

# Clarion

Numbers 10:1-10

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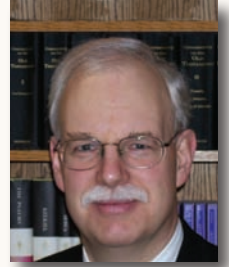
*Dealing with  
the dangers of the  
road of life*



## Inside this Issue

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- *Dispensing Waters from the Fountain of Life*





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# Danger Ahead!

*The road of life is filled with spiritual dangers*

When travelling by car, one will come across signs saying, "Danger Ahead!" There may be additional information, such as warnings about falling rocks, wildlife crossing, or construction. While sometimes it is possible to take another route and avoid these dangers, often they are unavoidable. For our own safety we do well to take the warning to heart.

As we travel down the road of life, there are also many stretches that would benefit from having a sign warning us, "Danger Ahead." This is necessary because the road of life is filled with spiritual dangers. Just like when travelling by car, at times it is possible to avoid dangers. At the same time, often they are unavoidable. Over the course of our life, there are even particularly dangerous stretches.

One such dangerous stretch starts around age eighteen and goes into the early twenties. With a view to being able to navigate this stretch of the road of life without serious accidents, it is good to reflect on why this stretch is so dangerous, and what can be done to avoid spiritual accidents.

## Time of transition

The reason why this is a particularly dangerous stretch on the road of life is that it is a time of transition. It is not unlike a person, having learned to drive in small towns and on two-lane highways, suddenly having to access a freeway. After all, around age eighteen, one enters the stage of being a young adult and is suddenly faced with many new responsibilities. This is the time of life when young people finish high school. At this stage in life's journey, they either enter the work force or start attending college or university. It is the time of life when suddenly the fences that have been keeping one from danger are taken away and it is expected that one goes on in the same way without the benefit of those fences. Another word for this is maturity. Maturity is doing what you should be doing without having to be told to do so.

Just think of all the protective fences that suddenly fall away around this section on the road of life. There may no longer be the protective fence of family life, with regular meals and bedtimes. There is no longer the protective fence of a Christian school with teachers concerned not only for your academic welfare but also your spiritual welfare. As this is a time in life when many young people profess their faith, it also means that the protective fence of weekly Catechism classes falls away.

All these fences may have been taken for granted. Perhaps they were even seen as nuisance. Yet, it is not so easy when they are all taken down. Young people soon learn this as they face the reality of the workplace. A young person may still live at home but misses out on family mealtime and devotions because they have to leave early and they come home late. The workplace is often very unchristian in language and attitudes. When students continue their education, they discover the schedules of colleges and university are irregular. Some classes start at eight in the morning, others go to ten at night. If students move away from home, there is no one to keep an eye on bedtimes or meals. You are on your own!

With the fences gone, it is soon discovered it can be more challenging than first realized to fully stand on your own two feet in looking after yourself, not the least when it comes to looking after yourself spiritually. With the new busyness of life on the freeway, it easily happens that Bibles are opened only on Sunday in church, and that personal prayer becomes irregular.

Furthermore, with the physical protective fences gone, there is greater temptation to step into forbidden territory, overlooking the fact that the spiritual fences are still there. Remember the earlier definition of maturity, of doing what you should be doing without have to be told to do so.

It was mentioned that this is a section on the road of life that we cannot avoid. Parents cannot shelter their children forever. Rather, godly parents will have





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
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made it a goal to prepare their sons and daughters for this segment on the road of life, knowing it is beset with dangers. Parents have had to navigate through it too. It is so dangerous because our three enemies, the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh are ever ready to spring into action. In this respect, it is again like accessing the freeway. It is most dangerous when you are trying to get on, merging into the traffic. Our enemies, bent on our destruction, will do what they can to cause spiritual accidents that may leave scars for the rest of our lives because of sexual indiscretion or experimenting with mind altering drugs. Drinking irresponsibly may damage one's own life or the lives of others. Even worse, our three enemies will work hard to make us crash spiritually, pulling us away from the riches of the gospel. A high number of spiritual casualties show up among those travelling through this time of transition, breaking profession of faith vows by either leaving the Lord behind altogether or turning their back on the church to turn to groups that do not display the marks of the true church.

**Safety tips**

Since it is impossible to avoid the dangers of the road, it is only responsible to prepare for dealing with those dangers so that you can navigate through them

**What's Inside**

Rev. Eric Kampen opens Issue 16 with an editorial that outlines some of the dangers that youth face as they travel the path into young adulthood. He discusses "safety tips" for this time of transition that both teens and their parents will benefit from reading.

This issue begins a series from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam on prayer, and what we can learn about prayer from the Old Testament incense offering. What "truth and substance" (BC, Art. 25) remain for us in the New Testament? We also have an article from Rev. Klaas Stam about fear and discrimination in today's culture.

Rev. William den Hollander and Rev. Clarence VanderVelde bring us a report from the URCNA Synod Nyack, 2012. We also include Rev. VanderVelde's speech that he presented to Synod Nyack on behalf of our Committee for Church Unity.

In news from the federation, this issue contains an article from Living Word CanRC on the installation of their very first minister, Rev. Agema. There is also a report from the Committee for the Needy Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. Additionally, there is our regular Treasures New and Old meditation.

Laura Veenendaal

safely. There are a number of things that can be done to deal with the dangers that lie ahead on the road of life.

First, it is important to acknowledge there will be dangers and that it will be a challenge to get past them. It is very dangerous to pretend they don't exist or that you will travel through them easily. Paul warned the Corinthians not to be overconfident. He wrote, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (1 Cor 10:12). The Lord Jesus also gave us this reality check when he taught the sixth petition, "And lead us not into temptation." Do not be naive. The devil is going around like a roaring lion, intent on devouring God's people. He knows how to push the right buttons. He knows how to make the ways of the world, with its idea of fun and instant gratification, look appealing. He knows how to play on our hormones, especially in that stage of life when they are raging. And worst of all, there is our own sinful nature, ever eager to regain dominance. It is remarkable how persuasive our sinful nature can be as it pulls us to the way of sin. We have to impress upon ourselves that there is a devil out there, that we live in an evil world, and that we have a sinful nature.

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*Maturity is doing what you  
should be doing without having to be  
told to do so*  
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Second, it is important to dress properly for the journey. The nature of the journey means we need a spiritual outfit. Paul used different images. In Ephesians 4:23, 24 and Colossians 3:9, 10 he wrote about putting off the old nature and putting on the new. He spelled out the ways of the old nature as well as the way of the new. In Ephesians 6 he called his readers to put on the whole armour of God so that they might resist the attacks of the devil. Especially at this time of transition, entering adulthood, it is important to do this very conscientiously, deliberately. It is just like when one learns how to drive and has to be very self conscious of how one does everything. In due time, those actions will turn into habits. It is important to learn good habits. This is also true for putting on our new nature, our spiritual armour. There have been many years of teaching about how to put it on. Now is the time to do it on one's own.

Third, it was pointed out how, at this time of transition, the fences of youth fall away. The reality of life is that it is not possible to maintain all the familiar practices. It is therefore necessary to establish new patterns in response to new situations. If this is not

done, the devil will gladly fill the empty spaces. It is spiritually very dangerous to stop regular reading of God's Word and personal prayer. It requires spiritual self-discipline to establish new devotional patterns. For example, if one has to leave home early, get up early enough not only to grab a bite to eat but to also read God's Word and pray. It will also be a good time to have a look at the book one may have received at public profession of faith. It does no good tossed on a shelf. Sloppiness, even spiritual laziness, will bear bitter fruits. As we confess in Lord's Day 45, God will give his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who constantly ask and thank him for his gifts.

This also has to be worked out when one goes off to post-secondary education. Reading and prayer will keep the Lord constantly on our mind. Paul commanded this when he wrote to the Thessalonians to pray continually, in the sense of regularly (1 Thess 5:17). Daniel set an example in this in the way he prayed in the direction of Jerusalem three times a day. In Psalm 119:164 the Psalmist said he praised the LORD seven times a day. If we pray at meals and before going to bed, that is not so hard to do.

Fourth, it is important to maintain the Spirit's weekly pattern of worship. This means, remember to keep the Sabbath Day holy. The Spirit has made each of us a member of a particular congregation. We have a spiritual home. The minister prepares weekly spiritual meals to feed that particular family. The Sunday is not, in the first place, a time to socialize but to worship. Just as it is important to stay connected with your family, you need to stay connected with your church family.

### Travelling mercies

I suspect that this article will probably not be read in the first place by those who it seeks to address. It is my hope that parents will encourage their sons and daughters who are in this stage of life's journey to read this article and that it may serve as a basis for a good discussion. Perhaps it will be a beginning for those heading out on the spiritual freeway to pick up *Clarion* more often for encouragement and instruction on the adult section of the road of life.

At times one may hear of prayer for travelling mercies, which is a prayer for safety in regular travel. That prayer for travelling mercies is all the more important on the road of life, where the dangers are a matter of eternal life or death. So, I conclude with prayer for travelling mercies for all those at this transition stage of life's journey. May our heavenly Father safely guide you through all the dangers that lie ahead.





MATTHEW 13:52

# Dispensing Waters from the Fountain of Life



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*"The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life." (Proverbs 10:11a)*

In ancient Israel, running water was a precious commodity. Communities could only be built in places where a reliable source of fresh water was available. A fountain of fresh, clean water meant life. A good water source was essential for a community's success. With that "fountain of life," the community could thrive.

As members of God's covenant people, we form a community. And just as a village in ancient Israel would rely on its source of fresh water for life, our covenant community relies on the words of our mouths as our fountain of life. Within our covenant relationships, our words must encourage our community to thrive and grow in love for each other and for our God. Our words, the fruit of our lips, must be sanctified because of who we are in Christ. The proverbs tell us that our words have power. Our words can either strengthen God's created order, or they can tear down and work against God's purposes.

God hasn't given us a technical manual on how to speak, or specific words for each situation we might find ourselves in. But what he has given us are principles that will work when they're put into practice – not because they're the habits of highly effective people, but because they're *his* principles. He created the mouth, the tongue, the lips, the words we speak, and the thought that goes into forming those words. He created our will

and the intentions of our heart. And he created all of these things for his glory, for his pleasure, for the purpose of his Kingdom. Our words are tools. They can be either tools of life, or tools that bring death.

Our words can bring healing to others. Where there is brokenness, such as the brokenness of sin and sorrow and pain and frustration and grief, our words can be a balm that soothes, a medicine that brings relief and restoration. Gentleness in speech is like a tree of life; in a world that's full of death, godly words bring life.

How do you speak to a brother who's struggling in his faith? How do you speak to a brother who's just revealed a secret sin that he's fighting to overcome? How do you speak to a brother who's discouraged, who thinks there's no hope, who is battling against unbelief? Your response to a brother or sister in a situation like that can bring healing; it can lead to repentance; it can bring rejoicing and gladness and celebration.

The person who misuses his tongue causes strife and separation. With his words, he can tear apart relationships that have taken years to build up. Rumours, innuendo, slander, lies – they may be spoken quietly, they may be whispered, but their result is nothing but ruin. Words can drive people from the church, and they can drive people into their sins instead of away from them. Our words, poorly chosen, and poorly spoken, can drive people

into the clutching grasp of the devil instead of into the loving arms of the Saviour. But godly wisdom means telling the truth, in the right way, to the right people, at the right time, for the right reasons.

And ultimately, we need to look to the example of our Saviour as we seek to become more and more like him in our words as well as in our actions. "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isa 53:7). Even when he was falsely accused of terrible crimes against God and his people, he didn't use his words to fight back. He didn't seek his own rights. He didn't fight fire with fire. He kept his mouth shut, and that should remind us of one of the other proverbs in Proverbs 10: "When words are many, sin is not absent, but whoever holds his tongue is wise" (v. 19).

Our words are meant to be a fountain of life. May they give healing. May they give encouragement. May they build up. May they give glory to God and joy to his people. May we in the power of the Holy Spirit become more like our Saviour so that when people hear us speak, they hear him and are brought to praise him, the Creator and the Redeemer of our tongues. Then our words, fitly spoken, will truly be a fountain of life – to God's glory, and the praise of his Name.







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# Prayer as an Incense Offering (Part 1 of 3)

What is prayer? One can say: praying is speaking to God. Yes, but what therefore does prayer involve? What is expected of us? What does the Lord delight in and what prayer is he pleased with? What are the prayers from our hearts and lips to be like?

According to Scripture, the prayers of God's people are like and are to be like an incense offering. In Psalm 141 David says: "May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice" (Ps 141:2). We can also think, for example, of the last book of Scripture where this image occurs as well. We read in Revelation 5:8, "And when he [the lamb] had taken it [the scroll with seven seals], the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (cf. Rev 8:3, 4). These two examples show that our prayers are to be as an incense offering to God. The Old Testament incense offering therefore spoke of and symbolized the prayers of God's people.

Now, if we can understand what an Old Testament incense offering involved, we will be helped in knowing what praying is all about and what it should entail. For our prayers are to be as an incense offering! So we see that although the incense offering itself is a thing of the past, yet the instruction that we can receive from the regulations about the incense offering as we find them in Exodus 30 are still very relevant for us today. Indeed, in Article 25 of the Belgic Confession we confess that

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ceased with the coming of Christ, and that all shadows have been fulfilled, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians. Yet their truth and substance remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled. In the meantime we still use the testimonies taken from

the law and the prophets, both to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel and to order our life in all honesty, according to God's will and to his glory. So let's apply this truth to our topic. Because our prayers are to be like the incense offering, we need to understand this sacrifice as well as possible. Then we will better understand God's will for our prayers today.

## The position of the incense offering

If one entered the tabernacle, the Holy Place, and walked straight down the middle of it to the curtain, behind which was the Most Holy Place, one would walk directly to the altar of incense. This altar stood in the middle, directly in front of the Most Holy Place. A curtain separated it from the ark of the covenant which was in the Most Holy Place. Thus it was close to the place where God met his people (Exod 25:22; cf. 29:42) and is therefore described in Leviticus 16:18 as the altar "before the Lord" indicating in this way its close association with the mercy seat.

Not surprisingly, being this close to God's presence, the altar of incense was a beautiful altar, all covered with gold and known therefore as the golden altar (Num 4:11). This altar was normally the closest the priests got to the Most Holy Place. The altar of incense stood in the Holy Place immediately before the curtain behind which God was enthroned on the ark in the midst of Israel (Ps 80:1; also 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; Ps 99:1).

Now because this close relationship of the incense altar with the ark is of utmost importance, therefore Scripture sometimes omits the fact that there was a curtain separating the two. In Exodus 40:5, we simply read, "You shall put the golden altar for incense before the ark of the testimony." There is no reference to a curtain until verse 26. It was more important, given the

context of Exodus 40:5, to mention the close relationship of the incense altar to the ark than to dwell on the fact of a separating curtain. In this light, we can also understand why 1 Kings 6:22 associates the incense altar so closely with the ark, that it says that this altar belongs to the inner sanctuary. This description is not a contradiction to the altar's standing outside the Most Holy Place, but only stresses the close association. Similarly we can appreciate Hebrews 9:3, 4 which states that "behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant." This does not mean that the author of Hebrews did not know the place of this altar. But, considering his theological concern with atonement and forgiveness and the entrance into God's presence, it is not surprising that the ark and the incense altar are brought here into a very close association, as was already done in the Old Testament. Furthermore the term, "having," does not need to mean that the altar stood *in* the Most Holy Place. The preposition "in" is not used. A very close relationship is expressed in the "having" of the altar (cf. Rev 8:3).

### **The aroma of the incense**

It was here at this altar of gold that the priest offered the precious offering of incense (cf. 2 Chron 13:10-11). The very best was burned before God and so given to him. The offering of the costly incense was a recognition of the LORD's place as God.

This offering was performed twice a day, every morning and evening (Exod 30:7, 8). As one can imagine, in the closed surroundings of the tabernacle, the smoke and smell of this offering would always be hanging in the air and never really leave. Indeed, verse 8 literally speaks of "a constant / perpetual incense before the LORD for the generations to come."

However, this was not all. More was necessary. On the Day of Atonement the incense had to be brought *inside* the Most Holy Place. We read in Leviticus 16:11-14, Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house; he shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small; and he shall bring it within the veil and put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat which is upon the testimony, lest he die; and he shall take some of the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat, and before the mercy

seat he shall sprinkle the blood with his finger seven times.

Notice the superlatives in verse 12. "A censer full of coals of fire" and "two handfuls of sweet incense" – as much fiery coal and incense as possible. The burning coals came "from the altar before the LORD," that is, the whole burnt altar outside in the court. There was always fire on that altar (Lev 9:9; cf. Num 16:46), so the coals could readily be retrieved.

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*If we can understand what an Old Testament incense offering involved, we will be helped in knowing what praying is all about and what it should entail*

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In verses 12-13, notice that only after entering the Most Holy Place was the incense to be burned. The purpose was to cover the mercy-seat with the smoke lest the high priest die. No one can see God and live (cf. Judg 6:22-24; 13:22; Isa 6:5). So the incense was brought directly into the very presence of God. Usually the smoke of the incense came to the Most Holy Place by going through the veil, but on the annual Day of Atonement it was brought right into the presence of God by the high priest.

Why was this continual smoke, smell, and burning demanded by the LORD? To answer this question properly, one must realize that the crucial element was not the smoke but the smell of the incense. This is clear, for example, from the exact directions that the Lord gave for the preparation of the mixture of incense. The parts have to be mixed exactly so! God instructed Moses to "take fragrant spices – gum resin, onycha, and galbanum – and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and sacred" (Exod 30:34, 35). God wanted the right fragrance, the sweet smelling savour of a well composed incense!

Because the altar of incense was immediately in front of the curtain of the Most Holy Place, the fragrance would work its way through the curtain to the throne of the LORD! God demanded that sacrifice of incense, that burning, so that, he the LORD could take in the sweet savour. What is behind this? Surely, God is not man that he simply needs and desires a perfumed house. What is the point?

*To be continued* 



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# Klaastrophobia

Actually the above title should read "claustrophobia." Slight spelling error, but not one without purpose. Claus is German; Klaas is English. We all know what claustrophobia means. To be *claustrophobic* means to be afraid of being closed in without any means of escape. Perhaps everyone more or less to some degree suffers from claustrophobia. Some of us start to sweat and develop breathing difficulties. Rapid, irregular heartbeat occurs. We may have to leave suddenly for wide-open places. It is not uncommon, I was once told, to develop claustrophobia in the pew during a worship service. Or on the pulpit. . . I thought. Who knew?

In a clinical sense the word *phobia* means deep psychological fear. It is not a matter of just being a little afraid but of having excessive and irrational angst. It has been said that everyone has some kind of phobia. We are all deeply afraid of something. Some even suffer from multiple phobias.

In a different, non-psychological sense the word "phobia" is also found in the Bible. It is said, for example, of the shepherds in Ephrata's fields that when they saw the herald angel in a brilliant light they were very afraid. I can understand that. Who can stand in God's glory and survive? The original uses the words *mega phobia*. Great fear. But the angel says to the shepherds: do not be afraid. It is the *liberating* word of the gospel, "Do not be afraid." No phobia.

Later these liberating words are also spoken at Easter, by another angel. The women who visit the Lord's grave are told not to be alarmed or afraid (Matt 28:5). Apparently angels come to soothe us and remove from us our fears. Klaas likes this.

## Do you have a phobia?

I do not think that many are afflicted with Klaastrophobia. Not everyone equally appreciates the man and some may outrightly detest him, and perhaps deservedly so, but he is not really the object of any phobia, unless perhaps to himself.

There is a difference between worries and phobias. We must distinguish between the two. A "worry" is a common concern about things of daily life. Will the bus be on time? Or, if you never take the bus, do you have enough gas in the tank? We might be worried about things, sometimes, but the Lord warns us not to be anxious. The word that is used means always to be focused on something, to the point that it dominates your thinking and actions. The part of Scripture that tells us not to be anxious is found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:25-24). It is a good piece to read together every week.

In recent times, however, the use of the word *phobia* has changed and its meaning has mutated. That is something which concerns me deeply. We need to be aware of this change so that we do not fall prey to a modern way of thinking. What used to be an irrational personal fear has now become a dangerous discriminating against others.

## Islamophobe?

More than once I come across the term *Islamophobe* in articles in newspapers or magazines. Here the word phobia has undergone a significant change. It means having an unnecessary fear of Islam or Muslims that leads to discrimination and perhaps persecution.

Whenever someone radically expresses concern about Islam or Muslims he is immediately branded as a phobe. Critics of Islam are simply Islamophobes, mostly misguided and sometimes sick. They are fanatics who may need to be eliminated by clerical fatwa or political death-sentence. They need to be treated as people who have an illness. It's enough to make you back off: exit, stage right.

We must be made to understand that not all Muslims are zealous terrorists and that many are good and noble citizens. There is no reason to subject Islam to harsh criticism and see a bomb behind every mosque. Watch out for Islamophobic tendencies.



Okay. I hear you. But there are some points that need to be raised and hopefully understood. Islam is not innocent. Wherever Islam comes to dominance, Christians and others are persecuted. Discrimination may be wrong, but discretion is not. The Bible tells us to have proper discretion. It's a keen insight into things and knowledge of how to deal with them. We need to know about all who would come to live with us that they accept and promote religious freedom.

### Homophobe?

As soon as someone speaks or writes against the practice of homosexuality, he is branded a "homophobe." In this case it means that someone has an unreasonable fear of homosexuality and discriminates against gay people.

I'll give you a true and concrete example to illustrate what I mean. A teacher was hired by a Christian school (board) and commenced his work at the school. By all accounts he was a very good teacher. However, in the course of time this person entered into a relationship with another man and they moved in together. The teacher was not shy about stating his view and defending his lifestyle.

The school board went into a discussion with the man, but he refused to amend his life. These refusals finally prompted the board to fire or dismiss the teacher, stating that this lifestyle did not show forth the "character of the school" as a Christian school.

To come to the point, a court case ensued with the gay teacher claiming that his rights had been violated. The judge agreed. The school board was severely reprimanded and fined. "Homophobia" is not allowed in any form. The teacher had to be rehired.

### Xenophobe?

Xenophobia is an irrational fear of strangers. You are afraid of someone simply because he looks and dresses differently. Now I am sure that every parent warns his/her child to be aware of strangers and not to go along with someone you do not know well. But xenophobia takes it one step farther: all strangers are to be mistrusted and avoided.

When I was still a child, my brothers and I were travelling home one day by bus from shopping with my mother. A stately Sikh gentleman, suitably attired with an impressive turban, offered each of us a nicely wrapped sweet. Quality Street. The look on my mother's face already discouraged me from unwrapping the

candy. At the next bus stop after the Sikh man had exited the bus, my mom told us to immediately throw the candy out of the bus. Since candy was not common immigrant fare, I sadly saw the sweets sail out into the street. Ever since, I've had this phobia about colorfully wrapped bonbons. That's probably the exact time when my personal Klaastrophobia started.

It is important to note that in God's law the "alien" (stranger) has the same basic rights (and public duties?) as any other member of the community. "You and the alien shall be the same before the LORD" (Num 15:14). There is only one law for all citizens. Now, the book of Numbers speaks about the *theocratic state* that Israel shall realize in Canaan. Even then the minority must be respected. There is to be no abuse of power. This is more important today because Christ has come into his royal glory. Tell this to the grand Mullah.

~~~~~  
*Discrimination may be wrong,  
but discretion is not*  
~~~~~

From his side, the stranger also had to respect the existing law. Today this is very important. There is one law for all citizens. There is not one law for certain religions (let's say Sharia law) and another law for other religions (let's say, common law). Many groups in society may have their own rules and traditions, but there is one law for all. This is the best antidote against xenophobia.

### The true fear

I reserve the right to be against Islam, without being called an Islamophobe. I reserve the right to be against homosexuality, without being branded as a homophobe. I also reserve the right to be wary of strangers without being considered a xenophobe.

When it comes to "fear" in the right sense and proper context of the word, I am reminded of what is written in 1 Peter 2:17, "Show proper respect to everyone: love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, and honour the king." Here a biblical balance is presented. The only person I need to fear is God himself.

Notice that the Apostle first sets his scope wide. Show proper respect to everyone. People around us should be respected, according to their position and calling. A judge is called "your honour." All rise.

(Actually people have to rise when *the jury* enters the courtroom; the jury is the highest authority.) But we need not slavishly bow to anyone: show proper respect.

The "brotherhood of believers" is the community of Christians, heirs with you of the grace of God. Paul here speaks about church fellowship, the communion of saints. Now the word is "love." This is a step farther. We are to respect everyone, but love the believers.

Then we read: fear God, honour the king. It's never the other way around: honour God, fear the king. Some people are more afraid of the government than having a sincere fear of God. But God alone is to be feared. Here the word "phobia" is used.

In this context it means that we deeply love God, acknowledge him as sovereign Lord and Creator, and also understand that he is greatly to be feared. In Hebrews 10:31 we find this warning, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." This God, we also know, has laid all our sins on the shoulders of Christ, our Saviour. He is a loving God. But do not underestimate his righteous wrath and judgment. We are to *fear* God!

And then we must remember to *honour* the king. No more. We render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar. For Christ's sake we must honour the king. Rulers must be given every honour that comes with their office, even when the government is plain-out nasty and persecutes Christians. God will avenge, says the Bible. Actually, to evil kings applies the word that it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It is first a word to the oppressors and then to the believers.

All we need to do is fear the Lord. No phobia in the modern sense of the word, but a deep and healthy respect. This fear is the beginning of wisdom. We take God at his word.

Sometimes I read that the expression "the fear of God" does not mean being afraid of God. Okay, fine. But true fear includes the understanding that God is mighty in judgment. He will by no means clear the guilty. He did not spare his only-begotten Son. We need to go to God in the Name of his Son and be found in him. We need to break with our stubborn sins and begin a new life. Only then does "the fear of God" not include phobia.

C



# URCNA Synod Nyack 2012

On Monday, June 11, 2012, on the campus of Nyack College, the Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church (RBC) welcomed delegates and guests to the Prayer Service at the eve of the opening and constitution of Synod Nyack 2012. "Nyack College is situated on the picturesque banks of the Hudson River in Nyack, New York, just 23 miles north of New York City," the organizing committee informed delegates to this synod in its general welcome bulletin. "Founded in 1882 as a missionary training institute, Nyack College is the oldest college continuing in Christian education in the United States." Although the buildings on this campus were from the mid-twentieth century and the accommodations somewhat "spartan" in the experience of many a delegate, the meetings that were held in the Olson Auditorium at Pardington Hall, from the opening Prayer Service to the closing session of General Synod 2012, were uplifting and upbuilding and conducted in the most spiritual and fraternal fashion! The walks to and from the Boon Centre, where meals and coffee were served, were great opportunities for personal conversations and deeply spiritual discussions; and all this against the backdrop of "a spectacular view of the Hudson Valley and palisades."

Upon the welcome and opening devotions by the Rev. Richard J. Kuiken, pastor of the Pompton Plains RBC, including a meditation on the words of Psalm 122, the gathering set out on one of the highlights of the entire experience at GS Nyack 2012: the singing! Throughout the Prayer Service and at every moment at which the meetings of Synod were adjourned or resumed throughout the week, the singing was majestic and glorifying in honour to God, heart-warming and edifying for the devotional participant! The Prayer Service *per se*, however, was just that: not a service with a sermon as its centre piece but manifold prayers sent up for every aspect of the work of the upcoming general synod, conducted by a selection of delegates to Synod Nyack 2012.

When the chairman of the convening church, Rev. Kuiken, called the meeting to order on Tuesday, June 12 at 8:00 am, the delegates were welcomed not only

most heartily, but also supplied with a well-prepared binder displaying an efficiently organized synod that was attended by some 200 delegates from over 100 churches, together with fraternal delegates from a variety of church federations (among whom the writers of this report, delegates of the Canadian Reformed Churches). After the convening church had taken care of the constituting exercises, Synod Nyack 2012 could be constituted with the following moderamen: Rev. Ronald Scheuers, of Chino, CA, as chairman, Rev. John Bouwers, of Jordan, ON, as vice-chairman, Rev. Douglas Barnes, of Hills, MN, as first clerk, and Rev. Greg Lubbers, of Byron Center, MI, as second clerk. The Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, of Sioux Center, IA, joined the podium as well, being the Stated Clerk of the federation of the URCNA. The delegates rose to indicate their assent to the Form of Subscription, and after some further initiating actions of Synod the twelve advisory committees could be sent to their respective rooms at campus to work on their assigned agenda items for the preparation of proposals to be discussed by Synod. By this time as well the fraternal delegates and observers had been recognized and welcomed and been given the privilege of the floor. We may add that your fraternal delegates of the Canadian Reformed Churches received a special place at a convenient location in the auditorium.

We would be going beyond the scope and format of this report if we would be writing about each and every item on the agenda. Before mentioning anything in particular, however, we would like to highlight the very warm and cordial welcome and reception we experienced throughout these days of GS Nyack 2012. In the meetings of the advisory committees we attended (at first the committee discussing the report of CERCU, i.e. the committee for church unity, and further the committee dealing with the report on doctrinal commitment), we received ample opportunity to contribute to the discussions. The address, also, by one of our delegates, Rev. Clarence VanderVelde (as accompanying this report), was well received and appreciated for its positive and productive



approach, continuing as it does to hold out much hope for progress in the process toward church unity. In the course of the proceedings and during many a point of discussion, the opinion and input of your Canadian Reformed delegates was asked frequently and was received with appreciation. The latter became evident, for instance, when in the midst of an interesting discussion about theological education and the required courses to be decided by synod for candidates-to-be, your fraternal delegates could observe with gratitude that the discussion made the need for a federational seminary apparent!

Among other matters of interest to our Canadian Reformed Churches, we may report with thankfulness the interest that was expressed to involve our (dormant) synodical committee with the Liturgical Forms Committee. Synod Nyack decided to have the revised and updated forms distributed among the churches of the URCNA to review these forms and correspond with the committee regarding their findings. In discussions with members of this committee the involvement of our committee was recommended and requested! With regard to the work of the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee, Synod







*Some of the fraternal delegates who attended the meeting of General Synod Nyack*

*Photo credit: Glenda Mathes (contributing writer, Christian Renewal)*

thanked its members. No churches, however, had responded to Synod 2010's reminder that suggested changes to the PJCO 2010 should be directed to Synod by way of overture through Classis. Rather than receiving the work for information, therefore, Synod decided to continue its PJCO committee and to receive the Church Order for a united federation of the URCNA and the Canadian Reformed Churches for continued study, feedback, and possible overtures. The URCNA committee that's working on a common Psalter Hymnal, on the other hand, did *not* turn back to our Common Songbook Committee from its cooperation with the OPC committee that's working on a new Psalter Hymnal as well. Rather, given its long history with the OPC going back to the days of the CRC, Synod approved of this cooperation and recommended it. Another matter of common interest was Synod's discussion and decision concerning the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). Although the request and recommendation was to enter with the RPCNA into Phase 2 according to the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, the fact that the RPCNA has ordained women deacons in some of their churches required much debate in the advisory committee as well as in the deliberations on the floor of Synod. In the end Synod adopted by a slim majority a proposal to enter upon this Phase 2, stating among the grounds that this practice is not the product of a liberal and destructive hermeneutic, that deacons are not part of the ruling body of the church, and that their practice is much like that of women deacons in the ERQ with whom the URCNA has Phase 2 relations.

During the days we spent at Synod Nyack your Canadian Reformed Coordinators for the Committee for Church Unity (CCU) had the privilege of interacting and communicating with many of the delegates at Synod. One of the main objectives of the conversations and discussions was to pursue some networking with the classical appointees

as members of the CERCU, as well as with the Stated Clerks of the various classes in the federation of the URCNA (particularly those located in the US!). As a result we may report that several representatives expressed interest in the attendance of one of our coordinators at their Fall Classis or at next year's Spring Classis! The suggestion was made that such visits at respective classes could be combined as well with preaching engagements in one or more of the classis churches, as well as with presentations in one or more local congregations. We may conclude this report therefore with thankful mention of Synod's decision regarding the pursuit of merger with the Canadian Reformed Churches, adopting the following recommendation:

That Synod encourage each classis and consistory to continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger between the CanRC and the URCNA by inviting Canadian Reformed ministers to fill our pulpits, inviting Canadian Reformed representatives to our classis meetings, seeking open dialogue with Canadian Reformed brothers regarding outstanding areas of concern, organizing joint events with Canadian Reformed congregations, attending joint conferences, and writing columns to foster our mutual understanding and affection.

*Respectfully submitted by the  
Coordinators for the Committee for Church Unity,  
Rev. C. J. VanderVelde, speaker  
Rev. W. den Hollander, reporter* 



Rev. Clarence VanderVelde  
is minister of the Canadian  
Reformed Church at Elora, Ontario  
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# Address to Synod Nyack 2012 of the URCNA

## Esteemed brothers in the Lord,

It is my privilege to bring you fraternal greetings on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). As the two Coordinators of the Committee for Church Unity (CCU), Rev. William den Hollander and I are happy to be here for the duration of your synod. We wish you the LORD's blessing in all your deliberations and pray that your decisions may be to the honour of his Name and for the well-being of Christ's church.

Much has happened since Rev. den Hollander spoke at Synod London 2010. Synod London made important and far-reaching decisions pertaining to the relationship with the CanRC and the efforts toward an eventual merger between the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and the CanRC. As representatives of the CanRC, we cannot hide the fact that Synod London's decisions with respect to the merger efforts met with much disappointment among many in the CanRC. We were disappointed to hear of the decision that your Theological Education Committee's mandate had been fulfilled and was at an end (Art. 53). We would have liked to see further efforts to surmount the impasse regarding how best to train men for the ministry in a united federation. Likewise, we were disappointed with the decision to conclude the mandate of the Songbook Committee to produce a common songbook for use in a united federation (Art. 135).

At the same time, we still found reason for hope with respect to an eventual merger in that Synod London decided that the Songbook Committee be in dialogue with the CanRC and that one of the grounds was that this would allow for the possibility of a common songbook in a united federation. Furthermore, we noted that the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee was continued and was mandated to continue working with the sub-committee of the CanRC to draft joint regulations for synodical procedure and to address some unfinished matters (Art. 41).

Even more importantly, we happily noted that Synod London accepted for continued study the Proposed Joint Church Order 2010 as the church order for a united federation. Therefore, although the CanRC experienced disappointment on several significant counts because of the decisions of Synod London 2010, we also found reason for hope on several counts.

Brothers, we want to impress upon you the deep desire of the CanRC for eventual merger with the URCNA. We were greatly heartened by the positive context within which your decisions were made, namely, that Synod London 2010 adopted without dissent the following recommendation: "That Synod explicitly reaffirm our conviction that the Canadian Reformed Churches are a federation of true and faithful churches of Christ, whom we love and respect as fellow-workers in the kingdom" (Art. 47). Moreover, we were grateful that Synod London also adopted the following recommendation: "That Synod encourage the churches to facilitate further opportunities to interact with the Canadian Reformed Churches by implementing the essential work of organizing events, speaking at conferences, writing columns, filling pulpits, and otherwise building the organic, heartfelt unity on which federative unity must be built" (Art. 47).


We realize that achieving federative unity requires time. We also realize that we are dependent on the LORD's timing and blessing. As CanRC, we must recognize and respect that in any relationship both parties must be ready to move forward to the next stage and that it would be counter-productive for one party to be too insistent on moving ahead. Our two federations have made wonderful progress in their relationship over the past twenty years. The CanRC cherish all the things we can already do together in our present relationship with the URCNA. As CanRC, we would have liked to take the step of merging with the URCNA sooner rather than later. However, as CanRC we must respect that Synod London came to the decisions that it made. We also noted that Synod



London adopted a recommendation "That Synod recognize that challenges and concerns remain among both the committees and congregations of the URCNA with regard to our relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches" (Art. 47). You know your federation better than we do, and we must respect that. We note that the introduction of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) report to Synod Nyack 2012 speaks of "concerns and fears" among the URCNA regarding the pursuit of the ecumenical calling (*Synod Nyack Agenda*, p. 108). Therefore, we are happy that we also read: "What we are recommending is a careful and gentle pressing on in the good work that has been begun in our ecumenical pursuits with all of our ecumenical counterparts, and particularly in connection with the Canadian Reformed" (*Synod Nyack Agenda*, p. 107).

Meetings between our CCU and your CERCU have focused on how best to cultivate continued and deepening contact between churches of our federations, as also articulated by Synod London 2010. May our churches strive to be creative in finding ways to foster greater awareness of one another. And let us use the means available to us in the hope that one day we will all be ready for merger. Brothers, in keeping with the gist of the CERCU report to Synod Nyack 2012,

please reiterate what Synod London 2010 said and encourage your churches to implement the essential work of creating occasions at which bonds with the CanRC can be forged and misconceptions removed. Besides pulpit exchanges where our respective churches are in close proximity, as Coordinators for the CCU we have heard of and seen little other activity from your churches since Synod London with a view to facilitating further opportunities for interaction. Because challenges and concerns remain among the congregations of the URCNA with regard to the relationship with the CanRC, please urge your churches to present those challenges and concerns to us as Coordinators so that we can work on them and if possible remove them. As Coordinators for the CCU, we are eager and willing to come to any classis to address any questions or concerns in order to increase knowledge about the CanRC and to build trust.

Let us never forget what was stated in a joint press release after meetings between our two committees held at the time of NAPARC 2011 (where the theme was church unity): "Formal, organic unity is the structure and shape of spiritual unity" (*Christian Renewal*, Feb 29, 2012). We have that spiritual unity. May we one day also have that organic unity. Thank you. 

*Tapan Zee Bridge, Nyack, NY*



# Living Word Welcomes Rev. Agema and Family

## Installation and inaugural service – March 4, 2012

Just short of a year since the institution of Living Word Canadian Reformed Church in April 2011, we experienced another milestone – the Lord provided us with our first minister, Rev. Douwe Agema. The installation service on March 4, 2012 was led by Rev. John VanWoudenberg, minister of Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church at Guelph, and counsellor for Living Word during its vacancy.

Following the installation of our new minister, a number of delegates from surrounding churches offered congratulations and words of support and encouragement from our brothers and sisters in the federation. In the afternoon service, Rev. Agema preached his inaugural sermon, focusing on Philippians 2 with the message, "I have to bring the Living Word to Living Word." He spoke on two directives of the living Word: to hold it out (like a torch), and to hold fast to it (have a good grip on it). The Word is life, and the Word brings life, and everything we do as a congregation comes from the Word of Life and we have to hold up this living Word to our community. We need to have a firm grip on this Word in order to bring it to our neighbours with conviction.

As we hold the Word, we must stand shoulder to shoulder – illustrating the importance of working together and being unified together as a church so that we can be more effective in how our light shines in our community here in Guelph and beyond. It is the Word that binds us together.

## Welcome evening – March 30, 2012

There is much to be thankful for and truly a reason for the entire congregation to celebrate. On Friday, March 30, we were able to give a warm welcome to our new pastor and teacher, along with his wife and family. This fun-filled event started with an opportunity to socialize before the festivities and program began.



Welcome Rev. Agema  
and Family!

Br. Greg Meinen opened with Scripture reading and prayer and then handed the floor over to Br. Tim Lodder, who was our emcee for the evening.

The children's choir led things off, directed by Srs. Cynthia Schieck and Deanna Linde, eagerly putting their welcoming words into song for everyone to enjoy. One song in particular was most suited for the evening and symbolized everything we wanted to express to the Agema family as they join our new congregation.

*Welcome to the family, we're glad that you have  
come*

*To share your life with us, as we grow in love and  
May we always be to you, what God would have  
us be*

*A family always there, to be strong and to lean on  
May we learn to love each other, more with each  
new day*

*May words of love be on our lips in everything  
we say*

*May the Spirit melt our hearts and teach us how  
to pray*

*That we might be a true family.*



Introductions of the Agema family followed. With six kids, three in-laws, and three and one-half grandchildren (now officially four), the growing Agema family was welcomed with open arms into our Living Word family!

Rev. and Mrs. Agema were invited to tell us a bit about their lives up to this point. Rev. Agema is well experienced with young and growing congregations having previously served as minister in Attercliffe and then in Fergus South. He mentioned he has received and accepted a total of four calls in his time as minister, but has only had three charges. He was unable to continue with a call to the mission field many years ago as, at the time, Mrs. Agema had a recent diagnosis of diabetes. Therefore the decision was made to decline the call and stay in the country. Rev. Agema urged the congregation to invest in the new relationship with our new minister, just as he invests in the relationship with each one of us. It's a two way street – just as you need to put money into an account and expect it to grow, so also with this relationship.

Tim took on the role of news anchor and interviewed Rev. Agema and his wife on past times, and a slide show was presented showing family photos.



*"Welcome to the Family!"  
joyfully sung by the youth of Living Word*

Various groups in the congregation then had the opportunity to welcome the Agema Family: The Youth Group recited a poem, an "Ode to Rev. Agema." On behalf of the Women's Bible Study group, Sr. Shannon Jager presented Rev. and Mrs. Agema with a map of Guelph on which was marked favourite shops, community events, good hiking trails and where to find the best deals in town. A Bible Study group had a game called "Something in Common" (a variation of Dutch bingo). The Agemas surprised us with their acute knowledge of family connections and won the game by a landslide! Then it was the congregation's turn to test their brains and knowledge of themselves with more Living Word trivia. Both teams did well, but let's have it be known, the ladies won!

On behalf of consistory, Br. Duane Westrik presented a gift to the Agemas from the whole congregation. A beautiful framed set of water colour paintings of familiar sights in Guelph and a book on the history of the city was well received.

On behalf of the Living Word Canadian Reformed Church, Rev. Agema and family, may you always feel welcome by your new family here in Guelph!



*The  
Agema  
Family*



# Support for South Africa

It is with much thankfulness to our Heavenly Father that we as Committee for the Needy Free Reformed Churches of South Africa can report that in the past year we have again been richly blessed with the support of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches with the funds and prayers to continue the work of assisting our needy brothers and sisters in South Africa.

With thankfulness we can report that for 2011, we could meet the budget for the Needy FRCSA Article 11. We made a total of three transfers:

1. April 15, 2011 for a total of \$24,502.47 (171,585.93 rand)
2. June 28, 2011 for a total of \$13,655.49 (92,894.49 rand)
3. September 22, 2011 for a total of \$5,300.00 (39,259.26 rand)
4. Grand total of \$43,457.96 (303,739.68 rand)

In their report dated March 12, 2012, the Deputies for the Needy Churches FRCSA Article 11 expressed their extreme gratitude to the supporting Canadian and American Churches. At present, they are receiving approximately sixty percent of their funds from the sister churches in Australia, Canada, and the United States. The needy churches deputies are working towards reducing the amount of dependency on foreign support, however they realize that the changes they propose will take years to implement. They state in



*Youngs adults Didace and Mogorosi become members*

their letter "Basic elements like food, clothing, etc. for the minister and his family should be provided by the congregation. But elements like Internet, medical support, etc. could be non-basic elements due to the fact that it is not a norm in a poor congregation." Their Synod April 2012 was to deal with this matter; at present we have not received a report from them concerning this issue.

The proposed budget amount they hope to receive from us for 2012 is 300,000 rand (approximately \$42,000.00). For the first quarter of 2012 the donations we have received from the contributing churches is down considerably. We have collected approximately forty percent less than the first quarter of 2011. We pray that God will continue to provide the means to support our needy brothers and sisters in South Africa.

Regarding the Mission Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, after having met the budget for Needy Churches Article 11, we were also blessed with the following donations available for transfer to the Mission Deputies:

1. November 7, 2011 for a total of \$18,262.85 (136,427.26 rand)
2. January 26, 2012 for a total of \$16,122.70 (121,125.02 rand)
3. Grand total of \$34,385.55 (257,552.28 rand)

The Mission Deputies are very grateful for the support in the past year, and for the funds received for mission work in South Africa. The funds they received from us were used to buy a church centre for the mission



*Manse with garage as church building*



*Kids from the neighbourhood attend Kids' Bible Club*

point in Akasia, north of Pretoria. They do not have any big projects planned for the next year, because of money constraints. As in the past, these constraints are due at least in part to the fact that they are largely dependent on foreign money, and the exchange rates remain volatile. Another area of concern for the Mission Deputies is that The Netherlands has informed them that they cannot increase their contribution. They state their plea for extra help in a recent letter: "Funds will

still be very much needed for the mission work in South Africa and we would again appreciate your support in the coming year so that the word of God can be spread in our country."


As a reminder, we would greatly appreciate if all donations be sent from either the local treasurer or deaconry. We do not operate under our own charitable status, therefore it is difficult for us to issue tax receipts.

We as Committee for the Needy Free Reformed Churches of South Africa would like to thank you for your continued support through financial contributions and prayer, and we hope and pray that our Heavenly Father will continue to richly bless our work, so we can continue to provide support to our brothers and sisters in South Africa.

Our contact information is:

**Committee for Needy FRCSA**

c/o Coaldale Canadian Reformed Church  
Box 1254, Coaldale, AB T1M 1N1

With Christian greetings on behalf of the  
*Committee for the Needy Free Reformed  
Churches of South Africa,*  
George Gritter, Secretary 

## Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

# CONVOCATION 2012

**September 7, 2012 at 8:00 p.m.**

You are invited to our 2012 convocation evening celebrating God's faithfulness in enabling us to commence a new academic year.

### **Highlights of the program:**

#### **Speaker:**

Dr. Jannes Smith

*"A Doorkeeper  
in the House  
of my God"*



#### **M.Div. Graduates: B.Th. Graduate:**

Timothy Schouten Robert Van Middelkoop  
David Winkel

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#### **Venue:**

Auditorium of Redeemer University College  
777 Garner Road East, Ancaster, Ontario

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*A collection will be taken for the annual CRTS conference, to be held January 2013, which will focus on the theme "Your Only Comfort: 450 years of the Heidelberg Catechism"*