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*Theological
Education and
Church Unity*

*Let Us
Remember
Him*

*Footsteps of
the Lord*



Lest We Forget



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Theological Education and Church Unity

This development is a setback to the unity process in which the URCNA and CanRC are involved

Some of the issues that will have the attention of Synod Smithers, which is set to convene on May 9, 2007, are the reports dealing with the unity talks between the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). Among these reports is also the report of the Theological Education Committee which was mandated to work closely with the counterpart URCNA committee and develop a proposal for theological education in a new united federation. A key stipulation of the mandate given to the Theological Education Committee was that "the new federation should retain at least one federational theological school at which the board of governors, the professors and teaching staff are appointed by synod" (*Acts Synod Chatham 2004*, Art. 76). The URCNA do not have a federational school and as is clear from a recent press release (see *Clarion*, June 23, 2006, p. 319), the two committees were unable to agree on any proposal for theological education. This development is a setback to the unity process in which the URCNA and CanRC are involved. That this impasse is indeed a step back is evident from the short history of the contact of these two federations.

An earlier agreement

In 2001, Statements of Agreement drafted by the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (CanRC) and the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (URCNA) were sent to the respective synods of each church federation. These Statements of Agreement can be found in published form as appendices to the Acts of these synods held in Escondido and Neerlandia. The URCNA delegate to Synod Neerlandia noted that "the Agreements were wholeheartedly and without reservation entered into

and ... presented as such to both synods" (*Acts Synod Neerlandia 2001*, 130).

With regard to theological education, the proposed agreement reads in part:

The unity committees recommend to the synods of 2001 that the mandates for the proposed theological study committee of both federations contain provisions for the commitment that should the Lord of the church grant eventual union, the resulting united churches will retain at least one federational theological school and that the synod recommend the school's professors and teaching staff for appointment.

It is telling how the two synods reacted to this document. Synod Neerlandia took grateful note of it "as evidence that significant progress had been made towards federative unity" (*Acts Synod Neerlandia 2001*, Art.73, § 4.1), while Synod Escondido, meeting about a month later, made it clear that "the Statements of Agreement. . . do not exhaustively reflect the full spectrum of theological (doctrinal) positions of URC congregations in some of its formulations, and that these positions have no official status in the URCNA" (*Acts Synod Escondido 2001*, Art. 31.C). Although it is not clear from this decision exactly what positions were a problem for some, this synodical decision was a factor in the inability of the two current theological education committees to reaffirm the agreement that had been reached earlier with respect to the desirability of at least one federational school.

The present situation

On one level, it is understandable that the URCNA committee was not willing to commit itself to at least one federational school. They do not have such a school at present and everything seems to go well.

Indeed, we were told that the local church is very involved in a theological student's education and training. Furthermore, the idea of going back to a quota system to support an official seminary meets with resistance as they have lost their trust in a federational school of the churches.

The CanRC committee emphasized that the only condition into which it entered the talks was the principle that there be at least one federational school, a point that had been agreed upon by the earlier committees on theological education. However, this point of principle was now unanimously rejected by the URCNA committee. As a result there was no meaningful discussion of how such a principle could be put into practice.

Clearly, it will be up to the respective synods meeting in 2007 to decide what to do next.

Some things to keep in mind

The CanRC committee is convinced that the long held principle of the churches officially taking responsibility for the theological education of its ministers is a biblical principle. An important passage, although not the only one, is 2 Timothy 2:2 where we read the apostolic injunction: "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." There is no room in this editorial to go further into the biblical background of this principle. I may refer the interested reader to the committee's paper "Why Do the Canadian Reformed Churches Have Their Own Seminary?" (It is available on the internet at www.canrc.org/college/CanRCSemReasonsRev.pdf).

Since the principle is biblical, the CanRC should never abandon it. From the earliest historical records available, it is evident that throughout history the training of future ministers had an official ecclesiastical character. The theological training of ministers of the Word is the responsibility of the churches whom they wish to serve. This is both biblical and logical. Today there are many independent seminaries, especially in the United States. However, it should be noted that this is a relatively recent development. Furthermore, since such seminaries are consciously independent of ecclesiastical control, a church receiving its ministers from such an institution will never be able to exercise the kind of oversight that is possible in a school that is set up and maintained by the churches.

May it be possible to renew the discussions on theological education in the future. It would be wonderful to see the URCNA and CanRC unite into one church. However, abandoning the principle of a federational theological seminary would be paying too high a price for such a union.



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Let Us Remember Him



MATTHEW 13:52

“Praise the Lord, o my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

Psalm 103:2

Do we really know what war is like? Let me be the first to confess that I really have no idea. And I think most of us – not all of us, to be sure, but most of us – are in the same boat. We live in a rather sheltered world, largely oblivious to the sacrifices that others have made for us. We don't really have a clue how families, lives, and minds were and still are ripped apart by the brutal atrocities of war. Glamorized war movies and sniper video games certainly don't help. Reformed people aren't pacifists; however, when you consider man's ever growing skill at killing, you can understand why some are drawn to this position. It's wise to have a day set aside at this time of the year to remember both the evil and the good, to stop and ponder lest we forget – because that's what we are prone to do.

It is no different with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do we know what Christ has done for us? Do we know how great his sacrifice was? Let me be the first to confess that here, too, I am often blind, superficial, and have at best only an inkling of what my Saviour has done. A contemporary song has a line that challenges me: “I'll never know how much it cost, to see my sins upon that cross.” We won't ever know the agony of hell; but that doesn't mean we quickly move on. More and more we should be in awe of the sacrifice our Saviour has made, how wide and long and high and deep is that love which gives the new expansive dimensions to our redeemed lives.

But there are forces here as well that conspire to blind us and desensitize us; worse things than movies or video games. Things that basically boil down to one thing that is dear to us all: our pride. And the tough thing about pride is that its force seems to grow as we grow in the Christian life. The more we have, the more we know, the more we do, the more we are, the greater pride tempts us. That pride was the devil's sin makes sense – since he was the greatest of all God's creatures. And when we are proud we become blind to Christ's work, opposed to it, and risk being cut off entirely from it.

Pride can manifest itself in many ways. Sometimes it's more obvious, like when we think we're not that bad – “certainly not as bad as them.” Sometimes it's more subtle: pride can even look like holiness. Isn't that what the Pharisees were all about? They might have cleaned up obvious sins, but the more noxious weed of pride took firm root in their hearts. Pride can be seen when we stop talking about sin in both its incredible guilt and its enslaving power. “I'll do better the next time” – as if we could conquer sin in our own strength. “I'm generally a good person” – as if the guilt of getting angry or gossiping last week is really no big deal.

The world doesn't help us. It's full of the pride of life, we read in Scripture. Man boasting in himself, declaring he doesn't need God. Take our western world's denial of miracles, of the supernatural. This isn't just a matter of “science,” of

man coming of age and leaving behind “primitive” superstitious thinking. Our culture doesn't just think miracles *do not* happen – it doesn't think miracles need to happen. “We're fine on our own. We don't need God.” It's just a matter of time, they say, until we find a cure for what ails us, eliminate poverty, eliminate crime, and set up a utopian dream somewhere.

This is a lie from the pit of hell, from the antichrist himself. And we need to prophetically denounce it – also as we speak of ourselves.

We need to openly confess in the midst of this proud world that we need a divine miracle to be saved. It was, it is, bad. . . far worse than a German occupation. We had joined forces with the devil himself. The Dutch welcomed the Canadians, but we were not even going to welcome the Saviour God had sent. We were dead, not one bit of life in us when it came to loving God. We were filled with hatred, selfish to the core. Who would love us? No human, perhaps not even an angel. We were in rebellion and would not be able to drink one drop of Christ's cup without raising an angry fist towards heaven.

But wonder of wonders, Christ has fully loved those who were filled with hatred. He has died not for good people, but for those who deserved to die. He has given the ultimate sacrifice for those who were selfish beyond their knowing. Let us remember and glory in Him.

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Towards a Common Songbook (Part 10)

Sometimes More Art than Science

Most of the synodically-approved principles and guidelines for considering songs to be included in the new songbook are not too difficult to apply. Other guidelines, however, are not applied so easily. Applying them to a particular song is more of an "art" than an exact "science." So it is with Guidelines 8 and 9:

8. The music of the song should suit the text
9. The music of the church should be expressive of the Reformed tradition. Where possible, use is to be made of music developed in the tradition of this rich heritage.

No doubt there are some degrees of "suitability" – and honest differences of opinion about whether a melody of a song actually "suits" ("fits" or "matches") the words of that song.

With much Christian hymnody one can hardly imagine a certain text without its own special tune. For example, "Now Thank We All Our God" could hardly be imagined without its stately tune. The minor key of "O Come, O Come Immanuel" well expresses the ancient Israelite longing for the Messiah and gives voice to the Christian longing for the second advent of Christ. In contrast, the faster beat and syncopated rhythm

of "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation" seems well-fitting for expressing the praises of the "One who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth."

Some URC committee members have asked those on the Canadian Reformed side of the committee whether some of the Genevan melodies "suit" certain psalms, in particular those psalms which praise God. Many of the Genevans have a minor key sound (the musical experts call these "modalities") which to some people seem particularly unfitting for songs of praise. Some of these melodies have a kind of sad, even discordant, sound, which, in the opinion of some, does not seem to suit joyful expressions.

Some of the more "challenging" melodies set to psalms of praise are *Book of Praise* Psalms 104, 147, and 148. While one of us (van Popta) is more comfortable with these three, the other one of us (Lankheet) is much less comfortable. Both of us admit, however, that it is difficult to be completely objective about such opinions. Our opinions as writers of this column, and the opinions of our church members, will depend somewhat on how familiar we are with a particular song.

What seems musically "unsuitable" at first gradually seems more suitable as a song becomes more familiar to us. Psalm 42, "As the Hart," seems very suitably set to the minor key and specific modality of the Genevan melody. It "feels" right to us. But this is probably because we know this song well and sing it often. But what about Psalm 103, "Bless the Lord O My Soul"? For most URC people the *Psalter Hymnal* rendition sounds much more joyful than its Genevan equivalent in the *Book of Praise*. However, if the Genevan Psalm 103 were practiced many (most?) URC folk probably would come to appreciate it as much as the Genevan rendition of Psalm 42.

Some psalm songs in the current *Psalter Hymnal* seem to be set to unsuitable tunes. Though our committee as a whole has not yet considered the psalm section of the new songbook, both of us as writers sense a mismatch of text and tune in *Psalter Hymnal* #91. This rendition of Psalm 49, "Dust to Dust the Mortal Dies," is set to a tune which sounds far too light for the main theme of that psalm, namely, the destruction of the ungodly. *Psalter Hymnal* #78, #134, and #158 may be other examples of mismatches.

Seeking to follow Guideline #9, our committee is giving priority to songs which express the Reformed tradition. Martin Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" is an obvious selection in this regard. Most Genevan melodies also are high on our list since they, likewise, have a long history with us. So do certain Scottish and English

melodies, employed since the days of the Puritans.

As with the previous guideline, this guideline allows for some variation in its application. For example, what percentage of songs in the final collection should be taken directly from the "Reformed tradition"? And to which century in our tradition shall we turn – the sixteenth, seventeenth, or

eighteenth? And from what particular part of that tradition – from the German, the French, the Dutch, the Scottish?

Selecting songs according to our eleven principles is not always an exact science. Often it is more of an art. And, as with some art, beauty lies in the eye of the beholder – or in the ear of the singer.



Book Review

W.L. Bredenhof

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Depression: A Stubborn Darkness

Edward T. Welch (Winston-Salem: Vantage Point, 2004).

Additional Information: Paperback, 275 pages, \$12.72 CAD.

Depression has been described as the common cold of mental illnesses. Many of us know people who chronically or periodically suffer with this ailment. Many of us ourselves suffer, often in silence. This being the case, it's always good to know of some helpful resources that direct us back to God's Word for the support and encouragement we need. This book by Ed Welch is one such resource that I can highly recommend.

Ed Welch is the author of several helpful books, including *When People are Big and God is Small*. He is a professor of Practical Theology at Westminster

Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and a counsellor, faculty member, and director of the School of Biblical Counseling at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation. His years of experience both in counselling and in teaching the Scriptures are reflected in this volume.

The book begins with a vivid description of what depression is and what it's like to experience it. For those who live with depressed people, this will be enormously helpful. It'll give you an idea of what your loved one is experiencing. From there, Welch goes on to describe the ways in which depression is suffering and how we're to interpret that suffering in the light of the Bible. He examines what depression is saying to us and goes on to look at ways that the depressed person can be helped. Welch acknowledges the place of medication in treatment for

depression, but he urges his readers to be circumspect. The book closes with some exhortations from Scripture to humility, hope, thankfulness, and joy. Like his other books, this one is really devotional in character. Skilfully using the Word, Welch drives us to God and, more specifically, to Christ the Saviour. It is a long book, but the chapters (26 of them) are short enough to read in one sitting.

There are many helpful insights in this book. This is not the "grin and bear it" brand of counselling, nor is it the brand that simply tells us that depression is a disease like cancer, a disease that might be helped solely by medical treatments. Welch's approach is balanced and biblical. All in all, when that stubborn darkness descends on you or someone you love, Ed Welch could be the one to bring the light of the Scriptures to bear with a good result.





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High Notes in the History of the Hymns: “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”

No survey of the Hymn section of our *Book of Praise* would be complete without a reference to the poetry of Isaac Watts (1674-1748). Raised in a Puritan household, Isaac Watts belonged to those late-seventeenth century believers in England who defied the Act of Uniformity (1662) by which the Parliament of England made adherence to the *Book of Common Prayer* law for all churches. The so-called Dissenters did not conform to this law, which included singing only the Metrical Psalms during worship services. Disappointed in both the quality and the performance of these Metrical Psalms, Watts and other Dissenters set out to reform congregational singing by composing “Christianized Psalms” and hymns based on the teaching and language of the New Testament.

Of the numerous hymns composed by Watts, five are included in our *Book of Praise* (numbers 23, 42, 54, 55, and 61). “O God, Our Help in Ages Past” (Hymn 42) is a good example of the “Christianized Psalm.” It first appeared in the form of nine stanzas of four lines in a collection that bears the long but revealing title, *Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament and Applied to the Christian State and Worship* (1719). In this collection of hymns Watts sought to accommodate the text of the Old Testament Psalms to the New Testament context; in places he added verses to the Psalms in order to infuse elements of the gospel.

Hymn 42:1

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

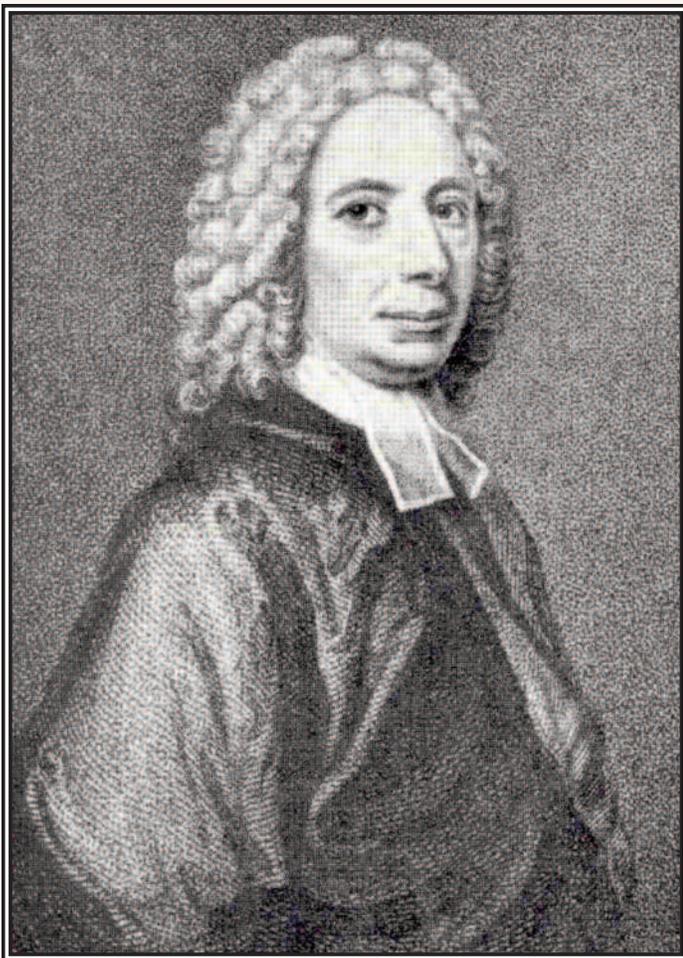
“O God, Our Help in Ages Past” is one of several hymns inspired by Psalm 90, in particular verses 1-5: “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God. . . (KJV).” As the subtitle, “Man Frail, and God Eternal,” reveals, the main theme of Watts’ hymn is the transitory nature of human life and the reliability of everlasting God. This theme is enhanced by an emphasis on the struggles of earthly life and the believers’ longing for the glorious future.

The hymn was composed with careful attention to meter, sound, and diction. In the opening stanza the movement in thought leads the singer from past to future and from storm to rest, punctuated by the final word, “home.” The rhythm in this stanza is very regular (note how almost every word is contained within its measure), reflecting the constancy of God. In the second stanza, however, the imagery shifts from shelter and storm to a king’s throne and his protected subjects; the language, too, is more varied.

God’s “Word” occupies a central place in this hymn; in the fourth stanza it is his Word that commands our flesh to dust; the reference to Genesis 1 develops the main theme by adding the element of the life-cycle (“return”... / .. “turn... again”) that is reinforced in stanza five by the image of the setting and rising sun.

Hymn: 42

Text: Isaac Watts, c. 1719
Tune: William Croft, 1708



noted, however, that they contain allusions to contemporary political circumstances and lend the original hymn a sense of relevance. It has been argued that the hymn was written shortly after another parliamentary act against the Dissenters threatened further discrimination against those who did not conform to the norms of the Church of England. The omitted stanza 8 seems to apply the theme of mortality in Psalm 90 to contemporary man-made governments, suggesting that also the present oppressive rule in England will end one day:

Like flow'ry fields the nations stand
Pleas'd with the morning-light;
The flowers beneath the Mower's hand
Lie withering e'er 'tis night.

The final stanza brings the poem full-circle by repeating the opening line, "O God, our help in ages past." Hereby the eternal quality of God is reinforced; the words, "Be thou our guard while troubles last" lend an immediacy to the poem, while the last phrase, "And our eternal home" give a sense of comfort and closure.

The name of the tune for Hymn 42 is St. Anne's, as it was composed by the organist at St. Anne's Church London, William Croft (1678-1727). Shortly after publication the hymn became widely known; it assumed a national character. It was performed at the funeral of Sir Winston Churchill. The hymn is often sung at civic events, including Remembrance Day celebrations in Canada.

Stanzas 4, 6, and 8 of the original composition were omitted when John Wesley published the hymn in his influential *Collection of Psalms and Hymns* (1737); since that time most hymn books (including the *Book of Praise*) have left out these stanzas. It should be



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Footsteps of the Lord

This is a revised version of a paper initially prepared for the West Albany Bible Study Clubs' Annual Kick-off Meeting in February and presented again for the Albany Combined Youth Societies in May

When we look at some of the catastrophic events that have happened during the last year or so, we can start to wonder, are we hearing the footsteps of the Lord Jesus approaching? Is He about to come back? Some time ago a tsunami in southwest Asia left more than 200,000 people dead. In Sudan's Darfur region tens of thousands have died and several million more have lost their homes. There were hurricanes and floods in Mexico and the southern United States last year and a mudslide in Guatemala that took more than a thousand lives. A massive earthquake in October claimed 25,000 lives in Pakistan. Cancer, AIDS, and other diseases continue to take millions of lives and medical authorities keep raising the spectre of a worldwide bird flu pandemic. So many disasters in such a short time, with fear of more on the horizon; how are we as Christians supposed to interpret such events?

The Bible speaks of the signs of the times, certain events which will happen before Christ returns. We read in Matthew 24 that these include wars and famines and pestilences and earthquakes, the same sorts of things we hear about in the news. Are we supposed to

conclude that the Lord Jesus is about to come back? Or are there some signs of the times that have not happened yet?

To answer these questions, I'd like to focus on one passage which deals with the signs of the times in detail, namely Matthew 24. It may be helpful for you to have your Bibles open and follow along as you read this article.

Two questions

The entire chapter is Christ's answer to a question which the disciples asked Him. Jesus had just walked out of the temple and the disciples pointed out the buildings of the temple to Him. It was a magnificent structure, originally built after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon, but greatly expanded and remodelled over the last forty-six years (John 2:20), thanks especially to the efforts of King Herod. But Jesus did not stop to admire the temple. Instead He predicted that it would be completely destroyed so that not one stone would be left upon another. The disciples were shocked and asked, "When will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?"

It is important to notice that the disciples in fact asked two questions here. The first question is: when will these things be? That is, when will the temple be destroyed? And the second question is: what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the

age? We know that the answers to these two questions are very different. The temple was destroyed by the Romans a long time ago, in 70 A.D. But the end of the age has not come yet. In the minds of the disciples, though, these two events were connected. And that is not surprising, when you consider what the disciples had just heard Jesus say in the previous chapter, Matthew 23. In the last words of Matthew 23 Jesus said that He would not come to the temple again until He would be greeted with the words of Psalm 118: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." So when Jesus told them that the temple would be destroyed, the disciples probably concluded that Jesus was coming back to destroy the temple.

In the rest of chapter 24 Jesus makes clear to his disciples that they ought not to combine the destruction of the temple with the return of Christ. First of all, He shows them that a number of events would precede his coming. Wars and rumours of wars would take place. Nations and kingdoms would rise and fall. Famines and pestilences and earthquakes would happen in various places. But even these terrible events did not mean that the world was coming to an end. No, said Jesus, all these are only the beginning of sorrows. The word that is translated as sorrows in verse 8 really means birth pangs. It reminds me of what we read in Romans 8:20-22, that the whole

creation has been groaning in travail ever since the fall when God subjected it to futility so that it produced thorns and thistles; famines show that creation is being held back from its potential to produce food; earthquakes are the groanings of a creation which longs to be redeemed. The fact that there are earthquakes and famines and pestilences show that Christ has *not* come back yet.

In other words, these are signs which do not help us to predict *when* Christ will come back, but they bring us to the conclusion that He's not here yet. Now, you might ask, isn't it obvious that Christ hasn't come back yet? We don't need an earthquake to figure that out. But remember that Jesus told his disciples that there would be people who claim to be the Christ and they would deceive many. How can they tell that these are false Christs? Because earthquakes and famines and pestilences and wars are still going on. If the real Christ had come, these things would not happen anymore. In other words, don't think small when it comes to the return of Christ; his return will affect not just Jerusalem or the temple but all of creation. He's coming on a grand scale. Earthquakes, wars, famines, pestilences, and the rise and fall of empires are events not restricted to the time just before Jesus comes back; they have been happening throughout history and they teach us only one thing: the end is not yet; Christ has not returned. And so we groan along with the rest of creation, longing for the day when death and decay is gone. These signs of the times teach us to say, "How long, O Lord? Maranatha – come back soon!"

What will be the sign?

The next section of Matthew 24 also shows that much had to happen before Christ returned. Verses 9-14 speak about the progress of the gospel. It would be accompanied by persecution, false teaching, and apostasy and the love of many Christians would grow cold. Notice that Jesus does not predict a mass conversion to Christianity. He does say that the gospel will be preached through the entire world, but as a witness to the nations. In other words, when Christ does come back as judge, the nations will not be able to say that they did not have a chance to hear the gospel;

How are we as Christians supposed to interpret such events?

persecution is the proof that they did hear the gospel but rejected it; false teaching is proof that they heard it but twisted its message; the love growing cold is proof that people used to believe but no longer. Only after the gospel has had this response throughout the world, only then will the end come. Again Jesus teaches the disciples that they should not think small when it comes to the return of Christ: the gospel of the kingdom is going to go throughout the earth; all nations will hear the name of Jesus Christ. Christ's return will have global significance; all nations will be affected by it.

And yet, this sign does not help us to predict the time of Christ's return either. Already in the book of Acts the apostles preached the gospel throughout the known world of the time. Paul went throughout

the Roman Empire, to Rome, possibly as far as Spain. In one of his letters, Peter passes on greetings from Babylon. Other apostles are said to have gone to India. Very early on there was a church in Ethiopia. And throughout church history missionaries have gone to the ends of the earth, the frontiers of civilization. That work still goes on today. To date, the Bible, or at least parts of it, has been translated into 2167 languages or dialects (see <http://www.biblesociety.org/index2.htm>). With every generation come new people who have not heard the gospel before and so the missionary task of the church continues until the end comes. Christ does not tell us to preach the gospel so that we can predict his return, but so that we work for his return. This is a sign of the times that puts the church to work.

So the first part of Matthew 24 has to do with the second question that the disciples asked: what will be the sign of Your coming? In other words, how will we know when You have come back? Jesus' answer is this: there will be people who claim to be the Christ, but don't be fooled. As long as there are wars and earthquakes and famines and pestilences, and as long as the gospel is still being preached to the nations, I haven't come back yet and the end of the age is not yet here.

When will the temple be destroyed?

In the next part of Matthew 24, Christ goes back to their first question: when will the temple be destroyed? In verse 15 He tells the disciples that they would see the abomination of desolation mentioned by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place. In other

words, the temple would be desecrated. Daniel 11:31 predicts the coming of a king who would defile the sanctuary, stop the regular sacrifices, and set up an abomination of desolation. This prophecy was fulfilled already in the days of the Maccabees, in the second century B.C., when a Syrian king named Antiochus IV Epiphanes plundered Jerusalem, invaded the temple, and sacrificed pigs on an altar to the Greek god Zeus. Now Jesus says that the temple would be desecrated again during the disciples' lifetime.

And what should they do when this happened? Should they conclude that Christ had returned to save the believers? No, said Jesus, they should flee for their lives; it would be a time of great danger not only for Jews who rejected Christ but also for Christians. The judgments that Christ had pronounced in Matthew 23 would come upon Jerusalem; the temple would be left desolate, just as He had said, but the sword of the Romans who brought this judgment would not distinguish between Jews and Christians; anyone who stayed behind would be in danger of death. And that's why Jesus tells his disciples to flee to the mountains, to run for their lives, not even to try to save their possessions, but to flee the way Lot once fled from Sodom and Gomorrah. Jesus announced woe to those who were pregnant or were nursing babies because they would be slowed down in their flight. There are plenty of Old Testament texts which tell what enemy soldiers would do to babies and pregnant women if they captured them. Run, run, run for your lives, said Jesus, and pray that nothing will slow you down, like the rainy conditions of winter or the travel restrictions of the Sabbath. For there would be a great tribulation, a time of terrible suffering worse than anything before or since, and if those days

were not shortened, no one would survive, not even the elect.

And yet, as terrible as this tribulation would be, it was not the final judgment. It did not mean that Christ had come back as judge. Sure, there would be counterfeits who would claim to be the Christ. These frauds would even be able to do amazing signs and wonders to back up their claims and they would try to deceive the elect. But Jesus warned his followers not to be taken in by reports of Christ-sightings. When Christ comes back, you won't have to go looking for Him, because it will be obvious. Christ's coming will be like lightning that lights up the whole sky. You can't miss it. Do vultures ever miss out on a carcass?

Jesus does not know the time of his return

No, they always seem to know where it is. In the same way, people won't miss out on the return of Christ. What makes his return so obvious? Well, the sun and the moon will stop shining, the stars will disappear, and the stabilizing forces that keep the heavenly bodies in place would be disrupted. Again, the message is, don't think small when it comes to the return of Christ: it's an event of cosmic proportions; it will disrupt the entire universe. You can't miss that.

The sign of the Son of Man

And when that happens, said Jesus in verse 30, then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the heavens. What is meant by "the sign of the Son of Man"? A sign is something visible, something that people will see. And then the rest of the verse describes precisely what people will see. It says that the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven

Church News

Declined the call to the church at Langley (Willoughby Heights), British Columbia:

Rev. J. Ludwig
of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Examined by Classis Pacific West on October 10th, 2006 and declared eligible for ordination:

Candidate Hendrik Alkema

The ordination will take place October 29, 2006, D.V., in Houston, British Columbia.

with power and great glory. In other words, the sign of the Son of Man is the Son of Man. If that's the case, why does Jesus speak here of a sign? Because Christ is referring directly to the question which the disciples had asked Him at the beginning of the chapter: what will be the sign of your coming? In other words, how will we know that you're coming? And the answer is, you'll know when you see Me. There will be no advance warning that He's about to come: He will simply appear.

And that fits what we read in the rest of the chapter. Verse 42 says, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming." And verse 44 adds that He is coming at an unexpected hour. Jesus gives the example of a master who comes home on a day when the servant is not looking for him. He also gives the example of the flood: people did not know when it would come, until suddenly it came and swept them away. So, too, said Christ, no one knows the time of Christ's return. It goes to show that the signs of the times are not meant to calculate a date for his coming. Plenty of people have used them for that purpose. But they neglect the Lord's words in verse 44: be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour

you do not expect. The signs of the times do not tell us when Christ will return.

Is that really true? Does Christ not give any indication of the time of his return? I'd like to go back for a moment to verse 29. There we read that immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, etc, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear. . . immediately after the tribulation. Remember that the tribulation here refers to the terrible suffering that took place when Jerusalem fell. So verse 29 seems to suggest that Christ would come back right after the events of 70 A.D. And verse 34 seems to support the same when it says, "This generation will by no means pass away till *all* these things take place." These words seem to suggest that the return of Christ would happen during the lifetime of Jesus' disciples. Many explainers have taken the approach that all of the events of Matthew 24 have already happened, that the coming of the Son of Man in verse 30 does not refer to Christ's second coming, but that it refers to Christ coming to judge Jerusalem, that behind the Roman forces is Christ who comes to punish Israel for refusing to believe in Him. However, such explainers have a very difficult time explaining verse 31, about the sounding of the trumpet and the angels who gather the elect from the four winds. Verse 31 is surely about the second coming of Christ.

No simple answer

So how are we to explain verse 29, which suggests that Christ will return right after the destruction of Jerusalem? There is no simple answer to this question. This whole chapter is one of the most debated passages of the Bible, simply because it is so hard to make all the bits and pieces fall into place. And yet I think that we can make some headway.

The first point that I'd like to make is that Jesus did not know

when He would return. Have a look at verse 36: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven." The footnote adds: "nor the Son, but My Father only." Now you might argue with me that it's just a footnote which does not belong in the text, but the parallel passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21 do include these words in the text. Jesus says that He does not know the time of his return. And therefore I conclude that verse 29 is not meant to give an exact time for Christ's return. Jesus did know that his return would take place after the tribulation, but exactly when it would happen He did not know and so He could not tell his disciples, even if He had wanted to.

There is only one message: be ready, for the Son of Man could come at any time

Then why did Jesus use the words "immediately after the tribulation"? I think that verse 33 gives us a clue: "When you see all these things, you know that it is near, at the doors." In other words, when you see all these things happening, the desecration of the temple, the great tribulation, and the false Christs leading people astray, then you know that the second coming is near. It's right at the doors, about to happen. That is to say, the tribulation of 70 A.D. is the last warning sign before the return of Christ. The very next sign will be the sign of the coming of the Son of Man. The great tribulation is the last sign which God reveals to us. There are no more revealed events which must happen before Christ's return. From then on there is only one message: be ready, for the Son of Man could come at any time. He's at the doors and He could step in without warning at any moment.

From a historical perspective, when we look back, a lot of things have happened between the tribulation and the return of Christ. Centuries of history have passed since the destruction of Jerusalem. And then it is hard to make sense of Jesus' words that He will return immediately after the tribulation. But from a faith perspective, looking forward, God has revealed only this: that we need to be ready for Christ's return. Ever since the destruction of Jerusalem the church has been waiting for Christ to come at any moment. That is the next big event.

Conclusion

In summary, the signs of the times are not meant to help us predict when Christ will return. When we hear of events such as wars, famines, earthquakes, and pestilences, these remind us that Christ has not come back yet. Creation is still groaning in travail, longing for the redemption that will come when Christ returns. So if people come who claim to be the Christ, we know that they are lying: Christ is still in heaven. Does that mean that there is nothing we can do? No. We can join in with the groaning of creation, crying out in prayer, O Lord, how long? And we can go to work in the kingdom of God so that the gospel continues to call out as a witness to the nations. That doesn't mean that we all have to be missionaries. In Matthew 24 Christ used the example of two men working in the field, of two women grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. It is there, in our daily work, in the field, at the mill, in the office, in the kitchen, on the building site, in the neighbourhood, and at school that we show forth the gospel in the way we talk and act. And when persecution comes and the love of many grows cold, let us endure to the end. If we continue to do all these things, then Christ will find us ready when He returns.



Farewell to the Kampens

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'your God reigns!'" (Isa 52:7). This was the theme for the farewell of Rev. Kampen and his family. After fourteen years of faithful service, the time had sadly come to say goodbye. It was also a time of rejoicing for God's faithfulness in giving this congregation one of his servants as a precious gift.

The evening began with a barbeque featuring chicken roasted on huge barbeques. The ladies of the congregation filled out the meal with an abundance of salads. By 7:30 everyone had sauntered into the church where they were greeted by Rebecca Jansen playing her violin, accompanied on the piano by her grandma, Dickie Jansen.

The evening was opened by Bill Vanderpol, chairman of the farewell committee. He read from Romans 10:1-15, which picked up the theme of Isaiah 52:7. After prayer and a few appropriate remarks in which he mentioned that this is also a difficult evening for the Kampens, who will be leaving three daughters and two sons-in-law behind, the floor was given over to Paul Schouten. Rev. Kampen has become an integral part of Willoughby Heights. He was an ambassador of Jesus Christ, teaching us to be a light in the world. He proclaimed the gospel, taught catechism, visited the sick, and encouraged the congregation. He was also involved in many ecclesiastical assemblies. Even though we'll be apart, we continue in the common bond of faith.

The various speakers were interspersed throughout the evening. Rev. Lodder spoke of Rev. Kampen as the quintessential Canadian pastor. He loved to chase pucks around the ice, even putting his back out once. His team gave him the "MVP" award – Most Valuable Pastor! Rev. Lodder thanked him on behalf of the congregation of Cloverdale for filling in during their time of vacancy. Rev. Van Vliet, speaking on behalf of Maranatha, picked up on the theme of the evening: there is movement of the Lord and his people on the road to Zion. The move to Orangeville is just a slight



Rev. and Mrs. Kampen

shift in this journey; the important things stay the same. God's people go from strength to strength (Ps 84). Along with Rev. Lodder, he thanked Mrs. Kampen for her time as teacher at William of Orange School. In fact, he had a message from a special grade 3 boy on behalf of the class, "We will miss you a whole lot!" Rev. Visscher came wearing four hats. One was as representative from Langley. The second one was from classis, although it was a semi-illegal hat, for the last classis had forgotten to appoint a spokesman! He thanked Rev. Kampen for his hard work. Whenever he was given a job, it was quickly done without further ado. The third hat was given by the Bulkley Valley, where he is kindly remembered. The fourth hat was personal. They had worked closely together on various committees and now he was being left behind with all those "jonge broekjes," being the senior pastor in the Fraser Valley. Rev. Visscher ended with quoting from Isaiah 62: 6, that the Lord will set watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem. Rev. Kampen was commissioned by the Lord to be a watchman in Willoughby.

Various presentations by the congregation were enjoyed by all. We had a young children's choir formed by Yvonne Jacobi and Joy Van Vliet and reflections on a catechism class by the Young People. Rev. Kampen always made the classes challenging and enjoyable.



Farewell barbeque

He would regularly take them on "helicopter rides" through history and time, even teaching some Hebrew and Greek along the way. The women's society, true to form, gave a hilarious presentation of Rev. Kampen as a great Canadian historian. Reference was made to his hockey injury resulting in the postponement of the celebration of the Lord's Supper the following day. We end by being divided into three groups and singing a variation of the "Twelve Days of Christmas" entitled "Fourteen Years of Service."

Alida Vanderhorst had a short speech which accompanied the presentation of a lovely photo album to which each family contributed one page. Next, Fiona Jansen and Wenda Sikma, our resident photographers, along with Joy VanVliet presented Rev. and Mrs. Kampen with a large, gorgeous photograph of a well known scene near by. It had been beautifully framed by Steve Schoen.

Rev. Kampen was given the opportunity to speak words of heartfelt thanks. He commented that he had never lived in one place for this length of time ever in his life. He was able to do the work that the Lord had given him to do in Willoughby Heights, placing stones in the spiritual house. The congregation rallied around the family when his wife had serious

surgery. He was allowed a sabbatical to finish off his Masters Degree. In those fourteen years they gained another daughter and then recently two sons by marriage. We have become tightly woven together. Together we have shaped each other and it is his prayer that we can take what we have learned and work with it.

Ron Dykstra, on behalf of the office bearers, thanked the congregation for their show of appreciation to Rev. and Mrs. Kampen. By God's grace Rev. Kampen could do his work diligently in the congregation and with the consistory. We do not lament what we are losing, but with gratitude rejoice in what our faithful Father has given us in Rev. Kampen. We ended the evening with a coffee social.

On Sunday we celebrated the Lord's Supper in the morning. In the afternoon Rev. Kampen preached his farewell sermon. He used as text 2 Corinthians 13:11. His theme was, "The Spirit has preserved Paul's words of farewell to the Corinthians that we might fare well at Christ's coming." Both the Corinthians and we today are to heed Paul's words of admonitions and be motivated by his words of encouragement in his farewell address so that they, as well as we, will fare well until Christ returns again. This minister, with his weaknesses, brought the Word in a unique way. At this time of parting we, both minister and congregation, are encouraged to work with the fourteen years of preaching and so be built up into a spiritual temple, growing in assurance and being prepared as a bride for her bridegroom.

Immediately after the service, Peter de Boer, on behalf of the consistory and congregation, spoke a few parting words after which we sang Psalm 134, a beautiful Psalm to send Rev. Kampen and his family on their way to take up the glorious work of our risen Saviour in Orangeville.



Young children's choir

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 22-24, 2006 at the United Reformed Church of Dutton, MI

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

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Matthew chapter 13 and prayer.

The minutes of the March 14-16 meeting were reviewed and approved, as were the agenda and timetable for the next three days.

No new correspondence was received from either the URCNA or CanRC.

A review of the work thus far completed resulted in a number of changes to better reflect the intent of the articles and to improve on clarity and style.

The terminology of withdrawing and resigning, as used in the article dealing with members, was again discussed. This article was subsequently changed and restructured into four parts:

A. The Reception of Members: Members from churches within the federation or churches with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall be received under the spiritual care of the consistory

upon receipt of a testimony attesting their soundness in doctrine and life. Others shall be admitted only after the consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. In such cases the consistory shall determine whether a public profession of faith shall be required.

B. The Departure of Members: Members departing to a church within the federation or a church with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall submit a written request to the consistory which shall send a letter to such church requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care.

C. The Withdrawal of Members: The withdrawal of a member shall be appropriately announced.

D. Letter of Testimony: If a letter of testimony concerning doctrine and life is requested by a member, the consistory shall furnish such a letter.

Some more attention was given to the term "council" as it is used in various articles in the church order. It is often considered to be another ecclesiastical assembly. It was therefore decided to include in the proposed article dealing with the consistory the wording that the term council designates not an assembly of the church but a meeting of the elders and minister(s) with the deacons under the authority of the consistory, at which matters are dealt with as stipulated by the church order or as assigned by the consistory.

The article concerning churches where there are a small number of office bearers was changed as follows:

Where the number of elders is small, they may perform their duties with the advice of the deacons. This shall invariably

be done where the number of elders is fewer than three.

Where the number of deacons is small, they may perform their duties with the advice of the elders. This shall invariably be done where the number of deacons is fewer than three.

Matters left over from the previous meeting were reviewed. The article regarding the Lord's Supper was changed in line with the church orders of Dort and the URCNA to convey that the Lord's Supper shall be administered in a service of public worship. As to admission to the Lord's Supper, the following wording was agreed to:

The consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord's Supper. To that end the consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those members who have made profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Visitors may be admitted provided that, as much as possible, the consistory has secured confirmation of their biblical church membership, of their proper profession of faith, and their godly walk of life.

Also the article on appeals and appeal procedures, which had already been worked on at the last meeting, was reviewed and finalized.

When all avenues for settling a dispute at the consistory level have been exhausted and a member is convinced that an injustice has been done to him by a decision of his consistory, he may appeal the decision to classis for its judgment. The judgment of the broader assembly shall be reached by majority vote, received with respect, and considered settled

and binding, unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the Church Order.

Any appeal to a broader assembly must provide written grounds, and the broader assembly shall provide adequate grounds for its decision to sustain or not sustain an appeal. If an assembly does not sustain an appeal, the appellant may appeal the decision of the narrower assembly to the next broader assembly. If a general synod does not sustain that appeal, the appellant may appeal synod's decision only once and that to the next general synod.

A member who desires to object to a decision of general synod regarding a matter pertaining to the churches in common shall bring the matter to his consistory and urge it to appeal the decision to the next general synod.

A consistory which is convinced that a decision of a broader assembly conflicts with Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the Church Order, shall appeal the decision to the broader assembly next in order as soon as feasible.

The church's calling regarding mission and evangelism was discussed at length with the conclusion to retain the articles already adopted at a previous meeting. However, to provide a clear biblical basis for the proposed articles, an additional Foundational Principle was formulated as follows:

The church's evangelistic and missionary calling consists of preaching and teaching the Word of God to the unconverted at home and abroad with the

goal of establishing new churches or expanding existing churches. This calling is fulfilled by ministers of the Word ordained to be missionaries and by equipping the congregation to be the light of the world. Matthew 5:14-16; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 4:11-13; Philippians 2:14-16; 1 Peter 2:9-12; 1 Peter 3:15-16

The article dealing with psalms and hymns used in the worship services was formulated to read:

The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful musical renderings of the psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by general synod.

A church shall be admitted into the federation by the nearest classis with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, only upon the recommendation of a consistory and provided that its office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and agree with the Church Order. If one of these office-bearers is a minister, he shall be examined.

A minister may have reason to request a temporary release from his work in the congregation. The following article provides for this:

If because of illness or other substantial reasons, a minister requests a temporary release from his service to the congregation, he shall receive the same only with the approval of the council. If the duration of the release is greater than four months, the council shall obtain the concurring advice of classis. He shall at all times remain

subject to the call of the congregation.

With this article the committee completed its work of drafting a proposed church order. Time was spent on structuring and sequencing the articles for final review. The Proposed Church Order includes an introduction that has sections providing a biblical and confessional basis, a historical background, and foundational principles. The main section follows the structure of Dort by ordering the ecclesiastical relations and activities under four divisions, namely: offices, assemblies, worship, sacraments, and ceremonies, and discipline.

The initial draft received was a four-column document mapping out the Proposed Church Order, the Church Order of Dort (for which the committee has used the church order of 1914, the English translation of which was adopted by the CRC in 1920), and the current church orders of the CanRC and URCNA. It was decided to submit this document along with the Proposed Church Order as part of the report of the committee to the respective synods of the federations.

Attention was also given to a draft proposal for protocol for interaction with the Joint Church Order Committee.

Dr. Kloosterman, in his closing remarks, expressed words of gratitude that after much effort a completed church order could be drafted for proposal to the churches. He stated his thankfulness to the Lord for the brotherly manner in which the committee could proceed with its labours. To God be the praise and glory.

*For the committee,
Gerard J. Nordeman*

Press Release of Classis Central Ontario, held September 15, 2006

On behalf of the convening church of Burlington Ebenezer, Rev. G. Nederveen called the meeting to order. He read from Psalm 99 and gave a brief meditation on the passage. He requested the singing of Psalm 100. He opened in prayer and then welcomed the delegates.

The church of Toronto examined the credentials. The churches were properly represented. There was one instruction.

Rev. Nederveen declared Classis constituted. The following officers took their place: chairman, Rev. J. Huijgen; vice-chairman, Rev. W. den Hollander; clerk, Rev. J. DeGelder.

Rev. Huijgen thanked the Ebenezer church for its work in convening and hosting Classis. In his opening words he mentioned as memorabilia that all churches have their own pastor, including the church at Flamborough, whose pastor, Rev. J. DeGelder, declined a call from the church at Lincoln.

The provisional agenda was adopted with the deletion of points 6a and 10.

The church of Burlington Fellowship found the classical archives in good order. Some records were still to be submitted. Classis received the report of the treasurer. The treasurer recommended an assessment of \$2.00 per communicant member for classis and \$2.00 per communicant member for regional synod. This was adopted. The treasurer was

thanked for his work and upon the audit report discharged for the past year. The treasurer requested Classis to adjust the date for his report on the financial statements to the September classis, so that it will cover the period from September 1-August 31. This proposal was granted.

The church of Burlington-Waterdown reported the books of the treasurer were found to be in good order. The church for the Fund for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry, the church of Flamborough, submitted a written report. The church also asked for a judgment of Classis in a particular case in which support was denied. Classis gave advice. It recommended that Classis set the assessment for the year 2007 at \$2.00 per communicant member. Classis adopted this proposal. The church of Burlington-Waterdown reported the books of the Fund for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry were found to be in good order. The Committee for Needy Churches submitted its recommendations. Classis agreed to support Ottawa as recommended and to the proposed assessment of \$18.00 per communicant member. The delegates of the church at Ottawa thanked the classis churches for their continued support. The church of Burlington-Waterdown reported the books for the Fund for Needy Churches were found to be in good order.

The chairman thanked the churches for their work.

In accordance with Article 44 C.O., the churches reported that the

ministry of the office bearers is being continued and the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. In closed session one church received advice on a matter of governing and discipline.

The church of Burlington Fellowship was appointed to convene the next classis, to be held on December 8, 2006 in the Burlington Ebenezer church building at 9:00 a.m. The following officers were suggested: chairman, Rev. M. Jagt; vice-chairman, Rev. Huijgen; clerk, Rev. den Hollander.

Br. A. VanTol (Fellowship) was appointed to the Committee for Needy Churches. All other appointments remained the same, except that Rev. J. van Popta will be examiner for Knowledge of Scripture instead of Rev. Jagt.

Delegated to Regional Synod East of November 8, 2006: as ministers, Rev. Jagt, Rev. Nederveen; alternates, Rev. DeGelder, Rev. Huijgen (in that order); as elders, Brs. I. VandeRee, H. VanDooren; alternates, Brs. E. Pol, A. Blokhuis (in that order).

There was one question regarding the criteria for closed sessions.

The chairman asked whether censure according to Article 34 C.O. was necessary. It was not required. The Acts were read and adopted. The Press Release was approved for publication. The chairman thanked the brothers for their good cooperation.

After the singing of Hymn 5:1 and 3, the chairman closed the meeting with prayer.

*For Classis,
W. den Hollander, e.t.*

