



# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

*Let us come  
before Him  
with thanksgiving  
and extol Him  
with music...*

Psalm 119:105







*Best Wishes  
and the  
Lord's blessings  
in the year 2011  
to all our readers*

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 **Clarion**  
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# Remember?

This time of the year is a time for remembering and reminiscing. We reflect with gratitude on the many blessings the Lord has given us in the past year. We also take stock of the challenges and difficulties which had been placed on our path and learn from them moving forward.

Remember? Remember what happened then and then? Memory is an amazing gift of God. The ability to retrieve information from the past and relive those precious moments that mean so much to us is an ability we all cherish. It is a tremendous tragedy when one is afflicted by adverse health which no longer gives one the ability to remember.

**Memory is an  
amazing gift  
of God**

As we leave one year and are about to enter a new year, it is good to call to mind that, as with all gifts of God, the ability to remember has far-reaching implications, comes with special responsibilities, and can occasion much joy.

## Remember!

God called and still calls his people to remember, to remember his great and mighty deeds of deliverance. God instructed his Old Testament people to call to mind his wonderful acts of strength. Lest they forget,

he gave them all kinds of memory aids. For example, the Sabbath had to be honoured in order to remember God's work of creating and his subsequent rest (Exod 20:10-11) and in order to call to mind that God had delivered his people from Egypt (Deut 5:12-15). The Passover had to be celebrated so that Israel would not forget how God spared their lives and delivered them from Egypt (Exod 12:1-27). The Israelites had to make tassels, including a cord of blue, on the corners of their garments to help them remember to do God's commandments (Num 15:39-40). A memorial of twelve stones had to be erected to commemorate the miraculous crossing of the Jordan when Israel entered the Promised Land (Josh 4:1-9). More examples could be given.

Also to the New Testament church the Lord God gave memory aids, lest we forget. Two examples are the sacraments. Baptism signifies that God has attached his name to ours and so seals the covenant relationship with all the attendant promises. When we remember our baptism, we call to mind God's covenant mercy and love (cf. Gen 17:7; Acts 2:39). When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we do so in remembrance of what the Lord Jesus went through to satisfy God's wrath for our sins (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24-25).

Why is the need to remember such an important theme in Scripture? What is the underlying reason for the memory aids that God gives to us as his children?

## Why remember?

In short the reason is to make sure that the Lord our God is and remains in the centre of our lives. Common to the history of the human race is the tendency to see oneself as the focal point of one's life. Today we live in a selfish secular culture that specializes in individualism and satisfying all kinds of imagined rights and

privileges. This egoistic and narcissistic mind-set is very attractive to the sinful human heart. Christians need to struggle against this allurements of our times.

**His faithfulness  
demands  
our thankful  
response**

God wants us to focus on him and to act accordingly. He is to be preeminent. And so as we move from one year to another, and reminisce, we do well to rise beyond the purely human and marvel at the great deeds of God as reflected also in our personal lives and in our church life. As the overview elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion* shows, the Lord has been very good to us as a church community! It is all undeserved favour. Great is his mercy and love! Indeed, he remembers his people. His faithfulness demands our thankful response.

When we put God in the centre and use the memory aids that he has given us, then he also enables us to obey, to worship, and to honour him who has set us free from all the power of Satan and sin and grave. For it is remarkable that Scripture often links remembering the Lord with doing his will. In the Bible, remembering is never just a theoretical or cerebral exercise. It has concrete consequences in real life.

For example, remembering the Sabbath day means observing it by keeping it holy and so not working (Exod 20:8-11). When we keep him in mind, he empowers us to live and act as believers (e.g., Num 15:39; Ps 103:18). Focusing on him and remembering his will and faithfulness makes it easier to see through the problems of life in a biblical way and to make the right decisions in the rough and tumble of life. He enables us meet the needs of the present and move forward into the future with confidence.

### The joy of remembering

Remembering the faithfulness of God who never forgets fills us with hope for the future and gives great joy. "He remembers his covenant forever" (Ps 105:8). We enter a new year as a year of our Lord. He remains sovereign and in control. His great and awesome deeds of strength continue as he goes on in his work of gathering together his people from all tribes and nations. He remains committed to those who call to him in true faith. When afraid, remember his greatness (cf. Deut 7:18). When needing comfort, remember his ordinances (Ps 119:50-52). As with the saints of old, also today he can change despair into hope for those who remember him. As Asaph, the psalmist, had hope because he remembered God's doings, so we may take courage when reflecting on God's faithfulness (Ps 77). Remembering him results in singing in the safety of the shadow of his wings (Ps 63:5-8).

And so, if we remember him, we can wish each other a blessed, that is happy, New Year! It is a year of our risen Lord! "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead!" (2 Tim 2:8).

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# *The Advent of Christ*

*“You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God.”*

(2 Peter 3:11-12)

As we approach Christmas we speak about the advent of Jesus Christ, the coming of the Saviour into the world. It's a theme that recurs throughout the Scriptures, like when Zechariah proclaims, “See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (9:9). There was great expectation among the Jews that their king would come as their Saviour.

That expectation is also found among the believers in the New Testament. Today the church waits in the wonderful hope of the coming of Jesus Christ. Peter speaks about that reality when he encourages the believers to live holy and godly lives as they look forward to the coming (*parousia*) of the day of God.

The Greek word *parousia* is a common New Testament word for the return of Jesus Christ. This word describes the arrival of a ruler, such as a king or emperor. When people heard that the king was coming, there would be a flurry of activity as roads were repaired and buildings were given a facelift. Everything had to be made beautiful for the coming king, to make a good impression on the ruler.

Therefore it was a sad day in Israel when their great King finally arrived in Bethlehem and the people were not prepared for his coming. When he arrived, no one in Israel was even aware that a great king had been born. While we might make excuses for the people, there was no excuse for this sad situation, for the prophets long ago had instructed the people that their king and Saviour was coming.

After his birth the Lord even sent John the Baptist as the herald to proclaim the coming of their king. Still Israel did not prepare, so that when Jesus arrived on the

scene proclaiming that the Kingdom of God had come, the people mocked and scorned him. The result is that God in his judgment rejected his people and caused his gospel to be proclaimed to the Gentiles. The light of Christmas was taken away from God's own people and given to the people of the world.

For the New Testament church the first coming of Christ is closely tied to his second. The believers in the early church lived in the expectation that the one who came as the Saviour of the world would come again on the last day in judgment. The first advent of Christ will lead to his second advent, when he will bring his saving work to completion.

In his second letter Peter has to deal with scoffers who are leading the believers astray. The scoffers are false teachers who call into question the second coming of Christ. They come with what they think is a clever argument when they say, “God is slow in keeping his promise. Nothing has changed since God said to our fathers that he will come to live with us.” For that reason they go and follow their own evil desires, for in their heart they believe that they will never need to give an account to God for their wickedness.

In our time people scoff at the biblical teaching of the advent of God. They scoff at the idea that at the last day he will come to judge the living and the dead. By denying his coming, they think they have the freedom to live according to their own immoral ways. In our culture people attempt to turn what God's Word has clearly said is wicked into something that is good and honourable.

The reason that people scoff at the idea of Christ's return is that they deny his first coming. But Christmas





## **MATTHEW 13:52**

is really the guarantee that Christ will return to be with his people. And when we live in the expectation of his coming, the result is that we will also prepare our lives for his return. Everyone who truly believes that Christ is coming again will desire to live a holy and godly life.

Your preparation will depend on your expectation. A lack of preparation will indicate that you have not taken seriously the coming of Christ. If you do not take it seriously, then in effect you also deny Christmas. But if you truly believe that Christ's coming has fulfilled God's promise to his people in the Old Testament, then you will also believe God's promise that Christ is coming on

the last day. In that great and wonderful expectation you will also prepare yourself for his coming, living a holy and godly life.

Therefore Christmas is not just a cozy time of the year when we reminisce about the story of Jesus coming into the world, but it is a story that must powerfully impact our daily life. This Jesus is the same Saviour that you are now expecting from heaven. On the day of judgment he will punish the scoffers, but will give life and salvation to all who lived by faith in the great expectation of his coming. We long for this day with all our hearts.

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# Christ's Coming

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Surely you are familiar with Charles Dickens's beloved story, *A Christmas Carol*. It is the story of a stingy miser, Ebenezer Scrooge, who is transformed by his encounter with three Christmas spirits – the spirit of Christmas past, the spirit of Christmas present, and the spirit of Christmas future

Titus 2:11–14 is breathed out by a different Spirit, but it likewise points to the past, present, and future in relation to the coming of Christ. It is Christ who transforms – who transforms by his coming in the past, by his coming in the future, and by his ongoing interim coming through his Word and Spirit.

## Keep looking at Christ's past coming

First, the Christ who *has come* transforms. He came precisely in order to “purify for himself a people for his own possession” (v. 14). Keep looking to the finished work of Christ in the past. “For the grace of God *has appeared*, bringing salvation for all people” (v. 11).

Our English word *epiphany* comes from the Greek word translated “has appeared.” In classical Greek, this term, for example, was used of the appearing of the sun. It came to be used to refer to the sudden appearance of a deity or hero in order to rescue someone. Who is this One who has appeared to rescue us? He is “our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (v. 13). He came in the flesh; he is fully human. At the same time, he is “our great God,” being fully divine. The second person of the Trinity became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth.

Verse 11 begins with the word “for,” giving a reason for what has just been said. Previously, Paul has said that pastors are to “teach what accords with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1), specifically godly behavior for older men (2:2), older women (2:3–4), younger women (2:4–5), younger men (2:6), and slaves (2:9–10). Often in Scripture, the basis for Christian behavior in God's grace is explained first, and then the practical

implications of the gospel are given. For example, chapters 1–3 in Ephesians proclaim the gospel basis for Christian behavior; then chapters 4–6 spell out the practical implications. But in Titus 2, God first gives the imperatives (v. 1–10), and then he explains the basis for them in his grace (v. 11–14).

What did Jesus do to bring salvation? He “*gave himself for us*” (v. 14). That is, he offered himself as a saving sacrifice. Notice that his saving sacrifice was voluntary – he “*gave himself for us*.” Second, it was vicarious – he “*gave himself for us*.” It was also victorious – he “*gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works*.” By his substitutionary, atoning death on the cross, he accomplished salvation for his people.

The salvation he accomplished is both negative and positive—it is both *from* and *unto*. He “*gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness*” (v. 14). When Jesus saves you, he saves you *from sin*. At the same time, he “*gave himself. . . to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works*.” When Jesus saves you, he saves you *unto godliness*. He supernaturally transforms you. He gives you a new heart and new desires. I knew a man named Tom, who had lived a wicked life. After his conversion, he kept some of his old friends and tried to be a good witness to them. At one point, someone asked him, “Aw Tom, why do you always have to go to church?” He replied, “I don't go because I have to; I go because I want to.” Our Lord Jesus “*gave himself. . . to purify. . . a people. . . who are zealous for good works*.”

This great salvation is both personal and corporate (v. 14). On the one hand, Christ gave himself “*to redeem us*.” When Jesus saves you, you can say with the Apostle Paul, he “*loved me and gave himself for me*” (Gal 2:20). On the other hand, he gave himself “*to purify for*



himself *a people* for his own possession.” Salvation is always personal, but it can never be private. The church is important because it was on God’s heart in eternity, and it was on Jesus’ heart as he hung on the accursed tree. When Jesus saves you, you belong to him; and if you belong to him, then you are part of his people, his church. It is your privilege and duty to join a church and identify visibly with God’s people, even though they are sinners saved by grace, just like yourself.

### Keep looking at Christ’s future coming

When Jesus “gave himself,” he died, but Jesus was not merely a martyr. He is the living Saviour! After he accomplished salvation for his people, he rose from the dead, was exalted to the highest place, and is now applying to his people the salvation that he accomplished for them. He *shall come* again to complete and perfect this transformation of “a people for his own possession.” Therefore, keep looking forward to the work of Christ in his future coming. The appearance of the grace of God at Christ’s first coming trains God’s redeemed children to wait eagerly for “our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (v. 13). Note three things about this hope.

First, it is a *blessed* hope. Jesus is coming again to judge the living and the dead. But we should eagerly await his appearing because it is a blessed hope. A blessed hope is the opposite of an accursed hope. Notice that this verse calls Jesus the “great God and *Savior*.” He comes as our Saviour, not merely as our judge. Therefore, “Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him” (1 Thess 5:8–10).

Second, it is a *visible* hope. It is the “appearing” of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Here is that word *epiphany* again. Acts 1 clearly says that the second epiphany of Christ will be similar to his ascension, which was physical and visible. “And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood

by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:9–11). God’s Word instructs us to expect a return of Jesus that will be physical and visible, like his ascension. He “will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Third, it is a *glorious* hope. It is “the appearing of *the glory* of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Revelation 1:13–16 gives us some hints about Christ’s glory: John saw “one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.” If those are hints, what must the reality be like? He is coming in power and great glory.

The Apostle Paul testifies, “Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Tim 4:8). Likewise, God says, “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Heb 9:27–28).

These Scriptures include an implicit warning. Who is he coming to save? “All who have loved his appearing,” “those who are eagerly waiting for him.” And yet many have taught and still do teach, “No! There will be no second coming of Christ.”

This is the stance of theological liberals, who defy the authority of God’s holy Word. But such error is found even among some who imagine themselves to be Bible believers. There is a small, but vocal, group called “hyper-preterists.” They insist that the prophecies about the return of Christ in power and glory and the resurrection of the dead were fulfilled in A.D. 70. Clearly, this is soul-destroying error (cf. 1 Timothy 1:18–20; 2 Timothy 2:16–18), and we must reject it.



At the same time, however, many do believe that Christ is coming again, but they nevertheless let themselves get lulled into spiritual slumbers. A good question to ask yourself is: Do you *love* his appearing? Are you *eagerly waiting* for the appearing of Christ in power and glory? If not, confess this sin to God. Pray for the Holy Spirit to awaken your heart. And set yourself to meditate on the blessedness, visibility, and glory of the coming of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

### Keep looking at Christ's present coming

Finally, keep looking at the Christ who, in this interim period, *now comes* in power by his Holy Spirit to transform "a people for his own possession" (Titus 2:14). Keep looking to the *present*, ongoing work of the exalted Christ. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age" (v. 11-12).

Notice that the grace of God in Christ *trains* us – it transforms! It is important that we take this seriously because most of us have been affected in one way or another by the commonly held, but false, idea that the grace of God does not transform, but just forgives. But look at what God himself says in verse 12: the grace of God in Christ not only forgives, but also trains. It not only justifies, but also sanctifies.

The grace of God in Christ trains us in two specific directions (v. 12). Negatively, the grace of God in Christ trains us "to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions." The grace of God teaches people to turn away from sin. Positively, the grace of God in Christ trains us "to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age." The grace of God in Christ transforms your relationship with yourself (giving you self-control), with your neighbours (making you upright), and with God (making you godly).

That raises another question: are you experiencing the supernatural, transforming power of God, so that day by day you are saying no to temptation and putting off the sins of the flesh? And day by day are you saying

yes to the grace of God in Christ and putting on the fruit of the Spirit? If not, then you need to ask yourself: do I really *know* the great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, or do I just *know about* him? Cry out to Jesus and ask him to save you, to deliver you!

### The shape of salvation

When he does save you, you live the Christian life between his two epiphanies! These two appearings reveal the shape of our Saviour's work: first grace, then glory. He came in humiliation; he will return in exaltation.

The two appearings of Christ also reveal the shape of your salvation: first grace, then glory; first the cross, then the crown; first humiliation, then exaltation. Look at 1 John 3:2 – "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

When I was a child, my mother had an uncanny ability to catch me doing wrong, even when I was sure she wasn't looking. I thought she had "eyes in the back of her head." As you live the Christian life, you need spiritual eyes in the front of your head, in the back of your head, and on top of your head. God calls you to keep looking in three directions at once. Every time you come to the Lord's Table, God reinforces that call.

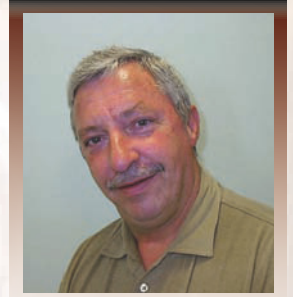
First, keep looking back to the past – to the appearing of grace, to the finished work of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who "gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

Second, keep looking forward to the future – to the appearing of glory, to the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Third, keep looking up in the present to the ongoing work of the exalted Christ, as he comes in power by his Holy Spirit, who works through the Word to transform us, "training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age."

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# *Eudokia*

## **Peace to men upon whom his favour rests (Luke 2:14b)**

Some people think that Christmas is for everyone. In a sense that is true. Our Lord Jesus Christ is to be hailed as the Saviour of the *world*. Those who call upon him and put their trust in him will not be put to shame. It does not matter in what time or place you live. All who believe in the Lord Jesus will be saved.

We cherish the words given us through the Apostle John, “[Jesus Christ] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). The gospel of salvation does not stop at our door but reaches out to all people.

Still, we do not agree with the teaching of universalism, the notion that everyone is (automatically) saved in Christ as they perished in Adam. We need to accept Christ with a believing heart. We find this clearly stated in the most succinct statement of Christmas, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only (only-begotten) Son that whoever *believes* in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

This important truth is summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism as follows, “Are all men, then, saved in Christ as they perished in Adam? No, only those who accept him with a believing heart” (LD 7). Faith is required.

## **To whom is peace promised?**

We see this also in the song of the angels in Ephrata’s fields. The first element in this song is that God receives the glory for his salvation in Christ. It is one of the first principles also of the Reformation: *solus Deo gloria*. It has a nice sequence: “Glory in heaven to God, and on earth peace to men.”

The second element in this song is that peace is given on earth. Some think that this “peace” is given indiscriminately to all. But the text speaks of peace “to men on whom God’s favour rests.” Not all receive peace;

only those on whom favour rests.

The questions that come to us now are many and also difficult: what is meant by “God’s favour”? More questions: how are we to understand this favour? Why is it given to some but not to all people? Who are these men that receive the favour of God? Are you someone on whom God’s favour rests? How can you know?

## **Various translations of the original**

In the original text, the Greek word *eudokia* is used. It says: peace on earth to men of (in) *eudokia*. Not everyone receives peace. It is given to people with *eudokia*. The main question is now: what does this *eudokia* mean?

We’ll have to digress into a small word-study on “*eudokia*.” I hope you don’t mind some of the technical stuff in the festive season. But we need to establish what the proper meaning of the word *eudokia* in this context is. After all, we ourselves would like to be among the people who have this *eudokia*. If we are not, we may be doomed with the world that rejected Christ from his birth on.

Killing the suspense, I mention that the word *eudokia* literally means *to esteem someone highly*. So the peace on earth is given to people who meet with God’s sovereign approval and pleasure. The prefix “*eu*” means good or favourable. The word “*dokia*” comes from a verb that means to scrutinize carefully and to consider positively. Sometimes the word is used directly of God’s *secret* will and council. When many refused to repent upon Christ’s preaching, he nevertheless rejoiced in the sovereign will of his Father which was being fulfilled, “. . . You have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your *good pleasure*” (Matt 11:26). God’s *eudokia* was still apparent in saving the unlearned and the little children. Sometimes it is used of God’s *revealed* law or will, “I desire to do your will [your *eudokia*], O my God, your law is within my heart...” (Ps 40:8). We

must do what is in accordance with God's will and is pleasing to him.

Ultimately the word *eudokia* refers us to Christ, our Lord. At Christ's baptism it was said by God, "This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (the verb form of *eudokia* is used).

The word *eudokia* is translated by the NIV as "God's favour," by KJV as "good pleasure," by RSV also as "good pleasure," and by NKJV as "good will." It is important to note that this *eudokia* is not a human characteristic but a *divine gift*. God gives his good pleasure in Christ to people and therefore these people can receive in Christ God's peace from above.

**Are you someone  
on whom God's  
favour rests?**

The word comes close to our word "approval." When God has *eudokia* in someone, he approves of this person. The one who receives *eudokia* meets divine standards.

Christmas does not benefit the whole world. God's favour is given in Christ to those who long for him, serve him, and seek to do his will. This longing for salvation has been worked in people's hearts by the Word and Spirit of God.

### ***Eudokia* and election**

Is this *eudokia*, then, the same as election? I do not think that we should easily speak of these two as being the same, even if they are connected. Election is God's eternal and hidden decree to save certain people in Christ. *Eudokia* is something that becomes visible in the course of time in people's lives through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Before Christ was born, many faithful Jews anticipated his coming into the world. We can think

of people whom the Bible itself mentions: Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph, Mary, the Shepherds, Simeon, and Anna. Of some of these people it is also testified in the Scriptures that they were righteous, i.e. they longed for the coming of Christ and strove to obey God's law.

These people were not perfect. God did not have pleasure in them because they were without sin. But they were people who by God's power and grace ardently awaited the coming of the Messiah. This explains why they reacted with great resolve and much joy when they heard of the birth of our Lord and Saviour.

Our Christmas celebration takes place in a different time and place. The expectation of Christ's birth is now the expectation of his second coming, his glorious descent from heaven. We know that he will come to judge the living and the dead and will vindicate all who have longed for his appearing.

Does God's *eudokia* rest upon you? Do you long for his glorious return? Are you justified by faith in him? These are very important questions for our Christmas celebration.

### **Peace on earth**

On Christmas day there is much talk of peace. People envision some kind of global calm in which all will be at peace with his neighbour. "Imagine. . . all the people. . ." sang John Lennon, whose seventieth birthday was remembered a few months ago. Lennon was born on October 9, 1940. The world celebrated its *own* Christmas with the man who said he was more popular than Christ.

Peace to men. Not to all men, but to the men on whom God's *eudokia* rests. Peace on earth to *specific* people. It is not a peace that now comes and then goes. It is perma-peace, with God, in Christ, through faith.

What is *peace*? It means more than the absence of war. Peace means that the relationships have been healed. I was an enemy of God; now I am his child. I enjoyed sinning, but now I hate it every time I fall. I was lost but now I'm found. I look forward to being released from this body of sin. I know by faith that God's *eudokia* rests on me. I have peace: *all is well between God and me in Christ*.

All is well. I wish you a joyful Christmas and a blessed new year. Perfect peace is coming.

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# *Letter from Synod London, 2010, of the United Reformed Churches in North America*

October 18, 2010

Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, Second Clerk  
227 1st Avenue SE  
Sioux Center, Iowa 51250

## **To the Canadian and American Reformed Churches, Esteemed Brothers,**

We greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the king of the church, and pray that He will continue to fulfill His promise to “build my church” in your midst.

Synod London, 2010, received “with appreciation” the two letters of the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches meeting in Burlington, Ontario in May of this year. Because our synod met only for four days, it was not possible to draft an appropriate and acceptable response in the space of that time and so it assigned the officers of the synod to draft a response to both letters, subject to the approval of the consistory of the calling church for our next synod. This is our response to both of your letters.

Our synod devoted much attention to our relationship with you as sister churches and to the matter of achieving a fuller expression of the spiritual unity we have in Christ.

On our first full day, we devoted a good part of the evening to hearing from Dr. Gerhard Visscher and Dr. Jason Van Vliet, who answered questions that had been submitted in advance by our churches. They also answered questions from the floor. We were impressed with their humility and patience and greatly appreciated the clarity with which they allayed the concerns of the questioners. The chairman of our synod responded to their work with words of gratitude and with a reference to the prayer of Jesus in John 17 and our need to give visible expression to our spiritual unity.

Regarding the work of the unity committees we jointly established in 2001, our synod took note of the fact that the Theological Education Committee has reached an impasse, and that the Songbook Committee had made little progress toward a united song book. In light of this, our synod terminated our involvement in both unity committees, although we continue to have a Songbook Committee for the development of a new songbook for our own federation. Although no longer working on a joint song book, the committee was reminded of the need to communicate with your churches according to the provisions of our current relationship of Phase 2, Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The churches were also alerted that proposed solutions to the impasse regarding the education of ministers may still be proposed by way of overture to future synods.

Although we have terminated our involvement in two of the unity committees, we have mandated the Joint Church Order Committee to continue to perfect their work for use by a united federation. We did this, in part, as an answer to an overture asking the synod to dismiss the committee. The rejection of the overture to dismiss the committee is a telling indication of our continuing commitment to eventual church unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches, even though our progress toward that goal has been impeded by several obstacles.

As a federation of churches, we remain committed to working toward reconciliation in obedience to the ecumenical imperatives of Scripture, such as Ephesians 4:3, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” and Philippians 1:27ff, “Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ ... stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith.” In that spirit, we approved a recommendation “that Synod explicitly reaffirm our conviction that the Canadian Reformed Churches are a federation of true and faithful churches of Christ, whom we love and

respect as fellow workers in the kingdom” (Article #47). We are not merely good friends; we are brothers and sisters in Christ, joined together in the bond of the Spirit, evidenced by a common confession of the faith and with you, committed to expressing our unity in concrete and discernable ways.

However, our situation is different than yours. While the vast majority of your churches know us well, through neighboring congregational relationships in Canada, nearly two thirds of our churches – those in the United States – do not have Canadian (American) Reformed congregations as near neighbors. This means that most of our churches are not intimately aware of how the faith lives among you. Such lack of information is, sadly, fertile ground for the seeds of both indifference and suspicion. Our situation is also different in that there is not among us the same degree of uniformity as is found among Canadian Reformed Churches. Unity committee reports regarding seminaries, songs and regional synods, for example, have sometimes raised concerns that our current freedoms would be curtailed in a way that would drive some of our own members to separate from us if a union were implemented in the near future.

Because of these differences, it has become evident that before we can move forward in building a single edifice in which we all can live together, we need to do more foundational work, especially at the local level. To that end our synod passed a resolution to “encourage the churches to facilitate further opportunities to interact with the Canadian Reformed Churches by implementing the essential work of organizing events, speaking at conferences, writing columns, filling pulpits, and otherwise building the organic, heartfelt unity on which federative unity must be built” (Article #47).

We ask that you be patient with us, recognizing that moving more slowly toward federative unity may be the best way of ensuring that our actions result in a lasting unity that will truly glorify God and advance the gospel of peace in the world.

Regarding your second letter, of June 7, 2010, concerning the status of the Nine Points adopted by Synod Schererville and the significance of “pastoral advice,” we can state that some clarity was achieved, although the matter was also referred to our Synodical Rules Committee for further clarification. The Nine

Points were also challenged by way of an appeal, directed not at their content, but at the procedure by which they were adopted. The appeal was not sustained, so the pastoral advice remains.

You ask if such pastoral advice is confessionally binding. Although the matter of defining the nature of synodical pastoral advice was referred to a synodical committee for further work, by implication, it appears that such statements by our synod are not confessionally binding. We make that observation on the basis of the grounds attached to theological statements made by this year’s synod. A study committee report submitted to Synod London asked the synod to affirm a list of theological statements, some of which were quotations from our confessions and some of which were not confessional quotations but statements summarizing the exegetical findings of the committee. Rather than affirming the entire list of theological statements, the synod responded by separating the confessional quotations from the committee’s own summary statements and made the following distinction: “clearly distinguishing direct quotations from the Confessions from the formulations of the 15 points [the committee’s summary statements] respects the binding status of our confessions as our doctrinal standards” (Article #113). Thus, the 15 summary statements affirmed by the synod were distinguished from the confessions which are binding.

You also ask if Point 6 of the Nine Points of Schererville was directed at the Canadian Reformed Churches and the view of the covenant upheld by the Liberation of 1944 in The Netherlands. No, it was not directed at the Canadian Reformed Churches or their view of the covenant. Synod Schererville addressed an error associated with Federal Vision which contends that in baptism a person is granted every spiritual gift, including a true and saving faith, the grace of conversion and justification. The Nine Points were made to uphold the doctrine that a man is justified *through faith alone*, and that God will never reverse His gracious declaration of justification concerning the believing sinner. Point 6 of the Nine Points of Schererville does not deny that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace. What Point 6 denies is that all baptized persons are in the covenant in *precisely* the same way *such that* no distinction is made between those who have the



promises by covenant and those who receive by faith what is promised. It should be read in the context of Point 5 which rejects the error “that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified, and adopted *by virtue of participation in the outward administration of the covenant of grace* but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness” (italics added). We gratefully take note of the fact that when addressing our synod on behalf of your churches, Dr. G. H. Visscher expressed agreement with this understanding of Point 6 and our concern.

We join with you in praying that the Lord will bless our efforts for unity and give us the wisdom to know how to proceed and the courage to do what His Word commands. May God give us all grace to persevere in obedience to the command to “make every effort” (Ephesians 4:3), having as our goal the prayer of Jesus, “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me” (John 17:23).

*On behalf of Synod London 2010,  
Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer  
Second Clerk ✍*



### **Dear Editor,**

We would like to thank Rev. Holtvlüwer for his article entitled “Sunday on Holiday?” in the October 8, 2010 issue of *Clarion*. It was inspiring to receive straight forward, concrete leadership and guidance pertaining to our worship on the Lord’s Day. The affluence enjoyed today which allows for holidays can be a blessing or a hindrance. This is also the Lord’s testing of us as to what we do with this blessing. The dictionary describes “diligently” as steady, earnest, and energetic effort; diligently attending church is what we confess in Lord’s Day 38 and in the Lord’s Supper form. A concern is what type of example do those placed in authority (parents, elders, ministers) set when going to a

faithful church (even twice) while on holiday becomes a nuisance or even a bother. It causes one to wonder how people in other countries who are persecuted for holding worship services would view the dilemma this article addresses.

As Rev. Holtvlüwer concludes, “God’s blessings are poured out bountifully upon his people. How can God’s people ever want a holiday from that?”



*In Christ,  
Peter and Benita Boerema*

# *St. Albert Welcomes Rev. Roukema and His Family*

St. Albert congregation has been eagerly praying and waiting for a minister since last October when Rev. Bredenhof took up his task as pastor and minister in London, ON. God graciously answered our prayers with the arrival of the Roukema family. On October 10, 2010, we could witness the incredible goodness and graciousness of our God when candidate Roukema could be ordained and installed as a minister of God's church in St. Albert.

## **Ordination**

Rev. Aasman had the privilege of delivering the sermon prior to the ordination and installation of Rev. Roukema. He began by stating what an exciting day this was for our congregation – two baby boys could be baptized by their grandfather and we could also witness the ordination of our new minister. Even though we have been blessed with being served by faithful visiting pastors and by our elders/deacons reading the Word, it doesn't compare with having our own pastor. Rev. Aasman chose as his text Ephesians 4:11-16. The ascended Christ gives his body a pastor and teacher that the body of Christ may be built up and grows up into Christ.

Paul explains to the Ephesians how Jew and Gentile belong to the body of Christ; there are no barriers since a new church has been formed. Christ has poured out gifts on his church – in particular the gift of men who can be pastors and teachers. We receive this gift through Brother Roukema. His new office requires that he knows our stories, struggles, dreams, temptations, and blessings, through laughter and tears. He is not to be just an author of sermons but someone who can address the needs of our congregation so that we can all grow and increase in faith. We must be equipped and trained by our minister in order to unify and strengthen the church, since a united church has the power to stand up against temptation. We must receive our



new minister in love and lift him up in constant prayer so that he may fulfill the office of his calling.

After the sermon and reading of the form for ordination of ministers, we were witnesses to the incredible event of the laying on of hands. Brothers Jack De Haas, Bill Muis, and Rev. Van Beveren and Rev. Aasman all took part in this ceremony. This was followed by singing Psalm 134.

When the service was done, Brother Muis read the subscription form and Rev. Roukema signed this. Then letters of congratulations were read from various churches in the Alberta classis as well as from our former minister, Rev. Bredenhof.

## **Inaugural sermon**

Our afternoon service was held in the St. Albert Christian Reformed Church and we were blessed to hear our new minister deliver his inaugural sermon. Rev. Roukema used Psalm 121 as his text. The psalmist confesses that our only and abundant source of help is the LORD. This confession is centered on who God is and what God does.

Rev. Roukema began his message with the words that Christians are quick to say God is good when



everything is going well but not so quick to acknowledge this when there are difficulties. Psalm 121 proves for us that God is there in the good and bad times of our lives. Everything that happens comes from his hand. This psalm is a song of faith and thanksgiving to God. We are able to call God by name – he is a personal God and we can have a relationship with him. He is also powerful – nothing can stop him. In Christ, heaven came down to earth. Every day, we have the blessing of knowing that in him we can have the fulfillment of this help. Verses 3-8 of this psalm shift focus from God as Creator to God the Providential. God is not a passive observer but our protector. He will not let our foot slip – he will uphold us spiritually and physically even when we fall. The reality is that Psalm 121 points us to and ever-vigilant and attentive God. He is in total control of our sufferings and blessings. The Lord's loving hand will be with us in life and death. Our calling is to put our faith and trust in him. Our song should be richer and fuller as we travel to the New Jerusalem because our Christ was the final sacrifice.

## Welcome evening

On October 16, 2010, the congregation of St. Albert officially welcomed the Roukema family. A welcome was given by Mr. Peter Lindhout. After he prayed, Mrs. Pauline De Haas gave a short history of the Roukema family. She included many tidbits of interesting facts such as both Rev. and Mrs. Roukema have family who are in the ministry. Her witty plays on words and phrases ended with the serious note of wishing



a blessing to both the Roukema family and the St. Albert congregation. A presentation of song from the preschool-grade one children was given amidst much appreciation. The young peoples group presented a coupon booklet for services by the young people so that the Roukema family can get to know them. Calvin De Haan and Grant Leyenhorst, on behalf of the young adults, conducted a survey of the congregation and shared the results with all of us. They informed all of us that ninety-nine percent of the people did not actually participate! The morning Bible study group presented a collection of recipes. Our small choir performed two songs – sharing God's praises. An alphabetical pictorial PowerPoint was shown with almost all of the members in it in some fashion or another – not all of them flattering! This was followed by a presentation from some of the children (who were closest in age to the Roukema children) of some gifts – a foosball table (second hand to follow our Dutch tradition) and other little things. Rev. and Mrs. Roukema were invited to come up to the front to accept their congregational gift of plants and a barbecue with the necessary apron and tools. Rev. Roukema then spoke a few words of thanks for the warm welcome he and his family experienced. He made sure to point out that although a comment had been made about him being middle-aged; it was not he, but the Revs. Aasman and Slomp who bore this distinction; he, on the other hand, is still young! We sang Hymn 63 to close off the formal piece of the evening and Mr. Bill Muis closed with prayer. We then enjoyed refreshments and a time of fellowship with one another. We are incredibly grateful and thankful to our heavenly Father for allowing us to the wonderful blessing of having our own minister and his family in our midst. Our prayer is that they experience his blessing over their lives as they minister to us.



# *Guido de Brès Christian High School, Commencement 2010*



After months of anticipation graduates, family, friends, and staff gathered for Guido's graduation festivities on October 2, 2010. Guests and staff enjoyed fellowship at a luncheon held in the high school's gym before the ceremonies began in the afternoon. For the eighth year in a row, Guido was privileged to conduct their graduation ceremony at Hamilton Place in downtown Hamilton. This impressive venue provides a fitting atmosphere to celebrate the many accomplished graduates and the quality Christian education that Guido was able to provide to them.

The program began with the processional to the tune of "Zadok the Priest" by George Frederic Handel, performed by Guido's orchestra. Cameras flashed while family and friends stood watching the one hundred twenty-three graduates enter the theatre. After the last graduate entered, the audience joined in singing "Jesus with Your Church Abide" as a confession that everything celebrated on this day was truly due to the grace of God.

Mr. N. VandenOever, Chairman of the Board, was first to address the crowd and commented on how four short years ago these same young people were starting high school with fear and anticipation. Now as they move on from high school, they are perhaps experiencing those emotions again as they look forward to post secondary education or work. Mr. H. VanDooren, Guido's principal, followed this with an address to the graduates. He started by acknowledging that school can sometimes seem endless and wearisome. As the writer of Ecclesiastes says, "Of many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body." However, the end had come and now was time to celebrate what they were able to accomplish in God's strength. He encouraged the graduates to continue to listen to the voice of God as they travel through life's journey. They were reminded that there is a lot of "noise" and distractions in life that keep us from listening to God.



Furthermore, not only are we to listen to his Word, but also heed it. Graduates were strongly encouraged to keep God central in their lives as stated in Guido's school motto, "Everything in Christ."

Following the principal's address, the audience enjoyed an eight-handed piano performance of "Pomp and Circumstance" by Esther Hutten, Annemarie Slaa, Estelle Visscher, and Mr. T. Nijenhuis. This was only the beginning of a series of performances by the grads, showcasing their wide range of talents.

Mrs. I. de Visser then addressed the class, speaking on the theme of making "A Lasting Impression." Her humorous and lighthearted approach was well received by the audience. She spoke about how, when you move on from something, you want to leave a lasting impression. She asked the class what they would remember about their experience at Guido in twenty-five years. It was suggested perhaps that teachers and friends would be most memorable for many different reasons, but hopefully most of all because these relationships pointed the students to Christ. She commented on how this occasion is often called "commencement" which may be confusing at first, since graduation is a celebration of *finishing* your high school career. However, it is also a celebration of the beginning of the rest of your life, working for your Master. She concluded by tying everything together with the thought that if you serve your Master in all you do, people will notice and you will leave that lasting impression.



Shortly afterwards, the moment each graduate had been waiting for (either with anticipation or anxiety) arrived: the presentation of the diplomas by Mr. N. VandenOever, Mr. H.

VanDooren, Mr. R. VanAndel, and Mrs. J. Jooisse. Each student's personality showed as they walked across the stage: the strong and silent to the exuberant and excited. As each took their temporary seat on stage, members of the audience looked on with joy and thankfulness and perhaps a tear in their eye.

The presentation of special awards and scholarships showcased a handful of students who excelled in academics, volunteering, and school involvement. It was clear that the graduates were extremely supportive of one another when loud applause and cheering followed each presentation. Following these awards, Leah Aasman, Karyn Bosscher, Justin Buist, Rosalyn Kieft, and Ashley Oosterhoff sang "I Will Remember You" accompanied by Tyler Heemskerck, Shannon Burns, Julinna Vandenbos, and Sheldon Gelderman. Like all of the performances in the program this one was truly impressive, once again showing how richly God has blessed each of these young people.

David Rozema represented the Class of 2010 as this year's valedictorian. He began by acknowledging how he, like many others, was busy with post-secondary endeavors but admitted that he would take his fond memories of Guido with him. The graduates laughed with him while he listed some of the more memorable moments they shared as a class. He described Guido as providing a learning environment second to none and praised God for the experiences that he and his fellow graduates could have had there. He concluded by congratulating the Class of 2010.

The afternoon ended with a prayer by Mr. A. Hulzebosch and the singing of the National Anthem. Truly God has been with these students throughout their years at Guido and we pray that he will continue to bless their plans for the future.



## Awards

### **The Harry Aasman and George DeBoer Memorial Scholarships**

Rachel Eikelboom  
Scott Linde  
Sara Groenwold

### **The Guido de Brés Proficiency Scholarships**

Gavin Bosch	Madeline Bremer
Nikki Deboer	Heather Homan
Kaitlyn Jans	Nakieta Jans
Chelsey Kampen	Rosalyn Kieft
Chaun Knegt	Danielle Ludwig
Madelyn Nordeman	David Rozema
Christopher Schouten	Jodie Van Dyk
Juliana Vandenbos	Stuart Vermeulen
Jodi Wieske	

### **The Governor General's Academic Medal**

Rachel Eikelboom

### **The Guido de Brés High School Participation Awards**

Gregory Breukelman	Lennart de Visser
Kevin DeJonge	Shield Helder
Kevin Ludwig	Annemarie Slaa
Heather VanAndel	Justin Vanderee
Kayla VanderMooren	Jonathan VanSpronsen
Stuart Vermeulen	Sheldon Winkel

### **The Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award for Students**

Sara Groenwold

### **The Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff Student-of-the-Year Award**

Lennart de Visser  
Jodi Wieske

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# *Visit to the Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil (IRB) Synod – October 2010 in Cabo Frio*

In response to an invitation by the Comissão de Contato com Igrejas no Exterior (CCIE) of the IRB, the CanRC Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) delegated Br. Paul Krikke of the Cornerstone CanRC, Hamilton and Br. John Vanderstoep of the Maranatha CanRC, Surrey to represent the Canadian Reformed Churches at the Concilio (Synod) of the IRB, held during October 18 – 23, 2010.

Traveling independently, we arrived in Cabo Frio in the afternoon/evening of October 16, 2010. The church of Cabo Frio, the convening church for this synod, is in a small town by the same name lying approximately 160 km east-northeast of Rio de Janeiro. All the delegates to the synod, as well as delegates to the Committee of Three (a cooperative initiative of the two sending CanRC churches and the deputies for mission of Drenthe, NL), were accommodated in three adjacent homes a short distance from the church building. All meals were provided by an organizing committee of the church and consumed at the home of one of the elders of the church. Throughout the week, our hosts treated us royally and graciously, attending to any needs that we might have.

On Sunday, we all attended the church services, in which Rev. Adriano of the Recife church preached in the morning and Rev. K. Wieske, one of Surrey's missionaries, preached in the evening. In the evening service special attention was given to the synod to be convened the next morning. Between services, all the delegates were divided into groups of two or three and hosted for lunch by one of the families of the church. While our ability to understand the spoken word was

limited, it was very obvious that the church diligently serves the Lord. The proclamation of the Word is central and applied to daily life and the enthusiastic singing of the congregation was a joy to hear.

On Monday morning, the synod delegates gathered in the Cabo Frio church building, the meeting opened, credentials examined, and the executive chosen. It is the practice of the IRB to have the pastor of the convening church preside over the synod. Because Pr. Elienai and his church joined the federation only in March of 2010, he was a little apprehensive. He did a fine job however, assisted by Pr. Manuel (Beto) Ferreira of the church at Unai as Vice-Chairman, Pr. Thyago Lins of the church at Maragogi as the Secretary, and Pr. Adriano Gama of the church at Recife as the Vice-Secretary. The Canadian delegates were warmly received and seated as fraternal delegates with the privilege of the floor, but not the right to vote. At the appropriate time, we were given the opportunity to bring greetings. Br. Krikke did this.

The synod, which in the Brazilian context functions as a hybrid between classis and synod, dealt with an extensive agenda, among which: considerations of amendments to forms; church visitation reports; advice on church discipline; relations with sister churches; and reports from a number of committees. One special event was the admission of the church at Esperança as a full member of the federation. This church, with a Baptist background, was admitted as a sister church two years ago, after some years of becoming committed to the Reformed faith and practice. Documents attesting to the adoption of the church confessions,

creeds, and church order and proper subscription to the confessions by its office bearers were presented. Church visitors also reported. The minister of this church, Pr. Laylton, after a comprehensive colloquium, was also admitted to the federation as minister of the Word and sacraments. His signing of the subscription form was a highlight of the meeting. This brings to five the number of churches in the federation, each with numerous congregations, preaching points, contacts, and activities. The number of ordained ministers now numbers seven, plus the three missionaries sent out by Canada. There was also a request by a member of the church at Esperança for Pr. Kauikwagner to be “examined” in the next year, with a view to being admitted to the federation. This minister also came from a Baptist background and with his small congregation embraces the reformed faith and wishes to be one with the federation. It was

a great blessing to be witnesses to this happy event. The churches were witnessed to be diligent not only in maintaining the Reformed faith and practices, but also to respond as best they can to the many enquiries about the rich promises of the gospel that they have come to know.

An item that has received much of the federation’s attention over the past number of years is that of theological training. In July 2009, the federation adopted a proposal to start their own theological training project (Institute for Theological Training). Realizing their limited resources, the churches requested the church at Surrey to loan its missionaries and the facilities at the Aldeia Training Center (ATC). They also mandated the two Surrey missionaries to implement this project for them. At the same time Committee of Three was requested to assist in funding the project. The report before the churches at this synod was that of the

Implementation Team (Committee). The Committee reported on the work that it had been able to do, especially since the approval of Surrey to loan the missionaries had been received in May of this year.

At the time of the writing of the report to Synod, the funding by C3 had not been confirmed. However, during the week of Synod, C3 did meet to consider this request. Due to differences in perception/interpretation as to how C3 can/must fruitfully function, it was decided to discontinue this cooperation. However, the Canadian sending churches (Hamilton and Surrey) did agree “to work together to support the IRB; and to work with those delegated by the IRB to develop a mutually acceptable implementation plan and budget for the theological training project in Brazil.” The need for trained leaders is very real and it is the prayer that collaboration between the sending churches and the IRB federation will provide these much-needed resources.

Another matter that has been on the agenda of the IRB is the relationship to the Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil (IPB). In 2008, the IRB suspended initial (official) contact in the hope of coming to a clearer understanding what they might and could do. The Commission for Relations with the Churches in Brazil recommended that rather than re-initiating formal contact at a federation-to-federation level, it would be more reasonable and doable if the local churches continued their local contacts where these existed and could be made. This could lead to more profitable interactions and possibly have



*Br. Krikke addressing Synod*



*Delegates together for a meal*



greater impact than to do so at the official level. This recommendation was accepted.

Synod also dealt with a proposed National Plan of Evangelization. This proposal had been submitted to the March 2010 Concilio, but received by the churches after the prescribed deadline, as such, it was before Synod now. In this plan the Committee that had been instructed to study this matter, after surveying all the churches, concluded that it was imperative that the training of leaders continue, including a plan of instruction of new leaders. They concluded that this training should utilize the current foreign missionaries and that they would be open to seeking agreement with sister churches to send more missionaries. They see the need to use missionaries (both foreign and native) in the enhancement and strengthening of churches already established and in the opening of new mission fields. Some local churches already have mission fields;

others have the desire to expand the proclamation of the gospel to their surrounding areas. It is clear that this plan is very closely tied to the

training of men and as such could be seen as a further articulation of the need for theological training.

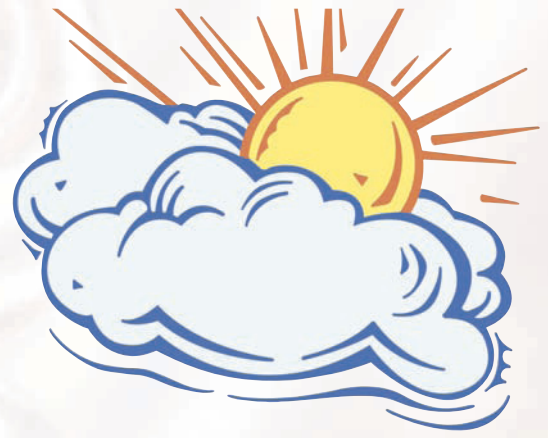
It was our experience that the brotherhood in Brazil seriously seeks to proclaim the Word of our Heavenly Father. They are committed and work diligently in pasturing the flocks entrusted to them, while at the same trying to keep abreast of the church developments around them and in their sister churches. We pray that the Lord of heaven and earth may continue to sustain and strengthen them!

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*Brazilian brothers reading and discussing Clarion*

# Ray of Sunshine



Corinne Gelms and Patricia Gelms



January 17 is approaching fast and I am sure everyone at Anchor Home is quite aware of it. Many a time Grace would say, "January 17," and if you would ask, "What about that day?" Grace would say,

"That's my birthday!!" Not only that, Grace could rattle off all birth dates of close family as well. Speaking about numbers, if you would hum the tune of a psalm, Grace would give you the number and words of that psalm. Grace loves singing and playing the keyboard. You might have seen her perform when the Anchor band is playing. Playing with one finger, and her pinky finger straight up, Grace is the centre of it all.

Grace has been living at Anchor Home right from the beginning of its opening in 1986, and for her it is truly home. Her evenings are full of activities like going to Bible study, doing crafts, band practice, and bowling, while during the day she takes time to deliver newspapers two days a week and helps with various chores at the home. Grace has her routine and likes to stick with it; playing computer is also one of her favorites, especially the memory games.

Grace loves coming for sleepovers to her family, too. When she comes, the clock can be put away since without fail Grace reminds us of having breakfast, coffee, lunch, coffee, and supper. Grace's hygiene is important to her and she loves to have her showers. There's nothing like being squeaky clean!

## A note to all parents and caregivers

If there are any address or other changes that we need to be aware of please let us know as soon as possible.

You can contact us by the following means:

Mail: Corinne Gelms

8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON LOR 2A0

Phone: 905-957-0380

Email: [jcorgelms@porchlight.ca](mailto:jcorgelms@porchlight.ca)

A highlight of a totally different nature happened in June 2010. Grace was able to publicly profess her faith, firm in her conviction that she too belongs to God, thankful for what Christ has done for her. It also reflects God's love and care in her concern and love for others. May the Lord continue to be with her in the years to come.

## Birthdays in January

- 2 Liz Koning will be 50**  
9905 152nd Street, Edmonton, AB T5P 1X4
- 7 Christine Breukelman will be 39**  
2225-19th Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4
- 14 Stephen Dykstra will be 28**  
Box 3573, Smithers, BC VOJ 2N0
- 17 Henry Driegen will be 55**  
#19-31450 Spur Avenue, Abbotsford, BC V2T 5M3
- 17 Grace Homan will be 55**  
c/o Anchor Home, 361 Thirty Road S., RR 2  
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
- 19 Edwin Schutte will be 27**  
844 Bowman Road, Abbotsford, BC V3G 1S9
- 19 Janine Smid will be 41**  
510 Second Street, Strathroy, ON N7G 3H8
- 30 Tyler Hoeksema will be 22**  
6755 Lorne Drive, Sardis, BC V2R 2G3

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday in January. We wish you a very enjoyable day together with your family and friends. It is also our hope and prayer that we all may enjoy the rich blessings in 2011; that we daily receive from the hand of our heavenly Father. Till next time.

✍



*From the Publisher*

## **A Season**

*There is a time for everything and a season  
for every activity under heaven.*

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Like our chief editor, Dr. J. Visscher, in his year-end review, so my thoughts also turned to the book of the “Teacher” for this message to you, faithful readers of *Clarion*. For over twenty years I have been privileged to write year-end notes to you about the activities of our team of editors and contributors that yielded another volume of *Clarion*. Now the time has come for me to write my last under this rubric.

As you may know, Premier Printing Ltd., publisher of *Clarion*, has undergone a corporate change through which I have become the sole owner. More changes are taking place, however: three of my sons, David, Theodore, and William, will assume management of the business. In this new arrangement William is taking on the office responsibilities, which includes the management of *Clarion*. While I have reached the age when the government finally gives (?) rather than takes, I will not disappear entirely from the corporate scene. But, there is a season for me also. As the new management team picks up the pace, I will slow down a little.

It has been a real pleasure for me to serve you in the capacity of publisher. God, in His providence, gave me this time to be an instrument for the promotion and continuation of *Clarion* (formerly *Canadian Reformed Magazine*), soon to be in its sixtieth year. I do not know the future of the printed word in this fast-moving digital world, but I know that God’s Word will go forth till the end of time. He is not limited to a season, as men are. We read that in Ecclesiastes 3 as well, in verse 14: *I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.* God be praised.

### **Our Thanks**

Again we thank our efficient team for their hard work this year. Our chief editor, Dr. J. Visscher,

peruses the articles and provides guidance for the group. Our copy manager, Mrs. Laura Veenendaal, then quickly sends the prepared material for each issue on to the printer. Co-editors Rev. R. Aasman, Rev. E. Kampen, Rev. K. Stam, and Dr. C. Van Dam, ensure that there is a sufficient supply of articles for you to enjoy. Thank you, all team members! After serving many years as co-editor, as well as a previous stint in the chief editor’s chair, Rev. R. Aasman has decided to pass on the task to others. We are deeply appreciative of his service to the readers and the publisher of *Clarion*. Thank you very much for your perseverance and dedication! In his place Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer has willingly accepted the invitation to join the team. Greatly appreciated!

Thank you to our regular contributors, Rev. C. Bouwman, Rev. R. Bredenhof, Rev. W. Bredenhof, Rev. J. Moesker, Rev. J. VanPopta, and Rev. G.Ph. VanPopta. The latter two are providing us with regular columns; Rev. Moesker will no longer provide the Press Reviews. We value your work towards an interesting magazine.

Subscribers and advertisers, thank you for your continued support. For almost sixty years you have helped us to send this magazine to many households. While the printed word is somewhat under stress, our readership is increasing and you are encouraging us to continue.

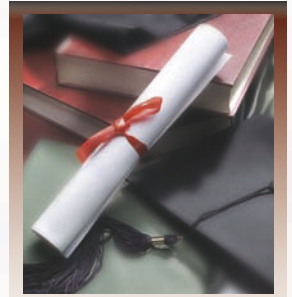
### **Greetings**

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son . . .” In remembrance of this fact we will celebrate our Redeemer’s birth in the coming days. May these celebrations honour His holy Name and make us aware that at the appointed time He will come again. Greetings to you and a blessed new year!

*Bill Gortemaker*

*Education Matters*

# *Powerful Teaching* *– ICRE 3*



Mr. Peter Veenendaal is principal of Immanuel Christian School in Winnipeg, MB

## **Opening**

Amid concerns that ash clouds from the erupting Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland would hamper air travel to the third International Conference for Reformed Education (ICRE) in Lunteren, The Netherlands in April, 2010, plans were finalized by the Dutch principals, realizing that God would determine who would be able to attend. They were not disappointed, and thirty-seven principals from Reformed (Vrijgemaakt) schools in The Netherlands, seventeen from Canada, four from Australia, and one from South Africa were privileged to spend a few days together in the Werelt Conference Center discussing various topics related to the education of covenant youth. A tradition begun six years ago in The Netherlands and continued in Sumas, Washington three years later, was continued a few months ago. Dutch organizers provided conference attendees with a program that stimulated discussion and debate and gave time for school administrators to share experiences and concerns which do differ from country to country.

In his opening address, Mr. Huib van Leeuwen pointed out that parents expect much from Reformed teachers, making it clear that a Reformed teacher plays a fundamental role in the spiritual growth of the youngsters in his care. This third edition of ICRE had the theme “Powerful Teaching,” referring to those extraordinary qualities expected from teachers in Reformed schools. These qualities can come only from the Holy Spirit. As we met together during the addresses of various speakers and workshop leaders, we could encourage each other in these things and later relay this encouragement to the classroom teachers in our various schools. In the easy interaction between conference attendees, it was clear that relationships had been forged between brothers and sisters three years ago in Washington and three years prior to that also in The Netherlands.

## **Keynote #1**

On Monday we started with a keynote address by Professor Dr. F. Korthagen, a professor from Amsterdam. The topic of “Levels in Reflection: Core reflection as a means to enhance professional growth” received a lot of attention. Most people, especially teachers, have heard of the term “self-reflection.” Teachers are taught to take time regularly (at least daily) to reflect on what has happened during a particular day – how the students behave, how well was the work done, did my instructions come out clearly, did I react appropriately when Johnny misbehaved again, and how could or would I do things differently next time? Korthagen calls this outer reflection and compares it to the outside layers of an onion. These outer layers have an effect on what goes on inside the onion (teacher) and are very important. If we work only with these outside layers when we are encouraging the development of new teachers, we are missing opportunities for making a much greater difference. Korthagen went on to explain how we should much more deal with the inside core layers.

This “core” of a teacher refers to his values and beliefs. The act of “core reflection” seems to be more effective if two people are involved. Especially a young teacher may realize something was not right but may need help working through the incident and determining a better plan for the future. The other person (perhaps another teacher or the principal) would then help the teacher work through questions that encourage core quality reflection. When the core qualities are mobilized, one’s values and beliefs help find solutions, not only for one individual situation, but in many more areas of life. As Reformed Christians, these core qualities include love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – the fruit of the Spirit. God is the source of our inspiration and his gifts to us are what we need at our



core in order to live and do our work usefully. Without him as such a source, we have no hope of adequately fulfilling our tasks as teachers of God's covenant children, and will surely slip again and again into human centered solutions which usually penetrate only the outer layers of our "onions."

Monday evening saw over sixty administrators beating out rhythms on authentic African jamebes – "skin-covered hand drums shaped like a large goblet and played with bare hands." Though this was great fun, don't think that many principals would be easier to control than a classroom full of students. Having well-experienced leaders and enough instruments for all made this a great activity to loosen up some of that stress that we all know comes with the territory as a school leader.

## Keynote #2

On Tuesday morning we welcomed Dr. A. de Kock, an educational expert and theologian who has spent much time involved with learning processes and religious identity. His topic of "Teacher excellence, reflection and identity" tied in very well with that of Dr. Korthagen.

**How important  
it is that we  
have truly Reformed  
teachers in front of  
our students**

De Kock says that in the Dutch school system about seventy-five percent of the schools are independent but fully-funded by the government. Most Dutch schools are organized on a specific philosophic, religious, and/or pedagogical foundation according to certain traditions or beliefs. Together we identified the characteristics of



an excellent teacher – a list that made many of us feel quite inadequate. Because of these characteristics of our teachers and our schools, we can expect that our process of reflection will mirror our identity as being Reformed. Consequently our schools are very leery of changes recently proposed by the Dutch Departments of Education, in which students are taught to learn more independently. Most often, the various aspects of such learning are in disagreement with the historical thinking of Reformed families. In this system, there seem to be conflicts regarding how teachers see themselves, how others see teachers, and the ideological dimension with regard to education in general. These make up our identity of education. Dr. de Kock identified a number of studies from which his conclusions were derived and concluded that how a teacher views himself will determine how he deals with new innovations in the classroom. We could certainly see from this how important it is that we have truly reformed teachers in front of our students.

Tuesday afternoon and evening was a time of social interaction and cultural exploration. Our first stop was a museum which gave a visual history of the area of Bunschoten-Spakenburg and its well-known fishing industry. Principals then visited the town hall in Spakenburg, where the mayor greeted each one of us individually. The foreign guests were given the privilege of being seated in the large circle normally used by councilors. His Worship had no shortage of stories to tell. In turn, we entertained him by singing "Oh Canada." Our whole group then boarded an old



restored fishing boat for a relaxing tour to our supper destination – an hour up river. As always, the food was plentiful and delicious.

### Keynote #3

The third morning speaker was Dr. P. Vos. His topic was “After Duty – The Need for Virtue Ethics in Moral Formation,” a paper which he called “a work in progress.” Vos started by identifying moral formation as an important preventative, pedagogical task of education itself, and not an externally imposed obligation. It is not limited to the cognitive and rational development of a person, but also has as its end the property of a marked development of personal attitudes and skills, including moral passions and emotions. In the past this students were taught by studying moral dilemmas. Vos stated that this may or may not be important to the students, depending on whether or when they are confronted with such situations. Most will never have to make decisions in extreme moral situations of great anxiety and uncertainty.

Vos describes virtue as “a state of character.” Virtues equip us for certain activities and also influence how we perceive and describe the activities in which we engage and how we respond to situations and other people. They are concerned with feelings and actions and influence how we perceive situations in our lives and how we respond to them. Through practice, certain actions result in habits, which in turn develop into character traits. If something is a good trait, we call it a virtue; if it is bad, we call it a vice. What is a virtue in one situation may be a vice in another; think of examples where anger is appropriate and where it is not, or where fear is a good thing and where it is not.

Some divide virtues into two categories, namely, those that a person acquires himself, and those that are infused by divine grace. Though the idea of learning virtues on your own is foreign to our Reformed theology, Dr. Vos nevertheless suggested that there is a need to return to ethics training, partly because the bond between home, church, and school cannot be taken for granted anymore. Although we expect that the Holy Spirit and Word will work virtue in the hearts of our students, it will certainly be a great boost for them if they see their teachers emulating the fruit of the Spirit, and in that way being virtuous living examples for them in the classroom every day.

### Goodbyes

Before our time of farewells, we also had an opportunity to participate in a variety of workshops led by teachers from Holland or Canada. After closing, some took advantage of a bit of extra time to visit relatives and/or friends and do a bit of sight-seeing. Some of us also visited some truly luxurious Dutch schools. It was good to interact with colleagues who do the same work we do but in a very different setting. It is obvious that we all have our challenges and successes as we lead our schools and teachers in the educating of the youth of the church. Several Canadian principals were appointed to make plans for another international conference in 2013. May God bless those efforts.

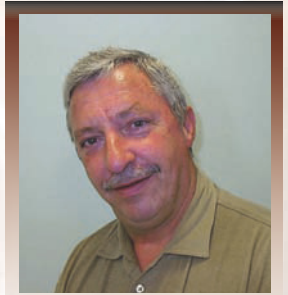
Thank you to the school boards and societies that made this event and our participation in it possible. We are truly blessed to have supporters who see the value in giving us these experiences. I am always thankful for the blessings we receive in our schools and the support we have from the homes and church. That is the way our parents and grandparents were able to establish Reformed schools in Canada, and we see the value in that every day of the year.

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







Rev. Klaas Stam is minister emeritus of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton, Ontario  
[cstam@sourcecable.net](mailto:cstam@sourcecable.net)

*Further Discussion*

## ***On The Road Again, Back to Abbotsford***

### ***A reply to some reactions***

Over the past few weeks, I have received some letters from members of or sympathizers with the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford.

What I will do is respond to some items that came up more than once in these letters. What I will not do is ask *Clarion* to publish the extensive rebuttal of Mr. Richard van Laar. You can find the response of van Laar on the Internet ([www.calltoreform.com](http://www.calltoreform.com)).

One of the main points against what I wrote is that Synod Smithers accused the DGK (in Holland) of “schism-making” and urged our contact deputies to admonish the DGK. It would seem that the LRC Abbotsford has a point here.

I do not intend to defend the decision of Synod Smithers. The decision of that synod was made with the light of that particular time. I was not at this synod but what I remember from the *Acts* of that synod is that our churches wanted to be sure no schism-making was involved and that the way of reconciliation should first be followed. What’s wrong with that? The DGK immediately took this to be a final judgment and made strong statements from its side.

The fact that Smithers’ decision was not a final one becomes clear in the decision of Synod Burlington-Ebenezer. One should give foreign churches some opportunity and time to finalize decisions properly. Our Synod Burlington asked our Deputies to scrutinize specific decisions of the GKNv, our Dutch sister-churches. The same synod also asked Deputies to contact the DGK for clarification and input. Clearly the DGK were not written off.

Some felt that I was not up to date with decisions of my own local congregation, which had opened the Lord’s Supper to people beyond our sister churches. Reference was made to what was written in the short

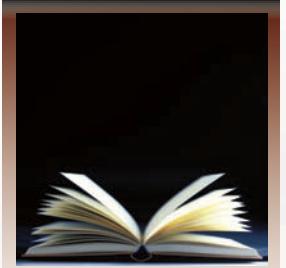
report of a Hamilton consistory meeting about guests attending the Lord’s Supper. Sometimes I have a *lapsus memoriae* (see Wikipedia) because of age and illness, but I remember this decision clearly.

That decision, however, did not concern a general situation, but was meant for a specific, local case. The rule of Article 61 was maintained, but an exception to that rule in a specific case was granted. Whatever the case may be, I would not have formulated and published the decision in that manner.

It was taken ill of me that I did not know that the report of the Dutch Deputies was available in *written* form and was not an oral report. Okay, granted, but the Dutch report had to be found through links in the computer document. I did not see that nor did I find a directive that here I had to click on a link. Be that as it may, the written Dutch report still contains wrong assumptions and gives the wrong impression.

It was also taken ill of me that I called the LRC of Abbotsford a “group of dissenters.” Some want an apology. Well, I can give an apology, but it does not do away with what I think. “Dissenters” is a word that was often used in church history for people who would not accept the decisions of the majority. Some Dissenters proudly bore the name! I used it in the more mundane sense for people who are indeed stubborn. The reasons for which they left the Canadian Reformed Churches do not hold water. When they left the Canadian Reformed Churches, in their opinion they left a false church and became the continuation of the true church. Rather presumptuous, in light of the facts.

My main concern is that untruths were being spread about the Canadian Reformed Churches. We do not have an open table or an open pulpit. Strange, none of the letter writers interacted with this. ✂



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## Book Review

***Bonhoeffer, Pastor, Martyr, Prophet,  
Spy: A Righteous Gentile vs.  
the Third Reich***  
**Eric Metaxas, (Thomas Nelson, 2010)**

**Additional Information: 591 pages**

A few years ago I wrote a three-part series on the life of German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who in April 1945, at age thirty-nine, was executed in the concentration camp Flossenbergl. His death had been ordered by Adolph Hitler, who was already hiding in his underground bunker in Berlin, and it took place shortly before the American armies reached Flossenbergl. Bonhoeffer was condemned to death because he had taken part in a plot to kill Hitler. A number of his fellow conspirators were killed with him. Others were executed in different camps. Among them were Dietrich's brother Klaus and two of his brothers-in-law.

For my previous articles I made use (in addition to Bonhoeffer's own writings) of the Bonhoeffer biography that his former student and close friend Eberhard Bethge published in the 1950s, with a revised and enlarged edition appearing in 1967. That massive work (of over a thousand pages) is still a primary source of information on the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Since its publication, however, new information has become available and many new commentaries on Bonhoeffer's life and work have appeared. The time had come for a new biography, and Eric Metaxas (the author also of a highly acclaimed book on William Wilberforce<sup>2</sup>) has given us that new biography.

Metaxas makes a good use of Bethge's work, but provides much new information as well. Moreover, whereas Bethge wrote for the immediate post-war generation, Metaxas writes for a postmodern public that hardly remembers the war. If Bethge's was the definitive Bonhoeffer biography for the twentieth

century, Metaxas's may well fill that role for the first part of the twenty-first. As such it is very welcome. The story of Bonhoeffer's Christian life still has the power to instruct, encourage, and inspire and Metaxas succeeds marvelously in making it accessible to present-day readers.

His book is first of all a biography, combined with a description of the political situation in Germany since World War I, rather than a work on theology. It describes Bonhoeffer's family background and education, the rise of Hitler and the horrors of the Hitler regime, Bonhoeffer's work in the church and the ecumenical movement, his leadership in the illegal seminaries of the Confessing Church, his two-year imprisonment, and his death. But his life cannot be separated from his faith, nor can his faith be separated from his theology, and Metaxas makes the connections clear. In describing Bonhoeffer's life, he acquaints us with a modern theologian who took his theological work seriously but refused to be a mere theorist. From first to last he not only described and proclaimed but also *lived* the gospel message and joyfully submitted to God's will, also when the ultimate sacrifice was asked of him. Characteristic of his entire Christian life are his last moments on earth, as observed by the Flossenbergl camp doctor, who wrote:

Through the half-open door in one room of the huts I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer, before taking off the prison garb, kneeling on the floor praying fervently to his God. I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God (532).<sup>3</sup>



As we learn from Bonhoeffer's own prison letters and from the testimony of fellow-prisoners, the same cheerfulness and submission to God characterized his life in prison and concentration camp.

## Orthodoxy

Today Bonhoeffer is widely acknowledged as a biblical theologian. He was not, however, immediately accepted as such. While orthodox Christians have always liked the Bonhoeffer of the 1930s, who was engaged in the church struggle, taught at the illegal seminaries, and wrote the spiritual classics *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together* (the latter an exploration of living in Christian community), they long believed that he had later departed from his orthodoxy. The suspicion was a result of certain expressions in his prison letters. A similar conclusion was drawn by "death-of-God" theologians of the 1960s, who in fact claimed Bonhoeffer as their prophet. Both sides thought they saw a profound theological difference between the Bonhoeffer of the 1930s and the one of the prison years.

As I showed in the earlier series, such an interpretation goes directly against the overall message of Bonhoeffer's writings. Bethge already objected to the liberals' abuse of Bonhoeffer's prison writings, even though he did think that his friend's prison theology differed from that of the earlier years. Mataxas, however, argues (and provides a good deal of evidence in support of his argument) that there was no real change in Bonhoeffer's theology, and that that theology continued to be orthodox. "Nearly all that Bonhoeffer would say and write later in life," he insists, "marked a deepening and expansion of what he had earlier said and believed, but never any kind of significant theological change" (84). Some of the misunderstandings were caused, he believes, by Bonhoeffer's frequent use of hyperbole or exaggeration for the sake of effect, which sometimes backfired. Another factor was that he lacked the opportunity to work out his ideas in any detail; his letters were often written in a hurry. He himself described his theological statements in these letters as a mere "thinking aloud," an attempt to clarify his thoughts and collect ideas for a book that he hoped to write later (465f.).

I have dealt with the controversies in the previous articles and will not repeat here what I wrote, but I do want to make a correction. At the time I stressed

Bonhoeffer's absolute submission to the Word of God but at the same time expressed agreement with his critics that in some of his prison writings Bible-critical influences were "clearly evident." Having read the Mataxas biography, and also having reread several of Bonhoeffer's own writings, I withdraw that statement. It is true, in a few instances questions remain, but the essence of Bonhoeffer's "prison theology" is biblical. In his prison letters, as in his earlier writings, he confronts us with truths we do well to take to heart.

## Christocentrism, this-worldliness, discipleship

What was the essence of Bonhoeffer's theology? He had been influenced by the Moravian Brethren and shared with them the quest for a living faith instead of the dull orthodoxy and arid theologizing of the official church. For Bonhoeffer as for the Moravians, faith was not primarily intellectual assent but a being renewed and transformed and made alive by Christ's Spirit. It implied an absolute Christocentrism, as well as an unwavering reliance on biblical guidance in all aspects of one's life. Bonhoeffer was convinced that "the Bible, every word of it, was a personal message of God's love for us" (129) and must be utterly trusted and obeyed.

He also taught the affirmation of the physical world, since it was God's good creation. Christ's incarnation convinced him that the Christian was to embrace the good things of the world and accept them as God's gifts, rather than as something to be transcended, or as temptations to be avoided. Another emphasis was the church's task with respect to the surrounding society. The Lutheran Church, he believed, displayed too much of a fortress mentality, was too self-centred and inward looking, and ignored the world's needs. In his affirmation of the world and society he parted company not just with fellow Lutherans but also with the Moravians and other pietistic branches of Christianity which, in their otherworldliness, would ask him to turn his back on the world and on non-Christians, a group that included several members of his own family. Another objection to pietism was its stress on moral performance, which tended to lead to reliance on one's own powers and to spiritual pride. In view of this particular danger he stated (with typical hyperbole) that "the Christian message is basically amoral and irreligious, paradoxical as that may sound" (83).

At the same time he stressed the demand for pious Christian living and in connection therewith the need for Christians to work, study, meditate, and pray together in community. This was especially necessary for the education of a new generation of theologians and pastors, who had to lead a church that, unlike the official Lutheran one, was close to Christ, dedicated to God's Word, and obedient even to the shedding of blood. None of this was taught in the normal seminaries, and he therefore attempted to realize the ideal in the illegal seminaries. One of the remaining fruits of this work is the booklet *Life Together (Gemeinsames Leben)*, which has lost none of its relevance for those seeking to live the Christian life both individually and communally.

Implied in all the foregoing and central to his theology and life was Bonhoeffer's affirmation of the biblical demand for discipleship, a daily following of Christ. He had taught this ever since the early thirties and described it in his book *The Cost of Discipleship (Nachfolge)*, another fruit of his work at the seminaries, published in 1937. The book was written in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and contains the well-known words, "When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die." Dying for the sake of Christ, Bonhoeffer taught (and demonstrated with his life), meant surrendering one's ambitions and desires but also, if Christ demanded it, surrendering life itself.

## Suffering

I read this biography shortly after I had written a review of James K.A. Smith's *Desiring the Kingdom*,<sup>4</sup>

and could not but note the similarities between the two books, or at least between their messages (for the books as such are of course very different). But both warn us that Christianity is not first of all a system of doctrine, of knowing and theorizing, but a matter of doing, of discipleship, of following a Person and of being "in" Christ. Both warn us against the danger of the church becoming part of the world, while at the same time stressing its responsibility with respect to that world, and both speak of the church as not a group of individuals but as a community. The main difference, which is probably to be explained in part with reference to the different societies with which the books deal, concerns the inevitability of Christian suffering, the cost of discipleship as taught in the Sermon on the Mount and as exemplified in Bonhoeffer's life. It is not least because of the message of Bonhoeffer's preaching and personally living the "theology of the cross" that the biography (as well as Bonhoeffer's own writings) continues to be relevant for Christians today.

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> *Clarion*, September 29, November 24, and Year-end issue 2006. For a digital version see *Reformed Academic* under Collected Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Metaxas, *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery* (HarperOne, 2007), 320 pages.

<sup>3</sup> Numbers within brackets refer to pages in Metaxas' book.

<sup>4</sup> *Clarion*, September 10, 2010. Digital version can again be found on *Reformed Academic*.

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# *Press Releases*

## **Press Release for the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches for a meeting held on September 9, 2010**

The Board of Governors met at the College Facilities in Hamilton, Ontario on September 9, 2010. Present at the meeting were Archie J. Bax, Hank Kampen (Treasurer), Lammert Jagt, Rev. Richard Aasman (Chairman), Barry Hordyk, Dr. Rev. Andrew J. Pol (Secretary), Rev. Willem B. Slomp, Rev. Eric Kampen, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, Rev. John Ludwig, and Karl J. Veldkamp (Vice-Chairman). All board members were present, with the Principal, Dr. G.H. Visscher also in attendance. (It was noted that this was the first Board meeting for Barry Hordyk, who executed a Statement of Compliance, as required.) The meeting was opened by Rev. Richard Aasman with the reading of Ephesians 2:1-10.

## **Minutes, Agenda, and matters arising from the Minutes**

The minutes of the Board meeting held on May 27, 2010 were, with amendments, adopted. The agenda for the meeting was settled. In connection with the minutes and in consideration of the recommendations of the past Secretary, Rev. R. Schouten, it was decided that: work normally completed by the Secretary would not be delegated to non-Board administrative staff; Dr. A.J. Pol would continue as the recording Secretary and would be exempted from preparing the reports on class room visits; K. Veldkamp will be designated as the corresponding secretary; and K. Veldkamp as the Vice Chairman will be formally included in the executive, with a corresponding amendment to the bylaws to be drafted for approval.

In recognition of the years of service of Rev. J. de Gelder as lecturer in church polity, it was agreed that a letter of appreciation would be written to both him and his council.

Dr. Jannes Smith joined the meeting and following introductions and the reading of the subscription form for professors, Dr. Jannes Smith signed such form.

## **Correspondence of note**

- a. Acts of General Synod Burlington 2010 are received and the items relevant to the College are observed and considered as follows:
  - i. the review and accreditation committee was mandated to collate and consider the input of the churches in regard to the possible appointment of a fifth professor, with the Senate fully involved. A proposal is to be developed for consideration by the full Board;
  - ii. the Board noted the appreciation and gratitude expressed by Synod for the assistance and support provided by Dr. Maris during the illness of Dr. N.H. Gootjes, while concurrently accepting the judgement of Synod that the Board had erred in regard to his appointment as temporary instructor.
  - iii. With the support of Synod, tenure was granted to both Dr. G.H. Visscher and Dr. A.J. de Visser.
  - iv. Dr. G.H. Visscher was appointed as Principal for the years 2011-2014.
  - v. At the direction of Synod the governance committee was mandated to seek the input of the churches in terms of finalizing the terms of an appointment policy and process for the appointment of professors.
  - vi. At the direction of Synod the review and accreditation committee was mandated to seek the direction of the churches relating to the rationale and considerations for the possible appointment of a fifth professor.
  - vii. With the approval of Synod, the College will operate under the operating/style name of the "Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary," with the express understanding that the legal name

will remain as the “Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches”

- b. In accordance with recommendations of the Senate, Dr. A.J. de Visser was appointed as vice principal, with his term extending to 2014, and Dr. B. Faber was confirmed in his appointment as guest lecturer in the homiletics department. Recent experiences have determined that further effort is required in clarifying the status of those who form part of the “Faculty” or not, such as adjunct lecturers, adjunct professors and the like. The governance committee was mandated to consider this and report to the Board with proposals.

### Receipt of reports-material items:

- a. **Academic Committee Report:** their provisional minutes of their most current meeting are received for information.
- b. **Finance and Property Committee:** Minutes of their most recent meetings were received for information. It is confirmed that all arrangements relating to the move of Dr. J. Smith and his family have been completed. The audited financial statements for the period ending December 31, 2009 are received and ratified and the budget for the fiscal year commencing January 1, 2011 and ending December 31, 2011 was approved and adopted. Henry Salomons, C.A. was appointed as auditor of the College for the next fiscal year.
- c. **Senate:** In connection with the work of the Senate the following reports were received: Course Work Reports, Registrar, Librarian, Lecture Schedule 2010-2011, Convocation Committee, Faber Holwerda Bursary Committee, and the Librarian (which included a report on a conference attended by the Librarian).
- d. **Visits to the churches:** A report of Dr. C. Van Dam of his visits to churches in Singapore and Australia for the period June 10-July 2 2010 was received. It was noted that there were no further plans to visit any other churches, in Canada, or otherwise, in 2010.
- e. **Conference Report:** Dr. G.H. Visscher provided his report on his attendance for the first time at the meeting of the Association of Theological Schools (“ATS”), with ATS being the association that the College is seeking accreditation with. The report indicated that these meetings have value and provide assistance. The Board affirmed its ongoing support and commitment to the accreditation process. As the conference was held in Montreal it also provided an opportunity for Dr. G.H. Visscher to connect with and interact with members of the ERQ and Institute Farel.
- f. **Pastoral Training Program:** The updated PTP manual was received, considered, and approved. With the amendments approved the PTP now has four main components:
  1. An orientation week after the first year.
  2. A Catechism teaching practicum during the second year.
  3. An evangelism/mission practicum after the second year and during the third year; and
  4. A summer internship after the third year.
- g. **Lecture Visits:** these are confirmed as follows: Revs. J. Ludwig and J. Van Woudenberg for Semester I of 2010-2011; and Rev. Richard Aasman and Dr. Rev. Andrew J. Pol for Semester II.
- h. **Students and Classical Examinations:** The matter of the need to consider the inclusion of oral testing and examinations was considered and evaluation. This would necessarily be connected to sermon preparation and delivery as well. Such discussion also included the understanding the role that churches and councils should play in counselling, guiding, and directing candidates for seminary. Heightened involvement of consistories was considered and will be pursued.
- i. **Review and Accreditation Committee:** This committee provides an update on our accreditation with the Association of Theological Schools, which is a detailed and slow process. At this stage the College has been accepted as an Associate Member. Upon finalization of a Readiness Report, the next material step will be the completion of a comprehensive self study. The Board appointed the Librarian, M. Vandervelde, as the coordinator of the accreditation process, with a mandate to work with the Senate and the Review and Accreditation Committee as needed in preparing the Readiness Report for the ATS.
- j. **Appointments and Teaching:** The appointment of Dr. N.D. Kloosterman as a lecturer in Church Polity for the second term is confirmed. The Sabbatical of Dr. Van Dam commencing full time in the second term of the Academic year 2010-2011 is confirmed. Next meeting of the Board is tentatively scheduled for January 6, 2011, d.v.



## Press Release and closing

The completion of the Press Release is delegated to the Vice Chairman in consultation with the Executive and the meeting was closed with prayer and thanksgiving.

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches,

*Karl J. Veldkamp, Vice Chairman*

## Press Release of Classis Alberta, September 23, 2010

On behalf of the convening church of Coaldale, Rev. D. Poppe called the meeting to order. He asked that we sing Psalm 19: 1, 3 and read Isaiah 55, after which he led in prayer.

Rev. Poppe welcomed the delegates, Br. Tony Roukema, and the deputies of Regional Synod West, the Reverends J. Poppe and J. Visscher.

In his memorabilia, the Rev. D. Poppe noted the following: that the church at St. Albert had extended a call to candidate Tony Roukema and that Br. Roukema had accepted this call; that Rev. J. Louwse of Neerlandia had received a call from the Canadian Reformed Church at Smithville, Ontario; and Rev. R. A. Schouten from Aldergrove is seriously ill and is in the hospital. The church of Coaldale examined the credentials. The churches were properly represented. There were no instructions.

Classis was then constituted. The following officers took their place: chairman: Rev. D. Poppe; vice-chairman: Rev. J. P. Kalkman; clerk: Rev. M. Jagt.

The provisional agenda was adopted with some minor additions.

The church of St. Albert requested a peremptory examination for Candidate A. B. Roukema, who has accepted a call to their congregation. The required documents were presented and found to be in good order. Br. Roukema then presented his sermon proposal on Ephesians 6:23-24. In closed session Classis discussed the sermon proposal and concluded that there were no hindrances to continue the examination.

Br. Roukema was then examined in:  
Old Testament exegesis on Malachi 3:13-4:6 by Rev. R. Aasman  
New Testament exegesis on Matthew 7 and Revelation 3 by Rev. J. Louwse

Knowledge of contents of Scripture by Rev. M. Jagt  
Doctrine and Creeds by Rev. W. Slomp  
Church History by Rev. E. Tiggelaar  
Ethics by Rev. D. Poppe  
Church Polity by Rev. H. Kalkman  
Diaconology by Rev. M. Jagt.

In closed session, with the concurring advice of Rev. J. Poppe and Rev. J. Visscher, the delegates from Regional Synod West, Classis concluded that Br. Roukema had sustained the examination. In open session this was conveyed to him.

Chairman Rev. Poppe read 1 Timothy 4:11-16 and led in a prayer of thanksgiving for him and the church of St. Albert.

Classis received a report from the Treasurer. The classical bank balance stands at \$16,192.44. There are sufficient funds. The treasurer is thanked for his work.

A letter was received from the Canadian Reformed Church of Grassie, Ontario. General Synod Burlington 2010 decided to centralize the various classical Needy Student Funds (Article 91). Grassie was appointed to manage the new fund.

Classis decided, upon the advice of the Committee for Financial Aid, to continue to support Br. Ted VanSpronsen until the end of March 2011, as agreed on, and after that to transfer the balance (anticipated to be \$438.93) to the church of Grassie. The committee will also pass on its mandate and any other helpful material.

In accordance with Art. 44 C.O., the churches reported that the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued and the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured.

There were two requests for advice on matters of discipline. This was given in closed session.

Rev. R. Aasman reported on his contact with the inter-church relations committee of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church regarding the church plant in Airdrie, Alberta. The committee of the OPC admitted that they had acted improperly.

The church of Edmonton Immanuel was appointed to convene the next classis to be held on Tuesday, December 14, 2010 at 9:00 a.m.; an alternate date was set on March 8, 2011 at 9:00 am.

The following officers were suggested: chairman: Rev. W. Slomp; vice-chairman: Rev. D. Poppe; clerk: E. Tiggelaar.

Appointments of Deputies and Standing Committees remained unchanged. Rev. H. Kalkman was appointed as observer to the RCUS, and Rev. D. Poppe as alternate. Rev. M. Jagt was appointed observer to the URCNA and Rev. J. Louwse as alternate.

The following brothers were delegated to Regional Synod November 2, 2010:

Rev. D. Poppe and Rev. W. Slomp; secundi: Rev. J. Louwse and Rev. M. Jagt. The brothers Bill Muis and H. Noot; secundi: Br. B. Wierenga.

Rev. Aasman was appointed to represent Classis at the ordination of Candidate Roukema.

Question period was held.

The chairman deemed that censure as per Art. 34 C.O. was not necessary.

The Acts were read and adopted. The Press Release was approved for publication.

The chairman thanked the brothers for their good co-operation.

After the singing of Psalm 97: 1, 6, Rev. Kalkman closed the meeting with prayer.

*For classis,*

*H. Kalkman, Vice-chairman at that time*

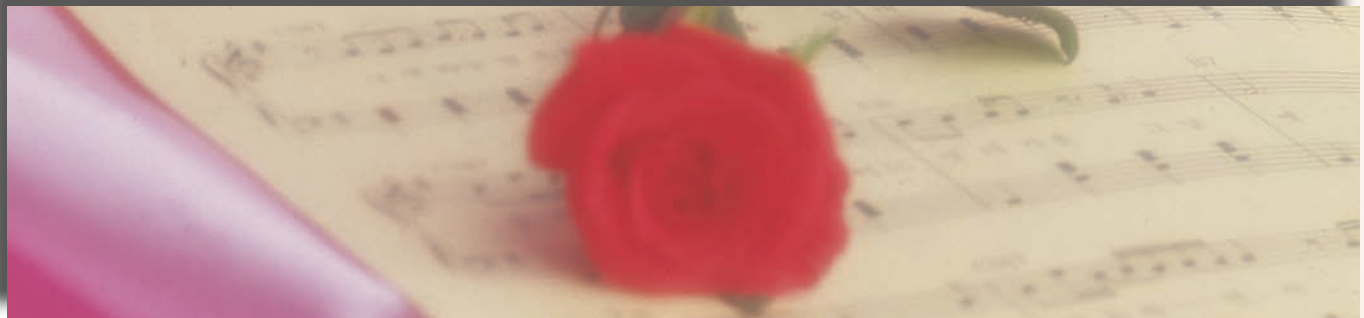
### **Press Release of the Combined Meeting of the Canadian Reformed Co-ordinators for Church Unity (CCU) and the United Reformed Sub-committee of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU)**

The combined meeting was held at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario on

November 4, 2010. From the CanRC, the Revs. William den Hollander and Clarence J. VanderVelde attended. From the URCNA, the Revs. John Bouwers, Peter Vellenga, and Harry Zekveld attended.

The greater part of the meeting focused on the letter written by Synod London 2010 of the URCNA to the CanRC. Our guiding thought was: Where do we go from here after Synod London 2010? As committees we recognize that discontinuing the Joint Songbook and Theological Education committees removes to some extent the pressure of working toward eventual merger. While this may be viewed as taking a step backwards in our ecclesiastical fellowship, our hope is that it will open the way to renewed and increased efforts among our churches toward building mutual appreciation. While a merger is not on the horizon in the near future, we discussed the implications of Synod London's statement to the CanRC that "We are not merely good friends; we are brothers and sisters in Christ, joined together in the bond of the Spirit, evidenced by a common confession of the faith and with you, committed to expressing our unity in concrete and discernable ways." We discussed together how the process of seeking unity has been a blessing to both federations in spite of the difficulties, and therefore committed ourselves to the need of maintaining the vision and sense of calling with respect to eventual merger. Ways and means will need to be explored and encouraged in order that the suggestions in the letter from Synod London for more local interaction and exposure can come to fruition.

The next combined meeting is scheduled for March 23, 2011 at the Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario.





## Press Release from the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise*

The Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* (SCBP) has worked diligently on the mandate received from General Synod Burlington in getting the Authorized Provisional Version (APV) of the *Book of Praise* ready for the churches as quickly as possible. All comments and suggestions made by the churches and received from Synod were duly considered and incorporated where appropriate. The APV is now in print and should be available to the churches from Premier Printing by mid-January.

The APV will differ in a number of areas from the *Book of Praise* currently in use:

1. The first thing you will notice is the size of the book. It now measures eight and a half by five and a half inches. The thickness remains about the same. One of the main benefits of this change is that the text of the psalms and hymns is larger making it easier to read.
2. Another aid to the user is that for psalms and hymns with more stanzas than fits on one page, the overleaf also has the music.
3. In accordance with the mandates received from Synod(s) the text of the metrical psalms has been updated and revised to more closely match the text of Scripture. Approximately one third of the psalms were revised substantially, one third received moderate changes, and one third received few, if any, changes. All these changes were reviewed by the churches. Many suggestions for improvement were received from these reviews. The committee has made grateful use of these.
4. The hymn section was also reviewed. Synod included nineteen of the hymns from the Augment. The total number of hymns is now eighty-five. The text of the hymns was also reviewed and updated where appropriate. In addition, the music notation was reviewed

and, on the advice of our advisors, some corrections and improvements were made.

5. No changes were made to the prose section (other than making the text references match the NIV) however, the layout received a new look. Except for the Heidelberg Catechism the entire prose section is now printed in two columns, mainly for easier reading.

These are the highlights of the new book. Synod Burlington 2010 authorized a provisional version for use by the churches prior to General Synod 2013. Since it is a provisional version, the book will be published only in soft cover to keep the costs down.

To help keep costs down even more churches and schools are encouraged to order the books in quantity that will save twenty-five percent of the regular price. The regular price is twenty-four dollars each, therefore the quantity price is eighteen dollars each.

We wish to stress yet one more thing: though this version is provisional it is a complete version and it is the one the General Synod authorized to be used in the churches.

We have encouraged the churches to place the order as soon as possible. The role of the churches is crucial since Synod requested the churches to use the 2010 version in their worship services and to alert the committee to any errors in it so that a pristine edition can be presented to Synod 2013. The sooner they are in the pew and being used, the better the definitive product will be. May God grant his blessings on all this and may his people use this book to his glory.

*The Committee*

Books can be ordered from:

**Premier Printing Ltd.**

One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2J 3X5  
books@premierpublishing.ca  
204-663-9000





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## *Year in Review 2010*

Long ago the writer of the Ecclesiastes reminded us that there is a time for everything: living and dying, planting and uprooting, killing and healing, tearing down and building up, weeping and laughing, and many other things as well. Among those things one can also add that there is a time for recalling and reflecting. Especially as one year passes on into the next, such an activity is fitting, almost natural.

It is also expected. By now you as readers know that when the year-end issue of *Clarion* arrives in the mail, it will contain a review of the highlights of what happened in our churches during the past year. So let us proceed. . . .

### **Local churches**

Beginning in British Columbia, the most westerly province, the church at Aldergrove celebrated the completion of a beautiful new church building. For years already the members busied themselves with fundraising. Once the building process began, they contributed many, many hours of free labour. Together with the contractor and the various trades, they constructed a building that is bright, functional, and roomy. If you go to their website you will see what I mean.

Further to the east in the northern Okanagan Valley, the church at Vernon also did some work on their building as they added additional meeting rooms. They addressed something that appears to be a pressing need in more of our churches, namely a lack of space for the many weekly meetings. It seems that when churches are being built a lot of planning goes into the auditorium and hall as well as into the babysitting facilities, but that meeting space is often limited and has to be rectified later.

Jumping all the way to the province of Ontario, the church at Smithville is finally doing something about its facilities. For years the congregation watched as new

churches were instituted around it and as new buildings went up to accommodate these new congregations. Meanwhile, Smithville had to make do with an aging building that was no longer suitable for the needs of the congregation. Something had to be done and something was done when it was decided to demolish the old structure and to erect a new one. No doubt we will hear in due time how they made out.

Further north, the church at Brampton had hoped that by now they would be meeting in new premises; however, the economic downturn derailed their plans and expectations. The latest news is that the discussions with a large local developer and builder are back on. May they bear good fruit!

Not too far away the church at Grand Valley was undergoing a major renovation and expansion this past summer. For the time being worship services were being held in the gym of the Dufferin Christian School. Hopefully those days are coming or have come to an end and the congregation can meet again in its own but rejuvenated premises.

In Hamilton, the Providence Church was able to purchase a used Netherlands Reformed Congregation church building and so their days of worshipping in a local school gym came to an end as well.

### **Ministers**

Every year sees some developments in the ministerial ranks and 2010 has been no different. The first piece of news that should be mentioned is not good as it concerns the health of the Rev. Rob Schouten of Aldergrove. In the fall of the year he was diagnosed with colon cancer and is scheduled to receive chemo treatments well into the year 2011. Many prayers are being offered up for him, his wife Janet and their children, as well as for the congregation. While it was good that he was able to preach in the new church



building on its first Sunday of regular use, it was disappointing to say the least that he has been sidelined ever since. May the Lord grant healing in the coming months and many more years of fruitful service.

With respect to ministers moving around in 2010, there is not a lot to report. As is customary, many calls were issued but most were declined. One of the exceptions was the Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, who departed from Carman, Manitoba and took up a new charge in Spring Creek, Ontario (or is that Tintern. . . Rockway?).

Thankfully, calls extended to candidates created some movement and excitement. Candidate Tony Roukema accepted the call to the church at St. Albert, Alberta, Candidate Arend Witten accepted the call to the church at Vernon, BC, Candidate Tim Sikkema accepted the call extended to him by the Armadale Free Reformed Church, Western Australia, for mission work in Lae, Papua New Guinea, and finally, Candidate Ryan Kampen accepted the call to the Church at Denver, Colorado. It may be mentioned that the first two brothers have already been ordained, that the third brother still needs to be examined in Australia, and that the fourth brother hopes to be ordained in December of 2010. Men and Brothers, may the Lord equip you all as you enter into the glorious ministry of the gospel!

The acceptance of these calls has helped to bring down the number of ministerial vacancies in the federation, but the need for more new ministers continues to be apparent as Carman, Grand Rapids, and Smithville are all without, as a number of churches are looking for second pastors and as more retirements loom on the horizon.

## A synod year

Every year sees its share of classical gatherings and regional synods, but 2010 was different in that it was also a general synod year. On May 10, 2010, a Prayer Service was held in the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church, Burlington, Ontario. It was conducted by the Rev. D.G.J. Agema, the pastor of the Fergus-Maranatha church, and the Chairman of the General Synod 2007. The following day Synod 2010 was convened. It was ably led by an executive consisting of the Rev. R. Aasman as Chairman, the Rev. P.G. Feenstra as Vice-chairman, the Rev. A.J. Pol as First Clerk and the Rev. D.G.J. Agema as Corresponding Clerk.

Over a period of several weeks twenty-four men grappled with a long agenda and a mountain of reports and letters. Thankfully all of the advisory committees

worked well together and it did not take long for proposals to be presented on the floor and for decisions to be made.

The use of laptops, speedy copiers, and a wireless network greatly aided the work. The daily assistance of Br. Gerard Nordeman was an added bonus. The work of the ladies in the kitchen led by sr. Donna VanHuistede kept the brothers happy and well fed (too well, some would say).

Some of the highlights in terms of decision-making included:

- approving the retirements of Profs. N. Gootjes and C. van Dam;
- appointing two new professors, namely the Rev. Dr. J. P. Van Vliet (Dogmatics) and the Rev. Dr. J. Smith (Old Testament);
- continuing inter-church relations with sister churches in Australia (The Free Reformed), Brazil (The Reformed Churches of Brazil), Canada (The Reformed Churches in Quebec), The Netherlands (The Reformed Churches), New Zealand (The Reformed Churches), North America (The United Reformed Churches), Scotland (The Free Church), South Africa (The Free Reformed), the United States (The Orthodox Presbyterian, The Reformed Church in the US);
- entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (the official name for sister church relations) with the Free Church of Scotland-Continuing and the Reformed Churches in Indonesia, declining to do so with several other federations, and sharpening the mandate with respect to the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands;
- deciding to move forward with merger talks with the United Reformed Churches of North America by sending them a letter of appeal, provisionally adopting the proposed Church Order, and re-appointing the three sub-committees dealing with church polity, theological education, creeds and forms;
- giving provisional adoption to the latest revision of the *Book of Praise*, complete with a revised psalter and a revamped and expanded hymn section;
- deciding to leave the matter of women's voting in the freedom of the local church after first agreeing that voting for office bearers in the Canadian Reformed Churches is not an exercise of authority.

Many more decisions can be cited but in the minds of many these will be among the main ones, and several will be among the controversial ones as well.

## The RCN

For instance, our relationship with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands continues to generate widespread concern, especially among the older and still Dutch speaking members in our churches. Some would like to see these relations severed in view of questionable views held by Dr. G. Harinck, the appointment of Dr. S. Paas who authored a rather controversial dissertation, synodical decisions made on the Fourth Commandment, on marriage and divorce, and what is all happening in local worship services.

Others, while saddened and disturbed by these developments, remain convinced that we still have a duty to express our concerns and to do whatever we can to remedy a perilous situation.

Synod 2010 decided that it was best if the task of dealing with RCN was assigned to a special sub-committee of capable men.

## Women voting

Another decision of Synod 2010 that was deemed controversial by many had to do with the matter of women voting. The advisory committee appointed by Synod could not reach agreement and thus Synod was confronted with both a majority and a minority report (not to be confused with the Study Reports submitted by the Church at Hamilton before Synod, which also included both a majority and minority report).

A crucial point in the debate was reached when both reports on the floor acknowledged that voting was not a matter of exercising authority in the church. All were agreed that authority in the church rests with the body of elders and not with the members of the congregation.

Local churches are now free to deal with this matter in the most edifying way. Some will no doubt maintain their current practice; whereas, others may well revisit the matter and decide to invite the female communicant members to participate in expressing their preference.

## The URCNA

A third matter that attracted some degree of controversy at Synod 2010 had to do with our relationship with the United Reformed Churches of North America. Lengthy reports had previously been submitted to the churches and the letters poured in on a wide variety of subjects. In particular the churches expressed concerns about a number of matters in the



Proposed Church Order, as well as about the future of theological education.

Synod addressed these concerns and provided clarity in a number of areas in the hope that this would move the proposed merger forward. Indeed, it should be considered as noteworthy that while many of our churches expressed concerns about various matters, none of them requested Synod to shelve the merger or to put it on indefinite hold.

Sadly, the same cannot be said of the General Synod 2010 of the URCNA. Synod London decided to re-appoint with Church Order Committee but then with a rather limited mandate. It also decided not to re-appoint the remaining committees. In other words, the proposed merger died in 2010.

In the meantime the postmortems have begun. Let me say that as one who spent a lot of time and energy as a member of the Theological Education Committee, I lament what has happened. I expected it and I am not bitter about it; however, I had hoped and prayed for better days, for a greater boldness of vision and for a clearer witness to the unity of Christ's church on earth. Alas!

## The Book of Praise

One final and perhaps less controversial area deserves some comment. It has to do with the *Book of Praise*. Synod 2010 took special note of the confusion in the churches about the status of the new revised psalms and the proposed new hymns. A number of local churches sang all of them, others sang none of them, and some sang some of them. In the future all of the churches will be singing all of them. By the end of 2010 or the beginning of 2011 a new provisional *Book*



*of Praise* should be appearing. Synod decided that the next synod would finalize it, although it is not expecting many changes to be made between 2010 and 2013.

Along with this, Synod 2010 went on record as considering the text of the psalms to be established for some considerable time. It charged the Standing Committee to take another look at some hard-to-sing psalms. It also differentiated clearly between the psalm section and the hymn section in that it envisioned the latter to be an ongoing work of improvement and even future expansion.

## **Electronic Acts**

Let me end this part of my review with one last comment and it has to do with the availability of the *Acts*. In the past the *Acts* of General Synod were always published in great quantities and at considerable expense. One copy per family and one copy per single communicant member living away from home was the norm. No longer. From now on the *Acts* will be made available on the federation website (canrc.org). Seeing, however, that we are in a time of transition between printed and electronic media, it was decided to print as many copies of the *Acts* as ordered by the local churches. So you can still get a printed copy, but realize that those days are fast coming to an end.

## **The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)**

Is there a new seminary in our midst? No, it's just the old one with an additional name. Over a period of time the realization grew that the official name of the College, namely "The Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches" did not communicate very well in our English-speaking, North American world. While it is true that there is still a "Knox College" as part of the University of Toronto, it is also true that most institutions that busy themselves with the study of theology are known as "seminaries." At the same time they also have a proper name, be it Covenant, Fuller, Mid-America, Reformed, or Westminster.

In light of this the Board of Governors proposed to Synod 2010 that while retaining the official name (as an official act of the Ontario Legislature it is both difficult and costly to change), the new operational name should be "The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary." Synod finally agreed.

Personally, I had hoped for something with a little more zing to it but then I also have to admit that the

"Name the College Contest" that I have been running in these Year-End Reviews over the last number of years did not produce any real knock-outs from you as readers either. Perhaps it is simply a case of the best names having been taken by others. So I hope that together we can get used to calling the College by its new name, or failing that, by its new initials – CRTS.

Speaking of the Seminary then, 2010 saw another class graduate. Along with the graduates already mentioned, Jason Vandeburgt and Sean Wagenaar were also awarded Master of Divinity degrees. Six students left, and it should be noted that six new students came in. The present enrollment at the Seminary stands at fifteen.

Along with new students, the Seminary also has a new Administrative Assistant in the person of Rose Vermeulen. She joins long time staff members Catherine Mechelse and Margaret VanderVelde.

To a new name and a new face should also be added a new look. If you have visited CRTS lately and looked around you cannot help but notice that the classrooms have been updated and gone high tech. The old worn-out tables and chairs have been recycled. The black or green boards have given way to white boards. Chalk has been retired and replaced with computers and projectors. Also, the downstairs kitchen sports a whole new look. What's next? A Tim Horton's franchise on the premises?

On a more serious note, the Seminary has also become an associate member of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). This organization is the main accrediting body for theological seminaries in North America. It ensures that such schools are run professionally and that proper academic standards and procedures are in place. It also gives validity to the degrees that are awarded and provides graduating students with recognition for their degrees and easier access to other institutions of higher learning.

Finally, mention has already been made of the fact that Synod 2010 appointed two new professors in the persons of Dr. J.P. Van Vliet and Dr. J. Smith. Both brothers are former graduates of CRTS and have gone on to distinguish themselves as pastors and academics. The letters of recommendation that accompanied their nominations to Synod spoke volumes about their ability and potential. It should be the prayer of the churches and all of us its members that they will serve well, long, and in good health.

At the same time our thoughts and best wishes also go out to the retiring faculty members, namely Dr. N. Gootjes and Dr. C. Van Dam. Both have served the



*Installation of Dr. J. Smith  
and Dr. J. Van Vliet*

Seminary for many years and have had a great impact on their students, and through them, on the churches. Of course the expectation and hope was that Dr. Gootjes would be able to carry on for some more years, but health issues have made that impossible. In light of this, it is our prayer that the Lord will surround Dr. Gootjes, his wife Diny, and family with his special help and care in the coming years.

With regard to Dr. Van Dam, he is not officially retiring until 2011. He will spend 2010 – 2011 on a long-delayed and well-deserved sabbatical. During that time he will assist Dr. J. Smith as he adjusts to his new role as a full-time teacher. He will do this by teaching one of the weightier OT courses. He will also engaged in research in preparation for writing a number of books during his upcoming retirement.

By the way, if your idea of retirement is a life of leisure, sleeping in every day, holidaying, and doing not much of anything, such is not Dr. Van Dam's view. His years over sixty-five may well be busier than his years under it as he ponders how best to deal with a myriad of teaching requests.

## **Home missions**

In addition to supporting a seminary in Hamilton, the churches also continued to be involved in and to support a wide variety of evangelism causes and efforts on the home front. In the Hamilton-Burlington area, Streetlight Ministries remains hard at work spreading the gospel in the inner city area of Hamilton. Rev. Paul Aasman and Br. Hilco deHaan work side-by-side as missionary and mission worker. In turn, they are supported by an army of volunteers from both local Canadian and United Reformed Churches.

Further to the north the church at Owen Sound remains involved in supporting the Reformed Churches in Quebec as these churches bring the gospel to "La Belle Province." The ERQ, as they are popularly called, are a small and struggling group of churches who are evangelizing a province that was once overwhelmingly Roman Catholic but is now increasingly secular. They need a lot of prayer and financial support and thankfully our churches are responding to their needs both with intercessions and offerings.

On the other side of the country there are two evangelism efforts. The first is led by the Rev. Jim Witteveen under the oversight of the church at Smithers and is located in Prince George, BC. The original aim of this work was to target the native people living in the city and region. Over time the Reformed witness attracted a wider audience. The result is that a church plant has developed and it is growing at a steady pace. No doubt the original aim has not been forgotten; however, it may end up being addressed in a roundabout way as first other people come to faith and then are used by the Lord as instruments to bring in the "native" people.

The second evangelism effort in BC is among people of Chinese extraction living in the greater Vancouver area. Under the auspices of the churches of Cloverdale and Langley, the Rev. Frank Dong remains busy preaching and teaching, as well as editing and travelling. In the local work he is assisted by Sr. Maple Zeng, who makes contact with both new immigrants from China and longstanding residents who came originally from that part of the world. While the growth to date has not been spectacular, it has been steady and a basis is being laid for what will hopefully one day be a solid instituted Chinese-Canadian Reformed church.

While full-time workers spearhead the work of outreach in Hamilton, Prince George, and Vancouver, in other areas it relies on a host of volunteers. In the small church of Ottawa, for example, there is a group of able and active members who are engaged in a "Love Ottawa" campaign. It consists of regular forays into the downtown area that involves developing relationships with down and out people. Bible distribution and food distribution are also part of this ministry.

In other areas Vacation Bible Schools, Saturday Bible schools, sports camps, inner city volunteering, literature distribution, fair stands, radio broadcasting, prison ministry, hospital visitation, retirement home devotionals, are some of the ways in which the light of the gospel shines in the darkness.



## Youth camps

Somewhere between outreach and in-reach we have the work being done by the various youth camps in our midst. In Smithers the annual youth camp continues to be directed at impacting the lives of young people from the native community. This work is not without its challenges and frustrations as it is exceedingly difficult to work among people whose lives have been so adversely affected by alcohol and drug abuse, unemployment, and a culture of dependence. Still, the work goes on and the members of our churches in the Bulkley Valley are to be commended for their efforts and perseverance.

In the Fraser Valley near Deroche the Stepping Stones Bible Camp continues to attract young people during the summer months. Thus far most of the participants are from our churches but there is the hope that in the coming years an increasing number will also come from outside our churches. Of course, all of this has to be handled with care and wisdom but the youth of the nation should not be bypassed when it comes to the witness of the gospel.

In Ontario Campfire! continues to be a huge effort as large numbers of volunteers, staffers, and young campers make the trek to Markdale from all over Ontario. Weekly camps are organized throughout the summer months for young people of various age groups. As well, camps and conferences are organized at other times of the year for adults.

While not everyone may be a fan of youth camps, what is becoming increasingly evident is that these camps are having a huge impact on our young people. Many of the young leaders in our churches credit these special places as being of formative influence in their lives.

## Foreign mission

In the year 2010 mission work on the foreign front also had the attention of the churches. In Ontario the churches supported mission work being done in various parts of the world. In the Niagara region a number of churches have partnered with the church at Smithville in the work being done in Timor, Indonesia. There the Rev. Ed Dethan is active in preaching the gospel, teaching new converts and training indigenous pastors. He and his wife are also involved in mercy work, especially in operating a local orphanage.

In the Hamilton area a number of churches are connected to the Cornerstone Church at Hamilton and its work in Maceio, Brazil. The Rev. Bram deGraaf leads these efforts and is hopeful that soon the church there can be instituted and take its place as a full-fledged member of the federation of Reformed Churches in Brazil.

North of Hamilton, the church at Toronto continues to direct the mission work being done in Papua New Guinea. For years this work was done on the western part of the island of New Guinea (now part of Indonesia) but in more recent times it has shifted its efforts to the eastern side. The Rev. Henry Versteeg, who laboured for years in the western part, is now active on the eastern side in the island around the Port Moresby area.

Currently most, if not all, of the churches in Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba support the church at Surrey and the work that it continues to do in northeastern Brazil. The Revs. Julius VanSpronsen and Ken Wieske work side-by-side in Recife and beyond. The Aldeia Training Center, where one of the missionary families lives and where in the future the other will live as well, is being used as a site for training both local church members and visitors from elsewhere. In recent years there has been a great expression of interest in the Reformed faith and this is keeping the missionaries busy as they deal with requests to teach in different parts of Brazil, as well as to assist local churches who have expressed an interest in joining the federation of Reformed Churches in Brazil. At the moment much study and research is being directed at theological training and how best to organize and finance it.



Mention should also be made of the fact that 2010 represents the fortieth anniversary of the involvement of the Maranatha Church at Surrey and the supporting churches in this work. To commemorate that fact a special Sunday evening worship service was held during which Rev. Thyago Lins, one of the Brazilian ministers, preached a most able and powerful sermon (with thanks to Rev. Wieske for his fluent translation).

In addition to supporting mission work in Brazil, the churches at Cloverdale and Langley, together with the Free Reformed Churches at Kelmscott and Mount Nasura, Western Australia, remain active in bringing the gospel to China. An Internet site continues to function and is regularly updated as more and more Reformed material is added. From all around the world, but especially from China itself, thousands of Chinese people are logging into this site every week. In addition, teaching teams are being sent on a regular basis to what is the world's most populous nation and what may soon be the world's most powerful nation as well.

Only there is a problem. The demand is growing at such a rate that it can no longer be met. As a result the churches involved in this work have decided to set up a high-speed online Internet college called "The China Reformed Bible College." The main purpose of this college is to train house or family church leaders. Such leaders number in the tens of thousands and most of them lack formal Bible and theological training. They need help and to that end a two-year diploma program is being set up. Half a dozen ministers and professors have agreed to write lectures for the courses to be offered by this college. Some of these lectures have already been received, edited, and are currently being translated. Thereafter they will be loaded into the website.

If all goes according to schedule then an introductory course in the Heidelberg Catechism will be given in March of 2011 and the regular curriculum will commence in September. In the first year enrollment will be restricted to twelve students. There are demands to admit a great many more; however, it has been decided that a careful and cautious start is the best approach. If all goes well, more students will be allowed to enroll in the second year. Should the Lord see fit to bless these efforts, they may also represent the first steps towards a future full-fledged Reformed theological seminary in China.

## Relief work

In August of 2010 another national Mission Aid Conference was held. It was hosted and organized by the Mission Aid Brazil Committee and took place in the building of the Willoughby Heights Church in Langley, BC. The main theme of the conference had to do with Christian education on the mission field. As well presentations were made on the adoption of foster children, on orphanages, on the possible formation of a mission association, as well as on other relevant topics. The overall conclusion was that this gathering served a worthwhile purpose in keeping one another informed, in establishing new ties, cementing old ones, and in mutually encouraging one another.

Another bit of news that is worth passing on is that the Mission Aid Brazil Committee has once again decided to employ a full-time mission aid worker. After evaluating a number of applicants, it was decided to appoint Chris Boersema to this position. This brother was raised in Brazil, speaks the language fluently, is well acquainted with the culture, and has other gifts that make him well-suited for the task at hand. May the Lord bless his labours in Brazil.

Turning to news elsewhere, Randy and Karen Lodder remain hard at work in Haiti where they are still dealing with the after effects of that devastating earthquake. In the meantime their sponsoring agency Coram Deo International has decided to merge with the Word and Deed organization. The latter receives most of its support from members of the Free Reformed and Netherlands Reformed churches.

The Children of Light organization remains active with orphanage work in Timor, Indonesia. Currently it is headquartered in Edmonton, Alberta. Much of its support is channeled through the Rev. Yonson Dethan, a brother of Ed Dethan (Smithville's missionary).

The Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund is also involved with supporting a number of orphanages, but along with that it contributes funds to a number of worthy humanitarian agencies. In addition, it alerts the churches about special needs and raises emergency funds when disasters occur in different parts of the world.

The church at Coaldale, Alberta, was approached by the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad to see whether it would be willing to lead efforts to garner support for the mission and mission aid efforts of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa. It responded



positively and now is busy approaching the churches to ask for their assistance in prayer and offering.

## Special homes and places

One of the signs of a caring community is how well it deals with the aged and the mentally challenged in its midst. Thankfully during this past year local rest homes continued to receive much support and the needs of the elderly were not overlooked. Along with this the needs of our challenged brothers and sisters were not forgotten. Organizations such as Anchor, Bethesda, and Rehoboth continued to operate homes, to provide respite care, to organize summer camps, and to supply other needed services.

## Political and cultural involvement

Along with many evangelistic activities, 2010 also saw the organization of any number of political activities. Much of the credit for this goes to a revitalized Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) and its enthusiastic Director: Mark Penninga. He, together with his wife Jaclyn, and other younger members in our churches, is ensuring that a Reformed witness is being brought to bear on many political, economic, and cultural issues. A very active website, regular newsletters, books and brochures, speeches and conferences held locally in various places and in Ottawa are all getting out the word. Members of Parliament, members of provincial legislatures, as well as local officials, are being contacted and informed about what the gospel has to say about a host of pertinent and pressing matters.

One of those issues happens to be abortion. Together the church at Langley and the local ARPA chapter invited all of the churches in the area to participate in a Life Chain on a Saturday afternoon. The result was that more than five hundred people let the public know that the killing of the unborn is not a forgotten matter but remains a crime of monstrous proportions.

## Publications

Once again this past year was not lacking in magazines to read. *Clarion*, *Reformed Perspective*, *Roadside Assistance*, *Horizon*, *Diakonia*, and *Evangel* all appeared at regular intervals.

One change deserves to be noted and it relates to the fact that the Rev. Dick Moes, who has edited the outreach magazine *Evangel* for more than twenty years, is retiring. The Rev. Marc Jagt of Taber, Alberta, has been

found willing to take his place. Thank you, Rev. Moes, for your faithful labours over many years! Best wishes to you, Rev. Jagt, as you take up your new task!

## Radio and Internet

Another person who is retiring is the Rev. Wes Bredenhof. He served ably and well for several years as the host of the radio program *Gospel Talks*. This program attracted a good number of listeners in the greater Vancouver area and was instrumental in bringing any number of people into contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches. It was hoped that once the Rev. Bredenhof moved east that the program would also find a home there. It was not to be and so he felt compelled to end his involvement with this Western effort.

While the voice of talk radio may be waning, the same cannot be said of the Internet. Currently many of the churches operate websites on which one can find sermons, bulletins, announcements, general information, and links to other sites. One church, the church at Langley, also operates a live feed over the Internet. This means that members who are sick, on holidays, or in care homes can turn on their computers and watch the worship services live. The same goes for courses being offered and concerts being held. In some ways if you cannot come to the church, the church is coming to you. Of course, it's not as good as the real thing but it is better than nothing.

## Closing off

This has been a long tale and it is time to wrap it up. As always my apologies if I have overlooked something or someone. In case of glaring omissions that really need to be corrected, please contact me at [jvisscher@telus.net](mailto:jvisscher@telus.net).

For the rest, I would close as I began with a word from Ecclesiastes. That Bible book not only reminds us that there is a time for everything, it also informs us that there is a conclusion to the matter of life and living, of time and years. What is that conclusion? It is this: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl 12:13).

Dear reader, may that have been your aim in 2010 and if not, make it your aim in 2011! Through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ our Lord and by the power of the Holy Spirit, may all our lives be dominated by a burning desire to honour our God and Father through the doing of his will.

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# *Season's Greetings*

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