



Clarion

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**GENERAL SYNOD
CARMAN 2013**



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Serving

***What God wants to see in his kingdom
 are diligent kingdom workers, true servants***

Many answers

What in the world is a Christian? The Bible gives different answers to that question. A Christian, it says, is a “child of God” (Rom 8:16). A Christian is an “heir” (Rom 8:17). A Christian is a “conqueror” – indeed, more than a conqueror (Rom 8:39). Then too Christians are “sheep” (John 10:1-18), “salt” (Matt 5:13), “light” (Matt 5:14), and “stars” (Phil 2:15). In short, the Bible says that Christians are many things. There are any number of ways to describe believers.

Such is, however, not just the testimony of the Scriptures, it is also the testimony of the Heidelberg Catechism. Lord’s Day 12 states quite clearly that being a Christian is all about being a “prophet,” a “priest,” and a “king.” All true believers are ordained into a three-fold office.

Now, it is good to be reminded of this, but at the same time we also need to admit that not all of these descriptions appeal to us in the same way. We may like the idea of being compared to an “heir” but we are not so excited about being likened to a “sheep.” Receiving an inheritance from God and being called an heir to all things is a lofty title, but being a sheep – dumb, lowly, and destined for the butcher – has little appeal. In the same way being “light” appeals to us. After all, who does not want to shine and be attractive? But being “salt”? Ugh! We identify salt with kitchen duty, and thus get little or no boost out of being likened to it.

Who wants to be a servant?

Hence while it is nice that God calls us so many different things, our response to some of these names or descriptions is less than enthusiastic. And that applies to one more designation that we have not mentioned yet. It is that of being a “servant.”

It too draws mixed reviews. Who really wants to be compared to a “servant?” Who is interested at being at the “beck and call” of others? Who wants to be on the receiving end of orders, instructions, tasks, and duties? We would much rather be “kings” than “servants.” Being served is one thing, being a servant is something else altogether.

And yet that is what we are. Time and time again our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ mentions this. When some Greeks come calling and want to see Jesus, he responds by referring to death, life, and service. “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am my servant also will be.” Here our Lord is speaking about following him and puts it, not in terms of glory, power, and dominion, but in terms of serving him and being his servant. He even adds for emphasis, “My Father will honor the one who serves me” (John 12:26). It is clear here that honour comes not through major achievement but through humble service. Advancement is not limited to those who do great things for the Saviour but comes especially to those who labour faithfully for him in the trenches of his world, church, and kingdom.

In this connection the parable of the talents comes to mind as well. It’s all about a man who calls his servants together and who then proceeds to give them different amounts of talents: five, two, and one (Matt 25:14-30). The servants with five and two talents respectively do much with them, and as a result, they multiply. Five grow to ten. Two talents increase to four.

But there is also that fellow with just one talent, and he does nothing with it. He buries it. Later when the master returns, he digs it up again and hands it back. At least he has not cost his master anything.

Only note this is a parable about servants, talents, and doing something with those talents. They are supposed to

be used, to be employed, to be put to work. They are not meant to be buried, shelved, or iced.

Hence a failure to use the talents that are given represents a failure of service and servanthood. This master does not need servants who play it safe and bury his money. Even the bank pays better dividends than they do.

Obviously, all of this is to be read with reference to God and us. What God wants to see in his kingdom are diligent kingdom workers, true servants. He wants people who are committed to working with his gifts and with the opportunities that he provides them. Our God wants real servants.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Issue 14 begins with an editorial from Dr. James Visscher. While there are many ways to describe a Christian, he points out, one is a servant. How do we serve? How do we have an attitude of service as our Lord Jesus Christ did? Why is this so important?

A good portion of this issue is devoted to the Press Release of our recent General Synod Carman. Here readers can familiarize themselves with a variety of decisions that were made, including the Seminary, the *Book of Praise* and Bible translations, relations with various churches, and women's voting.

As usual there is a Treasures New and Old meditation – the third of a four part series from Rev. Matthew VanLuik. We also have the Ray of Sunshine column, a letter to the editor, and a book review. Readers will also find a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

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Our servant Lord

Does this surprise you? Does this go contrary to your expectations? Does this come across to you as demeaning? It shouldn't. Later on in the New Testament the Apostle Paul is led to reflect on the life and ministry of his Lord and Saviour and then, no doubt through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he frames that life and ministry within the context of servanthood. In Philippians 2 he reminds believers then and now that Christ is "in very nature God" (2:6). He is divine, exalted, supreme. He lives in light and glory. He possesses all power and majesty.

But then he did something to himself, something truly astounding. Paul writes that he "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (2:7). How? By "being made in human likeness" (2:7). He became a man in order to serve man. God became a servant. The Creator became a creature.

***We would much rather be "kings"
than "servants"***

What a surprise! What a demotion! What a comedown! Unthinkable and unheard of, is it not?

Only there is more. For Paul goes on and relates that our Lord became a very special kind of servant. He became a suffering servant. His service was at bottom a service of sacrifice and death. His service was cross service.

Thankfully it did not end there. For Paul also refers to the fact that after his death God the Father intervened and took back his Son, as it were. He exalted him again! He honoured him by giving him the greatest name in the universe and by promising him that one day every knee would bow before him and every tongue would confess him. What will people everywhere say about him? It will be this: "Jesus is Lord, Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:11).

Our model

Now, it is fundamental to the gospel that we believe and embrace all of this. But something else is also fundamental. What is it? It is the words that introduce this demotion and promotion of our Saviour. Read verse 5 slowly and intently: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." What attitude? Why, his attitude of service!

At bottom there is no reason for a Christian to be uncomfortable with being called a "servant," for in so doing he or she is simply following in the footsteps of their Lord and Master. Our Saviour did not point his nose in the air when he heard the name "servant" or the word "service." He did not walk away in a huff. Rather he embraced both the name and the word. He did so totally, deeply, and utterly.

In response Paul says that we need to learn from this and we need to embrace servanthood as well. We need to understand clearly that our Lord is calling us as Christians to be his servants. He wants us to take on a life of selfless service.

Searching questions

All of this, of course, begs the question, "Do you see yourself as a servant? Is your life today a life of service?" Many years ago John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as President of the United States and in his speech there was one line that stood out. It was this: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country?" In the same vein it needs to be asked, "What are you doing for your God, for his Son, for his church, for his kingdom and for his world?"

Unfortunately, I see people who call themselves Christians, but their whole attitude is one of consumption, of self-centredness, of striving to be on the receiving end. Life is all about getting, not giving. I see people attending the worship services on the Lord's Day not to give praise and glory to God, but in order to be blessed by him in some special way. I see children wanting more, more, and more from their parents and never asking what they can do for them. I see workers demanding the most from their bosses but giving little in return when it comes to real labour. I see politicians dipping deeply into the pot of privilege and prestige but being devoid of any real sense of duty to those who elected them. I see church members expecting their pastors and elders to cater to them and to their needs without giving any thought to their own calling and responsibility in the church.

At times such attitudes drive one to the brink of despair. Are there any real servants left today? Are there any out there who are not asking, "What's in it for me?"

Our Lord and Saviour lived and modelled a vastly different way. Are you committed to following him in his way? It has not made it into the *Book of Praise*, and I am not suggesting that it should, but this is a time in which that old, discarded hymn "Brother, let me be your servant" could use some real singing, and some serious doing. **C**



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The True Brother

(Parable of the Prodigal Son, Part 3)

“But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

(Luke 15:32)

When the younger brother who had left home returns, his father welcomes back his rebellious son with open arms. The father rejoices, “This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” He says to his servants, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.”

When the older brother comes back from working in the field, he hears the sound of music and dancing. And when he is told that this celebration is for his younger brother who had returned home, he becomes angry. He is angry because his father accepted back his younger brother. He is livid because he believes that his father has mistreated him. The older brother has spent so many years working on his father’s estate while his brother has squandered his inheritance in wild living. It seems that his younger brother receives preferential treatment, for he gets the fattened calf and a feast.

From our perspective we can feel for the older brother. His brother had been totally irresponsible by leaving his father’s home and spending everything his father gave him, while the older son has behaved properly by working diligently all those years. Like a good son he always obeyed his father, but he now says to his father, “You never gave

me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.” We can understand the resentment that he feels in his heart, for it seems that he has been treated unjustly.

The father says to his older son, “You are always with me, and everything I have is yours.” In other words: “Son, you have nothing to fear. You don’t need to be jealous about your brother for you will always be my son, and you will always have a place in my home, for what is mine is also yours.” Nevertheless, the older son is angry and refuses to join in with the feast. The father’s interaction with his eldest son exposes what lives in the heart of his son. He still needs to learn what the younger brother learned the hard way, and that is the joy of living in his father’s house.

A true brother does not worry about his own position in his father’s house when a brother who has been lost is found. A true brother is someone who cares about his brothers and sisters. If you are a true brother, you will grieve just as the father grieved when the son was lost. A real brother will rejoice and embrace his brother when he returns home. The fellow in the parable did not love his brother, but he only cared about himself.

Jesus directs this parable to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law because they complained that he was eating with tax collectors and sin-

ners. His message is that they act like this older brother who doesn’t care about his lost brother. They are more concerned about their own reputation in Israel than about the eternal welfare of the tax collectors and sinners.

They stand in sharp contrast to Jesus who acts as the true brother. He cares deeply about those who are lost and without hope in Israel. He could have taken the attitude of the older brother and said to his Father, “What do I care about all those people who have rebelled and become disobedient to you? Why should I suffer and die for sinners?” But Christ sees their lost condition and without any concern for his own position, says to his Father, “I will go and give my life for my brothers and my sisters.” Jesus came to the tax collectors and sinners in Israel as a brother who cares, and with great love and compassion he proclaims that he is preparing a place for them in his Father’s home.

He understands the longing for a living relationship with the Father in heaven. He is willing to be rejected on the cross by his Father to open the way for sinners into the home of his Father. True brothers and sisters in Christ reach out to those who are lost so that they may be found. And a true brother rejoices when a brother or sister who was lost is found.



Significant Snapshots of Synod

Press Release of Synod Carman West of the Canadian Reformed Churches, May 7 - May 21, 2013

Opening

On Monday, May 6, 2013, twenty-four brothers from various congregations across the country arrived in the prairie town of Carman, Manitoba for the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches. These brothers, who were to serve as delegates, along with the congregation of Carman West and many other guests came together for a prayer service in the evening. Rev. R. Aasman, who had been chairman of General Synod 2010 in Burlington, Ontario, led this service. Preaching from the text of James 1:17-18, he delivered an encouraging message.

The following morning, May 7, Dr. A.J. Pol, on behalf of the convening church of Carman West, called the meeting to order. He requested those present to sing from Psalm 133 and then read from Romans 12. He gave a brief meditation on this passage. In this meditation he also noted that this synod was not the first to be held in the town of Carman. The General Synods 1954 and 1958 of the Canadian Reformed Churches were also convened in Carman. After leading in prayer, Dr. Pol welcomed all the delegates to Synod as well those delegates representing churches with which the Canadian Reformed Churches have ecclesiastical fellowship or contact.

The credentials were examined and found to be in good order. All the primary delegates as chosen by Regional Synods East and West were present and signed the attendance list.

By means of election the following brothers were chosen to serve as executive for Synod: Rev. C. Bouwman, chairman; Rev. J.D. Louwerse, vice-chairman; Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer, first clerk; and Rev. R.A. Schouten, second clerk.

On behalf of the convening church of Carman West, Dr. A.J. Pol declared Synod constituted and the elected officers took their places. Rev. C. Bouwman thanked the assembly for the confidence placed in the officers of Synod. He also expressed appreciation for all the work done by the church of Carman West in preparation for General Synod 2013. The meeting was adjourned for the rest of the morning while the executive prepared proposals with respect to the proceedings of Synod and the division of tasks among the various advisory committees of Synod. Five advisory committees were established and each committee was given various agenda items to discuss and then prepare as proposals for deliberation and decision in the plenary session of Synod. The details of each decision were placed in the Acts of Synod. These acts were made available on the website of the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches (www.canrc.org). Once they have been edited they will be made available to the churches in printed form. Before proceeding to its work, Synod adopted the agenda after a few late submissions were either declared admissible or inadmissible.

Here follow the major decisions of Synod Carman West 2013:

The Theological Seminary in Hamilton

On the evening of the first full day, Synod adopted the proposal to establish the position of a fifth professor at the Seminary in Hamilton. This proposal came to Synod after the Board of Governors had completed an external evaluation of the curriculum of the Seminary and the workload of the current faculty. Thus the Board had fulfilled the directives provided by Synods 2007

and 2010. The Board of Governors satisfactorily demonstrated that the department of Ecclesiology ideally requires its own professor, as the current professor of Ecclesiology is over-burdened in having to teach two departments, and that the overall program of the Seminary can be significantly enhanced by the addition of a fifth full-time professor.

The same evening, Synod accepted the recommendation of the Board of Governors to give the Board leave to appoint Rev. T.G. Van Raalte, pastor and teacher of the church of Surrey-Maranatha, as professor of Ecclesiology. For the fourth time in its history, the church of Surrey provides its minister in the service of the Theological Seminary in Hamilton. The chairman of Synod noted with thankfulness to the Lord how our Seminary continues to be blessed with faithful, capable brothers to teach a new generation of men to serve the churches as ministers of the gospel.

The following week, on Wednesday evening, the chairman of Synod welcomed and introduced Dr. T.G. VanRaalte, who was able to be present at Synod via Skype (the Internet). The chairman noted that the day before Rev. VanRaalte had successfully defended his doctoral dissertation and received his degree of "Doctor of Philosophy" (Ph.D.). The chairman congratulated Dr. Van Raalte on this accomplishment and gave thanks to our heavenly Father. Dr. VanRaalte then addressed the Synod, expressing his deep thankfulness for and his acceptance of his appointment. The chairman responded with fitting remarks and Synod joined in the singing of Psalm 115:1, after which the chairman led in thanksgiving prayer.

Synod noted with thankfulness that the mandate given by Synod Smithers 2007 and renewed by Synod Burlington 2010 regarding a full external review is now complete. Synod observed with deep gratitude the considerable work done by the Board of Governors, the Faculty, and the Staff of the Theological Seminary with respect to this review. Further, Synod approved all other decisions and actions of the Board for the years 2010-12.

The previous Synod of Burlington 2010 appointed the church of Grassie, ON as the church responsible for the administration of the Needy Students Fund. This church appointed a committee to launch the operation of this fund. In its report to Synod 2013, the committee provided support guidelines which it had developed. A considerable number of churches responded to this report indicating that a loan program as suggested is not the best way to achieve our goal of promoting steward-

ship among students in need. Synod 2013 decided among other things to mandate this church to review and modify the current guideline and procedures in light of the input from the churches.

Fraternal greetings

Throughout the duration of Synod, delegates from various foreign churches came and went. They gave Synod updates on developments from their respective churches and passed on their greetings. The following churches passed on their greetings via letter: Gereja-Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia (GGRI-NTT), the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea (KPCK), Free Church of Scotland (FCS), and the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN – Rev. Hoogendoorn), and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

The following men addressed General Synod on behalf of their churches:

Br. Wayne Pleiter – Free Reformed Churches of Australia

Rev. Bernard Westerveld – Église réformée du Québec

Rev. Dirk Boersema – Free Reformed Churches of South Africa

Rev. Daniel Kok – United Reformed Churches of North America

Dr. Peter Wallace – Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Rev. Maynard Koerner – Reformed Church in the United States

Rev. John M. Batteau – Reformed Churches of The Netherlands

Rev. Dong Sup Song briefly addressed Synod, as an observer from the Reformed Churches in Korea.

Rev. Matthew Kingswood addressed Synod as an observer delegate from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

Relations with churches abroad

With thankfulness to the Lord, Synod Carman decided to maintain ecclesiastical fellowship with all churches with whom such a relationship was established at an earlier time. It is worth noting that our fellowship with the Reformed Churches of Brazil (RCB) has been maintained to a large extent by the extensive contact that the Canadian Reformed Churches of Hamilton and Surrey have with the RCB through their missionary activities. The Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) was mandated by Synod to use every opportunity to have contact with the Reformed Churches in Brazil and to provide encouragement to them.

CANDIDACY EXAMINATION

Examined by Classis Ontario West June 5/6, 2013 and declared eligible for call:

Brother Ben Schoof

CHURCH NEWS

With respect to the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA), Synod once again decided to recommend these churches as worthy of continued financial assistance, to both help them support the needy churches in their federation and to assist them with their extensive mission work and relief efforts among the disadvantaged and sick in South Africa. Synod also mandated the Board of Governors of our Seminary to investigate together with the FRCSA if there are possibilities to set up a form of distance learning for the first year of theological training, with the use of facilitators.

Synod decided to maintain ecclesiastical fellowship with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Thanks and appreciation was expressed to our sister churches "Down Under" for their ongoing support for and interest in the Theological Seminary in Hamilton, including their generous financial support.

Ecclesiastical fellowship with both the Free Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) will continue and Synod gave the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad the revised mandate to be available to assist both of these Churches in any efforts at reconciliation and reunion should that be requested.

The Canadian Reformed Churches continue to seek to have a meaningful relationship with the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea (KPCK). Synod recommended among other things that the CRCA continue to work cooperatively with our Dutch and Australian sister churches in exercising our relationship with the KPCK in meaningful ways, such as by regular communication, by visiting the General Assembly of the KPCK and by meeting and interacting with their delegates at 2013 ICRC.

Synod noted that the Reformed Churches of New Zealand have established a new category of inter-church relationship called "Ecclesiastical Fellowship" (EF), in addition to the existing sister-church relationship. They also provisionally adopted new rules for this new relationship. Then they downgraded the relationship with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia from a sister church relationship to ecclesiastical fellowship. The CRCA was mandated to try to get a better understanding of the practical changes which come with the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. The CRCA was also to encourage the RCNZ to be consequent in its relationship with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia as it develops and finalizes its own rules for EF.

It was decided not to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Churches in Korea (RCK) until the Canadian Reformed Churches are satisfied with results of

meetings between Reformed Churches in Korea and the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea. A clearer understanding of the current status of this small federation, as well as future intent for joining with other churches is necessary.

Synod decided to continue in ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Churches of Indonesia referred to in their own language as the Gereja-Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia (GGRI) in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT). This federation of churches has recently united with two other federations of Reformed Churches in Indonesia in the provinces of Kalimantan Barat and Papua. The CRCA was mandated to gather and evaluate information on these other churches who are result of the mission work undertaken in the past by our Dutch sister churches and the Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto. Further, CRCA was mandated to encourage the Reformed Churches of Indonesia with whom we have ecclesiastical fellowship to seek closer contact and cooperation with the Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Calvinis, yet another federation of Reformed Churches in Indonesia with whom we have contact but have decided at this time not to offer a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship.

Synod acknowledged that the ICRC appears to be serving a useful function and it also provides a good opportunity to meet with other churches. The next International Conference of Reformed Churches will take place in Cardiff, Wales, 2013. A delegation of two voting members and two advisory members will be sent.

Relations with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands

Relations with our sister churches in The Netherlands had the special attention of our General Synod. Synod received a very extensive report from a subcommittee appointed by the previous synod. Synod Carman decided to address the Synod of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (RCN) directly by letter. Our Synod would express to their next synod our brotherly concerns in a letter of admonition as per the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (1 and 6) about the tolerance of deviations from Scriptures and confession that we see in our sister churches at this time. This letter will express our love for the RCN as church of our Lord and our sincere prayers for our sister churches in the extremely secular European situation. But it will also describe our disquiet about the following matters:

1. The views coming from or tolerated at the Theological University in Kampen (TUK) which show marks of Scripture criticism and which deviate from Reformed hermeneutical principles as indicated by Articles 5 and 7 of the Belgic Confession.
2. The work of the deputies Men/Women in the Church appointed by Synod Amersfoort-West 2005 and Zwolle 2008, especially regarding how Scripture was treated in their reports.
3. The growing relationship with the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC), without resolution of crucial differences such as women in office and subscription to the confessions.
4. A growing sense of estrangement as a consequence of the concerns mentioned above, which we hope and pray will not lead to a parting of ways in the future.

This letter was drafted at Synod and approved. It was translated into Dutch before it was to be sent. If it is possible our subcommittee is to be present when this letter is dealt with at their general synod.

The Synod reappointed the subcommittee consisting of brothers C. Van Dam, J. Moesker, J. DeGelder, and G.J. Nordeman. This committee was mandated to among other things:

- To maintain contact with the BBK of the RCN (their committee for contact with foreign churches).
- To continue to observe developments at the Theological University in Kampen.
- To monitor the work of the Deputies concerning the Role of Women in the Church and assess its report as well as the decisions of the next Synod of the RCN regarding that report.
- To monitor the ongoing unity discussions between the RCN and NRC.
- To review the decisions of the next Synod of the RCN regarding unity with NRC, to review the results of the revision of the RCN church order, to monitor the results of the RCNs involvement with the National Synod.
- To monitor the developments regarding the application of Article 67 of the RCN Church Order.
- To work in consultation with the deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

With respect to those who left our sister churches in The Netherlands, Synod Carman decided to have the subcommittee monitor developments in the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands in temporary federation (RCNvv) and the Reformed Churches Restored (RCR). The subcommittee is to inform the Reformed Churches Restored that as

long as they maintain ecclesiastical fellowship with the “Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford” closer contact between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Reformed Churches Restored will be impossible. Our subcommittee is to do their work in consultation with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

Relations with churches in North America

With respect to churches in North America, Synod decided to continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Église réformée du Québec, and the Reformed Church in the United States under the adopted rules giving attention to particular issues of concern or difference.

General Synod Carman 2013 received a letter from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. In this letter they elaborated on their position regarding women deacons, clarifying their stance on exclusive Psalmody, and requesting a re-opening of discussions with the Canadian Reformed Churches with a view to having fraternal relations. Their Interchurch Relations Committee provided a position paper, adopted by the RPCNA Synod of 2001, outlining their view of women deacons and their view of ordination. For example with respect to the former, it states, “The Diaconate. . . is neither a ruling nor a teaching office. Its exercise. . . and function is administrative.” Synod Carman 2013 decided to mandate the committee for Relations with Churches in North America:

- To respond to this letter sent from the RPCNA.
- To investigate and evaluate the way in which the RPCNA understand ordination, the nature, and root of the office of deacon, and the authority of such an office in light of Scriptures and the Reformed confessions.
- To investigate the nature and status of the Testimony.
- To continue dialogue with the RPCNA at meetings of NAPARC.

A number of Canadian Reformed Churches expressed concerns with respect to our membership in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) and the implications of such membership. Synod Burlington 2010 had appointed the Committee for Contact with Churches of North America (CCCNA) to investigate the status and implications of the “Golden Rule Comity Agreement” and the “NAPARC Agreement on Transfer of Members and Congregations” in order to determine whether or not these agreements interfere with the independence of the Canadian Reformed Churches in regard to establishing ecclesiastical fellowship with other federations. The

committee provided the churches with an explanation of the “Golden Rule Comity Agreement” and the “NAPARC Agreement on Transfer of Members and Congregations.” Synod considered that the CCCNA’s conclusion with respect to the advisory character of NAPARC should be underlined: “Our participation in NAPARC does not mean that we have recognized all its member churches as being true and faithful: rather, we have agreed to meet with them on the basis of an established constitution and by-laws.” It is important that local congregations understand that these agreements do not put us into ecclesiastical fellowship with every NAPARC church. The self-testimony required by NAPARC member churches is not sufficient basis for us to recognize them as true churches, but it is sufficient basis for us to dialogue together with them at NAPARC as a discussion partner. Like the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC), NAPARC is a discussion forum for churches who share the same Reformed confession. Synod Carman renewed the CCCNA mandate to represent our churches at NAPARC.

United Reformed Churches of North America

In light of the decisions of Synod 2013, the road forward to eventual merger with the United Reformed Churches of North America remains open. Synod did express regret that the CCU subcommittees dealing with liturgical forms and confessions, with theological education, and with the songbook had nothing substantial to report because their counterparts from the URCNA lacked the mandate to interact with them. Thankfully, the committee dealing with the Proposed Joint Church Order was able to prepare a final edition for Synod 2013. The coordinators for the Committee for Church Unity were very active in promoting the unity with the URCNA. It was noted by Synod that in many locales in Canada there has been excellent cooperation and fellowship among the CanRC and URCNA (e.g. pulpit exchanges, joint church services, combined council meetings, Bible studies, ministerial, support of Christian schooling, joint church news).

The coordinators for the committee for Church Unity (CCU) were reappointed to their task. They were given the mandate:

- To discuss with CERCU the areas of concern or fear in the URCNA that seem to be hindering progress toward merger with the Canadian Reformed Churches to seek ways to facilitate the work of building unity on the local level, as well as visiting churches and classes of the URCNA, particularly in the United States.
- To discuss with CERCU how to make preparations for Phase 3a, such as through the reappointment of the

subcommittees for theological education, liturgical forms and confessions, and a common songbook.

- To seek clarification from CERCU on the authoritative status and definitions of the different categories of doctrinal statements adopted by recent URCNA synods.
- To encourage the URCNA to refrain from making further statements of this nature.

With thankfulness to the Lord, Synod decided to continue in Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the United Reformed Churches and to reappoint the various subcommittees. Synod received the Proposed Joint Church Order 2012 for further modification and the Forms for Discipline for further refinement. The subcommittee dealing with the Proposed Joint Church Order was given the mandate to continue to work with the church order committee of URCNA and make further changes to the Church Order and the Forms for Discipline in light of the letters received from the churches.

The Book of Praise

The work of revising the *Book of Praise* was brought to completion by General Synod 2013. Minor changes were made to the wording of both forms of subscriptions, to the forms for celebration of the Lord’s Supper and the form for the solemnization of marriage, as well as to the confessions. With input from the churches, a final revision of the wording of the psalms and hymns was accepted. Many churches addressed Synod concerning the deletion of rests and breath marks in a number of hymns. A number of rests were placed back into the hymns. The decision was also made to revert back to the 1984 melodies of Hymn 18, 31, 37, and 48. Synod expressed thanks to the SCBP for its efforts over the years in reviewing, evaluating, and suggesting new hymns to the churches. A hymn index which enables one to see at a glance the Scripture passages upon which various hymns are based was adopted. Further, Synod mandated the SCBP to change the NIV quotations in the confessions and prose section of the *Book of Praise* to the ESV before publishing the final version. The decision of Synod Burlington 2010 to instruct the SCBP to refrain from capitalizing referent pronouns for God in the *Book of Praise* was upheld.

Synod thanked the SCBP for its dedication and effort in publishing the APV in book form and on the website. It also authorized the SCBP to publish 2013 edition of the *Book of Praise* as the Authorized Version for use by the churches and to make it available on the website in hyperlinked, indexed format.

The mandate of the SCBP was clarified. It was decided that all requests concerning factual errors, grammatical, typographical, or other minor stylistic matters

throughout the *Book of Praise* may be addressed by individuals or churches to the SCBP for their consideration and possible suggestion for change to a future synod. All requests concerning other changes to the contents of the *Book of Praise* (e.g. translation of confessions, rewording and rhyming of psalms and hymns, changes to liturgical forms) need to arise out of the churches in the ecclesiastical way, namely from consistory to classis, then to regional synod, and finally general synod.

Looking to the future, Synod decided not to renew the mandate given in Article 142 of Synod Burlington 2010 but to direct the churches which desire the addition of new hymns to take their proposals through the ecclesiastical route.

Bible translations

In its report to Synod 2013, the Committee for Bible Translations provided an evaluation of the 2011 NIV. It drew attention to five texts that they felt could eventually impact the churches' view of women in office. General Synod decided to refrain at this time from recommending the NIV 2011 for use or testing in the churches. Instead Synod recommended to the churches the use of the ESV, and leaves it to the freedom of the churches to use the NKJV, NASB, or the NIV84.

The Committee for Bible Translation received a new mandate which includes, among other things, the following:

- To provide a thorough study of the ESV with special attention to its readability and to what degree the concerns expressed by previous iterations of the CBT about the RSV remain a concern in relation to the ESV.
- To submit, receive, and evaluate comments from the churches on the ESV.

- To submit worthy translation changes to the ESV editorial committee and monitor the response.
- To send the committee's critical remarks and suggestions for improvement on the five texts pertaining to women in office to the CBTNIV and monitor the response.
- To serve the next general synod with a report sent to the churches at least six months prior to the next general synod.

Women's voting

The previous Synod of Burlington 2010 decided that any arrangements for the election of office bearers that goes beyond what has been agreed upon by the churches in Article 3 CO is a matter of local regulations, adopted for that purpose by the consistory with the deacons. This decision to leave women's voting in the domain of the local church led fourteen churches to appeal this decision to Synod Carman 2013. The delegates wrestled extensively with these appeals in committee and plenary session. Eventually the following decision was adopted with respect to women's voting. 1) That Synod Burlington erred on church political grounds in its decision to leave the matter of women's voting in the freedom of the churches. 2) That Synod Burlington erred in stating that exegetical sections brought forward in both the majority and minority reports "are hardly relevant or decisive for the matter of women's voting." 3) That the churches should return to the voting practice as it officially was before 2010, namely male communicant members only voting.





Back (L to R): L. Jagt, Dr. A.J. Pol, Rev. W.M. Wielenga, Rev. J. Moesker, S.H. DeBoer, Rev. A. Souman, C.H. Medemblik, Rev. C.J. VanderVelde, B. VanRaalte, Rev. W.B. Slomp, P.A.M. Broekema, R.J. Buist, H.F. Stoffels, Rev. R.J. Eikelboom, C. Leyenhorst, L. Kampen, Rev. R. Bredenhof, Rev. J. Ludwig, F.C. Ludwig, L.K. Wierenga, R. de Haan
Seated: Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer, Rev. J.D. Louwerse, Rev. C. Bouwman, Rev. R.A. Schouten

Format of Synod Acts and Synod Guidelines

An overture came from Regional Synod West concerning the format of the Acts of General Synod. It was asked of General Synod to choose the format of “material(s) – decision – ground(s) for its decisions and acts.” Synod decided to not accede to this overture and continue with the long held format of “observations – considerations – recommendations.”

In Article 62 of Synod Burlington 2010 it was decided to add the following new guideline to the Guidelines for Synod: *For all matters of the churches in common, individual churches may address proposals or significant submissions directly to general synod with the requirement that all such submissions are sent also to each church in the federation no later than six months prior to general synod.* (Article 62, recommendation 4.2, now General Synod Guidelines I.E.)

Four churches asserted that this new guideline contravenes Article 30 of the Church Order, since the guidelines allows churches to place matters for the church in common on the agenda of general synod without having the minor assemblies (classis and regional synod) filtering these matters first. Synod Carman decided that Synod Burlington erred in its decision to implement Guideline 1.E and that Guideline 1.E. be removed from the *Guidelines for Synod*.

Conclusion of Synod

Finally, in the evening of Tuesday May 21, Synod was able to complete the work set out in the adopted agenda. The work was completed in a spirit of peace and good order and censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order was not necessary. The vice-chairman took the opportunity to thank Rev. C. Bouwman for the fine way he served as chairman. Rev. Bouwman showed himself to be well organized, and fair and judicious in his work.

In his closing remarks, the chairman noted that Synod dealt with some 275 items of correspondence. He briefly reflected on the fact that the items on the agenda of Synod Carman 2013 were very similar to the items on the agenda of Synods Homewood-Carman 1954 and 1958. This similarity speaks of continuity, and especially of God’s continued faithfulness.

The chairman concluded that the decisions of Synod 2013 will now be judged by the churches and by God Himself in the light of his Word.

He also expressed thanks to all the brothers who served at Synod, as well as to the church of Carman-West for its exceptional hospitality. The ladies in charge of the meals were thanked and given a gift for their church kitchen. In closing, the chairman read from Ephesians 6:10-20 and gave a brief meditation on this passage. The members of Synod and those who had joined them for the evening sang from Psalm 124. The chairman led in prayer and General Synod 2013 was closed.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear reader: Is this your experience too?

You might have read an excellent article in one of our Reformed periodicals such as this one, and the next Sunday you might ask a brother or sister: “Did you read that article by So and So?” When they say, “Yes, we did”, you are able to share.

But, as you know, too often, even your most lovable brothers and sister may reply as follows: “No, where did you read this?” / “We have not read that magazine for a long time.” / “We just do not have the time.” / “We are not interested in what they write about.” / “If we have no time to read the whole paper it is not worth our fifty dollars.” / “We don’t read much, we really do not like reading.” / “We get it, but share it with our children”

In response to this last one we sometimes say: “Why not save a few back issues to reread with reference to later letters to the Editor and give your children their own subscription for birthdays or for Christmas?”

Or we might say: “We find that reading Christian magazines on Sundays is very enjoyable and well spent time. And money spent on Reformed magazines is also money well spent, compared to cable TV for instance.”

There are many other good reasons for spending our cash on good Reformed magazines. Most of us donate some of our hard earned money to very worthwhile causes. Good Reformed periodicals are also a very worthwhile cause. If you think of it, many Christian men and women use their God-given talents to write meaningful and upbuilding articles to strengthen us in our Christian faith and encourage us to live a Christian life. Other

Christian men and women invest their money to make the work of these writers and authors available to us in print. Theirs is a Christian ministry, well worth of our wholehearted financial support and prayers. We sometimes don’t think of it, but fact is, unless there are sufficient subscribers, publishers cannot publish and authors have no outlet for their talents.



Brothers and sisters, much of what we are writing about maybe something you have never given much thought. That is the way it is. But if you think of it, it is all part of the communion of saints, which we confess with heart and mouth each and every Sunday. Most of our churches have recently ordained new elders and deacons. And you probably also know that, in many churches, finding qualified and willing brothers becomes harder each year. Why? Many reasons; but not being informed, not reading good Christian periodicals and books, is certainly also one of the reasons.

In closing, *and this is very important*: We presume that most our brothers and sisters who really need to read this letter will not read it. Can you perhaps find a way to give them a copy?

Gerry and Paulina Denbok
Burlington 

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

CORRECTION

In Issue 12 (June 14, 2013) a Reader’s Forum article was mistakenly attributed to Ploon Hofsink. The article was in fact meant to be anonymous, while Mrs. Hofsink was the contributor of a photo elsewhere in the issue. Our apologies for the mistake and the confusion.



Rose Malda

Hello. My name is Rose Malda. Many of the people here at Mount Nemo Nursing Home call me Rosa. That is not my name, but as I cannot speak, I just smile and laugh it off.

I am the fifth of six children born to a typical Dutch immigrant family in Burlington, Ontario. My father, a tradesman, and my mother, a homemaker, along with my older brothers and sisters took great pleasure in welcoming me into this world fifty-six years ago. At the age of three months God called me to a specific task within his earthly kingdom via a severe case of spinal meningitis. While causing the permanent arrest of most of my intellectual development, this illness opened the door for my becoming an ambassador for Philippians 4:11-12. If you want a living example of someone that has achieved contentment in every situation, I humbly suggest that you look no further. Never have I argued with a roommate about how to decorate our room. I have never desired my neighbour's wheelchair or dreamed of leasing one with sportier rims. Whether in sickness or in health, I am quite content with a warm cup of tea, the company of friendly people, or the sound of a familiar psalm or hymn being sung.

Sometimes I notice my little sister looking at me as if wondering what I will be like when the chains of sickness and death are removed. Will I be equally content with the small things in life? Will I be just as rambunctious and fun loving while in a crowd? Will I be a true big sister that she can share a private joke or secret with? All of these things will be laid bare in due time, but if she is searching for the perfection that God intends every one of his children to have, it can be found by looking around me instead of at me. The smile that lights someone's face as I gently rub the back of their hand in appreciation for a warm cup of tea, the laughter that fills the room when I shout joyfully at the sound of a rousing hymn, or the easing of tensions that one of my signature bear hugs will bring to a caregiver burdened by personal problems are only some of the gifts that God gives the world through me in my simple condition.

Let me, at this time, thank my many care givers at Mount Nemo Nursing Home and beyond. The volunteers, staff, board, and other residents that look after many of my day to day needs as well as the doctors, dentists, nurses, and others that care for my specific requirements have been a blessing for many years now. In my own small way, I pray for them every day. Please do the same for me.

Come Lord Jesus.

For Rose Malda

August birthdays

Congratulations to all who celebrate a birthday in August. We thank that Lord that he has given you another year in his kingdom. It is our prayer that you will be given health and strength and God's continued blessing in your new year. We also hope that you have a wonderful day celebrating your special day with family and friends.

- 4 TERENCE BERENDS will be 37**
6528 1st Line, RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4
- 5 PHILIP SCHUURMAN will be 54**
1156 Diltz Road, Dunnville, ON N1A 2W2
- 9 ROSE MALDA will be 56**
Mt. Nemo Christian Nursing Home
4486 Guelph Line, Burlington, ON L7P 0N2
- 18 FENNY KUIK will be 61**
140 Foch Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2C 5H7
- 23 JACK DIELEMAN will be 41**
6528 1st Line, RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

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

You can contact us by the following means:

Mail: Corinne Gelms

8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

Phone: 905-957-0380, email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca

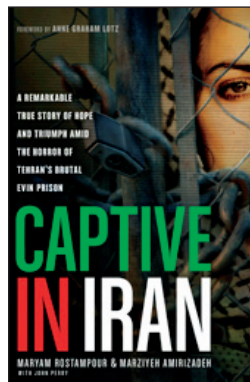


Captive in Iran: A Remarkable True Story of Hope and Triumph amid the Horror of Tehran's Brutal Evin Prison,
by Maryam Rostampour & Marziyeh Amirizadeh. Tyndale House Publishers, 2013

Additional information: 305 pages; available in softcover (price about \$15.00) and Kindle (about \$10.00)

It is helpful to read books that give an overview of the persecution of Christians around the world. It is also helpful to read a book that focuses on a single case of Christian individuals being persecuted for their faith. Reading such a book can add significantly to one's understanding of the plight of fellow Christians in other parts of the world.

The book *Captive in Iran* describes the journey of two young women who were imprisoned for their faith. Maryam Rostampour and Marziyeh Amirizadeh were born into Muslim families in Iran. They met while studying Christian theology in Turkey in 2005, and realized they had become Christians at about the same time six years earlier. Deciding to join forces, they returned to Iran and began a program of mission outreach. Over the next two years, they handed out New Testaments in Tehran and other cities. They started two house churches in their apartment, one for young people and another for prostitutes. In 2009, Maryam and Marziyeh were arrested in Tehran



for promoting Christianity – a capital crime in Iran – and were imprisoned for 259 days in the city's notorious Evin Prison. The official charges they received were apostasy, anti-government activity, and blasphemy, for which they were sentenced to execution by hanging. As many around the world prayed for their freedom, and as a result of international lobbying, Maryam and Marziyeh were released in 2009 and cleared of all charges the following year. After their release, they emigrated to the United States.

Just speaking for myself, the two main benefits from reading this book were the following: First, a much better understanding of how persecution “works” in a country like Iran: the kind of accusations Christians face, the kind of treatment they get when interrogated and imprisoned, the kind of challenges they face inside prison. Second, it is impressive to read about the kind of impact that these two young women had on their fellow prisoners, how they prayed for other women with whom they shared cells, how they used opportunities to speak about their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and how the Lord used their “prison ministry” in amazing ways. It is both humbling and encouraging to read such a story. Warmly recommended. 