

# Clarion

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## *Public morals have an influence on church members*



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# The Church and Public Policy

*Public morals do have an influence on church members*

From time to time, Reformed Christians can experience considerable frustration when liberal churches encourage or support government policies as being consistent with Christianity when they clearly are not. For example, the United Church of Canada has supported liberal abortion laws and the recognition of same-sex marriage. Indeed, it even intervened before the Supreme Court of Canada in defence of gay wedlock in 2004.<sup>1</sup> Since the United Church is the largest Protestant church in Canada, their support for such policies suggests to the nation that their views represent those of most Protestants in Canada.

The question arises whether we as churches should not have some voice in the process of legislation being planned when such legislation is in clear violation of biblical norms. Such laws are not only harmful to the nation but also to the church for they undermine public morality. And public morals do have an influence on church members. Also, can we let a distortion of biblical truth by liberal churches go unchallenged? In addressing this issue, let us first consider the task of the church and the implications this has.

## The church's calling

Before the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, He informed his disciples that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him. He then gave the church its commission in no uncertain terms: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to

the very end of the age" (Matt 28:19-20). For our purposes, two things can be noted. First, the task of the church is to preach the glad tidings of salvation in Jesus Christ so that those who hear may believe and be baptized. Second, it is also the task of the church "to teach them everything I have commanded you." This task indicates that preaching the gospel must include the exposition of the law and will of God. Those baptized need to know how to live the Christian life. Besides being instrumental in the process of personal sanctification, such preaching and teaching also equips and trains members of the church to function meaningfully in today's secular society as citizens of Christ's kingdom. The teaching ministry of the church includes both the Sunday preaching and the weekly catechism class. For such teaching to be relevant, the current moral crisis in the Western world needs to be addressed. In this way members of the church will be equipped with biblical principles to engage in the public debate about the issues of the day and be motivated seek to influence decision making in politics where necessary.

As a rule, it is not the calling of the church as a corporate body to interfere in the political process and attempt to influence the agenda of government. This is the responsibility of the members of the church. They are the ones who are to carry the implications of the gospel into all of life, also the political sphere. The church as corporate body does not normally have this responsibility. Indeed, the ecclesiastical offices are Christ's gift to his people "to prepare God's people for works of service" both in the church and outside (cf. Eph 4:12-16; 5:11-17). The task of the office bearers is directed to the church in the first place.



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Because the church's chief task is to preach the gospel and to equip the congregation for a life of service, our Church Order has the stipulation that ecclesiastical assemblies "shall deal with no other than ecclesiastical matters" (Art 30). This is a good rule.

But, the question does arise: does the church then have absolutely no responsibility regarding decisions made in the chambers of power? Can the church really wash its hands, so to speak, and say that what goes on in Parliament and the moral direction of our nation is of no concern to us? Scripture suggests and the Westminster Confession (Art 31) articulates that two exceptions would warrant the church as corporate body to be directly involved in political issues.<sup>2</sup>

**The church's involvement in exceptional circumstances**

The first exception is that the church must confess and bear testimony to the lordship of Jesus Christ to the civil authorities when these magistrates are making decisions that directly affect the ministry of the church and could compromise the church's identity as "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1Tim 3:15). As a lampstand shining in a dark world (cf. Rev 1:20), the church as an institution has no choice but to speak up when its ministry, identity, and well-being are threatened. A key purpose for the writing of the Belgic Confession was to testify to the authorities of the day what the persecuted church stood for so that room could be given to it so that it could function in peace. As has happened more often in the history of the church, this testimony was sealed with blood of martyrs. Today the situation is different but the church must be ever vigilant to defend the exercise of the true religion and be prepared to address the authorities if necessary. For example, if a law were to be proposed which would forbid the denunciation of a specific sin, such as homosexuality, the churches must surely lodge an official protest to the secular authorities.<sup>3</sup> On a more local level, if city hall should approve a route for a Sunday Santa Claus parade which makes it difficult for church members to attend worship services, the consistory should protest directly to the civil authorities.

The other exception is when the civil authorities request the input of the church on a current issue. The church then has the obligation to provide such input and indeed should be most willing to do so (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).

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In light of the above, it is understandable that our Dutch and South African sister churches each have a standing committee on relations with the civil authorities.<sup>4</sup> Such a committee has a restricted mandate which includes responding to any government initiative which could threaten the pure administration of the Word of God. Also, such a committee serves as the address to which government can go if they wish to have the input of churches on a particular issue. We have a specially designated church which acts as the official contact for the federation (the address church – Burlington Ebenezer). But one wonders whether it would not be good to consider having a synodically-appointed committee with a carefully defined and limited mandate that can be proactive in addressing the government on behalf of the churches with issues that directly affect the well-being of the church and its freedom to proclaim the gospel in its fullness.

I realize that there are potential pitfalls to having such a committee. I have already mentioned some of the reasons why the church should normally not get involved in the political issues of the day. We also need to be careful not to have the church address issues about which it knows little. That will damage the credibility of the churches. However, on the other hand we live in a post-Christian time and the law of God is openly being trodden underfoot and sin is exalted. Does the church then not have a responsibility over against the government of the land, if only to protect the sacred ministry of the Word and the freedom to believe and maintain the norms of the Bible? We still do not know, for example, the full ramifications of same-sex marriage for the church and the church's ability to address this form of sin. Furthermore, does our Church Order not enunciate the principle that the church should endeavour by "communication to secure and retain the favour of the authorities towards the church, so that the church of Christ may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way" (Art 28)?

## In conclusion

I would like to repeat that in spite of the exceptions just mentioned the church as an institution has a very limited role over against the civil authorities. This reality underlines the fact that church members cannot sit back and excuse themselves from political activity. To the contrary! Precisely because the church as an institution has a restricted responsibility highlights the need for members of the church to be active in this area of life. Reformed Christians need to be engaged

in the political affairs of our nation. Of course, we realize that we are pilgrims and exiles in this world (1 Pet 1:1). But, as Jeremiah exhorted the exiles in Babylon, we also have the duty to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city" where God has placed us. We must "pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, we too will prosper" (Jer 29:7). As Reformed confessor we are part of our nation and we, therefore, bear our share of the responsibility for its moral direction.

"How can I get involved?" you may ask. To begin with, get informed, join and support the efforts of the Association of Reformed Political Action (ARPA – <http://arpacanada.ca/>) and the work of the ECP Centre (<http://www.ecpcentre.com/>). These organizations provide an easy entrance into the issues of the day. But, be warned. Be prepared for a long, hard battle. Christian involvement in the political sphere will not save our nation overnight. After all, an entire culture of godlessness needs to be dealt with. But as people of light, we need to carry that light also in the political realm. Do Christ's claims not extend over all of life? Let us not grow weary and assume beforehand that our efforts as Christians are futile. Rather, let us be encouraged by the opportunities and freedoms which our triumphant Saviour gives us (cf. Matt 28:18) and which we may use to his glory.

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., The United Church of Canada on abortion and same sex marriage by going to <http://www.united-church.ca/> and using the search function.

<sup>2</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith, XXXI states in part: "Synods and councils are to handle, or conclude nothing, but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or, by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate."

<sup>3</sup> See G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (2nd ed., 2004) 327. It is of interest, e.g., that in 2003, our sister churches, together with other Reformed churches, presented the government with a brochure, *Gerechtigheid en welzijn (Righteousness and Well-being)* which called on society and government to return to the Ten Commandments as normative. See <http://www.refdag.nl/artikel/69820>

<sup>4</sup> Our Dutch sister churches have had such a committee since 1993 with a clear and restricted mandate. Among other duties, they need to be vigilant about laws being prepared that would impact the confession and life of the church. See, e.g., the report of these deputies to Synod Zwolle 2008 at <http://synode.gkv.nl/data/download/733.pdf>. For the South African sister churches, see, e.g., the short report of their 2008 synod at <http://www.vgk.org.za/KortVerslae/20080512-15%20SR%20Synod.pdf>



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# The Gifts of the Holy Spirit



**MATTHEW 13:52**

*“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*

*Acts 1:4-5*

With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, many gifts came to the followers of Christ. So what are those gifts that were promised by the Father?

The first is the church. At Pentecost, the New Testament church came into existence and it has been preserved through the indwelling the Holy Spirit.

The next gift is the Word of God, because it is through the Spirit that we have the Bible. He inspired it and preserved it. It is through Him that we know beyond any doubt that every word in the Bible is true and infallible. Everything it says has happened or will most surely come to pass.

The Holy Spirit also brings us a restored communion with our God. When God created man, there was a beautiful and loving relationship between God the creator and man his creation, but man broke this by his disobedience. However, God did not abandon man, but He promised to restore this relationship. The Lord Jesus accomplished this through his suffering, death, and resurrection.

It is because of this restoration that the Holy Spirit came to dwell, not only in the church, but also in our hearts. The Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts so that we believe the gospel. Without this faith we would never admit that we need a Saviour, and Christ does not want to save those who do not believe in Him.

The Holy Spirit brings us the communion of the saints. He works compassion and care for fellow church members in the hearts of the believers. He brings believers together and makes them see one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord. It is the Holy Spirit who makes the members of the church seekers and lovers of the truth.

These are some of the treasures that the baptism with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost has brought us and still brings us as church. We have much reason to celebrate this feast of Pentecost with great joy and thankfulness.

Now, it is always true that when God gives his people gifts, He requires that we do something with them. So what does this gift of the Holy Spirit require from us? The short answer is that we are required to use these gifts continually! We could say that the Lord gives what He requires and He requires what He gives.

The gift of the church requires that we be active members of that church. Not only must we come to church on Sunday, but we must cherish this church and support it with our love, our prayers, our talents, our time, and also our goods. This is a lot different from the attitude we see among some Christians: they act like customers in a store, who have the right to complain when they are not served in the way they wish, or leave for another church where the service is supposed to be better. The right

attitude in the church is a serving attitude, not a demanding one.

The gift of God's Word requires that we use it for what it is supposed to be: the guide for our lives. The Word of God preached or read is a light to us and by obedience to it we ourselves become a light to others.

We must also become people of whom it is evident that we live in a restored relationship with our God – another gift of the Holy Spirit. Our love for the Lord cannot and may not remain hidden, for it changes all our priorities, and in this way our lives can witness to the power of the gospel.

The Spirit's gift of faith requires that we show that our faith is alive by our works, demonstrating to others with word and deed the same love that the Lord shows to us. The gift of communion requires that we be seriously interested in the welfare of our fellow church members and pray for them. It also means that we be always ready to help our fellow members in whatever way is necessary. This is what makes the church so beautiful in the Lord's eyes.

Are we able to live up to all these requirements? Not by ourselves! But we need to remember that the ability to fulfill these requirements comes with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Just as on that day when some Galilean men received the Holy Spirit and many people heard them declaring the wonders of God, so may it be for us!





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# Psalm-Singing Churches?

(Part 3 of 3)

In this brief series so far, I have argued that a psalm-singing church makes the singing of psalms a priority and also, *in principle*, sings all the psalms. A final characteristic of a psalm-singing church is that it encourages and promotes psalm-singing, not only in the public worship services and other official activities of the church, but throughout the lives of believers. Let me illustrate with a few examples.

When it comes to evangelistic outreach/missions, a psalm-singing church is not ashamed of the psalms, but gladly, enthusiastically, and zealously uses them. We don't hide our *Books of Praise* under the proverbial bushels, but keep them out in the open and eagerly use them. After all, we recognize that the psalms are God's Word and the Spirit works with the Word to produce faith.

Some might say that the psalms are inappropriate for evangelistic contexts because they were written for God's covenant people. However, that argument proves too much because in fact the entire Bible was written for God's covenant people. If that argument is correct, then actually the entire Bible is inappropriate for evangelistic contexts. I'm sure no one wants to take that absurd position.

No, a psalm-singing church is going to be unabashedly singing the psalms in missionary milieus as well. As we do so, a lot of explanation and teaching will have to take place. If believers in established churches frequently need these explanations, how much more a new believer or someone on their way to becoming a believer?

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*A psalm-singing church encourages and promotes psalm-singing throughout the lives of believers*

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This all boils down to what we are actually trying to accomplish in our missionary and outreach efforts. Is our goal to see people believe the gospel and be brought into Christ's church (where the psalms are sung) or to establish a Reformed church (where psalms are going to be sung)? If that's our goal, then it's only appropriate that we begin with the end in mind. Some have tried to use other songs to introduce people to our Reformed churches. When (or: if) they finally attend a Reformed worship service, they wonder what

happened to the music they loved so much from the program they had been involved with. We call that "bait-and-switch." If our goal is to bring people into our churches as members (which it should be), I would argue that bait-and-switch tactics can have no place in our evangelistic outreach.

Next, a psalm-singing church is going to love singing psalms in its group Bible studies. If the focus of these groups is the Bible (as well it should be), then why not also sing from the Bible and discuss what's being sung? Why not use these inspired and inerrant songs to encourage one another and to reflect with one another on how to testify to us of the gospel of our Lord Jesus?

Finally, the families of a psalm-singing church are going to be singing the psalms in their homes with their children. We could never conceive of Sunday worship without singing, so how can we have family worship without singing? Then we'll also want to use the riches of the psalms and teach these to our children.

Connected with that, we could think of the relationship between the family, the church, and the Christian school. We have a rich heritage of having Christian schools where memory work is

# Church News

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**Rev. T. Van Raalte**

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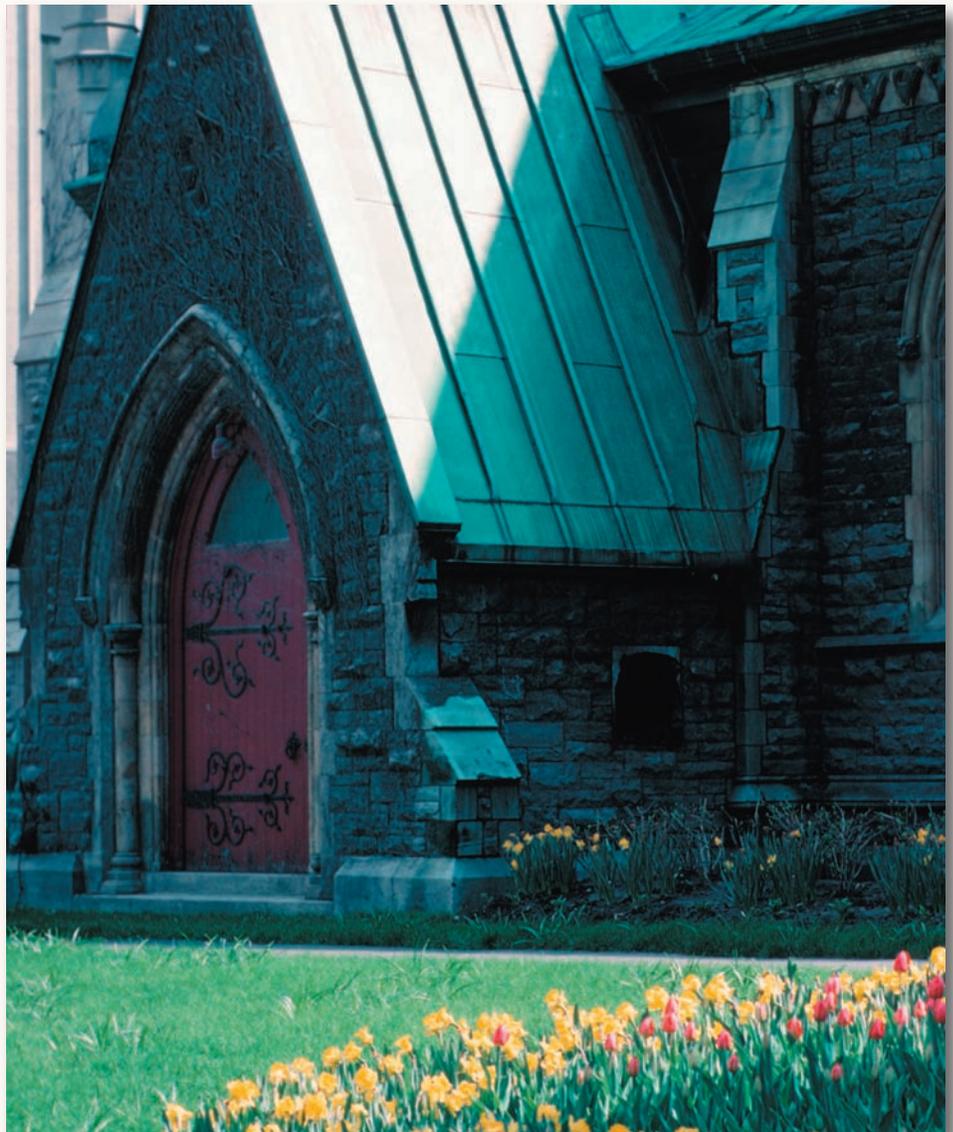
assigned to the primary students. This memory work typically includes and even emphasizes the psalms. The parents in a psalm-singing church will guard this practice within the Christian school and encourage it.

Of course, what I've written in these articles portrays the ideal psalm-singing church. In reality, things may be a lot different. That may lead us to consider whether we're still psalm-singing churches or perhaps whether we're moving away from that. For instance, I wonder how many readers still regularly sing at all (to say nothing of singing psalms) during family devotions. Though I would love to be proven wrong, I have a hunch that it would be a very slim number. Moreover, it seems that the psalms are rarely used in missions and evangelism and, generally, the closer to home the less likely they are to be used.

Psalm-singing is one of the things that defines our identity as Reformed churches. It sets us apart from many others. But at the same time, it links our identity with the early church. With its emphasis on psalm-singing, the Reformation did not introduce anything new. From the time of the early church into the late middle ages and early sixteenth century, the church used very few non-canonical hymns. The Reformers continued this practice. The main change introduced by the Reformation was to have the congregation do the singing (rather than a choir) in the vernacular (rather than in Latin). There was no essential change in content – only a change in terms of who was doing the singing and in what language.

So, what does the future hold for psalm-singing in the Canadian Reformed churches? Do we have reason for optimism? To be sure, there are pressures to resist. There is laziness to surmount. There are negative attitudes to overcome. But at the end of the day, the psalms are still God's Word and his Word is guaranteed to prevail and to be treasured by his people – if not among us, then certainly among

others. But, dear reader, wouldn't it be worlds better for us to treasure his Word (also in the psalms) and continue to be blessed by it?





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# Admission to the Lord's Supper in the Proposed Church Order

The committee responsible for drafting the Proposed Church Order printed a revised formulation of the article pertaining to admission to the Lord's Supper in the January 2, 2009 edition of *Clarion*. I wish to state upfront that I appreciate the proposed change and consider it a great improvement over the earlier formulation. At the same time, I think the proposed formulation merits further discussion.

The revised formulation reads as follows:

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 public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Visitors may be admitted to the Lord's Supper provided that the consistory has secured confirmation, by means of letter of testimony or interview, regarding proper profession of faith, their godly walk of life, and their biblical church membership.

The three sentences of the proposed article cover three topics, relating in turn to the task of the consistory, the admission of

members, and the admission of visitors. I'll comment briefly on the first subject and then go into more detail on the second and third.

## Consistory's role

That the consistory needs to play a role in supervising who attends the table of the Lord needs no elaboration in a Reformed publication. References to the task of the Old Testament priests in monitoring who could present sacrifices in the tabernacle (see Leviticus 13 and 14) as well as Paul's instruction to the Corinthian church to "hand this man over to Satan" (1 Cor 5:5) provide ample biblical justification of the point. At the same time it's understood that the individual participant also has a responsibility to determine whether he is able to attend the table. That's driven home by passages such as Numbers 9:10f and 1 Corinthians 11:28, 31. The interplay between individual responsibility and consistory responsibility need not detain us further now. All I want to add is that the Lord of the table is a holy God. He responded to unholiness in Old Testament Israel through plagues that killed thousands (see Numbers 14:29; 16:47ff; 25:9, etc) and responded with a similar heavy hand to the

unholiness of the Corinthians (see 1 Corinthians 11:30).

The other two topics mentioned in this article describe who consistory may permit to the table. The article divides the possible attendees into two groups, namely, the members of the congregation over which the consistory has responsibility and visitors worshipping in that congregation.

## Members

I appreciate how the article describes the consistory's task in relation to members' admission to the table. "The consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those members who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life." This formulation catches the standard practice in faithful Reformed churches and certainly in the churches I serve. Yet it may be reasonable to reflect briefly on just what this task of the consistory looks like in practice.

Those members who have made profession of faith may attend the table. We typically witness a profession of faith at least once a year and are familiar with what's involved. There's first a period of catechetical instruction (to say nothing of parental instruction and

Reformed education) and pre-confession class, in order to ground the member in Reformed thinking. Once a sufficient level of understanding and maturity has been reached, and the young member desires to respond positively to the promises of God in baptism, two elders speak with the person concerned about his motivation. This conversation, if satisfactory to the two elders, is typically followed by a conversation in the presence of the entire consistory. Thereafter the young person's name is mentioned to the congregation to learn whether anyone in the congregation knows of reasons why this person ought not to be admitted to the table of the Lord. The point I want to make is that elders are diligent in guarding the table; they do not permit members to attend simply because the member requests it. In fact, the elders even involve the congregation in determining whether a young member may attend, and that's because the elders are well aware that they do not know everything about their members themselves.

Similarly, making profession of faith does not give a member a free pass to the table for the rest of his life. Making profession of faith may occur on a certain day of a member's life, but thereafter the consistory wants to keep seeing "a godly life." Elders satisfy themselves about the godly lifestyle of their members by keeping their own eyes open – and specifically by visiting their members in their homes at least once per year. Through such conversation and observation, elders seek to stay abreast of what makes their members tick, and then in turn permit to the table only

those of whom the elders are convinced that they daily maintain their profession of faith. Again, elders lay before the congregation the command of the Lord in passages as Matthew 18, that if a member sins another is to admonish and if there is no repentance the consistory needs to hear of it. The point I want to make is that elders are diligent in guarding the table, to the point of knowing their members well and involving the whole congregation in looking after each other. The holiness of the Lord of the table requires this level of diligence.

### Visitors

If the holiness of the God of the table requires elders to fence with care which members of their congregation may attend a given celebration, it would seem logical that elders set the bar at the same height when it comes to visitors.

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*Elders are diligent in guarding the table, to the point of knowing their members well and involving the whole congregation in looking after each other*

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At first reading, the formulation of the proposed article does a good job of maintaining that standard: "Visitors may be admitted to the Lord's Supper provided that the consistory has secured confirmation, by means of letter of testimony or interview, regarding proper profession of faith, their godly walk of life, and their biblical church membership."

I appreciate the need for consistory to secure confirmation "regarding proper profession of faith, their godly walk of life, and their biblical church membership." These three criteria parallel exactly what a consistory requires of its own membership. We recognize the first two from our earlier discussion (above) and understand that the third (regarding biblical church membership) is implicit in relation to one's own members; no one, after all, may be elder in a church that is not biblical and so every elder is by definition convinced of the biblical church membership of their own members. Yet I need to come back to this element momentarily.

Challenges arise when it comes to the manner in which a consistory secures the required confirmation. Two means are mentioned: "by means of letter of testimony or interview." The "letter of testimony" refers, we understand, to one's attestation (or "travel attestation"). This is a document concerning your spiritual uprightness as your own elders see you on the basis of their observations and conversations with you. It speaks of the elders doing their task properly and now relating the conclusions of their work to another consistory so that those elders can permit you to the Lord's table as a guest.

On what grounds is a "letter of testimony" accepted by a given consistory and its contents respected so that you can attend the Lord's Supper? Such a letter of testimony from, say, the Anglican Church of Canada would not persuade elders in any Canadian Reformed Church to permit you to the table, simply because we do not see the Anglican Church of Canada as a church-of-Jesus Christ (i.e., a true church as

confessed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession). My point is that letters of testimony have weight because the church writing the letter is recognized as a true church – and so it's accepted as an *a priori* that the elders who have signed the attestation are acting responsibly before the Lord. At the end of the day, then, "letters of testimony" set the bar at the same height for visitors as for members. Given the holiness of the God of the table, this is good and proper.

According to the proposed formulation of the Church Order, consistories can secure the confirmation they seek also via interview. Let us in charity take it for granted that the elders conducting the interview will perform their task with the same level of care and diligence they would apply to their own members. Their interview, however, is by definition brief and shallow compared to the attention they give to their own members. Their own members are known to them and observed over a period of considerable time. A home visit with ones own members works with the knowledge office bearers have of the family they visit. An interview with a passing guest is conducted without the benefit of long term knowledge of the person concerned. Further, whereas the consistory requires the assistance of the congregation in looking after one another, a congregation by definition can play little or no role when it comes to a guest. The long and short is this: consistories who after an interview would permit guests to attend their celebration of the Lord's Supper set the bar lower for guests than for members.

At this point I need to return to the requirement concerning "their biblical church membership." A consistory may take the "biblicalness" of a sister church for granted on grounds that the churches together (in synod) have evaluated the churches concerned and via a committee for inter-church relations (and the adopted rules for churches in ecclesiastical fellowship) the churches remain assured of the sister church's faithfulness.

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*An attempt is made to set the bar at the same level for visitors as for members*

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But what is to be said of churches that we have not recognized as true churches of the Lord? There is no doubt that the Spirit of Christ blows where He wills and his church gathering work occurs in places and organizations we cannot even begin to imagine. Still, one consistory in our midst can consider a given church in yonder town a true church (so that a guest from that church is seen to have "biblical church membership"), while another consistory in our midst holds a contrary view – and so declines the same person attendance at its table. Here, then, room is granted for subjective evaluation and potential confusion for our members (younger or not so young).

### **Analysis**

I understand why the proposed church order makes mention of both members and visitors in

detailing the consistory's task in fencing the Lord's Supper. I appreciate too that an attempt is made to set the bar at the same level for visitors as for members. The proposed article, however, does not in the end manage to maintain that bar.

Perhaps we are here simply up against the struggles that come with our human limitations in a fallen world – a reality we need to accept. Then again, we do not have to encourage guests to attend the Lord's table, as if their participation is a biblical requirement. In my judgment we do wiser to encourage guests who "pass through" to attend the Lord's Supper in their own congregations with those who know them well. As to guests who linger for longer periods, well, they make themselves available to the observation and conversation of consistory and congregation alike – and so for them the bar ends up at the same level as it does for one's own members.

Given the holiness of the Lord of the table, perhaps some sobriety concerning our limitations is in place. Such limitations could receive expression in the proposed article by reworking the last sentence as follows: Visitors may be admitted to the Lord's Supper provided that the consistory has secured confirmation, by means of letter of testimony, regarding proper profession of faith, their godly walk of life, and their biblical church membership. Only by way of exception may the consistory secure the required confirmation through an interview.

# Farewell to Rev. VanderVelde

## Farewell service

On March 15, 2009 the Spring Creek congregation came together in the afternoon service to hear Rev. VanderVelde preach his farewell sermon. As text he chose 1 John 2: 24, 25. "See to it that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us – even eternal life!" Rev. VanderVelde stated that John is writing about beginnings. As we think back over the last four and a half years that Rev. VanderVelde has served among us as pastor, we may also reflect on how things have progressed. The Lord leads us in the way of faith, but not all of us in the same way. Some of us are led to faith from our youth, but others later on in life. His theme was: "See that what you heard from the beginning remains in you!  
1. Our Responsibility, and  
2. God's Promise."

John is writing believers who are dealing with false doctrine in the church. Some men denied that Jesus was the Christ and in doing so they were undermining the heart of the gospel. This is also relevant for us today, since many churches deny who Christ is, and



*Rev. and Theresa VanderVelde*

that is antichristian. John is working with the antithesis in this text – those who see Christ as He is and those who do not!

It is our responsibility and our task to see to it that what we have heard remains in us. We confess that faith is the work of the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit uses the Word to accomplish his work. We must be busy with the Word ourselves. The believers had already received the full gospel of Christ; moreover, they also had the Holy Spirit, who led them in the truth of God's Word. There is a command and urgency in this text

– this is for the sake of our very salvation! We must be responsible and listen attentively to the preaching and read God's Word and meditate on it. Only in that way will it remain in us! Through faith we are grafted into Christ and we will remain in Him if we walk close to the Word. God's promise is that if we have fellowship with Christ, then the way to God is open to us and that means eternal blessings and eternal fellowship with God! See to it that what you heard from the beginning remains in you!



*A gift to the VanderVeldes*

After the service, Mr. R. VanAndel spoke on behalf of Grassie church, Mr. B. Poort on behalf of Smithville church, and Rev. D. Wynia on behalf of Lincoln church and the churches of Classis Niagara. We also heard letters of thanks and appreciation from Dunnville/Wainfleet church and Immanuel ORC in Jordan and later a letter from Attercliffe church. They all expressed their appreciation for the work of Rev. VanderVelde whether in preaching engagements, his work in Classis Niagara, or in teaching pre-confession classes.

### **Farewell evening**

On a Saturday before the farewell service, the congregation also came together for a beautiful evening of fellowship and good food to say farewell to Rev. VanderVelde and family. The evening began with a dessert social, where every delicious dessert imaginable was found to satisfy the minister's sweet tooth! Our MC, Mr. Brian Bosch, opened the evening and kept everyone

laughing throughout with many amusing questions and comments. We learned the secret to slipping in a peppermint just like the Reverend! And no – it's not headgear with a Pez dispenser! Various societies came forward to do a presentation, say a poem, sing a song, or present a gift. We enjoyed a slide presentation of the time the VanderVeldes were among us. Many congregational members played musical instruments and

sang. The VanderVelde family was presented with a beautiful deacons' bench and a picture of the church, signed by the members, as a congregational gift. Heartfelt thanks was expressed for the work that Rev. VanderVelde has done among us, for he has been a wonderful blessing to our congregation in many ways and will be greatly missed. Rev. VanderVelde also conveyed his thanks in return by saying that he and his family enjoyed themselves, felt at home, and were grateful for the kindness shown to them as minister and as family. May God bless our congregation with a new pastor in his time and may He bless the VanderVeldes in their new congregation at Elora!



*Nicolette and Garret with toboggans*



# Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Patricia Gelms



## Joan Koerselman

Joan is from Coaldale, Alberta. She lives in the Rehoboth Haven Home with two other ladies. She likes to help in the kitchen there; helping with cooking and baking, setting and clearing the table, and loading the dishwasher. Even though

she enjoys work in the kitchen, one of her greatest pleasures is going out to eat. She also likes going to the library, reading, and watching TV. She loves walking, sightseeing, and camping. She also enjoys dancing and going for a swim. Shopping and getting groceries are also on her list of fun things to do.

Joan has been a member of the Coaldale church all her life. She enjoys going to services there and spending the day with family or friends. She attends a Reformed Bible study.

Every weekday when the weather is suitable, Joan walks to work. She works at the Rehoboth Christian

Ministries, where she does janitorial work and helps in the greenhouse.

Wishing Joan, Beverly, and all the others celebrating a birthday in June a wonderful day with God's rich blessings for each day anew! short visit, it is always most gladly appreciated!

## Birthdays in June

**17 JOAN KOERSELMAN will be 52**  
2113-16 Avenue, Coaldale, AB T1M 1J8

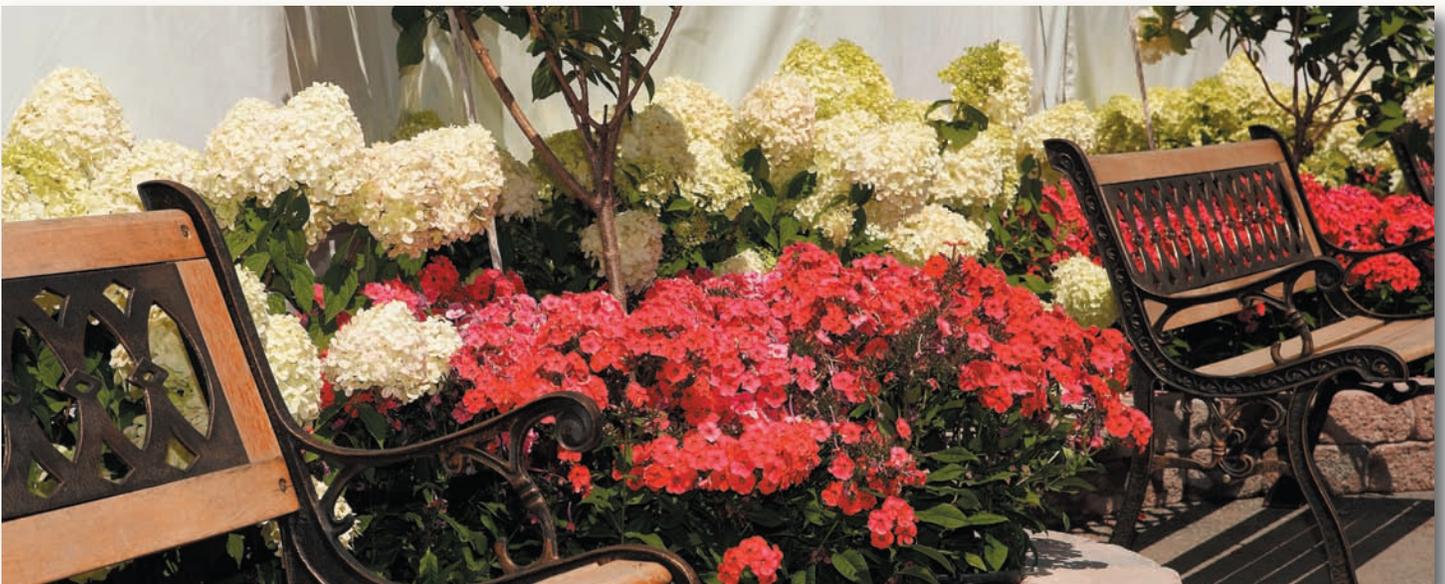
**30 BEVERLY BREUKELMAN will be 47**  
2225-19th Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4

If you have somebody to add to our birthday list or contact information needs to be changed, please let us know:

548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

Phone: (905) 563-0380

Email: [jcorgelms@porchlight.ca](mailto:jcorgelms@porchlight.ca)



James Meinen

# London's New Facilities



On March 13, the members of Covenant Christian School (CCS) and surrounding community gathered together to celebrate the blessing of receiving a wonderful new school building. After years of looking for a new facility and investigating building and renovation options, the Lord provided CCS with a spacious facility a few minutes south of the old building.

Over the Christmas holidays and the week that followed, the community came together to help move CCS to its own home. Over these three weeks, the old and new school was filled with volunteers cleaning, scrubbing, packing, loading trucks, unloading trucks, making small repairs, babysitting for volunteers, and installing bulletin boards and shelving in the new building. After some time allotted for preparation, CCS was ready to show the new facility to the entire community. The evening's attendance was overwhelming and our significantly larger facility could barely hold all those in attendance. Approximately three hundred visitors crowded into the gymnasium for the evening program.

The night began on the front lawn with the unveiling of the school's new sign. A former graduate of CCS, Mr. Jeff Temple,

spoke a few words about CCS and the significance of having a Reformed education. Reference was made to our old building and its opening celebration in the fall of 1976. CCS's youngest and oldest current students then together pulled the sheet off the new sign, unveiling it for all to see.

The evening festivities then moved indoors for a formal opening. The chairman of the board, Mr. Albert Meinen, began the evening with Scripture reading and prayer. Following that, the school's principal, Mr. James Meinen, had the opportunity to speak to the school community. The speech began with some reflections of Mr. Meinen's time as a student at CCS, as teacher, and as principal. The speech then shifted into a discussion of the

early efforts to establish a school in London and the importance of the community coming together. I will share a few excerpts from this speech:

This dream (to establish a Reformed school) began much before my time, in 1955, as London set up a school society. The church members recognized their role in nurturing and teaching. Providing children with a solid Reformed education is not just the role of the parents, but the church community is called to work together in this task. The goal in 1955 was to have a school open its doors in the fall of 1956. The *London Canadian Reformed Churches 25<sup>th</sup> Commemoration Booklet* states: "Records show that there were many obstacles



to be overcome and the enthusiasm dwindled. It was six years later when the school society folded and the church became the recipient of the money raised."

Despite this difficult start and lack of enthusiasm the need of a Christian school remained. The church renewed its efforts in the early 70s. The church collectively came together. Although the book written by Harro VanBrummelen *Walking with God in the Classroom* had not yet published, the words from this book resonate with me when I think of this renewed effort to establish a Christian School – a school that subscribes to our confessions and grounds itself not in the shifting sands of the world, but on the solid foundation of God's Word. I quote, "The injunction to nurture children in the Lord goes beyond the family and church, however. Both Deuteronomy 6 and Psalm 78 also address the people of Israel collectively. Telling 'the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power and the wonders He has done' (Ps 78:4) is a responsibility shared by the whole Christian community."

To summarize, Van Brummelen is stating that although the final responsibility for raising a child in the fear of God's name, falls on the parents' shoulders, the task of raising children is not only their responsibility. The communion of saints is called to work together, to help one another, to spur each other on to love and good deeds and to teach children the word of God. It's a

communal responsibility. We are one body. In an individualistic society it is easy to forget this fact, but this tendency does not negate what Scripture reveals on the topic.

Following the speech the audience enjoyed a power point presentation covering the school's history over its thirty-three years of operation. When over thirty years are condensed into fifteen minutes the changes in clothing style, hair, and technology are readily apparent! It is amazing to see how far our school came from the early days when it was a three-room school house.

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*Telling the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of  
the Lord is a responsibility  
shared by the whole  
Christian community*

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All throughout the presentation the audience played an extremely fast paced game of "name that person!" Even those who have been a part of CCS from its inception found this game challenging, as in thirty years people can change dramatically. Despite all the changes, one thing that has remained constant is the solid foundation of God's Word CCS is built upon. All throughout the evening we could be reminded of how blessed we are to be able to have the freedom and the financial means to establish Christian schools here in Canada.

In the programs handed out on this evening, guests could also read about what the students were

thankful for in our new facilities. Reflections ranged from, "My favourite part of the new school is the auditorium because it is nice and big!" to "I am looking forward to having a bigger school that looks like a school!" Students also shared their least favourite aspects of the new school. These comments ranged from "My least favourite thing of the new school is the boiler room. It looks scary." to "When I first came here, I was excited and a bit nervous about getting lost. The school was huge!" The best student comment that summed up what the majority of students thought came from Domi Szepessy who stated: "I like everything!"

The evening concluded with the students of CCS treating the audience to some wonderful singing and music. Mrs. Marjorie Bergsma did a terrific job in teaching and leading the students in singing praises to our God. The song that resonated with me on this night of celebration was "What a Day to Celebrate the Name of the Lord."

"What a day to celebrate the  
love of the Lord

Giving praise drives away the  
cares of this world!

New every morning, His love is  
new every day.

What a day to celebrate!"

What a day/evening it was! London and surrounding area's school society has been greatly blessed.

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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).*

Reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof

Rev. W.L. Bredenhof is  
co-pastor of the Canadian  
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**Christless Christianity:  
The Alternative Gospel of the  
American Church,  
Michael Horton,  
Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008**

**Additional Information:  
Hardcover, 270 pages, \$18.20**

In 1923 a stick of literary dynamite was tossed into American Christianity. J. Gresham Machen published his response to the deformation of the church in his day, *Christianity and Liberalism*. In this book, Machen decisively demonstrated that Christianity and theological liberalism are two entirely different religions. The sad irony is that nearly ninety years later, Machen's book remains relevant. Only the names have changed. Today's greatest threat to Christianity is not called liberalism.

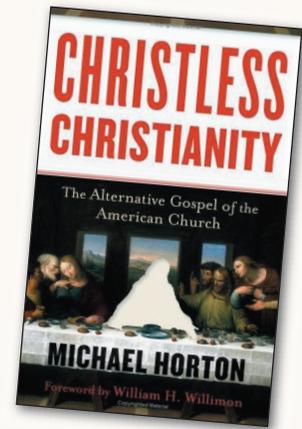
With this book, Michael Horton (professor at Westminster Seminary California and URC minister) has done for our generation what Machen did in his, surgically exposing the ultimate emptiness of much of what passes for Christianity in North America. In fact, according to Horton, much of what calls itself Christian on our continent is simply missing the boat on who Jesus Christ is according to the Bible – that's the essence of Christless Christianity. Says Horton, "Christless Christianity does not mean religion or spirituality devoid of the words Jesus, Christ, Lord, or even Savior. What it means is that the way those names and titles are

employed will be removed from their specific location in an unfolding historical plot of human rebellion and divine rescue. . ." (p.144). Christless Christianity means the trivialization of the Bible's message of good news through Jesus Christ.

By its very nature and by the author's admission, this is "not a cheerful missive." Horton incisively takes on the health and wealth pseudo-gospel of popular figures such as Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer as well as the positive thinking pseudo-gospel of Robert Schuller. He rightly points out that while the Emergent movement has put its finger on various problems in American Christianity, the solutions it offers are no less problematic. For instance, he critiques Brian McLaren, who "scolds Reformed Christians for 'their love affair for the Latin word *sola*'" (p.194). More "Christless Christianity" is not the answer.

In the first chapter, Horton promises to follow this book up with a "more constructive sequel." Nevertheless, he does begin to offer constructive alternatives towards the end of *Christless Christianity*.

He calls for resistance to the trend identified in this book. It all has to do with going back to the Word of God and what it says about us, about our ultimate problems, and about the solutions in Christ. Horton writes: "A church that is deeply aware of its misery and nakedness before a holy God will cling tenaciously to an all-sufficient Savior, while one that is self-confident and relatively unaware of its inherent sinfulness will reach for



religion and morality whenever it seems convenient" (p. 243).

While this book addresses the "American Church," I think many of us will recognize the same trends spilling over into Canadian Christianity, even in our own churches. Horton's cry from the heart is one that we all need to hear.

I have one slightly critical note regarding Horton's perspective on worship. He rightly notes that in much of contemporary American Christianity, people come to church to do something. "Everybody seems to think that we come to church mostly to give rather than to receive" (p.191). Horton wants to correct this by drawing attention to the ways in which public worship is about God ministering to us. While this is a helpful correction in many ways, some balance is called for and that balance can be achieved through emphasizing the covenant structure of biblical worship. Yes, God's ministry of Word and Sacrament to us stands central in biblical worship, but reflecting the structure of the covenant also means that there is a place for human response. Horton has worked with that in *A Better Way*, but it would have been helpful to have it mentioned here also.

Obviously, my overall assessment is positive. Five stars, ten out of ten, whatever you wish – this book receives my highest recommendation. My prayer is that, unlike Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*, this book would be entirely irrelevant in ninety years.



## Press Release for the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches for a meeting held on December 11, 2008

The Board of Governors met at the College Facilities in Hamilton, Ontario on December 11, 2008. Present at the meeting were Archie J. Bax, Lammert Jagt, Hank C. Kampen (Treasurer), Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen (Chairman), Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. Andrew J. Pol, Rev. Robert A. Schouten (Secretary), Rev. Willem B. Slomp, Rev. Eric Kampen, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, and Karl J. Veldkamp (Vice-Chairman). All board members are present. The Principal, Dr. G. H. Visscher is also in attendance. The meeting is opened by Dr. G. Nederveen with the reading of Scripture and prayer.

### Minutes and agenda

The minutes of the Board meeting held on September 4, 2008 are approved as written and the agenda for the meeting is settled.

### Correspondence of note

- a. A letter was sent to the Deputies for Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia in response to their comprehensive inquiries relating to the possibility of distance learning and working with the College.
- b. A letter was sent to Dr. N. H. Gootjes inquiring with respect to his health and his ability to return to his task at the College.
- c. A letter was received from Dr. Hannes Breytenbach, National Coordinator of the Ministerial Training Structure of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, requesting an

opportunity to meet with representatives of the College to explore how the programs and expertise of the College could be used for the benefit of the FRCSA. The Senate of the College was designated to deal with the matter.

- d. The Board was informed of the formal conferring of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by McMaster University on Dr. G. Visscher which took place on November 21, 2008.

### Material agenda items

- a. **Executive Committee Report:** This committee confirms the recognition of Prof. J. Geertsema for the forty-fifth anniversary (celebrated on December 15, 2008) of this brother beginning in the ministry.
- b. **Finance & Property Committee:** The continued faithful support of the churches was gratefully acknowledged and it was confirmed that the Free Reformed Churches of Australia were providing continued generous support in excess of that expected. All financial arrangements relating to Dr. Maris and Rev. Van Vliet were confirmed.
- c. **Instruction in Dogmatology:** Based upon the current understanding of the medical condition of Dr. N. H. Gootjes and recent contact with both himself and his wife, it was apparent that Dr. N. H. Gootjes would not be able to fulfill his regular tasks for the 2009-2010 academic year. Dr. N. H. Gootjes was confirmed as being on indefinite medical leave until further certainty regarding his condition was available. To deal with the vacancy in the dogmatics department, it was agreed that there would be a further temporary

appointment(s) for the 2009-2010 academic year. The Senate was mandated to explore the matter and make a recommendation to the Academic Committee. The Academic Committee in turn was directed to bring a proposal to the next Board meeting scheduled for January 29, 2009.

- d. **Governance Committee:** The proposal of the Governance Committee relating to the procedure for the appointment of new professors was reviewed and adopted, subject to final approval by the next General Synod of the churches.
- e. **Proposal re Exit Surveys:** Rev. E. Kampen and Rev. J. Van Woudenberg were delegated to initiate the delivery of exit surveys to previous students, to collate the results, and to report on same.
- f. **Department of Old Testament:** As Dr. C. Van Dam is to retire after the 2010-2011 academic year, a vacancy in that department was declared. A search committee, comprised of Rev. E. Kampen, Rev. R. Schouten, Rev. W. Slomp, Dr. G. Visscher, and K. Veldkamp was established.

Next meeting of the Board was scheduled for January 29, 2009, D.V.

### Press release and closing

The completion of the Press Release was delegated to the Vice Chairman in consultation with the Executive and the meeting was closed with prayer and thanksgiving.

On behalf of the Board of  
Governors of the  
Theological College of the  
Canadian Reformed Churches,  
Karl J. Veldkamp, Vice Chairman

## Press Release for the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches for a meeting held on January 29, 2009

The Board of Governors met at the College Facilities in Hamilton, Ontario on January 29, 2009. Present at the meeting were Archie J. Bax, Lammert Jagt, Hank C. Kampen (Treasurer), Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen (Chairman), Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. Andrew J. Pol, Rev. Robert A. Schouten (Secretary), Rev. Willem B. Slomp, Rev. Eric Kampen, Rev. John VanWoudenberg and Karl J. Veldkamp (Vice-Chairman). All board members are present. The Principal, Dr. G.H. Visscher is also in attendance. The meeting is opened by Dr. G. Nederveen with the reading of Scripture and prayer.

### Minutes and Agenda

The minutes of the Board meeting held on December 11, 2008 were approved as written and the agenda for the meeting was settled.

### Correspondence of note

- a. A letter was sent to Dr. Hannes Breytenbach, National Coordinator of the Ministerial Training Structure of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, confirming that the Senate of the College would be interacting with their churches.
- b. Correspondence was exchanged with Dr. N.H. Gootjes regarding the current status of his health. In such correspondence Dr. N.H. Gootjes confirmed that he would not be able to fulfill his teaching duties for the foreseeable future.

### Material agenda items

- a. **Report of Visits to the Lectures:** Rev. E. Kampen and Dr. G. Nederveen provided their report on visits to the lectures of Dr. C. Van Dam, Dr. J.W. Maris, Dr. G.H. Visscher, Dr. A.J. de Visser, and Rev. J. DeGelder, which visits were completed on September 26 and October 21, 2008. These

reports indicated that such lectures were delivered soundly and ably, indicating a very positive state of affairs.

- b. **Instruction in Dogmatology:** H. Kampen and K. Veldkamp provided a report on a visit to Dr. and Mrs. Gootjes which confirmed that Dr. Gootjes was not able to fulfill his teaching duties for the foreseeable future. To fulfill the vacancy in the chair of dogmatics which had been declared by the Board, upon the recommendation of the Senate and the Academic Committee, the Board decided to appoint Rev. Van Vliet as a temporary instructor for the chair in dogmatics for the 2009-2010 academic year.
  - c. **Report of Search Committee to fulfill vacancy for the chair in Old Testament:** this committee confirmed that it had commenced its work with letters having been sent to the churches and the Senate seeking their input.
  - d. **Report of the Review and Accreditation Committee:** a report of this committee relating to alternate options for the delivery of programs (which might include part time lecturers) and the expectations that the College and the Board have of Faculty (i.e. teaching assignments, service to the churches and programs of research) was received and considered. In light of the delays being experienced in accreditation with the Association of Theological Schools (which included an independent review element) and the desire to complete an independent review prior to the Synod scheduled to convene in 2010, the accreditation committee was mandated to have an independent review completed by September 1, 2009. For this independent review the accreditation committee would involve third party professionals familiar with our churches and the College, with Reformed theological and academic backgrounds.
  - e. **Proposal from Senate re Bachelor of Theology Program:** A proposal from the Senate relating to the establishment of a Bachelor of Theology program is accepted. The purpose of this program is to meet the interest and needs of interested foreign students that do not wish to, nor are able to, enter the ministry with a Master of Divinity degree, or simply do not meet the prerequisites relating to language requirements.
  - f. **Pastoral Training Program:** The report of the program coordinator, Dr. A.J. de Visser was received which related to the internships of Ken Bergsma, Ryan DeJonge, and Rodney Vermeulen, all of which were very positive experiences. It was confirmed that the College would cover the costs associated with those supervising the catechism instruction being completed by students in the PTP program.
  - g. **Reports re Conferences:** reports relating to attendance by Professors at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society held in November, 2008 in Providence, Rhode Island, and the Bavinck Conference held in September, 2008 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, were received.
  - h. **Vice-Principal:** Dr. Van Dam was confirmed as the vice principal going forward until subsequent review scheduled for September of 2010.
- Next meeting of the Board was scheduled for September 10, 2009, D.V.

### Press release and closing

The completion of the Press Release was delegated to the executive for completion and the meeting was closed with prayer and thanksgiving.

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Karl J. Veldkamp,  
Vice Chairman