



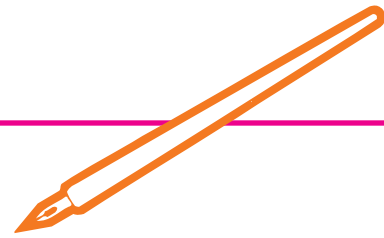
Clarion

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*Fergus, Ontario
- Site of General Synod 1998*

By J. Geertsema



Young man, who are you? Young woman, what should you look like?

What the newspaper said about modern men

On Friday, December 26, 1997 an article by Jon Wells, appeared in *The Hamilton Spectator* dealing with the question, "What do men really want?" Being a man seems to have become a problem.

Years ago, before the dawn of "men's studies," being a man entailed little mystery. . . . But times have stumbled forward, and there is a growing men's movement. . . . attempting to figure out what masculinity means. "There is a lot of confusion right now about what being a man is," one student of men's studies recently bemoaned. . . . But does the men's movement signal the evolution of men or the decline of men? Is there anyone out there who can help? Well, yes, there is plenty of help out there: counselors, web-sites, books, men's magazines. . . . "It's so helpful for men to meet in groups, and talk honestly, for strength and to encourage change," explains Dr. . . . who with his wife runs the Gender Institute. . . . A University of Toronto social anthropologist. . . . says the men's movement "represents a need for men to ascertain who and what they are. There just isn't a sense of what is valuable and integral to their being." "The men's movement began in the '70s as a modest response to feminism," said a social historian at the University of Pittsburgh, and author of *Be a Man!*

It is obvious that for many men it has become a big problem to understand who and what they are. Men in general are in the midst of an identity crisis. They feel insecure and lost. They need help and guidance. Social anthropologists and psychiatrists enter the stage, writing articles and books about this "dreadful" situation. Academically trained counselors hold week-long seminars and establish counseling institutions. Yet, this is but another of the many man-made problems that create research and teaching and counseling jobs for anthropologists and sociologists and historians. These man-made problems build careers for psychologists and psychiatrists and other counselors, for physicians and pharmacists, and likely for still more professional academics and other non-professionals. In other words, it all costs a lot of money, to be paid by the lost male patient with his masculinity problem.

The article in *The Spectator* acknowledges that this male mental-health problem is of a very recent date – since the 1970s – and that it is caused by the rise of feminism. Feminism, however, does have an old root. This root is the philosophy of humanism which proclaimed liberty, fraternity,

and equality as found in the cry of the French Revolution of 1789. The root of the problem is in man himself; it is in man who refuses to listen to God. Mankind is continuing the rebellion of Paradise in rejecting the wisdom of the Creator. With his man-made and, in fact, devil-inspired wisdom, he causes his own problems that destroy the life that God gave.

The modern male will not find the true solution in himself as individual, nor in the male group. He knocks at all the wrong doors. Further, he keeps shut and barricades the right door, the door behind which the solution is found in an old document: the Word of God. Certainly, in our sinful world many individual men have difficulty with manhood. Many men also have abused their position. But that is not the issue here. Here we deal with this new general male problem. Of course, not all men participate in this problem as it is conceived here.

In many advertisements in which (young) men are portrayed, a type of masculinity that is enhanced by physical body building predominates. It results in handsome, strong, bodies appearing attractive to the opposite sex. This seems to be one form of dealing with the male problem.

What the newspaper said about young women

The next day, on Saturday December 27, *The Hamilton Spectator* contained Denise Davy's review of the book *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* by Joan Jacobs Brumberg. This review begins with the following statement with which also the book starts:

At the close of the twentieth century, the female body poses an enormous problem for American girls, and it does so because of the culture in which we live. . . . Brumberg takes us from the corseted women of the 1870s who didn't dare show an ankle to today's teens with their skimpy outfits and fascination with body piercing.

[She] writes, today's young women "regard the ability to display their bodies as a sign of women's liberation, a mark of progress and a basic American right." But all that displaying, writes Brumberg, has elevated teen angst to a new high. She cites a study that shows 53 per cent of American girls dislike their bodies by the age of 13 and 78 per cent dislike them by the time they reach 17. That has fueled higher levels of eating disorders, substance abuse and drop-out rates than ever before.

Designers have played a major part in changing women's shapes. In 1908, for example, Parisian designer

Paul Poiret brought in a new dress that shifted the interest away from the tiny waist and wide hips, to the legs and to the slender, long-limbed figure, still popular today. In order to adapt to the current look, women have turned to diets, special bras and girdles, to new hairstyles and make-up. Brumberg states, "Although elevated body angst is a great boost to corporate profits, it saps the creativity of girls and threatens their mental and physical health.

The reviewer of the book has this point of criticism, that it "falls short in describing the powerful force that business has played in dictating how women look. . . [and] how companies create an insecurity in women in order to push them to buy their product."

What do we learn here?

This is a remarkably sharp criticism on the devastating manner in which the fashion business makes big money. The secular world we live in is dominated by mainly two things, money and sex. The apostle Paul writes that "it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6; see also Col. 3:5-6).

In many ways, sex is used to make money. One way is prostitution. Another wicked way is the production of pornographic material, (now made easily available through computers via the Internet) destroying the mental health of many a man as well as his marriage. But that is another

What's inside?

In several months time, General Synod Fergus 1998 will convene, Lord willing. Sixteen men delegated by our two regional synods will spend the first several weeks of May together to make many decisions having to do with the life and well-being of the federation of churches. The mailman has already brought them stacks of mail – reports and the odd appeal – which they have to read, digest, and understand so that they will be well prepared to participate responsibly in the deliberations at Synod. We wish the brothers the rich blessing of the LORD God as they prepare.

To help the readers of *Clarion* become somewhat better informed as to what is on Synod's agenda, we are very happy to publish summaries of the committee reports that are going to Synod. In this issue, you will find a summary of the report of the Committee on relations with Churches Abroad. (In the next few issues, we plan to publish the rest of the reports.) You will also find an article about General Synods (what they are and how they work) by the Rev. E. Kampen.

Not only do we have relations with Reformed churches far away; we also meet other Reformed churches in our cities, towns and villages. When we meet others who love and live the Reformed faith, we rejoice; however, we sense that it is not good to give each other no more than a friendly wave, and then proceed to ignore each other. Rev. C. van Spronsen puts forward a suggestion worthy of our consideration.

We hope you enjoy reading these and the other offerings of this issue.

GvP



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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: C. Van Dam
Coeditors: R. Aasman, J. De Jong, J. Geertsema,
N.H. Gootjes, G.Ph. van Popta

ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION
46 Sulphur Springs Road, Ancaster, ON L9G 1L8
Fax: (905) 304-4951
E-Mail: clarion@compuserve.com

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS: (subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202
Email: premier@premier.mb.ca
World Wide Web address: <http://clarion.home.ml.org/>

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chapter. What we see in the book review is basically the same. The fashion business is criticized here of using sex in a way, hidden for many, to make money. It creates an image of how a young woman must be to be attractive and attract attention; what kind of clothes, therefore, she should fit into. In this way the fashion industry causes angst in her mind for not conforming to the desired image. So, women's "body angst is a great boost to corporate profits but it threatens their mental and physical health." Does not our Lord speak of the devil as the deceiver and murderer from the beginning (John 8:44)?


When I read this book review, I thought that there is not much difference in principle between getting people addicted to drugs for the sake of money, and creating a need for a special sexy fashion in which a specific sexy body will fit. Both have a destructive result on their victims.

Blessed are those who listen to the Good Shepherd

Let us look at God's view regarding His children, young men and young women. In the first place, let us go to Psalm 139. There young men and young women of God can read those beautiful words about their own beginnings. They were woven together by their almighty Creator Father in heaven through His Son, Christ Jesus, our Saviour. Our Maker and Father made that body of ours as it is. He formed us, body and soul at the start of our life. He guided us through life, so that we are who we are as young men and women. And so, as we are, He receives us as His children and wants to use us for the coming of His kingdom. As we are, thus He wants to use us in His service, to His glory and for the preservation and gathering of His church.

For young men and women who believe in Christ as their Saviour (who bought them with his blood to belong to him and serve him in the fear of the LORD their God) this faith drives out of their mind the angst of the world. It drives out the angst of young women to fit into that compulsory feminine fashion; it defeats the angst of young men to find their masculine identity. The words of Christ Jesus in Matthew 11:28 apply: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

This yoke is the love and fear of the LORD, our Maker and Redeemer and Sanctifier, Father, Son, and Spirit. Bearing this yoke means seeking to be a (young) man as God speaks about him and who gives identity and task. It means being a (young) woman as God speaks about her and who serves God with a humble and quiet spirit, in faith and holiness, in decency and propriety. This is the guidance of the Good Shepherd for His sheep. He gives us this identity: we are bought by Him in order to fulfil the joyful task to live for Him in holiness.

May our young men and women not get lost in the angst of the world, but abide in this Good Shepherd. May we not serve idol Mammon, the god of money and the goddess of fashion. Idols are nothing. The one behind these man-made gods is the devil who seeks to deceive and enslave and destroy. Let us, as the redeemed of the Lord, show, at the same time, the light of the gospel of redemption in Christ Jesus to this world that still makes its own enslaving idols and by it perishes in its false, man-made, destructive angst. 

TREASURES, NEW AND OLD

MATTHEW 13:52

By J. Ludwig

"Discipleship: Self Denial"⁽¹⁾

As they were going along the road, a man said to him, I will follow you wherever you go. Luke 9:57

"As they were going along the road . . ." These opening words of Luke 9:57 need to be understood in the framework of verse 51 where we read that Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." Luke is telling us there about the obedience of our Saviour. Jerusalem was the city where God had decreed that His Son would be tried, condemned and crucified. For Christ, Jerusalem is the place of punishment and death. Although the prospect of eternal punishment filled Him with dread – Jesus was a true man! – He did not shrink back from His messianic task. He continued resolutely on His way to Jerusalem.

Nothing could deter Him from accomplishing all that His Father had decreed in eternity and revealed in Scripture about the salvation of His sinful people.

As He journeys toward Jerusalem He draws with Him a great crowd. The question that would have begged an answer was, "What is Jesus going to do at the end of His journey?" The expectations of the crowds and even of His disciples were radically different from what Scripture foretold. The law and the prophets were crystal clear that the Lamb of God had to be led to the slaughter, that the servant of the Lord had to be reckoned with transgressors,

that the promised Messiah had to be smitten and afflicted. The road to Jerusalem was the road to eternal death. It was the highway to hell.

But that is not what His twelve disciples envisioned! When they heard the word "Jerusalem" they thought of the glory and power of Israel as a political kingdom. They imagined the restoration of David's fallen throne! Earlier on, in chapter 9 they showed that they did not want to hear about a Saviour who suffered and died. They had their own preconceptions and hopes of what He should do! Sure, they keep following Him, but not really knowing where He

is going or what He will accomplish. Their thoughts are still permeated with popular nationalist ideas about the kingdom of heaven. That's why in verse 54 they ask Jesus if they can call fire down from heaven to consume a village of Samaritans who were not receptive to their Lord and Saviour.

Keeping all that in mind, we begin to understand now why Luke placed the triad of sayings about discipleship (verses 57-62) precisely at this point in his account. He wants to show that following Christ to Jerusalem entails something totally different from what the disciples think. The first of His sayings is about self-denial, the second about obedience, the third about commitment. In all three cases, the outcome is not given. We do not know how these would-be followers acted upon the words of Christ. By leaving that out, the Holy Spirit shows us that these three individuals are not the focal point. Rather, the responses of Jesus are important and how the Twelve (and we today) must take to heart and live according to what Christ is revealing here.

While journeying to Jerusalem, a man said to him, "Lord,¹ I will follow you wherever you go." This man recognizes that Jesus is more than a teacher. Students of Judaism lived with their teachers in order to learn the Torah (the Law) but what Jesus demands is different. To "follow Him," means more than sitting at His feet and studying the law. It calls for a complete reorientation of life, a whole-hearted acceptance of His Word, a word that may lead to bearing scorn and enduring oppression for his sake. Keep in mind the time at which this man approached Jesus! It is when Christ had His face set toward Jerusalem. He is going along the road to the rejection by His people, to the death of the cross, to the forsakenness of God.

"This man," you will say, "didn't know all about that when he declared, 'Lord, I will follow you wherever you go.'" And yet, he *could* and he *should* have known. Matthew, in chapter 8, identifies this man as a "scribe." In other words, he was a man extremely well versed in the Scriptures. He had made it his calling to study, interpret and explain the Word of God. He could have known who Jesus was and why He had come down from heaven.

Although he does not give any sign that he acknowledges Jesus to be the promised Messiah, he obviously saw

something special about Him. He called Him, "Lord" after all, and he expresses the desire to "follow" Him. He is neither coaxed nor coerced by anyone to follow Jesus. It is completely voluntary. This scribe, this leader of the people, comes forward on his own. "I want to follow you, Lord."

Follow Christ. That's what this man wants to do. Leave behind his house and home. Say farewell to his family. Ruin his reputation in the eyes of his fellow-scribes. Do not forget, they were scheming to kill this man from Nazareth with His "blasphemous claims."

Forsake all for Jesus. That's quite something! Would we be prepared to do the same if we knew it was going to cost us our home, friends and family? Would we still say, "Lord, I will follow you wherever you go?" Would we exchange everything that we are for all that Christ is? Do we consider Him to be our highest joy, our greatest treasure? Is it our burning desire to stand in His service? Is it our deepest yearning to yield everything to Christ?

It's so easy to say, "Lord, I'll follow you wherever you go." The intention may even be pure, the thought earnest, but are the consequences understood and embraced? Have we truly counted the cost? If push comes to shove, are we willing to give everything for Christ? The last words of Luther's hymn flow readily from our lips. "Let goods and kindred go / This mortal life also / The body they may kill. . . ."

The man who said this to Jesus is convinced. There is no waffling on his part. No hedging his bets. He does not say, "Lord, first tell me what I can expect and then once I've weighed the odds I might follow you." Similarly, Jesus does not rebuke him for being hypocritical, for not meaning what he says. We have to accept that this scribe meant what he said. "I will follow you. I will not murmur about the path you choose. I will not resist your leadership. I will not backtalk, acting as if I am wiser than God."

Do you see how much one has to deny oneself in order to follow the Anointed of God? Our nature is not one which likes to follow. We all want to be leaders. We all want to go our own way. That was evident right from the beginning. Think of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden. God clearly warned them: "Do not eat of the forbidden fruit." Under the prodding of the Serpent they went

ahead and did it anyway. We know better than God! We'll be masters in our own house! *Maitre chez nous!* And we are not one bit different from our first parents.

Sometimes we live under the impression that following Christ means "being good" – giving up what we call the "wrong" things and making sure we do what we call the "right" things. The problem with that is we are still taking our natural self as the starting point.

But the Christian way is totally different. As one writer put it, Christ says, Give me All or nothing. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work. I want YOU. I have not come to torment your old self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut a branch here and a branch there, I want the whole tree down and the roots torn up. Nor will I stop there. I will give you my own Spirit, so that my will shall become your will.²

"I will follow you," says the scribe, "and not just now and then, here and there, or when I really have no one else to turn to. I will follow you *wherever* you go." *Wherever*. That is as absolute and as broad as you can get. *Wherever* – even if that entails suffering, persecution, the enmity of the world, the valley of the shadow of death!

This requires self-denial. And self-denial means we do not give precedence to our own desires, that we do not grasp for what we want. Rather, we bend our will to that of another. That Other is Jesus Christ. If you truly follow Christ, then you let Him have the say! Always! You submit yourself to Him in every circumstance and to Him alone. You put yourself last and Christ first. Better yet, you let Christ be the First and the Last!

How can it be anything less? The Saviour whom we must follow, He gave himself up to the eternal wrath of God so that all who believe in Him might have eternal communion with God.

Rev. J. E. Ludwig is the minister of Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church in London, Ontario.

¹Actually the RSV (and NIV) omit "Lord" which many of the Greek manuscripts have – the name or title by which this prospective follower addresses Jesus. The NKJV includes it.

²C.S.Lewis *Mere Christianity*, "Is Christianity Hard or Easy?" pp,165ff.

The Who, What, When, Where, Why and How of a General Synod

By E. Kampen

Introduction

In only a couple months, eight elders and eight ministers will come together in Fergus, Ontario for a general synod. Since very few church members ever attend a general synod, and since those who once have sat in on a session of a synod may have been rather bewildered by the course of events, a “synod year” is a good opportunity to reawaken our awareness of what a general synod is all about. The purpose of this article is to examine the “who, what, when, where, why and how of a General Synod.” You will notice that we will take some liberty with that order.

“What” is a General Synod

While we will all be aware that we live in a federation of churches, for most of us this is apparent in that we may have relatives who live in another place who also belong to a Canadian (American) Reformed Church. When we visit our relatives, we go to church with them and we feel at home. Where churches are located in proximity, a regular pulpit exchange among the ministers makes us aware of the federation as well. Further, because there are other Canadian (American) Reformed churches, when we move from one place to another, we have a church home to go to.

These practical experiences are the result of churches which share the same confession having covenanted themselves together. The Church Order lays out the terms of that covenant. Part of being covenanted together is that the churches meet each other on certain occasions. You will understand that this does not mean that all the members meet together. That would be impossible. The churches meet via delegates who have been properly appointed. We call these meetings, “ecclesiastical assemblies” (Church Order 29 and following). The word “ecclesiastical” refers to “church.” These are “church” assem-

blies, as compared to civil assemblies, or meetings of various charities and organizations.

Article 29 of the Church Order lists four assemblies: the consistory, classis, regional synod, and general synod. Our focus, of course, is the general synod. The word “synod” means “to get together; to have a meeting in order to deliberate.” The word “general” sets it apart from a “regional” synod. General synod involves all the churches in the federation.

We can also notice that it is the last in the list. If we know the basics of Reformed church polity we will realize that being last does not mean it is highest. The only ecclesiastical assembly that has direct authority from the King of the Church is the local consistory.

A synod is, therefore, *a meeting of those delegated by the churches to deliberate on certain matters put before them by the churches*. Since it is a “general” synod, it involves all the churches that are federated together in the widest possible sense. It may be worthwhile to emphasize as well that it is a meeting of the churches, not of individuals, in that the churches determine the agenda of the assembly.

“Why” a General Synod?

Scripture does not give specific commands for the structure of church life beyond the local congregation. For example, Paul gives Timothy and Titus written instructions pertaining only to the government of the local congregations, as he writes about elders and deacons.

Though Scripture does not prescribe ecclesiastical assemblies beyond the local consistories, it is easy to see how the other ecclesiastical assemblies are a natural outgrowth of the Christian faith. This can be understood in light of the confession concerning the church and the communion of saints. As it is natural that believers in a particular place be drawn together to form a congrega-

tion because of their unity of faith and to exercise the communion of saints, so it is natural that local congregations be drawn together. If that drawing together is not there then we might question whether there is truly unity of faith, even though it may be vigorously stated that there is. If the confession of the catholicity of the church is taken seriously, then that has to be worked out in seeking and cooperating with the faithful churches which Christ gathers. As we are to use our talents and gifts willingly and cheerfully for the benefit of our fellow members locally, so we must as local congregations, as much as possible, do that in a wider context. Through the delegations at ecclesiastical assemblies, the churches are living out their confession of the catholicity of the church and the communion of saints.

The history of the New Testament church is marked by churches getting together. The history books give us details of many different councils. Though we have to take issue with the way these councils were at times thought to have some sort of higher, inherent authority, we cannot deny that in principle getting together to assist each other, especially in doctrinal issues, was the proper outworking of the confession concerning the church.

The churches in the time of the Reformation, which suffered much under the hierarchical abuse of Rome, nevertheless soon sought fellowship with each other. The French churches, already in 1559, began to work out how to live as a federation. At that point there were some 2,150 churches in France holding the Reformed faith. The churches worked hard to have a common confession and church order which would prevent disunity and difficulty. As a federation was organized, the autonomy of the local church was put first. The aim of the synodical assemblies was to serve the well-being of the churches. Thus the churches

avoided independentism and maintained the unity of the church without falling into hierarchy.

In the Netherlands, where there was also much persecution, the churches also sought to link together in some way. The Convent of Wesel (1568), though having no official standing, nevertheless reinforces that the churches sought each other. It was this seeking of each other as local churches that led to the synod of Emden in 1571. The motivation for this synod was both the honour of God and the edification of His congregations.¹

It is worthwhile to note these actions of the Reformed believers who had suffered so much under hierarchy. They did not retreat into independentism. Rather, united in faith they sought each other and made every effort to guard their relationship against hierarchy.

One final aspect is to be considered under this point. Why is a general synod basically a “national” synod, that is, a meeting of churches in one particular country? The answer would have to be that this is the most practical. Churches in a particular country will share a similar language and history and have to deal with a similar culture and political situation. Though we live in an age where travel is very easy, we should keep in mind as well that for most of history, travel was far slower. To make contact and assistance between churches feasible and relevant, you have to confine your circle. Due to the travel possibilities of our time it is possible to have meetings of representatives of various Reformed/Presbyterian churches from all over the world via an organization like the International Conference of Reformed Churches. Since issues will vary so much from country to country, an international general synod would not prove very useful. For practical reasons it is thus best to confine synods to churches federated nationally.

The sum of the matter should be clear: Ecclesiastical assemblies, including synods, are a natural consequence, a practical application, of the confession concerning the church and the communion of saints.

“When”

Article 49 of the Church Order specifies that “[t]he general synod shall be held once every three years.” It is interesting that the churches in the Netherlands, were not able to implement this for centuries! The period of 1571-1586

saw a number of synods. From then on, however, synods became very difficult to convene because they needed government permission. Thus, for example, in dealing with the Remonstrants, it was necessary to first win the support of the government before a synod could be called. Though that synod is the well-known synod of Dort (1618-19), which confirmed the Church Order as it had developed over the years, the government again for many years did not permit general synods to be convened! It was not really till the 19th century that the Reformed Churches could start to implement that practice.

“Through the delegations at ecclesiastical assemblies, the churches are living out their confession of the catholicity of the church and the communion of saints.”

While many churches with roots in the Reformation have annual general assemblies (eg. OPC, Reformed Church in the United States), via our Dutch heritage we have the practice of having a general synod once every three years. It should be kept in mind that there are also classes (normally four times per year) and regional synods (normally once per year). This shows that the churches do meet on various occasions.

That a general synod is held only once every three years, puts it in proper perspective. Though it may get the most publicity in church life, while classes and regional synods seem to take place in relative obscurity, it is especially at the classis level that the federation functions the most actively and relevantly. For example, it is at a classis that examinations for the ministry take place, that advice is received in matters of discipline, and where appeals are dealt with. The classis is the place where the churches deal with the *nitty-gritty* of church life! The three year interval between synods reminds us that matters dealt with at that level are not so press-

ing that meetings should be held more frequently.

“Where”

The general synod of 1995 was held in Abbotsford, B.C.; this year’s general synod is to be held in Fergus, Ontario. The churches have adopted the practice of alternating synods between the churches in the East and the West. Additionally, the practice is also to alternate between the classes. Synod Fergus will (according to custom) appoint the next convening church from Classis Alberta Manitoba, since Abbotsford was in Classis Pacific.

In principle every church should get a turn to host a synod. There is, however, a practical consideration. To hold a synod one needs proper meeting facilities. Various rooms will be needed to accommodate committee meetings. Facilities and the necessary (wo)man power must also be there to provide meals for the delegates for a number of weeks. Delegates will also need accommodation during their stay.

Though it may seem somewhat inefficient to rotate the places where synods are held, it does prevent the idea that the church has its headquarters in a certain city. We have no denominational buildings with denominational offices and do well to avoid moving in that direction in even the slightest way.

The church appointed by the previous general synod does all the preparatory work. There are guidelines in place that assist the convening church in this task (Acts of Synod Abbotsford, pg. 103-106). It is the task of the convening church to send out notices requesting items to be submitted for general synod, to draft provisional agendas as material is submitted, as well as to distribute, well in advance of synod, the material to those delegated to attend so they can study the matter beforehand. In this way there is no need for any interim committee between synods, nor stated clerks (permanent secretaries).

Over the years the churches have been well served by the various churches appointed to organize synods as there were always brothers with organizational skills who could attend to this task.

“Who” Goes to a General Synod?

If one would compare the names of those who attended a general synod over the years, one would find that many have been there more than once. This is true not only for ministers but also elders. Though one may question

the wisdom of this, this is not their own doing. There is a selection process that begins at the level of classis. Classis elects brothers to a regional synod. One of the duties of the last regional synod before the general synod is to choose delegates to that general synod (Church Order Article 47).

At a regional synod it is customary to make a list of all the ministers serving the churches in that region. Through several rounds of voting the delegates are chosen, along with four alternates. The churches are asked to submit names of brother elders able to attend a general synod. A similar procedure is used to elect four elder delegates as well as four alternates. Alternates will be called upon if the primary delegates are unable to attend.

The question is raised from time to time whether delegation should be by means of rotation, so that every minister gets a turn and more elders would get turns. Regarding the elders, it has to be kept in mind that not all elders are able to take the time off work required to attend a general synod. As for the idea of rotation, already in the 1500's this idea was proposed but rejected in favour of choosing delegates by way of free elections.²

In this process you can see that a general synod is not so much a representative assembly where each church is able to send a delegation. These delegates are not there to represent the opinions of their constituents. Rather, the churches together appoint brothers deemed competent to handle the matters before a synod. This does not take away from the fact that brothers at a regional synod will most likely delegate those with whose approach they feel in agreement in the matters bound to come before general synod. What we see here is that the churches have agreed on a way to deal with the matters that applies to all of them.

“What” Does a General Synod Do?

Article 30 of the Church Order gives the general rule that church assemblies should deal with “ecclesiastical matters.” In other words, the assemblies should deal with church business. Further, the Church Order specifies that a major assembly “shall deal with those matters which could not be finished in the minor assembly or which belong to its churches in common.”

Regarding things “which could not be finished in the minor assembly,” this does not mean “the things for which

they did not have time.” Rather, it means the things the churches have agreed require the involvement of the sister churches. For example, a matter of church discipline cannot be finished by the consistory for it has been agreed that the advice of classis is needed before the second public announcement can be made. Likewise, a church cannot complete the calling and installation of a minister without involving classis.

“The classis is the place where the churches deal with the nitty-gritty of church life.”

Since we are dealing especially with general synods, we should consider what the churches have agreed cannot be finished without the involvement of a general synod. Basically, it will touch on the things that belong to all the churches in common. For example, relations with churches abroad (Church Order, Article 50). Though a local church may have learned about a church in another country, perhaps through the visits made there by one of its members, and has made extensive investigation, a relation with such a church involves not just itself but all the churches. Relations with other churches must be brought to the attention of a general synod and can only be completed there. Another example is the matter of the songs used in worship. The churches have agreed that this is a matter they will look after together. A local church, or a classis or regional synod, is not in a position to change things. It can only be brought to a proper conclusion by involving the whole federation by a general synod. You can understand that this also involves questions concerning the Confessions of the Church and its Church Order. Though proposals can arise only from the churches, churches have agreed that they will not implement things alone, for as a church in a federation they cannot complete a matter on their own anymore. Being in a federation, they have voluntarily limited their freedom to do certain things.

A look through previous Acts of Synod will show that matters like the Confessions, the Church Order, theo-

logical training, contact with churches abroad, the Book of Praise – all the things we share as federated churches – are what keep a general synod busy. Each synod usually appoints a number of committees to fulfill very specific mandates and to report to the next general synod about these very matters. Overall, though, a synod has quite a limited area of responsibility! Troubles arise in the churches when a synod begins to intrude on the work of consistories and other assemblies. When each fulfills the task assigned to it, then the life of the churches can continue normally.

Another item that will show up on a general synod's agenda is “Appeals.” These appeals can pertain to issues dealt with by previous general synods, or they can pertain to decisions of regional synods. Strictly speaking, appeals against decisions of previous synods should only be coming from the churches, that is, sent by the consistories.³ After all, the general synod is an assembly of the churches. Concerning the latter, the churches have agreed that anyone who complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly shall have the right to appeal to the major assembly (Church Order, Article 31). Normally, this means a person will appeal to a classis. Should one feel that the decision of classis does an injustice, one can appeal to a regional synod. It is to be hoped that a regional synod would bring to a conclusion appeals pertaining to personal injustices and discipline. It is possible, if one is convinced a regional synod dealt unjustly, to appeal to general synod.

A general synod thus has a very limited sphere of responsibility as it is to deal only with common matters pertaining to all the churches as well as appeals. It is good to keep this limited responsibility in mind so that a synod is not seen as the super-consistory. Churches guard against hierarchy by keeping in mind the limited role of the general synod and not expecting more from it than it is called to do. When you see this limited role, then you also can have more comfort that it is not a popular, representative assembly of each and every church.

The “How” Of a General Synod

Getting Started: When it comes to the workings of a general synod, there is much more going on than meets the eye. We have already explained the role of the convening church in orga-

nizing a synod. It is also the task of the convening church to open the synod.

It is customary, but not required, to have a worship service the evening before synod convenes, in which the blessing of the Lord is asked. Part of this custom is that the chairman of the last synod will be asked to lead the worship service.

On the opening day of synod, the minister of the convening church, or, if vacant, its counselor presides over the opening ceremonies. The credentials need to be checked to see if those delegated are present. Officers must be elected to lead the synod. By way of a voting process, a chairman, vice-chairman, a first and a second clerk are elected. Again, there is the custom that if general synod is held in the East, the chairman will be from the West, and vice versa. Once the officers (executive or moderamen) are elected, the synod is officially constituted. At this point the work of the convening church comes to an end.

Agenda: The first order of business will be to establish the exact agenda for synod. One of the rules for synod is that matters should have been submitted six weeks before the synod convened so that those delegated could study the material. In principle it should thus be easy to establish the agenda. The experience at synod Abbotsford, which apparently was not unique, was that on the first day of synod more material was received by the delegates than had been sent to them beforehand! This was not due to the tardiness of the convening church but the tardiness of the churches submitting material!

Advisory Committees: According to adopted regulations, a number of advisory committees will be established to serve for the duration of synod. This is done to streamline the proceedings. Each delegate should be familiar with the material but it requires special effort to summarize the material and come to conclusion and recommendations. When a report is presented by a committee, a synod member should not have to depend just on that report but he should be able to evaluate the report in light of his own study.

Since a synod has 16 members, normally there will be four committees with four members each. Each committee will have a convener who has to lead the meetings of the committee. A committee will also have a *recording secretary* who reports to the synod as a

whole and defends the report during the discussion.

Structure of Reports: A look through the Acts of past synods will reveal a set pattern of dealing with agenda items: "Material, Admissibility, Observations, Considerations & Recommendations." The heading of "Material" will refer to the relevant items under discussion. The next point is the matter of "Admissibility." It must be established whether the material is rightly before synod, for synod should not deal with things that do not belong to her jurisdiction or have not been fully dealt with at the other assemblies. It may seem frustrating to hear arguments about admissibility, but much damage will be done when synods simply plunge ahead with matters that are not its business! Under "Observations" there will appear a summary of the material. The "Considerations" are reflection on the observation. When you read the considerations you should begin to sense already what the conclusion will be. In essence the "considerations" form the grounds for the decisions that should flow out of it. The decision is usually phrased as a "Recommendation." This reflects that a committee came up with the report and recommends to the whole synod that it take over its work. Hence, if the synod as a whole is satisfied, in the Acts it will conclude with the word "adopted."

"Since a synod has 16 members, normally there will be four committees with four members each."

Meetings of Synod as a Whole: The bulk of the work at a synod is done in the various committees. Since the work of the committees has been printed and distributed to the members of synod before a discussion of synod as a whole, those who decide to spend an evening at a synod may wonder what is going on. It may even seem that very important matters are dealt with in a relatively short time. This overlooks that a committee has done much work. Furthermore, the manner of discussion at a synod also is very structured. To facili-

tate a good treatment of the material, in the first round of discussion delegates are expected to simply address the issue as it is before them. If a previous speaker made a comment he disagrees with, he must wait to interact with that till the next round. The second round gives room for interaction and rebuttal. If a matter can be finished with some minor changes, these will be made and the issue will be voted on. Should there be a need for major revision, a committee will take it back and rework it. This proves to be more efficient than trying to rework all sorts of details in full session.

Meals and Hospitality: By following the above procedure, a synod is able to work its way through its agenda. You will understand that delegates must digest much material rather quickly. Synod weeks prove to be very intensive weeks for all those involved. Fortunately, delegates are well looked after by the many ladies who look after the meals and refreshments, and they are received hospitably in the host congregation. It is in no way a reflection of the hospitality and care of the hosting congregation that after the intense weeks there is a sigh of relief when the chairman closes synod and everyone can head home again.

Conclusion

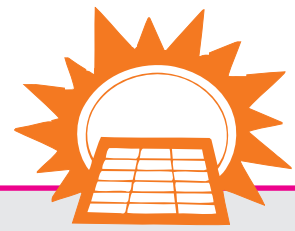
While our own lives thus continue in their regular busyness, you should now have a sense of the busyness in the convening church, as well as the busyness awaiting those delegated to attend the upcoming general synod. For the brothers delegated there will be a time of intense concentration. While remaining sober about the place of a general synod in the life of the churches, it will nevertheless be appropriate to think of and pray for those involved in the work pertaining to the upcoming synod. You will recall that the motivation for the churches in the Netherlands seeking each other in the age of the great Reformation was the honour of God and the edification of God's beloved churches. May the upcoming general synod serve that noble twofold aim.

¹H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht* (Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan, 1985) vol. 2, pp. 1-5.

²Joh. Jansen, *Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordening* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1976 [reprint of 1st ed.] 225-226.

³E. Kampen. "A Question of Admissibility: Who Has the Right to Address the Broader Assemblies?" *Clarion*, Vol. 45 (1996) 104-106.





By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

"Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world. . . ." Philipians 2: 14,15

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The above words were written by the apostle Paul to the Church in Philippi. Paul was in prison at that time. He would love to visit the people in Philippi, but he could not. Therefore he wrote them this letter. Because Paul knows how difficult it is for his friends in Philippi, he writes a letter full of encouragement. He hopes that through his letters he will be able to help them to continue to serve the Lord.

That letter could have been written to us as well. Even though we live many centuries later, many things are still the same. Because the letters written by Paul are in our Bible, we can still read them, and try to apply them in our daily life.

But to do what Paul writes here, is not easy. Never grumble? Never ask any questions? How can we ever make that. When the weather is not to our liking, everyone grumbles and complains about it. And of course we do, too. There are so many other things that everyone complains about, and often we do the same thing. Asking questions? Yes, we do that. Why are we the way we are? Why did the Lord give us this illness or this handicap, or why did we have to lose our loved one, why did He leave us childless, why can't I find a job, and why do I have to stay single? We think we have many reasons to grumble/and or to ask questions.

Yet the words in the Bible are meant for us, too. And Paul also explains to us why it is so important for us to do that: We have to be blameless and innocent in the midst of a world full of sin, so that we shine as lights in the world.

The Bible often uses the terms light and dark. The Lord uses the term Light for the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Light of the world. Darkness is used for Satan and his works. Workers of Satan do their jobs in the dark, for they do not want to be seen. The Lord Jesus warns us not to walk in the dark, for then we might trip over something and get hurt. He also tells us that God's Word is a Lamp for our feet. It lightens our path, so that we will reach Home safely.

We, out of grace, are members of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, just like the people in Philippi were. Members of Christ's Church are children of the Light. We cannot behave the same way as the people of the world. They live in darkness. When you are in the dark, you are looking for a light. When suddenly all the lights go out, we look for a flashlight, or we try to light a candle. For we need light. So the people of the world who live in darkness, must be able to find the Light of the Church. We, as members of that Church must let that Light shine. How can we do that? Of course we can talk about the Lord to other people. But that talking is not going to help any if we behave the same way other people do. Therefore, Paul gives the advice: do not grumble, do not ask questions. But accept everything out of the hand of the Lord.

Obey those who are placed in authority over you, and do not grumble about the government, or the police, or the boss, or the teacher, or the elders and the minister, or your parents. Do not do things that you know the Lord does not want you to do. Accept whatever happens to you out of the hand of your Father. Later on Paul even suggests that we be glad and rejoice with him. That means rejoice and be glad in the Lord.

If that is what we are doing, as God's children and as members of Christ's Church, then we will spread a light in this dark world. Then we can be as tools in the hand of the Lord to attract people to His Light.

It is hard work, for it is not always easy. No grumbling, no asking questions, rejoicing in the Lord. That sometimes seems *almost* impossible. But with the Lord it is possible. Not if we try to do it in our own strength. But if we pray for it, and ask the Lord to help us, then we will be able to do it. Paul could do it, even while he was in prison! We know of other people from the Bible and from Church History who did it, even when they were being killed. We also notice it around us: people who are very ill, or who go through suffering and grief, we see that they can still praise the Lord in difficult times. They shine their Light, and they show to the world around them that with the Lord you can rejoice at all times.

Let us pray the Lord to help us to shine our Light in the world. That it may attract the people out of the darkness into the Light of Christ's Church. So that they, out of grace, may join the Church in its confession. For there we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, born, crucified, resurrected, and ascended into heaven, from where He will come to gather His Church from all the ends of the earth into His eternal Glory.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord;

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary;

suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried;

He descended into hell;

the third day He rose again from the dead;

He ascended into heav'n, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;

from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit;

I believe a holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints;

the forgiveness of sins;

the resurrection of the body;

and the life everlasting. Amen.

Hymn 1A

Birthdays in April:

2: Derek Kok

Spruce Dale, 160 Fraser Street, Strathroy, ON
N7G 2C4

19: Marinus Foekens

290 Forest Street, Apt. #4, Chatham, ON
N7L 2A9

23: Arlene DeWit

c/o P. DeWit, Barnston Island, Surrey, BC
V3T 4W2
They will be 28, 46, and 37, D.V.
I wish you all a happy birthday!

The change of address for Henry Driegen came too late for me to place it in this column. I hope that the mail sent to the old address still reached him.

Just a note to those who send in request for birthdays or changes of addresses: the birthdays go in the *Clarion* volume before the birthday month, and have to be sent in by me several weeks before that. So it is advisable that I receive your letters well in advance, i.e. this column left my house on February 2nd.

Until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen,
7462 Reg. Rd. 20, RR#1,
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

Synod 98: Churches Abroad

By J. Visscher

In the first week of January 1998 the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad published its 53 page report to General Synod Fergus. Seeing that this report has been sent to every church but not been made available to each and every member in the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Managing Editor of *Clarion* has asked me to summarize its contents for you, the readers.

Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship

From the Acts of previous Synods you can glean that the Canadian Reformed Churches have sister church relations with a number of churches in different parts of the world: the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Free Reformed Church in South Africa, the Presbyterian Church in Korea, and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. These relationships are all governed by the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship and hence these churches are also called Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship (formerly they were called Rules for Correspondence, but Synod 1983 changed the name and Synod 1992 revised the rules).

Our Report governs the years 1995 to 1998 and it recommends, with thankfulness, that the Canadian Reformed Churches continue to maintain relations with these five churches.

These recommendations are based on letters received, Acts scrutinized, and visits made.

Particular attention is paid to the fact that the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa are undergoing considerable change in their ministerial ranks with ministers repatriating to the Netherlands and others coming over from the Dutch Reformed Church. Mention also is made of difficulties being experienced in the Free Church of Scotland, of various decisions made by the latest Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, and of communication problems with the Presbyterian Church in Korea.

Due to the situation in South Africa and upon their urgent request, the Committee charged the Rev. J. Moesker to visit the Free Reformed Churches there. His report has already appeared in *Clarion*.

The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

Our delegates to the latest meeting of the ICRC in Seoul, Korea, Prof. N.H. Gootjes and Rev. C. VanSpronsen, gave their report. Some of this material has already appeared in *Clarion*, as well as on the Internet.

As a result of their findings, the Committee recommends to Synod 1998 that the Canadian Reformed Churches remain members of this or-

ganization. Some suggestions are made to improve future meetings, and because the next meeting will be in North America, it is recommended that we send a full complement of two delegates and two advisors.

A new sister church?

The last Synod instructed the Committee to further investigate the Reformed Church in the United States with a view to entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with it. As a result, our subcommittee made up of the brothers E. Kampen, A. Nap and C. VanSpronsen met for a day with representatives of this church in Spokane, Washington. As well, the Rev. C. VanSpronsen attended the 1996 Synod of the RCUS. (Attempts to send someone to their 1997 Synod failed due to all Committee members having prior commitments.)

As a result of these visits, and other visits reported to Synod 1995, documents received and studied, the Committee comes to Synod 1998 with a positive recommendation to receive this church as a sister church. They, on their part, decided in their 1997 Synod to invite us to enter into the same relationship with them.

Other contacts

Since January 1997 the Committee has received a number of letters and e-mails from a group in Sri Lanka that

calls itself the Lanka Reformed Church. They would like to enter into a formal relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches and request us to send them missionaries and theological teachers, as well as funds for buildings and mission workers.

Since our Committee has funding only for administrative purposes, we had to inform them that we could not contribute to their financial needs and recommended that they take up contact with the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund. The Committee also recommends to Synod that the Lanka Reformed Church be advised to take up contact with our sister churches in Asia.

The Committee receives invitations on a regular basis from the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). Thus far we have received these invitations for information and have never yet sent an observer. Study of the documents that they have sent us thus far leads us to conclude that membership in this Council would be of little benefit to our churches.

A future strategy?

The Committee has also spent time reflecting on and discussing whether we should not have a strategy in place when it comes to future contacts. As a result, it comes to Synod with the recommendation that in the future the Canadian Re-

formed Churches give priority to establishing relationships with churches located in North and South America. The Committee also recommends that, as much as possible, invitations coming from churches in Africa, Asia and Europe be directed to sister churches in those areas. Finally, it recommends that Synod 1998 give the Committee the mandate to discuss this strategy with the sister churches and see whether a common approach can be worked out.

Retirements

Synod 1995 adopted a retirement schedule for all synodical committees, including our Committee, and this means that the brothers A. Nap, J. Visscher and J. Vanderstoep will retire in 1998. Their ranks are joined by br. S.H. DeBoer who resigned because of his move to the Maritimes. Synod 1998 will thus be called on to replace half the Committee.

Finances

Synod 1995 gave the Committee a budget of \$10,000.00, which includes \$2,500.00 paid in fees to the ICRC. This means that our actual operating budget over three years was \$7,500.00 or about \$2,500.00 a year (or about .33 cents per communicant member per year). From that amount we paid our administrative expenses, as well as all travel costs.



CALLLED AND ACCEPTED to Carman, MB

Rev. J. Moesker


of Cloverdale, BC

UPDATED MAILING ADDRESS:

Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church of Winnipeg

c/o W. Gortemaker, Clerk
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB
R2J 3X5

In conclusion

I trust that this gives you some idea as to what is contained in the Committee's report to Synod 1998. When the Acts come out after Synod, you will be able to read it in full since it will be included among the appendices. If you want more information about any of these matters before Synod meets, you should ask your Consistory for a copy of our report. 

Ecclesiastical Fellowship – A Realistic Solution

By C. Van Spronsen

On various ecclesiastical fronts the churches are dealing with the matter of relationships to other Reformed churches such as the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA), Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (OCRC), Free Reformed Churches (FRC) and l'Eglise Réformée du Quebec (ERQ). Local consistories, classes, regional synods and general synods express their joy and thankfulness that

we meet other faithful churches but at the same time struggle with finding ways to express this unity of faith with others who have different historical backgrounds and practices.

It seems that our dilemma is that basically we only maintain two kinds of relationships with others. We either live together as a federation in federative unity or we establish a relationship of "ecclesiastical fellowship." The remain-

ing choice is to have no official relationship.

Ecclesiastical Fellowship is generally reserved for the relationship with churches who live outside the geographical area of the federation of churches, such as churches in the Netherlands, Australia, Africa, Korea, Scotland, etc. We have a set of rules, mutually accepted by both parties, to regulate this fellowship. These rules

allow for different practices, variations in the church order, different psalm/hymn books, other Reformed confessional statements, etc. We receive each other's members, allow for pulpit exchange and so on (please see sidebar).

Within the borders of one nation we generally seek to establish complete federative unity once recognition of each other as true churches of Jesus Christ has taken place, with the same church order, the same ecclesiastical assemblies, etc. Almost all will agree that this is a beautiful and beneficial way of living together as churches of Jesus Christ and therefore should certainly remain the ultimate goal. However, is this the only way faithful churches of different backgrounds can live together and express their unity in Jesus Christ? Would this not be pressing the matter too hard at this stage of contacts when we deal with Churches who have been apart for many years and who have had their own historical development for so long and at times in totally different cultural settings, such as the ERQ, for example?

It seems to me that there is a realistic and fairly simple solution to our present dilemma if we free ourselves from the notion that "Ecclesiastical Fellowship" can only be entertained with Churches abroad and accept that we can maintain such a relationship with other Reformed Churches within our own nation and continent as well. I would hope that our Churches and the General Synod 1998 would seriously look at this possibility, even if the long-term goal would still remain federative unity, for the following reasons:

1. It is a Scriptural demand that we seek ways to express the spiritual unity we have in Jesus Christ and as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity (1 John 17, 1 Cor. 1:10).
2. It is unrealistic and not essential for recognition of each other as true churches of Jesus Christ that first federative unity be established.
3. We already have a form for the proposed relationship in place in "Ecclesiastical Fellowship" as well as the rules for it. Although generally this was with churches abroad we already have the precedent within our own borders in the affiliates of the Free

Church of Scotland within our nation (Toronto, Edmonton, PEI).

4. We already meet with the UR-CNA and the FRC in the forum of the ICRC. In the Constitution of the ICRC we have subscribed to the Purpose, Art. III 1, 2: "to express and promote the unity of faith that the member Churches have in Christ; to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member Churches." This certainly would encourage us to seek closer forms of fellowship within our own nation and continent.
5. We could share our common calling in this world in much the same way as the ICRC does on the international level. We could meet together in conference format like a regional ICRC, for example, once every two years.
6. Throughout our contacts with the above mentioned churches we have experienced a certain hesitation bordering on fear to push for federative unity. Brotherly love for one another should motivate us to respect these sentiments whether we feel they are justified or not.
7. Establishing ecclesiastical fellowship would also remove some of the present tensions and frustrations experienced by local churches, such as Aldergrove, Langley, Hamilton, Vernon and others, where the different churches have come to mutual recognition of one another. The rules for ecclesiastical fellowship regulate the matter of pulpit exchange, Lord's supper attendance, attestations, etc.
8. Ecclesiastical fellowship allows for some different practices without forcing the matter of being uniform in all respects, a common Book of Praise, etc. (see Art. 50 C.O.).
9. Establishing ecclesiastical fellowship does not undermine the goal of coming to full federative unity but allows time and a forum to grow towards this further expression of unity even if it would take another 5, 10 or 15 years.

RULES FOR ECCLESIASTICAL FELLOWSHIP,

as adopted by General Synod,
Lincoln, 1992. (Acts, art. 50)

1. The Churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defence and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy, and be watchful for deviations.
 2. The Churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or Minutes and otherwise, at least by sending decisions relevant to the respective Churches (if possible in translation).
 3. The churches shall consult each other when entering into relations with third parties.
 4. The Churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing, which also means admitting members of the respective Churches to the sacraments upon presentation of that attestation or certificate.
 5. The Churches shall in principle open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective Churches.
- In exercising these relations, the Churches shall strive to implement also the following:
6. When major changes or additions are being considered to the confessions, church government, or liturgy, the Churches shall be informed in order that as much consultations can take place as possible before a final decision is taken.
 7. The Churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as much as local regulations permit.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address. They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length. Please include address and phone number.

Re: A letter to the readers from the Editor in Chief: Changes aboard the good ship Clarion (47: 01)

I am afraid that in the *Clarion's* editorial policy, the truth has been lost to a desire to present a unity that does not exist in our churches.

Allow me to quote from Rev. Geertsema's summary of *Clarion's* editorial policy. "We did not want to present to you, the readers, conflicting opinions from one issue of *Clarion* to the next. Our aim has always been to set our compass in the Reformed direction and to sail the good ship *Clarion* on that course marked out by Secession(1843), Doleantie(1886), and Liberation(1944)." And let me add, the "Buiten verband."

However, the *Clarion* does not seem to want to deal with fruits of this history. During the Liberation two groups of people left the Synodical Church. There were those who left for reasons of doctrine, i.e. presumptive regeneration. These, from what I've been taught, were by and large from churches whose roots were in the Secession. They were, by and large, more confessionally oriented. "True-churches," we might say today.

There were also those who left for reasons of church polity; those who felt that Synod was wrong to depose a minister/professor. They joined the Liberated Churches as well. Their church historical background was more from the line of the Doleantie and they were also more ecumenical. They continued to work with Christians from other churches politically and in education. Many of these left the Liberated churches in the Netherlands in the sixties with the "Buiten verband." However, since most of the immigration into Canada occurred during the fifties, those people are still part of our rich heritage. These lines have continued to the present day.

For example, during the sixties, early seventies, and even today in some communities, there was/is a disagreement over the education of children. Some, including my mother's father, insisted that true Christian education could not be found in any school but a Canadian Reformed School, and therefore sent their children to public schools until Canadian Reformed schools existed. Even today, if their children do go on to post-secondary education, they by and large choose secular schools.

Others, including my father's father, sacrificed financially and sent their children to the local Christian Reformed schools until Canadian Reformed schools existed. In fact,

they continue to support Christian Reformed and interdenominational institutions by sending their children to Redeemer College, Calvin College, Dordt College, the King's College and Trinity-Western University.

How can these two elements of our churches co-exist without disagreement spilling over onto the pages of *Clarion*? Only by having a policy like this one. "We did not want to present to you, the readers, conflicting opinions from one issue of *Clarion* to the next." The truth is lost to a facade of unity.

I pray that this editorial policy will change in the future and deal with the fact that differences of opinion do exist within our community.

Yours in his service,
Pete Scholtens
petrus@credo-chs.langley.bc.ca
Langley, B.C.

Dr. Gootjes' recent article, 'W.W.J.D.' (*Clarion*, January 23, 1998), makes the point that in contemplating our own actions it does not help us to think of what Jesus would do. He pleads for a change from W.W.J.D. (what would Jesus do?) to W.W.J.W.M.T.D. (what would Jesus want me to do?).

I first want to comment that there is nothing wrong with the seven-lettered expression, W.W.J.W.M.T.D., except to say that it is rather cumbersome. Second, to the extent that Dr. Gootjes's fear is the danger of Socinianism, which reduces Jesus' suffering and death to an example only, he is right.

Nevertheless, his article is flawed. He mentions several things which Jesus did, and which we cannot or may not do: Jesus' actions when as a teen he went to the temple (Luke 2), his authoritative teaching, and his miracles.

Could it be, however, that there was something in Jesus' loving attitude throughout his life of suffering that requires us to imitate him? Dr. Gootjes appears to dismiss this with one brief sentence: 'What Jesus did as human sufferer, can hardly be something for us to do.' This is true with regard to the unique redemptive meaning, the atoning significance, of Jesus' suffering and death. Having said this, however, the Scriptures do testify to Jesus' attitude of love in his humiliation and suffering as an example for us.

I would like to refer you to the following passages:

- Eph 5:1-2: 'Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and

gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.'

- Phil 2:5: 'Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.' Paul continues this comment with a beautiful hymn on the humiliation and exaltation of our Lord.
- Matt 15:24: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'
- John 13:14-15: 'Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.'
- 1 John 2:6: 'Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.'
- 1 John 3:16: 'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.'
- 1 Pet 2:21: 'To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.'

It seems to me that in the light of these passages, Dr. Gootjes's warning against 'W.W.J.D.' bracelets does not stand the test of Scripture.

Hans Boersma,
Aldergrove, B.C.

Thank you for the positive tone of Dr. Gootjes editorial WWJD and for opening a discussion on what Jesus' humanity means to us in our personal lives.

The WWJD movement is inspired by Charles M. Sheldon's classic novel, "In His Steps." In the first chapter the Rev. Henry Maxwell is struggling to complete his sermon on 1 Peter 2 : 21, "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps." He had emphasized in point 1 of his sermon the atonement as Jesus' personal sacrifice and in the second point how Christ's atonement served as an example to early saints who, through faith in Christ, helped to save men by imitating His example. While completing his final point – the necessity of following Jesus in His sacrifice and example – he is interrupted by a poor stranger asking for his help. Again, at the conclusion of the worship service this poverty stricken, very ill man presents himself. Very politely he asks the whole church "What do you Christians mean by following the steps of Jesus?" and tells this comfortable, established church something of his story which comes from

the other side of life – unemployment, poverty, apathy, despair.

This leads to a group of people in the church pledging themselves earnestly and honestly for an entire year, not to do anything without first asking the question “What Would Jesus Do?” and then following Jesus as exactly as each knows how no matter what the result may be. How were they to know what Jesus would do in situations in our present age which are not mentioned in Scripture? By studying Jesus through the Holy Spirit – much Scripture study and many hours on their knees in prayer. Also, they would meet together weekly to pray together and support one another. The rest of the book details some of the dramatic changes this brings about in their personal lives, the church and the town of Raymond.

Dr. Gootjes’ editorial leaves us with the impression that Jesus’ life is not to be seen as an example but only as an atoning sacrifice. His humanity is almost deified, put outside of our human experience as something we may not relate to. Is this what Scripture tells us? Why did Jesus prefer to call Himself the Son of Man? What do texts like Matt. 16 : 24, Phil. 2 : 5, 1 Peter 4 : 1,13, Eph. 5 : 1,2 and 1 Thess. 1 : 6 mean then? Would Clarion please discuss this topic further helping us to apply in a practical way what Jesus humanity means in our daily lives?

Sincerely,
Pieter & Fran Vanderpol.
Abbotsford, BC

What would Jesus do? This is a very important question for each of us to ask ourselves. Dr. Gootjes wrote about this in the January 23rd editorial. I would like to comment.

We are continually tempted by Satan. So was Jesus. In particular, in the desert Satan came to Jesus and tempted Him. Jesus responded in a way in which we also must respond to temptation. He said, “It is written.” He used the Word of God to fight the temptations of the Devil. We too, young and old alike, must know God’s Word and use it to fight the temptations of Satan.

Can our young people look at Jesus’ life for guidance in their own situations? Luke 2:52 says “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men.” Jesus’ actions as a child and teenager showed His wisdom and drew favor from both God and those around Him. It is obvious from this that Jesus obeyed His sinful parents, showed patience with His brothers and sisters, applied Himself at school, and was kind and helpful to everyone. Most importantly, He honoured His heavenly Father in all things. Of course our young people can take example from this.

Dr. Gootjes writes that “maybe we can do several things He did. We can walk around, eat and sleep.” Is that all? Can we not show patience as Christ did with the crowds? Can we not show compassion for the sick and needy as Christ did? Can we not

have a love for the lost as Christ did? Yes! By the grace of God we can.

Why would we need an “improvement” on W.W.J.D.? We are told in 1 Thess. 1:6 to be imitators of the Lord. Our Lord humbled Himself and became a servant. We may do no less.

Jennifer Bergsma

A few weeks ago I had a conversation with someone about “W.W.J.D. wristbands.” When I received the Clarion issue with the wristband on the front cover, my first thought was that someone is writing a warning about this idol. It was a shock to realize that one of our professors of our Theological College was writing in favour of it. Is this really the way to be reminded of our Lord Jesus Christ? We have Scripture, and more important, we have the Holy Spirit Who dwells in our hearts, is always with us and not a worldly idol.

I am wondering what the next thing will be: a cross or a crucifix hanging off the rear-view mirror or mounted on the dashboard of our young people’s car? Or perhaps a terafim (house god) on our fireplace mantels in our family rooms? Do I put it too strongly? A warning would have been in place in the last part of the editorial instead of the glorification of a wristband.

B.F. VanderBruggen,
Burlington, ON

In your recent editorial titled, “W.W.J.D.”, you make the point that you feel that there are many things about the life of Jesus Christ with which the Christian cannot identify. Three main aspects, His teaching, His miracles, and His sacrifice on the cross cannot be imitated by us today. Therefore, the suggestion is made, we should ask, “What would Jesus want me to do?”

I think, in arguing this way, you are side-stepping the issue. Surely those wearing these bracelets are not trying to imitate Christ in the manner represented above. I believe the “W.W.J.D.” bracelet is based upon the principle set out in passages such as John 13, where Jesus, before the last supper, washes the feet of His disciples. He says in verse 15, “I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you,” and in verse 34, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” Paul also picks up on this idea in his letter to the Philippians (2:5), “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus,” and also to the Thessalonians (1:6), “You became imitators of us and of the Lord.”

All of this, of course, is not news to you, as well as the many other texts where we are called upon to lead Godly lives. This brings me to my second point. It almost seems like someone approached you and said, “These bracelets, what are they all about? All these young people wearing them – it’s like some kind of cult! Why don’t you write something about it!” Why do we do this? There are so many negative trends and philosophies in our world that have an

effect on our young people and ourselves – materialism, secular thought, the fashion industry, alcohol abuse, etc. Why do we feel the need to criticize or pick apart something that is good and positive? “W.W.J.D.” bracelets are not meant to function as a summary of all our beliefs concerning our Lord, Jesus Christ, but as a gentle reminder that we are His followers and should live as such. Why not just leave it at that?

Freda Jagt,
Burlington, ON

We (father and his four children) were given W.W.J.D. bracelets as a gift from a friend who is just returning to the faith. We wear them proudly, not, as to say, “to remind us of Jesus,” but to ask ourselves throughout the course of the day, “What would Jesus do?” in *this* particular situation. Would He turn the other cheek? forgive this person? walk away from conflict? compassionately reach out to this person in need?

To us, 1 John 2:6 expresses this best: “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” (Please see also 1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1,2; Rom. 15:1-6; 1 Pet. 2:13-25).

Our friend sees wearing the bracelet as an opportunity to tell others about Christ, as a conversation-starter to share his newfound faith. We have passed them on to our children with this in mind. We also like W.W.J.D. to mean “Walk with Jesus Daily” at times when we think we can do just fine on our own, to remind us to walk closely and humbly with our Lord. The Bible tells us to mirror our lives after Jesus’ life by living the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25 – *to walk the talk*).

“W.W.J.D.” has nothing to do with speaking with the authority of Jesus Christ, performing miracles like He did, suffering on the cross as He did, and being raised from the dead. Obviously we cannot nor may not copy these deeds; yet, in difficult situations, we can say to ourselves, “Although my first human reaction might be to do *this*, how would Jesus have handled this situation?” You are correct in saying: “We need to think more about Jesus Christ when we are asking ourselves what to do as Christians.” We must obey Him and not give in to temptations. This obedience must be visible in our lives, and if wearing a W.W.J.D. bracelet can help us remember these important things, then we will definitely continue to wear them with pride.

Luke and Jill Jelsma and children,
Burlington, ON

Thank you for the wonderful editorial “WWJD” (Jan. 1998). I have made it mandatory reading for my catechism students. It was refreshing to have an editorial which had the young people of the church as primary audience. Since almost all of them wear these bracelets, this editorial spoke to their hearts, as well as mine.

Rev. J.L. van Popta
Ottawa

In an editorial in *Clarion* (January 23, 1998), Dr. Gootjes focused on the meaning of the letters "W.W.J.D." In this connection he raised the question: "Does it help to think of what Jesus would do?" He tends to be rather negative about this: "It does not help very much to think about what Jesus would do in a certain situation. He might very well have done something we would never be able, or even be allowed, to do."


Dr. Gootjes is entirely correct in pointing out that there are limitations to how we can derive principles for our own conduct by asking the question "What would Jesus do?" In many respects what Jesus said and did was so unique it cannot be imitated or repeated. This also applies where we read:

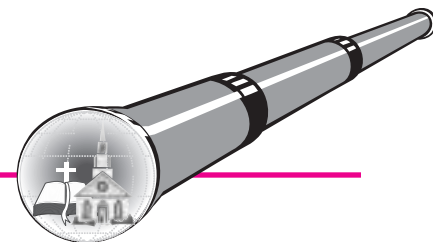
"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an *example*, that you should *follow in his steps*" (1 Peter 2:21-RSV). As Christians we are called to "follow" Christ (cf. Mat 10:38; 16:24; etc.). This is not the same as "imitating" Him in every respect.

There are, of course, texts that do point in the direction of "imitating" Christ. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul summons his readers: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (compare also 1 Thessalonians 1:6). But if we look at the gospels, it becomes clear that this too is meant in terms of following an authoritative pattern, not necessarily imitating every detail slavishly. Other-

wise we would still be literally washing each other's feet nowadays since Jesus told His disciples: "For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15).

Perhaps the troubling aspect of the "W.W.J.D." formula is that it focuses on what Jesus *would* do in our case, whereas one of the things Scripture teaches us to focus on is what He *did* do and what its meaning is for us: "He who says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked" (1 John 2:6). Maybe out of respect for that fact, W.W.J.D. should be changed to W.A.J.D. (Walk As Jesus Did).

A.J. Pol
Guelph, ON 



Observation Deck

By J. VanRietschoten

From the Christian Observer I gleaned the following information:

Harold Lindsell dies at 84; authored *Battle for the Bible*

LAGUNA HILLS, Calif. (BP) – Harold Lindsell, a former editor of *Christianity Today* magazine whose 1976 book, *The Battle for the Bible*, told of a coming upheaval over the issue of Biblical authority, died Jan. 15 at a retirement village in Laguna Hills, CA. He was 84.

Lindsell died of flu complications, family members indicated. He was diagnosed in 1991 with a rare disease of the nervous system, called polyneuropathy, and had become wheelchair-bound.

In the preface to the Zondervan-published *Battle for the Bible*, Lindsell wrote, "I regard the subject of this book, Biblical inerrancy, to be the most important theological topic of this age. A great battle rages about it among people called evangelicals. I did not start the battle and wish it were not essential to discuss it. The only way to avoid it would be to remain silent. And silence on this matter would be a grave sin." After its founding editor, Carl F. H. Henry, moved on to other pursuits, Lindsell was *Christianity*

Today's editor from 1968-78 and had authored more than 20 books, including another volume on the issue of Biblical authority, *The Bible in the Balance*, 1979, and several study Bibles.

Lindsell held membership in Southern Baptist churches throughout his career – most recently at El Toro Baptist Church, Lake Forest, CA, and earlier at Glenfield Baptist Church, Glen Ellyn, IL, and First Baptist Church, Alexandria, VA. He was ordained in 1944 at First Baptist Church, Columbia, SC, where he was a professor of church history and missions at Columbia Bible College.

In addition to his wife, Lindsell is survived by three grown daughters and a son; 11 grandchildren; and one great-grandchild. A memorial service was held Jan. 18 at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church,

Lindsell wrote in the preface of *The Battle for the Bible*, "The book itself could be expanded almost indefinitely, for there is no end to the available material. The data I have used comprise only a small part of what I have personally collected for ten years. . . . But I have tried to represent matters fairly and objectively . . . I hope that I have not misquoted or misinterpreted anyone whose

words appear in this book. There is sufficient material available that makes it unnecessary to do this."

This last paragraph characterizes Harold Lindsell. Some years after the publication of his book, I had the opportunity and privilege to attend a series of lectures Mr. Lindsell presented on the same topic as he presented in *The Battle for the Bible*. His stand was firm, his presentation clear, and whenever he needed to name persons he did so charitably but with the same firm conviction.

Born in New York City on Dec. 22, 1913, Mr. Lindsell graduated from Wheaton College in 1938, then earned a master's degree in history from the University of California at Berkeley and a Ph.D. in history from New York University. In 1947, Mr. Lindsell and six other men founded Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif. At Fuller until 1964, Mr. Lindsell served as registrar, then dean of the faculty and then vice president. Leaving Fuller, he moved to Washington to work as an associate editor at *Christianity Today*. In 1968, he became editor, moving to Wheaton when the magazine relocated there.

Mr. Lindsell's leaving Fuller Theological Seminary was closely related to his later work in defense of the authority,

inspiration and infallibility of the Bible. Those who wish to read more about this phase of Mr. Lindsell's life and struggle should read George Marsden's, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*, Grand Rapids, (1987). The clarion call of Harold Lindsell was taken up by others. At the same seminary at Otterburn, Manitoba where I heard Mr. Lindsell, I attended a week long seminar on the same topic by Dr. Bill Nix, professor of church history at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary in Portland Oregon. The work of Mr. Lindsell awakened others to also join the battle for the Bible. May his work continue to bear fruit.

(From: Presbyterians-week@xc.org [Christian Observer] Tue, 27 Jan, 1998. "Harold Lindsell dies at 84; authored *Battle for the Bible*," by Art Toalston, Baptist Press, <http://www.religiontoday.com/bp>)

God Can Stay In Alabama

In a case only a lawyer could love, the Alabama Supreme Court announced Jan. 23, that Circuit Court Judge Roy Moore of Etowah County may keep the Ten Commandments on the wall behind his bench. The American Civil Liberties Union of Alabama and the Al-


abama Free Thought Association had been attempting for more than a year to remove the small wooden tablets which reminded members of the Circuit Court that Judge Moore takes American history seriously. . . . The actual decision delivered by Justice Ralph Cook stated that Governor Fob James and Attorney General Bill Pryor had no standing to bring a lawsuit supporting Moore's practice. The ACLU demand that Chief Justice Perry Hooper toss Moses and his prejudices also failed. Governor James cannot guarantee the right to post the tablets and the ACLU cannot pull them down. . . . Expect letters from both sides requesting donations for round two and opportunities to speak in defense of American liberty. [GN]

Sabbath Under Assault in Scotland

Home Secretary Jack Straw recently announced a plan to relax the 1789 Sunday Observance Law in Scotland in the interest of creating 3,000 new jobs in liquor trade. The decision could also create more opportunities in emergency medicine, law enforcement, and

social work. . . . In a related matter, the Northern Presbytery of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland officially chided the Highland Council for permitting car trunk sales in the Council Headquarters park on the Sabbath. The Council defended itself by calling the permission a temporary experiment for a trial period.

[Rev. N. M. Ross, Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland 100756.75@COMPUSERVE.COM. Presbyterians Week Jan. 23, 1998

It is now more than ten years that in Canada a similar campaign resulted in scrapping *The Sunday Observance Law*. Let us pray that the voice of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland may be blessed with retaining this similar law in Scotland. The relation Sabbath-Sunday remains a point of discussion among Reformed people. In May 1997, I was given the opportunity to present an essay on this topic before the ministers' conference in Abbotsford BC. The editors of *Clarion* asked me to rework this essay into a series of articles for *Clarion*. It is a major undertaking to rework this material into articles which make for easy reading. I continue to labour at it and hope to complete the work. 

Beyond Revolution

By Bret C. Davis

With the prospect of a new school year comes the opportunity and obligation to begin again. As an association and as members of the church of Jesus Christ in Blue Bell, we prayerfully labor for the cause of Reformed education, as do so many of our brothers and sisters. But, if we are to stay true to our calling, we must remind ourselves of the reason that our schools exist. So much time and effort for what? So many difficulties often arise between brothers and sisters which at times threaten the very existence of the school, and even our lives as congregation. So many obstacles arise! Why do we work when our work can seem in vain and the foundations appear to crumble?

Part of the reason we labor to maintain the schools lies in the fact that Christianity is not revolutionary. Since man, in Adam, listened to the words of the father of lies (Has God said) this desire to overthrow lives deep within our hearts. So, history has seen the rebel man set his heart on overthrowing the order which God created. In its place, man craved to have a world of discontinuity and discord with all that God had made. The goal of Reformed education is to show forth the fact that all things must be brought back to the full harmony which the living God intends. Culture must be seen as unified and catholic, and all things must be brought before the Lord for His judgment.

Reformed education must take place within the context of the communion of the saints. We must work within the bounds of a common confession established in the generations of the past. Only in this way will we ensure that a bond will exist with those who will come after us and with Jesus Christ. This anti revolutionary thinking prevents every man from doing what is right in his own eyes. By maintaining the schools (L.D. 38) we establish continuity with our brothers and sisters of the generations past, who often gave their very lives in the confession of the true Reformed religion. In the school, all of life is brought under the scrutiny of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. In the school

parents live in union with one another in a common calling to act as faithful stewards of the children of God's covenant. In the school, we live not as rebels, but as children submissive to the rulers God has placed over us. For, to the elders comes the serious obligation to ensure that parents to the best of their ability attend a school where the teaching is in harmony with the confessions of the church (c.o. Art. 58). As parents, we are called to obey those placed over us. The churches of past generations saw this as an essential component of faithfulness to God and of the continuance of the way of the covenant. The Reformed school arises from the desire to fight against the individualistic spirit of our day and to wrestle together to establish a heritage of Reformed thought that will last to the coming generations. In this way, we establish continuity with the future generations when we are gone from this earth. Only in this environment can we solidify our unity to Jesus Christ who rules over all things. Aided by His Spirit, the school seeks to bring every subject and every part of creation, in all its richness, back to God and to bring every thought captive to Him our loving Master.

We pray and work for the generations to come knowing that Jesus Christ has ascended and taken His lawful place at the right hand of the majesty on high. This is the theme and the confidence with which we at Reformation Christian school begin our new year. In the past few years, we have had five new families added to the congregation. In this, we have seen the Lord's hand to

build His church here in Blue Bell. And with this, we have had to continuously make the changes that are necessary to serve these new members of the congregation. We have constantly adapted the curriculum to meet new challenges and to grow in preparing the coming generation to submit all of life to God's Word as summarized in the confession of the church. Recently, we have had the calling and the joy of making another significant step: the hiring of a full time teacher. We have pushed the current staff as far as we believe is possible. (At times their physical and mental well being has been jeopardized.) We began as pioneers in our endeavor to lay the foundation for the education of the children at Blue Bell. The foundation being laid, we continue to build the structure that will honor our great God, and, under His blessing, we work for the future and the continued growth of Reformation Christian School!

For us, it is a great joy to know that we are weak and powerless as the world counts power. We know that our labors wholly depend on the blessing of our Triune God. All the provisions of the school – past, present, and future – flow to us from the cross of Jesus Christ as in Him the lasting city is established and the new humanity is formed. All things are ruled by our King. Our job, our calling is to strive with all our energy and talents to live as faithful citizens, as prophets, priests and kings, presenting all things to Him in the Spirit of thankfulness and holy joy. Every thought must be taken captive to Him – a task that will last to all eternity. We

Dear Friends,

Because of the size of our congregation in Blue Bell, we have as an Association sought to develop and maintain a relationship with our friends in the Federation of churches. We are compelled to seek out this camaraderie because of the communion of the saints; because you too have laboured to see that the children of the covenant are taught the riches of the Reformed heritage. It is our hope that, for those that can, you will help us financially. Currently we face a \$25,000 deficit. We ask you also to pray for us and always welcome those who can visit.

Thank you.

continue to strive to move ahead in faith knowing that from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.

We write to tell you our continuing story, to let you know our joy in this calling and the blessings we have enjoyed. We believe this is the work of no man, but is the faithfulness of our God shining forth. We have relied upon your kindness and support in the past – a support that has brought us this far. Again we ask you to assist us in our calling. Please pray for our school as we continue to face the reality of our own limited resources. But also join with us in thankfulness that both to us and to you God has granted the knowledge of the riches of Reformed Education. May the labor within all the schools be honoring to Him!



*Reformation
Church,
Blue Bell*

