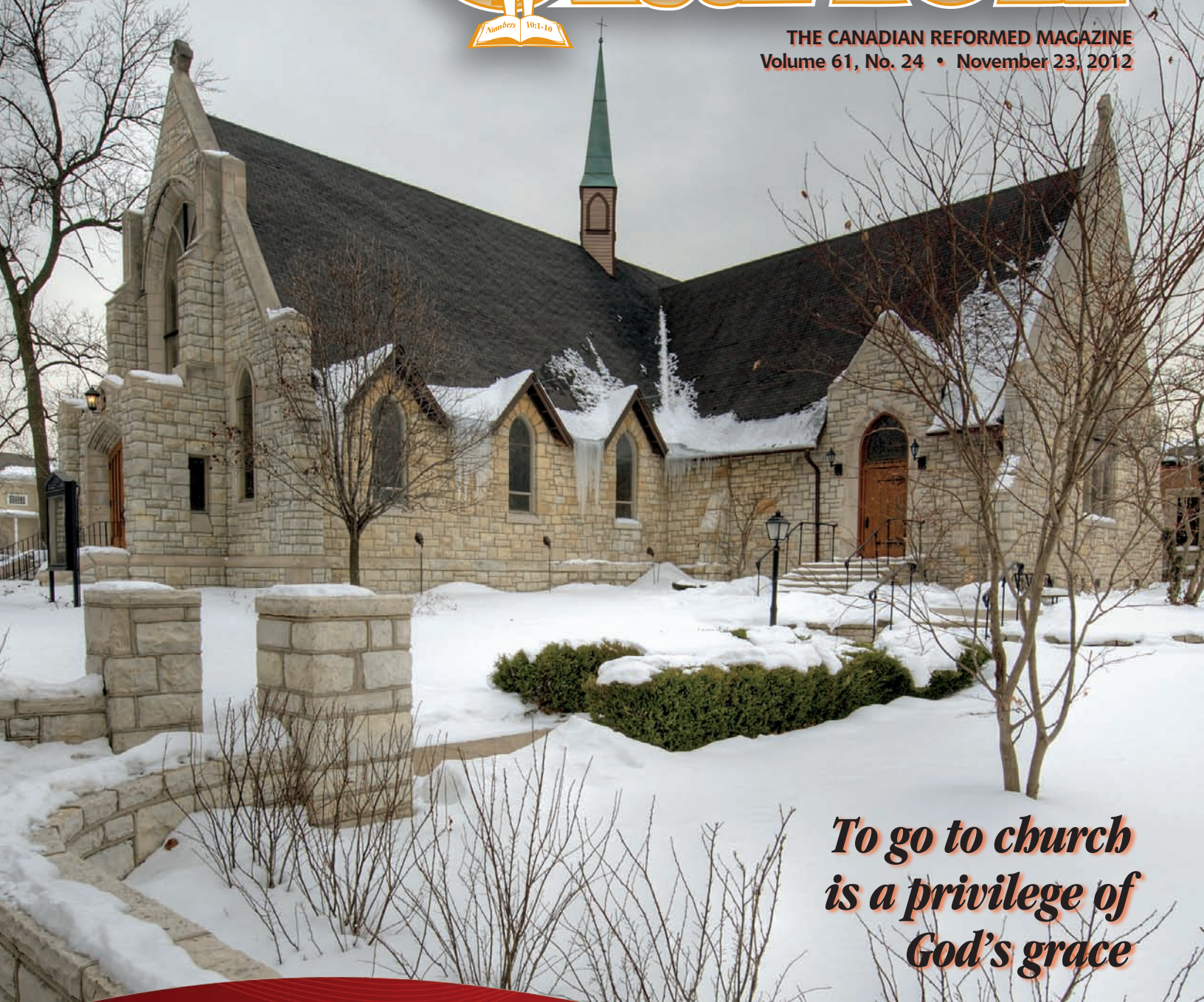


Clarion

Numbers 10:1-10

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*To go to church
is a privilege of
God's grace*

Inside this Issue

- *The Privilege of Worship*
- *Living Together in Unity*





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The Privilege of Worship

Why do fewer and fewer people go to church in the free Western world with its rich Christian heritage?

Every Lord's Day, millions of Christians defy their civil authorities and gather together to worship in obedience to the King of kings. Why is it that those in repressive Communist and Islamic regimes risk all to gather together to praise God and listen to his Word?

Why do fewer and fewer people go to church in the free Western world with its rich Christian heritage? Why does there appear to be a developing trend in orthodox Reformed churches, including "our" churches, that fewer are attending the second service? What is going on?

An important part of the answer seems to be that people in anti-Christian regimes may have a greater appreciation for the awesome privilege that gathering with God's people to worship entails.

Worship is meeting God

To worship is to come before God with thanksgiving and praise. "Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. . . Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care" (Ps 95:2, 6-7). If this was true of the old dispensation, how much more today when God has come to his people in the Spirit on the basis of Christ's work of redemption. Small wonder that God's Word enjoins us: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing" (Heb 10:25). This meeting together is described in terms of worship and entering the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus (v. 19). Indeed, there is the exhortation: "Let us draw near to God!" (v. 22)

It is not by chance that when we come together for worship and have expressed our trust and dependency

on God, then it is God himself who greets us in his presence through the mouth of his servant, the minister of the gospel. "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:3). And our worship ends by God sending us on our way with that wonderful blessing of Numbers 6. "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." So God puts his Name on his people and blesses them (Num 6:27)! The second service ends just as spectacularly: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14). The entire worship service is conducted in God's presence with the proclamation of his Word as the central focus. So obvious should it be that God is the centre of everything and that he is present in our worship that if an unbeliever should walk in "he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'" (1 Cor 14:25)

Because of God's presence, one needs to prepare oneself to meet God who is holy. This preparation includes getting our minds ready to meet God. After all, God's holiness stands in stark contrast to our unworthiness and sin and so we can only enter into worship with a contrite heart (cf. Ps 51:17; 6:1-5). Preparing for church also includes making decisions about what to wear so that one is suitably attired both to appear before God and to be within the holy congregation. Surely nothing but our very best is to be reserved for Sunday dress! Furthermore, nothing in what we wear should detract from the focus that we or our neighbour has on the worship. Once in church, to be silent and in awe of God is most appropriate when waiting for the service to begin (cf. Hab 2:20).



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What a privilege that sinful people can appear before God in holy worship! What evidence of his grace and mercy that the way is opened to the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus (Heb 10:19)! Small wonder that millions brave persecution and oppression seeking every opportunity to meet together every Lord's Day in secret, trusting God whom they worship with joy and gratitude.

But in the West, attendance for worship declines and in our own circles we hear the question more frequently: "Do we have to go to church twice a Sunday? There is no biblical mandate for that so why should we go twice?"

The second service

To say that there is no biblical warrant for a second service is saying too much too quickly. In Old Testament times there was a pattern of morning and evening worship. This is evident from the need to bring offerings to God both at the beginning and end of the day (Num 28:1-10). A Song for the Sabbath, Psalm 92, reflects this pattern when it jubilates: "It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night (vv. 1-2; my emphasis). Not surprisingly, the New Testament church also worshipped in the evening of the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

What's Inside

Issue 24 begins with an editorial from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam, which describes the great privilege we have of worshipping God every Lord's Day. Worship is meeting God. And so we must be prepared and excited to participate in the weekly services we are privileged to have.

In an article about the translation of Lord's Day 44, Dr. Jason Van Vliet outlines the changes that have taken place in the translation of Question and Answer 115 over the past twenty years, as well as the reasons for a proposed change that will be considered at Synod Carman 2013.

News from the federation includes a report on Denver Family Camp 2012 as well as a summary of the Canadian Reformed Missions Association meeting.

This issue also includes regular columns Treasures New and Old, Roadside Assistance, Education Matters, and a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

The entire Lord's Day is to be a holy day of rest and worship. Having two services dominate the day enhances that characterization and helps make it a reality. These services as it were frame the day and set its tone. The Lord's Day is a holy day. It is sacred time in which we have the privilege of focusing especially on the Lord and his work for us in Jesus Christ.

The entire worship service is conducted in God's presence with the proclamation of his Word as the central focus

And what a blessing such a time is! It nurtures our faith and enables us to grow stronger as Christians so that we are better equipped to resist the temptations of the world. By honouring the Lord's Day we make use of the means of grace: the preaching of the gospel and the use of the sacraments. We need those means to build up our faith so that we can be true to our God for as Christians we live in a very hostile environment. It is not for nothing that those who have been set over us call us to Sunday worship. They know it is necessary for the well-being of our souls (cf. Heb 13:17).

But ultimately answering objections and convincing someone on an intellectual basis that a second service is in line with Scripture is not sufficient. Would a thankful Christian not want to worship at every opportunity? Is the Sunday not the Lord's Day and should we not take every opportunity to be in his presence!? Is being satisfied with only one service when two are available not ultimately insulting to the Lord who has loved us in unfathomable ways and wants to meet with his people? Surely neglecting a second opportunity for worship is not a sign of progress but rather of underestimating the privilege and

importance of communal worship. This is particularly so when one contrasts this development with the devotion of millions of God's children who risk much just to attend worship in parts of the world where civil governments prohibit or discourage it.

The real issue

"Why do we have to go to church twice" is the wrong question and shows that the significance of the worship service is not understood. To go to church is a privilege of God's grace. He addresses us there and gives us his blessing. Would any child of God want to miss such an opportunity? Elsewhere Christians risk much for the privilege. Would we do less? If you have tasted something of God's grace and mercy in your life, would you really want to miss being in his presence with his congregation to thank, praise, and worship him?!

Furthermore, if Christ so loved the church that he gave himself up for her (Eph 5:25), would we not want to spend as much time as possible with his bride, the church, in worship and so show our love to our Saviour?

Would any child of God want to miss such an opportunity?

The principle of Isaiah 58 still holds. "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord" (vv. 13-14). The Lord's Day properly used gives us a foretaste of the eternal joy to come in God's presence. As our Catechism puts it, we may "so begin in this life the eternal sabbath" (HC, Q/A 103).

C





MATTHEW 13:52

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"
(Psalm 133:1)

Living Together in Unity



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We read in Psalm 133:1, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" Yes, it's "good and pleasant" when it happens. Never take the bonds of faith and love for granted: not in a family setting, nor in the church. Sin can disrupt them thoroughly.

We experience unity together in a special way when we unite in worshipping our God. He breaks the power of sin through Jesus Christ and forges bonds between us. Those are spiritual bonds: the results of the work of his Spirit and Word.

Psalm 133 speaks of the fellowship of believers as something that is "good." God our heavenly Father binds us together as his children. The unity that is "good" corresponds to his laws for the way we should interact. Then the relationships are the way they should be within the fellowship of the church.

At times difficult issues need to be dealt with. But we have the privilege and calling to discuss them in the light of God's Word. If our desire is to honour God and submit wholeheartedly to the guidance that he gives, there is hope for restoration.

"Good" Christian unity is a gift of God, but also a task given to us. That task begins with praying for true unity in the faith. It also involves doing whatever it takes to seek unity and to preserve it. So how can you maintain and promote it in practical ways? Be observant! Be sensitive to each other's needs. Reach out to each other. Serve each other with the gifts the LORD has given you. Help each other. And when you have to correct someone, be careful how you do it. The Apostle Paul instructs us:

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." Don't crush someone with harsh criticism. Come alongside your brother or sister in a spirit of love. Otherwise you might cause estrangement instead of drawing the person back.

Psalm 133 illustrates the riches of the fellowship of the church by two comparisons. The first comparison is with "precious oil." This precious oil was sacred, fragrant anointing oil. It was made according to the specifications of the LORD (Exod 30:22-29). It was a sign of consecration to priestly service and pointed to the equipping work of the Holy Spirit.

The point of the psalmist is that the unique fellowship of the church is like that oil. It sets the church apart from social organizations. The unity we have is unique and sacred. Like the oil on Aaron's head, it's an expression of consecration in God's service. It's a visible testimony that we have a bond with the LORD and with each other.

The fragrant oil poured on Aaron's head was made in the way commanded by God. What conclusion can we draw from this? Unity in the church must be pursued and maintained according to God's commands too. He determines how we should be one. Anything else is a recipe for disaster.

Psalm 133 compares the unity of the church with "the dew of Hermon." Hermon is the name of a high mountain between what is now Syria and Lebanon. Its top is usually covered with snow all year. When this snow melts, moisture goes into the air. At night the air in

Israel cools off quite a bit, especially near mountains. The moisture then condenses and results in an abundance of dew. The dew is important for keeping vegetation alive during the dry summer periods.

Why compare covenant fellowship with this dew? David is picturing the refreshing effect of unity in the LORD. This unity keeps life from withering and dying. It causes life to bloom even in desert conditions. That's a blessing.

In an Old Testament way, our psalm points out where this fellowship can be found. It is clearly connected with Zion. "Zion" was the name for Jerusalem, the centre of worship for God's people in those days. That was where the ministry of reconciliation took place. Sacrifices were brought to atone for sins. The sacrifices were accompanied by meals, a sign of peace and shared joy.

The sacrifices in the temple pointed to Christ, the Lamb of God. The temple is gone now, but the sacrifice of our Saviour remains effective. We have the privilege of fellowship with God. By his grace it's also possible to live in true unity as his children.

The LORD is the source of the unity that we sing about. He establishes it and keeps it going. We gather in his name. As we meet in worship, our fellowship with the LORD becomes visible. We hear the Word of the LORD and learn what it means to belong to him together. Value that gift highly! The blessing of life in fellowship with the LORD lasts forever.





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Being Renewed in God's Image: The Translation of Lord's Day 44

Perhaps you noticed it too – in September and October there was a noticeable uptick in activity on the CanRC website. In addition to some calls being extended, accepted, or declined, a good number of committee reports were posted. When the reports start rolling in, it's a sure sign that another general synod is just around the corner.

One of the larger reports, weighing in at forty-four pages, came from the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* (SCBP). This time around the committee "presents the 2013 definitive edition of the *Book of Praise* to General Synod for approval." It's been well over a decade since Synod Neerlandia 2001 mandated the SCBP to begin receiving submissions for additional hymns (Art 97), but the job's almost done now.

Final touches

Before presenting the "2013 definitive edition" to Synod Carman, the committee wanted to dot as many i's and cross as many t's as they possibly could. They further refined the wording of some revised psalms. The musical notation of some hymns was fine-tuned. Here and there syntax was strengthened and historical details were sharpened. And, if you soldier on through to sub-point 9.4.2 on page 39, you will discover that the SCBP is also proposing a change to the translation of Lord's Day 44, Question and Answer 115.

"But," you ask, "I thought we were revising psalms and hymns, not the Catechism?" Good question. Tracking down the answer leads us back to the rolling

farmland of northern Alberta, to an ecclesiastical assembly in a town not far from the shores of the mighty Athabasca River. You guessed it: Synod Neerlandia 2001. Not only did that Synod initiate the process leading to our augmented hymn section, but it also decided to forward a letter from Regional Synod West (Dec 5, 2000) to the SCBP. That letter contained some "proposed improvements to the translation of the Heidelberg Catechism" (Art 78). One of those proposals, indeed the most significant one, was an improvement to the translation of Q/A 115. So, before the 2013 edition of the *Book of Praise* is printed, the SCBP wanted to tidy up this outstanding matter as well.

So, what's the issue?

The Catechism is being memorized by youth from Surrey to Ottawa, from Neerlandia to Denver, and beyond. Therefore, if we are going to alter the translation of a certain Lord's Day, there ought to be a compelling reason. Stable, familiar wording assists in solid, long-term retention. So, why change Q/A 115? Let's take a closer look at the first part of the last sentence as we have it in our present translation. "Second, so that, while praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God's image. . . ." Compare that to a literal translation of the original German text from 1563: "Furthermore, that we, without ceasing, devote ourselves and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we might be renewed more and more in God's image. . . ."

Two items are noteworthy here. First, the original German text leaves us hanging a little bit with the words “devote ourselves.” “Devote ourselves to what?” someone may ask. One possibility is that we should devote ourselves to prayer. After all, that fits with the next section, Lord’s Day 45-52, which is all about prayer. Another possibility is that we should devote ourselves to doing good works. This would be in line with the previous answer which emphasized that those converted to God begin to live according to God’s commandments (A 114). However, whether Answer 115 encourages us to devote ourselves to prayer or good works (or both!) is not immediately clear.

If we are going to alter the translation of a certain Lord’s Day, there ought to be a compelling reason

Second, what is clear from the original German is that God, through his Holy Spirit, is the one who renews us in his image. In fact, this has already been clearly confessed in Lord’s Day 32. There we learned that not only has Christ redeemed us by his blood but “Christ. . . also renews us by his Holy Spirit to be his image” (emphasis added). However, when you read our present translation you might well walk away with the impression that it is our unceasing striving which leads to the renewal in God’s image.

Now the sharp grammarian in the crowd will point out that “to be renewed” is a passive verb. This passive form indicates that the action of renewing is being done to us not by us. However, will the average fourteen-year-old sitting in a catechism class pick up on that finer point of English verbal morphology? Or will he (and many others) simply see “strive” beside “renewed more and more after God’s image” and conclude that it is our striving which accomplishes the renewal? The issue is further complicated by the fact that whereas the original German mentions devoting (or: striving) first and praying second, our present English translation reverses that word order. Now instead of a close connection between praying to God and renewal in his image we have a tighter tie between our striving and renewal.

So, here’s the heart of the issue. Who renews us in God’s image: Christ, through his Holy Spirit, or

us? From Lord’s Day 32 the clear answer is: Christ. However, our present translation of Lord’s Day 44 muddies the clarity of that water a bit.

A pastoral, spiritual matter

All sincere Christians are concerned about the incompleteness of their renewal in God’s image. We long for “more and more” holiness in our lives. However, we’re often left sighing, “Too little and not enough holiness in my life.” If you yearn for greater sanctification in your life, where do you go and what do you do?

Do you begin with striving? But then, what if the results are not what you expected, and you are still giving in to that tenacious temptation? What do you do next? More striving? And when you’ve re-doubled your efforts to avoid Satan’s lures, and the results still hover somewhere between negligible and non-existent, what’s your next step? Still more striving? By now, you get the point.

The Apostle Paul, also self-described as “the wretched man,” was afflicted by the small measure of sanctification in his life. He regularly found himself doing what he ought not to do, and not doing what he knew he should be doing (Rom 7:14-24). In his plight, he did not say, “O my soul, strive yet harder, you can do it!” Instead, he turned to his God and asked, “Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:24-25). In short, being renewed in God’s image requires nothing less than divine power. And to receive divine aid we must pray.

This does not mean that we may idly, let alone fatalistically, sit by and ignore God’s commands, thinking to ourselves that the Holy Spirit will do it for us. The Holy Spirit does not work our sanctification *instead of us* but rather *inside of us* – from the heart to the head to the hand. Yet it is he who does it. If we try to renew ourselves by our own striving and strength, the task would be hopeless and in vain (Hymn 28:3). We need a translation of Lord’s Day 44 which clearly teaches us to rely on God for our sanctification. At this particular point, our present translation has the potential to confuse young and old alike.

So, both from a translation perspective, as well as a pastoral, spiritual point of view, our present translation is sufficiently weak that it warrants another look. Indeed, Synod Neerlandia 2001 already pointed us in this direction.

Back to the translations

So, how shall we translate Answer 115? A glance through previous editions of the *Book of Praise* demonstrates that we've been wrestling with this for some decades now. Back in 1972 the last sentence of the answer read: "Second, that we may constantly endeavour, and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, to be renewed more and more after the image of God. . . ." The strong points of this translation are that it is close to the original and it directly connects prayer and renewal, thereby indicating that it is God who renews us. The weak point is that we're left with a lingering question about what we must "constantly endeavour" to do.

If you yearn for greater sanctification in your life, where do you go and what do you do?

Therefore, in 1984 an effort was made to answer the lingering question. The new translation was: "Second, that we may be zealous for good deeds and constantly pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that he may more and more renew us after God's image. . . ." So, now it was very clear what we should endeavour to do: "good deeds" (cf. Q. 86 and A. 114). Moreover, it was made even clearer that God does the renewing. There was only one problem. The phrase "for good deeds" is not in the original text of the Catechism.

Upon further reflection, Synod Winnipeg 1989 decided that it was not wise to have a translation of Lord's Day 44 which "brings into the text more than the original expresses" (Art. 159). Consequently, yet another translation was adopted. This time it was borrowed from the Psalter-Hymnal of the Christian Reformed Church of North America. That's also the translation we still have today. (Interestingly, in the meantime, the CRCNA also found its translation of Q/A 115 to be problematic and moved to a different one.)

One question and answer, three different translations, and all within the span of less than twenty years: it was not an ideal situation. But it's also water under the bridge. The best we can do now is try to stabilize things for the future.

The new proposal

The SCBP is now proposing the following translation: "Second, so that we may constantly apply ourselves and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit to be renewed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach the goal of perfection." For the most part, it is quite similar to the 1972 translation. In a sense, we're coming full circle here. That's the way it sometimes goes in (ecclesiastical) life. After you try this and that, you discover that what you originally had was not so bad after all.

There is one noteworthy change, though. Instead of "we may constantly endeavour" (1972), the proposal suggests "we may constantly apply ourselves." For one thing, this is closer to the original German (*wir o[h]ne unterlasz uns befleissen*). Yet, more significantly, it underlines how we should live before our Triune God. In the end, maybe it's not so important that we decisively determine whether the endeavouring of Answer 115 reaches back to the obedience of the commandments (A. 114) or forward to the activity of prayer (A. 116). After all, both are central parts of our thankfulness to God.

Living out of gratitude for God's grace is something about which we all need to be sincere and serious

However, it is crucial that our entire life of gratitude is filled with "earnest purpose" (A. 114). And it is precisely this emphasis that the new proposed translation aims to convey. Living out of gratitude for God's grace is something about which we all need to be sincere and serious. That is to say, with a heartfelt love and delight, we ought to "apply ourselves" to every aspect of being thankful to God for such deliverance.

Translation is always a challenging task. Yet, the Lord willing, the proposed translation of Answer 115, coming to the table of Synod Carman 2013, will serve the churches well for many years to come.





What if Another Church is Suddenly More Attractive than Mine?

By Rosalyn Kieft

Rosalyn Kieft is from Waterdown, ON

It seems that in our modern age of questioning and self-indulgence an increasing number of our fellow Christian youth are exiting the doors of Reformed buildings to attend other churches. This has been an issue throughout our parents' and grandparents' generations, but the culture we live in today encourages this sort of personal journey and the concept of finding what works for you. Right now you can probably think of a handful of friends or family members you know who have engaged in this sort of journey. Perhaps they have found a different church and you have lost contact with them, or maybe they begrudgingly stayed in the church where they were raised. Remember how you could not fathom what would cause them to even consider leaving?

But what happens if now that's you? What if your dissatisfaction with your church is too heavy to ignore? Many Reformed youth find themselves at this difficult crossroad, wondering how to approach their desire to question and discover answers.

Hard questions

To begin, Jesus never said that following him would be an easy or simple task. He told his disciples over and over again that the cost of following him was great; consider Luke 9:57-63, where he bluntly spoke of the costs being as painful as leaving family or being without a home. Francis Chan, in his book *Crazy Love*, illustrates this point well: "God doesn't call us to be comfortable. He calls us to trust him so completely that we are unafraid to put ourselves in situations where we will be in trouble if he doesn't come through." You will face hard questions and while it can be painful to deal with them, it is important to face them head on.

Never be afraid to live out the words of 1 John 4:1, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." How solid are your beliefs if you have never been challenged to explain them? Catechism classes create a space to discover the doctrine of your own church and how it aligns with the truth of the gospel. Likewise, it is also important to consider the truth and falsehood of the practices and beliefs of other churches.

Be reminded of 1 Peter 3:15, when Peter says "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." Has anyone ever asked you why you are a member of your specific Reformed church denomination? Or more importantly, would you have an answer to give them? In our culture of post-modernism which embraces the idea that everything is equally good, it is difficult for people to understand why you would choose one specific church in which to worship and fellowship for all of your days here on earth! You must have good reasons for doing so.

Consider the source

Consider the source of your attraction. Do you feel a sense of belonging when someone shakes your hand as you walk in and welcomes you? Do you feel more comfortable in your jeans, fellowshiping with a coffee in your hand? Do you feel more alive when you sing along with the guitar and drums to worship music instead of Genevan tunes? Or do you find yourself questioning the doctrines of infant baptism, divine election, or salvation by grace alone?

It is crucial to distinguish whether your attraction stems from doctrinal or practical issues. Doctrinal issues can only be proved or disproved by the true Word of God

– only issues as strong as these should be motivation to pack up and leave the church you have been raised in. Rejecting the Reformed church because you don't enjoy organ or piano music is not legitimate. Consider if your attraction to a different church stems from your desire for belonging or to be heard. Paul instructs young Timothy to "[f]lee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels" (2 Tim 2:22-23).

Does your attraction stem from the fact that people seem to have more zeal, more fire, more passion for God in the church you are visiting? Maybe your Reformed church needs a kick-start of zealous love for Jesus, a radical lifestyle that honours God in every single aspect. Does your attraction come from liking anonymity or noting the absence of "Dutch bingo"? Maybe the Reformed church does need to lay aside its tendency to gossip about relatives or family members. Please note that leaving a church because of the people is never a good reason. Church is about Jesus; it is about your relationship with Christ which translates into love for your fellow brothers and sisters. Sometimes there is a severe issue with this translation of love in our churches, but that is where you come in.

You get what you give. Often youth will notice that the reason they so enjoy worshipping in a different church is because there they are more into their worship, whether they are happier, more willing to worship, or even more desirous to create relationships with their fellow Christians. This begs the question: how active are you in your own church? Many youth claim to feel more alive or closer to God while worshipping in another church but are these youth the ones who stumble into their own church begrudgingly, look around with a critical gaze, and slip into the pew to catch up on an extra hour of sleep?

I'll say it again: in a church, you get what you give. If you are actively involved in a Bible study and the ongoing events of your church, you will reap the reward of your commitment. If you invest hours of love and prayer, and cultivate personal relationships with your fellow Reformed churchgoers, you will discover that oh-so-important feeling of belonging. If you find yourself willing to commit time and energy into a different church, ask yourself why you haven't done so in your own church. What's stopping you?

Consider your place

If you decide that visiting or considering another church is necessary for you to fully seek the truth, do so in a wary manner and surround yourself with friends and family members who will engage with you in the doctrine, strengths, and weaknesses of the Reformed churches. Ground yourself with people who are willing to discuss your questions with you, because it is easy to lose yourself if you are searching for something that feels better. It is also important to "[p]ut on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand

against the devil's schemes" (Eph 6:11). Prepare yourself mentally and spiritually as you enter into the realm of spiritual questioning where "your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8).

Above all, trust God's plan. The fact of the matter is that God has placed you in your church for a reason; you have been raised there for a purpose. Please note that if you have already made a commitment to your church through your profession of faith, you must consider even more carefully the act of breaking that promise. Whether or not you have, you must consider your place in your own church. It could be that your desire to have radically zealous worship is something that will benefit your home church. It could be that your longing to be surrounded by sincerely devoted believers would be irreplaceably valuable in a position as youth leader or youth mentor. If you feel a strong disgust for the gossip and judgment that you may witness, be the person to stop it and preach against it. Paul instructs young Timothy with these words: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Tim 4:12).

Conclusion

No church is perfect; no church will ever be free from hypocrisy, gossip, lazy believers, or stubborn traditions because no church is free from sinful people. This is the sad reality that Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 5:7-9,

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

We will always be longing for that day when we will worship God in perfect unity, harmony, and perfect zeal.

Do you have questions about your church? Find answers for those questions and supplement your search with fervent prayer and devoted time with God's Word for you. Seek his direction in everything, always bringing your decisions to his Word for validation. Do not be afraid to speak, even when, like Jeremiah, we might say, "Ah, Sovereign Lord! I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." God replies to you with "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you" (Jer 1:6-7).

Make your decisions advised by the truth of God's Word and motivated by the greatest commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind (Matt 22:37). And in all your searching, questioning, and journeying, consider carefully the words of Ecclesiastes 11:9, "Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment."





Edu-sketch

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You are reading a first effort at starting something new and continuing something old. In the past, Mr. Keith Sikkema has kept the masses informed of the various challenges and joys that Reformed schools have experienced across Canada and in Lynden, Washington. His "Peregrine Survey" was carefully written with a great balance of news and views – his helpful comments. The mandate of sharing news and views of the schools has now been passed on. I'll give it my best.

In an effort to start something new the Education Matters board has invited me to come up with a new name. We agreed on "Edu-sketch." It brings to mind a once favourite toy for many, the Etch-a-sketch. My goal in this and future columns is to sketch out some of the common themes as well as the unique events in the realm of Reformed education in our schools. And, as is the case with most etch-a-sketches, every attempted sketch will be unique with its imperfections but genuine in its efforts.

When this task of sharing the news and views of our schools with you became my task, a call went out to the schools asking them to send me their school magazines. That call was answered with a flood of magazines filling my inbox and a lot of interesting reading became necessary. But one of the things that struck me in receiving these magazines is the overwhelming number of people who are involved in each of our schools. There are countless parent volunteers serving on boards and their various committees. If you consider that all of our schools have the same underlying purpose, namely the education of God's covenant children, then we can say that in the schools alone, there are hundreds of people volunteering their time to achieve this end. God is doing a marvellous work through them all and such a volunteer base helps to underscore the covenantal shared responsibilities we have in the work of education.

As we reflect on God's marvellous work, we can see his faithfulness even among the tides of change

and times of challenges. Undoubtedly, many personnel changes have occurred. Some teachers have retired while others have joined the ranks. Some have changed their career paths while others have simply changed schools. There are also those who have had to deal with health concerns that have taken them away from their desks. In all of these circumstances we put our trust in the LORD's faithfulness.

We can also mention that two longstanding servants of Christian education have retired, Mr. Hans van Dooren and Mr. Frank Ludwig. These two men have faithfully served as teachers and principals of various Reformed schools for many years. The leadership in their school communities was highly valued. Finding replacements for their positions was a challenge, no doubt. Taking on the task of principal at Guido de Brès is Mr. Roger Vanoostveen. He previously served as principal at Providence Reformed Collegiate in Komoka, Ontario. Taking on the task at John Calvin School in Smithville, Ontario, is Mr. George Hofsink. He previously served as principal at Covenant Christian School, in Millgrove, Ontario. This, of course, left open two more spots that needed to be filled. Mr. Chris deBoer was appointed to the task of principal at Providence Reformed Collegiate while Miss Tracy Jelsma was appointed as an interim principal at Covenant Christian School. In addition, Mr. Ed Balch moved as principal in Owen Sound to serve as teacher in Dufferin Christian School in Carman, Manitoba. Mrs. Petra Jonker has taken on the task of principal in Owen Sound.

As a new school year begins and the newsletters are shared, it quickly becomes clear that a common theme among our schools is the themes in our schools. It is great to see that the purpose of our schools remain a primary concern among the staff members and administrators. Godly themes with biblical texts continue to be the normative practice with much initial effort and intent being made to ensure that the theme is actively applied throughout the school year. As a reminder to the teachers and principals – continue to

make that effort in November and April too! Speak of your school's theme in the classroom and make engaging meaningful connections for the students.

Another common, but very different thread that becomes quite apparent is the Nut-Free and/or Fragrance Free policies. It is interesting how, for the sake of one student, a whole school community or at least a classroom is affected. This is a positive demonstration of how we care for one another. While such policies do place minor restrictions and limitations on our societies, they are necessary components for safety in our schools. Even more importantly, they remind us to be thankful to the LORD for his goodness. It is a wonder that not more of us suffer from severe allergies. While it may be a challenge to adjust our eating/snack/food preparation habits for the benefit of even one student, it is good to make a concerted effort.

Finally, one other thing that many schools have in common is an active Ladies' Auxiliary. Whatever the local school calls it, this group of dedicated parents and supporters work hard to raise funds for different things in the school. It is interesting how much money is raised by these organizations across the country. One of the most common programs is the Voucher Program whereby anyone can purchase gift cards for use in a variety of stores and the school receives a two and a half to eight percent return on those cards sold. Imagine if the whole school community and supporting church communities would get on board with these local programs. Perhaps the financial challenges could be reduced. One of the interesting questions that different school boards struggle with is the relationship between the Ladies' Auxiliary and the Board. Does the school board need to ask the Ladies' Auxiliary for funds, or is it such that the Board decides where funds from the Ladies' Auxiliary would best be spent? Can the Board adjust tuition rates based on the premise of receiving funds from the Ladies' Auxiliary, or does the Board always have to assume that they may get a negative response. Perhaps the Ladies' Aid has their own purpose for the funds. However the relationship functions, it is a real blessing to a school community to have a group dedicated to finding ways to raise funds for the education at the school.

Let's shift gears now, and consider some of the unique things going on in the schools. The purpose of sharing these things is so that we can learn from each other and consider things we may not have considered before. One of the things that may motivate some schools to assess their teaching of letters is Coaldale Christian School's decision to teach kindergarten students lowercase letters first. They note that

"lowercase letters are used in text ninety-five percent of the time. Upper case letters are used only occasionally and for a specific purpose." They cite two sources: Bradshaw et. al. 1985 and Clair et. al., 1999, p.140. Perhaps Coaldale will be able to share the benefits of this decision with other schools in a year or two and in the mean time, others can look up the sources and consider making changes as needed.

Another interesting development is taking place in the Fraser Valley. The school boards of William of Orange and Credo Christian Elementary School are "exploring opportunities to cooperate as an interim solution to enrolment and/or financial challenges that both schools face." The board of Credo is seeking some volunteers who would be willing to send their children to William of Orange for a number of years, starting in September of 2013. Of course, this could mean longer transportation time for some and it means leaving a school family that one may have been a member of for quite some time. As such, Credo may also offer financial incentive to make such a move. We pray that the LORD will bless these efforts and cause the increased cooperation to be successful and beneficial. The interim element of this relationship is tangible as there is a Joint Fraser Valley Strategic Planning Committee that is seeking longer term solutions to the demographic changes experienced in the Fraser Valley. May this, too, receive God's blessing.

One of the challenges that schools face is a way to keep parents involved. Cornerstone Christian School in Guelph, Ontario has found a way: assign math homework to parents. The selected math program used in Guelph "requires the students to do a lot of repeated work; this is the strength of the program, in that it allows the students to get a good grip on all areas of math through repeated exercise." The challenge, of course, is assessing all of this student work. They have had regular volunteers help in this endeavour but they now "expect all parents of students in [grades] 5-8 to participate. . . we will do everything we can to accommodate people's schedules." The parents are asked simply to assess whether the answer is right or wrong and the teachers will use this information to follow up with the class or individual student as needed. This is certainly a way to keep parents involved and it serves as an opportunity for parents to serve the education of the covenant youth.

These are the tidbits that I gleaned from the schools' magazines. I hope that this sketch may have been educational and helpful. If there is something specific that you would like to see shared about your local school community, feel free to let me know.





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Mostly Canticles

Rest in Him

1. Our Sav - iour Je - sus lift - ed up his eyes
2. "To lit - tle ones you have your truth re - vealed.
3. "My Fa - ther has en - trust - ed all to me.

and prayed to God, who dwells a - bove the skies:
From wise and learn - ed you keep it con - cealed.
The Fa - ther knows the Son so ten - der - ly.

"I praise you, Fa - ther, Lord of earth and heav'n.
For this, O Fa - ther, was your gra - cious choice.
And I, the Son, know Fa - ther, up a - bove,

To you all glo - ry and all thanks be giv'n.
I and your chil - dren al - ways will re - joice.
as do his chil - dren, whom I dear - ly love.

4. "O, come to me, all you that are oppressed.
Lay down your burden, I will give you rest.
Take up my yoke and learn from me your part,
for I am gentle and I'm mild in heart.

5. "The soul that's anxious will find rest in me.
My yoke is light and carried easily.
The burden which upon you I impose
will carry you away from all your woes."

Text: Matthew 11:25-30; vers. George Ph. van Popta, © 2011
Tune: Frederick C. Atkinson, 1870

MORECAMBE
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*Dedicated to my children, Matthew and Anne-Marie Van Dyken, who are serving the Lord in Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico.



Adventures in Discipleship, Denver Family Camp 2012

Comfort, comfort my people. . . Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed. . .

Isaiah 40:1-5

I have a notebook full of treasures stored up from that weekend in the mountains: notes, quotes, scribbles, scriptures, and memories. This little pink book has become a tool for me to carry as I adventure on as a disciple throughout the rest of the year.

And truly, one weekend at Denver Family Camp, savouring the heavenly Father, and savouring fellowship with brothers and sisters in the heavenly knighthood, has enough refreshing power to stay with you the year through.

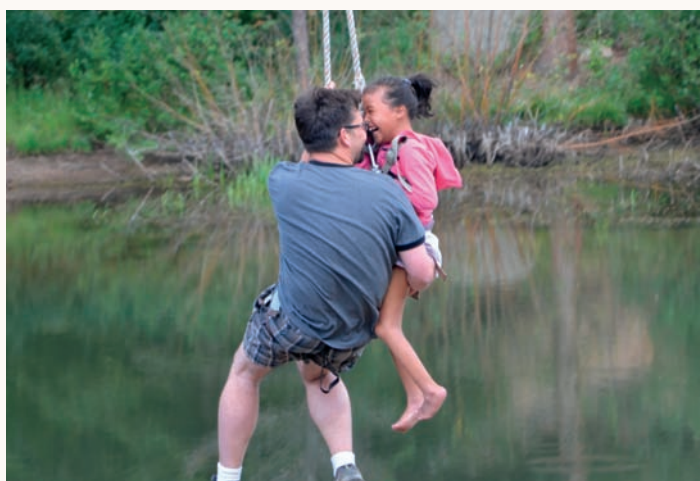
At Camp Eden days are split between sessions, fellowship, and activities, and just enough free time to roam the mountains, grassy paths, and waterside, for fellowship and prayer. Time for being filled up, time for pouring out.



The favourites were back. For outdoor adventure there was zip-lining down the cliff and over the lake, and hiking in lovely weather. For indoor fun there was the mystery box (this year we got to reach up a cardboard pig's snout to try to guess what he'd eaten), the game 9 squares, and hymn sings on a whim. As ever, we closed off with the sometimes-hotly-competitive but ever-fun Bible trivia.

And there was plenty of new: new friends to be made and new experiences. A favourite new pastime was the scavenger quest, and throughout the weekend we young people enjoyed gathering hidden supplies and compiling them into a marshmallow catapult. Upon closing night, we had the great joy of using these to launch mallows into the mouths of Rev. Kampen and Dr. de Visser.

It is good and refreshing to spend a weekend without electronics and all the conveniences we are





The spiritually mature must train those with less experience (Titus 2:4). It is not easy being a follower of Christ. We have a sinful nature and are prone to go astray. Our Lord knows this and does not require faultless devotion. He does, however, require loyalty and perseverance. The test of true discipleship is unflinching and undaunted loyalty.

This theme proved more comforting to me as I left family camp. *Be anchored in Christ.* Because if we are anchored in him, then we truly are staid the year through: whether storm or sunshine, whether visiting mountaintops or toiling away in the valleys below, we are anchored. We are safe. We are home.



so used to and be surrounded by the beautiful Rocky Mountains. And every single year it is difficult to return to daily life; some years, the parting is simply *awful*.

The theme of our family camp this year was "Discipleship Anchored in Christ," and we explored biblical discipleship. We must have true fellowship with Jesus Christ before we can ever obey his commands and keep his Word. We must have union with Christ; likeminded with Christ, having a love for him, and being students in the school of Christ. Abiding in his Word means that we choose his Word as a guide for our living, thinking, and acting.





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CRMA Membership Meeting (with observers)

Early in September, when many members of our churches flock to Hamilton for the Convocation of the Seminary, many other meetings are held. On September 5, the fledgling Canadian Reformed Missions Association met.

Presentations

Dr. A.J. de Visser, professor at the Seminary (who teaches, among many other disciplines, courses focusing on missions and evangelism), presented a short paper reviewing and discussing mission projects and strategies. He also made comments and suggestions on future directions. Dr. J. Visscher (emeritus pastor of Langley church) updated the meeting on curriculum development and the other work the Urban Mission Board is engaged in at home and abroad.

Informal reports

The meeting then turned to representatives and observers who briefly reviewed the work being done in various mission fields. The meeting heard of a new work in Southern Manitoba. The Manitoba churches are in the process of finding a minister to work in a church plant. Delegates from Toronto spoke of the work of the Reformed Bible College in PNG. Reports were heard about work in Brazil and Indonesia and Quebec and in other places in Canada and the world.

Membership

Dr. Visscher led a lively discussion concerning membership. Who should be members: churches or boards? The consensus of the meeting was that "churches should be members, as represented by their boards." The executive will draft appropriate constitutional amendments for discussion and approval at the September 2013 meeting.

Vision and purpose

Potential and present members had presented some questions regarding the vision and purpose of the CRMA, so the board used this opportunity to share more clearly its vision for the future and to invite feedback from the meeting. The following summary statement was presented:

The purpose of the CRMA is to assist local churches in carrying out their mandate to do mission work, both locally and internationally. Recognizing the principle that mission is the task of the local church, the CMRA has no intention of playing any other role than a purely supportive one.

What kind of support would the CRMA be able to offer? Based on feedback from sending churches and mission boards, the CRMA envisages that it will support the churches in mainly three ways:

- (1) The CRMA would assist churches and mission workers with *advice*. Whether questions come from a mission board that is involved in foreign missions or a local church here in Canada that is looking for a good evangelism course, the CRMA could become an address where such questions can be asked.
- (2) The CRMA would help churches and mission workers to *coordinate* efforts and use each other's expertise. The problem is all too often that mission workers are struggling to find a solution to a certain problem while the solution for that problem has already been found somewhere else. The CRMA could function as a platform where mission workers can share expertise. The CRMA will also be able to maintain contact with mission organizations of other Reformed denominations (NAPARC, ICRC churches) and share relevant information with the churches.
- (3) There is often a great need for members of mission boards and evangelism committees to be *equipped* for their task, not just practically but also in terms of Reformed principles. The CRMA will stimulate this

by organizing mission conferences with capable speakers and by pointing churches and individuals to good Reformed material.

This clarification from the executive was received favourably by the meeting.

Conference September 2013

A conference on missions will be organized in conjunction with the membership meeting scheduled for September 7, 2013 (the Saturday after the CRTS Convocation). The executive will try to arrange for the following two topics to be addressed during the meeting: (1) Theological education on the mission field; (2) Missions and money. Both topics are relevant and important for all foreign mission projects of our churches.

Website

Since there are no finances at present, website development has taken a "back seat." The meeting urged that a modest website plan yet be developed.

Finances

If all members contribute again a half percent of their mission budget for the 2013 calendar year, and enough churches/boards/committees together join this undertaking, then it should all work out well. The treasurer's proposal was approved by the meeting.

NAPARC

Dr. de Visser was delegated to represent the CRMA members at the soon to be convened NAPARC missions meeting in Philadelphia.

Conclusion

Delegates and observers marvelled at the scope of missions of the churches and the wealth and depth of experience among the many boards and committees. It again became clear that the CRMA can be a blessing by advising, coordinating, and equipping us in the missionary mandate of the church. May the gospel go out to the ends of the earth?

