical heights. The prevailing motto was: "More, more, more." Prudence gave way to carelessness, caution was relegated to the sidelines, and the spend mentality took hold. No one wanted to be left behind in the accumulation game.

The result is that now almost no one has been left behind in the downturn either. Many homeowners are homeowners no longer. Many workers are sitting on the sidelines looking for work and collecting unemployment insurance. Many pensioners are worrying about their shrinking retirement plans. Many young people are wondering about their futures. The picture is grim.



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**The outlook**

At the same time the outlook is not much better. Politicians in many countries are pinning their hopes on their bailout plans. Large corporations are actively looking for handouts. All sorts of companies are claiming a share of the pie. Whether or not there is still a market for their products is a question that is hardly asked. And all the while the government presses are running overtime as they print more and more money.

Meanwhile, there is a growing cynicism when it comes to all of these government attempts to get us back on track financially. It may well be that the economic tsunami will simply have to run its course through the nations of the world and that only thereafter can the pieces be put back together and a new start be made.

**A Christian perspective**

In the interim what shall we do as Christians? Have any of you bothered to put on your biblical thinking caps and dared to look at what is happening from a Christian perspective?

Negatively, one can say quickly enough that God is teaching the peoples of the world some hard economic lessons. One can even go further and say that He is also teaching his own adopted children some hard lessons. There is surely a certain divine discipline at work today among believers and unbelievers alike.

In addition, in times such as this and through trials such as these, God is also teaching us about the folly of relying on the god called Mammon. He is very much a fickle and faithless god. He tempts and entices. He ensnares and entraps. He puffs up and inflates. He makes us think that money makes the world go round. But then along comes God, the only true God, and He pricks this idolatrous balloon and it explodes. The lesson is plain: trust in Mammon and you are trusting in a false god.

**In This Issue**

Editorial – Hard Times	
— J. Visscher .....	134
Treasures, New and Old – A Right Hand on Your	
Shoulder — J. Van Woudenberg .....	137
Reforming the Press Release — E. Kampen .....	138
Press Review – The Church Song – Old Debate	
with New Vision? — J. Moesker .....	140
NAPARC 2008 — A. J. Pol .....	142
Ray of Sunshine — C. Gelms and P. Gelms .....	144
Education Matters – CRTA Convention 2008	
— A. Kingma and K. Sikkema .....	145
Letter to the Editor .....	148

Besides Mammon, there is another god whose balloon has also been pricked by the current crisis and he is called Pride. It was not so long ago that many people were swaggering about without a care in the world, firmly convinced that they were masters of their own fate and makers of their own financial destiny. But also this balloon has exploded. One day we were rich and the next day we woke up poor and no matter what plans we made or what precautions we took, they all failed. So much for human ability and shrewdness.

### Stewards

But then, if there are negative lessons here, there are also positive ones. The first one is that what is happening economically should remind us once again that biblically we have been called to be stewards. What is a steward? He is a man or person who is given much to care for and much to answer for as well. Christian stewardship means that we recognize God as the ultimate owner of everything. He invented it. He created it. He handed it to us for proper use. What He gives is not allowed to be exploited and abused by us. This means that we see money and possessions as gifts from above. This means that we handle them responsibly and carefully. This means too that we always keep an eye on the day of accounting when the master will come back and our books will be audited.

Biblical stewardship means that we do not expropriate what belongs to God. It means that we do not spend and borrow with abandon. It means that we live wisely and within our means. As well it has to do with living out the principle that the first fruits of our labour always belong to the Lord.

### Pilgrims

Along with stewardship, there is another biblical teaching that needs added stress today. It has to do with pilgrimage. In other words, the Lord our God never intended for us to identify completely with this life, with its things and its toys, with its properties and investments. Our calling is to walk carefully through this life and to travel lightly. Why? Because our home or commonwealth is elsewhere (Heb 13:14). Our true and lasting dwelling place is not the here and now. Our real loyalty may not be to this life and to what it

has to offer us. Our future is above and beyond. It is with Christ our risen and glorified Head and it is with the new heaven and the new earth that He is preparing for us.

Now, this is something that we have a hard time learning. We gravitate so easily to this life and this world. The devil loves nothing better than to see us get all caught up in the fads and fashions of this world. He means to suck us in as he sucked in the people of Noah's day and the peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah. Over against this we need to remind ourselves that we are pilgrims, namely people who take their calling to be a light of the world and a salt of the earth seriously, but also a people who possess a vision and a hope that transcends all that they see.

### Children

Yet if we are called to be stewards and pilgrims, we are also called to be one more thing, namely children. Believers are at bottom children of God. And what a great antidote that is for living in troubled times! For surely as children of God, we know that no matter what obstacles we face, God as our Father will always be there for us with his love, faithfulness, and care. We know too that no matter how badly we behave or how dumb we act, we have an elder brother who has paid for our sins and who does not dismiss us. We know also that every day we can call on our heavenly Father and He will hear us and help us. We may not know the ins and outs of exactly how He will do this, but we know that He will be there for us.

Indeed, there may be nothing more encouraging for us today than to read often the words of the Lord Jesus as found in Matthew 6: 25 and following. There we are told over and over again not to worry. Why not? Because our heavenly Father will feed us, clothe us, and care for us. He has committed Himself to our well-being. And we, we just need to commit ourselves to "his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt 6:33).

Dear readers, it may well take some time before we are out of these hard times, but do not despair. Look up to the throne of God, expect your help from Zion every day, and live as stewards, pilgrims, and children.





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# A Right Hand on Your Shoulder



MATTHEW 13:52

*“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.’”*

Revelation 1:17

Picture the scene: John, the last surviving apostle, is on the island of Patmos. Not at a resort enjoying a holiday, but on a barren island as a banished convict, considered dangerous by the Roman authorities. John was there “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”

When Sundays came, John could not go up to a house of worship. How his heart must have yearned for that! Still, as a faithful servant, he was “in the Spirit,” praying to God, worshipping Him, reading and meditating on the Word of the Spirit. On one such Sunday, John suddenly heard a loud, trumpet-like voice. He turned to find himself face to face with a man so glorious that he was seized with fear.

Clearly the man was a high-ranking royal figure, being “dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet, and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow” – as glorious as God Himself! (cf. Dan 7:9). “His eyes were like blazing fire,” piercing, penetrating, before whom no one could hide anything. “His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace” ready to step out and engage in battle – even with mighty beasts, false prophets, and satanic hosts. His voice was overpowering, “like the sound of rushing waters,” for what He said held sway even over the greatest voices of the day. A “sharp double-edged sword” was found, not in his hand, but proceeding “out of his mouth.” Just

as God had once said, “Let there be light” and there was light, so was the power of this man’s words. “His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance,” and John’s eyes simply could not handle it.

No wonder John “fell at his feet as though dead!” Yet at the same time John realizes who this man is: He is one “like a son of man.” That’s what Jesus had often called Himself when He walked on earth. In that time John was the closest and most intimate of his disciples. Why then the fear? Because John vividly sees that Jesus, though still the same person, is now so highly exalted!

But notice what Jesus does. He sees John lying at his feet. He sees John’s depth of fear and hears his inward cry: “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty” (Isa 6:5). Therefore Jesus places his right hand on him. Amazing! Just as a father lovingly comes to his distraught son and wraps his arm around him to be close to him, to comfort and encourage him – so the exalted Christ does to John.

“John, I have not forgotten you – even though you can no longer walk with me in the same way as before. Though I am now highly exalted, reigning supreme over the entire world at the right hand of my Father, I have not forgotten you. I know that you have been banished to this island. I know that my churches have to press on without you – even in the face of

intensifying persecution and rising heresies. John, do not be afraid. See and ponder how great I now am, but instead of letting that fill your heart with fear, let it remove all fear!”

“True, you are unworthy, but I died for you. I have overcome death! Powerful and ruthless rulers may attack and banish you. But I am the First and I am the Last: what I say and what I do and what I promise will carry the day! John, even if they kill you, realize that I hold the keys of death and Hades.”

Wouldn’t it be so encouraging for us too, if Christ put his right hand on us as we face mockery for our faith, nagging doubts, relationship problems, powerful impulses in our lives, foreboding political developments, worrying trends in the church and in the state of Christianity? It would be encouraging – therefore Christ does precisely that by giving this passage to us today!

For notice how Christ in coming to John actually comes to all his churches. Even before John can turn to see where that trumpet-like voice is coming from, he hears the command: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches!” The number seven is the number of fullness; the seven churches represent all churches in these last days! “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Read Revelation 1 and feel the comforting and encouraging right hand of the exalted Lord on your shoulder!



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# Reforming the Press Release

A familiar part of church life is the Press Release, sometimes called the Short Report. By means of press releases the members of the churches are informed about the dealings of ecclesiastical assemblies as well as various organizations. Over the years, as I have looked at thousands of these press releases, I would suggest that it is time to reform the way they are written so that they will live up to their intended purpose of informing the members as well as promoting good contact between the ecclesiastical assemblies and the members. To this end, I will briefly review the problem with the current practices before suggesting a better way.

## Problems with current practices

When we consider the typical press release found in the ecclesiastical press, it falls far short of the goal of informing. This is so because whatever is of interest and noteworthy gets lost in the midst of much irrelevant information. For example, what benefit is there in reading each time again that "the chairman, Rev. A, opened the meeting by reading passage B and leading in prayer"? What is gained by knowing that Br. C was absent with notification? Further, what is gained by reading

a long list of memorabilia, all of which has appeared or will appear in pastoral columns? Why must it be reported that the agenda, after modifications, was adopted? One can go on. What benefit is there in knowing a letter was received from Organization D, and passed on to the deacons? Furthermore, much of the information is often written in a very cryptic way which at best leads the reader to question what something was about and at worst leads to speculation. In this case one can think of "A letter was received from a brother. It was discussed. A draft response will be prepared." Three questions immediately come to mind:

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*It is time to reform the way press releases are written*

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Which brother sent a letter? What was it about? What did the Council decide?" The only point where one is bound to find noteworthy information is under a section like "New Business" or perhaps when a council deals with "Committee Reports."

The examples given so far pertain mainly to local council or consistory press releases. Classes

and regional synods can have their own irrelevant information and mystery. A review of some press releases will lead the reader to conclude that some brothers met, they dealt with matters, and they went home, but there is no real sense of what the meeting dealt with. Again, what purpose is served by mentioning the opening by the chairman of the convening church, the constitution of classis, or a long list of appointments for various classical duties? Items of interest such as decisions regarding appeals will be surrounded by mystery as it is reported they were dealt with in closed session. In light of this, it is understandable why *Clarion* decided that press releases would no longer be published (this decision is currently under review).

Perhaps the best way to sum up the present manner of writing press releases is to call them edited agendas with a few notes or diluted minutes. This is evident also in the way press releases will be formatted with their numbers and bullets. There are many words, but there is little news. Further, the format is such that it is not very inviting to read it. Both of these are contrary to the nature of a press release. This will come out when we briefly consider what a press release is intended to be.

## What is a press release?

When it comes to describing the term "press release," one dictionary states, "A bulletin prepared by a press agent, public relations department, etc., announcing an event, development, decision, etc."<sup>1</sup> Press releases are commonly used in the world of business to inform the press of a new product. They are used in politics to inform the press of a major initiative or policy. A search of the Internet quickly takes you to sites of companies that will help in the writing of effective press releases. Press releases are thus meant to get the press interested in the hope that they will do a story on a product, event, or new policy. To that end, these releases must be written in a captivating, engaging style. In a way, a press release is in the category of advertising.

## A better way

When we are aware of the normal purpose of press releases, we may hesitate to use the term in our church life. However, it is probably too much part of our church vocabulary to cease using it. We don't have to stop using the term, but we do well to keep in mind that a press release should be written in a captivating, engaging style so that all will want to read it.

To accomplish this, the first thing that is called for is brevity. This means that it is not necessary to refer to the mechanics of the meeting like opening, adoption of the agenda, or what mail was received. When you recount a great dinner enjoyed at home, you don't go into all the details of how the potatoes were peeled, the meat roasted, and the gravy made. You speak of the meal in the way it was presented. The other details would detract from that. The same holds true for matters of interest from a meeting.

The second thing that is called for is clarity. This means that there should be no obscure references to a letter from a brother or some vague statement that the Council will appeal an article of the Acts to the next synod. In this respect, a helpful guideline is that many of the meetings are open to visitors.

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*A press release is meant to be brief, clear, and engaging*

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If something could possibly be dealt with in the presence of visitors, and it is of interest to the congregation, report on it clearly. Perhaps a brother has taken issue with a decision of a council. That is allowed. If it is written in a brotherly way, why not record the brotherly response for the edification of the congregation? Further, why not inform the congregation when certain matters are being appealed to a synod and what the opinion of the Council is on the matter? Otherwise the congregation has to wait till the Acts are published before it knows what its own council thought about a matter.

The third thing that is called for is an engaging style. Interesting, informative material can be lost through a dull style. To be sure, style should not trump substance, but at the same time solid substance will be lost to the reader due to poor style.

All this raises the question as to how to do this. In a way, the current edited agenda/diluted minute approach is the easiest and the safest because it really does not tell much. Further, in many meetings the press release is approved before the meeting concludes. It may be more difficult to do this with the suggestions that have been made. Perhaps the meeting could conclude by

# Church News

Called by the church of Owen Sound, Ontario:

**Rev. J. Moesker**

of Vernon, British Columbia.

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The Board of Governors of the Theological College is pleased to announce that Rev. J. VanVliet, minister of the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church of Surrey, BC, has accepted his appointment as temporary instructor in the department of Dogmatology for the 2009-2010 academic year. We are grateful that God has once again provided for the needs of the College. The Lord willing, the Board will be approaching Synod 2010 with a request for approving the appointment of Rev. VanVliet as the permanent professor of Dogmatology. Please remember in your prayers the needs of the College as well as those of Rev. VanVliet and the church at Surrey.

highlighting a number of items for inclusion in a press release and a brother could be entrusted with the task of writing up a good press release at home. It is also possible that the minister be asked to incorporate a few of the items in his weekly pastoral column. That is often done anyway when a council or consistory wants to ensure the congregation is informed about certain matters. Generally speaking, it won't take more than a paragraph to communicate the points from a meeting the congregation should know about.

A press release is meant to be brief, clear, and engaging. In this way it will better inform the members of the churches and they will appreciate the openness.

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<sup>1</sup> Funk and Wagnalls *Standard College Dictionary*, 1975



J. Moesker



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# The Church Song – Old Debate with New Vision?

Via the Internet I regularly receive "Pro Ekklesia," the church bulletin of the Free Reformed Church of Cape Town, South Africa. This church belongs to the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (VKKSA), sister churches of the Canadian Reformed Churches. I was paging through some older issues before discarding them, when I came across this short and relevant article about the songs sung in worship in the November 2007 issue. Our sister churches in Africa also deal with upheaval in the area of "church songs." What follows is the article in full. It was published by the Deputies for Liturgical Music appointed by Synod Cape Town 2006 of the VGKSA. My translation.

## Introduction

The discussion around the church songs in the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa is as old as the church federation itself. Throughout the years, from synod to synod, we have wrestled with various aspects such as Genevan tunes, "singable" and "unsingable" psalms, hymns, free church songs (songs which are not actual rhyming of parts of scripture, jm). This is also a sensitive matter in other churches. In the GKNv

(Liberated Reformed Churches in The Netherlands) there has been much controversy connected with the singing of hymns subsequent to the expansion of their hymn section with 255 new songs. In the South African context there is the new Cloete-rhymings which has resulted in (dis)contentment among many church members.

## For nothing?

The big question in these debates is whether there has been any progress. What have all the years of study and deputy reports at synods accomplished? It seems that, especially at the last few synods, little progress has been made in putting into effect the synodical decisions. So it's understandable that at the last synod (Nov. 2006, jm) there was even a proposal to terminate the Deputies for Liturgical Music. Synod, however, decided otherwise. New deputies were appointed with the unenviable task to give new direction to the discussion surrounding church songs. The deputies hope to regularly publish articles about

this. The aim is to keep the discussion about church songs alive and to inform the church members about the progress of the study. Thus, recently, an article was published in *Kompas* (the magazine of the VGKSA, jm) entitled: "Sing as You Believe and Believe as You Sing." We hope to publish more articles soon.

In this article we would like to draw attention to the purpose of the songs sung in church. In order to do this, we first need to determine the origin of those songs. In 1 Chronicles 16:7 we're told how David first gave Asaph and his brothers the task to sing a "psalm of thanks to the Lord." We read in 1 Chronicles 23 and 24 that David appointed 4000 singers under the direction of 288 directors. Imagine how that must have sounded; fulltime singing by thousands of singers. Under the leadership of Asaph there was constant singing in the temple – the so-called command of David. The theme of those songs was: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is



good. His love endures forever.” And it’s no surprise, then, that that theme is repeated in various psalms; not only the well-known Psalm 136, but also Psalms 100, 106, 107, and 118.

### **Singing chases the devil away**

The preaching of the Word is supposed to be the primary element in the worship services. This Word also has to be sung and that’s why God gave us the gift of music. The person who believes is joyful and therefore also wants to sing. Does that also mean that someone who doesn’t sing can’t be a believer? There’s an old saying among Reformed people: “Singing chases the devil away.” In the Bible there are many references to singing songs in the worship services above and besides the Psalms: Exodus 15 (song of victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea), Jeremiah 20:13, Zephaniah 2:14, Mark 14:26 (The hymn sung by the Lord and his disciples before they went to Gethsemane), Ephesians 5:18-20 (call to sing songs to God’s praise together), James 5:13, and Revelation 14:3 (the 144,000 sing a new song).

### **Characteristics**

How can we define a church song? This is not just a song that is sung in church. The word “church” implies communion with (i) Christ and (ii) the church of all times. That means that Christ has to be the main focus, but also that the heritage of our forefathers may not be ignored. History and tradition are relevant; but that doesn’t mean that proposed changes to church songs ought to be rejected as such, because things have always been this way.

What, then, are the characteristics of a song which

can be sung in church? Rev. G. van Rongen (one of the most authoritative contemporary experts in the area of Reformed church music) has suggested the following:

- Church songs must keep to the theme of Psalm 136: “Give thanks to the Lord”
- Church songs must be faithful to the Bible (covenantal)
- Church songs must testify about God’s deeds of deliverance; specific covenant deeds and occasions.

### **Those characteristics have certain consequences**

1. The Psalms must be the most important of the church songs. They are a great treasure which the Lord Himself has given us to praise Him.
2. This doesn’t mean, though, that we’re limited to only singing the 150 Psalms in worship. The Lord has also accomplished deeds of deliverance in the New Testament.
3. The so-called free songs, however, must testify to God’s great deeds in salvation history and not to the personal experiences of devout people. In pietism, for instance, all the emphasis is placed on people and their faith experiences. This is a characteristic of songs sung in evangelical circles.
4. History has shown that the more the self is made central, the less psalms and the more free songs are sung. Interest in God’s great deeds fades away and God is not longer central.
5. When the content, poetry, and musical style of the church song are in agreement with the

command of David, then we sing in communion with the saints of many centuries. Then we sing on earth in the same way as those who have gone before us sing in heaven.

A few remarks yet about the musical aspects of church songs. The text should be the focal point and supported by the melody. This principle shouldn’t be turned around so that the text is made subject to artistic music. A clear example of that are the so-called Gregorian songs. The music dominates the music to such an extent that the text has become unintelligible.

### **Finally**

We need to keep remembering that the purpose of church songs is to praise the Lord. That should determine our attitude when we discuss church songs with each other – the singing of hymns or not, Genevan tunes or not, etc. Then we won’t revile people who have a different point of view and then we won’t stay silent when hymns are sung in church. It’s very sad to see how polarizing the debates about church songs have been in the past and still are. Let us together genuinely keep seeking the way to praise God rightly. Then we can train here on earth today so that we can sing God’s praises perfectly and eternally in the new heaven and on the new earth.

Some things to think about as we come closer to Synod 2010 where decisions will need to be made about the songs we sing in the worship services. Church songs are not an emotional issue, not a matter of what we personally like or don’t like. It’s an issue of how we can best offer praise and thanks to the God of our salvation together. And so “chase the devil away.”



# NAPARC 2008

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## Membership accepted

General Synod Smithers 2007 instructed the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA) to seek membership in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).<sup>1</sup> As a result, an application was submitted. The thirty-fourth meeting of NAPARC was convened at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in South Carolina from November 11-12, 2008. At that meeting it was announced that a sufficient number of member churches of this organization had approved of the Canadian Reformed application for membership. Accordingly, the delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Revs. E. Kampen, A.J. Pol, R.E. Pot, and Br. J. Kuik were invited to be seated as full voting members of this Council.

## Member churches

So far, the following churches are also members of NAPARC: The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), the Église Reformée du Quebec (ERQ), the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA), the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC), the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North

America (RPCNA), and the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA). Observer delegates were present on behalf of the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) and the Presbyterian Reformed Church. The latter church has a membership request that is pending.<sup>2</sup>

## Meeting

The meeting took place under the leadership of Rev. B. Westerveld of the ERQ, with Rev. L. Bilkes (FRCNA) serving as vice chairman, while Rev. Ron Potter (RCUS) functioned as secretary and Rev. M. Koerner (RCUS) as treasurer. Reports were received from each of the member churches and after each report a delegate from another member church led in prayer for the reporting church. A similar procedure was followed with the observer churches.

In the evening of the first day Rev. John Carrick (OPC) gave a lecture on "Jonathan Edwards and his Preaching" for those present as well as for guests from the community. Rev. Carrick is a professor at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

The following day the minutes of the 2007 plenary session were declared approved as corrected.<sup>3</sup> Communications from various member churches were dealt with, followed by various housekeeping matters. Work on the NAPARC website is ongoing. Hopefully in the

future more up to date and complete information will be available.

A report was given on Foreign and Home Missions consultations. Information on various activities made it clear that it is desirable for the member churches to be in touch with each other in regard to their activities since sharing of information can lead to a beneficial sharing of resources and prevent unnecessary duplication of certain activities. The next meeting for such consultation is scheduled for January 2010 in Orlando, Florida.

The thirty-fifth meeting of NAPARC is scheduled to be hosted by the Heritage Reformed Congregations from November 17-18, 2009 at the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

## Contacts with churches

As pointed out by the CCCNA to various Canadian Reformed synods, attending NAPARC meetings is not only beneficial because of the exchange of information during the formal sessions. Next to this there are also opportunities to meet with delegates from churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship. The Canadian delegates made use of the occasion to meet with delegates from the ERQ, the FRCNA, the OPC, the RCUS, and the RPCNA. Details of these visits will be made available in reports to the next synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches.



However, some information derived either from the sessions of NAPARC or from the separate meetings with delegates of individual churches can be highlighted here.

## ERQ

The ERQ has celebrated the twentieth anniversary of its existence. It currently consists of only five congregations, but the desire is strong to reach out to the people of Quebec. It has recently adopted a liturgy for the baptism of covenant children. This is a significant step forward in ensuring that this sacrament is administered in an orderly way. Discussions have also taken place at their synode in regard to the admission to the Lord's Supper. The federation covets prayers for harmonious deliberations leading to decisions that accords with God's will.

It was also reported that the Lord has blessed the various activities related to the *Quebec 400* project of the Église Réformée St-Marc de Québec. The exhibit concerning the Huguenots of New France has been well received by many and the hosting museum announced that the exhibit would be continued for six months longer than originally planned.

## FRCNA

The FRCNA has 4,461 members distributed over twenty congregations and one preaching station in Toronto. During NAPARC 2008, two meetings between the CCCNA delegates were held with the Revs. L. Bilkes and J. Lewis, delegates from the FRCNA. The first meeting focussed on how we view each other and how we understand the status of our relationship. The second addressed the question of how to proceed in the future. The Canadian Reformed delegates indicated willingness to have

further contact but left the initiative for this with the FRCNA.

## OPC

The OPC now has 28,799 members, with 263 congregations and fifty-seven mission works. At its last assembly, substantial progress was made in revising their Directory of Public Worship. There were discussions as to how much should be put in it. The concern was that if not enough direction is given to local churches, the next generation may forget why certain things are done in a certain way. The assembly also decided to invite the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB) to enter in to a corresponding relationship with the OPC. This was motivated by the fact that the IPB had a major house-cleaning in 2002, with conservative men now in their headquarters.

In discussion about ecumenical efforts some attention was focused on the question to what degree organic unity between federations can and should be pursued. How can we best use the resources God has given us?

## RCUS

The report from the RCUS indicated that their membership is now at 3,857, as compared to 3,423 forty years ago. In the meantime, they now have twice as many churches as then, which means that the average church size has decreased. They noted that as the result of an overture from a classis, a committee has been appointed to look into instituting church visitation as practised in many other Reformed/Presbyterian churches. This will be discussed further at their synod in May, 2009. The RCUS also noted a shift in their view of Christian college education, now regarding this as the responsibility of parents rather than the synod to

establish which institutions are worthy of special consideration.

During the meeting between the delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches and the RCUS committee, the RCUS brothers inquired about our position in regard to writings of Rev. N. Shepherd and "federal vision." A fruitful and clarifying discussion ensued about these topics with attention being focused on what our confessions say.

## RPCNA

The RPCNA is known for its emphasis on singing Psalms exclusively. This body of churches has recently completed a revision of their *Book of Psalms for Singing*, in which they have made an effort to eliminate archaic wording. During the meeting with the delegates from the RPCNA at NAPARC, attention was devoted to the relationship between their Testimony and the Westminster Standards. Some attention was also given to their Constitution.

## In conclusion

Attendance at NAPARC has again shown its value, enabling the delegates of the CCCNA to interact with committee members of other churches in various ways. May the Lord continue to bless such work, using it to promote mutual understanding and to further the cause of unity in the faith. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov 27:17).

<sup>1</sup>Acts - General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches - Smithers, BC, 2007, p. 255.

<sup>2</sup>Quick links to member church directories can be found at: <http://www.naparc.org/directories.html>

<sup>3</sup>Downloads of the minutes of the meetings of 2007 and 2008 can be found at: <http://www.naparc.org/downloads.html>



# Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Patricia Gelms



**Bryce Berends** lives in the beautiful town of Dunnville, Ontario. He is a member of the Beacon Home along with seven other house mates and feels very at home there. Bryce has become familiar with his neighbourhood because he is a frequent walker as well as a regular flyer deliverer. Over

these past winter months Bryce has been called upon to keep the walkways clear of snow around the Beacon Home. Are you glad to pack away the snow shovel now that spring has arrived? In the summer months Bryce enjoys outdoor activities and he participates in the sports activities when he can. Bryce is passionate about his family and has a beautifully researched family tree to show for it. He also enjoys keeping in contact with his friends and family from BC. Not only are friends and family important to Bryce, but he's also deeply interested in life in the church. In his own congregation he is a regular member of the men's society and he is also interested in the concerns of the whole church federation. He was quite relieved and pleased that Rev. DeBoer stayed in the Dunnville-Wainfleet congregation. Drop Bryce a line if you have the chance, or send him a birthday card and help him to celebrate his thirty-fourth birthday.



**Derek Kok** lives in Dunnville, Ontario residing in the Beacon Home. Derek keeps up the humor level in the home as he frequently has a scheme or a joke up his sleeve. His humor provides for a fun atmosphere in the home. He enjoys playing cards with his friends and somehow manages to be the

winner each time. He goes out two days a week and treasures the time he spends with his friends at Day

Away. Derek joins in the sports that are played regularly over the summer months. One night the baseball game is next door in a town field and another night the game is held at ACRES, the church's elementary school. At each opportunity Derek is an enthusiastic player. Tuesday night is Derek's night in the kitchen and whether it is measuring out the ingredients, stirring the pot on the stove, or checking the dish in the oven, it's all done with great enthusiasm. Oh, he is also handy with a tea towel as he joins in the clean up after dinner. Derek also helps in the home by preparing the flyers for regular delivery. Church life is important to Derek and he likes to know who is preaching on the Dunnville-Wainfleet pulpit. He is also a regular attendee of the friendship club at the United Reformed Church close by. Derek would gladly receive your birthday wishes as he hopes to celebrate his 39th birthday this year.

## Birthdays in April

### 2 DEREK KOK

653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

### 23 ARLENE DEWIT

31126 Kingfisher Drive, Abbotsford, BC V2T 5K4

### 29 BRYCE BERENDS

653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

Also this month we would like to congratulate Arlene DeWit as she celebrates her forty-eighth birthday. We hope you have a wonderful day together with your family and friends. May God bless you all in this new year.

C. Gelms and T. Gelms

*If you have somebody to add to our birthday list or contact information needs to be changed, please let us know:*

548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2.  
Phone: (905) 563-0380, email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



Arthur Kingma and Keith Sikkema

Mr. Arthur Kingma is vice principal of Emmanuel Christian High School in Fergus, Ontario  
[abkingma@kwic.com](mailto:abkingma@kwic.com)

Mr. Keith Sikkema is principal of Dufferin Area Christian School in Orangeville, Ontario  
[ksikkema@istop.com](mailto:ksikkema@istop.com)

# CRTA Convention 2008



About two hundred teachers met in John Calvin School, Smithville, to begin a two-day convention of devotions, speeches, and workshops. Members of the CRTA executive opened the convention and announced the theme *Life in Abundance*. Rev. Bill DeJong, pastor of Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton, spoke about this theme by expounding on John 10:10. Jesus came into the world to give life to the full, which literally means that Jesus came to give life hereafter. Throughout his life on earth, Jesus showed this fullness of life when He provided wine at the wedding in Cana, when He provided the crowds with bread and fish, and when the disciples drew in their nets so full of fish that their nets nearly broke. Jesus was not a

miserly but a generous giver. He gave us abundant life. He also provided us with gifts and talents in which we can show Him a life of abundant thankfulness. Teachers must support parents in fostering a culture of life and gratitude.

After the devotional speech, Mr. Frank Ludwig shared what this life of abundance would look like in a Christian school. He highlighted the need for schools to resonate a "home" atmosphere. This atmosphere is characterized by a foundational trust in the Lord, love, friendliness, even-tempered teachers, clear rules, and consistent fairness. In a safe and including environment, the love of Christ must prevail.

Mr. Jeff Buist, an elder in Burlington, visualized what this life of abundance would look like in the

church. He used the analogy of building (construction). We need to build physically and spiritually. Not only do we need children to learn the trades, but we need them to be committed to the Lord. The school should inform, instruct, and foster children in an inclusive and safe place (fear kills) with consistency and fairness. School should also uphold the truth, teaching the children that truth is not relative, but concrete and tangible.

Rev. and Mrs. Huijgen shared how they personally experienced this life of abundance in the schools' and communities' care for their special son, Lars. At first they did not feel the abundance that God gives, but along with the schools, they learned that they did not have to "fix" Lars, but that they had to learn from him. Self denial and role modeling one's faith are two things that Lars taught them. That God doesn't make mistakes, but that He gives to all in perfect measure is another thing that Lars taught them. God provides in different ways, but there is no doubt that He provides life in abundance.

The rest of the day was spent by all teachers in workshop sessions. Not only did workshop leaders include "experts" in their fields who imparted their wisdom, but also teachers who shared specific topics with teachers, enabling teachers together to focus on a certain aspect of teaching and learn from each other.



## Business

After the formal closing of the first day, representatives from each school and other interested teachers remained for the annual CRTA business meeting. Phil Houweling from Down Under presented the [www.reformedteacher.net](http://www.reformedteacher.net) initiative. The key idea is that the roughly 400 English speaking Reformed teachers from around the world will share their best materials, practices, and papers with others through this website. Teachers can be of great support to one another by sharing their clearly Reformed materials. Another exciting development physically present at the convention was the new CRTA magazine. Appearing for the first time in about ten years, it was printed in full colour on glossy paper. This magazine will be able to fill a void in sharing professional material and stimulating growth and development among the CRTA membership.



## Day Two

The second day of the convention was opened with singing from the Augment to the Hymnary, and the song, *Life in Abundance*, specifically composed for this convention by colleague Tim Nijenhuis from Guido de Brès Christian High School. From his wheelchair, Peter Harsevoort led the devotional and reflected on how Jesus undercut the materialistic view of life so common among our economists and sociologists – for instance in Luke 12:13-15. Our focus should rather be on spiritual things and the abundance of life we have in Christ can burst forth from unlikely places – such as Lazarus' grave. This is the spiritual life teachers ought to model and foster.

## Exceptional children

Dr. Johan W. van der Jagt of Southeastern Louisiana University delivered the main address on: *Exceptional Children with Amazing Strengths: Please Handle with Wholesome Care*. Dr. van der Jagt's paper was based on much research and contributed to an understanding of the abundance we have received. He noted much progress in protection of and assistance for exceptional children through legislation and assistive and motivational technologies, even as parental expectations have become higher, with much litigation and demands on accountability.

Working with special needs students has its rewards. Special needs bring people together and bind together the community of home, church, and school. Children



with exceptionalities have strengths as well, as they learn to compensate for "lesser strengths" and develop resiliency and courage along the way. Children with autism syndrome, for instance, may teach us to communicate nonverbally. While we may fear the consequences of our choices, people with intellectual disabilities may easily accept each new day and model dependence on God's strength.

Our care for exceptional children must be wholesome, filling every need in body and spirit. Such care can only be given if the care-giver is also wholesome in body and spirit – as is the case in our schools. Cooperation and communication between teachers and parents is needed to best meet the needs of each individual with a specific learning disability. Our small schools have a quicker route to addressing student needs than other school systems. In all cases, several principles need to be observed. These include that no one should be turned away because of an inability, that there should be no discriminatory formal evaluation, that education should be inclusive with a minimum of out-of-classroom LAP, that there should be due



## Life in Abundance

John 10

Tim Nijenhuis

In Christ we have life in a bun-dance; to its ful-lest we live in his care.  
We don't know the voice of the stran-ger, and the path that he leads we won't go.  
In Christ we have life in a bun-dance; he gives more than enough for our needs.

He has o-pen-ed the door to sal-va-tion; he pro-TECTS us from death and des-pair.  
But in stead we will fol-low our shep-herd; it's his voice that we trust and we know.  
He's the giv-er of life ev-er last-ing; We give thanks for his glo-ri-ous deeds.

Christ came down to this earth for re-demp-tion; in our stead he en-dured curse and shame.  
Je-sus Christ is the gate-way to hea-ven; to the Fa-ther there's no at-ter-way.  
With each step we must stay close to Je-sus; and be-cause he has led us by his long and grace.

He laid down his own life and he saved us; for our guilt he took all the blame.  
We put all of our faith in our savi-our; let-ting no-one lead us a-stray.  
Through this life 'till the end he will lead us to that great and won-der-ful place.

Like a shep-herd He called us by name.  
Fol-low where He leads and serve Him each day.  
There's no one else who can do this.

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which the first day started with four or five degrees below zero outside, gradually warmed up to balmy levels. The staff of JCS was to be commended for the entourage, Jerry Tillema of Bethel Books for his Reformed book display, and the ladies in the kitchen for providing for physical nourishment throughout the two days.

When people left on Friday afternoon, they had an abundance of ideas and educational and spiritual food, and plenty of social renewal to be grateful for and to discuss with colleagues on the way home; to share with others back there, and to implement in their respective classrooms and schools. The blessings received at the convention were reflective of the many blessings and abundant life the Lord lavishly showers us with.

process and confidentiality, and that the student and his or her parents should participate in IEP development.

In the church, Dr. van der Jagt suggested, we receive exceptional children as a gift from the Lord. Together we learn how to meet their needs and there is a task for church leaders here as well. Deacons can focus on bringing joy to homes. The extra attention required to address the needs will make them leaders in drawing the community together, and helps the individual child to maximize the potential for their mandate as prophet, priest, and king. Home visits can help foster trust and cooperation. We are to all enhance each other's lives by giving wholesome care. A living communion of saints is a most precious reward that cannot be matched by the public system.

## Summary

Throughout both days, at appropriate times, there was opportunity to stand and sing, to chat, and to meet for various purposes. The abundance referred to in the conference theme turned out to be extended to the conference itself. The chill with

*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*





**Dear Editor,**

In the January 2, 2009 issue of *Clarion* you invite the readers to comment on the recent decision not to print the press releases of classes any more as a general feature.

I was very happy with the decision to end this printing since there was usually very little content in these reports. Further, they all are now available on the website of our federation and I believe that most of our readers do have access to that site. I assume that Br. Heemskerk would be able to do this as well. The additional benefit is that these classis releases can be downloaded and stored in your computer and one can print as many copies as desired.

I have always found these press releases way too long-winded. They are quite often written as a "form letter" and never like a bit of a story. It also appears that we are about the only periodical anywhere that prints them. It would be quite an improvement to see the space being used for articles of general interest to our church community.

So, please do not change your mind on a previous decision to place these press releases on the website instead of printing them in *Clarion*.

Sincerely, *Arie J. Hordyk*  
Subscriber #19 (very early stage)

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



**Advertisements:**

Announcements of Weddings, Anniversaries (with Open House) should be submitted six weeks in advance.

**BIRTHS**

*I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. Psalm 139:14*

With praise and thanks to God, we joyfully announce the birth of our son

**CALEB HARM**

Born December 22, 2008

**Harm and Annette Kelly**

A brother for *Joshua* and *Hannah*

7th grandchild for Ed and Alice Kelly

6th grandchild for John and Annete VanHengstum

1195 Bains Road, Dunnville, ON N1A 2W8



*I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. Psalm 139:14*

With thanks to God and great joy, we announce the birth of our daughter and sister

**SACHA**

Born on January 12, 2009

**Marten and Margriet Bijlsma**

*Haaye*

RR 1, 7729 14<sup>th</sup> Line Mapleton, Alma, ON N0B 1A0

*You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 2:1*

We announce with great joy the birth of

**TIMOTHY EDWIN LODDER**

born on the Lord's Day, February 22, 2009 at 12:41 a.m.

He is named Timothy after the first century apostolic preacher,

whom the apostle Paul called "*my true son in the faith.*"

He is named Edwin after another Christian preacher,

of the 3rd millenium, his father.

We praise God that he has made everything well for Marina and the baby, and that he has granted us another son and brother!

His happy grandparents are

Jitse and Kitty Vandermeer of Hamilton, ON and

Robert and Trudie Lodder of Fergus, ON.

**Theo and Marina, Joshua, Katie, Nathan, Austin and Rebekah Lodder**

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