

Clarion

Numbers 10:1-10

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The Second Annual CRTS Lecture Series



Inside this Issue

- *Sexting*
- *How Do You Know God's Will for Your Life?*





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Sexting

*It is much easier to text things that you feel
or desires you have
than it is to say them aloud in person*

Have you ever heard of sexting? Not a very pleasant-sounding word, is it? The activity itself is even more foul, and yet sexting is making in-roads among our cell-phone using young people – and adults. It is the new frontier in the ugly world of pornography.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not against cellphones, iPods, or any of the new communication technology. They can all be used for much good in this world, including the spread of the gospel! Yet we must recognize that the same devices also open the door to do evil as well. As we adopt and adapt to using iPhones and BlackBerry phones, we need to consider how to maximize their good use and minimize or eliminate their evil risks. So it's time we opened our eyes to the risks of texting becoming sexting.

Texting is huge

To those who use cellphones it will come as no surprise that text messaging has become more popular for a large segment of users than making a regular voice call. Text messaging is sending a very simple message from phone to phone in digital characters that appear on the screen. Characters are typed in via the phone keypad where three or four letters are associated with each number. A user typically uses his or her thumbs to tap the keys in order to produce the desired letters. A text message is limited to 140 characters, so texters soon become quite skilled at using short forms of words. For example: "R U HM?" is short for, "Are you home?" In fact, there is almost something like a separate texting language made of commonly used short-forms.

In the last fifteen years since texting has become commercially available, usage has sky-rocketed, particularly among the young. As of June, 2011, US subscribers sent an average of 196.9 billion texts (short

for "text messages") per month! An average subscriber sends 610 messages per month (www.ctia.org/consumer_info/service/index). Among adults, seventy-two percent of cellphone users send and receive text messages (<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1572/teens-cell-phones-text-messages>).

Usage is even higher among teens. Here is a summary of recent US statistics compiled by the Pew Research Center in May, 2010:

- Some seventy-five percent of 12-17 year-olds now own cell phones, up from forty-five percent in 2004
- Fully seventy-two percent of all teens – or eighty-eight percent of teen cell phone users – are text messagers; a sharp rise from the fifty-one percent of teens who were texters in 2006
- More than half of teens (fifty-four percent) are daily texters
- One in three teens sends more than 100 text messages a day, or 3000 texts a month (collated from the previously mentioned website)

If we haven't already figured it out by our experience, this data show that our young people prefer to communicate via text than by almost any other method. Because it's a silent communicator and done where parents cannot see what is being said without making an extra effort, the content of the texts can easily go unnoticed by parents – until lines have been crossed and damage has been done.

Texting to sexting

Most of these texts will show the usual banter back and forth between teens, but some begin to strike a more personal note. Typically, parents and teens will send a quick text to keep in touch and let each other know their whereabouts and their plans. Many texts among peers are simply ways of saying "hi" or



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In This Issue

Editorial – Sexting — P.H. Holtvlüwer	102
Treasures, New and Old – How Do You Know God’s Will for Your Life? — J. Poppe	106
Liturgical Change in the Christian Reformed Church (1964-1985) (2) — W. Bredenhof	107
Press Release of the Meeting between CanRC and URCNA, November 14 and 16, 2011	109
Building an Attachment Church Community — M. Vandenbos	111
Rejoicing in Growth: Church Planting and Evangelism — T. Roukema	113
Ray of Sunshine — C. Gelms and P. Gelms	118
Book Review — reviewed by J.P. Grigoletti II	119

otherwise connecting with a friend. Texts are used to find out quick answers to social questions like what time someone will arrive, their current location, when they are off work or school, what their plans are for the day or night, if they are “busy” studying for exams and many such things. All of this can serve a useful purpose. But some texts become bolder and veer toward the intimate, even the sexually suggestive. Once they cross that line, they become “sexual text messages” and are known simply as “sexts.”

The concept itself is not new. Messages with sexual innuendo or which are even blatantly erotic have been exchanged among teens and adults in many forms over the centuries – verbally or in writing, in person or over the telephone, in poetry or in prose – even in the note passed around at school! Where hormones rage and desires are aroused, the temptation to explore sexuality outside of the God-given context of marriage has long existed and been indulged. In the digital age, many forms of pornography have multiplied and while we are increasingly aware of the dangers of *Internet* porn, are we sufficiently aware of the risks of person-to-person pornography being exchanged on the *cellphones* of our teens?

What’s Inside

The issue in your hands begins with an editorial from Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer on the sensitive but relevant topic of sexting, a trend that is rapidly on the rise especially among young cellphone users.

Rev. Wes Bredenhof brings readers the second of a five part series on liturgical changes in the Christian Reformed Church. Speaking of Rev. Bredenhof, this issue also includes a review of his new memoir, *The Gospel Under Northern Lights*.

We also have an article from Marcy Vandenbos on attachment in the church community. This article was originally a speech from a Manitoba Women’s League Day.

Rev. Tony Roukema summarizes the second annual CRTS convention, held in January at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. This year’s topic was “Rejoicing in Growth: Church planting and evangelism.”

Issue 5 contains regular columns Treasures New and Old and Ray of Sunshine. There is also one press release.

Laura Veenendaal

According to the same survey cited earlier, four percent of all cell-owning teens admitted to sending sext messages, while fifteen percent report having received one. When it rains in the world it usually drips in the church and anecdotal evidence I've run across suggests it is the same in this case. The hormones of our teens are no different from the world's and Satan has every motive to use the vulnerabilities of our teens against them in breaking down their commitment to sexual purity. Even if our teens are not given to *initiating* such messages, they can easily be on the *receiving* end, since they are hard to block. And once a person is drawn into a flirtatious exchange, it is only a small step to fall into sexual sin with serious consequences.

Texting risks

One of the differences with texting as a newer form of communication is that the texter feels freer to say things via a text which he or she would have great difficulty saying in person. When we communicate in person, the presence of the other person and how they might react is a strong reminder to us of social expectations and also the Lord's commandments, of what is acceptable and not acceptable behaviour. In the presence of others, our conscience is on much higher alert. We don't want to get in trouble, we don't want to offend or create a confrontation, we don't want to be thought of poorly, and so when we are in the company of others, we generally guard what we say and how we act.

*I would suggest that parents
teach their resident texters to see
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and the less personal the better*

That safeguard is not nearly as present when we are alone with our cell phones (or with our iPod Touch, Internet, or email for that matter). Your inhibitions are down. The tendency to say what's on your mind without restraint is much greater. It is much easier to *text* things that you feel or desires you have than it is to say them aloud in person.

It's also easier to interpret or *read into* a text you've received a message you would *like* to hear than it is to misinterpret what a person says to you face-to-face. In texting, there is no body language, tone of voice, or

speed of talking to help you understand the complete nuance of what a person is really saying. All you receive is bare text on a screen which may come across to you as suggestive. This is especially the case if you *want* it to be suggestive.

These are some reasons why a friendly exchange of texts can quickly become a flirtatious exchange and morph into a sext. Other reasons include the pressure teens face to fit in, be accepted, and be liked. Imagine a popular high school jock sending an alluring or provocative message to an unpopular girl a grade or two lower – how hard it would be for her not to respond in kind! An insecure teen could – without much difficulty – be bullied through sexting into some sort of unchaste activity. Even if it is only *perceived* pressure, peer pressure can – especially if one is alone with her cellphone – make otherwise steady people act in an inappropriate, even sinful and destructive way. It takes very little for a text to turn into a sext, which can quickly turn into a rendezvous to follow-up on heated desires.

Words and pictures

It's also important to understand that sext messages are not limited to words. With virtually every cellphone having a built-in camera, it is literally a snap to take a nude, semi-nude, or otherwise sexually explicit photograph of oneself and text it to an interested party. Sexting as the new frontier of porn comes through both prose *and* pictures. What many young sexters don't realize is that not only can these compromising photos be sent all over the world via the Internet, never to be deleted (with all the attending embarrassment, misery, and fallout with future spouses, family, and employers), but if the teen is under sixteen in Canada, that friend who received the nude pictures can be legally charged with possession of child pornography. This is no game.

Dealing with it

How, then, do we deal with sexting? The best place to begin as parents is to develop open and honest discussions about cellphone usage and its risks with your teens and young adults. Put this topic on your list for family prayer time. Together as a family regularly seek the Lord's help in being kept from temptation and in using this technology for the glory of his name. Speak about employing all gifts for the cause of Christ's kingdom. Remind your teens that there is forgiveness for this sin, too, but then in repentance there must be a powerful desire and effort to flee from temptation – something the Lord will give by his Spirit only when we ask.

There seems to be little software on the current market that filters out sexting for cellphones, so concerned parents must educate their teen or else remove the device altogether. Instruction is the first best step. However, if necessary, removal should be considered if that is what it takes to prevent a child of God from falling into sin (or relapsing). We should not forget the “deal-with sin-radically” approach of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:29, “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away.” It is better to enter eternal life having texted no more messages than to sext ourselves right into hell.

Texting guidelines

I would suggest that parents teach their resident texters to see texting as a tool for communicating very basic facts only – and the less personal the better. Comments on a person’s looks, attitude, clothes, demeanor, and the like are out of place in a text. It’s the texts of a personal or intimate nature that are in danger of becoming sexts. If you wouldn’t post the message on a public bulletin board with your name beneath it, don’t text it either.

Anything involving emotions, particularly strong emotions, should be communicated via a voice call or, better, in person so there is no mistaking the nature

and intent of those emotions. When a sext has been received, it should be reported to a parent and parents should follow up if at all possible with the parents of the sender (a sext in print is proof no parent or perpetrator can deny). If child pornography is involved, the police should be contacted. Before “send” is hit, re-read the message to check for inappropriate or misleading wording. A texter should ask, “How will this be understood by the person receiving it?” If there is doubt, rephrase for clarity or make a voice call instead.

Accountability

It is true that a parent cannot monitor every word spoken or every text sent. But if teens know that they are accountable to Dad and Mom and that they will ask regularly and check up periodically, the texters will have a stronger conscience about using this tool in a good way. Above all else, every cellphone user should have these words of Christ emblazoned on their mind, “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” Text or sext, voice call or email, conversation or communication of any kind, our ultimate accountability “partner” is the Lord Jesus himself – and with him there is no partiality. 

*“Concerned parents
must educate their teen. . .”*





MATTHEW 13:52

How Do You Know God's Will for Your Life?



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"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belongs to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."
(Deuteronomy 29:29)

We're all called to make decisions. Some of our decisions are very important and many relate to the things of everyday. Young people are faced with decisions that will have great impact on their future: whether to commit their life to the Lord, whom to marry, and what career or job to pursue. We all make decisions each day in terms of what we buy, how we spend our time and energy, what shows we watch, and what kind of music we listen to. How do we know whether our decisions are good ones? How do we know God's will for our lives?

In Scripture there are two ways of speaking about God's will, and we often confuse them. Deuteronomy 29:29 refers to both the secret and revealed will of God. His secret will is his plan for our lives. From before the foundation of the world, God has chosen his people unto salvation (Eph 1:4-5, 11; Rom 8:28-30). He has recorded their names in the Book of Life (Phil 4:3; Rev 13:8). Our days are numbered (Ps 139:16). James 4:13-15 teaches us that in planning we should always say, "The Lord willing." For God holds even the smallest things of life in his hands (Matt 10:29-30).

God knows whether we'll get married, and if so, to whom. He knows what our career path will look like. He knows where we'll live. He knows whether we'll be healthy or sick. He knows when and how we'll die. But such knowledge is too wonderful for us. We wouldn't

know what to do with it. God doesn't share with us his plan for our lives and we shouldn't try to pry into this, as some try through horoscopes, fortune-tellers, and the like.

The Scriptures speak about God's will in another way. They refer to God's revealed will (Matt 7:21; 12:50; John 4:34; 7:17; Rom 12:2). God's revealed will consists of his commands and precepts. His Word not only reveals the way of salvation through God's grace in Christ, it also teaches how we as God's people are to lead holy lives out of thankfulness for his redeeming work. God reveals his will, how he wants us to live in godliness before him.

So how do I know if this girl I'm dating is the right one for me? How do I know whether to take a job directly out of high school, or if I should take an apprenticeship, or go to college or university? How can I decide whether to stick with the job I have, or to start my own business? Is it OK for me to spend \$1000 on a new flatscreen TV? Is it right to take out a \$300,000 mortgage to buy the house of my dreams? The Bible doesn't give me answers to these questions. How am I supposed to know God's will for my life?

Answering these specific questions requires us to study God's Word diligently and to pray for the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Often it is good to seek advice from parents and grandparents, pastors and elders. While God's Word does

not always provide answers to our specific questions, its wisdom does give clear direction in how to live according to God's will.

For example, God's Word makes clear that when seeking a marriage partner, we are to look for someone who shares our faith and leads a godly life (2 Cor 6:14-18; 1 Pet 3:1-7; Eph 5:21-32). God's Word also has much to say about our calling to work, and to do this faithfully in the service of Christ (Gen 1:28; Exod 20:9; Eph 6:5-6; Col 3:23-24). Our decisions about what job to take or what career to follow should not be determined on the basis of how much they pay. Rather, we need to evaluate our gifts, our interests, and what we would bring glory to God and benefit our neighbour.

God's Word teaches us much about stewardship, too (Gen 1:16-30; Matt 25:14-29). It warns against allowing money to be our god and against covetousness (Matt 6:24; Exod 20:17; 1 Tim 6:6-10; Heb 13:5). We are to fight against all selfishness as a work of the sinful flesh (Gal 5:20; Phil 2:3; James 3:14-16). We are taught to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness (Matt 6:33). These passages give much guidance about how we are to spend our time and money.

If we are willing to submit our hearts to the direction of God's Word and Spirit, then it won't be difficult to discern God's will for our lives. God's blessing rests on all who love him and obey his commands. 



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Liturgical Change in the Christian Reformed Church (1964-1985) Part 2 of 5

In the previous instalment, we noted that the 1960s were a tumultuous time, not only for North American society in general, but also for the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC). Especially at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, there was increasing pressure to change the church. Most of this pressure came from professors and ministers. In this instalment, we begin to survey developments at the synodical level in the CRC.

Synod 1964

Our survey begins in 1964 with the appointment of the Liturgical Committee. How did this committee come into existence? A committee was originally appointed in 1957 already to undertake a revision of the Form for the Lord's Supper. This committee presented its work to Synod 1964. Accompanying the report on Liturgical Form Revision was a request from Classis Grand Rapids East (CGRE) to appoint a standing Liturgical Committee. Is there any significance to the fact that the request came from the classis that included Calvin College and Seminary? I have not been able to determine the answer to that question, but I have my suspicions.

The overture from CGRE was to appoint a committee whose task would be "to engage in a thorough and continuing study of the liturgy and worship of the church beginning with a study of the scriptural principles of worship, the role of the sacraments. . . and the history of Reformed liturgy." The committee would then come with guidance. It would provide direction with regard to both liturgical practice and the ongoing revision of liturgical forms.

The ad hoc committee for Liturgical Form Revision recognized the value of this overture. They said, "There is in our time, in the church at large, an awakening

interest in liturgical matters and a growing concern for liturgical reform." There were also liturgical concerns recognized in the CRC. Among these was the fact that the use of choirs had become increasingly common, even though this was discouraged by CRC synods in the past. There was also the matter of home mission and liturgy. The committee asked, "What flexibility is allowable in the structuring of worship in the newly emerging churches?" Thus the committee recognized the concerns of the CGRE overture. However, in the end, the ad hoc committee recommended that Synod 1964 not accede to the CGRE overture for a standing committee on liturgy, but instead just appoint another ad hoc committee.

For the most part, Synod 1964 seems to have agreed with CGRE. They appointed a standing liturgical committee with the following mandate:

- a. To review all our liturgical literature in the light of its history, its theological content, and the contemporary needs of the churches; and to recommend such revisions or substitutes as the results of this review might recommend.
- b. To study liturgical usages and practices in our churches in the light of Reformed liturgical principles and past synodical decisions, and to advise Synod as to the guidance and supervision it ought to provide local congregations in all liturgical matters.

This proposal was adopted and so a committee was spawned which endured for the length of the period we are investigating. There are two aspects to this committee's mandate: work on the liturgical forms and undertake a study regarding the liturgy more broadly considered. It is this latter aspect to which I want to devote special attention in what follows.

Thus far already we can see that the genesis of this committee is partly accounted for by discrepancy between local practice and synodical decisions or recommendations. It is also partly accounted for by the growing emphasis in the CRC upon evangelism/home mission. However, no less important was the increasing pressure for liturgical change in American Christianity in general. Such pressure also filtered into the CRC in this tumultuous era.

Synod 1968 – a major development

At Synod 1968 we find a report from the Liturgical Committee which sets the course for at least the next three decades. Since this report is quite lengthy, the most we can do here is summarize its highlights. The report was written because the Committee felt that their mandate could be accomplished only by means of a thorough study. The primary drafter of the report appears to have been Dr. Lewis B. Smedes, a figure known to push the boundaries of Reformed orthodoxy.

The report was meant to function as a study primarily of the morning worship service, although much of what was written was recognized as applying equally to the second service. The report began with some general comments about liturgy and its origin. The report then moved into a focused discussion on the character of worship. This was done through surveys of both the Old and New Testaments. This is where we discover the guiding principle which determined CRC discussions on worship from this moment forward: "Worship for the people of God has always been a dialogue." Dialogue was further said to be "the inherent structure of worship. The question of liturgy is the question of how the dialogue is appropriately and effectively articulated."

The report proceeded to speak about "The Enduring Structure of Liturgy." It asserted that precise rules are not to be found in the New Testament itself, although several elements may be detected: prayers, confession of faith, reading, preaching, greetings and blessings, offerings, and the sacraments. There was great freedom in the liturgy of the apostolic church, but the substance was always about maintaining the dialogical principle. Much the same is witnessed in the first five centuries of the church. Even with the Roman mass and all that was tragic about it, the basic dialogical structure was maintained: "Hid beneath clerical domination and liturgical embroidery is the structure, at least, of the ancient dialogue. . . while the instrumentation was badly fouled, the symphonic structure was the same." Calvin, following Bucer, maintained and even strengthened this dialogical

structure. With respect to the Dutch liturgy of Peter Dathenus, the basic structure was followed again, but with more emphasis being given to the Word. This was not seen by the report as a positive development. The conclusion of the report at this point was to ask the question "whether we can truly recapture the enduring structure of the liturgy of the Christian church, and thus become more Calvinistic and more catholic at the same time."

We begin to survey developments at the synodical level in the CRC

Four motifs were brought forward to function as criteria for evaluating the liturgy. The first is the biblical motif. Here we find a surprising statement: "The Bible does not prescribe an order of worship; hence we do not contend that the church must do only those things expressly commanded for worship. But the Bible is our basic orientation." Already here we need to stop, analyze, and evaluate this statement. The reasoning was not cogent.

First, we find the fact that the Bible does not stipulate an order in which worship must be conducted. Then the conclusion is that we may not argue that worship must contain only those elements which are expressly commanded in Scripture. This is a non sequitur. The conclusion does not follow from the premise. The premise speaks of structure and order; the conclusion speaks of elements. They're apples and oranges.

Second, speaking historically, this is not a Reformed conclusion. This is not the view found in the Three Forms of Unity, for instance in Lord's Day 35 or Belgic Confession Article 7. The position taken in this report abandoned a basic Reformed principle of worship. Not only that, but it also represented that confessional position prejudicially. The addition of the word "expressly" deliberately overstated matters. Historically, it has been recognized by Reformed churches that God's Word regulates the elements of our worship in a variety of manners, and not always with "express" commands.

The committee went on to deal with the second motif, the catholic. This demands "that Christians of any time or place in the past or present ought to be able to recognize our worship as Christian worship." The confessional motif was the third one and this served as a counter-balance to the catholic motif. Here worship is more defined: ". . .the church at worship is limited by its

confessions; worship ought to be consistent with them at the least and embody them at the most." The irony of this statement was that there was not a single place in the report where the confessional data that deals with worship was acknowledged, much less engaged with. The Reformed confessions were ignored and this results in a lamentable one-sidedness, as we shall see further.

Finally, the report also spoke of a pastoral motif. Referring here to John Calvin, the report insisted that love must be our guide. The liturgy and whatever changes are made to it must have edification as its end: "The liturgy must serve to edify; and what is useful for edification in Manhattan, New York, may be harmful in Manhattan, Montana." Thus the committee refrained from looking to synodical regulation concerning liturgical details in the CRC.

From here the report went on to discuss the components of liturgy. Much of what was presented there is familiar. The components mentioned were the same elements that one would generally find in any given Canadian Reformed church today. Even

in the section on preaching, there is a traditional, conservative approach. There were no innovations in this section of the report.

The report concluded with three model services proposed by the committee for experimentation purposes in local CRC congregations. Notable in these models was the use of abundant vocal response on the part of the congregation. That would seem to have fit with the strong emphasis on dialogical structure in the report.

Synod 1968 commended "this report to the churches for their study and consideration." There does not appear to have been any controversy surrounding the report. As we conclude this section, I would ask you again to note these two key features: 1) the heavy stress on the dialogical structure of Christian worship; 2) the lack of attention given to what is confessed about worship in the Three Forms of Unity. These two points will return as we continue our survey.

Next time: Synod 1973 – Pushing the Boundaries



Press Release

Press Release of meeting between CanRC and URCNA, November 14 and 16, 2011

The 2011 meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) in Lawrenceville, GA provided opportunity for personal and extended engagement between representatives from the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA).

All or most of the representatives from the URCNA's Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) and the Canadian Reformed Churches' Committee for Church Unity (CCU) and Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA) met on two separate occasions (November 14 and 16). Those present from the CanRC were Rev. Willem Den Hollander, Rev. Clarence Vander Velde (from the CCU), Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, Rev. Eric Kampen, and Elder Henry van Delden (from the CCCNA). From the URCNA

Rev. Greg Bero, Rev. Bill Boekestein, Rev. John Bouwers, Rev. Todd De Rooy, Rev. Bill Pols, Rev. Ralph Pontier, Elder Al Vermeer, and Rev. Harry Zekveld were present.

The purpose of the meetings was to discuss goals, expectations, frustrations, and commitments regarding the relationship between the two federations. The meetings also presented opportunity for the representatives to develop personal relationships with and grow in appreciation for one another. A number of potential objections to the proposed merger between the URCNA and CanRC were discussed along with ways to constructively respond to them.

Getting to know one another

It was observed that congregations do not affiliate in a federation on the basis of knowing every other congregation but rather on the basis of confessional agreement; something which does exist between the URCNA and the CanRC. Still, the representatives felt the practical importance of facilitating ways for

Church News

Called by the Chatham CanRC (for the second time):

Rev. D. De Boer

of Dunnville, Ontario CanRC

Called by the Chilliwack, British Columbia CanRC:

Rev. J. Poppe

of Winnipeg (Redeemer) Manitoba

Called by the Redeemer CanRC of Winnipeg for mission work in Manitoba:

Rev. K. Wieske

missionary in Brazil of the Maranatha CanRC of Surrey, British Columbia

ministers and congregations from the respective federations to get to know each other. In particular, congregations are encouraged to open their pulpits to ministers from their sister church. Classes are encouraged to extend invitations to fraternal delegates for the purpose of developing closer ties; classes in the USA are encouraged to receive members of the Canadian Reformed Coordinators for Church Unity as fraternal delegates to their meetings. Where feasible, classes are also encouraged to consider holding joint CanRC/URCNA classis meetings (business meetings would be conducted separately; devotions, meals, and other times of interaction could be enjoyed jointly. Such an arrangement is being planned for Spring 2012 between Classis East of the URCNA and Presbytery New Jersey of the OPC). As a step toward getting to know each other Rev. Willem den Hollander has given a brief presentation on CanRC/URCNA history and relations which can be viewed at youtube.com. Lack of knowledge of one another may also contribute to the concern that our two denominations are simply too different from each other. In response, the CanRC delegates pointed out that diversity in the URC can be a strength provided that those who disagree on non-confessional matters make no attempt to bind the consciences of another.

Getting to trust one another

There are some in the URC who mistakenly lump the CanRC with the Federal Vision (FV) stream of thought. Given the positions taken against FV by the URCNA and other NAPARC denominations, such a view naturally breeds distrust. Dr. Wes Bredenhof has written a series of articles to help dispel this misunderstanding by distinguishing the CanRC and FV (the first installment of which can be read at <http://www.reformedfellowship.net/articles/federal-vision->

[bredenhof-jul-aug11v61-n4.htm](http://www.reformedfellowship.net/articles/federal-vision-bredenhof-jul-aug11v61-n4.htm)). On the other hand there are some in the CanRC who are hurt to hear that they are not trusted. Such feelings have had a cooling effect among some in the CanRC regarding the merger.

It was also acknowledged that there has existed in the CanRCs an element of exclusivism which could also create disinterest among URCs to join with them. The old thinking that existed among some in the CanRC was that there could be only one visible manifestation of the true church so that every church, other than one's own, must be a false church. As Dr. Godfrey mentioned in his address to NAPARC the recognition of denominations entails acknowledgement that there are other Christian bodies that are faithful manifestations of the true church. The CanRC representatives humbly acknowledged personal and denominational development with regard to this view.

There is also a fear among some URCs that the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) is hierarchical. It was observed that part of that perception could come from a functional congregationalism that may exist in some URCNA churches. It was pointed out that until greater trust develops there will remain an unwillingness on the part of some to embrace delegated assemblies.

Appreciating the ecumenical imperative

The representatives would encourage preaching on John 17:21 and other texts which highlight the moral imperative of unity. The general consensus amongst the brothers was that while formal, organic unity cannot exist in any beneficial or meaningful way where there is no spiritual unity, both are essential. Formal, organic unity is the structure and shape of spiritual unity.

In summary, CERCU encourages each classis and consistory to continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger between the CanRC and the URCNA. The Canadian Reformed brothers expressed their eagerness and willingness to come to any classis to address any concerns to enable us to come to know and trust one another more fully. Those who have been involved in this process of facilitating greater unity have been profoundly impacted with the spirit of unity. Throughout the process relationships have been formed and misconceptions addressed. It seems that most or all of those present have experienced progress in terms of our understanding of the unity of the church. We have also experienced how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell in unity (Ps 133:1).



Building an Attachment Church Community

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This article was originally a speech held at Manitoba Women's League Day, 2011

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5

An attachment is a force of attraction pulling two bodies toward each other and this verse from John 15 gives a beautiful description of how God pulls us to him and causes us to be attached to him. John 15 continues to develop that theme of attachment, staying close to God so that we as church may have a compass point toward which we may turn so we don't get lost. God is the ultimate compass or attachment point around which his church revolves, teaching us how to build an attachment church community. In this article I would like to look at who the church community is, how the church community can become and stay connected, and how we may celebrate the attachment church community.

Who the church community is

The church is a group of "chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet 2:9). Many of us will say, we know that, but it doesn't feel like that. In fact it feels more like "When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:21-24). The struggle between saint and sinner is very real on this earth, because that is who we are. We are not saint or sinner, but saint *and* sinner. We are Christians under

construction who continue to grow to be like Christ as we look to him for direction. "Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!" is the answer Paul gives in Romans 7:25 to the question he posed in verse 24.

Attachment theory

In this next section I would like to look at a psychological theory put forward by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, who observed children with their mothers in real-life settings and found an innate need for the child to form an attachment bond with its mother or another adult. Gordon Neufeld continued their work and has since put together a great amount of information to help us understand attachment.

According to these theorists, attachment has four distinguishing characteristics:

1. **Secure Base** – The attachment figure acts as a base of security from which the child can explore the surrounding environment. In the church community our secure base is the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, God has placed Christ as the head of the church (Eph 5:23) and Christ has given the keys of his kingdom to the church and its leaders (Matt 16:17-20).
2. **Safe Haven** – Returning to the attachment figure for comfort and safety in the face of a fear or threat. As church members we look to God as our refuge and strength. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Ps 46:1).
3. **Proximity Maintenance** – The desire to be near the people we are attached to. This is why we can say with David, "Come let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care" (Ps 95:6,7). Ephesians 2:19-22 describes the church as: "Consequently you are no longer

foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

4. Separation Distress – Anxiety that occurs in the absence of the attachment figure. Again we can hear and echo David's cries of distress when he feels separated from God "I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted (Ps 77:1, 2).

Usually there is one key primary attachment person who presents as a safe haven and secure base and for the church this is Christ, our head; but he has given the task of shepherding his people on this earth to overseers and deacons of the church. Therefore, in the church we look for a safe haven in which to be with his people and together glorify God, serve others, and grow to be like Christ.

So how do we attach to this attachment figure which is our compass point, giving us directions so that we do not get lost? Neufeld describes six ways of attaching which all children, adolescents, and adults need to go through, from simple to complex:

1. Senses – through our senses of smell, sight, sound, taste, and touch we begin to bond. As infants use their senses to attach to their mother, we as church members also bond to God. He has given us his wonderful creation, his general revelation, from which we can sense him. "The heavens declare the glory of God: the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps 19:1ff).
2. Sameness – we try to be like the one we feel closest to, to identify with them, imitate them. Paul describes this in Romans 8:28-29, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."
3. Belonging and loyalty – this is when we lay claim to the one we are attached to, being faithful and obedient to them. Joshua warns God's people about serving other gods and then proclaims: "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Josh 24:15).
4. Significance – feeling like we matter to somebody. John tells us how much we matter to God when he says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his

one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

5. Feeling – pursuit of emotional intimacy where we carry the image of a loving and beloved figure in whom we find support and comfort. Throughout 1 John we get a beautiful description of God's love for us in that he sent his only Son that we might live and be his children, but one verse summarizes this. "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:11, 12).
6. Being known – we feel close to someone when we are known by them and God knows us. "O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar" (Ps 139:1, 2ff).

Thus we see that as church community we have many ways to stay close to our God but as a community of believers it is more difficult to stay attached to each other. We must follow those same six steps to attach to one another and to find a safe haven in the church community.

Therefore I would like to look at what prevents us from staying attached to the church community. Although we would like to work together as a community of believers the first obstacle is that the busyness of life gets in the way. We all have our own jobs and families, our leisure time to relax and refresh, but it is also very important to carefully review our schedules and build in time to connect with one another so that when there are issues we have the bond of faith to be able to reach out to each other with love and care. If we have not built up a rapport with a brother or sister, they will not feel safe enough to come and share their burdens, which Paul explains in Galatians 6:1, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently."

Past hurts and vulnerable places also get in the way of staying connected. Because of things that have happened in our past, either things we have done, or things that have been done to us, this can make us emotionally wounded and cause us to react in a way which may have nothing to do with what is happening right now. Knowing our vulnerable places can help us become aware of them when they are triggered later in life.

Small things add up to big things. Perhaps we have been on the receiving end of critical comments, insensitive remarks, or irritating acts, whether intentional or not and one more thoughtless act or comment pushes us over the edge. When we feel these hurts from people of the church community, they take on a life of their own. We start to hear, "You don't care about

me; you don't want me, understand me, respect me, or love me. Therefore, there is no way I can trust you with my heart. It isn't safe" (Hart & Morris, 2003, p. 19).

Or there could be a big disappointment in our relationship with the church community. Something happens which makes us feel shut out by the church community. We do not feel the emotional support of its members; therefore we start to look elsewhere, to other church communities for support. We believe that the church community was not there when we needed them the most. We believe there has been a betrayal of trust, our heart has been injured, and judgment has been exercised upon us without anyone fully hearing our side of the event.

All of these obstacle fuel a cycle which can lead to one of four attachment styles which I have applied to the church community.

1. Secure attachment – people who are securely attached to their church community generally become visibly upset when there are problems in the church and are sincerely happy when conflicts are resolved and sheep return to the church community. As adults, those who are securely attached tend to have trusting, long-term relationships. Other key characteristics of securely attached individuals include having high Christ-esteem, enjoying intimate relationships, seeking out social support, and an ability to share feelings with other people.
2. Anxious/Ambivalent attachment - People who are ambivalently attached tend to be extremely suspicious of strangers. They will become overly distressed with problems in the church community but do not seem reassured or comforted by their resolution. In some cases, the member might passively reject the church community by refusing comfort, or may openly display direct aggression toward the church community.

Research has suggested that this attachment style might be a result of abusive or neglectful support from a caregiver. A person who continually goes to a caregiver for comfort or soothing, but instead gets punished, will learn to avoid seeking help in the future. As adults, those with an ambivalent attachment style often feel reluctant about becoming close to others and worry that others do not reciprocate their feelings. This leads to frequent breakups, often because the church relationship feels cold and distant. These individuals feel especially distraught after the end of a church relationship.

3. Avoidant attachment - People with avoidant attachment styles tend to avoid the church community as an attachment figure. This avoidance

often becomes especially pronounced after a period of absence. These people might not reject attention from the church community, but neither do they seek its comfort or contact. People with an avoidant attachment show no preference between church communities.

As adults, those with an avoidant attachment tend to have difficulty with intimacy and close relationships. These individuals do not invest much emotion in church relationships and experience little distress when a relationship ends. They often avoid close church connections by using excuses such as long work hours. Other common characteristics include a failure to support other church community members during stressful times and an inability to share feelings, thoughts, and emotions with other members.

John Gottman describes four key behaviours which are extremely detrimental to staying connected to others or finding a safe haven with them and he applies them to the marriage relationship. He calls these interactions the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Rev 6:2-8). Since the church is the bride of Christ we can also apply these behaviours to the church community today.

1. White horse – criticism which is a personal attack on the character of another person. Criticisms often contain a tinge of being let down or of having trust betrayed (Hart & Morris, 2003).
2. Red horse – contempt is one step further than criticism because it takes aim at the sense of self-respect. This includes insults and name-calling, hostile humour, mockery, and body language which portrays contempt: sneering, rolling the eyes, curling up the lip, deep sighing.
3. Black horse – follows contempt closely and is defensive. The natural response to attack is to protect ourselves and go on the defensive. It may sound like: "That is *not* what I meant." "You have it *all wrong*." "I know what it looks like *on the outside*, but I was just about to. . . ." It may look like: edges of the mouth curl up, eyes don't light up, defended body shifts from side to side, arms folded across chest forming a breastplate, hands fiddle around neck or rub eyes to clear vision, and the eyes look away (Hart & Morris, 2003, p101).
4. Pale horse – stonewalling which is when one person stops responding to the other, putting up an impenetrable invisible wall. The message this sends is "you really don't count, you don't matter to me or you're not even worth fighting with." The interaction becomes aloof, distant, detached, and seemingly uncaring (Hart & Morris, 2003).

How the church community can become connected

We have seen what the church community looks like through the lens of the attachment theory and I will now continue to use that lens to show how the church community can become more connected and therefore more attached to our Triune God. 1 John 4:20, 21 "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, who he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

Dr. Archibald Hart and Dr. Sharon Morris describe three building blocks for creating a safe haven: trust, emotional availability, and sensitive responsiveness. They describe trust in two ways, reliability trust which is dependable, on time, honest, truthful. "Those who know your name will trust in you, for you Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you" (Ps 9:10). The second way is heart trust where no matter what happens we will be there for you, having your wellbeing always at heart. "Accept one another, then just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Rom 15:7).

The second leg of the tripod is emotional availability. This means that when someone needs you, you are there physically and emotionally, where others can find you and turning your full attention toward them. This is done through active listening which includes looking, listening, matching, and tracking; acknowledging what the other is saying; inviting more information; checking out or clarifying the information; and summarizing to ensure the accuracy of your understanding. All this is done verbally and non-verbally.

The third leg is called sensitive responsiveness. Even though someone may be trustworthy and emotionally available, if they do not respond sensitively the whole connection can be broken. Being sensitively responsive means listening with warmth and ease without judging. You are able to share your deepest issues without fear of rejection, criticism, or disinterest.

If we are able to see these three aspects in creating a safe attachment church community as a three legged stool we can see how wobbly the whole structure becomes if even one of those legs is a little shorter than the other two. If all three of the legs are at different lengths then the whole community can come crashing down even if the teachings of the church are theologically sound. Tara Barthel, in her Peacemaking Church Women's Study, calls this the difference between our confessional theology (what we claim to believe) and our practical theology (how we actually live).

Celebrating the attachment church community

Ephesians 4:1-3 tells us, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." When we are rightly attached to God, this is going to overflow into love for our neighbour whether within the church community or without. Let's work hard so that we are not defined by other people, but be wholly defined by the gospel. Let us be who we are – with grace, and learn to use our gifts – with grace. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pet 4:10). Three qualities of God's character are essential ingredients for lasting change – lavishing grace, truth, and redemptive time on others – just as we receive them from God (Barthel, 2007).

When we do these things God is pleased. "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore" (Ps 133). Because of God's grace through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, and through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, we can obey the truth of God's law. Celebrate by praising God in song and gathering together in fellowship and friendship over a meal or simply coffee socials. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord and celebrate with all his people the attachment he has built into us for himself and all his church.

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Rejoicing in Growth: Church Planting and Evangelism

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The Second Annual CRTS Lecture Series, January 13-14, 2012

One of the areas of great interest in our churches is the spreading of the gospel into our communities. As individuals and as churches we have been asking questions of how we might more effectively engage our neighbors and bring them the Word. This interest was clearly evidenced by the large turnout of ministers, missionaries, evangelism committee members, and others who came to the Rejoicing in Growth conference, hosted by the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) on January 13 and 14.

Rev. Henk Drost: Spreading the seed of the word

Rev. Drost, a missionary with our sister churches in The Netherlands, who is currently serving as a missionary in Ukraine, spoke first. He used the Parable of the Sower to explain the how and why of evangelism. In bringing the Word, he said, we sow and let go, prayerfully bringing the gospel, knowing that God is the one who will bring the growth.

Rev. Drost spoke of the identity markers of Reformed evangelism: Word, grace, choice, and body. He stressed that we must bring the Word in a way they will understand, realizing at the same time that it is not simply about reaching the outsider, but reaching the outsider with the Word. The method will not dictate the result. Only God can bring conversion. We sow and pray; we go forward with the Word and the Spirit. As we go forward we bring the grace of God. We lovingly confront people with the reality that they are sinners. It is only when they grasp this reality that they will fully see the grace of reconciliation with God through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we bring this gospel of grace, the Holy Spirit will work in them through the Word, and at some point they need to make a decision – a choice. They need to respond to the call of the gospel. The call of the gospel involves a call to become a member of Christ's church. The weary sinner finds rest in the body of Christ, and in the church Christ supplies

what is need for the journey through the preaching of the gospel and the sacraments, fellowship, and pastoral care and teaching.

Rev. Ross Graham: Reformed church planting in the twenty-first century

Rev. Ross Graham, a teacher of church planters for the OPC, took the stage next. He emphasized that church planting is a powerful work of the Holy Spirit wherein the Shepherd brings together his sheep. However, he also warned that the church planting movement in North America has entrenched expectations of how things are done, and these expectations are in conflict with the Reformed approach, so we must be aware of our underlying assumptions as we carry out this work.

The first assumption we work with is that our churches are ruled collectively by elders, and not by a single visionary pastor/leader. Within this assumption is the biblical approach to the offices, to church governance and, to what Rev. Graham called a connectional perspective. The term connectional refers to the strong ties that connect us within the church and as churches. Most church planting material is written from a non-connectional perspective, meaning that they focus on a strong leader and assume a lack of structure and governance. Using these materials will often lead to frustration because they are in conflict with biblical principles regarding the church and church government.

The second assumption is that our confessional beliefs determine the outworking of our ministries. When we plant churches we are not starting from scratch. We are connected, not only to each other and to other churches, but also to our doctrinal confessions. The tendency in church planting networks, Graham said, is to avoid strong doctrinal commitments since they can be an impediment to growth.

The third assumption is that the emphases with which a church is begun determine how it will believe and function in the future. We begin the church with the same commitment to structure, preaching, and teaching that we hope to see in a mature church.

Building on these three assumptions, we should build churches, encouraging them to be self-consciously Reformed in doctrine, Reformed in government, and ecclesiastical in ministry. Rev. Graham ended by expressing his hope that churches of this kind might be an effective voice speaking into our decaying culture.

Rev. Henk Drost: Developing missionary-minded congregations

Rev. Drost began his second presentation by pointing out that God works in his church, and from within his church – from within us – his energy goes out to those around. We are to be salt and light in the world, and that means that we must grow in our faith and live out our faith. It is impossible to be missionary-minded without this sanctification being present, for people will only ask us about our faith if they see us living it. It is on the foundation of the covenant that there is this movement of building up and reaching out.

Here Rev. Drost interacted with what he considered one of the weaknesses of the church planting movement, and that is their concept of church. Under the cover of mission work people start their own congregations and advance fragmentation and disunity. The key to growth, he said, is not to build a better church, but to revitalize the existing church. There is a call to us to be faithful in the place God has put us.

Rev. Drost emphasized here the active and central role the consistory must play in building up and equipping the church as they grow in grace, communion, and witnessing. Grace is at the heart of the church. Grace must be proclaimed and the consistory must ensure that this is happening. A listening congregation, Drost said, becomes an active congregation. They become aware of grace and they wish to share it. We should also see that the communion of saints has something to offer this world. The consistory is the engine of this movement to build up the communion and to reach out as that communion, as they urge the congregation to live holy lives in Christ and use the gifts of the Spirit. The church must then use her mouth – she must witness what is heard from the pulpit. Effective witnessing involves knowledge, and the consistory has a role here in providing for confessionally-based instruction and guidance.

Rev. Theodore van Raalte: Motivating Reformed churches to multiply

The afternoon was rounded off by Rev. Ted Van Raalte, minister of Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church in Surrey, B.C., speaking on what some of the churches in the Fraser Valley have been looking at doing in Burnaby. He pointed out that our churches in the Fraser Valley started in the city, but we have drifted to the outlying suburbs. He countered the suggestion that Canadian Reformed Churches do not have a love for the city in their DNA and argued that this desire can be built.

On Saturday morning we once again assembled and attendees could choose from four sessions. The sessions were offered in parallel twice, meaning that all the attendees could attend two of the four.

Rev. Ross Graham: Six things to remember about planting a Reformed church

Rev. Graham began his session by pointing out that planting a church is a frontal assault on the forces of Satan. He then laid out the plan of attack that is followed in the OPC. Each step was backed up by an explanation of a passage from Scripture.

1. Start by gathering a core group that will form the new church (Acts 17:2)
2. Appoint elders to oversee the group (Acts 18:5)
3. Bring in an organizing pastor to set in order what remains (Titus 1:5)
4. Take the time necessary to allow the body of Christ to be formed in the group (Gal 4:19)
5. Organize the group as a church (Eph 4:11-16)
6. Expect the new church to take its place and assume its responsibilities within its regional and national body (Phil 4:15)

Following these steps, Rev. Graham said, provides for a consistent Reformed church planting methodology that grows out of an understanding that we take seriously our Reformed confessions and church government.

Rev. Theodore van Raalte: Practical steps for church planting in urban centres: lessons from the Reformation

Rev. van Raalte opened his workshop by presenting the variety of tools used by the Reformers of the sixteenth century to effect the Reformation of the cities of Europe. Using alliteration, he reviewed some nine tools - preaching, popular language, public disputations, prayer, profession, publications, psalm singing, prints, and posted mail. Bridging the gap to the present, Rev. van Raalte pointed out that urban areas today are much more populous and often multi-cultural, which means that apologetics is more needed today,

but the basic scriptural message is the same and needs to get out by every legitimate means. The participants split up into small groups to consider a number of questions and challenges that CanRCs would face when reaching into the heart of urban areas, from targeting ethnic groups to overcoming certain CanRC traditions or characteristics to implementing Christian schooling in the inner city.

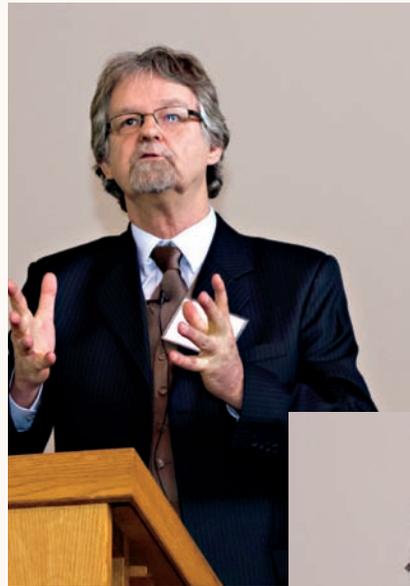
Rev. John van Popta and Bonita van Popta: Reaching your neighbours: evangelism and video programs

The van Poptas shared their evaluations of various video evangelism programs as a way to reach out to our neighbours, friends, and colleagues. They looked at four different programs and evaluated them on biblical, confessional, and practical grounds. The various programs have differing strengths and weaknesses, which were highlighted in the presentation and discussion. The van Poptas noted that these evangelistic programs are based on “small group” formats where building relationships is of paramount importance.

Rev. Jim Witteveen: The Prince George Canadian Reformed Mission Project

Rev. Witteveen outlined the exciting work God is doing in Prince George. The church hosts a number of Bible studies and programs and advertises these via newspaper, radio, and Facebook. Rev. Witteveen has also served as a volunteer chaplain and is on the board of the crisis pregnancy centre.

Rev. Witteveen emphasized that we have a mission field right in front of us. There is much opportunity and the Canadian Reformed Churches have much to offer. We have the gospel and it is preached faithfully. We have the Reformed confessions, which guard sound doctrine, and it is difficult for someone to come up with a new wind of doctrine or teaching and begin spreading that in a new church. We have a biblical church order that the church must follow, which protects members from being treated unjustly. There is much injustice in churches in North America, precisely because they do not have a church order. We also have a serious, liturgical style of worship and our worship services are predictable and normal. So many people are coming from a background where they see worship in church as just plain weird and unpredictable. And we sing the psalms and have a spiritual depth to our singing that so many churches out there do not enjoy. Rev. Witteveen stressed that we do not need to apologize for what we have and what we are. We have something beautiful and powerful and we should be willing to share it.



Rev. Henk Drost



Rev. Ross Graham

Conclusion

Rev. Drost then closed the meeting with some reflections on the conference. He urged the attendees to be realistic as they take on this work of evangelism and outreach. This type of work, he said, is like standing in the mud. There is the mud that is inside your heart – the feeling that you don’t have the boldness to talk about Jesus Christ, and there is the mud that is around you – the situation that we find ourselves in and which we must work through. He encouraged the Canadian Reformed Churches to go forward with God’s strength.

The conference was a delight in terms of learning, fellowship, and opportunities for the future. At one point during the conference, Dr. G.H. Visscher challenged the attendees with a question about evangelism and outreach, and it is a challenge that serves as an appropriate way to conclude this article. He asked, “Are you mature enough in Christ to be involved in this activity?” This is certainly something to consider as we make our way through the mud.¹

¹ If you are interesting in learning more about standing in the mud, you can access video for the speeches at www.canadianreformedseminary.ca/general/2012_conference.html. The van Popta material on video programs can be found at <http://www.soulequipment.com>.



Ray of Sunshine

by Corinne Gelms and
Patricia Gelms



Tinielle VanRootselaar

Hi, I am going to be sixteen on March 14! I live with my family in Dunnville, Ontario after having moved from Chatham. I love dolls and taking care of them and I love Anchor Camp in the summer. I like to bowl with my bowling friends on the Dunnville Dynamos team and playing baseball at ACRES in the summer.

I go to Friendship Club as well and my favorite song is "Jesus loves me." When I grow up I want to live in one of the Anchor Homes because I won't be able to live by myself. I love my family and I have lots of brothers and sisters and I am an aunt as well! I love getting mail and look forward to my birthday! Hope you all have a good day.

Birthdays in March

We hope you have a great "sweet" sixteen birthday Tinielle, may the Lord continue to bless you and your family with many more years. We also give our hearty birthday greetings to Trevor, James, Gerry, Lisa, and Jim. We wish you the Lord's blessing in this your new year and pray that he will sustain you with strength

and health. May you receive all that you need to live in service to our heavenly Father. We praise God for you and wish you a wonderful day celebrating with friends and family.

- 3 TREVOR HOFSTINK will be 34**
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- 10 JAMES BOONE will be 16**
1020 Abbeydale Drive, NE
Calgary, AB T2A 6H5
- 12 GERRY EELHART will be 50**
C/O Mrs. Grace Eelhart
#120, 13425-57 Street, Emmanuel Home
Edmonton, AB T5A 2G1
- 14 TINIELLE VANROOTSELAAR will be 16**
409 Cedar Street
Dunnville, ON N1A 2J2
- 14 LISA ALKEMA will be 31**
6528 1st Line,
RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4
- 15 JIM VANDERHEIDEN will be 53**
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

A note to all parents and caregivers

If there are any address or other changes that we need to be aware of please let us know as soon as possible.

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reviewed by Joseph Paul Grigoletti II

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Wes Bredenhof, *The Gospel Under The Northern Lights* (Providence Press, 2011)

Additional Information: 325 p., \$19.95 USD

Rev. Dr. Wes Bredenhof's memoir, *The Gospel Under The Northern Lights*, can be described as a non-biblical means of grace that thaws the soul and drives the heart to delight in the God in desiring to see the gospel proclaimed to all people groups both local and afar. In 325 pages we encounter the life of a young man searching for vocation and through the normal workings of ordinary men and church polity an extraordinary work of gospel ministry commences in British Columbia. Now, you must understand, I am an American (born and raised) from a non-Christian background, I encounter worlds I have never known: Canada, Third Nations, Dutch Reformed. And after reading this memoir, I have a better appreciation of the hard work ministers/missionaries do in their preparation (seminary, college, examines, ordination etc. . .), their day to day ministry lives, and their personal lives. . . for better or for worse.

After a brief preface and list of acknowledgements (takes up three pages), chapter 1 exists apart from the story by informing the reader about the history of the people and region in northern British Columbia from the days of French Roman Catholic missionaries to the present day. One thing that I appreciated is that Rev. Dr. Bredenhof takes the pain in this section to reference his points, but keeps the information minimal so one is not likely to forget that this is the foundation to the story. The story of how the French word *Babine* came to be used is quite an interesting one and made for lots of LOLs in the margins as I marked up the book on my e-book reader's notes function. But as interesting as history is, it serves as the fountain head for one unique story.

In chapter two we meet our story teller on page 23, who takes us through a journey that lasts well over a decade. Rev. Dr. Bredenhof tells us portions of his personal journey as it relates to his years as a missionary pastor in Fort Babine, BC. I will not go into the details, but between page 23 and 284 we read a modern missionary tale of how the beautiful gospel went in to an unreached place here in Canada where so many are hurting and in desperate need to surrender to the beautiful Saviour who offers himself freely to them. There are ups and downs to the life of the Bredenhofs told here frankly but with sensitivity and he paints a realistic picture of modern day missionary work in a Western country.

This book however, is not just a pretty picture of the gospel going forward by one man, but also the work of the community of faith in action, specifically the Canadian Reformed Church. Sometimes the polity and methods adapted by the author and the church seemed

shocking and unnecessarily strict given it was cross cultural ministry. Instead of trying to progressively move towards the usage of the baptismal explanation as written in the *Book of Praise's* liturgical forms, perhaps time would have been better spent trying to focus on making more available in Babine. I couldn't help getting the impression that the church community (I am not speaking of Rev. Bredenhof here) wanted to try to slowly force the *Babine* into eventual conformity that looked more like the British in India than the church in the book of Acts. This impression receives further confirmation through several conversations recorded in the memoir that can only be described as racist, even though the people saying them would not consider what they said to be such. This subject brings up several points that need to be discussed further within Reformed missiological literature concerning polity and how to go about cross cultural missions.

In conclusion, I'm delighted to commend Rev. Dr. Bredenhof's tome. In it we have a Reformed pastor-theologian who takes seriously the call of minister, but is not content to restate the same old thing that he has learned, however helpful that may be. Rather we find a sincere man of God whose heart finds delight in sharing the gospel to all persons. And even though I did make a rather specific negative comment, I want to conclude by saying how grateful I am for having read about a church having the courage to be willing support such a mission work even if I disagree in minor specifics about how they went about it, because it is better to go and try than to just stay in a comfortable corner and never go out. We as North Americans have a guilty legacy when it comes to our ancestor's treatment of the Native Americans. And even though I or any of those who read this may not be directly descended from the English or French who first started these abuses (I'm from an Italian-Irish-Polish background!), we do in a very real way share a corporate blame. But as Christians we know that what unites us is not fundamentally our language, liturgical practices, or skin colour. It is that we all are born in sin and that all of us as individuals must come to the truth (which can only be done by the power of the Spirit through the Word) that our only comfort in life and death is that we are not to our own, but belong completely to Jesus Christ who has paid fully for our sins, rescued us from Satan, and preserves us to the day when we shall see him face to face. This is the message that is proclaimed throughout this book and why I recommend it so strongly.

This book can be found at Rev. Bredenhof's website: www.bredenhof.ca.

