



# Clarion

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**THE WESTERN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE HAS BECOME  
FOR MANY OF YOUR PASTORS AND THEIR WIVES AN  
OASIS OF BLESSING AND ENCOURAGEMENT**





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# Committee-ocracy

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## *Committees serve an important purpose*

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There is this phenomenon in the life of almost any organized group of people, including the church, called the “committee.” Some people dread them. Some love them. None of us can get away from them – either serving on them or being affected by their decisions. For better or for worse, we are stuck with committees.

### **Committee work**

On the one hand, committees serve an important purpose. They are the agent of the governing body to do part of that governing body’s work. Take the committee of administration, standard in many of our congregations. The council will appoint several members with a mandate to look after the assets of the church, including the church building and property, the manse, the administration of the finances, and other such “bricks and mortar” matters. The decisions they make affect every church member. From the way the church building is heated or cooled, to how cars are parked, to the upkeep of the buildings, to the paying of bills, we all are touched by the results of their work.

The council (i.e. consistory with the deacons) often appoints other committees for other work, also important. There is the evangelism committee, the library committee, the music (or organ) committee, and perhaps also the nursery committee. Each plays a role in the tasks that need to be done in the church – all of which is under the supervision of and remains the responsibility of the council.

### **Committee issues**

All of this is well and good much of the time and a diligent, faithful committee is a real blessing, but problems can arise when a committee begins to take on a life of its own. This isn’t necessarily nefarious or even

intended by the committee members. But, well-meaning persons who sit on a committee for a long period of time, who diligently do the work behind the scenes, can at times begin to think in terms of it being “their” work. Over time, they begin to take initiative in matters going beyond their mandate. The idea of seeking permission from the council becomes irritating and quickly dismissed. Then answering to the council becomes a growing nuisance. Sometimes a tug-of-war takes place between the wishes of the council and the wishes of the committee.

### **Committee-ocracy**

When this happens, the committee effectively runs that area of church life and we have a cancer setting in, what I call *committee-ocracy*. Literally, that means “rule-by-committee.” Historically we as churches have been very concerned (and rightly so) to guard against *hierarchy*, a system of ruling the church by grades or rankings of authority, like a pyramid structure. Reformed churches firmly acknowledge Christ as the only head of the church and that Christ has appointed elders to rule the church on his behalf. But lurking in the background of our presbyterian church government is the danger that committees usurp some of the office-bearers’ authority, making and implementing decisions outside of their purview or which have not been sanctioned by the council.

Committee-ocracy can lead to things like evangelism committees promoting courses not first evaluated for faithfulness to Scripture and brought to Council for approval; or music committees bringing in additional instruments without Council’s permission; or library committees placing doctrinally questionable videos and books on the shelves since they have been given no criteria to go by.

Committees of administration have been known at times to do an “end-run” around councils (in matters beyond their mandate) in order to “get something done.” Committee-ocracy is like the tail wagging the dog, an abnormal and hazardous situation!

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Our second issue of 2013 begins with an editorial from Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer. The topic of his editorial is committees: the purpose of committees as well as the issues that come with having committees.

Dr. Theo Lodder begins a series on musical instruments and musicians in the worship service. With trends changing, there will be many questions and decisions to be made. This series will explore how we can do that in a way that will promote unity rather than divisiveness.

We also continue a series from Rev. Reuben Bredenhof on Proverbs 31. Part two takes a close look at the woman described in this chapter.

In news from the federation we have a report from the last Western Ministerial Conference – not to mention several “award winning” photos from the event. Issue 2 also includes a Treasures New and Old meditation and two press releases. There is also a Mission News insert.

*Laura Veenendaal*

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## **Neglect**

Councils can let this happen by never asking for an account. Some committees don't have a place on the regular council agenda item and so rarely are reported on. Some don't have a liaison. Some are almost forgotten. The library committee and the music (organ) committee seem to fall into this vacuum more often than not. How many councils hear regular reports from these committees? How many councils have even assigned specific mandates to these committees? Councils can unintentionally frustrate their committees by not providing clear direction (no mandate) or failing to deal with their requests in a timely manner.

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### ***How many councils hear regular reports from these committees? How many councils have even assigned specific mandates to these committees?***

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In many cases, things will run quite fine. People, in general, mean well. But when trouble strikes, when strong wills take over and begin to push agendas, how will they get reigned in if there is no regular check and balance? It is no easy task to put the brakes on a runaway committee and it usually comes with a great deal of stress, unpleasantness, and damaged relationships. Councils will do well to head this off at the pass by reviewing all appointed committees, mandates, and terms of service very carefully and ensuring there is regular reporting taking place.

## **Committees are servants**

Every committee needs to remember that it exists to serve the governing body which appointed it. Individual members of those committees need to remind themselves of this fact and keep focused on their mandate, neither to exceed it nor to do less than asked. Committees do not have "their own" turf. They work on behalf of the council, which works on behalf of Christ for the benefit of the whole church. And while every wise council will give its committees sufficient room to do their work without feeling suffocated (councils should not do the work they've assigned to a committee or bother with all the small details), committees should be happy to report to and answer to the council.

There should be good harmony – greatly aided by an active and diligent liaison. The council will wish to know the general direction of the committee's work and its progress. Council should commend and express thanks for the faithful work of a committee. After all, members give voluntarily and freely of their time and talents to serve on these committees and most if not all do it out of love for Christ and his church. This should not be taken for granted but properly acknowledged and promoted. Council may also give direction or, in some cases, re-direction, through the liaison, for at the end of the day, council is in charge and takes responsibility for whatever its committees do.

## **Committees of General Synod**

In this year of another general synod, let's not forget to pay close attention to the committees appointed by our previous general synod, for the same danger exists here. Perhaps the danger is greater at this broadest level. Unlike a local council, general synod is not a permanent body, which is as it should be. However, the committees are re-appointed from synod to synod and do much of the on-going work of the churches as a federation. Committees and their members are usually given terms of nine years which make the membership of committees more stable than that of successive general synods.

In some special cases, as with our Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise*, terms have at times been extended beyond the nine years. For example, of the five current members, four have served since 2001 (twelve years) and one since 1995 (eighteen years). There may have been special reasons for this but, generally speaking, this is not healthy. Regular turn-over in membership helps to ensure there are no long-term agendas begin played out (I'm making no such allusion here to our SCBP; I speak in generalities and refer to the risk level that long terms bring). Because of the longevity of committee appointments, there is a risk that committees become the dominant, driving force of synod decisions when, according to our Church Order, the churches should be in the driver's seat.

Synodical committees operate independently for long stretches between synods (three year periods). Much goes on and not everything gets reported. I know this because I sit on one such committee and have previously sat on another. Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing or done with any ill intent. The truth is, committees can hardly report exhaustively on all their activities

between synods. They usually (and properly) present to the synod a summary of what has taken place concerning the handling of their mandate, highlighting the salient points for the churches to know in order to make decisions. When committees stick to this and do their work well, the churches will be well-served.

### **Missing information**

It's when committees begin to be less careful and/or less complete in dealing with their mandate that problems can begin. There are at least two ways in which this can happen, the first of which is leaving out important information. A committee, through its report, has great control over the flow of information both to the churches and to the delegates to a general synod. Churches write letters to synods based largely on these reports and synods make decisions based largely on the same. When a committee chooses not to pass along all relevant information to the churches or to the general synod itself, a great disservice is done. The situation will not be well-understood by the assembly and this can easily lead to a weak or poor decision.

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### ***The committee is responsible to stick to and fulfill its mandate to the best of its ability – and no more***

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There is an example of this arising in the BBK, a committee of deputies appointed by the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), our sister churches. This is brought out in the current report of our Sub-Committee Netherlands of the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad (available publicly at [www.canrc.org](http://www.canrc.org)). Our sub-committee has spent much time discussing the direction of our sister churches in The Netherlands with their counter-parts in the BBK, but they experienced an obstacle. They report:

The problem in the discussion was that though some brothers perhaps even personally shared similar concerns, as body of deputies they did not really wish to interact with and comment on the issues we brought forward. . . The BBK seemed to think that concerns should be addressed by a CanRC synod to an RCN synod, whereas we see the BBK as the body to discuss those concerns and pass them on to synod. (Report to General Synod 2013, p.41)

This indicates that although the BBK heard the concerns of the Canadian delegates, they did not do very much with them. Thus, their Synod Harderwijk 2011 missed important information and especially internal analysis from its own committee.

### **Over-reaching the mandate**

Committees can under-report but they can also over-reach their mandate, another key way in which committees can begin to control the agenda of the churches. Each synod gives a committee a new (or renewed) mandate. The committee is responsible to stick to and fulfill its mandate to the best of its ability – *and no more*. Some committees or individual members are eager to do the work (which is in itself commendable) but in their zeal may seek to be “pro-active” and address issues not included in their mandate but which they feel to be relevant to their work. In this way, the churches suddenly find things on their agenda which weren't there previously and which never arose out of the churches themselves. When this happens, we are on the verge of committee-ocracy.

### **Being watchful**

I don't think committees begin with this intention but it can work out that way if they are not called out on their mandates. This is the task of the churches, in particular of the councils as they review the reports to General Synod Carman 2013. I would urge all councils to carefully review all committee reports to Synod. Compare the mandate with the report and check and see whether there is neglect of or over-reach beyond the mandate. Churches can then write their concerns to General Synod and General Synod will be well-informed to commend or correct the committees according to their faithfulness. In addition, all committees should have a regular turn-over of membership, capping terms at nine years (even as decided by Synod Abbotsford 1995, Article 116). Exceptions should be rare and for specialized reasons.

In this way, the churches, as individually ruled by the elders under Christ, will retain their freedom and authority to make well-founded decisions and set the direction for the churches in common by way of their delegates to general synods. Then the dog can keep wagging its tail, as it should be.







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# Baptism is Like a Funeral

***“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”***

(Romans 6:3)

Baptism is like a funeral. But it’s one with a surprise ending: it ends with a resurrection. The word “baptism” finds its roots in a word that was used for describing the sinking of a ship. Over time, it took on the meaning of cleansing. Both these meanings are connected to Christian baptism.

Imagine Jesus’ baptism by John in the streams of the Jordan. That plunge into the running waters was like death. The moment that they swept over him was like a burial. The rising back into air and sunlight was like a resurrection. Our baptism, too, is like a funeral. And it is also like a resurrection. For by faith inwardly, and by baptism outwardly, we have been united with Christ in his death and resurrection.

Paul has written that all people are condemnable. Those who sin must die. Sin’s paycheck: death! But in Christ there is hope. Not only is there forgiveness of sins, there is hope for the future. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all. Christ bore sin’s penalty. He met its claim, and received the just reward.

We need to go to the beginning. We know the story: Adam and Eve were created good and in God’s image. They were created for a life of perfect communion with God. The test of that communion was a test of faithfulness, “Don’t eat of the tree, or you will die.” But they did

eat. They wanted autonomy and independence. What they got was a life outside of communion with God. We call that the original sin. We have a personal communion with Adam in the guilt of our first parents. The Belgic Confession says original sin is so abominable and vile that it is enough to condemn the whole human race. We inherit a sinful condition that is sufficient to condemn all. And God’s justice demands that this sin be punished.

God in Christ has borne the burden of Adam’s sin, and every sin that found its root there. For every sin finds its root there, and is from that woeful source. “Jesus was made to be sin for us,” Paul says elsewhere. There, and only there, was sin dealt with – at Golgotha – in the humiliation and crucifixion of the Messiah, the crucified God. There sin was discerned in all its horror. The iniquity of us all was on him. The punishment that we deserved was on him. By his stripes, we are healed.

Then he went into the grave. And we with him, united by baptism to him in his death. Baptism is like a funeral! For we were baptized into his death. He, the second Adam – he of no sin – took the punishment for sin. Now sin has no more claim on him, it can demand no more of him.

Christians are people who have died to sin, and their baptism emphasizes that death. Sin has no claim

on us any more. In Romans 6 Paul is saying that it is quite impossible for anyone who understands what baptism means to acquiesce cheerfully to a sinful life. The baptized have died to that.

Baptism is therefore a beautiful sign of the sure promise of God. Not just that sinners die with Christ, but that our baptism is like a funeral. And this funeral has a surprise ending, because it ends with a resurrection!

Paul says that we are joined to Christ. We are united with him in his death. More than that, we are raised up with him to a new life. We are crucified with him, we died with him, and are buried with him. And wonder of wonders! We are made alive with him. His death and burial were followed by resurrection to a new life. So also our death in him is followed by our new life. The power of death and sin lies broken, so we too, may live a new life. Not just live, but move, make progress, go places. We may walk a new life, lead a different kind of life in him.

The death of Jesus was not the end. His story does not end with a funeral. So with us. We are joined to him in baptism, and the old is buried. We are raised with him, and we get a new life. For Christ died and rose again, and we with him! **C**



# Musical Instruments and Musicians in Worship

Dr. Theo Lodder is minister at Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church [thlodder@telus.net](mailto:thlodder@telus.net). The focus of his doctoral studies was Christian liturgy and worship (Doxology), including a dissertation on “Musical Instruments and Musicians in the Worship of the Canadian Reformed Churches.” The dissertation is available at [www.tren.com](http://www.tren.com).

## Where have all the organists gone?

The Canadian Reformed Churches are at a liturgical-musical crossroad. I’m talking in particular about the musical instruments and the musicians who play them. There’s a declining number of organists. Now, this isn’t a new observation. Among others,<sup>1</sup> Dr. James Visscher, one of *Clarion*’s familiar voices and now a retired pastor, raised the issue already almost a decade ago when he asked whether the organist will go the way of the dinosaur (Vol 53, No 10). At the time, some readers may have considered his clarion call mildly humorous and a little overboard. Others, no doubt, chafed. His observations, however, proved to be a reflection of reality, and an accurate forecast of developments since then. Not only is there a shrinking supply of organists, as Pastor Visscher said back then; in some congregations, there is not even a single organist.

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## One wonders what the future holds for the organ in worship

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Indeed, that trend has continued. Sometimes pianists are asked to play the organ, even if they haven’t been trained to do so. Alternatively, churches have turned to the piano to replace the organ. Pianists, after all, are quite plentiful.

## Look both ways. . . and back!

When you’re at a crossroad, you have to keep moving. But it’s always a good idea to look both ways. And. . . to use your rear-view mirror. When we do this at the liturgical-musical crossroad at which we find ourselves, there’s hardly any question about what place the organ, especially the beloved pipe organ, has had among us.

Over the past centuries, in fact, the organ “has come to be an integral part of the service of the Western Church.”<sup>2</sup>

The Canadian Reformed Churches are no exception. Considering the present trend, however, one wonders what the future holds for the organ in worship.

## Alternatives?

Along with the trend of a shrinking supply of organists comes the question of what the alternatives are. Is it time to introduce other instruments in worship? Besides, if there are more trained pianists than organists, should piano play a more dominant role? Also, considering all the other musical instruments that are available and the wide variety of musical talent within the body of Christ, should these be employed? Does the Bible warrant, maybe even command, the use of a broad spectrum of instruments? You hear lots of people asking these sorts of questions in our churches these days.

## Wisdom needed!

Those aren’t the only questions that need answers, of course. Godly wisdom dictates that we should also be asking what practices and choices best serve the unity and edification of the congregations and the glory of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. By its very nature, any discussion on music in worship can be quite charged and emotional. Universal experience confirms that music has the power to be either unifying or divisive. Clearly, Christians desire unity, not division, if our hearts and motives are in step with the Spirit of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

As church musical scholar Erik Routley has written, “it should be one of the marks of the church’s special genius that its music can be satisfying both to the musician of fastidious standards and to the nonmusical worshipper.”<sup>4</sup> Neglecting or ignoring such an important matter as music in the worship of the church, and how that music is

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## CHURCH NEWS

made, would not merely impoverish the church; it would also dishonour God. Carl Halter, another church musical expert, once said: "The church which neglects its music or assigns to it a purely pedestrian function robs itself outrageously, and it flies in the face not only of the experience of the church but also of the will of God."<sup>5</sup> The Bible's teaching on music and song largely confirms these notions.

### What now?

Singing and making music to the Lord is one of the pivotal liturgical activities of Christ's church in her Lord's Day worship services. There are weighty biblical and church historical grounds for devoting considerable attention to which musical instruments are most suitable for inclusion in the church's song. What are the best criteria for making this choice? How did the organ become the preferred instrument to the exclusion of others in most Canadian Reformed Churches, as in many other churches? What alternatives are there, and what might be the reasons for exploring them? Why is this topic so emotionally charged? How do factors such as architecture, finances, culture, location, congregational size, and musical expertise influence the selection of instruments and musicians? How can we move forward without de-

spair, cynicism, and division? How can we praise our God in music and song as joyfully, skillfully, and pleasingly as we are able?

These are some of the questions we hope to explore in this series of articles.

<sup>1</sup> E.g., H.F.W. Roth, "A Dearth of Organists: What Now?" *Reformed Music Journal* 14 no. 1 (January 2002); P. Janson, "Editorial: On Shortage of Organists," *Reformed Music Journal* 4 no. 3 (July 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard Kappner, "The Church Service and Music," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 12 (1956): 254. Cf. John Ferguson, "Instrumental Music in Service to the Text," *The Complete Library of Christian Worship* Vol. 4, *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, Robert E. Webber, ed. (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing Group, 1993), bk. 1: 394.

<sup>3</sup> Erik Routley, *Music Leadership in the Church* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1967), 90.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Halter, *The Practice of Sacred Music* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955), 11.







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# The ABCs of a W.O.W. (Part 2)

*This article is a revised presentation from the 2012 Women's League Day at London, Ontario*

In the same spirit as Proverbs 31, Paul sets before us a picture of a Christian woman in 1 Timothy 2:9-10, "Women should dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, *but with good deeds*, appropriate for women who profess to worship God."

## **The woman up close**

The Apostle's words prompt us to lean in and look a little closer at the portrait of a woman of wisdom in Proverbs 31. We'll look at her heart, her mind, and her hands.

### **1) A heart that is worshipful**

We start with the heart, because Proverbs says it's from the heart that spring forth all the issues of life. So we're back to verse 30: "A woman who fears the LORD is to be praised." In her heart, she fears God! For what kind of God is he? He is Creator of heaven and earth. He is Saviour, he is Judge, he is King, and he is Renewer. We know him as our Shepherd, our Defender, our Rock and Fortress, our Sun and Shield. We know him as our God and Father in Jesus Christ.

If you start there, the wise woman's response to God becomes obvious: she *fears* him. And let's not be too quick to say that this isn't a trembling, knees-knocking sort of fear – for think of how many of the saints of old responded to their encounters with God: with terror, with the awful sense they were about to be "undone," as Isaiah said. For anyone who's half-awake to his glory, there's an intense recognition that this God is completely beyond us in his majesty and holiness. The closer we get to God, the more we see the reality of who he is, and we are humbled. But the fear of God isn't fearful. It's worshipful. It means the Proverbs 31 woman kneels in awe at his splendor, each new day. For whatever comes her way, she's ready to

submit to his power, depend on his grace, and thank him for his favour. There's a sureness that this God is greater, this God is wiser, this God is stronger than she is in every way. And because he is, the woman of wisdom seeks to honour him above all.

To nurture a worshipful heart, how important it is then to keep growing in the knowledge of this God! I know it's hard to have time for reading Scripture and communing with God in prayer – it's difficult, when we're just trying to get our stress levels under control, save a dollar or three, and keep the kids in line. "Quiet time" can seem like a quaint notion from yesteryear! But nothing's more essential to the "wise life" than knowing

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***Whatever comes her way, she's ready to submit to God's power, depend on his grace, and thank him for his favour***

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the Author of wisdom. And to do that we need to be immersed in his Word. It probably won't answer your every question with an exact chapter-and-verse. It may not give you the same kind of boost as that third cup of coffee. But being in the Word daily, deeply, and devotionally will set before us the glory of the Triune God – and that's the knowledge that can bring light to every corner. So we hear the Spirit exhort us in Proverbs 4:7, "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." Such is the "woman of wisdom" still today: determined to fill her heart with what's holy.

### **2) A mind that is prudent**

If we could peer into this woman's mind, we'd see an abundance of good judgment. Just notice what this woman does in verse 16; she has the intelligence to research a real-estate transaction, and carry it out. Her prudent mind is seen again in verse 27, "watching over the

affairs of her household.” This woman oversees her activities with a mind that is alert and engaged. She knows the comings and goings of her household, and sees that things are well-ordered. And this has good results. For example, verse 21 says, “When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet.” The woman of wisdom can look on a crisis with a calm spirit, because she’s made her preparations. Things aren’t going to fall apart at the first sign of trouble, for she’s thought carefully about what the needs of the people in her life.

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***Busy hands can bring praise to the LORD  
and benefit to others!***

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To use our minds like this, exercising your intelligence and practical know-how for the work that’s set before you, remains a great blessing from God. You might call it “sanctified common sense,” because there’s no issue in life that fearing God doesn’t somehow touch upon. Sometimes there’s this idea that it’s less spiritual to be organized, that it shows more faith to always be spontaneous and just take life as it comes. And we do know the limitations of any human planning. But a prudent mind can still be a great help in serving the Lord. For example, what family doesn’t benefit from a well-thought out household structure, from that ordered schedule on the fridge to those well-stocked cupboards? Such things provide a backdrop of peace and stability so that other important things can get done in the home: activities like worship, and nurture, and communion.

The woman of wisdom will exercise her mind, and not just to get things done or to keep up with the Vandens-Joneses. But remember the W.O.W. factor: she’s thinking hard, because she fears God and wants everything to be for his praise. She delights in doing things well, because she knows this pleases God.

**3) And hands that are busy**

Studying Proverbs 31, I realized that this section of my address had the potential to be the very longest by far! Because fully one half of this passage sees her busy with the work of her hands. Verse 17 is the theme: “She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for

her tasks.” This is one active woman, busy selecting wool and flax (v. 13), doing her spinning (v. 19), and making garments (v. 22). She’s even got a business going (v. 24). It seems like she hardly sleeps (v. 15), and she’s a woman in constant motion (v. 14).

A woman today can be busy with a whole different set of duties. We live in a different time, with a different kind of economy and structure to society. But what’s the same is a woman’s engagement in a dizzying array of activities. You’ve probably seen that piece about all the roles that a mother has in the home: she is a chauffeur, she is a tutor, she is a chef, a coach, a guidance counselor, a cook, a seamstress, a laundress, she is a doctor, a financial advisor, a general manager, and probably several more. Usually such articles conclude by saying that we should pay mothers more than we do! (And we probably should. . . .)

But the point in Proverbs 31 is not that such activities debase a woman’s worth, or that they’re without some good purpose. Rather, they speak to the diversity of her gifts, and her importance to the family’s well-being. This is how the New Testament speaks of it too. Consider Paul’s counsel in Titus 2:5, that younger women be trained “to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, *to be busy at home.*” Exactly because busy hands can bring praise to the LORD, and benefit to others!

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***There is great honour in serving***

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I know that work can feel like a daily slog. When it feels like you wash and fold and iron and you wash some more, and you never quite see the bottom of the laundry basket. When the meal you just spent an hour preparing has been inhaled in ten minutes, and everyone’s asking about dessert. When the thought crosses your mind every week that they make self-cleaning ovens, but not self-cleaning toilets! Sometimes the job seems never-ending. And the rewards? The gratitude? At times, they seem depressingly absent. But Scripture gives the right perspective on this too. For fearing God has everything to do with everything we do.

This is how Paul can say to the Colossian slaves, “Do your work with reverence for the Lord” (3:22). And then in the next verses, “Whatever you do, work at it with all

your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. . . . *It is the Lord Christ you are serving*” (vv. 23-24). We admit that it runs contrary to this world’s wisdom, but there is great honour in serving, especially serving God by serving others. There can be joy in tackling your daily work with all your heart, whatever that work is! If we have the awareness that we’re doing this task for the Lord – using our gifts, working in thankfulness, bathing our labours in prayer – then it can be nothing less than an act of holy worship for God. Said one writer in a colourful way, “Christ moves among the pots and pans.” Because Christ isn’t far from us when we’re working, not if we’re doing it for him. “Do your work with reverence for the Lord.”

Now, let’s touch a moment on idleness. See again verse 27, that the woman of wisdom “does not eat the bread of idleness.” That’s worth thinking about, because there can

be a lot of time-wasters, for all of us, and also for the women of God. For example, technology can come to own us, whether we’re watching far too much TV, or we’re staying glued to the computer or our hand-held device all day. What’s more, our society is strongly oriented to leisure. There’s a new word in our vocabulary: “me-time.” As in, “I’m entitled to some me-time.” Because you’ve worked so hard, and you deserve that pedicure and that spa treatment, complete with cucumbers. Yes, God did make us with a need to rest, and give us a calling to enjoy his good gifts. But let’s not buy into the self-absorbed thinking of our time, nor ignore the mandate to labour for God with perseverance. Consider again the woman of wisdom in verse 13, “She works with eager hands.” She’s not eating the bread of idleness, but she’s enjoying God’s blessings on her diligence. C







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# Western Ministerial Conference

## November 6-8, 2012

The day was Tuesday, November 6, 2012. In the pouring rain, United Reformed and Canadian Reformed pastors and their spouses, most of whom had wheeled and winged their way to the Fraser Valley of British Columbia from all over Western Canada and the United States, headed across or toward the US border.

Was it Election Day in the USA that was drawing so many Canucks? Naw. Was it the cheap American beer? Don't ask. Was it the deals to be had on gas, groceries, and goods? Well, maybe. But there had to be something else for these pastor-types. Ah! Was it maybe the charming chalet, nestled among the enchanting forests at the foot of Mt. Baker, now famous among Western Reformed pastors as the place to be at the beginning of November? You got it!

Forty pastors, most of them accompanied by their wives, some of them toting a baby, gathered at Cedar Springs Christian Retreat Center, near Lynden, Washington, for what promised to be a few good days of fellowship, mutual encouragement, and refreshment of soul, body, and mind. They came from Denver, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and Washington.

This time the key-note speaker-couple was an amiable, unpretentious professor, Dr. Arjan de Visser, of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, and his gifted, good-natured wife, Inge. We had a great time with them, and they enjoyed being with us.

In his usual creative and encouraging manner, Rev. Dick Moes, pastor of Covenant Reformed Church (URCNA) in Surrey, BC, opened the conference with a meditation on Psalm 8 and an appeal to consider the presence and beauty of God as displayed in the creation just outside that we'd be enjoying together, in the Scriptures that we'd be exploring together, and in one another as we'd be reflecting the glory of Christ to one another.

Dr. deVisser then spoke to us about the prison letters of Guido de Brès (1522-1567), with a sobering and moving account of the great self-sacrifice, courage, wit,

and faithfulness of this Reformed pastor and servant of Christ, who died a martyr for the true, biblical, Christian religion. Apparently, when one wealthy woman came to visit him in prison in Tournai (Doornik) – as many curious people did – and expressed how fearful and eager to die she would be if she was in chains like he was, de Brès responded by telling her that his chains in Christ were music to his ears, and of much more value to him than all the chains of gold and silver that adorned the earth's wealthiest nobles. A hush fell over the room as Professor de Visser later concluded his speech by reading Pastor Guido's last letter to his wife, which he wrote from his prison cell about a month before his death by hanging in the public square of Valenciennes, at the age of forty-five.

That evening, Rev. Hank Van der Woerd, pastor of Trinity Reformed Church (URCNA) in Lethbridge, Alberta, spoke to us about finances, encouraging us from the Scriptures to find the balance between contentment and merit in our labouring, giving, and receiving as pastors and wives. Before entering the ministry of the Word and sacraments, Pastor Van der Woerd had worked in the financial industry for some twenty-five years.

On Wednesday, Dr. de Visser spoke to the pastors about spiritual warfare, while his wife addressed the women on the topic: "Surviving in the Household of Faith." Then Mrs. de Visser gave all the pastors a frank and honest talk about the perspective of "A Sister in the Worship Service." In her characteristic maternal, direct, and humorous way, she told us what we needed to hear, in a way that few would dare, at the same time offering us a rare glimpse into the souls of the wives of pastors. She asked us to contemplate the words spoken by hymn-writer, Frederick William Faber, in 1874: "How you can think of us so well and be the God you are, is darkness to my intellect but sunshine to my heart."

Rev. Ralph Pontier, pastor of the United Reformed Church in Neerlandia, then reminded us in his presenta-



Our special guests,  
the de Vissers



A reMarcable play  
(photo by Joe Poppe)

tion on physical fitness to take care of the bodies God has given us through regular exercise, so that we have energy and health to serve our Master. We were left with little doubt that he was well-qualified to teach us, when we heard that he had clocked a little over 25,000 miles of running since 1979.

That evening, Dr. de Visser addressed the question: “Can Reformed Worship Survive?” and got us all thinking and talking about ways in which we can restore and improve biblical worship, particularly as ministers of the Word and sacraments facing contemporary pressures and challenges. He reminded us of the high value of singing in worship with the words of the early church father, Augustine: “*Bis orat qui cantat.*” That is: “They pray twice, who sing.”

The final session on Thursday morning was a sermon-making seminar, led again by Dr. de Visser, while the women again gathered separately with Mrs. de Visser. After some opening interpretive and homiletical (preaching) remarks on John 15:1-8, Prof. de Visser asked us preachers to separate ourselves into groups, joining with those we didn’t know well, and to test our sermon-preparation skills using the template of one of four styles of preaching.

Throughout the conference, we did lots of energetic and spirited singing, mostly from the *Psalter Hymnal* and the *Book of Praise*; we were also taught a couple songs by a certain professor’s wife. A group of pastors gathered early both mornings for prayer. Before each meal, a

handful of pastors took their turn to lead opening devotions, with Scripture reading, a meditation, and prayer.

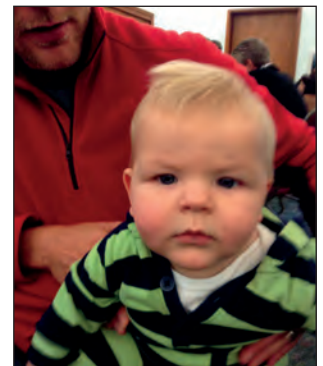
Now you shouldn’t be left with the impression that all ministers and their wives do when they get together at such gatherings, is listen to speeches, talk shop, and act all serious. While that’s mostly what they do, they also need food and drink, sleep, fellowship, exercise, and. . . a little fun! Well, we were provided with an abundance of delicious food and drink throughout the conference. We enjoyed simple but comfortable accommodations in the lodges. We laughed and joked lots. We even had some time for long walks and a game of football! One minister, who will remain unnamed, actually returned home with a reMarcable black eye.

And let’s not forget the photo contest! Contestants were asked to submit photos that would compete for three prizes: the most humorous, the most romantic, and the most serious. The conferees chose the winners during a slideshow on the final day. We complied with the requests of those who preferred not to have their photos published.

All in all, the conference was a great success. The Western Ministerial Conference has become for many of your pastors and their wives an oasis of blessing and encouragement, learning and debating, laughter and tears, unburdening of heart and soul, refreshment of body and spirit, and worship of and prayer to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!



Most humourous photo:  
Alisa Roukema  
(photo by Cecilia VandeVelde)



Most serious photo:  
Benjamin Swets  
(photo by Bill Pols)

## **Press Release CERCU/CCU November 2012**

Once again the meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), which was held on November 13-14, 2012, in Dyer, Indiana, provided the opportunity for a meeting of most of the members of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) of the URCNA and the Coordinators of the Committee for Church Unity (CCU) of the CanRC. Those present from the CanRC were Rev. William den Hollander and Rev. Clarence VanderVelde; from the URCNA Rev. Bill Boekestein, Rev. John Bouwers, Rev. Casey Freswick, Rev. Todd Joling, Rev. Adam Kaloostian, Rev. Bill Pols, Rev. Ralph Pontier, Rev. William Van Hal, Rev. Peter Vellenga, and Elder Al Vermeer were present.

The focus of the meetings that were held on Monday evening, November 12, and Wednesday afternoon, November 14, 2012, was Synod Nyack's decision (without dissent) regarding the Canadian Reformed Churches; particularly the recommendation that "each classis and consistory continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger between the CanRC and the URCNA by inviting Canadian Reformed ministers to fill their pulpits, inviting Canadian Reformed representatives to our classis meetings, seeking open dialogue with Canadian Reformed brothers regarding any outstanding areas of concern, organizing joint events with Canadian Reformed congregations, attending joint conferences, and writing columns to foster our mutual understanding and affection."

Regarding invitations to meetings of classes, Rev. den Hollander could report with thankfulness on his invitation to Classis Pacific SW US, September 18, 2012, and his related engagements with groups of ministers in Ontario CA and San Diego CA, as well as the opportunities to preach in the URC of Chino and Ontario CA, respectively, on Sunday, September 16. Similar invitations are being prepared and organized to Classis Eastern US, Classis Central US, Classis Pacific NW US, and Classis Michigan, as well as to churches in Iowa, the Lord willing in April and May of 2013. The experiences and discussions that were had in Classis Southwest gave much helpful and fruitful insights and feedback with a view to some outstanding areas of concern.

We also spoke about the possibilities for United Reformed Churches to engage their local church and classis in discussions about the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) and the matter of Theological Education in a united federation of CanRC and URCNA. The members of the CERCU could report that there are churches that are seeking ways to engage the US churches with the PJCO and its benefits for the URCNA compared to its present Church Order. Also the discussion regarding Theological

Education and the support for at least one seminary is ongoing, while following Synod Nyack the matter of federational standards for theological education and the approval of other seminaries with a mechanism for oversight and review are being discussed among United Reformed Churches as well. The brothers of the CanRC, while still convinced of the federational seminary model themselves, would like to see a URC classis wrestle with and propose a way forward.

In the context of a discussion about concerns among some URCNA men with regard to the position of the CanRC on Federal Vision, the Coordinators of the CCU drew the attention to their report to Synod Carman 2013, which can be found at [www.canrc.org](http://www.canrc.org). Of particular interest is their evaluation of URC statements against Federal Vision, especially concerning two points that aroused the most interest among CanRC people. The Coordinators report to Synod Carman 2013:

These [15] points were adopted by Synod London 2010 with respect to the Federal Vision, a movement with particular views on covenant and baptism. Point 12 is of most interest to us. Contrary to the Federal Vision movement, we too believe that baptism does not bring about the believer's union with Christ or justification. One is united to Christ through faith, and one is justified through faith. It is good that we state this explicitly, since we are sometimes seen by some as being part of the Federal Vision movement.

Neither should we feel threatened by Point 6 of the Nine Points adopted by Synod Schererville 2007, which received much attention among us. In Point 6, Synod Schererville 2007 rejected the error of those ". . . who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC Q&A 21, 60; BC 29)" (Acts Synod Schererville 2007, Art. 72). As Canadian Reformed Churches, we too believe that while all covenant children receive the promise of salvation, not all will receive the promised salvation. This is what Point 6 of Synod Schererville is trying to get across.

In conclusion, the recommendation was made to seek inclusion of this Press Release of our meetings in local church bulletins and/or congregational newsletters, to ensure it be read as widely as possible. All representatives expressed their joy and thankfulness for the frank and fruitful discussions, which will be very helpful for their further efforts in order that progress toward union may be maintained and enhanced. The United Reformed broth-



ers are giving serious consideration to working toward a recommendation to URC Synod 2016 (the synod after the next) to enter into a Phase 3A relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches. This would entail a commitment to making preparation for eventual, integrated

federative church unity. Although much work yet needs to be done, all were motivated to move forward prayerfully with patience, perseverance, and faith, as together we make every effort to obey the ecumenical imperative of Scripture. **C**

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## **Press Release of Classis Niagara December 12, 2012**

### **Opening of Classis**

On behalf of the church at Grassie, Br. Fred Bosscher opened the meeting by requesting singing, reading Scripture, and leading in prayer. After finding the credentials in good order, Classis was declared constituted. The following brothers formed the moderamen as per the suggestion of the previous classis: chairman – Rev. D. Wynia; vice-chairman – Rev. P. H. Holtvlüwer; clerk: Rev. J. Huijgen.

### **Memorabilia**

As memorabilia, the chairman mentioned that the church at Dunnville has received a new minister in the person of Rev. J. VanWoudenberg. Prof. Geertsema is doing remarkably well. The church at Blue Bell is considering the Lord's calling for their future as their numbers continue to diminish.

### **Agenda**

With the addition of a proposal from the church at Dunnville and a piece of correspondence from the church at Blue Bell, the agenda was adopted. Rev. Joel Dykstra was seated as a fraternal delegate from Classis Ontario East of the United Reformed Churches.

### **Approbation of call**

The documentation regarding Dunnville's call to Rev. J. VanWoudenberg and his acceptance was inspected by the moderamen. They reported that all was in good order. Classis then approbated the call and expressed thanks to the Lord for this joyful development.

### **Question period ad Article 44, C.O.**

The church at Grassie seeks and receives concurring advice in a case of church discipline as per Article 68, CO.

### **Proposals**

The church at Dunnville proposed to change the classis regulations to overtly permit and thus regulate the use of email communication in the convening of classis. Discussion ensued and some questions were raised regarding the particulars. Classis expressed agreement in principle

with the proposal but requested Dunnville to consider reworking it to address the concerns raised and to come to a subsequent classis with a revised proposal.

### **Correspondence**

A letter was received from the church at Blue Bell outlining the recent developments within their congregation and seeking advice. Blue Bell as congregation is shrinking to the point where a consistory will soon no longer be able to function and the church is considering what to do. An open discussion was held, general support was offered but it was stressed that Blue Bell needs to take the initiative and come with a proposal to a subsequent classis.

### **Reports**

The Spring Creek church reports that the archives of Classis have been inspected and two minor documents were found to be missing. This is noted by Classis. Spring Creek also points out that classis regulations call for the "nearest church" to inspect the archives held by the church for the archives. Accordingly, it is noted that this task falls to the church in Dunnville from this point forward.

### **Appointments**

Convening church for the next classis - Lincoln.

Date of the next classis – March 6, 2013; if cancelled, then June 12.

Suggested officers for the next classis – Rev. C. Bouwman (chair); Rev. J. Huijgen (vice-chair); Rev. D. Wynia (clerk).

### **Fraternal delegate**

Rev. Joel Dykstra is given an opportunity to address Classis and he briefly remarks with appreciation at how familiar we are becoming with one another.

### **Closing of Classis**

Personal question period was not made use of. The chairman declared that censure according to Article 34 CO was thankfully not necessary. After the Acts and the Press Release were each read and approved by the assembly, Rev. Wynia led in prayer of thanksgiving. Thereupon Classis was declared closed.

*For Classis Niagara December 12,  
Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer, clerk at that time* **C**