

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Volume 54, No. 21 • October 14, 2005

Prehistoric?

*God's Glory
Declared in
the Heavens*

*Coaldale
Rejoices*

*What glory we see in
the works of God's
hands!*





By Cl. Stam

Rev. Cl. Stam is minister emeritus
of the Canadian Reformed
Church at Hamilton, Ontario.
clstam@canrc.org

Prehistoric?

*It is a common belief in many churches that
Genesis 1-10 probably never occurred.*

In a past issue of *Clarion* (Volume 54, Issue 7) there was a nice article about our pagan forefathers. No problem with that whatsoever. What caught my eye, however, was the cover of that issue. It shows Dutch *hunnbeden*, monuments similar to those erected in England by the Druids and related folk. The cover caption used the word *prehistoric* monuments, and I would like to comment on the (use of the) word “prehistoric.”

This word can be used in a very innocent manner. That’s how it was used in the *Clarion* caption. I have no quarrel with the publisher of that issue. The Webster’s dictionary defines “prehistoric” as follows, “. . .relating to times antedating [before] written history.”

*Unless humans have seen and described
it, it is not really history.*

History is a written account of events that took place in a certain time. If there was no one present to write about the events, these are called “prehistoric.” With respect to the stone monuments, no one knows how and why they were put there and hence they, too, are commonly called “prehistoric.”

Urgeschichte

Still, we must be very careful with the use of the term *prehistoric*. Some German theologians were eager to use the term “*Urgeschichte*” which means much the same as *prehistoric*, except that now the express element is added that *prehistoric* has the connotation of being mythical and uncertain.

The *Urgeschichte* never really happened and is the stuff of which legends and fables are made. Ancient history is dark and uncertain, and our origins are very obscure. The *Urgeschichte* is

filled with many scary creatures like dinosaurs and extreme conditions like the Ice Age.

Whatever happened prehistorically is really unknown and untrustworthy. No definite conclusions or binding commands can be taken from the *Urgeschichte*, for, in fact, it probably never happened.

It is a common belief in many churches that Genesis 1-10 probably never occurred. Actual history starts in Genesis 11 with the calling of Abram from Ur. The site of Ur has been excavated and identified in Mesopotamia, and therefore Genesis 11 tells us about stuff that we *can verify*. What comes before that. . . is. . . well. . . *prehistoric* and probably not true.

Urgeschichte can be deeply interesting but is basically irrelevant. In the end many people conclude that we do not really know what happened in the beginning. It’s all prehistoric.

Douma on Genesis

My professor of ethics, now retired, is Prof. Dr. J. Douma of Kampen. A student is always eager to read when material comes from the old, tested, and tried professors. Therefore I was very happy when Dr. Douma started a series of (Dutch) books on the Old Testament in which he would point to ethical foundations. Great project!

The first books are in! I eagerly started reading the first one on Genesis and I was in no way disappointed. Douma’s pleasing style and in-depth comments are still engaging and thought-provoking.

Of course, I was also quite eager to discover what is written about the notion of “*prehistory*.” Douma writes, “God has begun a history with the once-created world, in which Adam and Eve were the first humans.” Excellent. Then he asks, “But do we receive in the description of creation itself, as presented in Genesis 1, [real] *history*?” (I added the word “real” because I think it is implied in the original.) He answers: we can only speak of history in an already existing world. His

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: R. Aasman, W.B. Slomp, Cl. Stam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:

Clarion, 57 Oakridge Drive South, St. Albert, AB T8N 7H2
E-Mail: veenendaal@shaw.ca

**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: clarion@premierprinting.ca

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Subscription Rates for 2005	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*	\$44.00*	\$72.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds  	\$46.50	\$60.00
International	\$72.00	\$108.00

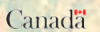
*Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$13.50 per column inch

Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$19.00 per column inch

We reserve the right to refuse ads.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.



Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

Agreement No. 40063293; PAP Registration No. 9907; ISSN 0383-0438

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

Useful Link: www.canrc.org

conclusion, “In a strict sense the story of creation itself is not history.” He also asks, “Must we take what is written here [Genesis 1] literally? Do we find a historical report in Genesis 1 about how it went in the creation of the world?”

He adds that if we take Genesis 1 literally we get trapped in all kinds of insoluble, academic problems. For example, how can there be light without the sun first having been created? And there are other difficult questions. But the bottom line is that “in a strict sense” Genesis 1 does not offer an historical account, but gives a view written by people who lived centuries later.

Creation and evolution

As we might expect, Douma rejects the theory of evolution as mere speculation. But at the same time he asks the loaded question, “Why should we without any further ado reject a theory as “the big bang” on the basis of what the Bible says about creation?”

At least the big bang theory “admits” that the earth was not eternal but came into existence at a certain time. With respect to the age of the earth, Douma also agrees that the formation of the earth may have taken longer than just six days. He follows what is known as the Framework hypothesis. The days of creation have become undefined periods of time in which a certain evolution (from lower to higher forms of life) may have taken place.

God writes history better than we ever will.

Genesis 1 offers us a version of how this world came about, not in a scientific way, “but in an adapted story (inkleding) of God’s creative and formative work that is comprehensible for all people, in the framework of a week.” A week is apparently not always a week.

IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – Prehistoric? — Cl. Stam	494
Treasures New and Old – God’s Glory Declared in the Heavens — J.D. Louwse	497
Lord’s Day 46 — J. Wiskerke van Dooren	498
Overcoming Discord in the Communion of Saints (3) — K. Sikkema	499
Ray of Sunshine — C. Gelsms and E. Nordeman	501
Coaldale Rejoices — P. Groenwold	502
Camp Yak’isda Bik’ah 2005	504
Education Matters — B. Faber	507
Readers’ Forum	509
Press Releases – CanRC and URC combined committees, Classis Ontario West, Classis Pacific East	511

With respect to *history*, we have the impression that unless humans have seen and described it, it is not really history. Things did not happen necessarily in the way they are described. Douma does not deny that Genesis 1 has historical implications, but he says that *in a strict sense* (note those words!) the story of creation is not history.

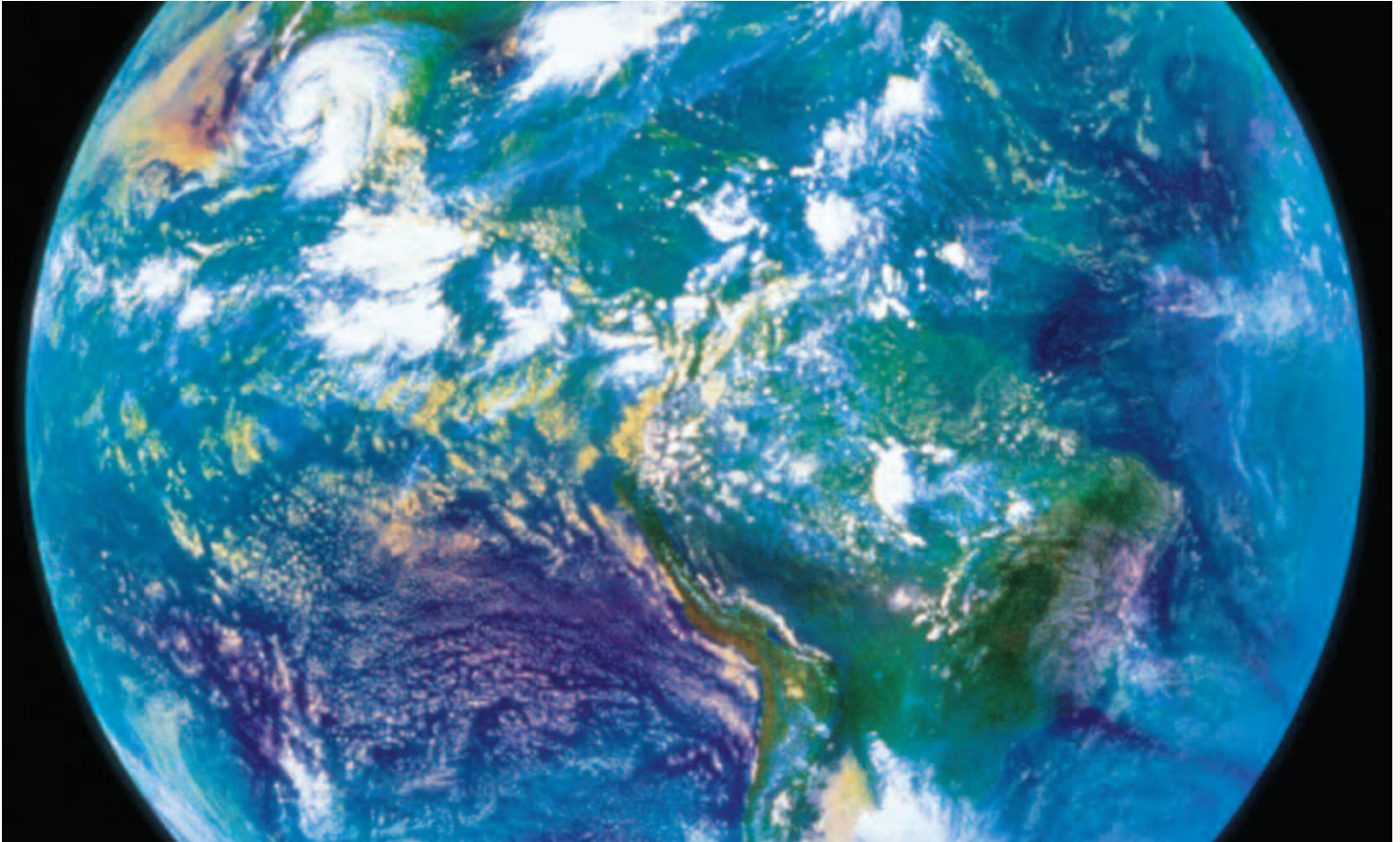
Dangerous road

I fully accept that Prof. Douma in a strict sense upholds Scriptures and is faithful to the Reformed confessions. His remarks on Genesis 1 are very carefully worded. He takes the Bible seriously and wants to do full justice to the Word of God. He also wants to respond to difficult questions posed by

science and technology. It is time that the so-called scientific conclusions are properly challenged.

Still, I think that he is traveling on a dangerous road. I am left with the feeling that Genesis 1 is in fact *prehistoric*. Then exegetical freedom easily becomes a license for Scripture criticism. This is far from Douma's mind, I am sure, but the danger exists.

History starts when God begins creating, and we have an infallible account of this history in the inspired words of Genesis 1. God writes history better than we ever will. We may be left with some questions, but we do not (have to) know everything. We should definitely not flirt with the term *prehistoric*.



J.D. Louwerse

Rev. J.D. Louwerse is minister
of the Canadian Reformed
Church at Neerlandia, Alberta.
jlouwerse@canrc.org

God's Glory Declared in the Heavens



MATTHEW 13:52

“The heavens declare the glory of God.” Psalm 19:1

In your walks outdoors this summer did you ever stop in wonder as you gazed up at the sky? What a majestic sky! What an expansive heavens! Be it day or night one stands in awe as one looks upward. Actually, wherever we live we have the same glorious display of God. So God reveals Himself to all.

That is what David writes in the first part of Psalm 19. This psalm begins also with David looking upward to the skies and saying, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”

What glory we see in the works of God's hands! For what is more impressive than the clear blue skies or the vast variety of clouds? What is more wonderful than the shining sun, bright moon, and the twinkling stars? God reveals Himself throughout all times with the work of his hands.

How do the heavens proclaim God's glory? Without words! You cannot *hear* their testimony of God the Creator. As David writes in verse 2 and 3, “Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they display knowledge! There is no speech, nor are there words: their voice is not heard” (NKJV). In quiet majesty the heavens proclaim the glory of God. This silent testimony is seen by all. As David notes, “Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the end of the world!” Whether one lives in Norway or New Zealand, whether one speaks Swahili or Spanish, all see this revelation of God. It is his general revelation. He has not left Himself without testimony (Acts 14:17).

How then do the heavens declare the glory of God? By doing the task the Lord God has given to them! It is the heavenly

bodies, the sun, moon and stars, which determine the separation of day and night. They serve as signs to mark seasons, days, and years (Gen 1:14). As it literally says in verse 4, their line goes out into all the earth, their words to the end of the earth. They serve as the measuring line. When the sun rises in the sky, it is day; when the moon shines, it is night! So they do their task, as the sovereign God had decreed: “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease” (Gen 8:22).

David points to the sun as an example. The sun follows God's decree faithfully. Day after day the sun obeys! Every day the sun rises out of the tent God pitched for it and runs its course through the sky. As David writes, “It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other: nothing is hid from its heat.” Everyone in the world can see the sun rise in the east and set in the west. All mankind enjoys its light and comes under its heat. By fulfilling the designs of the Creator for its place and function, the sun obeys God!

This is what David and everyone sees. For God has made it plain for *all* to see. The skies point to our great and majestic God: the God of glory! Yet, how many glorify Him?

There is something even more impressive and glorious than God's revelation of Himself in the heavens: God's revelation of Himself in his Word! David tells of this in the second part of the psalm. God is revealed more clearly and fully in his Word. He reveals Himself as Lord. The Lord that is Yahweh! In the second half of this psalm this name of God is used seven times! The God who

established an everlasting covenant with his people; who revealed Himself as faithful and true to this covenant; who showed Himself as the faithful Redeemer of his chosen people! Surely this is most glorious! Most impressive! Most gracious! What a Lord David and we have.

It is from the Law of the Lord that David knew of glorious redemption. The law of the Lord our God begins with: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of slavery.” Having so graciously and mightily redeemed his people, He gave his statutes, commands, and ordinances to them. These are more precious than gold, sweeter than honey! Such is God's Word, which tells us of redemption and also lays out his demands. David, as servant of the Lord, was to keep his commands, ordinances, and judgements. So God was to be glorified by David his servant: just as He is glorified by the sun his servant.

But did David keep the law? No! For what does David say near the end of this psalm? Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. David did not always bring glory to our Lord God. Someone other than David was needed to bring full glory to God! One who can keep the law, who is truly righteous. One who is blameless, innocent of great transgression. He is Jesus Christ, the son of David, our great Redeemer! What glorious works of redemption He has done for us. From the Lord's full and complete Word we know of our great Redeemer. So we have every reason to live in thankful obedience; to bring glory to his great Name! May the words of our mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer!



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 4.6

Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.



Buckingham Palace

Wouldn't you want to look around inside Buckingham Palace in England? Would you be allowed to ring the doorbell? And if the door was opened would you ask to talk to and visit with the queen? Don't count on them letting you in! If people want to visit the queen in her palace, they have to ask permission first. The door will only be opened if this permission is granted. For a king or a queen is not just anyone. They are the highest, most important people in the country.

God is our heavenly king. We cannot just walk in on Him, not even when we want to pray. For sinful people do not belong in his palace. They cannot be in the presence of the holy God.

We need someone to open the gate so that we can go to God. And that gate was opened when the Lord Jesus took our sins to the cross! There He died for us. At that time the door to God's palace was opened. Now we are allowed to directly pray to God.

The Lord Jesus did even more for us. We may even call God "Father," and be as close to Him as we are with our own earthly father. Our fathers do so many things that are nice and good for us; and yet, our heavenly Father is the best father. You can believe that for sure.

Even though we may call Him "Father," don't ever forget that He is God. He is more powerful than all people. It is great that we can begin our prayers by calling Him "Our Father," but keep in mind that those words are followed by "in heaven." For this Father is at the same time a mighty God, full of majesty. We should respect Him greatly, for He is holy. Right now our prayers go up to the Lord; one day we will be allowed to stay with Him always.



Keith Sikkema is vice-principal of John Calvin School and an elder in Smithville, Ontario. ksikkema@istop.com

Overcoming Discord in the Communion of Saints

(Part 3 of 5)

In the second installment I began to describe the context of my study about discord around the rise of home schooling. I wrote about the parental task to raise their children, summarized the history of Reformed day schools, and touched on the role of the community in establishing and maintaining these schools. Schools are a community commitment to an application of the scriptural principle to help each other with the gifts God gave, particularly with regard to teaching children. They do not replace parents, and they are not the only way in which the community can help parents. Yet, they have become an integral part of our communities.

There is some danger inherent in the commitments that communities make. An influential secular sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), found that Australian aboriginal communities create their own religion, as well as moral and ethical standards. They do this to give their society the solidarity it needs to function. Since there is no higher authority from which to draw ultimate truth, their society decides what is acceptable. Durkheim applied this to Western society and declared that what society calls right is right. Note, however, that it is one's god who determines what is right. Thus, for all practical purposes, Durkheim concluded, society, or the state as its representative, is god (*Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp. 208-210). Of course, this is purely secular and horizontalist thinking that reckons not with God Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. When people declare

that God is dead, people seek something to replace Him with.

Let us be sure that we know God from Scripture. Through Christ we have a vertical connection and fellowship with Him. Through God's Word we also know right from wrong. Our solidarity and our fellowship, our communion, do not exist in man-made rules but in our common salvation in Christ. Yet, there is amongst us a struggle with these questions: may people withdraw from the Reformed day school? Should not all people support it?

Through God's Word we know right from wrong.

This generates a more profound query: is the commitment to build and maintain schools a principle that all must subscribe to? What about Christian liberty? Should we be looking for a balance (among others) between community and a lack of group cohesion (*Nederlands Dagblad*, April 18, 2005, *Kerken op zoek naar balans*)? Do we have to balance community commitment and individual freedom? I will briefly comment on what the Reverends Rutherford, Trigland, and Kloosterman say about this.

Christian liberty

Samuel Rutherford was one of the Scottish Commissioners who helped draft the Westminster Confession of Faith in the 1640s. Earlier, he wrote a

catechism, which speaks of Christian liberty as a fruit of justification (Cap 29). Christian liberty and justification are linked: our Catechism also notes that those who are grafted into Christ by faith produce fruits of thankfulness (HC 24, Q/A 64). The way in which God's people, justified and made righteous in Christ, are knitted together in love has much to do with how they ought to treat one another. In the common Scottish spelling, Rutherford asks,

Quherin standeth our Christian libertie? In that we are freed from the curse of the law and sinne, and from the commandementis of men and all ceremonies.

Quhat is our libertie in things indifferent? We may use them or not use them, providing we hurt not the conscience of other men (Rom xiv 13; I Cor viii 13).

During the Arminian controversy of the early 1600s in The Netherlands, Rev. Jacobus Trigland granted that people can decide certain things for themselves, depending on their preferences. These are the indifferent things Rutherford speaks about. Indifferent must be understood here as not specifically prescribed by the Lord, not as being of absolutely no concern. Trigland continued, however, that for the sake of peace in the household of God "we must at times let go of some of our preferences; but in God's matters this tolerating and letting go may not take place" (*Rechtgematigde Christen*, p. 9).

Dr. Nelson Kloosterman connects this notion to what Scripture teaches

about the “weak” and the “strong.” The “strong” in the church should not claim greater liberty to do as they please than the “weak.” Christian liberty should not lead to individualism and isolation, but rather spur people on to love their neighbour and do what is best for him or her. This is so because Christ has set us free to do good works. Good works, as the Heidelberg Catechism observes, are “only those which are done out of true faith, in accordance with the law of God, and to his glory, and not those based on our own opinion or on precepts of men” (HC 33, Q/A 91).

People can decide certain things for themselves, depending on their preferences.

Communion with Christ (the first part of our confession about the communion of saints) results in fellowship with and good works towards the neighbour. The purpose of Christian love and liberty is the edification of the church and its individual members, in order that in Christ “the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:16). We no longer seek our own good in the first place, but that of others, for God’s sake.

Community shift

Communities, including our own, reflect what happens in the world around them. There is a shift towards individualism in our society. Sociologists identify this as a move from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* types of communities. In the 1950s and 1960s our own communities could be characterized as *Gemeinschaft*: people lived together and depended on each other; they were united in spite of all separating factors. There were Frysians, Grunningers, and Hollanders, but they piled together in the same truck to get to church; they were bonded together in the blood and Spirit of Christ. As people became more independent, however, they began to make choices about where they would rely on and be present for the others, and where not. Instead of car pooling, each now took their own car. They became more separated in spite of the uniting factors. They began to show *Gesellschaft* characteristics, in which people only associate with like-minded others, or if there is some benefit to be had. This is happening, and, in the secular mind, it generates a dilemma that is defined as seeking a delicate balance between individual freedom and community interests.

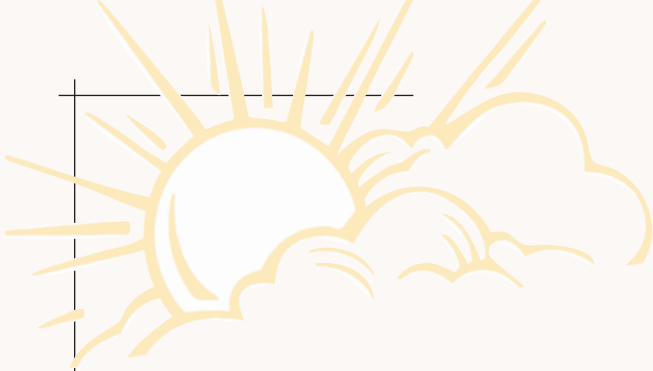
In the context of what I said about Durkheim, and society being god, I note that there are human commandments and ceremonies about which Scripture is indifferent. Our Church Order (Art 50) also acknowledges this. Secular

authors cannot make that distinction, simply because they know no higher authority than man. This leads to the majority determining what is right and wrong, what is morally acceptable and what is not, and imposing its human opinion and its man-made principles on the minority. Moderates may propose a great deal of tolerance, but in the end it leaves little room for God’s truth. Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms constitutes the ultimate standard, and has been interpreted and applied to justify increasingly flagrant departures from the divine standard on which the country was founded. Without recognizing God’s higher authority, that is all they can devise.

There is a shift towards individualism in our society.

To look back at our Canadian Reformed community now, what are we doing differently if we raise indifferent things to principles? I submit that we may set a social norm or a long-standing tradition as a preference, and agree to abide by it, that we may even commit ourselves to do so; but that we may not make ourselves a durkheimian god which everyone is forced to follow. In that vein, in 1944, we rejected being bound to a particular interpretation of covenant and election.





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

“Devote yourselves to prayer; being watchful and thankful.”

Colossians 4:2

This article introduces the beginning of a series on the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. We will focus on why prayer is so necessary in the life of a Christian and why the Lord taught the disciples how to pray. The Heidelberg Catechism also has a section which is devoted to prayer.

Prayer is an important part of the thankfulness which God requires of us. Our life is to be a prayerful life. For when we pray, we are speaking with God. We may open our hearts and lay our thoughts before the Lord, directing ourselves to Him.

Yet when we look at Psalm 139: 4 we read, “Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.” So why then do we need to pray? It is a command of Christ. Through the Holy Spirit and the work of Christ we now have fellowship with God. In prayer we recognize Him, plead with Him, and trust in Him that his will may be done in our lives. For it is glorifying and pleasing to the Father when his children turn to Him in humble prayer, asking and thanking Him for all things that we need for body and soul.

Jesus also prayed, even though He was the Son of God. Often He went alone, away from the crowds, to pray in a quiet spot. Jesus also prayed when He was on the cross: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?” He did this in order to glorify the Father and to seek his strength. In this way Jesus could go from strength to strength.

Today He still intercedes for us in heaven. He prays on our behalf knowing the sinful world we live in, knowing our weaknesses, understanding all our sighs and longings, and carrying all our sorrow in His heart. He also gathers all our tears and rejoices in all our happiness.

From Jesus' example we can see and learn how He has taught us to pray.

In Lord's Day 45 we read, “Moreover, God will give his grace and the Holy Spirit only to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask Him for these gifts and thank Him for them” (Q/A 116). We may be assured of all God's gifts in the covenant, but they do not just come automatically. They are

only received in the way of prayer. God is open to a people who are open to Him. Daily we must bring our prayers before our heavenly Father. We must continue to seek the Lord, because without his grace and Spirit we cannot live. We must train ourselves in prayer. As Christians, if we stop praying, we will not persevere in the struggle of faith. For without prayer we would lose our confidence and could not really sing the words of Psalm 138:7a, “For though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life.”

May we be encouraged to pray to God to strengthen our faith and see the riches of knowing and trusting in God. Then we will prayerfully thank Him in humble obedience for all his goodness that we receive daily. Only then is our life truly glorifying of God and pleasing Him!

*With song and prayer, in faith progressing,
In all you do God's will obey.
Expect from Him alone your blessing;
He will renew it every day
For God will never those disown,
Who put their trust in Him alone.*

Hymn 48:4

Birthdays in November:

3 WILMA VAN DRONGELEN will be 48
306-33375 Mayfair Avenue
Abbotsford, BC V2S 1P4

Congratulations with your birthday Wilma! May our gracious God bless you in this new year and grant you an enjoyable day together with your family and friends.

Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
905-563-0380



Coaldale Rejoices

Welcome evening

Friday, July 8, 2005 was a day of celebration for the Canadian Reformed Church of Coaldale. In the early evening the members of the congregation gathered to extend a warm welcome to our new minister, Rev. Dirk Poppe, his wife Amanda, and their children Benjamin, Angelica, Caleb, and David.

Chairman Gerald Van Seters opened, expressing our thankfulness to the Lord for sustaining his church in Coaldale and the wish that our new minister will receive everything he needs for his work among us. Psalm 111 was fitting for the occasion: "Praised be the Lord! I shall impart my thanks to Him with all my heart among the righteous congregation."

The children's choir, led by Zan Voorhorst and accompanied by Sylvia Hofsink, sang two songs: Praise the Lord with the Sound of Trumpet and Welcome Song to the Poppe Family. The latter selection was written by Angela Hulst, meant to give the Poppe family an impression of what they can expect to experience here in "prairie land": blue skies, winds that "nearly blow a man away," and, on a clear day, a distant view of the mountains.

Hetti Bultena presented scrapbooks of pictures and stories about each family and individual of the Coaldale congregation to help Rev. Poppe and his wife and family become familiar with the congregation. Most of these pages were works of art, crafted with great care and attention to detail.

Rev. Poppe apparently likes history, so he should enjoy Dirk Kok's gift: a history



of the Church of Coaldale from 1948 to the present. This booklet, authored by Br. Kok, contains historical events, pictures, and stories that provide insight into the diversity of the Coaldale congregation.

Rev. W.B. Slomp, by his own admission, wore three hats as he addressed the audience and the Poppe family. (You should have seen him!) He read a letter from the Council of the Immanuel Church, congratulating us on receiving a minister of the Word. The churches of Classis Alberta, he assured us, have also been looking forward to this day. Among other things, it means another vacancy has now been filled. As far as his work as counselor is concerned, Rev. Slomp stated that he had done this with pleasure, but added that he hoped, for our sake, that we would not be vacant for a long time! He wished Rev. Poppe the Lord's blessing. After a period of adversity, now is a time of joy!

Br. Van Seters thanked Rev. Slomp for the advice and support given during our vacancy, and thanked the churches of Classis Alberta for their assistance in supplying ministers for our pulpit.

The Rejoice in the Lord Choir, directed and accompanied by Sr. Sylvia Hofsink, sang I will Serve the Lord All My Days, followed by a lighter selection entitled We're the Choir.

Congratulatory messages were brought in person or by letter from the Canadian Reformed Church of Taber, the Free Reformed Church in Monarch, and various churches of Classis Alberta.

Rev. Poppe was presented with a unique directory on behalf of Paul Vanderheide: a beautifully framed map of the town of Coaldale, with the addresses of all members residing in the town specifically marked. The map included directions to all the rural members'

homes. Rev. Poppe assured us he would put this directory to good use!

Julia Bareman and Lydia Penninga described the Young Peoples' Society as an "adventurous and energetic group." They invited Rev. Poppe to drop in on a meeting and suggested he participate in some of their other activities. Quizmaster Henry Vandenberg challenged Rev. Poppe to match a number of young people to their parents. To our surprise he was able to match some; to our delight he mismatched others.

Rina Wiersma and Irene Oostenbrug gave a brief history and highlighted some of the Wednesday Morning Bible Study's outreach activities. They presented the family with a basket of gardening supplies.

Rev. Poppe expressed his appreciation for the prayers offered for him and his family and also the warm welcome they have received. He stated he was looking forward to serving as our minister and assured us that the Lord will take care of his people. We must seek to do his will, and so move forward in faith.

Br. Van Seters read I Chronicles 29:10-13. Vice chairman D. DeVries then closed the evening with thanksgiving.

Installation and inaugural sermon

On Sunday, July 10, we witnessed the installation of our new minister. Rev. W.B. Slomp conducted the morning service. He selected Colossians 4:12 as the text for his sermon, which dealt with the prayerful wrestling of the minister for his flock. In such a prayer he must ask for stability, maturity, and assurance.

Epaphras agonized in prayer for the Colossians. He suffered because of his own sins, and like every good minister knew his shortcomings. In the face of adversity, he got down on his knees to pray for grace, in order that his charges would stand firm in all the will of God. We, likewise, must learn to pray for each other, for office bearers, and especially for our minister. Epaphras prayed for maturity. True maturity implies that you learn to rely on God to direct you and that you use the gifts God has given you to benefit others. Spiritual maturity is enhanced by sufferings and trials, for they

teach us to rely on the Lord and to turn to Him in prayer. Epaphras wrestled not because of doubt but because he was convinced God exists. A church leader must know God has given salvation to believers and members of the congregation must acknowledge God's work in their midst. Having overcome in Christ, we will experience the full victory of our Saviour when He comes.

Rev. Poppe delivered his inaugural sermon that afternoon. In Colossians 1:24-29 we read that the Lord commissions his servants to proclaim the good news to his people. We heard about the contents and goal of the message, and about the manner in which it is brought. God commissions his servant to present "the Word of God in its fullness." It is our human inclination to turn away from the Lord and his Word. We need to be reminded of the supremacy of Christ. The gospel finds its fulfillment in Christ and God makes us alive and grants us salvation through Him. The goal of the message is "to present everyone perfect in Christ." The messenger accomplishes this by teaching and admonishing. Christ commissioned his apostles to teach (Matthew 28), and elders are expected to do the same. The servant also has to admonish: he is the watchman, whose neglect to warn will be held against him (Ezek 3). His aim is not to make life miserable for us but to increase our joy. We must allow ourselves to be taught by our trials. God uses those who are weak to shame the strong; the servant is weak but the Lord is strong. Paul writes in I Corinthians 4 that though we are hard-pressed we are not crushed; this is only because Christ is at work within us. As his children we can go forward with great courage.

It is our hope that by the grace of God we may receive comfort and courage to live with confidence to his honour and glory.



Camp Yak'isda Bik'ah 2005



Once again the prayers, the volunteer hours, and the financial donations of federation churches have come together under the Lord's blessing, resulting in two successful Bible camps, a youth camp, and a teen camp.

The Christian Outreach Board would like to thank all who helped to make camp possible and kept the camp in their prayers. It is only through the power of prayer and the working of the Spirit that the camps will bear good fruit.

For those unfamiliar with the camp, the majority of children who attend camp also attend the yearly Sunday school held at the Smithers Canadian Reformed Church. This week long camp is a highlight for the students and they look forward to it all year.

The Outreach Board is actively seeking opportunities and volunteers to increase the involvement with the students and their families. The Board is exploring options that include adult-to-teen and family-to-family mentoring

situations. The Board asks that you continue to keep these students, their families, the local volunteers, and the Board members in your prayers.

May God bless this work richly and may many hear the gospel and believe.

From the Christian Outreach Board

Youth camp, July 11-17

Not everyone has the privilege of experiencing camp firsthand. To give you an idea of what camp is like, the volunteer counsellors have written down some of their thoughts and experiences.

This year was my first year at Yak'isda Bik'ah, and to tell you the truth I didn't know what to expect. At first, I admit, I was a little apprehensive about it all, thinking that I'd say the wrong thing, or do the wrong thing – but once the kids came and we got into our schedules, I realized I had nothing to be scared about. These kids were just that – kids!, and

they wanted to have fun, so what else could I do but make their time at camp fun and memorable.

One of my favourite times at camp was the campfires at the end of the day – we would gather all the kids and counsellors around the fire and sing praise and worship songs for about half an hour. There were always, of course, a few kids that just weren't in the mood for singing, but there were also the kids that truly enjoyed it. I remember sitting on the bench looking across and seeing two of the younger ones sitting real close, sharing a book and staring at it so intently, concentrating so hard like they didn't want to miss a single word of the song. It was definitely a moment that I will remember.

At the end of the week looking back, it seemed like it went by so quickly, but we fit a lot in, and I hope the kids remember and take to heart what we taught them. I am already looking forward to next year!

Suzanna Vegter

What really felt rewarding at camp was to have a successful Bible lesson. You could prepare sufficiently, but if the kids were feeling antsy, it was difficult to teach.

One lesson, though, I was explaining how the Holy Spirit was part of the Trinity. I used the age-old analogy of the Holy Spirit being like a three leaf clover. The three leaves make up the one clover, just like the Holy Spirit, Son, and Father make up God. Kalyn, one of my students, nodded and then posed the question, "So what about a four leaf clover then?" – haha.

Renae Schutte



Spongeball waterfights!

I first have to say that it was awesome, and totally worth my time. I was asked on the last day of camp whether I thought it was worth all the trouble; whether or not it was worth it to arrange all the kids to be there, to get cooks and food for everyday, to go through all the trouble of finding counsellors who don't mind parenting for an entire week, etc., etc. Well, I had to respond that when I looked at all the kids at camp I knew that it definitely was. Through the week you could see kids learning so much in their Bible lessons, making new friends with other kids and counsellors, enjoying the outdoors and keeping healthy, and having just a ton of fun. I saw kids asking to be read another Bible story at night, kids singing praise songs with a group of friends in their own free time, and kids that had prayer requests that ranged from the sick pets to their parents "who shouldn't be drinking so much every night." When I think of the amount of impact that just one week can have on a child, yes, I must say that this week was definitely worth all of the trouble. Thanks for all the fun and the memories, and maybe I'll be around for next year. God Bless.

Thomas VanderHorst

Besides having fun while teaching the kids about God and his Bible, this camp also made me look at God differently. I found myself looking at Him in a new light-through the kids' eyes and it was just incredible how much I learned from that.

One of my favourite memories of the week was when I was on dock duty and the kids (no matter how many times they had done it already) thought it was

hilarious to hug me after they just got out of the water and were soaking wet. The whole camp was amazing and one of the best experiences of my life!

Natalie de Haan

ummm...I'm not totally sure what to write about. I could talk about how amazing the Bible lessons were and how rewarding, especially after a lesson where you thought you were not getting through, to have a girl come up to you and say, "That was the best lesson ever!" and give you a huge hug. I could talk about how awesome it was to be sitting around a campfire and see a boy and a girl sharing a song book, and singing as loud as they could, with huge smiles on face. I could also talk about the overwhelming support shown by the community in the cooking, hospitality on Sunday, and all the helping out at night. To conclude, I would have to write that saying that the week of Yak'isda Bik'ah camp was the best week of my life would be an understatement.

Sue DeHaas



Eric Wilson, Jared Joseph and Breyden Davis creating tin foil creatures.

The camp began with wild shouting as kids of all ages raged off the bus! It was an awesome sound, knowing that all of the kids were excited for this week full of fun and adventures! As the week went on the counsellors and the kids bonded a lot, and by the end of the week when it was time to say good bye and the children left, it felt like there was a chunk taken out of my heart. Some people may think that it's not possible to bond that close in only one week, but, it is definitely possible. We, as counsellors, were at this Bible camp to teach these children a lesson, but they taught us

many lessons in return. From playing capture the flag to singing and praising God it was an awesome experience for the children as well as the counsellors.

Katie Vandergaag

When I got to camp my first year I had no idea what to expect or if I'd end the week feeling like it was totally worth it. After doing it for two years it totally is. Once you get to know the kids and a little bit about them and their background you see them differently than your first impression. It's a great feeling to get the chance to have kids look up to you and have the chance to be their friend.

At times during Bible study it seemed tough to get through to the kids but when you do it's really cool.

Sitting around the campfire after the kids had gone to bed was also a highlight, because then everyone would share stories that happened throughout the day, some that show these kids are learning about God.

One afternoon I was outside on a hillside with a few of the day campers. They were running down the hill and seeing how far and high they could jump. Then Michael (who I think is 5) said, "This time I'm gonna run as fast as I can and jump all the way to God!" Then he paused for a second and said, "Maybe I shouldn't cuz then when I fall back down I might hurt myself."

It's the little times like this that make camp so awesome, and when the week is over you look back and see it's definitely worth it. But then again when is it not worth it to witness for Christ.

Darren Leffers



Enjoying good food!

Teen camp, July 25-28

There are so many alternative activities to attract teens that a weekly Bible study when attempted has been poorly attended. As a result, the teen camp has been sporadic. Some years there is not enough interest; other years we've had only a boy's camp or only a girl's camp. This year, I was asked if the camp would be for boys and girls. With some trepidation I said yes. Other approaches have not worked so I was willing to try something different despite the added concerns of how to supervise the boy-girl relationships, especially knowing that several of the campers were sexually active.

Finally, the first day of camp arrived with thirteen campers. With four fulltime counsellors (including myself) and several part-time volunteers to help with special events and night time supervision, we had a fun-filled camp with many opportunities to share the gospel. Mealtime devotions gave us an opportunity to explore the key messages of the gospel through Bible readings and discussions, while campfire devotions gave us a chance to discuss how the Bible can guide us in our lifestyle choices. It is our heartfelt prayer that these young people may take to heart what they learned in this camp and through the strength of the Holy Spirit apply it to their lives. May they overcome the many obstacles in their lives and break free of the destructive cycle of worldly living that so many of them are caught up in.



Abandoned sawmill on Lyon Creek Trail, Babine Mountains day hike.

Thanks to Rich and Betty Klaver, Karen Bandstra, Dave Penninga, Harold Dykstra, and others who helped make this camp possible.

Denise Van Raalte

The north end of Tyee Lake, a place of beauty, Monday afternoon the first two campers arrive; both thirteen. Really? Josh was six feet, 170 pounds and Ben not much smaller. A little later two vehicles arrived with the rest of the group including Denise and Karen (counsellors). Included in this group of three more boys and eight girls is Kirsten (15), the granddaughter of the well-known Patricks of Ft. Babine. Kirsten, as it turned out, presented her grandparents with a healthy great-grandson the morning after the end of our camp. Her thirteen-year-old brother Shawn and cousin John, although now living in town, are original Ft. Babiners.

Sisters, Crystal (17) and Catherine (16), who brought her mother's NIV family Bible, have Sunday school connections with Denise. Their high-spirited, chatterbox friend, April (14), no more hit the ground when she pushed the counsellors to let them go canoeing and swimming. After the rules were explained, the complaint was heard from her that it was too bad that bikinis were not accepted beach apparel at our Bible camp.

Roberta (13) and friend Kristie (14) from Moricetown were experienced campers and settled in like pros. Candice (14), also a former camper with five years experience, was a welcome and natural leader. Her cousin Julian (13) came to camp with a box of prescription medicines which proved to be inadequate to keep him manageable and he was brought home the second day of camp. Jessica (12) rounded out the campers from Smithers and she fit in real well.

Devotions were a big part of the camp and had mixed reactions. Basic knowledge of our Triune God was not foreign to them, nor did they question his existence. But how they see his importance in the lives of these modern teens was difficult to judge. We were all



A human totem pole!

included in the devotional program Denise had set up and we had some deep discussions regarding showing Christian life styles. The influence of spirits, God's judgement regarding suicide, and other thought-provoking questions were part of the fellowship discussions.

A warm stove greeted the campers on cool and some wet mornings. The mountain hike on Lyons Creek trail to timberline was enjoyed with some reservations and sore muscles. Crystal, the meekest and most homesick camper, was first at the top. Kirsten made it most of the way up until two other campers talked her into going down with them when they became exhausted. All except three of the campers and counsellors also enjoyed a short but exhilarating horseback ride in Driftwood.

The support of many from our congregation who volunteered their time for cooking, candy making, archery, musical accompaniment, and supervision for late nights was much appreciated by the full-time counsellors.

All in all, we were blest with good weather, good cooperation (Josh was a friendly giant), and God kept us from all harm and danger. Many songs of praise and prayers were brought before God's throne and we trust in Him to accept them and answer our prayers for the sake of his Son and our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Rich and Betty Klaver



Dr. Benne Faber

Dr. Benne Faber is Assistant Professor of English at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario.

Nicholas Wolterstorff on Christian Education



In a previous issue (Volume 54, Issue 10) this column mentioned a seminar series hosted by Covenant Teachers' College on the work of Wolterstorff. The aim of the seminar was to introduce the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff into the conversation among teachers, administrators, and others involved in Reformed, Christian education by reading together *Educating for Life* (Eerdmans, 2002). Over four evenings participants considered key chapters of the book and vigorously discussed the implications of Wolterstorff's ideas for Reformed education.

Wolterstorff as philosopher

Nicholas Wolterstorff is one of the foremost philosophers in the Calvinistic tradition in North America. Together with Alvin Plantinga, a classmate at Calvin College in the 1950s and later a colleague in its philosophy department, Wolterstorff developed what came to be known as Reformed epistemology: an approach to such questions as "How do we know that God exists?" and "What role does faith play in science?" that begins with properly basic belief in the existence of God. Wolterstorff not only presents a thoughtful and persuasive critique of the foundations of knowledge in western philosophy since Descartes, he also argues positively for the importance of one's commitment to Christ in the pursuit of knowledge. Over a wide range of philosophical disciplines (including ontology, hermeneutics, aesthetics, and ethics), Wolterstorff develops a coherent, comprehensive philosophy that is shaped by the systematic theology of John Calvin. After

Augustine and Calvin, the figures whose work is most evident in Wolterstorff's philosophy are the eighteenth-century Scot, Thomas Reid, and the nineteenth-century Dutchman, Abraham Kuyper.¹

Starting points for education

Wolterstorff's view of the learner begins with Calvin's understanding of the human being as made in the image of God with an "awareness of divinity." The cultural mandate for Wolterstorff is more a "cultural blessing" with privileges and responsibilities than an onerous obligation. The cultivation of delight in living as a child of God in a good creation is central to Wolterstorff as a motivation for education. The debilitating effects of the fall are not to be downplayed, but the positive impetus of education is found in the goodness of God's creation.

There is nothing, then, which lies outside the domain of education: the whole world belongs to God and He directs the history of the universe to its completion at Christ's return. Therefore, the curriculum of the Christian school must be comprehensive, including even those aspects of human culture that graphically depict the brokenness of the human condition. There is dichotomy for Wolterstorff between "secular/sacred" education or between Christian and non-Christian scientists: the learner is simply called to fidelity to God's Word in her or his being in the world.

Since the 1980s Wolterstorff has emphasized the need for the application of theory: like faith without works, theory without practice is dead. The measure of authentic Christian scholarship is not only fidelity to the

Bible but also the extent to which it is active in promoting the Kingdom of God. For instance, in the realm of justice, one should not merely analyze the structures of society; one must see to it that righteousness and peace will flourish. Thus, Wolterstorff's involvement in the struggle against *apartheid* and in the plight of Lebanese Christians in the Middle East was motivated by the need to effect change in the world. Not only the cessation of hostility but the flourishing of peace, delight, and gratitude constitutes the realization of the Biblical ideal of *shalom*: all human activity, including Christian education, must be the cultivation of *shalom* in the world. The goal of Christian learning cannot be reduced to thinking correctly and reasoning sharply but must encompass "a certain way of being in the world" that is proper to the Christian.²

Spirited discussion

The pieces collected in *Educating for Life* generated fruitful discussion among the participants of the seminar, ranging from the practical (such as the integration of provincial curricula) to the philosophical (such as the relationship between church and school). For those who were encountering Wolterstorff for the first time, the primary objective was to come to an understanding of his work. But this moved quickly to the secondary objective, which was to come to an honest assessment of his ideas. This inevitably involved a good deal of healthy self-examination, a taking-stock of Reformed education as we practice it.

For instance, the question was asked whether Reformed schools are too



Church News

ADDRESS CHANGE:

Rev. B.J. Berends

7633 Sapphire Drive,

Chilliwack, BC V2R 3A7

Phone: 604-858-2536

closed, not only in terms of membership in school societies but also in allowing students to engage ideas which may come from outside the Reformed purview. Such dialogue with people in the broader Christian community can sharpen a student's grasp of the Reformed faith and equip him with an apologetic to defend and promote a Reformed understanding in various issues.

Occasionally the discussion returned to the perceived conflict between students' intellectual development and the practical application of education. In much of his work on education Wolterstorff is reacting against a tradition of Christian education that privileges the mind over the hands; Wolterstorff takes pains to redress the imbalance by giving greater importance to the *practice* of a Christian's being-in-the-world. The question was asked several times during the seminar whether Reformed schools were following too readily the trend in education away from the life of the mind: is Reformed education doing enough to provide the intellectual tools to discern the spirit of the times, to challenge the presuppositions of prevailing thought, and to respond to false philosophies?

Another area of discussion was the place of "tendency development" in Christian education: should Christian education aim to transform the heart and will of the learner? According to Wolterstorff, since education inevitably shapes the disposition of the learner, Christian education should be deliberate in cultivating the tendency or inclination of the child to act in a manner obedient to God's Word and faithful to Christ Jesus. Although many expressed appreciation for drawing attention to the need for the spiritual growth of the child through Christian education, others voiced concern about such talk of "transformational education" in the setting of the covenant community.

Yet another point of debate was the distinction that emerged between "Christian education" and "Reformed education." Wolterstorff works with a

broader view of the church than what is held in most Canadian and American Reformed schools. In this regard, the constituency and clientele with which Wolterstorff seems to be dealing is different from that of the schools experienced by most readers of *Clarion*. The distinctive features of Reformed education, summarized in the quartet of "antithesis, covenant, confessions, and a unity of church and school," are downplayed by Wolterstorff. Although Wolterstorff follows Abraham Kuyper's antithetical framework, he rather emphasizes the interaction of Christian and secular learning. Much of Wolterstorff's writing about education assumes infant baptism and covenant theology; this assumption, however, is not developed into a covenantal basis for Christian education. While the Reformed confessions are personally dear to Wolterstorff, they do not play a significant role in his philosophy of education. Since these pieces are on Christian education Wolterstorff does not see the need to develop the biblical doctrine of the church. Consequently, the close link established between church and school in the covenantal understanding of education is absent in Wolterstorff.

Shalom

The final session of the seminar consisted of a three-person panel which focused on the central concept of *shalom*. Rev. Agema suggested in his assessment of Wolterstorff's use of *shalom* that the full richness of the word as expressed in the person of Christ Jesus is absent; the peace, gratitude, and delight that Wolterstorff includes in *shalom* is given to God's people in the context of the covenant of grace. Associating *shalom* with so-called "common grace" removes its specific, Christological character. Dr. de Visser presented a critique of Wolterstorff's theory of social justice, suggesting that his lofty goals for Christian education are idealistic and impractical. Dr. van Halen-Faber compared the idea of *shalom* with similar philosophies of liberation in

contemporary pedagogical theory, concluding that Wolterstorff's *shalom* should be drawn closer to expressions of comfort as found in the Heidelberg Catechism. While one should not tar Wolterstorff with the same brush as Paulo Freire, for instance, one should also be wary of adopting the language and ideas of Liberation Theology unwittingly via Wolterstorff's *shalom*. All three panelists indicated that the term *shalom* could easily become an empty slogan in Christian education. Rather than jettisoning the concept of *shalom* entirely, however, participants in the seminar concluded that the goals of Reformed education must include the practical expression of gratitude, delight, and peace by children of the covenant.

Conclusion

As the seminar demonstrated, the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff can play a significant role in the on-going development of Reformed education. Whereas his philosophical writings may prove a challenging read, Wolterstorff's essays on education in *Educating for Life* are accessible to the general reader. Near the start of another school year parents, teachers, and board members may want to consider forming a reading group with Wolterstorff at the centre to listen with critical appreciation to another voice from the wider community of Reformed Christian education.

¹See Wolterstorff, "Abraham Kuyper on Christian Learning" and "What Is the Reformed Perspective on Christian Higher Education" in *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education*, ed. Gloria Goris Stronks and Clarence Joldersma (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

²"Teaching for Tomorrow Today" in *Educating for Life*, p. 92.



A Sense of Office?

An Office Bearers Conference on *Leadership in the Church... and in the World* was recently held in the Fraser Valley. The first four sessions were related to the work of the elder and the final two sessions to the work of the deacon. In general, the sessions were well received and well attended. Although my comments in this article will relate primarily to the office of the deacon, I wish to make a reference to a comment made in one of the first sessions, namely "that the elders need to have a 'sense of office.'" I would like to expand on this and ask about the deacons. How is the "sense of office" among the deacons in our federation?

The presentation on *The Office and Task of the Deacon* provided background history to the establishment of the diacony and also provided some thought provoking case studies. One statement in particular which caught my attention was, "In well established churches, with long standing ties, it will not be necessary to make formal visits to find out needs." It was suggested that ongoing needs could be accomplished by having an ear to the ground to be aware of new or changing situations.

This raises a question: how can one make sure that "no one in the congregation of Christ may live uncomforted under the pressure of sickness, loneliness, or poverty" (*Book of Praise*, p. 631) without making visits? In my experience a formal visit with the opening of Scripture accomplishes much more than casual contacts. We may think we know what is going on in a family's or individual's life, but situations can change and formal visits are the best way to stay in touch and get to the heart difficulties. Visits that begin with Bible reading and prayer will make clear that the deacon is not there on his own behalf, but on behalf of Christ and his congregation.

Deacon visits are often generated by emergencies rather than taking a preventative maintenance approach.

In this affluent society it would be easy to succumb to the thinking that the more we know church members the less we need to visit; however, loneliness seems to increase as society becomes more affluent. Just ask the elderly, the shut-ins, and those caught in the rat-race of today's economic climate. Visiting should be promoted rather than reduced. The collective lack of onus on the deacons to make regular visits detracts from the urgency of the deacon's task.

In *The Ordained Servant* (1,1, p. 14-21), an OPC periodical, C. Van Dam writes the following on family visits:

How can the deacons best fulfill this task? The new Dutch form (adopted by Synod Kampen 1975) explicitly mentions a new element which answers this question; namely, the family visit. The diaconate must, as it were, go on the offensive and visit all the families of the church. There is great merit in this, precisely in these times of rush and busyness when we do not always know what lives among the people... because there is no time to visit (contrast the assumed situation in Israel).

Since deacons often serve as the gateway to the consistory for understanding the grass roots of church life, including the service of visitors and strangers, close cooperation between the elder and deacon as well as regular visits to the members is a must (Huizenga, W., *Deacons Go Visiting!*).

What the deacons need more than ever in an age of established churches is

"a sense of office" as was pointed to and recognized for the elder. A study of some key historical events could explain why the deacons may find themselves wondering where they fit after being elected and called to the office. Quite often they feel they are not quite "on par" with the elder, through their own thinking or by the body of elders who sometimes may operate without communicating sufficiently with the deacons. Here we would do well to take a closer look at some key points which took place during the Reformation with respect to the deacons and their relationship to the consistory.

From the Synod Emden (1571) commonly regarded as the first national synod of The Netherlands we read the following articles:

1. No church shall have dominion over another church, no minister of the Word, elder, or deacon shall exercise dominion over another.
6. Each church shall have assemblies or consistories, composed of the ministers of the Word, the elders, and deacons.

This position is in line with Article 30 of the Belgic Confession which states that "there should be elders and deacons who, together with the pastors, form the council of the church." Council is synonymous with consistory (*Acts of Synod Cloverdale* 1983, p. 65).

However, Synod Cloverdale (1983) ruled against a minority report and against the Committee for the Revision of the Church Order to include the deacons as part of the consistory. While there appeared to be good reasons given

to include them, this synod claimed it to be an “unexpected change.” This decision would also exclude them from the ecclesiastical assemblies (CO, Art. 29), perhaps unintentionally, and also tends to distance the diaconry from the consistory. Synod Cloverdale’s 1983 decision also tends to create confusion over who is actually the governing body of the church – the council, the consistory, or both. This confusion is still alive today, ask the member in the pew!

Of course, there has been a significant amount of history from 1571 – 1983. From the Church Order Commentary by W.W.J. Van Oene, *With Common Consent* (p. 176), we read,

The Synod of Dordrecht (1574), however, introduced separate meetings of ministers and elders on the one hand, and deacons on the other. One of the best-known teachers of Reformed church polity, Dr. F.L. Rutgers explains this change as having been caused by the circumstance that at the time of the Reformation the deacons also became administrators and stewards of those confiscated possessions of the Romish church which had become public possessions for the support of the indigent. And thus the deacons could easily get into a conflict of interest as they were in part accountable to the consistory and in part to the civil authorities. Thus it was more convenient for them to be completely on their own and not to be members of the consistory... it is to be deplored that the churches did not return to the very beginning once the position of the deacons had (again) become a purely ecclesiastical one.

In our current Church Order, based on the proceedings of the Synod of Dordrecht, we see that deacons still remain included in many of the governing aspects of the church (CO, Art. 3, 5b, 9-14, 24, 26, and 71). Perhaps church councils should give pause to see whether sufficient information is given to

the deacons in order for them to make informed decisions regarding the contents of these articles. They should not simply be called in at the eleventh hour to rubber stamp a decision which has already been made by the elders.

Some may argue that Article 42 of our Church Order suggests the office of deacon is subservient to the elder, where it reads, “[The deacons] shall give account of their labours to the consistory.” However, this article is based on Article 36, Synod of Dordrecht, which reads:

It has been decided that where the deacons have only alms to gather, they shall present their accounts every month to the consistory. But where they receive a share of the income from the Holy Spirit and the other foundations for the relief of the poor, they shall present their accounts to those whom the magistrates, together with some members of the consistory, shall appoint. And this shall be laid before the congregation on each occasion so that everyone who wishes to be present for the accounts may attend.

The reference here is to financial accounting and does not suggest that the office of deacon is subordinate. In the reformational activities leading up to the 1944 liberation in The Netherlands we can catch a glimpse of the hierarchical tendencies displayed with regards to the deacons:

- In the *Church Order Commentary* written by Van Dellen and Monsma we read, “[Deacons] should be careful not to assume an attitude of parity with the consistory” and “yet if deacons should be delegated [to major assemblies] they would be placed on par with the elders at the classis” (p. 177, 179).
- In the *Ministry of Mercy* by P.Y. DeJong we read, “Delegation of two elders to be present at all diaconal meetings throughout the year.” He also writes that ministers should visit deacon meetings “to see whether deacons

understand their office, whether meetings are conducted in an edifying manner, and whether the relations of the deacons among themselves are amiable and exemplary, in this way any tendency on part of the diaconry to develop independently of the consistorial control can be curbed at the very outset” (p. 163, 165).

With all due respect to the above authors, it seems to me they were caught up in the hierarchal thinking of the day. Here we should keep in mind what Prof. F.L. Rutgers says about the progressive nature of hierarchy: “Germ, shoot or tree, the difference is only a matter of time: the nature of these three is entirely identical” (DeJong, J., *Bound Yet Free*, p. 8, 9). A minister’s primary purpose for visiting deacon meetings should be to keep in touch with the congregation and offer advice if requested (*With Common Consent*, p. 199).

When we give some honest reflection on the history of deacons and their relationship to the consistory it becomes obvious that there has been some ambiguity with respect to where they fit. This does nothing to give the deacon a “sense of office.” No doubt each office (minister, elder, and deacon) has its distinctive characteristics and should be maintained, but no elder should ever say to the deacon “this or that is none of your business” or vice-versa when it relates to the well-being of the people the Lord has entrusted *jointly* to their care. Attempts to separate the “material” (deacon work) from the “spiritual” (elder work) should also be avoided. There should be close cooperation with all concerned parties when it concerns the care of the flock, while maintaining a high degree of confidentiality on sensitive matters.

“It was again the Reformation which restored the office of deacon to its proper place and function” (*With Common Consent*, p. 109). Are we keeping in step with this and promoting a “sense of office” among the deacons?

Aubrey Vandergaag
+

Press Release of the meeting of the combined committees of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches to propose a common church order, held August 8-10, 2005, at the First United Reformed Church, Chino, CA

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, and Mr. Harry Van Gorp representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). Rev. Raymond Sikkema of the URCNA was unable to attend due to health reasons.

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Acts 15: 1-5 and prayer.

The minutes of the March 15-17, 2005 meeting were reviewed and approved, as were the agenda and timetable for the next three days.

Correspondence from two URCNA congregations interacting with the committee's reports to the respective synods and press releases was acknowledged. Feedback from the churches is much appreciated. These comments will be taken into consideration when the committee deals with and reviews the relevant articles.

In a review of the articles thus far adopted, some articles were modified and improved for grammar, punctuation, and style.

The matter of authority and governing as it relates to the broader assemblies was again extensively discussed. This resulted in a change to Foundational Principle 6, "The Lord gave no permanent universal, national, or regional offices to his church by which the churches are to be governed. Rather,

the offices of minister, elder, and deacon are local in authority and function. Therefore, the decisions of the broader assemblies are settled and binding among the churches only when they agree with Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, and a commonly adopted church order" (Acts 14:23; 16:4; 20:17,28; Eph 4:11-16; Titus 1:5).

In connection with this the last sentence in Foundational Principle 10 was changed to read: "The decisions of such assemblies are settled and binding among the churches unless they are contrary to Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the commonly adopted church order."

To reflect this principle in the church order a paragraph was added to the article dealing with Ecclesiastical Assemblies as follows: "All decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be received with respect and shall be considered settled and binding, unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the church order."

An article dealing with equality among office bearers was finalized to say that among the office bearers equality shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their respective offices and in other matters as far as possible, according to the judgment of the consistory and, if necessary, of classis. A similar article was adopted stating that no church shall in any way lord it over other churches and no office bearer over other office bearers.

An appendix dealing with the examination for ordained ministers from outside the federation was reviewed in detail. We are looking at three possible situations: 1) An examination of a minister of a church with which we maintain ecclesiastical fellowship and who has received a call to a church of the federation; 2) An examination of a minister of a church with which we do not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship and who is seeking eligibility for call to the churches of the federation; 3) An

examination of a minister of a church with which we do not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship and who is seeking entrance into the federation with his congregation. More work needs to be done on this before it can be finalized.

The question: "Who, from outside the federation, may be admitted to the pulpit" was once more discussed. This matter also requires further study and will be on the agenda of the next meeting as will the article regarding the right and procedure of appeal.

Consensus was reached on the article on subscription. Each office bearer shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription. Anyone refusing to subscribe shall not be ordained or installed in office. Anyone in office refusing to subscribe shall, because of that very fact, immediately be suspended from office by the consistory, and if he persists in his refusal he shall be deposed from office.

This requirement was also included in the article on Ecclesiastical Assemblies by adding the sentence: "These assemblies shall require each delegate to indicate his agreement with the Form of Subscription."

An article on the protection of doctrinal purity was formulated: "Ministers and elders shall use the means of instruction, refutation, warning, and admonition in the ministry of the Word as well as in Christian teaching to protect the congregation from false teachings and errors which endanger the purity of its doctrine and conduct."

Regarding the sacraments the following articles were adopted:

- The sacraments shall be administered under the authority of the consistory in a public worship service by an ordained minister with the use of the synodically adopted forms.
- The consistory shall ensure that as soon as feasible God's covenant shall be signified and sealed by holy baptism

to the children of communicant members in good standing.

- Adults who have not been previously baptized shall be engrafted into the Christian church by holy baptism upon their public profession of faith.
- At least every three months the Lord's Supper shall be administered according to the teaching of God's Word and in a manner most conducive to the edification of the congregation.

The article dealing with the administration of the Lord's Supper and who may be admitted to the table of the Lord received lengthy discussion and deliberation. Clarification on differing practices and understanding of the sacrament were helpful. However, the article could not be finalized at this meeting. Both the CanRC men and the URCNA delegates will prepare proposals to be presented at the next meeting for further deliberation.

Several other articles were discussed and completed.

- Church records: The consistory shall maintain accurate records which include the names of the members of the congregation, dates of their births, baptisms, professions of faith, marriages, receptions into and departures from the church, and deaths.
- Funerals: A funeral is a family matter and shall not be conducted as a worship service.
- Prayer services: It was deemed unnecessary to have a separate article for special days of prayer, but to include this in an article on worship services.
- The weekly worship services: The consistory shall call the congregation together for public worship twice each Lord's Day. The consistory shall regulate the worship services, which shall be conducted according to the principles taught in God's Word, namely, that the preaching of the Word have the central place, the

confession of sins be made, praise and thanksgiving in song and prayer be given, and the gifts of gratitude be offered. At one of the services each Lord's Day the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word of God as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism by treating its Lord's Days in sequence, and may give attention also to the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort.

- Special worship services: In the manner decided by the consistory, special worship services may be called in observance of Christ's birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. Special worship services may also be called in connection with prayer for crops and labour, Thanksgiving Day, the turning of the New Year, and times of great distress or blessing.

The next meeting of the committee will take place D.V. November 1-3, 2005 at the Ebenezer CanRC of Burlington, ON. Appreciation was expressed to the First United Reformed Church in Chino for the hospitality and the assistance received from many members of the congregation. Dr. Kloosterman, in his closing remarks, expressed his thankfulness to the Lord for the brotherly manner in which the committee could proceed with its labours and the amount of work that could be accomplished. To God be the praise and glory.

*For the committee
Gerard J. Nordeman*

Press Release for Classis Ontario West, held September 14, 2005 in Kerwood, ON

Opening

On behalf of the convening church at Kerwood Rev. J. Slaa called the meeting to order and led the opening devotions. He welcomed all the guests, in particular the fraternal delegates: Rev. John

Ferguson representing Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Rev. Harry Zekveld representing Classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches of North America. Rev. Slaa mentioned two items of memorabilia: the vacancy of the church at Hamilton and the return of Rev. G. van Popta from his sabbatical.

Credentials and constitution

The credentials were examined and found to be in good order. It was noted that the church at Ancaster had two instructions. Classis was constituted. The appointed officers were: Rev. Slaa (chairman), Rev. J. Ludwig (vice-chairman), and Rev. R.E. Pot (clerk).

Adoption of the agenda

After some additions the agenda was adopted.

Question period ad Article 44

Question period according to Article 44 of the church order was held. The chairman asked the three necessary questions. All the churches via their representatives answered the first two in the affirmative and the third in the negative, while the church at Ancaster made use of the third question. It requested concurring advice regarding a matter of discipline. In closed session advice was given. The church at Ancaster also brought up a question about a proposed Form for Installation of Ministers appointed for Teaching at the Theological College. Should this proposed form be send directly to General Synod via Classis and Regional Synod to the broadest assembly? The church at Ancaster was advised to follow the latter route.

Correspondence

The church at Ancaster submitted to this classis a letter from the Registrar of the Theological College stating that Br. Richard Horlings had successfully completed his third year at the College.

Reports

A report from the treasurer for Classis was presented. Classis adopted the recommendation to keep the assessment at \$4.00 per communicant member for the year 2006.

The Church at Chatham, which administers the Fund for Needy Students, received a request for more assistance. It proposed that Classis approve an assessment of \$15.00 per communicant member (an increase of \$2.50). This proposal carried. The Church at Chatham asked advice about extending financial assistance to students who have been declared eligible at the June Classis. Classis advised the Church at Chatham to give support to such students until their graduation in September, if so needed.

The Church at Ancaster, which administers the Fund for Needy Churches, presented its report. The following recommendations were adopted:

1. To defer approval of the Auditor's Report for the period August 1, 2004 to July 31, 2005 until the first classis following the receipt of the report by the Church at Ancaster and at that time discharge the Church at Ancaster for the period August 1, 2004 to July 31, 2005.
2. To accept the request of support from the Fund by the Church at Grand Rapids and approve the assessment of \$35.00 per communicant member for 2006 (a decrease of \$6.00 per communicant member from 2005). The delegates from Grand Rapids abstained from voting.

Appointments

For the next classis the following appointments were made: Convening church – London; officers – Rev. D. Vandeburgt (chairman), Rev. Slaa (clerk), Rev. Pot (vice chairman); date – December 14, 2005 (alt. date March 8, 2006); place – London.

Delegates to Regional Synod in Attercliffe, to be held November, 2005 were appointed. Ministers: Rev. van Popta and Rev. Pot; alternates: Rev. Vandeburgt and Rev. H. Versteeg (in that order). Elders: F. Oostdyk and J. Vanderwoude; alternates: J. Bos and H. Nienhuis (in that order).

The fraternal delegates were given the opportunity to address the assembly, conveying greetings and encouragements. Rev. Pot and Rev. van Popta responded on behalf of Classis.

Personal question period was held. Censure ad Article 34 was not deemed necessary. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release approved. Rev. Slaa led in closing devotions.

*For Classis Ontario-West
Vice-chairman at that time: Rev. J. Ludwig*

Press Release of Classis Pacific East, held September 15, 2005 in Chilliwack, BC

Rev. M.H. VanLuik, chairman of the convening church of Chilliwack, requested those present to sing Psalm 48:1, 3, 4 and read the same Psalm. He then led in prayer for God's blessing on the assembly. Welcome was extended to the delegates as well as to Rev. J. Merica, who was among us on behalf of Western Classis of the Reformed Churches in the United States (RCUS). Rev. VanLuik noted that since the last classis Rev. C. Bouwman has been installed as minister of Yarrow church. He also noted that Rev. R.A. Schouten has declined calls from the Churches at Hamilton, Aldergrove, and Orangeville. Positive developments in the sister churches in Brazil were also noted with gratitude to the Lord.

The Aldergrove delegates reported that the credentials were in good order. Classis was declared constituted and officers were proposed. Classis proceeded with the following officers: chairman: Rev. VanLuik, vice chairman:

Rev. J. Moesker, Clerk: Rev. W.H. Wielenga. The agenda was established. Classis agreed to have Rev. Merica seated at table with the delegates with privilege of the floor.

A proposal from the Church of Chilliwack to organize a Classical Home Missions Committee to collect funds for home mission, ostensibly to establish churches elsewhere, was tabled. Some rounds of discussion were held and delegates expressed the sentiments of their churches and personal reactions to the proposal. Classis decided that while it supports the desire of the Church at Chilliwack to nurture the work of organized evangelism within this classical area, it is not convinced that a "Classical Home Mission Fund" is the best way to promote this work. Churches within Classis Pacific East, though, are encouraged to boldly and creatively undertake the organized work of local mission projects and to seek the help of neighbouring churches as needed.

The Church of Yarrow requested Classis to approve a statement on homosexuality. A brother of this congregation has been charged with discrimination based on sexual orientation and is scheduled to appear before the Human Rights Tribunal early next year. A statement on homosexuality adopted also by an assembly of the Canadian Reformed Churches would be very helpful to this brother's case. Classis provided the brother with a letter affirming that Yarrow's statement on homosexuality is characteristic of the position every Canadian Reformed Church would take. Yarrow's statement reads as follows: *The members of the Canadian Reformed Church in Yarrow, when mature in their faith, make public profession of faith in accordance with the attached Form for Public Profession of Faith. By responding affirmatively to the questions of this Form, members state that they believe wholeheartedly the doctrine of the Word of God as taught in this Christian church. They also declare their intention to continue in*

this doctrine in life and death, rejecting all heresies and errors conflicting with God's Word. The Canadian Reformed Church of Yarrow believes that the Bible is the inerrant word of God. This Word of God teaches us in the Old and New Testaments that homosexual behaviour is evil before God (Lev. 18:22; Lev. 20:13; Deut. 23:18; Rom. 1:26, 27; I Cor. 6:9-11) and so must be rejected as an error by those who publicly profess their faith in this church.

The report of the treasurer concerning the Classis Pacific East Fund for 2004 was already tabled at the previous classis. The Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry had nothing to report, as there is no balance and there have been no applications for assistance. The Committee for Needy Churches also had nothing to report, as there have been no requests for help. Report of a church visit made to the Church of Vernon (June 6, 2005) was presented. It was noted that church visit reports of visits to Lynden (Feb. 3, 2005), and Yarrow (Jan. 10, 2005) were presented but not recorded in the Acts of the last classis. Chairman noted with gratitude that life in the churches is proceeding in a Biblical and orderly way.

Rev. Merica of California, fraternal delegate of the Western Classis of the RCUS, addressed Classis. He spoke with appreciation about the relationship between the church federations. He was thankful for the Canadian Reformed Churches' adherence to Scripture and confessions and assured Classis that this was also the stand of the RCUS. He brought forward a number of examples of errant teachings being disseminated in the US, which have been exposed as unbiblical by committees of RCUS Synods. He passed on greetings from the churches in Western Classis and encouraged the churches of Classis Pacific East to continue in the Lord Jesus Christ. Rev. VanLuik responded to the words of Rev. Merica. He expressed thankfulness for the desire of the RCUS to remain faithful to the doctrines of the Word as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity. He noted the

differences between the churches in dealing with issues such as highlighted in Rev. Merica's address. He requested that Rev. Merica pass on the sincere greetings of the churches of Classis Pacific East to the brotherhood in Western Classis of the RCUS.

The churches of classis were asked (Art. 44 C.O.) whether the ministry of the office bearers is being continued and whether the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. Delegates replied in the affirmative for all churches. It was also asked whether there are any matters in which consistories need the judgement and help of classis. No church requested the judgment and help of classis in any matter.

The following appointments were made: The Church at Lynden was appointed convening church for next classis, the date being December 8, 2005

with alternate date being March 16, 2005, time being 9:00 am. The officers appointed for next classis are: chairman, Rev. Moesker; vice chairman, Rev. Wielenga; and clerk, Rev. Bouwman.

The following brothers were appointed as delegates to Regional Synod West Calgary, November 22, 2005. Ministers: Rev. Moesker and Rev. Schouten; alternates: Rev. Bouwman and Rev. Wielenga. Elders: K. Jagersma and H. Schouten; alternates: B. Meerstra and M. Krabbendam.

Advice was given in response to a question asked during personal question period. Chairman expressed thankfulness for the good harmony and cooperation at Classis and wished the brothers a safe journey home. He requested the brothers to sing together Psalm 67 and led in thanksgiving prayer.

J. Moesker, vice chairman e.t.



Grass River, Manitoba

Photo courtesy Cheryl Marke