

# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Year-End Issue



*Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap  
or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.*

Matthew 6:26

*Best Wishes  
and the Lord's blessings  
in the year 2012  
to all our readers*

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Peter Holtvlüwer

# Angels and iPods



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"All I want for Christmas is a new iPod Touch!" Our kids, it seems, are not exactly asking for their "two front teeth" anymore! Most of us, I think, are in the habit of exchanging gifts at some point around Christmas. For some it might be on Sinterklaas (December 5), for others Christmas Eve, and for others at some point in Boxing week – to catch the sales of course!

It's okay to give each other gifts. I think we'll all agree that we need to be careful about not making Christmas about the gift-giving. And we'll need to keep ourselves in check so that we do not spoil our kids and cave-in to the commercialism that is all around us. The hype can't be "what we got for Christmas" but must rather be: what did God give at Christmas?

Christmas is about God sending his Son to be born of a woman, to become a human being in order to take upon himself our deserved punishment for sin (death) and give us what we don't deserve: eternal life! When that is central in our minds, when that message is highlighted in our Christmas gatherings, then the joy of salvation will come out in different ways. And if we choose to express that joy – in a spirit of thankfulness to God – by giving our loved ones a gift, what can be against it?

## Gifts fit for Christmas?

A better question to ask is: what kind of gifts are we giving and how are we using them? Are they a help or a hindrance to us in living as Christmas people? As people touched by the Christmas message? Some gifts we give will be highly practical – like a new winter coat, long under-wear, or warm socks – but many will be intended simply for our pleasure – a chocolate letter, a puzzle, a book, a video, perfume, or perhaps, yes, even an iPod Touch!

It's good to ask ourselves: do these gifts fit with the message of Christmas? A book normally makes a fine gift but what if it's a raunchy romance novel or low-brow crime caper? What if the book or video has an engaging story but contains the blaspheming of God's Name or the Name of the Christmas Child? What if we give chocolate or candy to someone whom we know struggles with over-eating? We need to be discerning participants in

our surrounding culture and part of that is to be discerning gift-givers. If the Child whose birth we celebrate came to set us free from sin's slavery and filth, how can we give gifts which flaunt sin or even give sin a new foot-hold in someone's life? The gift should allow the receiver to truly enjoy the fruits of Christ's saving work and be experienced or employed as a blessing.

## Gifts which connect

I wonder if we give enough thought to this when it comes to gifts of *communication*. In the last decade, we've seen an explosion of electronic media hit the market and enter our homes. Many of us have a Blackberry strapped to our hip or an iPhone in our pocket or iPod ear-buds dangling around our neck – and our teens are increasingly among them. How many of us didn't buy one of these for our teens this Christmas?

The common attraction to these products is their ability to increase our communication – both in-coming and out-going. Each has its specific use but all excel in connecting us with others. Two of them serve as cell phones, all three link to the Internet, give access to email and text messaging. The iPod Touch (the latest!) allows an almost unlimited number of music files to be loaded for listening pleasure. This makes long bus-rides entertaining or bike-rides more interesting or walking through the mall less of a bore. Many adults need at least a cell phone and email access for work but most teens are making use of this technology for staying in touch with friends (and parents!) and general entertainment.

## Person-to-person priority

Now, it's not that these gadgets are sinful in themselves, but are we using them in a Christmas-friendly way? I have been at restaurants where mothers or fathers are thumbing away on their phones while their three-year-old is desperately trying to get their attention. I have seen parties of 8 (extended) family members sitting down

for a nice meal and three of them – two teens and one adult in this case – were absorbed in text messaging or emailing! I have been in gatherings where suddenly someone's phone vibrates and – mid-conversation – the person walks out of the room to answer it without so much as an "excuse me!"

Such people have lost all sense of how rude it is to consider the communication of someone miles away (maybe continents away!) of more importance than to speak with the family member or friend sitting right beside you! Unless it's a genuine emergency, the people you're with should take priority over the people far away. By all means, keep up contact with those friends and family elsewhere but not during face time with other family or friends. Phone them after the meal and discuss life, but not during dinner! Of all occasions, a family dinner at a quiet restaurant should be a time for talking and laughing together but many of us seem to get lost in our own self-made world of electronic chatter of 140 characters or less! We are in danger of exchanging meaningful, in-person discussion with empty prattle of no consequence over wireless networks!

### Touched by an iPod?

iPods hold an additional but similar danger. I've witnessed adults and teens alike with ear-buds firmly embedded completely absorbed in their own world as they mingle in the midst of others. They plunk down beside someone on the school bus or public transit without so much as a "hello" and carry-on in their own head-space. I've seen that done right in my own van! It's as if you don't exist and the iPodder (new word) couldn't care less. The volume is up loud enough to block out surrounding sounds so that when you ask, "So, did you hear that the Jets beat the Leafs *and* the Canucks last week?!" there's no sound of disbelief, not even an incredulous gasp! *Hello? Anybody home?* It made me think: imagine if the shepherds in the fields had each been wearing iPods, staring into their camp-fire – they might never have heard the angels singing in the sky!

### Christmas communication

But the shepherds did hear – God saw that. Christmas is about communication. It's the act of God sending his Word to become flesh! Think about that: God wanted so much to make something crystal clear to us that he wrapped the message in a human nature and announced his arrival by myriads of angels chorusing in the night! The shepherds who heard then went to see the

babe in the manger and afterwards went on their way spreading the word about this child!

And it's been that way ever since. John the Baptist came to prepare the way of the Lord and he did it through *preaching*. When Jesus later began his official ministry then he did so proclaiming a message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt 4:17). And at the conclusion of his earthly work the Saviour commanded his church to "Go and make disciples of all nations. . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Christians are nothing if we are not communicators! The message we've heard, the Christmas gospel of the Savior's birth combined with the Easter gospel of his death and resurrection can never be kept to ourselves!

We must speak to the world outside but we also must speak to the brotherhood within. Jesus came to save his people, to purchase his church with his blood, to form a *community* of people under his headship. A community by definition *commun*es within itself. Members of a community *communicate* with each other. We fellowship together, which at a minimum means speaking together, conversing about life as Christian pilgrims. It means we care about each other, ask questions, show an interest in and give a priority to the needs of others.

A Christian may not cloister in his own little world. We are not the caterpillar which hides in a cocoon but we are the butterfly who spreads his wings and blesses others by showing his beautiful colors. And God has made each of us "beautiful" for he has given of his Spirit and his gifts to every one of his children so that all have something special to share with others.

### Taming the technology

All of this means we should carefully examine how we and our children are using the technology – have a discussion about discussion with your teens this Christmas holiday. Are we using these new and unprecedented tools of communication to bless our church community and spread the message of grace into the world? Is the Lord pleased with how we treat our neighbours with these tools? Are the text messages we send adding value to someone's life or is it a waste of everyone's time? And are we giving due attention to the person in the room with us or on the bus seat beside us? Let's not pretend we are "helping" a neighbour far away (via texting) when we virtually ignore the neighbour right next to us. If you switched the phone to "off" and took the ear-buds out, would it not clearly show to the person you are with that you care about them? That you want to give them your time and focus?



Let's become fully Christian communicators. Let's analyze what comes in through our ear buds and what goes out through our cell phones and see if all content agrees with the Christmas message. Let's also analyze how we use our iPods and iPhones to see if we are doing

it in a Christ-like manner. Jesus may never have thumbed a text message or wore ear-buds but if he had he would never have let them interfere with love for God or love for his neighbour. Let's follow suit and if we must have them let's employ them for the King born in Bethlehem!




# Clarion

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5  
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202

**Subscriptions:** clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca

**Advertisements:** clarionads@premierpublishing.ca

**Website:** www.premierpublishing.ca

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One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

<b>Subscription Rates for 2012</b>	<i>Regular Mail</i>	<i>Air Mail</i>
Canada  	\$49.00 *	\$ 84.00 *
U.S.A. U.S. Funds	\$69.00	\$ 92.00
International	\$98.00	\$149.00

\* APPLICABLE GST, HST, PRT TAXES ARE EXTRA – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$18.00 per column inch

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# God With Us

“‘And they will call him Immanuel’ – which means, ‘God with us.’”

(Matthew 1:23)

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God the Son has received many exceptional names, such as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, King of kings, Saviour, the Anointed One, Shepherd, and Lamb of God. The one to which we now give attention is “Immanuel,” which means, “God with us.”

Immanuel particularly points to the incarnation, namely, that God became man. This name also calls attention to the real spirit of the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Much of the talk we may hear about the spirit of Christmas misses the point. Too often it is limited to feelings of nostalgia, family togetherness, and kindness to the poor, the lonely, and the hurting. While of course all these are important, our focus needs to be on what God has done and is doing in Christ Jesus. In him God is with us. What an awesome truth!

## God with us

That Jesus was conceived in Mary without a human father was an amazing miracle. So is the reality that one person can be both God and man. It is also an awesome fulfillment of the LORD’s covenant that God should be with us (Exod 34:10). How stupendous, that God who ought to consume stiff-necked humans (Exod 33:3, 5) is with us!

From the perspective of the evil character we inherited from Adam and Eve, we are disgusting creatures. Think of it: man was created to be a perfect image of the perfect God, who enveloped us in love and blessed us beyond anything we could imagine. Yet we dared to think that the Almighty could be a liar. What we did was truly shocking: “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (Gen 6:5). Even so, in Christ, holy God is with us!

## God with us

Jesus Christ did not just work his miracles and salvation from heaven, nor did he take on only the appearance of a man, something different than true humanity. Jesus could not have been more *with us*, for he was born as a true man, suffering through the pains of a human birth, experiencing all the stresses, distresses, and weaknesses that are ours. He did not sin, but he did assume the human nature impacted by the curse of sin. “By sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, [God] condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:3, ESV).

“He had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17). With us in our suffering, with us in our sin, Christ delivers us from suffering and sin by appeasing the wrath of the Judge of all the earth, the only anger that truly matters.

## God with us

In Eden God walked with man. His children were in his presence and delighted in him. Nothing is more precious to a man than to be in the Lord’s presence. Sadly, Adam was later shut out of the Garden. God’s holiness stood in sharp contrast with man’s sin, and his rejection of sinners was expressed by expelling man from his presence.

After Israel’s terrible sin with the golden calf, the Lord told Moses to lead the people into the land flowing with milk and honey. An angel would go with them and would drive out the people living in Canaan. However, God himself would not go up with this stiff-necked people, lest his holy zeal destroy them. The presence of an angel and the promise of blessings were no consolation to Israel. Nothing could be more tragic than God’s refusal to go with his people. God and only God himself with us makes us his distinct people, his





## MATTHEW 13:52

covenant people, his forgiven people. As a type of Christ, Moses pleaded with the Lord that he would forgive them and go with them. Read this gripping story in Exodus 33:1 to 34:10. In 34:6-7 the Lord reveals his name to Moses, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love

and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."

That name of grace and forgiveness comes to its greatest expression in Jesus Christ – God with us, who in his mercy inhabits you and me by his Spirit. What an awesome thought!



*Seek first his kingdom  
and his righteousness,  
and all these things  
shall be yours as well.*

Matthew 6:33



# Vital Virginity

This chapter is republished with kind permission from the publisher: Moody. It is taken from Kevin L. DeYoung's fine new book on the Heidelberg Catechism called *The Good News We Almost Forgot: Rediscovering the Gospel in a 16th Century Catechism* (Chicago: Moody, 2010, 252 pages).

## Lord's Day 14

35. Q. What does it mean that he "was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary"?
- A. That the eternal Son of God, who is and remains true and eternal God, took to himself, through the working of the Holy Spirit, from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, a truly human nature so that he might become David's true descendant, like his brothers in every way except for sin.
36. Q. Does the holy conception and birth of Christ benefit you?
- A. He is our mediator, and with his innocence and perfect holiness he removes from God's sight my sin – mine since I was conceived.

The accounts of Jesus' birth in Matthew (chapter 1) and Luke (chapters 1-2) are clear and unequivocal: Jesus' birth was not ordinary. He was not an ordinary child and his conception did not come about in the ordinary way. His mother, Mary, was a virgin, having had no intercourse prior to conception. By the Holy Spirit, Mary's womb became the cradle of the Son's incarnation (Matt 1:20; Luke 1:35).

It's no secret that in recent history, the doctrine of the virgin birth (or more precisely, the virginal conception) has been ridiculed as fairytale make-believe by many outside the church, and not a few voices inside the church. Two arguments are usually mentioned.

First, the prophecy about a virgin birth in Isaiah 7:14, it is argued, actually speaks of a young woman and not a virgin. (To be fair, some scholars make this argument about Isaiah's prophecy and still believe in the virgin birth.) Many have pointed out that the Hebrew word in Isaiah is *almah* and not the technical term for virgin,

*bethula*. It is true that *almah* has a wider semantic range than *bethula*, but there are no clear references in the Old Testament where *almah* does not mean virgin. The word *almah* occurs nine times in the Old Testament, and wherever the context makes its meaning clear, the word refers to a virgin.

More importantly, the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures begun in the third century BC) translates *almah* with the Greek word *parthenos* (the same word used in Matthew 1:23 where Isaiah 7:14 is quoted), and everyone agrees that *parthenos* means "virgin." The Jewish translators of the Septuagint would not have used a clear Greek word for virgin if they understood Isaiah 7:14 to refer to nothing more than a young woman.

Second, many have objected to the virgin birth because they see it as a fairly typical bit of pagan mythologizing. They argue, "Star Wars has a virgin birth. Mithraism had a virgin birth. Christianity has a virgin birth. Big deal. They are all just fables." This is a popular argument and it sounds quite plausible at first glance, but there are a number of problems with it.

1. The assumption that there was a prototypical God-man who had certain tides, did certain miracles, was born of a virgin, saved his people, and then got resurrected is not well founded. In fact, no such prototypical "hero" existed before the rise of Christianity.
2. It would have been unthinkable for a Jewish sect (which is what Christianity was initially) to try to win new converts by adding pagan elements to their gospel story. I suppose a good Jew might make up a story to fit the Old Testament, but to mix in bits of paganism would have been anathema to most Jews.
3. The virgin birth parallels are not as strong as we might think. Consider three of the usual suspects, Alexander the Great, Dionysus, and Mithra. *Alexander's* most reliable ancient biographer (several centuries after his death) makes no mention of a virgin birth. Besides, the story that began to circulate (after the rise of Christianity, it's worth mentioning) is about an unusual conception, but not a virgin birth (Alexander's parents



were already married), *Dionysus* was born when a god (in this case Zeus) disguised himself as a human and impregnated a human princess. This is not a virgin birth and not like the Holy Spirit's role we read about in the gospels. *Mithra*, a popular parallel was born of a rock, not a virgin. Moreover, the cult of *Mithra* in the Roman Empire dates to after the time of Christ so any dependence is Mithraism on Christianity and not the other way around.

To the Greek warrior, the Greek god, and the cult of *Mithra*, we can add Buddha: his mother dreamed that Buddha entered her in the form of a white elephant. But this story doesn't appear until five centuries after his death and she was already married. You get the drift. The so-called parallels always occur well after the life in question, well into the Christian era, and are not really stories of virginal conceptions anyway.

But even for those who believe in the virgin birth, it is sometimes questioned whether the doctrine is really that important. For example, one pastor has argued, in what has become a very well-known passage, that the virgin birth may not be all that essential. "What if Jesus had an earthly father named Larry?" he asks. What if the virgin birth was thrown in to appeal to the followers of *Mithra* and *Dionysian* religious cults? What if the word for virgin referred to a woman who became pregnant the first time she had intercourse? He suggests that none of this would be catastrophic to the Christian faith. "What if that spring [the virgin birth] was seriously questioned? Could a person keep jumping? Could a person still love God? Could you still be a Christian? Is the way of Jesus still the best possible way to live?"

There are a lot of questions here, but the underlying one seems to be this: Is the virgin birth really that essential to Christianity? The answer, the pastors' insinuation notwithstanding, is a resounding Yes!

First, the virgin birth is essential to Christianity because it has been essential to Christianity. That may sound like circular reasoning, but only if we care nothing about the history and catholicity of the church. Granted, the church can get things wrong, sometimes even for a long time. But if Christians, of all stripes in all places, have professed belief in the virgin birth for two millennia, maybe we should be slow to discount it as inconsequential. In his definitive study of the virgin birth, J. Gresham Machen

concluded that "there can be no doubt that at the close of the second century the virgin birth of Christ was regarded as an absolutely essential part of the Christian belief by the Christian church in all parts of the known world." Perhaps, then, we should not be so hasty in dismissing the doctrine as a take-it-or-leave-it element of the Christian faith.

Second, the gospel writers clearly believed that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived. We don't know precisely how the Christ child came to be in Mary's womb, except that the conception was "from the Holy Spirit" (Matt 1:20). But we do know that Mary understood the miraculous nature of this conception, having asked the angel "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34). The gospels present the virgin birth as "an orderly account" of actual history from eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4). If the virgin birth is false, the historical reliability of the gospels is seriously undermined.

Third – and this intersects with the Catechism – the virgin birth demonstrates that Jesus was truly human and truly divine. How can the virgin birth be an inconsequential spring for our jumping when it establishes the very identity of our Lord and Savior? If Jesus had not been born of a human, we could not believe in his full humanity. But if his birth were like any other human birth – through the union of a human father and mother – we would question his full divinity. The virgin birth is necessary to secure both a real human nature and a completely divine nature.

Fourth, the virgin birth is essential because it means Jesus did not inherit the curse of depravity that clings to Adam's race. Jesus was made like us in every way except for sin (Heb 4:15; 7:26-27). Every human father begets a son or daughter with his sin nature. We may not understand completely how this works, but this is the way of the world after the fall. Sinners beget sinners (Ps 51:5). Always. So if Joseph was the real father of Jesus, or Mary had been sleeping around with Larry, Jesus is not spotless, not innocent, and not perfectly holy. And as a result, we have no mediator, no imputation of Christ's righteousness (because he has no righteousness to impute to us), and no salvation.

So, yeah, the virgin birth is essential to our faith.





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# Canticles

## The Song of Hannah.

1. My heart is filled with joy;  
 my voice I will employ  
 to praise the LORD my Sa - viour.  
 I mock my en - e - my  
 for God has set me free  
 and shown to me his fa - vour.

2. There is none like the LORD  
who is by us adored,  
the Holy One of Israel.  
There is no one like God,  
whom we will praise and laud.  
Our Rock is God eternal.

3. Don't talk pretentiously  
or speak so boastfully  
for God pays close attention.  
The LORD gives careful heed  
and weighs out every deed  
of hurtful men and women.

4. He breaks the warrior's bow  
but lifts up those laid low  
and arms them with his power.  
The ones who were well fed  
go begging for their bread  
but God feeds those who hunger.

5. The barren wife is blest  
with nurselings at her breast,  
a household full of children.  
The one with fertile womb  
is filled with morbid gloom:  
a fretful anxious person.

6. The LORD gives life, and kills,  
and does whate'er he wills  
for he is God Almighty.  
He raises from the dust  
all those who in him trust  
and gives them thrones of glory.

7. This world is God's domain;  
his saints he will sustain  
as they walk on securely.  
The wicked he will ban;  
he'll silence evil man  
in darkness, black and gloomy.

8. 'Tis not by human might  
that one is proven right;  
God will judge his opponent.  
The king he will supply  
with power from on high  
and raise up his anointed.







Peter Holtvlüwer



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# Jubilee Woman

## (Part 1 of 3)

The following is a slightly adapted speech that was given to the sisters gathered at the 50th annual Ontario Women's League Day hosted by the Spring Creek congregation on October 19, 2011. To fully benefit from what follows, please read in advance *Leviticus 25:1-13* and *Luke 4:14-21*. This is part 1 of 3.

### Lady Frantic

I'd like to begin by introducing you to a lady some of you may know. When you meet her, you can see the lines of strain creasing across her forehead and the look of anxiety in her eyes. She is a woman heavily burdened. Her burden is not physical – her health is good over-all. Her burden is not financial – she and her husband have all they need. Her worry is not being childless – God has given them several children. She can, in fact, count quite a few blessings in her life and yet she is a woman under oppression.

She is a lady on the run, torn between this obligation and that, hustling to meet this expectation and that one. She is physically on the run, back and forth to pick up the kids from the soccer field, the hockey rink, piano lessons, taekwondo, or school events; she's off to this parents' meeting, that committee meeting, this study evening, that choir performance, this evangelism event. She flies over to an aging parent to visit, drops in at a sibling, phones a friend who has issues, drops off a meal at the home of sick church member, all the while answering constant text messages from her 15 and 17 year-olds from wherever they are! She has many balls in the air and she is struggling with the juggling.

This is a lady under constant pressure – got to make sure there's enough food in the house for the family and that it's mostly healthy stuff; make sure the kids have proper clothing - clothing that's stylish and preferably brand name (yet not too expensive!). Keep on top of the home-work and Catechism. Be there for those talks, address their needs, have constant communication – oh, and be there to support your husband as well! Listen to his concerns, give him the time and attention he needs. And when this lady attends the Ed-Com meeting or Ladies'

Aid or goes to Bible Study, then she not only has to come prepared but she has to look good.

She has countless obligations and she must meet them all and she must meet them well or she will be a failure. Fear of failure makes her life frantic – she's a woman who knows no rest and has no peace and is at times border-line depressed. And she doesn't know what to do about it. Have you met this woman before?

### Cultural Egypt

I think she may be rather familiar in our midst and I'd like to suggest to you, sisters, that this woman is under a modern-day form of slavery and oppression. Much like the Israelites were trapped in Egypt and forced to serve under Pharaoh's whip, many women – unbelievers and believers alike – are in a cultural Egypt, forced to serve the demands and expectations placed upon them by others or even by themselves.

There are differences, of course. Today's oppression is not *physically* brutal but mentally and emotionally it often takes as big a toll. It may even be, in that respect, somewhat worse because at least the Israelites knew who the enemy was – the Egyptians! They yearned to be free from the enemy's grip, but for the woman living in today's Egypt, who is the enemy? It is not always so clear and this adds to the frustration and panic because even if you realize things are not right, that they have to change, what do you go after and why? Who or what is oppressing the women of Canada in 2011? And how can they be set free?

### Jubilee gospel

I'd like to answer that second question first by speaking about the gospel of Jubilee. Today as sisters you celebrate fifty years of meeting together and that number fifty is a special one in the Bible. We read about it in *Leviticus 25* – it was a time of celebration and great rejoicing because in that year as in no other since their release from Egypt, the people of God experienced freedom! They experienced renewed liberty from some of the worst forms of oppression in their day.



## Sabbath rest

To get the full picture of the year of Jubilee, it's important to realize that it was the climax of a whole system of important celebrations. Leviticus 25 starts off speaking about the Sabbath year, which was to take place every seventh year, but the Sabbath Year is based upon and built upon the weekly Sabbath Day. From the beginning of Israel's release from Egypt, the LORD was insistent that his people were to rest every Sabbath Day. Look carefully to one of the key reasons why as given in the Fourth Commandment:

Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant *may rest, as you do*. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an out-stretched arm (Deut 5:13-15).

The Sabbath Day was assigned as a day to remember their release from Egypt's oppression! In Egypt they were forced to work seven days a week under a ruthless dictator. Work was back-breaking, work was relentless and the people had no rest. But the LORD set them free from that misery, broke the power of their slave masters and gave to his people the precious gift of rest!

God did not make us to be work-aholics. God did not design us to be enslaved and oppressed. As humans our highest purpose is to know and enjoy our Creator and while work is a gift of God and has its proper place, it is not to *consume* the people of God! And so God renewed the creation Sabbath as a day of physical rest so the Israelites might enjoy their freedom always, be reminded of their high calling in life, have time to worship God and remember the rest he freely gave them!

## Reverse the curse

God's salvation, however, goes further than release from Egypt's oppression and to show that God gave also a Sabbath year. Not just one day every week to stop and rest but one year every seven! They were promised an abundant harvest in the sixth year to get them through the following two years until the crop of the eighth year would come in. In the meantime, they were to let the land rest, refraining from active farming in the seventh year. They could pick what grew freely of itself for their own food, but they were to make no production out of harvesting. God's people were to rest and God's land was to rest so that the people and land might experience some relief in the midst of a sin-cursed world!

For that is ultimately what lies behind all the various Sabbath laws – the LORD is undoing the curse! When Adam and Eve fell into sin, the harmony of creation was shattered. The peaceful and blessed cycle of work and rest, of planting and harvesting, of earth cooperating with man and man exercising stewardship over the earth for God's glory – all of that came to a grinding halt. Man's sin brought punishment, a curse on the ground which now would only produce under pressure from man's painful and sweat-soaked toil. There would be difficulty and pain in the whole child-birthing process. Nothing worked smoothly anymore. The animal kingdom fell into inner-hostility even as it became outwardly hostile toward man; the plant world no longer gave of itself freely for man's benefit, and human beings among themselves became antagonistic toward each other and toward God. Nothing worked right.

There was no peace and there was no rest – until the LORD intervened! Until he gave the promise of a Saviour and gave a sign of his redeeming work in the Sabbaths! The weekly Sabbath was and remains a message of hope: *God has come to reverse the curse!*

## Jubilee's jubilation!

A Sabbath day every week, a Sabbath year every seventh year – can you imagine a whole year off the back-breaking work of farming? The curse of sin would not triumph! It would not have the last say and those who put their trust in the LORD could enjoy some relief and rest every week, every seventh year and then in a most special and jubilant way every fiftieth year, the year of Jubilee!

Leviticus 25:8 relates the two as follows: "Count off seven Sabbaths of years – seven times seven years – so that the seven Sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years." Now, this number seven, as you likely know, is a key number throughout the Bible, signifying perfection, wholeness. Some have called it the number of God. So when God commands that every seventh Sabbath year is to mark off another special year, immediately we know that this is a very special occasion, the climax of all those Sabbath years. On the heels of the seventh Sabbath year is to follow the year of Jubilee. Year forty-nine would be a Sabbath year and then year fifty would be another one, a special Jubilee!

That would make two years in a row where the people did not have to work the land – a double time of grace! – but there is much more! The LORD specifies the purpose of this fiftieth year in Leviticus 25:10, "Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim *liberty* throughout the land to all its inhabitants." Put this all together and you see that the character of God's Jubilee, the character of the crown of *all* the Sabbaths can be summed up in one word: "Liberty!"



## Freedom for God's people

More than physical rest for the land and people, Sabbath and Jubilee are all about freedom for God's people! It's all about restoration of what was lost and freedom from slavery to live again as an independent person before the LORD. We read in verse 10, "Each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan. . . everyone is to return to his own property." Such a law prevented continual poverty and slavery among the Israelites. In our sinful, broken world, business ventures can go wrong. Bad decisions are made, disaster strikes, and a person's living is lost. People in those days couldn't live on credit as long as we can today. Government social programs simply didn't exist. The lender would demand payment quickly and if you couldn't pay, you had to forfeit your property. And if your property wasn't enough to cover your debt, you may even have to become a slave of the lender, literally working off your debt. So life could become miserable and demeaning, with little hope for improvement and no thought of enjoying life in God's promised land. It sometimes happened that God's people entered into a new form of oppression – financial slavery, landlessness, poverty.

But the Year of Jubilee was meant to change that situation! The Jubilee was there to give hope, to give a new start, to give restoration. All the Israelite slaves were to be set free in the Jubilee and everyone was to be given their property back. It was as if every fifty years God wiped the slate clean for his people and gave them a chance to begin again! God had purchased his people out of Egypt by the blood of the Lamb. He was their God, their owner, their Lord and he would not see them go back into another form of slavery. For freedom the LORD had set his people free and they were not to return to Egypt – to any form of oppression! The LORD was their Master and they were to live under him and enjoy his freedom!

## Fulfillment in Christ

This is what the Lord Jesus is talking about when he quotes from the prophecies of Isaiah as we read it in Luke 4:18-19, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." The year of the Lord's favour was another way of speaking about the great year of Jubilee. After all, what was that year but a year of God's undeserved favour, of his mercy and grace? In Jubilee, people with debt up to their eyeballs were forgiven it all. Indentured servants could go home. People without a property could go back to the

family farm and start over. None of it deserved, none of it earned. It was a year of grace for Israel like no other since the day they left Egypt and now Jesus says, "I've come to usher in the greatest Jubilee ever!"

In fulfillment of all of Yahweh's promises of old, the Lord Jesus was sent to proclaim freedom – freedom for the spiritual prisoners, freedom for the blind, freedom for the oppressed! As wonderful as the original Jubilee was for God's people, so much greater is the liberty which Christ brought, for he gets to the root of the problem. In Israel's day, God addressed the effects of the curse and provided relief from certain symptoms – the tyranny of toilsome labour, financial ruin, slavery. But in the Messiah, God goes much further and addresses the curse of sin itself!

## The horns of freedom

That was already foreshadowed in the Jubilee instructions of the LORD, for did you notice on what day the Jubilee was to begin? We read in Leviticus 25:9, "Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land." The Day of Atonement was that uniquely special day where the High Priest would enter the most holy place in the tabernacle, where he would take some of the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkle it on the mercy seat over the Ark of the covenant! That act would ensure God's forgiveness of the people for all their sins. It was the annual ceremony of national guilt-cleansing and right after that the Jubilee could begin! First the payment for sins, then freedom for the people! *Sound the trumpets, O priests!* First the blood of the lamb, then the enjoyment of life, true life for God's people! *Aaron, blow the horns of freedom!*

## Jubilee people

And Jesus came to make that payment once and for all, to do what the animal sacrifices could only foreshadow and symbolize but never accomplish in themselves. Jesus puts himself in the place of sinners and endures the righteous punishment of God against sin so that the curse can be forever broken! Jesus is the Lamb of God whose blood painted the beams of the cross so that all who find refuge on Golgotha, all who live in the shadow of the cross, are passed-over by the curse and instead receive blessing! Christ releases his people from the Egypt of sin and the Pharaoh called Satan so that his people – Christians – do not have to toil under the curse anymore! As far as the curse of sin extends in this world, so far does the payment of Christ extend, so far does his salvation reach! His slogan is the same as it always was but now with fullness: *reverse the curse!* His proclamation of liberty reaches to every form of oppression caused by sin or its consequences! He makes his people a Jubilee people – Jubilee men and Jubilee women!







# Welcome to Rev. Bouwman

## Installation and inaugural service

As the calendar was transitioning from September to October, and the changing of the seasons was visibly upon us, the congregation of Smithville was experiencing another significant change – one which was welcomed and long awaited. After a number of years without a minister of our own, our vacant pulpit was finally being filled. Through God's grace and according to his time and plan, we were able to receive Rev. Bouwman (officially) on our pulpit on September 25, 2011.

The morning service was lead by Rev. S.C. Van Dam (our counsellor during vacancy), who conducted the installation of our new minister. The afternoon service was then lead by Rev. Bouwman, who preached on the theme of "Paul the preacher begs for the prayers of the saints." Under this theme, we learned that Satan will try to tempt a preacher to stray from the true preaching of the Word and to cater to the listening ear. In this reality, the minister of the Word needs prayerful support. In using Paul's letter to the Ephesians as the basis for the message, Rev. Bouwman expressed how the preacher needs prayer for the content of what is preached, for encouragement and for strength. In Paul's experience, it was through the prayers of the Ephesians that he received strength from the Lord to persevere and to continue to speak and write while in prison. As a result, the Ephesians themselves benefitted as they received Paul's letters which helped to strengthen their faith. Rev. Bouwman explained that this has relevance for us in the context of present day Smithville, as God has sent us a preacher and Satan will attempt attacks on the preaching, in the way members talk about the minister, etc. In essence, he will attempt to demoralize everything. However, we can combat this through prayer and we are called upon to do such. In that, we were encouraged to pray for Rev. Bouwman fervently such that God will give him wisdom and words to preach to us as we need them. This is the first step of the minister-congregation relationship as it will allow growth in the Lord.



## Welcome evening

On Saturday, October 1, the weekend after installation, we had the opportunity to welcome Rev. Bouwman and his family to Smithville. The venue was our new church building, which provided the stage for a night of celebration and fellowship. The evening was lead by our MC, Jason Heemsker, who opened with Scripture reading and prayer. A few words of welcome were given to the Bouwman family and the goal of the evening was introduced as being one of integrating the Bouwmans to Smithville's culture. With that introduction, the Bouwman family was told that in order to begin to understand this culture, they needed to "sit where we have sat." And so, they were introduced to one of our old (and exceedingly uncomfortable) pews which was escorted to the front of the new church where the Bouwman family was sitting. Although the family acquiesced to our request to "sit where we have sat," they were not able to "last as long as we lasted" and needed to vacate the old bench for the comforts of our new pews in less than thirty minutes!

Moving on to the varied entertainment of the evening, things kicked off with several songs by the students of John Calvin School (those that are Smithville





a family” – more specifically, it was a Discover Niagara package consisting of passes for various attractions, events, etc. that would allow the family to spend quality time together. The evening’s entertainment was rounded out with the delivery of an envelope from a mysterious elderly gentleman (a Smithville tradition) which consisted of an excerpt from Rev. Bouwman’s “personal diary.” The excerpt, which was entitled “Musings of a Minister,” was read aloud by our MC for all to hear. We learned

residents), including a beautiful version of Psalm 116:1 and 2. This was followed by another musical piece in the form of a piano solo from young Karissa Van Egmond. As the entertainment advanced, so did the age of the performers, with the next piece being a skit from the Young Peoples Society in which they provided some insight into what the Bouwmans can expect when they host a YPS evening. Rod Tenhage and Alex Ravensbergen then teamed up, on accordion and organ respectively, to play several pieces and lead the congregation in song. The Men’s Society then pitted the male Bouwmans against the female Bouwmans in a game of matching catechism students to their parents. This was followed by another game presented by the Women’s Society in which Rev. Bouwman competed against Mrs. Bouwman in trying to identify “famous” Smithville landmarks. While Mrs. Bouwman was the clear cut winner, Rev. Bouwman could certainly argue her upbringing in nearby Pelham gave her the competitive advantage. Several gift presentations were next on the agenda and included a photo directory of the students and staff of John Calvin School as well as a gift basket from the congregation. The basket represented the gift of “time spent together as



many insightful things about Rev. Bouwman and his family, and one might say we may never look at his facial features (or those of some congregational members) in quite the same way.

Rev. Bouwman, resplendent in a bright yellow tie, then took the stage to say a few words of thanks and to introduce the congregation to himself and his family through a slide presentation.

The evening was closed in prayer by Roy Hummel and the singing of Hymn 78. The verses of that hymn provided a fitting end to the evening and to the journey of receiving a new minister in our midst. In this hymn of praise, the congregation could again be reminded how everything is guided by God’s hand, how he provides according to the measure of one’s needs, and how all praise for all things ought to be given to him.







# Guido de Brès Christian High School – Commencement 2011

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” These words from Jeremiah 29:11 describe the celebration of 115 students from Guido de Brès Christian High School. The graduands made plans, with their families and friends, to attend their commencement on October 1. And, as they came to the luncheon in the school gymnasium, their plans became reality. Inside the school they attended for four years, they reunited with classmates to begin their day, realizing also that it is the Lord that allowed for these plans to be made and carried out; realizing that the Lord has directed their paths through their years of high school, and also now as they have started a new part of their life after high school.

The formal graduation ceremony began with the entrance of the graduands into Hamilton Place, in front of their parents, grandparents, siblings, other family and friends. The first song, *A New Commandment*, includes the words that we must “love one another as [Jesus] has loved us.” Indeed, these graduands were loved by their parents when they were sent to a school where God’s name could be praised and glorified in everyday activities and classes.

After a word of opening from Mr. A. Kampen, vice-chairman of the board, Mr. J. G. VanDooren, principal of the school, addressed the graduands. He spoke of the desire of the school to shape God-fearing people, and encouraged the former students to look back on their years at Guido. He reflected on water which can be both a blessing (a source of life) and a curse (in tsunamis and hurricanes), and on how Jesus promises to give a living water, one which “will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). For their future planning, he expressed his desire that the graduands desire this living water as they continue in their lives after high school.

Rev. D. Wynia, of the Vineyard Canadian Reformed Church in Lincoln, then spoke on the topic of being



disciples of Christ. In Matthew 16:24 Jesus tells his followers to “deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Rev. Wynia described how difficult this may be, and how denying ourselves and serving others is contrary to our own nature. There are many voices that are calling out in our lives, and also in the lives of young people, but we must listen to the voice of Christ. We must follow the example of Christ, and live a life of servitude. Even if there are uncertainties in our lives, if our plans include the decision to be a disciple of Christ, and to follow his commands, then we won’t go wrong.

The graduands became graduates, as the diplomas were presented to each student by Mr. Kampen,



# Ontario Secondary School Diplomas

Harry Aasman  
Deanna Linnette Bartels  
Graham Derek Bartels  
Kerri Breanna Bartels  
Steven Frank Boot  
Justin Richard Bos  
Rebecca Margret Bos  
Rachael Bosma  
Stephanie Ruth Breukelman  
Tracy Christine Breukelman  
Kevin Dylan Buist  
Nicholas Edward Dantuma  
Rachel Deboer  
Matthew Herman DeBoersap  
Rachel Claire DeHaan  
Andrew Kenneth DeJong  
Jonathan Adam Dekker  
Hette Derek Feenstra  
Jodi Lynn Feenstra  
Ruth Ann Feenstra  
Ryan Matthew Fربول  
Anna-Lynn Gracey  
Michael Steven Gracey  
Melissa Tina-Dawn Haining  
Alexander Daniel Albert Heemskerk  
Angela Jane Heemskerk  
Kevin James Heeringa  
Kaylee Brianna Hofsink  
Kimberly Nicole Hordyk  
Lisa Aimee Hordyk  
Nicole Elena Victoria Horlings  
Jolien Huijgen  
Leanne Danielle Hummel  
Katelyn Janelle Hutten  
Kyle Stephen Jager  
Matthew Peter Jager  
Rachel Joanne Jansema  
Natalie Danielle Jongsma  
Ashley Grace Kamstra

Steven Kamstra  
Esther Clara Kelly  
Aren Benjamin Kingma  
Adrian Daniel Knegt  
Bradley Logan Knegt  
Cassandra Lynn Knegt  
Chantelle Dianne Knol  
Rianna Joanna Komdeur  
Nadine Alida Krikke  
Andrew John Ligtenberg  
Matthew Aaron Linde  
Nathan Harvey Linde\*  
Samantha Joy Linde  
Brendon Robert Lodder  
Keegan William Lodder  
Benjamin Ross Loopstra  
Alaina Danielle Ludwig  
Rachelle Brianna Ludwig  
Candice Amber Mans  
Taylor Ray Muis  
Marc Benjamin Mulder  
Benjamin Nobels  
Lauren Justine Nordeman  
Andrew John Oosterhoff  
Erin Janell Oosterhoff  
Darrin Post  
Dylan Post  
Gregory Post  
Nicole Aileen Ravensbergen  
Andrew William Redwood  
James Alexander Reinink  
David Robert Schoon  
Kaitlyn Marie Schoon  
Philip Edward Schouten  
Benjamin Jacob Schulenberg  
Kevin William Schulenberg  
Joshua Dennis Skinner  
Devon Blake Sloots  
Tamsin Johanna Sloots

Ryan Sybrand Spanninga  
Karyn Elisabeth Strating  
Taylor Victoria Tamminga  
Shane William Tenhage  
Nicholas Gerald Terpstra  
Jasmine Elaine Togeretz  
Stephen Paul Torenvliet  
Alan Edward VanAnDel  
Barry Martin VanAnDel  
Melissa Christina VanAnDel  
Jaclyn Irene van Barneveld  
Julia Rachel VanDasselaar  
Joshua Dale VanderBruggen  
Michelle Maria VanderGugten  
Laura Geraldine Vanderhout  
Kristina Anne VanderVeen  
Jason Paul VanderVelde  
Valerie Alexandra Vanderwoude  
Edward Matthew VanDyk  
Eric Ryan VanEgmond  
Alissa Rose VanEs  
Michelle Wilhelmina VanGoolen  
Gavin Hein VanLuik  
Jordan Robert VanSpronsen  
Warren Adam VanSydenborgh  
Jared Ryan Vermeulen  
Thomas Nathan Vis  
Alexandra Rose Walters  
Valerie Michelle Wanders  
Kenneth John Watson  
Jessica Lynn Werkman  
Kaitlin Victoria Werkman  
Ryan Mark Wierenga  
Maegan Trudy Wieske  
Matthew Paul Wieske  
Rodney Charles Wieske  
Michael John Zwaagstra

\*Receiving the Ontario School Certificate

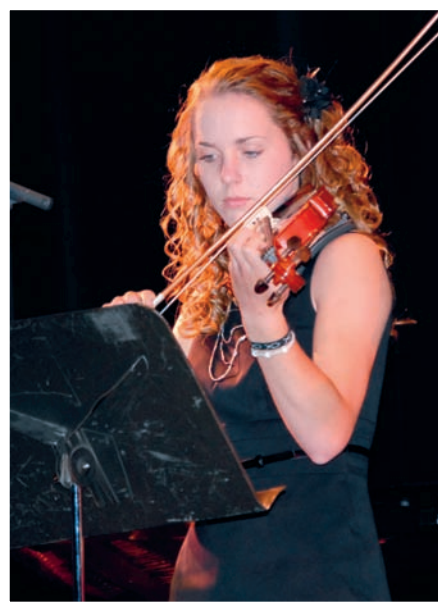


Matt deBoersap



Mr. VanDooren, and Mr. VanAndel. The class of 2011 was presented to the loud cheers of their families and friends. Several students were acknowledged for different accomplishments during their years at Guido: the Harry Aasman and George DeBoer Memorial Scholarships, given for exceptional academic achievement in university or university/college level courses; the Guido de Brès Proficiency Scholarships, given to students who achieved academic excellence in six university or university/college level courses and contributed to school life in general; the Governor General's Academic Medal, for the highest average in their Grade 12 year; the Guido de Brès Christian High School Participation Awards, for students who were actively involved during all their years at the school; the Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award, given to the student who had the most volunteer hours (over 600!); and the Dr. F. G. Oosterhoff Student-of-the-Year Award, given to a student who demonstrated Christian love in all aspects of school life, both academic and extracurricular.

Several of the graduates presented a musical performance, a song called *Something Eternal*, written for the commencement by Mr. Tim Nijenhuis. The lyrics of the each verse end with "until time runs out and the plan is all done," another reference to the plans of our Lord, as he brought these students through high school, and will continue to do so until the end of time. Matt deBoersap then represented his class as valedictorian. He used an old proverb, "we cannot control the wind, we can just set the sails," and mentioned that our plans are made with the knowledge of God, and that the Lord has set our plans for us. He also used another well-known phrase: "fail to plan, plan to fail," and we must remember our plans are always carried out if the Lord wills. We must remember that God controls the winds, and we should set our sails using his Word.



Jodi Feenstra

Another year, another class of graduates, and once again a reminder that the Lord has blessed Guido de Brès Christian High School. May he continue to grant his blessing on these graduates, along with their families, as they move forward in their lives, seeking to do his will, and following the plans he has laid out for them.





## Awards

### The Harry Aasman and George DeBoer Memorial Scholarships

Rachel Bosma  
Jodi Feenstra  
Cassandra Knegt  
Shane Tenhage

### The Guido de Brès Proficiency Scholarships

Ruth Feenstra  
Kaylee Hofsink  
Nicole Horlings  
Chantelle Knol  
Nadine Krikke  
Benjamin Nobels  
Dylan Post  
David Schoon  
Tamsin Sloots  
Taylor Tamminga  
Julia VanDasselaar  
Michelle VanderGugten  
Valerie Vanderwoude  
Michelle VanGoolen  
Warren VanSydenborgh  
Valerie Wanders

### The Governor General's Academic Medal

Jodi Feenstra

### The Guido de Brès Christian High School Participation Awards

Jodi Feenstra  
Cassandra Knegt  
Chantelle Knol  
Keegan Lodder  
Krista VanderVeen  
Valerie Vanderwoude  
Jared Vermeulen  
Matthew Wieske

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

Kaylee Hofsink

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

Chantelle Knol



# From the Publisher

*“Christ Jesus made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”*  
(Philippians 2:7)

## Entitled

We live in an age of entitlement. In this past year, we have seen “Occupy” protests, protests against austerity measures in Europe, and much political consternation on proposed cuts to the size of governments and their programs. Also closer to home, we are tempted to try to “keep up with the Joneses,” and advertisements constantly ensure us that we deserve more. We easily take for granted the blessings we have received, and consider ourselves entitled to them.

It is not so with our life and salvation. On the contrary, we know our sins and misery, and that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). We confess in Lord’s Day 4 and 5 of the Catechism that “we deserve temporal and eternal punishment.” It is only by grace that we do not get what we are entitled to.

When we consider the incarnation and birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see that it was not so for him either. If ever there was one entitled, surely it was he. But Paul writes that Christ “being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” What love the Saviour showed for his church to condescend to live among us as a servant! We read further that after he had humbled himself and become obedient to death, God exalted him and entitled him with “the name that is above every name.” Let us bring humble praise and devotion to our great King, through whom we have been given many undeserved blessings, also in this past year.

## Thank You

Much time and energy was given again in the past year to make each issue of *Clarion* possible. Thank you to our editor – Dr. J. Visscher – and co-editors – Rev. P. Holtvlüwer, Rev. E. Kampen, Rev. K. Stam, and Dr. C. Van Dam – for regularly gathering and preparing material to teach and encourage us. After his retirement, and decades of contribution to *Clarion*, Dr. Van Dam has agreed to continue with the team. Congratulations, and thank you! Our copy editor, Mrs. Laura Veenendaal, continues to organize and prepare copy for printing. Our thanks to you for doing this work cheerfully and dependably.

Thank you to our regular contributors – Treasures New and Old coordinator Dr. R. Bredenhof and writers, Education Matters coordinator Otto Bouwman and writers, Ray of Sunshine writers Corinne Gelms and Patricia Gelms, Rev. J. Van Popta, Rev. G. Van Popta, and Dr. W. Bredenhof – for filling the magazine with content.

Subscribers and advertisers, your support is essential in ensuring *Clarion* continues to enjoy success and make a positive contribution in our homes and churches. Thank you!

## Greetings

Greetings to you this Christmas and best wishes for the New Year! May we in our joy and celebration bow the knee to our faithful Saviour, and “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

*William Gortemaker*



James Visscher



Dr. James Visscher is co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia  
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# Report on the Western Ministerial held in Cedar Springs, WA from November 1 - 3, 2011

On Tuesday afternoon, November 1, 2011, the first guests began to arrive at the beautiful facilities of the Cedar Springs Conference Center in Sumas, Washington. In total thirty Canadian Reformed and United Reformed ministers and their wives came together for their annual Western Ministerial.

The Rev. Hendrik Alkema opened the Conference on behalf of the organizers, namely the ministers in the Bulkley Valley of BC, and welcomed all of those present. Our main speaker, Professor Alan Strange from Mid-America Theological Seminary presented his first of four addresses. It was called "the privilege of pardon" (1 Tim 1: 12-17) and in it he looked at who Paul was by nature, what he became by grace, and how he fostered God centredness.

The next morning he spoke on the "the privilege of preaching" (1 Thess 2:13) and pointed us to the nature of the Word, the role of the apostle and the responsibility of the hearers. Later that morning he addressed us on "the privilege of praying" (Acts 6:4) and proceeded to speak about the nature of prayer and the necessity for prayer in the life of the minister.

That afternoon time was set aside for fellowship, hiking, as well as a workshop dealing with Logos Bible software.

In the evening Prof. Strange addressed us on "the privilege of pastoring" (John 13:1 - 20). Using this famous passage about foot-washing, we were reminded about the ministry of our Lord and the humbling nature of Christian service and shepherding.







together. Great speeches, excellent meals, wonderful facilities, beautiful surroundings, and superlative fellowship will cause this gathering to be remembered for many years to come.



On Thursday Dr. Christine VanHalen-Faber addressed us on "Teaching and Reaching: Pastor as Pedagogue" and a lively discussion on catechetical instruction took place. Later she did a delightful presentation on "Growing Up In The Manse."

Before winding up the Conference, a discussion was held about next year's Conference. It was decided that the ministers in the western part of the Fraser Valley would organize the 2012 Conference.

As the attendees went home they did so full of thankfulness and encouragement for a wonderful time







# Ray of Sunshine

by Corinne Gelms and  
Patricia Gelms

## Always With Me

God is with me in the shadows, He is there in  
sunshine or rain  
Always with me in every trial, He is with me  
through each pain.  
God is with me in the night when I am lonely,  
He is there  
His love forever surrounds me, He takes every  
burden I bear.  
What He does for me, dear friend, He will do the  
same for you  
His power always protects me, faith in Him sees me  
through.  
God is with me on the mountain, He is there in  
the valley below  
He gives many blessings and favours, as into a  
new year we go.  
The tests in life we go through will some day be  
forever gone  
Even if our journey is not easy keep looking up  
and travel on.  
Just walk with God every day, lean on Him in  
humble prayer  
As we carry on in this new year, He is with you,  
do not fear.

## Birthdays in December

- 1 Sandy Spykma will be 30**  
c/o Peace Haven Homes  
6 Oneida Drive, Brantford, ON N3S 7X8
- 10 James Kamminga will be 27**  
Box 1125, Carman, MB ROG OJO
- 16 Julie Kamminga will be 23**  
Box 1125, Carman, MB ROG OJO

## Birthdays in January

- 2 Liz Koning will be 51**  
9905 152nd Street, Edmonton, AB T5P 1X4
- 7 Christine Breukelman will be 40**  
2225-19th Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4
- 14 Stephen Dykstra will be 29**  
Box 3573, Smithers, BC VOJ 2N0
- 17 Henry Driegen will be 56**  
#19-31450 Spur Ave., Abbotsford, BC V2T 5M3
- 17 Grace Homan will be 56**  
c/o Anchor Home  
361 Thirty Road S., RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
- 19 Edwin Schutte will be 28**  
844 Bowman Road, Abbotsford, BC V3G 1S9
- 19 Janine Smid will be 42**  
510 Second Street, Strathroy, ON N7G 3H8
- 30 Tyler Hoeksema will be 23**  
6755 Lorne Dr., Sardis, BC V2R 2G3

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday at this time of year. We hope and pray that you may enjoy your day with your family and friends in good health. May our Heavenly Father continue to bless you in this new year.

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, let us reflect on the gift of eternal life in him our Saviour. This gift we may celebrate every day of our lives. Glory be to him alone! May we wish you all God's rich blessings for the new year 2012 D.V. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

### *A note to all parents and caregivers*

If there are address changes that you are aware of, can you please let us know as soon as possible. We'd appreciate keeping the birthday list as current as possible.



If there is anyone who is interested in joining the birthday list, don't hesitate to inform us of this. Thanks so much. . . together we can keep bringing joy in the form of a birthday card to the lives of our special brothers and sisters.

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 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)







*Reviewed by Nick Schuurman*

Nick Schuurman  
(reviews@christiancourier.ca)  
serves as reviews editor for  
Christian Courier

## Why We Tell Stories: Tales from One Man's Life

### **Stories From Years Gone By** by Leendert Kooij. Toronto, ON: Leendert Kooij Records and Books, 2010

Fifty stories. Not a memoir, not an autobiography, not an historical account. Just fifty tales from the well-traveled suitcase of a storyteller's memory. That storyteller is a certain Leendert Kooij, and these stories paint a picture of childhood in Holland and youth spent in the radical transition of immigration.

#### **Difficult years**

Kooij, like so many others, lived through no few dark days. World War II, the "Hunger Winter," life in a nation limping under a struggling economy, and the difficulties of immigration would, in my mind, be reason enough to start these stories with the old cliché, "when I was your age." My generation does not understand the kind of life our parents and grandparents faced. For the most part, we live comfortably in worlds sheltered from the realities of war, hunger, and poverty.

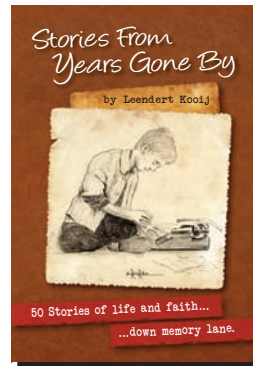
Kooij, however, chooses not to write with the patronizing tone one might expect. There is, in fact, an almost infectious joy in his writing. He describes times of difficulty for what they are, but throughout it all expresses immense gratitude at the simple pleasures he remembers and retells: a salted herring wrapped in newspaper, an old sweater, a mother's bedtime stories. This sense of contentment and enjoyment in the midst of scarcity is one of the book's gifts to younger generations, whose propensity to stockpile in search of happiness has left us as restless as ever.

#### **Simple faith**

Throughout these stories, he recalls the resilience of his family's simple, earthy faith. "That is the way things were back then," echoes his refrain, "we just trusted that God would provide." Like the Psalmist retracing the points of grace in Israel's history, Kooij recalls, with holy glee, God's faithful provision in its unlikely and unexpected forms. In this sense, the book forms a hymnbook of playful doxologies and indeed ought to be read as devotion.

Trust, however, is no excuse for idleness, and these stories reflect the deep-rooted work ethic of the Dutch immigrant community. Whether it was feeding chickens on a neighbour's farm, harvesting potatoes during summer break, or shovelling snow to save up money for skates, he

### **Awesome new book** "Stories From Years Gone By" By Leendert Kooij



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expresses a sense of satisfaction for work well done and a sense of joy for the chance to do so. Again, even in the midst of a recession, I am not sure my generation understands the commitment to labour that is retold in these stories.

#### **Travelling, prose**

The names that are scattered throughout the book will be as familiar as breathing itself to some and to



others will remain utterly unpronounceable points on a map. Middenmeer, Zwijndrecht, Rotterdam, Dordrecht, Wiergerwerft – it is across this landscape that he leads the reader in this series of stories. A nomad of sorts, Kooij has done well to carry stories with him as he went.

From time to time, he gets sidetracked, rambling off on tangential details. On more than one occasion, he catches himself and writes, “But I was going to tell you about...” While there are times when the amount of peripheral detail can be a bit much, the trait endears more than it detracts from the storytelling. After all, who hasn’t sat through a story and wondered, “Where is he going with this?” He always pulls the reader back, and the stories are all written with both direction and intention.

*Stories From Years Gone By* will find a welcome audience across generations. Those who walked similar paths themselves will be given a chance to reminisce and reflect on their own history and readers from the

generations that have now followed will be granted insight into the world that shaped their own. The book is written in clear and simple language that can be understood by young and old. Where there is an object, event or person that might not be known to a younger reader, or someone who did not grow up into the particularities of this culture, Kooij courteously offers an explanation.

### ***Why we tell stories***

We roll our eyes too quickly, as children. In our youth, it is difficult to see beyond our own place in history, to understand the stories and sacrifice that shaped us. It is only when we have lived long enough to have ourselves sacrificed and suffered for the sake of love that we understand why we are told stories and begin to tell them ourselves. Read this book, sit at the feet of a gifted storyteller, and be reminded of God’s good provision. 🍎





## Clarification re: Grabbing Hold of God in Prayer

Denver's annual Camp Eden was once again eloquently described by a sister whose gift for vivid expression makes readers wish they could have been there (*Clarion* Vol 60, No 22). As the speaker for the camp in 2011 I would like to take the opportunity to thank her for her fine work. However, there were a couple of expressions which made it into the write-up for which I would like to offer clarification.

First, the weekend theme was "Taking hold of God in prayer." We learned about God's command for us as his covenant people to take hold of his promises in prayer. We referenced Isaiah 64:7, 1 Timothy 6:12, 19, and Hebrews 6:18, among others. However, we also feasted upon the greatness and glory of God so that we wouldn't presume upon our privilege of being heard but would be ready always to submit to his will in case he would not grant our petitions. I avoided the expression "grabbing hold of God" since it is more open to misunderstanding.

Second, I do not know whether God has a sense of humour. We discussed this at camp based on an audience question. There are times, we noted, when God's providential guidance leads our lives in ways that we first said we would never go, and it is almost like God is laughing at our short-sightedness. But to say in general that God has a sense of humour is not something I was or am willing to speculate about apart from further study.

In closing, I would really like to encourage the church of Denver to continue putting on their yearly camp. It was a very edifying experience for those of us who visited from Canada, and surely it must also be a very unifying experience for the members of the congregation. I would also like to encourage the young, budding writer of the yearly report to continue writing such appealing accounts.

*Ted Van Raalte*

*The Denver Family Camp Committee thanks Rev. Van Raalte for his teaching during the weekend. We certainly wish to avoid misrepresenting a speaker, and are grateful for this avenue of clarification.*

## Dear Editor,

Brother Ed Vanwoudenberg suggests that the option of lots be made available to the churches when selecting office bearers. I am in full agreement. Let me make the case more forcefully.

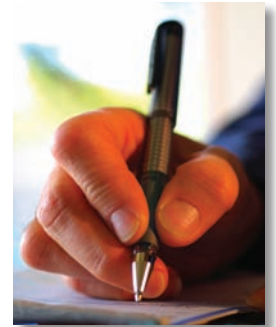
The question in the election debate should never have been framed as whether or not women ought to vote, but rather, "Should we (women or men) be voting for elders or deacons at all?" Whose church is this? Should not he be the one selecting the shepherds of his flock?

I fully agree with the four-step process put forward by Brother Vanwoudenberg. In the Bible men are either appointed or selected by lot, from the time of Moses to the appointment of elders by Titus. Two examples are worth expanding on.

When God instructed Samuel to anoint a son of Jesse to be king of Israel, Samuel did what most of us would do. He went first to the oldest son Eliab and said, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before him." But God's response was most instructive: "The LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). Jesse also falls prey to this way of thinking, parading seven of his sons in front of Samuel before thinking that David ought to be called out of the field.

The use of lots is pervasive in the Old Testament. Lots were used: to select the scapegoat (Lev 16:18); to select and distribute parcels of land (Josh 18); to decide who would fight first in battle (Judg 20:9, 18); to select a king (1 Sam 10); to determine who were the wrongdoers (Josh 7, Achin; 1 Sam 14, Jonathan); to determine offices and service in the temple (1 Chron 24-26).

However, lots were not only an Old Testament phenomenon. A relevant example in the New Testament is the account given in Acts 1. There, the apostles decide that the place of Judas needed to be filled. Peter sets out the criteria for nomination (as our church does). The brothers then put together a slate of men (as our church does). Then they prayed that God "who knows the hearts of all" might show which man he had chosen (as our church does). And then they cast lots between the two men and Matthias was chosen. Obviously, this is where our church deviates from the biblical example. It seems like our attitude is, "God knows the hearts of all, but what we know of the men is enough for us to take care of the selection process ourselves."



The benefits of the use of lots over the use of ballots are substantial:

- The use of lots demands a greater dependency on and trust in the providence of God;
- Lots remove the outer façade often considered in the election process;
- Lots have greater authority than ballots and ought to have greater legitimacy than ballots;
- Trusting that God is in control, lots can accommodate present and unknown weaknesses in men;
- Trusting that God is in control, lots can accommodate future and unknown challenges in the life of men;
- Trusting that God is in control, lots can select men whose potential for servant leadership would not otherwise be realized;
- Lots would properly put the selection process back into the hands of him whose church it is;

- Lots emphasize the importance and reality of the calling of the office as coming from God and not from the democratic majority – this for the benefit of the parishioner;
- Lots emphasize the importance of the calling of the office coming from God and not from the democratic majority – this for the benefit of the office bearer;
- Lots remove popularity from the equation;
- Lots aren't tainted by sin.

I am unaware of any compelling reason why we ought to continue with the use of the ballot when the Bible gives clear direction and example otherwise, and when the use of lots in the selection process could only deepen our dependence on our Providential Father. I suggest that we seriously consider changing the selection process of our office-bearers.

*André Schutten*

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







# The Voice of the Professing Believer

Dr. Karlo Janssen is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford, B.C.  
[rcjanssen@shaw.ca](mailto:rcjanssen@shaw.ca)

A number of issues ago (Vol. 60, Nos. 17 and 18) I wrote on the church political side to the matter of female communicant members participating by means of casting a ballot in the election of office-bearers. Since then a number of letters to the editor on this have been published, as well as an editorial by Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer. I also received a few communications addressed to me privately.

In what follows I will attempt to respond to that which has not yet received a response.

## “Shall”

In my previous articles I indicated there are various positions within the Dort tradition on the involvement of the congregation during the election of office-bearers. I described how over time an attempt was made to capture these various positions in one process for the election of office-bearers. That attempt has not been very successful. It has created a Church Order article which is open to multiple interpretations.

I have the impression that some draw the conclusion from my contribution that I would be against “women voting.” I am not against communicant female members voting, however.

So why did I write as I did? Because, in view of 1 Timothy 2:12, I am against women voting if voting is understood to be an act of authority. In my opinion, given the wording of CanRC CO-1983, Article 3, a strong case can be made for understanding it to define voting as an act of authority.

It all hinges on the word “shall.”

Br. Kuik (Vol. 60, No. 21) challenges my reading of the word “shall,” pointing out that the word “can be a ‘command’ or an ‘obligation’ but it can also be ‘intent.’” In a previous response I quoted the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary as proof that “shall” should probably be read as “obligatory.”

This time I turn to a gauge of public understanding: Wikipedia. On the legal use of the word “shall” it says:

Legislative acts and contracts sometimes use “shall” and “shall not” to express mandatory action and prohibition. However, it is sometimes used to mean “may” or “can.” The most famous example of both of these uses of the word “shall” is the *United States Constitution*, and claims that “shall” is in fact or is not used with these different meanings have caused discussion and have significant consequences for interpreting the text’s intended meaning. This confirms my conclusion that Article 3 CO is legitimately open to various understandings.

Personally, I still think “shall” tends to suggest “obligation” to people (see, e.g., [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) “shall,” definition 3). The Wikipedia article just referred to also mentions the following:

“Shall” derives from the Old English “sceal” meaning “must.” “Should” is the past simple and conditional form of “shall” . . . *Should* is used with a sense of quasi-obligation, synonymous with *ought to*. In more formal language shall (or the archaic second person variant “shalt”) is used for similar purpose: “Thou shalt not steal.”

This means that it is very legitimate for someone to argue that “those elected shall be appointed” means “those elected must be appointed” or “those elected ought to be appointed.” Br. Kuik is entitled to his opinion, I believe I am as entitled to mine.

Please do understand me correctly. My point is not that this must be read the way I see it. My point is rather that the current wording of the article is open to multiple interpretations. This creates dissension, dissension which can be avoided by revising Article 3 CO.

## Jurisprudence

Br. Kuik figures there is no need to change the Church Order. He writes: “The only issue is whether the congregational vote has decision-making authority. Synod 2010 said it did not.” Indeed, Synod 2010 said it did not (Article 176 consideration 3.9).

In our societal setting it is accepted practice to allow judgments to (re-)define laws. This is referred to as “case law” or “jurisprudence:” the wisdom (prudence) that arises from making judgments (*juris* = “of law”). Precedent plays a prominent role in the governmental structure of our society. Lawyers do their utmost to draw parallels between the cause they are pleading and previous cases they perceive to favour their desired outcome.

While I will not dispute the need to study “jurisprudence,” I do have issues with the weight attributed to it. It is not wise to have a Church Order with a measure of ambiguity which requires the researching of synod considerations if it is to be understood properly. Many readers will know about the complexity of the “*quia/ quatenus*” issue that became a catalyst for the Secession of 1834.<sup>1</sup> A Church Order that is legitimately open to various interpretations is a recipe for dissension, regardless of considerations by synods. Moreover, it can happen that subsequent synods contradict previous ones, and therefore synod considerations are not necessarily a reliable indicator for the meaning of a church order clause.<sup>2</sup>

We should also remember that our Church Order is not a confessional document. Our Church Order allows for the fact that it can be changed: “If the interest of the churches demand such, they *may and ought to* be changed, augmented, or diminished” (Article 76 CO; emphasis mine). In my opinion, the interest of the churches is served by a clear Church Order, certainly on this point. The very fact that I am writing this article proves it. And we should not be fear a discussion to change it. If we are afraid of such a discussion, we should ask ourselves whether we are not attributing to our Church Order the character of a confession.

My plea is for simplicity and clarity in our regulating documents. Let the Church Order say what it needs to say, no more and no less. In regards to this debate: if the involvement of the congregation in the process of the election of office bearers is no more than a consultation (and I, with F.L. Rutgers and W.W.J. VanOene believe it is), then let us have the Church Order say so.

## Acts 2 – the lot

Br. Ed VanWoudenberg (Vol. 60, No. 21) suggests the lot be introduced instead of using the voting process. He suggests it would make us in the end a more Spirit-led church. Br. André Schutten (in this issue of *Clarion*) finds himself in agreement, listing many benefits for the use of the lot compared to the use of ballots.

I am of a different persuasion. The Lord has granted us a rich Reformed heritage. This heritage includes a redemptive historical reading of Scripture. When reading

Scripture and determining its application for today, a Reformed person will ask “where in the history of salvation is this account situated?” We don’t go to the temple any more, on Good Friday the veil was torn. We don’t circumcise our boys any more, we have baptism in its place.

I note that the division between the old and new covenant eras is not marked by Matthew 1:1. Soteriologically (in relation to salvation) the division is marked by the death and resurrection of Christ. Ecclesiologically (in relation to the church) it is marked by the ascent of Christ and the descent of the Spirit. Moreover, in view of Hebrews 8:13, a strong case can be made for a period of overlap of the old and new covenants (being 30-70 AD). We need to be very discerning in how we draw on Scripture in determining the practice of the new covenant people of God.

Where does the lot fit into this? In my opinion, the lot belongs with the shadows of the old covenant. In Acts 2 we read of that momentous event, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the whole people of God, young and old, men and women, so that they might prophesy. Prophesying is speaking on behalf of God as one is moved by God’s Spirit. Moses’ prayer was “I wish that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” (Num 11:29). With Pentecost that happened.

I would argue that Acts 2 marks for the church the turning point from the old covenant to the new. Up until the outpouring of the Spirit, ecclesiology was determined by God’s explicit directives, since the days of Moses contained in the Mosaic laws. After Pentecost this changes. Ecclesiologically we now speak of “the Pentecostal maturity of the congregation.”<sup>3</sup>

Now the lot is not mentioned after Acts 1. That makes sense, for after the outpouring of the Spirit, *the congregation* brings to expression the will of God. This truth underlies our first ordination vow: “Do you feel in your heart that God himself, through his congregation, has called you. . . ?” To use the lot in the new covenant era would be to avoid taking a God-given privilege and responsibility. Re-introducing the lot is like having the responsibility of an adult but acting like a child. As the Spirit now dwells in the hearts of all church members, the Spirit-led church is the church that has believers speak, not the church that casts the lot.

I realize, this line of reasoning also undermines much of what my colleague, Rev. Peter Holtvliüwer wrote in a recent editorial. In my opinion, his argument based on Acts 1 fails because it does not take into consideration the redemptive-historical watershed of Acts 2. I cannot be long on this (maybe someone else will?). Allow me to



# Church News

Called by the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto to serve as a missionary in Papua New Guinea:

**Rev. C. Kleyn**

of Kerwood, Ontario

Called by the Living Word Canadian Reformed Church of Guelph, Ontario:

**Rev. D. Agema**

of Fergus Maranatha, Ontario

Called by the Barrhead, Alberta Canadian Reformed Church:

**Rev. D. Poppe**

of Coaldale, Alberta.

note two redemptive-historical points that ought not to be overlooked in the events described in Acts 1. First, the end decision is made via the lot, and this is the last mention in Scripture of the lot (but not the last mention of the calling of office-bearers). Second, here we are speaking of the appointment to an extraordinary and temporary office.<sup>4</sup> One may agree with Rev. Holtvüwer's exegesis. However, his application of this passage to the current debate does not necessarily follow from his exegesis. For even if it is true that women were excluded from the election process in Acts 1, this may be because this passage still belongs to the old (pre-Pentecost) dispensation.

## The positional approach

In a previous *Clarion* article I wrote on applying law. I there explained the existence of three tendencies: the positional (what does the CO say), the principle (what is our starting point), and the interactionist (what do we seek).<sup>5</sup>

In the discussion on communicant sisters voting, all three are present. The principle approach looks at whether Scripture allows sisters to vote. The positional approach looks at what the Church Order obligates churches to do. The interactionist (interpretive) approach looks forward: do we get to where we want to be. It is not all cut and dried, but it is helpful to analyze the debate in this way so as to get an idea of what we need to do to move forward in unity without creating the perception of denying our convictions.

To that end, permit me this rather long sentence. If as churches we are of the conviction that Scripture is not clear on whether voting is an act of authority and thus precludes sisters from voting (Acts 2010, art. 176, cons. 3.6) and if as churches we want to give local churches the freedom to allow sisters to participate in voting (Acts

2010, art. 176, decision 4.3), then our Church Order needs to allow for this without becoming a source for debate. Structurally put: given that our principle and interactionist considerations tend to allowing communicant female members to participate more fully in the election of office-bearers, we should ensure that our positioned text (i.e. Church Order) indisputably allows for this.

Some may find this legalistic. I understand, for the positional approach to law is, by definition, legalistic. But I object if this is said to make my plea out to be pharisaical or heart-less. We need to realize there is a place for our common practice to be articulated in crisp and clear agreements. Again: ambiguous church orders are recipes for dissension.

## In conclusion

If the voice of the church is heard through those called by God to lead consulting with all those whom God has given his Spirit, let us say so. Remember, "We believe that ministers of God's Word, elders, and deacons ought to be chosen to their offices *by lawful election of the church, with prayer and in good order*, as stipulated by the Word of God." (BCoF article 31, emphasis mine). Today, the church that elects is the Spirit-led church. In short, a no to lots, and a hearty yes to all my sisters, who have received the Spirit of God to prophesy (Acts 2:17) as long as their prophesying does not entail exercising authority over men (1 Tim 2:12).

1 Two other examples are: "*in verbondenheid met*" in NHK CO-1951 art. 10 and the expression "*vasthouden aan het belijden*" (as opposed to "*de belijdenissen*") in the GKN(s) Form for Subscription of 1972.

2 In Canadian Reformed history: who may make submissions to a general synod and are we in ecclesiastical fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland (continuing)?

3 My attempt to translate the Dutch: "*Pinkstermondigheid der gemeente*." See AN Hendriks, *Van God Gezonden: Over de Ambten in Christus' Kerk* (Woord en Wereld #33), 48-50. Cf. J. VanGenderen and WH Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, 46.3. I don't know the origins of this Dutch phrase, but it is also found in synod documentation relating to "women voting" in the GkV in 1978 and 1993.

4 As it concerns an apostle, one could argue the appointment had to be made directly by the Lord Jesus Christ, hence the use of the lot rather than a ballot.

5 I have since discovered that in English these are referred to as (legal) positivism, natural law, and (legal) interpretivism. In the context of the church, "natural law" would be "divine revelation."

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







## **Press Release for the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches [Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary] for a meeting held on September 8, 2011**

The Board of Governors met at the Seminary Facilities in Hamilton, Ontario on September 8, 2011. Present at the meeting were Archie J. Bax, Hank Kampen (Treasurer), Rev. Richard Aasman (Chairman), Barry Hordyk, Dr. Andrew J. Pol (Secretary), Rev. Willem B. Slomp, Rev. Eric Kampen, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, Lammert Jagt, Rev. John Ludwig, and Karl J. Veldkamp (Vice-Chairman/Corresponding Clerk). Regrets: None. The Principal, Dr. G. H. Visscher was present as well. The meeting was opened by Rev. Richard Aasman with the reading of 1 Peter 1:1-9 and prayer.

### **Memorabilia**

In our memorabilia we remembered the passing to glory of Sr. Geertsema, the late wife of Professor Geertsema, and Mrs. Visscher, the mother of Dr. G. H. Visscher. Further, we remembered and held up in prayer our brothers Dr. de Jong and Dr. Gootjes and their families, both of whom have significant health challenges.

### **Minutes, Agenda & Officers of the Board**

The minutes of the Board meeting held on April 26, 2011 were, with amendments and clarifications, adopted. The agenda for the meeting was settled. It was affirmed that the current officers would continue in their positions: Rev. Richard Aasman, Chairman, Karl J. Veldkamp, Vice-Chairman, Corresponding Clerk, Dr. Andrew J. Pol, Secretary, and Hank Kampen, Treasurer.

### **Correspondence of Note**

- a. Press Release for April 26, 2011 Board meeting
- b. Request to Superannuation Fund relating to retirement of Dr. C. Van Dam
- c. Letters of appointment relating to the teaching assistant, Joshua Walker (Freshmen Greek) and temporary lecturer, Rev. John Ludwig (Church Polity)
- d. Letter of appreciation to Dr. N. D. Kloosterman
- e. Letter of appreciation from Catherine Mechelse, administrative assistant at the Seminary in connection with recognition of her twenty-five years of service to the Seminary.

### **Receipt of Reports-Material Agenda Items:**

- a. **Academic Committee** – It was reported that the guidelines for lecture visits were finalized by this committee, and subsequently adopted by the Board. The matter of the “Statement of Institutional Purpose” had substantial attention by the academic committee and subsequently by the Board. It was determined that a review and refinement of this statement will be a material element of the self study within the process of seeking accreditation with the Association of Theological Schools (“ATS”). The process of accreditation will assist in the intended refinement and review.
- b. **Finance & Property Committee** – The minutes of the meetings of this committee held on March 24, 2011 and June 9, 2011 were received for information. The Twenty Ninth Annual Report of this committee was also received with thankfulness. It was apparent from the faithful support of the churches and the fund balances, that the Seminary was (and is) truly blessed. The finalized and audited financial statements for the fiscal period ending December 31, 2010 were received and Henry Salomons, CA was re-appointed as the auditor of the Seminary for the period ending December 31, 2011. A draft budget for the calendar year 2012 was presented, discussed, and approved. Such budget requires an increase in the per communicant member assessment from 69.00 to 72.00 (CDN).
- c. **Senate** – In connection with the Senate reports the following were received: Course Work Reports; Registrar; Librarian; Lecture Schedule for 2011-2012; Convocation Committee; Faber-Holwerda Bursary Committee and a Conference Attendance report from the Librarian
- d. **Principal** – The report of the Principal was received with thankfulness.
- e. **Visits to the Churches** – The report/summary of Dr. A. J. de Visser relating to his visits to various churches in Australia and in Papua New Guinea was received with much gratitude. It was noted that visits of this nature, although at times inclusive of informal element, do have long term incalculable benefits in strengthening the bonds between the churches there and in Canada.
- f. **Sabbatical Report** – The report of Dr. C. Van Dam relating to his sabbatical activities was received with much gratitude and interest.



- g. **Rev. Thomas G. Reid** – During the meeting Rev. Thomas G. Reid was invited to join the meeting. Rev. Thomas G. Reid is the current Librarian and Registrar of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA. He provided advice and direction to the Board with respect to the completion of our comprehensive self study with ATS. As he has been involved in this activity at his home seminary, his experience and involvement in such process was of practical and timely value. He will continue to assist throughout the self-study process on an “as required” basis.
- h. **Governance Committee** – A material proposal of this committee presented new definitions relating to “adjunct professors” and “adjunct lecturers,” both of which were defined within the context of the governing Act of the seminary and the bylaws. Subject to final drafting reviews and the like, the changes were approved in principle. Such amendments are subject to the further and final approval of the next general synod of the churches to be convened.
- i. **Accreditation** – The readiness report was confirmed as being delivered to ATS in April of 2011, with the subsequent approval of ATS by a letter dated June 27, 2011 confirming that the candidacy status of the Seminary had been granted. Dr. G.H. Visscher, Margaret Van der Velde, and Karl J. Veldkamp were appointed to the Accreditation Steering Committee. It was further confirmed that Margaret Van der Velde and Karl J. Veldkamp would be attending an ATS workshop in Pittsburgh, PA on September 15 and 16, 2011. All of the sub committees for the completion of the self study were settled and agreed to, with the result that the Board is fully engaged across the full range of the self study modules.
- j. **Schedule of Lecture Visitors for 2011-2012 academic year** – Rev. Eric Kampen and Rev. John Van Woudenberg were appointed to complete the visits in the Fall of 2011 and Rev. Richard Aasman and Rev. Willem Slomp were appointed to complete such visits in the Winter session.
- k. **Church Polity Instructor** – The appointment of Rev. John Ludwig as a temporary lecturer in church polity for 2011-2012 was confirmed.
- l. **Professor Search Committee** – this committee was tasked with reviewing, considering, determining, and presenting candidates for the position that will be created upon splitting the department of Diaconology and Ecclesiology. The composition of this committee was confirmed as including: Rev. Eric Kampen, Rev. Willem Slomp, Rev. John Van Woudenberg, Dr. G. H. Visscher, and Karl J. Veldkamp (convenor). It was confirmed that this committee will be commencing its activities which will include the solicitation of input from the churches. It was further confirmed that any such proposed appointment is conditional on the approval of the next general synod of the churches to be gathered to the formal authorization for the position of a fifth professor at the Seminary, and the actual appointment itself.
- m. **Preaching Seminar – 2012** – upon the recommendation of the Senate, a seminar with a focus on preaching was approved for January, 2012.
- n. **Letter/Proposal from the Deputies for Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia** – A letter from the Deputies was received which entreats the Seminary to explore ways in which there can be some form of distance learning from the Seminary for students in Australia. In particular they suggest a form of foundational first year to be taken by distance learning. The matter was considered at length and referred to the Committee for Standards 7 & 10 (part of the ATS self Study) to consider, evaluate and report on. It was agreed that the letter of the deputies would be responded to with the request to be patient to allow for a full review and consideration of the proposal.

Next meeting of the Board is tentatively scheduled for March 1, 2012, d.v.

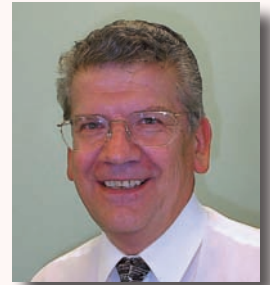
### Press Release and Closing

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/Corresponding Clerk*



James Visscher



Dr. James Visscher is co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia  
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# 2011 in Review

## How not to tell time

When this last colourful issue of *Clarion* for 2011 drops on your kitchen counter with a bit of a thud, you know that it is just about time to come to grips with the end of one year and the dawning of another. Perhaps you will even remark, "Is it that time of year again? How quickly this year has flown by." The passage of time is something that almost all of us make comments about.

Only what kind of comments? Hopefully it is not the kind of comments that you can find in 2 Peter 3. For there the apostle utters some scathing remarks about people who do not know how to tell time. He calls them "scoffers." What are they scoffing about? They scoff about the promise that Christ Jesus is coming back. They refuse to give any credence to it in order that they can follow their own "evil desires" and their own wicked agendas.

According to these people, changing calendars is no big deal. It's something that we do with boring regularity. As well it is something that we should do without any great expectation. "This whole idea that one day Christ is coming back is nothing more than a pipe dream. It is not going to happen. The passage of time should not awaken in us any new hopes. It should simply cause us to repeat the monotonous refrain – 'same old, same old.'"

Yet that is not true! For in addition to calling all such people "scoffers," Peter also calls them poor students of both the Bible and time. Biblically speaking, they have conveniently forgotten about both creation and flood. Time-wise, they have also overlooked the fact that the Lord treats time differently than we do. As well they forget that he is much more concerned about time in relation to repentance and giving people time to become reconciled to him. Unlike many people both then and now, our God does not turn a blind eye to time and its passing.

## Time as reminder and opportunity

No, time is both reminder and opportunity. It reminds us that every day is a day closer to the return of our Lord and Saviour and that every year is a year closer to the end and the beginning. One day and year this world will

be destroyed by fire. One day and year as well, this world will be made totally new. Instead of it being the home of wickedness, it will become "the home of righteousness." Time's passing should constantly remind us of this.

The other thing that time should do is cause us to seize our opportunities. What kind of opportunities? Peter writes that time gives us the opportunity to re-dedicate ourselves to living "holy and godly lives" (v. 11). It should also cause us to re-double our efforts to "be found spotless, blameless, and at peace" with God (v. 14). One day the Lord will come back and he will find you, but just how will he find you? In what kind of shape or condition will he find you? It is to be hoped that he will not find you "ignorant and unstable" (v. 16) but growing "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (v. 18). Let us put holiness and godliness at the top of the agenda for 2012.

## A special "retirement"

Usually we lead off our review of the past year's events and highlights with a look at churches and pastors. This year, however, I have chosen to start with a professor, namely with Prof. Dr. Cornelis Van Dam. Why pick on him? Because 2011 marked forty years in the ministry of the gospel for him and of those years more than thirty have been spent as professor of Old Testament studies at the Theological College, or what is now known as the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS).

It can also be said that in some ways seminary life in 2011 was dominated by him. In January the Seminary hosted the first of what will hopefully be many annual conferences. It was a conference to mark the upcoming retirement of Dr. C. Van Dam and to honour him with a series of essays to be bundled later into a festschrift. The Conference was called "Living Waters from Ancient Springs" and during it four scholarly essays were read in summary and discussed. Colleagues, friends, students, and fellow scholars came from far and wide to participate and to pay tribute to him for his many years of dedication and service in the field of the Old Testament scholarship.



Later on in the year the four essays presented at the conference, along with eleven others, were bundled together and became available in a book bearing the same name as the conference. It has been ably edited by Prof. Dr. J. Van Vliet and nicely printed by Pickwick Publications of Eugene, Oregon. A copy of this book was officially presented to Dr. Van Dam at the CRTS September graduation ceremonies.

On the day after the graduation a time was set aside at the Seminary building to congratulate Dr. Van Dam and his wife Joanne, with their many years of faithful labour in both the churches and at the Seminary. Again, many came to express their gratitude and to wish them every blessing in the years to come.

What kind of years will they be? Only the Lord knows for sure, but from Dr. and Mrs. Van Dam's side, there is every desire to make them just as productive as ever. Dr. Van Dam's hopes to keep on teaching but now his classroom will move from Hamilton, to places in Brazil, China and elsewhere. Also, he intends to spend more time writing and thus sharing the fruit of his years of exploring the OT. In between all of that, there will hopefully also be time to put up his feet, relax a little more and to enjoy time with his wife and family. I am sure that our readers will join with me in wishing him and his wife every blessing as they enter the sunset years of their life.

## The Seminary

Seeing that we started with a professor, we may as well continue with the Seminary. 2011 has been a good year for CRTS. The two new professors appointed by the Board of Governors on the instructions of General Synod Burlington 2010, namely Dr. J. Smith and Dr. J. Van Vliet, have settled in well. Dr. Smith succeeds Dr. Van Dam as Professor of OT studies and Dr. Van Vliet takes over from Dr. Gootjes as Professor of Dogmatics. This brings the Seminary back to its full complement of four full-time professors.

At least it does so for now. Synod Burlington, along with past synods, has instructed the Seminary to come to the next synod with a proposal regarding a fifth professor. Thus it is hoped that in 2013 action will be taken to further expand the teaching staff.

In the meantime, there was plenty to do. Four students rounded off their studies and graduated. Justin Roukema is still waiting for a call but in the meantime he is assisting the church at Brampton as it pursues its new outreach program. Abel Poi decided to work together with an experienced pastor, namely the Rev. D. Agema

of Fergus (Maranatha) for some months and hopes to be declared eligible for call near the end of the year. Steve Vandevelde received and accepted a call to the church at Carman East. Ted Van Spronsen received several calls and accepted one to the new congregation of Bussetton, Western Australia.

Graduating students leave empty places but these were soon filled by new faces. From Langley, BC, there came Rick Vanderhorst and Randall Visscher (via Korea). Steve VanLeeuwen came from Winnipeg (via Neerlandia), Gerard Veurink came from Coaldale, Alberta, and Johan Bruintjes came from Denver, Colorado. This time the entire incoming student body comes from the West, either western Canada or the western USA.

Besides new professors adjusting, students going and coming, 2011 was also another busy year for the faculty and staff in connection with being accredited by ATS. These initials stand for the Association of Theological Schools and it represents the main academic body that regulates educational standards and procedures for institutions that provide higher theological education. In a continent filled with phoney schools and cheap degree mills, it's important to have some sort of body that insures the quality of the education provided.

Thus for the future wellbeing and reputation of the Seminary, it is vital to become a full member of ATS. Yet that is no small task as it demands a total review of present procedures and practices, the development of new policies, and the implementation of new standards. In short, it is a lot of work, and the process is not over yet. We wish the Seminary well as it continues down this road to accreditation. May it be crowned with success.





## Churches in Canada East

Seeing that last year we started in the West, it is only fitting that for 2011 we start in the East. By the "East" we mean eastern Canada of course. Although even that is not quite accurate for there is more to eastern Canada than just Ontario. One can only hope that in the future the East will be better represented with churches in Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, as well as Newfoundland and Labrador.

Back to Ontario. Beginning with church at Brampton, the last information that I received indicates that past plans to trade their present property and building for a new one are back on track. These plans would also dovetail nicely with their decision to start an outreach study centre (more on that in a moment). Further north and somewhat west the church at Grand Valley completed the renovation and expansion of their church building. Not too far away the church at Elora has been busy doing the same to its premises.

Meanwhile, a new church was instituted in the western part of Guelph and called itself The Living Word Canadian Reformed Church. At the moment they are holding their meetings in the school that the members purchased. They also extended a call to Candidate Ted Van Spronsen but received a decline. As this was going to press they were waiting for an outcome to the call they had extended to the Rev. D. Agema of Fergus.

In the Burlington area there is not much to report, except that Fellowship church is enjoying their newly renovated and rented quarters. They are also busy pursuing a land swap in the hope that this will enable them to start building.

In the Hamilton region, the Providence church continues to enjoy worshipping in its new surroundings. Meanwhile, the Cornerstone church is having problems housing its growing flock and discussing its options. They also called a second pastor to work beside Pastor Bill DeJong; however, Pastor John Louwerse decided to stay in Neerlandia for now.

Further into the Niagara peninsula, the church at Smithville has finally taken possession of its new building. For many years the congregation saw new churches being planted all around it and along with those new churches came new buildings. Meanwhile, Smithville had to make do with the old and the worn. But no longer, for better and brighter days are here in the form of a beautiful, sparkling, new building, along with much more comfortable pews.

Only not too comfortable, I trust, for that will force their new minister, Pastor Clarence Bouwman, to preach even harder. Yes, Smithville has a new building and a new shepherd. After a vacancy of almost three years, there is a new face on the pulpit and a new voice coming from the pulpit. As long as the voice of the Good Shepherd is still coming through, that's great.

Not too far from Smithville is that church whose many names I have been gently kidding over the years. After hearing from more than one irate parishioner, I have finally figured out that the name of the church is no longer Rockway, or even Tintern, but rather Spring Creek. I like that name, and I will try to behave myself and use it from now on.

Going down the 401 in a westerly direction brings one to London. This congregation too is enjoying a new building. It's not new in the sense of newly built, but in the sense of newly bought. Enjoy!

Hitting the road again, we come to the church at Chatham. Since the departure of the Rev. H. Versteeg in 2009, it has been vacant. Attempts to fill the vacancy have thus far met without success. Hopefully, the coming year will see the arrival of a new pastor and teacher.

## Churches in the USA

Crossing the border into the USA, we come to Grand Rapids. The church there has been in decline for some time and is having its struggles. There have also been ongoing discussions about future viability. For the moment the decision appears to be that the church will carry on. We wish the members every help and encouragement. It's not easy being an isolated church living in a sea of competing and contrasting Reformed churches.

Since we are in the USA we may as well move further west and so we arrive at Denver, Colorado. Last year this church called Candidate Ryan Kampen but he has been stuck in Canada with immigration difficulties ever since. The latest word is that he will be ordained on November 13 but then immediately thereafter he will have to head north again, cross back into Canada, and wait some more. All in all, this is a trying situation both for our brother and his congregation. Let us pray that the American authorities will soon be moved to grant the necessary visa. In the meantime, it has had at least one side benefit in that he could fill the pulpit of the vacant Carman East Church.





## Pastors and teachers

Attention has already been paid to the retirement of Dr. C. Van Dam, but he is not the only retiree in 2011. The Rev. E. J. Tiggelaar of Barrhead also reached the as yet still common age for retirement in Canada. After pastoring for thirty-three years in the churches of Chilliwack and Barrhead, he joined the ranks of the superannuated. It is our hope that he and his wife, Dianne, will enjoy many years of health and happiness together, as well as continue to make a contribution to the well-being of the church and the coming of the kingdom of God.

Besides ministers leaving regular service in the churches, there are also ministers who continue to pursue further studies. This year saw the Rev. T. Lodder of Cloverdale receive his Doctor of Ministry degree from Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. His thesis project was entitled *Musical Instruments and Musicians in the Worship of the Canadian Reformed Churches*. Hopefully, a way will be found to publish this study and thus its results can be shared with musicians and other interested folks. Our congratulations to him on this special achievement!

At the same time there are other ministers in the federation who are busy with post graduate studies of one kind or another. And that is beneficial for a variety of reasons. For one it gives the churches a pool of ministers who can be considered for future appointment to the Seminary. It raises the level of expertise in certain areas of ministry and creates a larger resource base to draw on. It benefits the churches that they serve because ongoing ministerial training usually pays concrete dividends in the areas of preaching, teaching, and counselling.

The year 2011 also saw a number of ministers receive calls, some of which were accepted but most of which were declined. Among those who accepted calls were Rev. Clarence Bouwman who moved from Yarrow to Smithville, and Rev. Rinze Ijbema who exchanged Chilliwack, Canada for Groningen, The Netherlands.

Another minister who moved but not because of a call was the Rev. Marinus van Beveren who left Edmonton after many years for Richmond Hill, Ontario. He did so in order to live closer to one of his daughters. Shortly after this move he also had a birthday, a very special birthday, as he reached the age of ninety years! Congratulations, brother! May the Lord continue to surround you with his grace and supply you with his gifts.

On the health front, the health of one of our pastors

## Churches in Canada West

Going from Denver to Carman is not just a hop, skip, and a jump. It's more like a huge leap. The church at Carman East called a number of pastors after the departure of the Rev. P. Holtvüwer and finally achieved success with the calling of Candidate Steve Vandevelde. Seeing that he will first have to pass the classical exam, it will be some time before he can be ordained and begin his work. Still, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Moving to the Alberta front, we come to Barrhead, which became vacant in 2011 when it said "farewell" to its pastor of more than twenty-nine years in the person of the Rev. E. J. Tiggelaar. It has started the work of calling a new minister but thus far it has not had a positive response. No doubt it will keep on trying. In the meantime it has another challenge as well. Its building has become too small.

Finally, we come to British Columbia. It should be noted that the churches at Chilliwack and Yarrow both became vacant around the same time and have begun their calling work. The church at Abbotsford also continues to look for a second pastor. The members of the Aldergrove church are enjoying their fine new church building, although there is still work to be done on the organ.

The churches in this area are also in the process of discussing a proposal to plant a church in the Burnaby area, close to Vancouver. Over the years there has been a steady exodus deeper into the Fraser Valley where the house prices are more reasonable and life is lived at a quieter pace. This has resulted in a retreat from the Vancouver area. And that is not deemed to be a good thing. The church needs to be where the people are and where the opportunities for witness are plentiful. Hence, this proposal is a call for the churches to reclaim their place in the city landscape.





was of special concern throughout a good part of the year. Pastor Rob Schouten of Aldergrove had been diagnosed with colon cancer and endured an intense period of chemo treatments. Thankfully the treatments were blessed and the prayers of many were heard and his health has been restored. Still, there is concern as the recurrence of this type of cancer is high. May the Lord calm the fears of our brother, his wife Janet, his children, family, and congregation, and graciously grant him a cancer-free life.

Later on in the year the health of the Rev. Walter Geurts of Fergus, Ontario, created some concern as suddenly he needed to be operated on a broken leg. It is to be hoped that by the time you are reading this healing will have occurred and better health will have arrived.

In November many of the Canadian Reformed pastors and their wives in the West gathered together with about ten United Reformed colleagues and their wives for the annual Western Ministerial. It was held once again at Cedar Springs in Sumas, WA. The featured speakers were Prof. A. Strange from Mid America Seminary and Dr. C. VanHalen-Faber from Covenant Teachers College. A great time of fellowship, discussion, and sharing was had by all present.

## Home mission

A proposed church planting effort in Burnaby has already been mentioned, but there is more, much more. In the greater Vancouver area the churches of Cloverdale and Langley continue to spearhead evangelistic work among the Chinese population. Pastor Frank has been set aside for this work and his church continues to grow in

faith as well as in number. Plans are currently underway to ordain at least two elders and one deacon in the coming months. This would then lead to the establishment of the Chinese Reformed Church.

The aim is for this church to join the federation. Only it will be a church with a difference, as both the Chinese language and culture will remain very much in evidence. Indeed, for the time being the worship services will continue to be in Chinese as many of the members are newcomers to our land who do not have a firm grasp of the English language. No doubt the older immigrants among us can identify with this development. For them the transition from Dutch to English was not always easy nor quickly accomplished either.

Further north in BC, the work spearheaded by the church at Smithers and Pastor Jim Witteveen is also moving forward. New contacts are being made on an ongoing basis and new faces are seen at the worship services. There too the aim is to develop a good core group of members on which to build a future church.

Further east in the greater Winnipeg area, there are also outreach plans. Consideration is being given to the possible calling of minister who will dedicate himself to church planting efforts in the southern part of the city.

The greater Toronto area is next and there the church at Toronto (or is it Richmond Hill, north of Toronto?) continues to support the efforts of Pastor Jorge Barros as he seeks to establish a Portuguese speaking church in that city.

Finally, there is also downtown Hamilton where Streetlight Ministries is located and where Pastor Paul Aasman and Mission Worker Hilco de Haan are labouring. On recent trips to Ontario I was informed that there is some discussion going on about instituting a Streetlight Church sometime in the future. No doubt this effort will face some special challenges seeing both the location and the special nature of the home mission work there. Still, it is good to discuss these things and to draw up a plan that spells out future goals and directions.

All of these special efforts and projects, however, should not obscure the fact that many of our churches are involved in a host of regular evangelistic efforts. Some churches host special outreach programs such as Alpha (modified), Christianity Explored, and Two Ways to Live. Any number of them operate Coffee Break programs or something like it but then under a different name. In addition, there are neighbourhood Bible studies, hospital outreach efforts, seniors ministries, radio broadcasts,



literature distribution work, and the list goes on.

One of the latest developments is that some of our churches are making use of Facebook and Twitter to publicize events and to connect with people. You can predict with some degree of confidence that in the future greater and greater use will be made of social media.

Somehow connected to all of this electronic stuff is also the use of MP3 broadcasting and live feed worship services. For some time now the church at Langley has been using the Internet as a means to broadcast its worship services around the world. By means of live feed members travelling far and wide, as well as visitors living in different places, can not only hear what is being said but they also have a bird's eye view of what happens in a worship service.

Another side benefit of live feed broadcasting is that it allows believers access to worship when they cannot go to church. Last winter a severe snow storm shut down much of Alberta and hundreds of shut-in members made use of the Langley live feed to participate in worship.

Is that still evangelism? Probably not, but it can be. Indeed, it underscores the fact that our churches are making use of every opportunity to reach out.

## Youth camps

Strictly speaking our youth camps may end up being more for the benefit of the young people within our churches than for those outside of them. Nevertheless, as many have remarked, also here we should not neglect our outward and evangelistic focus. These organized efforts represent excellent opportunities to introduce young lives who do not know the Lord to the Lord. So if you are involved in running a camp next summer this is as good a time as any to reflect on your aims and priorities. What is a camp that has no desire to reach out to the world but a navel gazing operation.

Thankfully there is a camp that has always understood this and applied it, and that is the one that is operated in Smithers for the native children of the community. There a concerted effort has always been made, and continues to be made, to reach un-churched young people with the gospel.

At both Camp Stepping Stones in Deroche, BC and at Campfire in Markdale, Ontario, the same zeal and intent is present, but it is not always easy to realize. One has to strategize, advertise, and subsidize to make it happen.

Still, the work of reaching out to the youth goes on, and it continues to meet with success and rave reviews. True, it takes an army of staff and volunteers to operate these camps, but there is every indication that these efforts are appreciated and bearing fruit.

One more effort that is appreciated is the fact that

Deroche Camp has been devoting at least one week in the summer to preparing new college and university students for what is coming and for equipping already enrolled students with keen and critical minds. To all involved the message is: keep up your efforts and keep on re-inventing yourselves for the good of the youth, both church and un-church alike.

## From ministries to missionaries

In addition to evangelistic efforts, all of our churches are involved in foreign mission either as calling churches or as supporting churches. Some of our churches are even involved in more than one foreign mission project. Indeed, there was a lot happening on the mission front in 2011.

In Papua New Guinea the Rev. Henry Versteeg spent a lot of time and efforts on the training of local pastors and teachers. He does this training work together with missionaries from sister churches in Australia and New Zealand. On the whole the work is progressing; however, there are any number of challenges, one being the different levels of education of the students. The curriculum for the RCBC (Reformed Churches Bible College) is two-thirds completed and the aim is to complete it in 2012.

Meanwhile, the church at Toronto decided that more manpower is needed in PNG and thus extended a call to Pastor Cornelius Kleyn of Kerwood, Ontario.





In Brazil the Revs. Bram de Graaf (Maceio) and Julius VanSpronsen and Ken Wieske (Recife) continue their labours. Rev. de Graaf is doing his utmost to prepare the church at Maceio for institution. Once that is accomplished, he may well move on to a different area or to a different aspect of the mission work. Rev. Wieske had some health challenges in 2011 and much of it appears to have been a matter of being over-worked. The prescription for that is a lot of rest and a learning to slow down. Now, that may be difficult for our highly energized brother; however, there were indications that by year's end he had learned some valuable lessons on pacing himself and his health was improving. For Rev. VanSpronsen and his family, 2011 was a furlough year and as a result they spent a good deal of time in Canada reconnecting with family and friends, visiting the churches and relaxing.

In Kupang, Indonesia the Rev. Edwer Dethan, the missionary of the church at Smithville, remains involved in the work of preaching, teaching, and spreading the gospel. His prime work remains educational as he too spends most of his time operating and teaching at the Bible college that he founded a number of years ago. The work has been blessed and continues to draw students from Timor and surrounding islands. In July he and his family received a rather large influx of visitors from the Fraser Valley. A team of students and teachers from Credo Christian High in Langley arrived to help out and to experience Indonesia first hand.

In China our churches do not have a missionary on site; however, they do have any number of men who visit regularly and teach. Pastor Frank was joined at different times and places by Pastor Clarence, Pastor James, Professor Keith, and Brother John. At one place they spent a week teaching and interacting with pastors who are operating a large number of colleges and training schools throughout China. The results were extremely positive and led to many invitations to come back soon and teach more and more. Altogether this highlights what may be called a "good problem." It is "good" because there is so much demand. It is a "problem" because the workers are few and the demand cannot be met. To address this efforts continue on setting up the China Reformed Bible College (CRBC). In 2011 all of the lectures for the first semester were completed and work was started on the second semester. It is hoped that 2012 will see the completion of the lectures for the second semester and a good start being made on the lectures for the third and final semester.

By now you may have noticed that there is a common thread in all of these reports on foreign mission and it has to do with training and teaching. In the past it was common to send out a missionary with the instruction to try to plant a Reformed church in a foreign country. Today, however, all of that has changed as missionaries spend much more time and effort training local pastors and would-be pastors. The awareness has grown that the money spent on sending out one missionary can be better spent on him training others than doing the work himself. Keep in mind that it takes a long time to bring a foreign missionary up to speed. He has to be trained, to move, to establish a mission post, to adapt to a new culture, to learn a new language and so forth. Besides all this there is also the matter of finances as often you can train and multiply a lot of local workers for the cost of one foreign missionary. Better stewardship of time, ability, and resources has forced a re-direct in the area of missionary work.

### **Mission aid work**

Closely connected to the work of foreign mission is the work of mission aid. At present most of the mission aid work done by our churches is directed at Brazil. Presently there is a Mission Aid Worker in place in the person of Chris Boersema, a son of Rev. and Mrs. Ralph and Lucille Boersema. Chris is managing the aid that comes from Canada. Most of this aid goes to education and the support of a large high school in Maragogi, as well as an elementary school in Recife. Support is also given to local businesses run by church members, to seniors, and to other causes. Further south in Maceio, support received via the mission aid efforts of Hamilton flows through to the local Christian school.

In Indonesia currently most of the aid is directed at orphanages and schools. It comes from the Smithville area, as well as from the Children of Light organization in Edmonton. The latter funnels its support through the Rev. Yonson Dethan and his wife.

In a different part of the world, Randy and Karen Lodder continue to be hard at work in Haiti. They now do this work under the umbrella of Word and Deed, as their former sponsor Coram Deo has merged with that organization. In 2011 Randy and Karen also had an opportunity to introduce their work to interested believers from a variety of conservative Reformed churches in both Eastern and Western Canada.





On a broader scale the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund (CRWRF) remains active. Regular support is given to orphanages in different parts of the world. Emergency relief is also a regular feature of their work. And then too contributions are directed at aid projects of different types: famine relief, agricultural efforts, medical assistance, and family support.

Linked to CRWRF is Faithworks which sends out short term volunteer teams to help with the building of homes in poverty stricken areas in North America and elsewhere.

Speaking of short term volunteers, attention has already been directed at such a team that went to Indonesia in 2011. In addition, teams also went to Mexico to help out in the construction of orphanage facilities at Dulce Refugio in Aguascalientes. Jeremy and Ana Van Beelen, as well as Duane Visscher and his wife Mirabel, are living and working there under the Children of Hope umbrella. They continue to attract a lot of support from church members in Langley and throughout BC.

### **The Canadian Reformed Missions Association (CRMA)**

In 2011 a new organization came into being that has much to do with both mission and mission aid. It is called the Canadian Reformed Missions Association (CRMA). While as Canadian Reformed Churches mission work is being done in different countries and mission aid work is also being funded and directed at relief efforts in many places, there is no headquarters, central committee, or anything else overseeing these efforts. Each calling church and organization is directly responsible to itself and to its supporting churches and members.

So what happens in such a situation? Over time as

efforts multiply so does competition for mission and mission aid dollars, duplication happens too, as does a lack of co-ordinated planning. For all of these reasons, and more, the last number of missions conferences have resounded with more and more requests for some sort of forum or association in which all of the stakeholders could meet regularly to keep one another informed, to learn from each other, to share resources, to plan strategy, to mediate differences, and to appoint representatives for international Reformed mission meetings.

In 2010 the Urban Mission Board of Cloverdale/Langley drafted a proposed Constitution and By Laws for just such a forum. It was adopted by the Churches at Cloverdale and Langley and in 2011 the invitations went out to all sending churches and mission organizations. In September 2011 a meeting was held in Hamilton, Ontario, to establish the CRMA. Delegates came from east and west and the CRMA was officially launched. The first executive consists of the Rev. Dr. James Visscher (chairman), Prof. Dr. Arjan deVisser (Vice-chairman), the Rev. John VanPopta (secretary), and Mr. Otto Bouwman (Treasurer). Instead of the next meeting being held in another year, it was decided to hold it in January of 2012 in Hamilton, Ontario. On the agenda will be an overview of mission efforts and related costs, a recommendation for a comprehensive website, a proposal on future mission strategy and direction for the Canadian Reformed Churches, and a report on mobile missionary training.

### **Christian education**

In 2011 Christian education continued to be a top priority for members in our churches. Perhaps the highlight of the year was the opening of a new school in Ottawa called Ambassadors Christian School. As such this school did not get off the ground without challenges but in due time a teacher was hired and finally suitable facilities could also be rented. Although the start is small, we wish this fledgling school and its members, as well as staff and students, every blessing from above. May it prosper and grow in the years to come.

In addition to a new school, any number of older schools went through renovations, expansions, and improvements. Indeed, especially the summer holidays months are often the time when a school gets a make-over – new carpets, lino, desks, computers, washrooms.

Although I do not have the hard and fast figures, and I do not know who has them, I calculate that



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across the continent there must be about twenty-four elementary schools and nine high schools. These in turn employ hundreds of teachers and educate thousands of students. (If anyone has compiled the exact figures, please let me know.)

In addition to elementary schools and high schools there is also the Covenant Teachers College situated in Hamilton, Ontario. Under the capable leadership of Dr. Christine VanHalen-Faber, assisted by Allard Guinink and others, it continues to train young men and women and to provide a steady supply of new teachers for our Christian schools, especially in Ontario.

Principals from across Canada and the USA, as well as from Australia and The Netherlands, gathered together in October at Cedar Springs, Sumas, Washington, for a very stimulating educational conference. The keynote speaker this time was Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, formerly from Mid-America Theological Seminary and now at work for Worldview Resources International.

### Special homes

On a different front, 2011 was also a year in which any number of special homes continued to operate in our midst for the benefit of special members.

In Ontario there are a growing number of group homes operated by Anchor for adults with special disabilities. These homes are now located in Beamsville, Burlington, Dunnville, and Fergus. In other provinces too these same sorts of efforts are continuing. Alberta has its Rehoboth and BC has its Bethesda. They are great places to live and staff and supporters are to be commended for their efforts.

Along with group homes, we also have care homes for the elderly. Ebenezer Villa (Hamilton), Maranatha Home (Burlington), Shalom (Grimsby), Trinity Towers (Brampton), Mount Nemo (Burlington), Greenview Villa (Carman), Emmanuel Home (Edmonton), and Manoah Manor (Langley). In all of these places, and more that have not been mentioned, our seniors are able to live out their years in peace, with care and much fellowship.



### Political involvement

2011 was also a good year for the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA). Spear-headed by Mark Penninga, who was ably assisted by Andre Schutten, ARPA continued to garner support from various parts of the country. Any number of elected officials, local, provincial, and federal, heard from its members and received input on new legislative efforts, inquiries, and legal challenges. As well ARPA also made its presence felt in Ottawa where it hosted a meeting with members of Parliament. Its ongoing input into matters of abortion, prostitution, hate laws, and other pertinent issues are much appreciated.

### Closing

The time has come to bring this long tale to an end. It seems that every year it gets just a little bit longer. Still, some things have no doubt been overlooked. So if you feel inclined, please send me an email at [jvisscher@telus.net](mailto:jvisscher@telus.net). It will hopefully lead to a more accurate summary next year.

In closing may the Lord bless you, our readers. You and I do not know what 2012 will bring, but we do know that our gracious God remains the same. He does not change and his promises do not fluctuate. So let us all continue to depend on him and look to him for all that we need in this life and in the life to come. Oh, and remember, to keep time God's way by numbering your days and years in the light of the return of our Saviour Jesus Christ.







# *Season's Greetings*



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