

# Clarion

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*Unity*

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*Theological  
Students:  
A Shared  
Concern*

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*A New Building,  
A New Name*



*Free Reformed Church of Southern River*



E. Kampen

# Unity

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*To the outsider, the Reformed world is hopelessly confusing*

## Introduction

The unity of the church continues to be an issue that lives in the churches. The synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches held recently in Smithers had an extensive report dealing with the efforts to come to federative unity with the United Reformed Churches in North America. Reflecting on this matter in preparation for synod, there came to mind something I read quite a number of years ago as well as something I read more recently. I must admit that these pieces were not in the category of theological books but in that of books read for relaxation. Though meant for relaxation, they actually gave room for some discomfort.

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*While unity is Christ's work, He also calls us to be active*

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First, many years ago I learned of the Canadian satirist Stephen Leacock (1869-1944). In his honour, there is a Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour. In his book, *Arcadian Adventures of the Idle Rich*, he writes about the foibles of life in Canadian society around the turn of the twentieth century. One chapter is entitled, "The Rival Churches of St. Asaph and St. Osoph." St. Asaph referred to the local Anglican Church while St. Osoph was the local Presbyterian Church. To give you some context, it is helpful to know that at the turn of the twentieth century, these were the two dominant Protestant denominations in Canada. After describing the character of St. Asaph, he describes St. Osoph:

St. Osoph's is only presbyterian in a special sense. It is, in fact, too presbyterian to be any longer connected with any other body whatsoever. It seceded some forty years ago from the original body to which it belonged, and later on, with three other churches, it seceded from the group of seceding congregations. Still later it fell into a difference with the three other churches on the question of eternal punishment, the word "eternal" not appearing to the elders of St. Osoph's to designate a sufficiently long period. The dispute ended in a secession which left the church of St. Osoph practically isolated in a world of sin whose approaching fate it neither denied nor deplored.

Second, a few years ago someone, aware of my particular sense of humour, referred me to the writing of Garrison Keillor and his books about a fictional town in Minnesota called Lake Wobegon. In this book, he seems to give a description of his own youth. In one chapter, he describes how he grew up in a "Brethren" family. Keillor states that the Brethren separated from the Anglican Church in 1865. I do not know if this is fully accurate as other sources date the origin of the Brethren back to 1827. As for their theology, it is a blend of Calvinism and pietism, with strong millennial overtones. Considering the setting of the story is in Minnesota, obviously he is referring to the immigrant descendants of these Brethren. Of particular interest is the way Keillor describes some of the developments within the Brethren movement after they separated themselves from the Anglican Church. He writes,

Unfortunately, once free of the worldly Anglicans, these firebrands were not content to worship in

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peace but turned their guns on each other. Scholarly to the core and perfect literalists every one, they set to arguing over points that, to any outsider, would have seemed very minor indeed but which to them were crucial to the Faith. . . Once having tasted the pleasure of being Correct and defending True Doctrine, they kept right on and broke up at every opportunity, until by the time I came along, there were dozens of tiny Brethren groups, none of which were speaking to any of the others.

In a footnote, after explaining some of the reasons for division such as whether a Christian could indulge in a hot bath, Keillor writes,

Patching up was not a Brethren talent. As my Grandpa once said of the Johnson Brethren, "Anytime they want to come to us and admit their mistake, we're perfectly happy to sit and listen to them and then come to a decision about accepting them back."

**Division**

You will recall how I indicated that these books were read to give some comic relief. Laughter, however, soon turns to grief. This happens when you substitute some different names in the stories. If we do not do it ourselves, we can be sure someone else will do it for us. When reading such accounts as Reformed people, you cannot escape the feeling you are looking at yourself in a mirror. To the outsider, the Reformed world is hopelessly confusing. It seems that division has been synonymous with being Reformed ever since the Secession of 1834 in The Netherlands and it has followed its heirs when they crossed the Atlantic. In its divisiveness, the Reformed churches have proven themselves to be no better than many other groups.

To prove this point, all one has to do is review developments since 1834. A study of the Secession reveals that the Secession was not as homogenous as it may appear. The secession was led by five young ministers. Though united in opposition to the deformation in the national Reformed Church, it took considerable time to develop into a cohesive whole. They were not united in how to live together. It was not until 1869 that the vast majority formed one federation. If we do a quick survey of current Reformed church groups rooted in the Secession in

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one way or another found in North America, the list is quite extensive. The following come to mind (in alphabetical order): Canadian Reformed; Christian Reformed; Free Reformed; Heritage Reformed; Netherlands Reformed; Orthodox Christian Reformed; Protestant Reformed; United Reformed. I recall that in my previous congregation, if you drove around the block, you had a Canadian, Christian, and Free Reformed Church.

To be sure, each has a reason for its existence. Without doubt, there are times when separation is called for to remain faithful. In such a situation, it should be able to give a crisp explanation with reference to the three marks of the church. Yet, when it comes to many of the differences, to someone with no church background the differences will appear similar to those that set St. Osoph apart from other Presbyterians. Actually, not only those unfamiliar with the Christian faith are perplexed. Who is able, upon a moment's notice, to give a brief, precise summary of the differences between all the Reformed churches mentioned previously, let alone distinguish between those matters requiring separation and those that are the equivalent of arguing over the length of eternity?

### **Uniting is hard**

As for patching up differences, the Brethren were not the only ones a little short on that talent. After the Doleantie, there were descendants of the Secession who had the attitude of "anytime they want to come to us and admit their mistake, we're perfectly happy to sit and listen to them and then come to a decision about accepting them back." We know that, by the grace of God, that attitude did not prevail but the people of the Secession and the Doleantie for the larger part found each other, coming to a union in 1892. Yet, that attitude pops up from time to time.

Uniting is hard. In fact, it would be impossible if it were not the work of our Saviour, who works through his Spirit and Word. In his Word He sets out the true boundaries of his church. By his Spirit He turns hearts to that Word and then to one another. In this respect, it was a privilege to be at this last synod and experience that desire to work things out when it comes to promoting the unity of Christ's church, if only in a little way among the Reformed churches. The synod established Ecclesiastical Fellowship with two more federations, L'Église Réformée du Québec and the

Reformed Churches of New Zealand. At the same time, progress was made in the effort to come to federative unity with the United Reformed Churches of North America. This latter was all the more remarkable considering the sense that an impasse had been reached. There was an obvious awareness that Christ is not divided.

In all this, however, we need to keep in mind that while unity is Christ's work, He also calls us to be active. As the Apostle Paul says, "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph 4:16). When we work on this, it will be much easier to answer our children or anyone else who ask us, "What is the difference?" But all the more, when we work on this, we will glorify our God. For, in a world divided by hatred, God's work of grace is manifested and his blessing flows where his people live in unity.



C.A. Vermeulen



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**MATTHEW 13:52**

*“Adam named his wife Eve, because she would be the mother of all the living.”*  
Genesis 3:20

Given the context, Adam’s naming of his wife is a surprising profession of faith. Earlier, when the Lord had asked him if he had eaten from the forbidden fruit, then Adam’s response had shown the sin and selfishness that had entered his heart. He blamed his wife: “The woman. . . she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate.”

God had responded with words of curse and judgment. In pain the woman would bring forth children. Her desire would be for her husband. There would be struggles and difficulties in childbirth, in family life, in marriage. The ground was cursed. Man’s daily labour would become a difficult struggle for survival, which would end in death: “Dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” Misery, suffering and death would become a daily reality in this fallen world.

Given his corrupted heart, it would have been no surprise if Adam had responded to God’s words of curse in a sinful way. Maybe with accusations: Why did God not create us differently so that we could not sin? How can God be good if He let sin happen? Many descendants of Adam have responded to God in exactly this way – by challenging God, by scoffing at Him, by blurting forth the rebellion of their hearts against Him. Or Adam might have responded as his son Cain would one day respond to the curse of God – my punishment is greater than I can bear.

However, the name Adam gave his wife did not demonstrate unbelief, but faith. In the midst of judgment, God had also spoken those words of the gospel – the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). God had promised salvation and life. That is the promise of God to which Adam clung in faith. There was hope for the future. Not in himself, the first Adam, who had failed, but in the second Adam, who would come from the woman. God’s promise pointed Adam to his wife – salvation and life would come from her seed, from Jesus Christ. Adam embraced this promise in faith by giving his wife a beautiful name, Eve, for she would become the mother of all the living. Indeed, this was the first profession of faith, of a sinner who publicly acknowledged God’s promises and sought his life outside of himself in Jesus Christ (see the second question of the Form for the Public Profession of Faith).

This faith is so surprising, so amazing. Adam was not able to work this faith in himself. The fallen, corrupted heart hates God and will reject his promises in unbelief. That Adam spoke in faith shows that God was already fulfilling his promise to put enmity, separation, between the devil and his seed and the woman and her seed. Adam and Eve had sided with the devil in rebellion and unbelief. But in mercy, God had pulled them back. He had set them apart from the devil; He had worked new life in

them. In Genesis 3:20, we see God at work, raising up a church of believers who put their hope and trust in his promises.

God continues his work today, with the result that many of those who sinned in Adam also join Adam in making profession of faith. They do not work that in themselves. Of themselves they can only speak like Adam did when he blamed Eve for his sin. But through God’s mighty work, they are separated from the devil, they are given new life, they are made to believe.

And the essence of what believers today profess has not changed. We continue to live in a fallen world, characterized by brokenness and struggles. Difficulties in family life, struggles against thorns and thistles in our daily work, the sadness of death. But professing our faith is to confess that there is life and hope in the seed of the woman, in Jesus Christ. In Him there is hope when we struggle with difficulties in marriage. In Him there is strength for the task of bearing and raising children in the fear of God’s name. In Him our work in this creation with its thorns and thistles is not hopeless and meaningless. In and through Him death is not the final end but the entrance unto eternal life.

Adam named his wife Eve because she would be the mother of all living. Eve is your mother, for she is the mother of Jesus Christ, through whom we are able to truly live. Believe it and profess it!



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# Theological Students: A Shared Concern

As noted in a previous article, our federation continues to endure numerous vacancies and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. In the next decade, eleven of our active ministers and professors will reach the age of sixty-five. Combined with other factors (including slow but sustained growth and the need for missionaries), there continues to be genuine reason for concern about the ministry of the Word and sacraments. Our churches need to actively and conscientiously promote theological education.

The recognition of this responsibility recently led the churches of Classis Pacific West (CPW) to reconsider this matter. Have we been maximally effective in promoting study for the ministry? Have we been faithfully following what we have agreed upon in Church Order Article 20? That article reads, "The churches shall endeavour that there be students of theology, extending financial aid to those who are in need of it." The churches of Cloverdale and Langley presented a request to a classis in 2006 that this matter be carefully investigated. That classis appointed an Ad-hoc Investigative Committee which reported to the March 27, 2007 CPW. That classis restructured what was formerly called "The Committee for

Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry." The new committee is now known as "The Committee for Theological Students."

As part of the discussion at the March 27, 2007 CPW, it was suggested that we share what we have done with the rest of the federation through an article. Our hope is that the other churches in our federation will also re-examine the ways in which we endeavour to follow what has been agreed upon in CO Article 20. Perhaps we can develop a common approach to these matters that best serves the federation and the ministry of the Word and sacraments therein. What follows here is a modified version of the report sent to the March 27, 2007 CPW by the Ad-hoc Investigative Committee. It has been modified to reflect the decisions of that classis on this matter.

## Our previous model

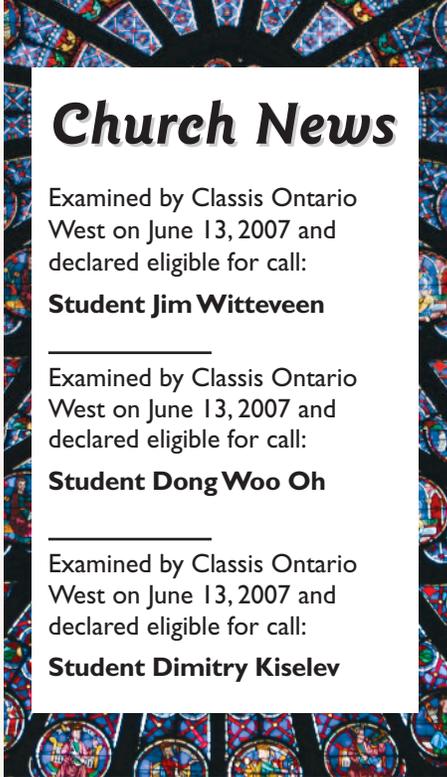
In the previous situation, the churches of Classis Pacific West prayed for students of theology and provided informal means of encouragement. Generally, those aspiring to be students of theology carried out their pre-seminary studies apart from any direct guidance or supervision of the churches. Before a student was admitted to the Theological College, he requested and received

an attestation from his consistory that included an assessment of his suitability for the ministry. It was uncertain whether or not these assessments accurately reflected a student's potential to preach, teach, and provide leadership in other ways. Upon becoming a student in Hamilton, the ties with the home church and home classis were usually loose. The only exception was when a student was in financial need.

Under the previous model, the Committee for Financial Aid to Students was working with a reactive paradigm. A student came with a financial need and the committee reacted. When a request was received (and this had to be before June 1 according to the former regulations), it often took several months before financial aid could be given. The request had to be evaluated by the committee. Once the funds had been collected from the churches, the student received the support requested.

## A new model

In the past, Article 20 seems to have been understood as requiring the churches to "merely" provide financial aid to needy seminary students. In the new model, we have a more meaningful understanding of the first statement of Article 20, "The



# Church News

Examined by Classis Ontario West on June 13, 2007 and declared eligible for call:

**Student Jim Witteveen**

Examined by Classis Ontario West on June 13, 2007 and declared eligible for call:

**Student Dong Woo Oh**

Examined by Classis Ontario West on June 13, 2007 and declared eligible for call:

**Student Dimitry Kiselev**

churches shall endeavour that there be students of theology. . . .” Furthermore, with respect to financial aid, we find a more proactive paradigm. In this manner, we believe that the churches will be better served with more men preparing themselves for the ministry in a more meaningful way.

This more proactive model starts at the promotional level. Our restructured committee includes promotion of the ministry as part of its mandate. This could be accomplished through various means, including annual evenings for interested young men, occasional blurbs in the Fraser Valley Church News, and a website.

When a young man indicated an interest in the ministry, typically the local church became aware of this interest. Under this new model, when the student is pursuing university studies to prepare for seminary, he will be paired with a mentor who can provide guidance to the student and also more accurately ascertain his suitability for the ministry. Normally this would be the student’s minister, but it could happen (for instance with a vacancy or a large number of students in one congregation) that this is not feasible. The description of the task of mentors is something that is yet to be formulated by the committee. Coordination of mentorships will also be the responsibility of the committee. A mentor will prepare two reports about the suitability of the student and submit it to the consistory that

has oversight over the student at the completion of the student’s final and next to final years before entering the Theological College.

Prior to a student’s departure for Hamilton, two members of the committee will meet with the student to assess whether or not he has any financial need. During his time in Hamilton, the committee will contact the student twice per year, normally in August and January, to reassess his situation. The committee will have a standing reserve fund of \$10,000. The committee shall have the authority to make disbursements as necessary in a timely way, and when necessary, approach a classis to request further assessments from the churches to meet any possible needs.

Under this new model, theological students will have a closer connection to their home churches and home classical region. The churches will continue to pray for these students, but their support and encouragement will be more concrete and meaningful. Seeing this, our hope is that more students will present themselves as potential candidates for the ministry.

## **A new structure**

The Committee for Theological Students (CTS) is composed of four members: two ministers and two men who have either served or are currently serving as elders. They shall be appointed for a rotating four-year term. The committee shall appoint a chairman, a student liaison, a

treasurer/secretary, and a mentorship coordinator/promoter.

## **A new mandate**

The mandate of the CTS as adopted by CPW March 27, 2007 reads as follows:

1. Deputies are to be actively involved with the promotion of theological study for the ministry. The committee is mandated to investigate and implement the best means to this end.
2. The committee will approach the churches of this classical region annually for the names of men who are preparing to study for the ministry. When the committee is informed of such names, deputies are to ensure that the students are meaningfully affiliated with a mentor. Normally this will be the student’s minister, but in the event that this does not work, the committee will facilitate an alternative arrangement.
3. Deputies shall ensure that mentors submit reports about the suitability of students preparing to study for the ministry to the consistories who have oversight over the students.

4. Financial aid from the committee shall be restricted to theological students of the Canadian Reformed churches enrolled at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches.
5. Before beginning studies at the Theological College, two deputies of the committee shall meet with the student to discuss any potential financial need. If he requires support, the student is obliged to provide all information required by the deputies. Thereafter, the student liaison from the committee shall contact the student on a semi-

annual basis (normally in August and January) to inquire about any potential need. The student shall also be reassured that he can contact the committee at any time for assistance. The churches in other classical regions (i.e. Ontario West) shall not be burdened with the financial support of students from our region.

6. If a student is dismissed from the Theological College, he is under obligation to repay to the deputies aid received at a rate of interest determined by the deputies. In case of withdrawal from the College, deputies shall

make a recommendation to classis whether aid received must be repaid.

7. Deputies are mandated to maintain a balance of \$10,000. Deputies are authorized to make any necessary payments from this fund. They are also authorized to request the churches to provide them with any funds necessary to maintain the balance.
8. The Deputies shall submit a written report on their work to each October classis.
9. In cases for which this mandate does not provide, deputies shall ask the advice of classis.



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# Some Reflections on General Synod Smithers 2007

## **Prayer service**

The Canadian and American Reformed Churches have prayed on a regular basis for the work of the delegates at General Synod Smithers 2007. We know that "unless the Lord will build the house, its builders toil in useless vain" (Ps 127:1). With this recognition a prayer service led by Rev. C. VanSpronsen, chairman of the previous synod in Chatham 2004, was held the evening before Synod convened. In his Word God teaches us that the church is a gift of God's grace (1 Cor 1:1-3). The delegates were encouraged to understand this truth in all their decision making and to remember that they were not serving themselves in their task, but the Lord Himself.

## **Synod convened on May 9 at 9:00 a.m.**

With thankfulness to the Lord, Synod was able to convene with the public reading of God's Word and prayer. Synod elected Rev. D. Agema as chairman, Rev. J. Visscher as vice-chairman, Rev. G. Nederveen as first clerk, and Rev. R. Schouten as second clerk. The material the delegates were given to work with included approximately 600 pages of reports to General Synod from the various committees, various letters from

the churches interacting with these reports, several appeals, and some overtures. In light of the great amount of material, the increase in delegates to General Synod (from sixteen to twenty-four) and the possibility of having six committees instead of four, proved valuable.

## **Visiting delegates and observers**

Synod was blessed with delegates visiting from several sister churches, including the United Reformed Churches, the Presbyterian Church in Korea, the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa. Observers came from the Reformed churches in Quebec and New Zealand, representing their respective federations who were seeking to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. All visiting delegates and observers were given opportunity to address General Synod. Greetings were sent from our sister churches in the Reformed Churches in United States and the Free Reformed Churches in Australia.

## **Synodical process**

It became clear at General Synod that the churches read and

interacted with the reports they received. Considering that there were 600 pages of reports and about three months to deal with them, the office bearers must be highly commended for their hard work. You can be assured that the letters that made it to General Synod were handled with due diligence. The process was simple – all the material submitted to General Synod was divided up and dealt with by six advisory committees. Each advisory committee was expected to prepare proposed recommendations for the plenary session to accept, correct, or reject. When a proposal from the advisory committee came to plenary session that did not reflect the views of the churches, this was quickly made known by various delegates. As an observer to Synod I now understand the meaning of the phrase found several times in the Acts: "The committee proposal received a preliminary round of discussion. The committee takes back the proposal for further consideration." Do you know what that means? To translate literally: the body of sharks see a bleeding fish and summarily dispose of it ... the feeding frenzy done, the committee licks its wounds and hides in the committee room for another try. From time to time the second draft came back with exactly the opposite conclusion

and was adopted with little revision. Used to a system where we hold on tight to our convictions, it was strange to see an advisory committee change its final conclusion completely. What do we make of this? There are no politics at general synod. One man cannot push his own agenda. An advisory committee is a servant of the plenary session. The voices of the churches are heard at general synod and what lives in them is known at the table. Finally, Canadian and American Reformed Churches are precise. We can be thankful for that, because it makes us confident that the decisions (even if you do not agree with them personally) have been worked at prayerfully and carefully.

### **Ecclesiastical fellowship**

Judging by the time we spend at broader assemblies, committee meetings, and coffee shops discussing ecclesiastical fellowship with other Reformed churches, it is clear that we value such contact very much. For the most part existing relationships were continued with a mandate to continue to help each other according to the rules adopted for that purpose. It is our prayer that the bond with these sister churches around the world may grow stronger through visits, presentations, and informal contact at international meetings. May God use these relationships to the furtherance of his kingdom on earth and to the up building of his people in the CanRC as well as in the sister churches.

After hearing the requests of several federations to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship, Synod had to decide how we as churches should go forward in relation to them. In the end the decision was made to wait for more information from some, to distance ourselves from others, and also to establish



sister church relationship with two federations, namely, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand and the Reformed Churches of Quebec.

#### *1) Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ)*

As a small federation, the churches in New Zealand, represented by Rev. Hoyt, urged us to consider how we may help them in their struggle to remain Reformed in doctrine and polity. Those who opposed this union expressed the concern that the RCNZ is in a relationship with the Christian Reformed Churches (CRC) in Australia. However, when the history of this relationship is considered, as well as the fact that the CRC of Australia is quite different from the CRC of North America, and the fact that our Australian sister churches stated through their deputies that they would not object to our having a relationship with the RCNZ, it was clear that there is merit in taking a different approach with the RCNZ. Synod showed wisdom to consider the history of this federation and not to simply make a judgment based on what churches the RCNZ are related to in some way or another, but to focus on how they are dealing with the situation they are already in. Since the RCNZ are letting their light shine in the CRC of Australia by defending tried and true Reformed doctrine and

practice and expressing concern over the evidence of deformation in the CRC of Australia, the help we can give them at this time may be crucial. May God bless these sister churches with strength and boldness in the proclamation of God's Word in New Zealand.

#### *2) Reformed Churches in Quebec (ERQ)*

The ERQ have been in contact with CanRC for several years and at different levels. We think especially of the involvement of the Owen Sound CanRC with Rev. Bedard in St. Georges. Thankfully this relationship could be formalized in a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship at General Synod Smithers 2007. It is good to keep our eyes open to faithful believers in our own country. May our relationship give them assistance as they seek to be faithful in all matters of doctrine and church polity – and may we learn from them some good ways to engage our culture and spread God's Word in the midst of an increasingly liberal society.

#### *3) Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCC)*

After many years of considering the split in the Reformed Churches in Scotland, it was clear that it was not possible to recognize both the FCC and the FCS as sister churches. Furthermore, there is

recognition that the split is not a result of doctrinal dispute and that there is no scriptural warrant for this division. Interestingly the ICRC just recently denied the membership of the FCC on the same basis. This is a sad development that could not be avoided by the CanRC. The wisdom of the decision comes in the prayer and expressed desire that we may be able to assist the FCC and the FCS in a process of reconciliation.

4) *Gereformeerde Kerken Hersteld (GKH)*

The "mother" church in The Netherlands often is a point of discussion in our homes. Visitors return from seeing their relatives and report that "something negative" is going on in Holland. Now a group of churches have broken off from our sister churches there. This group has entitled themselves the continuation of the true church in The Netherlands and even called the GKNv (our sister churches) "false". Although there was some discussion about how quickly a judgment can be made on the correctness of the decisions made by the GKH, it was clear that ecclesiastical fellowship could not be established with this group and that they needed to be admonished

for their actions in a brotherly manner. Again it is our prayer that God will grant reconciliation and that the concerns expressed by the GKH may be dealt with in a manner that serves God's people in their daily lives.

**United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)**

Rev. J. Bouwers addressed General Synod on behalf of the URCNA, urging the brothers to consider very carefully how to move forward in this relationship. It appears from the unanimous decisions that were made at General Synod Smithers concerning this relationship that his advice was well heeded – we praise God that He has shown us so clearly that there is no need to give up pursuing federative unity.

Concerning the Theological College, it was noted with thankfulness that there is basic agreement among the CanRC and URCNA that theological education must be pursued within the principle that the preparation of students for the ministry must be done by the churches and by Reformed educators. General Synod Smithers 2007 remains confident that an agreeable proposal can be reached based on these principles.

Concerning the Proposed Church Order, General Synod decided to adopt the recommendation of the joint committees to move forward on the basis of this Church Order. The Church Order committee is willing to gather, collate, and evaluate input from the churches over the next three years with the goal of adoption at the next synod.

Work also continues on the Common Songbook and, here too, General Synod noted with thankfulness the many advances that could be made when they gave a green light to continuing on with this work. The discussions were held in a brotherly manner, input from the URC delegates was warmly received, and the love and desire of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches for federative unity was clearly expressed. May God work this same positive desire in the hearts of our United Reformed brethren as they meet at their upcoming general synod in July.

**The Book of Praise**

Some decisions were also made with respect to the *Book of Praise*. It was decided to follow the recommendation of the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* (SCBP) in almost all areas. What changes will we notice?

1) *Mandate to revise the Psalm section*

In the first place General Synod Smithers 2007 mandated the SCBP to oversee a review and revision of the Psalm section in order to update the language and ensure the accuracy of the rhymed version. The SCBP is open to input from the churches on this project. Although such change may be somewhat daunting to those who have memorized so many of the Psalms, it is important to keep the Psalm section a living part of our lives





and worship and not some “out of date” historical artefact that is fun to look at but gathers dust on our shelves. We will see at the next general synod what comes of this.

### 2) Decision to adopt prose section with NIV Bible references

In the second place, Synod decided to adopt the updated Liturgical Forms and Prayers in which all RSV Bible references have been changed to the NIV (the translation most commonly used in our churches). For those of us who have been using the NIV in our homes and worship services for quite some time already, this change will probably be most welcome.

### 3) Decision to provisionally adopt twenty-eight new hymns

In the third place, Synod decided to provisionally adopt a series of twenty-eight hymns presented by the SCBP for a period of testing. In the near future you can expect a supplement to the *Book of Praise* – and we will be encouraged to attempt to sing these hymns with the purpose of adopting them finally. It will be important that the churches not only analyze the content of these hymns, but also the necessity to have any one particular hymn at all in our adopted *Book of Praise*.

## Theological College

Generally speaking, General Synod ensured that normal life at the College could continue and that there would not be any major changes at this time. This means that the proposal to add a fifth professor will not be adopted at this time. It is interesting to note that although there is a general openness to changing things at the Theological College, it is hard to show the necessity for this. I guess when we consider the admirable job the College is doing with the present organization it is hard to convince the churches.

## Website and technology

Developments in technology helped Synod in many ways. During the whole synod wireless Internet was available and committees had a searchable digital copy of all incoming mail thanks to the good preparatory work of Brs. Phil and Rick Bandstra of Smithers. However, it remains tricky to switch from a paper society to a digital society on a more formal and regulated basis. There can be no doubt that we like our paper and our books. Is it money well spent to have all submissions to synod in thirty copies? Is it money well spent to send out a three volume copy of the

reports to all council members in printed form instead of simply making them available on the Internet? Or to print out a copy of the Acts of General Synod for every communicant member instead of only making them accessible on the Internet? It seems that at this time we consider it worth it. I guess there is wisdom in staying away from the cutting edge of technology – it is safer to look and see how things will develop before we get hurt on the cutting edge.

## Conclusion

General Synod Smithers 2007 was a synod with several unique experiences. It was the first time that twenty-four delegates were sent and six advisory committees were formed. This puts a greater strain on the convening church to find six committee rooms and may limit which churches can host General Synod in the future. It was the first time that the busy minds of the delegates sucked up so much energy from the system that a power pole fell into the river and we had to work without electricity for twenty-four hours. Thanks to the resourcefulness of several members and the gas power of generators, Synod could continue without any major delays. On one evening, immediately after the Ascension Day service, a power-point presentation and DVD served as the “speech” from Rev. Kleijn of South Africa. Delegates were encouraged to keep in shape with a climb up to a viewpoint that granted them a wonderful view of all the local mountains. And then when it was all over and Synod was officially closed all the delegates shook hands “like at a hockey game” (said the chairman)! A fitting end to two weeks of loving service!



# A New Building, a New Name: Free Reformed Church of Southern River

April 2007 was a month of new beginnings for our church, in more ways than one. Not only were we blessed to open the doors of our new church building; we were also able to open these doors under a new name, one which better reflects the locality in which we now worship.

On April 28, 2007, the Free Reformed Church of Southern River was officially opened. The day had been awaited with much anticipation – a large scale project such as this does not happen overnight. But the outcome is such that we are overjoyed and deeply thankful to our Heavenly Father.

## History

The FRC of West Kelmscott was instituted in November 1998, having split off from the FRC of Kelmscott. Some six months later, we were able purchase ten acres of land along Southern River Road. From this time on, the plan of having our own church building on this land moved slowly from germination to, eventually, wonderful fruition.

It is evident that much planning has gone into the building. In the initial stages, there was broad

consultation with the congregation as to expectations and ideas for the building. Professional assistance was sought from an architect. The approvals process required much patience, but God in his time opened the way. Once the government approvals were in place, we were able to move quickly through the building phase. Concrete tilt panel walls saw the construction quickly take shape. Tireless effort from our building committee and builder, along with a team of dedicated volunteers, meant that by opening day everything from lighting to landscaping, collection bags to crèche facilities were completed.

It was mentioned earlier that we needed much patience. We are

aware that it was not only our church that required patience. We thank the members of the FRC of Kelmscott, who for these past eight years have allowed us the use of their building, not only for worship services but also Bible study and other meetings. We hope that you all enjoy your more regular “coffee after church” on Sunday mornings, as we will!

## Opening day

A bright sunny afternoon welcomed us to the official opening. It was a festive afternoon, in which we were able to give thanks to Almighty God for his blessings, also in providing to us a place of worship.



*Church building*

Photos courtesy M. Pot

Distinguished guests in attendance included the Mayor of Gosnells – Cr Pat Morris, Canning MHR – Mr. Don Randall, along with the MLA for Southern River, Mr. Paul Andrews. All welcomed us into the area and hoped that we would have a positive impact on the community. Mr Randall kindly mentioned that his contact with members of the Free Reformed Churches, particularly through his recent attendance at the John Calvin Christian College on Anzac Day, left him with a positive impression. He expressed the optimism that we would continue this positive contribution to the wider community.

Various contributions from within the congregation added both musical and jesting spirit to the afternoon. An initiative worth mentioning was also released on the opening day, being a full colour Commemorative Edition booklet. It contains various photos of the building project. In particular, it also contains a photo of every member of our congregation. It will be especially useful to new members joining our congregation and be of great benefit in the communion of saints.

### Plaque

Our minister, Rev. Veldman, unveiled the plaque. The text it bears is Revelation 22:17, which reads: "And the Spirit and the bride



*Rev. Veldman after unveiling the plaque*

say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."

In his sermon the following morning, Rev. Veldman preached on this text. This text, he said, points to the central function of the church building: the preaching of the gospel. Although we rejoice in a beautiful building, we rejoice more in having preached from its pulpit the pure gospel, every Sunday. For this is the water of life. Rev. Veldman pointed out that the world also offers much water to those who are thirsty; however, it is polluted water. Through the work of the Holy Spirit we, the bride, must extend to the world the invitation to "Come!" and drink from the pure water of life.

As church, we have a word for the world. The plaque should not serve as a simple ornament, but

rather a stimulus to use opportunities to boldly speak of the hope that is in us. Rev. Veldman expressed the desire that, in this way, we may truly live what is written on the plaque.

### Welcome

The doors of our new building are open, but not only to members of the FRC of Southern River. All are welcome (and, going by the number of visitors the past few weeks, many have felt welcomed!) We hope to have the joy of worshipping with many of you in the years to come.

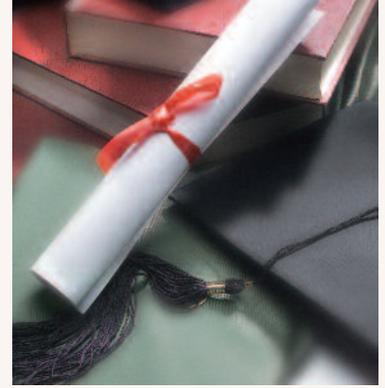
Many years of hard work have come to an end. With deep thankfulness in our hearts for God's goodness, we look forward to worshipping Him in our new building. May it be to the honour and glory of his Name!



Keith Sikkema

Mr. Keith Sikkema is principal of Dufferin Area Christian School in Orangeville, Ontario  
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# Sin, Bullies, and Saints



*In a different format, this was first presented as a speech to the PTA of Dufferin Area Christian School*

One of the four markers of Reformed education emphasizes that it is covenantal. This refers first of all to the relationship God has with his people. God established this relationship despite their total depravity and promises salvation through Jesus Christ. It also was his pleasure to include the children of believers in this covenant. This gives great reason for gratitude, and in his Word God gives direction for expressing this gratitude as the demand of the covenant. In covenantal education, parents seek to thankfully acknowledge and act upon God's promises and instruct their children – or have them instructed – in the doctrine of salvation. In order to have this accomplished to the best of their ability, parents will seek teachers and establish schools that acknowledge this. They want the nurture of the covenant relationship with God to continue at school, in order that children may learn obedience there, as well as at home and in church.

In addition to loving God as the foremost command, the other important part of living a life of covenant obedience is to love one's neighbour. There are various places in Scripture where this is

explained, but key characteristics of being in line with what God demands are summarized by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and selfcontrol. Against such things there is no law." The opposite, he points out, is the acts of the sinful nature, which include, among others, "idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy. . . and the like. I warn you, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." Now, within the communion of saints, not all is love and joy and peace and gentleness all the time, as our depraved nature is still there. This article is concerned with what we commonly identify as bullying.

## **Bullying defined**

In their two-volume intervention and prevention program, Arthur M. Horne and others list several common elements in definitions of bullying. They include: harm is intended; there is an imbalance of power; there is often organized and systematic abuse; it is repetitive, occurring over a period of time, or a serial activity randomly applied by someone feared for this behaviour; and hurtful experiences can be physical or psychological (*Bully*

*Busters – a Teacher's Manual for helping bullies, victims, and bystanders.* Champaign, IL: Research Press, 2003. pp 68 ff.) Of many definitions, I only quote Barbara Coloroso's and Ken Rigby's. Coloroso:

Bullying is a conscious, willful, and deliberate hostile activity, intended to harm, induce fear through the further threat of aggression, and create terror. It is not about anger or conflict, but about contempt. Contempt comes with three apparent psychological advantages that allow kids to harm others without feeling empathy, compassion, or shame: a sense of entitlement, an intolerance toward difference, and a liberty to exclude. (*The bully, the bullied, and the bystander.* Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 2002)

Rigby:

Bullying is repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons" (1996. Quoted in Ronald Hecker Cram. Summer 2001 Memories by Christian adults of childhood bully experiences: implications for adult religious self-understanding. In: *Religious Education*).

Contempt, as stressed by Coloroso, leads to treating people as non-persons. To use other examples of this: Nazi Germany did not recognize Jews as persons and justified the Holocaust; in Canada, unborn children are not regarded as persons and over 10,000 are aborted each year. Bullies dehumanize their victims in similar ways. People made in the image of God are treated as though they are not. Sadly, it also happens among us.

### Scripture

Scripture is not aloof to realities in which some people are treated as less than others. The Pharisees were blinded by their ill-advised rules about keeping the Sabbath. John 9 tells the story of the man born blind, whom they thought must therefore have sinned. In the end, they chose to shun the healed man and kicked him out. They bullied in the name of God. The Corinthians claimed superiority one over another. "I follow Paul," one claimed. "I follow Apollos," another bragged. Their focus had shifted from relying on the salvation received in Christ, to their own smarts, prowess, choice, and ability. In the process, they took each other to court and condoned wickedness. Paul agreed that they all had different and excellent gifts, even of faith and hope, but maintained that the greatest gift was the one they neglected: love (1 Cor 1, 3, 12-13).

In the Old Testament, several Psalms speak of poor treatment of God's people by God's people, but we read of contempt elsewhere also. Ezekiel prophesied around 590 B.C., just before the destruction of Jerusalem. He portrayed how Israel's departure from loving the Lord led to poor treatment of the

weak among them. Turning to self-willed worship, they showed contempt for God and their neighbour: they ignored God and bullied the weak. In Ezekiel 22, we learn that Jerusalem had become a wicked city that committed and condoned systematic bullying. They had become dross to the Lord, for which the people would be dispersed or be gathered for God's fierce wrath. Common vices included princes who devoured people and made widows; priests, who profaned the holy things;

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### *Bullying is a conscious, willful, and deliberate hostile activity*

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murderous abuse of power; contempt for parents; oppression of the weak; mistreatment of orphans and widows. To top it off, certain prophets whitewashed such things. Jerusalem despised the Sabbaths and made allowances for slander and lewdness. Incest and rape, bribes, usury, extortion, and denial

of justice were common. Jerusalem had a culture of contempt, of oppressing the weak, of hostility, aggression, and terrorism by God's people against God's people. This persistent bullying was the reason for the destruction of Jerusalem (chapters 4 and 5), the punishment of the people (chapter 7), and the departure of the glory of the Lord from the temple (chapter 10). They forsook God; He forsook them. Forsaking God leads to bullying and God's covenant wrath follows.

Later on, during the exile, Ezekiel saw the vision of the valley of dead bones – God's people. He learned that dead bones can live when God's Spirit makes them alive (Ezek 37). He also saw a vision of a new temple and the return of the glory of the Lord (Ezek 40 ff), implying the message of hope that God would again dwell amongst them. In the New Testament it got better yet. John reports that the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. With a reach and significance far beyond earthly bullies, the believers' relation with God is restored in Christ. He is with them:



Immanuel. Bullied Psalmists could cry to God, because of Christ. Bullied Christians, too, look forward to the day when He will wipe every tear from their eyes; the day when the old order of things has passed away and all will be restored to the glorious state God intended. (Rev 21:4)

### **The old order**

Bullying belongs to the old order of things. It is not normal, because it did not belong to the original order of things, but it is very common. It is not limited to public schools and unbelievers, either. Rather, in the covenant community, saints have a joint calling to resist and address all sin, including bullying, and to seek the perfection God asks of them. That perfection is the original good order of creation. When God created us in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24), the intent was that we would rightly know God our Creator, heartily love Him, and live with Him in eternal blessedness to praise and glorify Him (LD 3) Indeed, we confess that man "was adorned in his mind with true and wholesome knowledge of his Creator and of all spiritual things; his will and heart were upright, all his affections pure, and therefore man was completely holy" (CoD, III/IV:1). Man was made in the image of God.

How different it became immediately after the fall into sin, when our total depravity did not take long to manifest itself. Adam and Eve's marital relationship became strained with strife and a search for power, dominance, and revenge. The bond with God was broken. Cain killed his brother, Lamech bragged about his revenge, and every inclination of

the thoughts of man's heart became only evil all the time. The flood ended the first world, but man's depravity remained. We are still made in the image of God, but today's reality is a far cry from the intended glory.

Our Form for the Baptism of Infants acknowledges that the children God gives to believing parents are, by nature, also children of wrath. They are no better than others, and have no entry in the Kingdom of God unless they are born again. The form speaks of the impurity of their souls, which cannot obtain salvation or be cleansed in their own strength. They are caught up in the old order of things also. This would be devastating if it were not for the deliverance of which the form speaks as well, for just as they share without their knowledge in the condemnation of Adam, so are they, without their knowledge received into grace in Christ.

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### *Contempt leads to treating people as non-persons*

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### **Covenant image bearers**

More so than the fact that our children were made in the image of God, the fact that they belong to the covenant compels us to do something about bullying. True, because all men are made in the image of God, and because God says so, we ought to treat others well. But even humanists will call for respect, dignity, human rights, and keeping the golden rule. We should not just treat each other well because God Almighty directs us to do so as his image bearers,

but because in his mercy He has established a life-giving relationship of love with us. It was in his mercy that God saved us from eternal condemnation and rejection. Whereas we in fact do deserve to be bullied for ever, God punished his Son in our place. He was treated with contempt, so we could be set free. For this reason, we and our children have every justification to be humble and grateful for that deliverance and to not bully others or treat them with contempt. We should rather love our neighbour like ourselves, as God loved us first. To not embrace this and to bully others is to ask for the covenant wrath of God as Ezekiel experienced.

Secular approaches to bullying will try to bring out "the good" in every child, work on "behaviour modification" and "character education." Our Heidelberg Catechism takes a different tack, as it exposes the wrong of bullying in its elaboration on the meaning of Ten Commandments in Lord's Days 40-44. Even though covenant saints know that Christ died for them all, some grieve God by treating them as if they are not included (cf. Deut 32:10; Ps 17:8; Zech 2:8). While God calls his people to love Him with their whole heart, mind, soul, and strength, and their neighbour like themselves, people ignore God (cf. Ps 14) when they place themselves on his throne to make proud and foolish judgments about others and mete out punishment. Here indeed is cause for much and profound grief. With a reminder of our undeserved status before God, and in the context of admonishments concerning how we treat others, Paul exhorts us not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph 4).

## Policy

Some years ago, Covenant Christian School in Flamborough dealt extensively with the issue of bullying and developed a policy that we should consider. It states, by way of introduction,

Covenant Christian School does not tolerate bullying in any form. We believe our students are covenant children, created in the image of God. When a student is made fun of, bullied, or abused physically, verbally, or emotionally then we are doing the same to God. All members of the Covenant Christian School community will work together to create and maintain a safe learning environment for all his children.

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*The fact that they belong to the covenant compels us to do something about bullying*

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Our Heidelberg Catechism identifies saints as people who are members of Christ, have communion with Him, and share in all his treasures and gifts. The communion of saints calls us to use our gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members. We need to discuss how we do that in examining ourselves. We need to do that in dealing with bullies. We need to do that in dealing with the victims. We need to do that in dealing with the

bystanders. We need to do that seriously, in and with the communion of saints. We need to do that in a spiritual way, according to Paul's instruction: Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently (Gal 6:1).

Realizing that we ourselves are engaged in this struggle should also make us patient with the weaknesses of our students (cf. Gal 6:1; Eph 6:4). We are called to forgive, as Christ forgave us (Col 3:13). At the same time, we will have to place the horror of the sin before the students and teach them to abhor it.

The policies developed by Covenant Christian School of Flamborough (2004) and Maranatha Christian School (2006) have several elements that make them well worth considering. Covenant was probably the first Canadian Reformed school in Ontario that had a policy. Maranatha's spells out in more detail how to deal pedagogically with bullying, using the five key notions of repentance, restitution, resolution, reconciliation, and reinforcement.

How do we deal in a Christian pedagogical manner with situations of bullying? Do we give a lecture? Do we listen and try to understand? How do we present the promises and the obligations of the covenant in this context? Is our response punitive, pastoral, or discipline-oriented, or all three? It is well for schools to consider whether their discipline policy is adequate and sufficiently thought-

through to deal properly with bullying. Considering human nature, we should not expect to eradicate bullying with a policy, but we can resist it, fight it, and deal with it.

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*It is well for schools to consider whether their discipline policy is adequate and sufficiently thought-through to deal properly with bullying*

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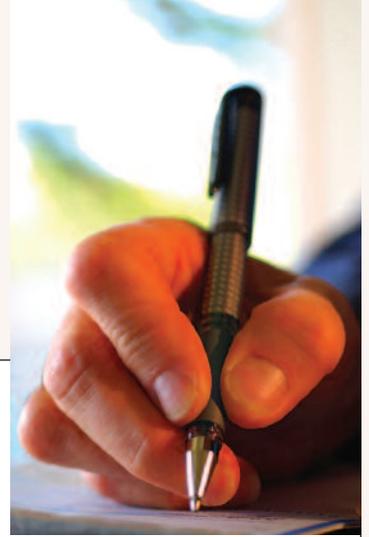
## Finally

I know of One who was bullied by being spat on, beaten, bound, insulted, cursed, condemned, humiliated, and shamefully executed for our sake. He gave his life so bullies who turn to Him could live. "Today," He said to the criminal hanging on the cross next to Him, "you will be with me in Paradise." He gave his life and rose again, so victims, too, can live. He gave his life, rose, and ascended, so bystanders will know who their helper is when they jump into the fray. Thank God.

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*The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman*  
[obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us](mailto:obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us)

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## Letter to the Editor

Keeping in mind Proverbs 18:17, I would like to respond to the Letter to the Editor by Frederika Oosterhoff in the *Clarion* of March 16, 2007.

Dr. Oosterhoff and I believe that Br. George Hart can take care of his own defence. Dr. Oosterhoff is concerned "about the way in which the letter describes developments in the Dutch churches. It speaks of the bad influence of 'modern ideas and philosophies,' of 'backsliding,' 'questioning of scriptural authority,' and 'deviations from Reformed doctrine.' No qualifications are made and, more importantly, no grounds are given for the accusations." She warns for "the risk of condemning and joining in condemning others unheard (LD 43)." My problem is that she is not free of this risk herself. She states: "We are referred to speeches by men who are already in opposition and to a website that is outspoken in its criticism of the direction of the Reformed churches. This means that we hear only the arguments of the accusers, not those of the accused."

This is a serious statement that fails to convince because brother Hart wished only for a broader and more informative reporting on the developments in the Dutch churches. Dr. Oosterhoff's reaction inadvertently quells the discussion. Therefore I would like to submit the following for your consideration.

In the first place, how does one present concerns about developments in the church? Concerns do not find their origin in agreement. It is a fallacy to label some as "men who are already in opposition." What else can one do to express a concern than by being in opposition, regardless of the extent of ones' opposition?

Secondly, what is the problem with "a website that is outspoken in its criticism of the direction of the Reformed churches"? It is Reformed to judge arguments on their merits. Truth does not depend on numbers.

Thirdly, it is important to note that there are more websites expressing serious concerns about the developments in the Dutch churches. Let me

mention some additional ones:

[www.gereformeerdbleiven.nl](http://www.gereformeerdbleiven.nl) (eight GKN ministers stating deep concerns); [www.de.vijfhoek.nl](http://www.de.vijfhoek.nl) (members of five congregations identifying concerns and organising study evenings); [www.skocourant.nl](http://www.skocourant.nl) (very informative); and [www.kampenoord.ichthus.nl](http://www.kampenoord.ichthus.nl) (updates on the "split" in Kampen). It also may be helpful to have a look at the online discussion groups one can find in sites such as [www.nd.nl](http://www.nd.nl), [www.rd.nl](http://www.rd.nl), as well as [www.gkv.nl](http://www.gkv.nl).

Further, the impression is left that the so-called concerned are a small isolated group. However, our Australian sister churches have presented serious concern at several Dutch synods, especially Synod Zuidhorn 2002. In addition the OPC has investigated the Dutch churches regarding their view on the authority of Scripture, which recently was reported on. This is compounded by the serious concerns the RCUS delegate presented at Synod Amersfoort 2005.

Also Dr. David Engelsma (PRCA) recently published, in the *Standard Bearer*, a serious article on the GKN concluding that 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is being fulfilled. I would not echo nor defend his thoughts, he can do that himself, but it shows that the concerns in question are not the concerns of a few malcontents.

Furthermore, in the final paragraph of her Letter to the Editor, Dr. Oosterhoff reverses the burden of proof, by implying that she is right until proven wrong. Such is not the nature of a brotherly discussion. In addition, the discussion about concerns did not start with Br. Hart commenting. These concerns and the discussion about them started in the Dutch sister churches and Br. Hart wished a proper reporting would take place.

Finally, I seriously doubt that any discussion done in brotherly love and Christian frankness would be harmful to our churches or our sister churches.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. J. Huijgen

## Letter to the Editor

### *Dealing with disagreements in the church*

Under this title Dr. Oosterhoff is informing us about developments in our Dutch sister churches. Some of the developments have her sympathy, others not. To start with the latter, Dr. Oosterhoff is not agreeing with the website *eeninwaarheid.nl*. The tone, the contents, and the method are not approved by Dr. Oosterhoff. It is clear that she does not like *eeninwaarheid.nl* to take to heart the advice of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the word, be urgent *in season and out of season*, convince, rebuke, and exhort."

Before we take over this opinion of Dr. Oosterhoff, we have to realize why these men are on the internet with this site. The site was established a few years ago. The founders are very concerned about the direction of the *Vrijgemaakte Kerk*. As office bearers they are convinced that the church is under attack. As watchmen you are called to sound the trumpet (Ezek 33). They do sound the trumpet, but Dr. Oosterhoff states that the tune is not right, the trumpet they use is not right, and the one who sounds the trumpet is not right either. To me it does not matter if I have to be alarmed, who plays the trumpet, nor how it sounds, as long as it wakes me up. Those who do not heed the sound of the trumpet do so at their own risk (Ezek 33:4).

There are also developments in The Netherlands which are rather to be welcomed than condemned, according to Dr. Oosterhoff. She sums up quite a list in her article; we will mention a few here.

There is a *legitimate* demand for changes in the liturgy. More contemporary music should be used, lowering the church walls and thresholds and involving the children in the liturgy. Different music instruments should be used and choruses be sung that are understood and by a vast majority of young people. Dr. Oosterhoff quotes from another source, "The movement towards contemporary worship music is essentially an attempt to speak the musical language that many people speak today." Dr. Oosterhoff mentions that modernism focused more on the head, while postmodernism stresses more experience, emotions, and spirituality. It seems that this means that the Spirit enters the post-modern generations through emotions rather than the living preaching of the Word. Much more is mentioned by Dr. Oosterhoff. The conclusion is that in order to reach the post-modern generation we have to improve in the worship service more on *style* than

on *substance*. If we don't adapt to the post-modern generation, they will drop out of the church. The lack of all this stuff in our churches might also be a stumbling block to church unity with other Reformed churches. It seems that tradition is a danger for our churches. Dr. Oosterhoff concludes that we will be wise to ask what we can learn from The Netherlands. That is a good question; surely we can learn from The Netherlands.

We first take a look in the church where all the needs of the post-modern generation were realized because the whole liturgy was fabricated to the newest fashion. One of these youth churches was even named God Fashion. Four of these youth churches were operating successful for a short time. After some time the organization involved with these youth churches announced (December 2006) that it dismissed itself because the goals were not accomplished, not enough visitors and hardly any outsiders were reached. Conclusion: even if you let the young people fabricate their own liturgy style, success is only temporary; the young people drop out of these fashion churches too.

Young people dropping out of our churches is the message of Rev. Luiten in Zwolle. It may be noted that this is far less in other, more conservative churches, than our sister church *de Vrijgemaakte Kerk*. These churches (*Gereformeerde Bond and Hersteld Hervormd*) have in average the same liturgy as our sister churches twenty years ago. Conclusion: the more changes and "improvements" in liturgy the more (young and old) people drop out of the church. What can we learn from The Netherlands and from many churches from around the world? We can learn that no matter how hard they work on new liturgy styles and more and more hymns, it does not stop the exodus of the young. In addition the older people also leave the church, tired of pushing a shopping cart of hymnbooks to the church in order to find out in the worship service that they do not have the right ones and can not join in the congregational singing. Last Sunday a Reformed guest from Budapest Hungary joined us in our worship service. She was able to join in the congregational singing thanks to the Genevan tunes she was familiar with; what a blessing that is for experiencing the unity with other believers. My conclusion is that there is nothing wrong with Dutch products such as *klompen*, *kaas*, and *kroketten*, but we do better to leave the *kerk* problems in Holland.

John de Boer

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