

Clarion

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Call Fatigue

Everyone feels the shortcomings of the calling process at one time or the other

Have you ever felt frustrated with the calling process in our churches? We certainly can be thankful that the Lord provides shepherds to congregations, but judging from the complaints I've heard over the years, both congregations and ministers can feel disgruntled at times. Is this unavoidable? I don't think so. Let's take a look at how it goes and how things can be improved.

Fatigue

For a vacant church, going through the calling process can be long and tedious, perhaps especially for the consistories and calling committees. The people investigating ministers for recommendation to the consistory spend many hours collecting information. Consistories take time to weigh the options and sometimes turn down the committee's recommendation. This frequently means going back to the drawing board. Meanwhile, the congregation often endures long periods of silence from their governing body which strains their patience.

When (finally) a name is presented to the church and enough support is found within the congregation, the actual call may then be issued. Frustration can mount for the brothers and sisters when a minister comes, preaches, meets the congregation, asks lots of questions, shows care and concern for the needs presented, and appears interested only to return a "no" answer days later. Thus begins another months-long process of considering a new minister or candidate.

When this happens not once or twice but three, four, five, or more times (over many months if not a year or two), the process becomes disheartening for the vacant church. "Call fatigue" sets in and by the time the sixth minister is called, only half the people show up to meet him and very few expect him to say "yes." The minister, then, isn't at all sure that the congregation actually

wants him to come, and such a malaise can easily turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Aggravation

If there is frustration in the vacant church there can at times be aggravation in the church of the minister who happens to receive many calls. It occurs more often that certain ministers receive call after call after call. At times these arrive simultaneously but just as frequently they come on the heels of each other. A minister has just spent weeks considering and declining a call only to receive another one from a different church a month or two later.

During the time when the call is being considered, the congregation (which, as a rule, would like their minister to stay) is on pins and needles. Finally they hear that he has decided to decline the new call and continue his existing call to their congregation. A sense of happy relief sets in only to be displaced with aggravation when their minister receives a new call a short time later and the whole congregation is once again thrown into a time of uncertainty. Members of the congregation can easily think: "Don't these churches get the hint? He has decided to stay, so leave him alone!"

Exasperation

It's at this point that a minister, too, can feel exasperated. When a call is received (an honour in itself, to be sure), the minister's regular work within his congregation slows down and nearly stops. He has to give time, energy, and focus to the calling church. In most cases he will go for a visit. People will email or phone him about the call. All of this becomes (necessarily) very distracting and his congregation will notice that too.

If the calling process puts a strain on the minister's congregation, it puts an even greater strain on the minister and his family. I don't mind saying that it is a grueling few weeks, for you must, with an open mind and a ready heart, consider the possibility of uprooting your family, breaking ties with your congregation, leaving friends and perhaps extended family connections, and potentially moving a long distance away. As minister and father, you worry about the impact on both your flock and your family. Meanwhile, your wife and children are also anxiously thinking about all these things.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

This issue begins with Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer's editorial on "Call Fatigue." An interesting and thought-provoking editorial for vacant churches, ministers, and churches with a pastor who is considering calls. In this article Rev. Holtvlüwer asks if there are ways that we may improve the calling process.

Issue 10 begins a series of articles by Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher on women in the church voting for officebearers. The article in this issue asks a question: "Is voting advising or governing?" A relevant and important question in our federation.

The Cloverdale congregation brings us news of their sixtieth anniversary celebration. This issue brings regular columns Treasures New and Old and Ray of Sunshine. We also have a You Asked question and answer, a book review, a canticle, and a press release.

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
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You can say that all of that comes “with the territory” of being a minister, and that’s true. But make no mistake: it’s an exhausting and upsetting time for the family. When a minister and his family have to go through this repeatedly in a relatively short time, it becomes oppressive and burdensome. It begins to feel like the only way you can put a stop to the constant interruptions and the pressure to move is by accepting a call. But then, if the minister faithfully carries on as before, it usually doesn’t take too many years and the whole unpleasant and erratic “pressure-cooker” starts up again!

There’s a problem with our system. All the parties feel its shortcomings at one time or the other. I don’t know of any superior system but to reduce everyone’s frustration, let me present a few ideas to improve the one we’ve got.

Transparency

To begin with the vacant church, I would encourage consistories to be as transparent as possible with the congregation. Everyone understands that researching potential candidates or ministers takes time. People also comprehend that specifics cannot be shared until the time that a formal recommendation is at hand, but when no information is forthcoming for long stretches, people get antsy. Why not make a remark in the pastoral column from time to time that lets people know the process is underway, names are being considered, and information is being gathered? A timely update along with an encouragement for people to make this a matter of personal and family prayer will keep the congregation thinking and praying alongside the consistory.

Give the timing of your call careful thought

That transparency should extend to the minister or candidate under consideration. Over the years I’ve encountered different “philosophies” in calling committees (or consistories). Some choose to contact in advance the man they have in mind in order to see if there would be any compelling reason he could not consider a call at that time. Others choose to keep the minister in the dark, say nothing to him, and spring it on him out of the blue! There seems to be a view that telephoning the minister in advance would somehow taint the purity of the calling process.

As you may guess, I personally favour the former approach and would encourage it. While I certainly regard

the entire calling process as guided by the hand of the Lord which we need to carefully honour, I do not think this excludes consultation with a minister in advance. God’s guidance is also in that telephone call, is it not? Can we not see this as part of the broader process of gathering information (in the same way that contact is made with elders, deacons, or other church members to inquire after the minister in question)?

The reality is that the Lord also directs the circumstances of a minister’s current ministry and family life. There may legitimately be things going on which would prevent him from accepting a call anywhere at that moment. Would it not reduce the frustration for the vacant church if they called someone who was at least in a position to consider accepting their call? I’m also convinced that for most ministers, eliminating the element of complete surprise would also reduce their frustration in being caught off guard or flat-footed by an unexpected call.

Five is the new three

Unless I miss my guess, it seems there has been a change as to when congregations might first consider a minister eligible for call. It used to be that churches wouldn’t call a man before he had served a minimum of three years in his current church. This is one of our unwritten rules which are changing – in my view, for the better – to five years. That seems to be the new minimum call-free period. Some calling churches haven’t taken this to heart yet but I would urge them to do so – three years is a very short time to minister to a congregation. Just consider: would you want your own minister (assuming all is well) to be called away after only three years?

I understand that, in times past when there was such a shortage of ministers, it was more necessary for the pastors to move around frequently. That time has passed. The percentage of vacancies is lower and the length of time a church remains vacant is not as great as it used to be. Seminary students are graduating each year and some are on stand-by for a call, giving the churches options.

Besides, a five-year ministry is still brief enough. Building trusting relationships in pastoral work takes time and your effectiveness tends to increase the longer people get to know you and you them. Professors at CRTS advised us back in the day to not leave before one Catechism cycle was completed, generally six or seven years. Unless there are special difficulties in a minister’s work that would make it advisable to move earlier, I hope our churches will think in terms of a man having “five plus” years under his belt before considering him for a call.

Timing of calls

The timing of calls is also sometimes vexing and even baffling for ministers. For example, I have seen a minister receive a call (usually the out-of-the-blue kind) the day before he is to go on summer holiday with his family. Nice, relaxing summer vacation, eh? Or the call comes a week before Christmas, a time of the year when extra sermons need to be prepared and the family is coming home. After a full fall session of preaching, teaching, and visiting, a pressure-filled call is the last thing needed over the Christmas period. Please, consistories and congregations, I beg of you: give the timing of your call careful thought. Ministers aren't looking to be coddled but just to be given a fair shake to consider your call at a time when they have the physical and mental energy and focus to do so.

*An inquiring, informed, and perceptive
calling committee could serve its
congregation very well*

To me, the best time of the year to launch a call is in the first third of the year, January through April. It's not a time for extended holidays (spring break at the most), so congregants and ministers are available to interact with each other. It also fits in well with the seasonal work in both church and school. For example, Catechism classes normally end in April. Profession of faith, installation of new office bearers, the celebration of Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost all take place in the spring. School (for those ministerial homes with school-age children) ends in June. If a minister considers accepting a call, a very natural time of the year to transition from one congregation to the other is after school is out (or at least after Catechism is done). A winter or early spring call will allow for a timely move prior to September.

Calling cycle

Calls which are made in the summer or fall are competing with the normal time of holidays or the beginning of a new season of both church work and school studies. The latter is a time when renewed focus is placed on the congregational work. I wouldn't say such calls are impossible to consider but I would say their timing is far from ideal and likely does more to add to the all-around frustration.

Could we not begin to think in terms of a calling cycle? If we accept that the first four months of the year are the best time for calls, why not aim to make all the calls for a year within that time period? For example, a calling committee could be mandated to come with a list of three suitable men by late fall. Using the list, the consistory and congregation could then proceed with calling in early January, one after the other if necessary. Some vacant churches wait lengthy periods between calls – is that necessary or beneficial? I would think that more than one suitable candidate could be researched and recommended simultaneously.

With a list of three men in hand, it would only take weeks (not months) to move into the next call. If after three calls there is still no positive reply, would it not be to everyone's benefit to take a break for eight months and have the calling committee go back to the drawing board? After three solid attempts, it will be good for everyone to have the pressure off for a while. The consistory and congregation (and ministers) could then get mentally prepared for the next calling cycle.

Stop consecutive calls

What should we do about the frustration of consecutive calls? It's simple: vacant churches should stop making them. Wait a full year. Seriously, when a minister has considered an incoming call and turned it down, then most often it means *he has recommitted himself to his current call in his existing congregation*. This being the case, the man should be given time to press on with that call and neither he nor his congregation should need to undergo that unsettling process of reconsidering his standing for at least another twelve months. I think it would be healthy if this became the new normal, one of our unwritten rules.

An exception to this would be when a minister indicates to a new calling committee (which, wisely, inquires in advance by phone) that his circumstances are unusual. It could be that he may not have felt able to accept the recent call for particular reasons but at the same time, he is quite open to another call. In other words, the pastor is looking to move on. In that case, a quick, consecutive call makes good sense and may actually reduce everyone's aggravation. This is just one example of how an inquiring, informed, and perceptive calling committee could serve its congregation very well.

All in all, I hope we can collectively do a re-think of our calling practices. Why not get the discussion going around your coffee table and in your consistory room? **C**



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A Place in the Father's House

"I am going there to prepare a place for you."

(John 14:2)

Ever since the fall into sin, heaven and earth have been separated. There has been a deep chasm between God and mankind. God created us to praise him, but we rebelled against him in Adam.

Yet despite our disobedience, God came down to us in his grace and mercy. In the time of the old covenant, he dwelt among his people in the tabernacle and then in the temple, in the Most Holy Place. Although the LORD was with his people, he was also clearly separated from them. Only the high priest could come into God's presence, and then only once a year.

Then God sent his one and only Son to earth. This Son, the Word, crossed over from heaven to earth, became flesh and tabernacled among us. He is the second Adam, the one who has fulfilled God's law perfectly and who bore in his flesh the wrath of God against the sins of the whole world. After he died and was buried, he rose from the dead. He is the first fruits of the new creation! He is the first of the new mankind. All those who believe in him will follow him into God's perfect kingdom and may dwell with God forever.

God the Father has received Jesus Christ into heaven and that is where he now dwells in God's presence. He is in his Father's house. This is the gospel of the ascension: there

is already now a man of flesh and blood like us in heaven. He is not only enjoying God's presence, but he is also busy preparing a place for us, for all those who believe in him, for all God's children.

In John 14 Jesus is comforting the disciples before his death on the cross, and he is explaining to them what he will be doing once he has finished his task on earth. Once he has returned to his Father, he will be making a place ready for us, his brothers and sisters.

How beautiful and encouraging are these words of our Saviour! We have the same heavenly Father as our Saviour has and therefore we belong in the same house as he. As he is already in that heavenly mansion and as we share in him who is our Head, soon we will be with him in our Father's house. He did not ascend to heaven to abandon us, leaving us here to fend for ourselves, but he has gone to heaven to continue his work of salvation.

He has gone to heaven to make ready our place in our Father's house. There are many rooms in this heavenly mansion, enough rooms for all of God's children. We will receive a place from our Saviour in the presence of God, a place in which to rest in peace and enjoy God forever. This is a place which no one and nothing can ever

take away from us, for Christ's work is sure and stands forever.

Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven in order that he might make a place ready for us in the house of our heavenly Father. Once this work of preparation is over and once all the elect have been gathered in, then he will come back and take us to be with him forever. Then we will be in God's presence together with Jesus Christ, our brother and our Lord and Saviour. On the day of his return to earth in glory we will be reunited with him our Head. Then Head and body will be together in a renewed and restored world, serving and glorifying God in perfect righteousness and holiness.

If we have passed away before that time, our bodies will be raised and will be reunited with our souls. Or if we are still alive when Christ returns, then we will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor 15:52) and we will receive holy immortality.

In the meantime, we know that there is a righteous man with a glorified and imperishable body already in heaven. Right now he is there, busy on our behalf. His presence with God already is a guarantee that we will later join him, in God's good time. May we be encouraged and strengthened in our faith by this wonderful reality!



Should Sisters Vote for Officebearers? Is Voting Governing?



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As churches assess Synod Carman 2013, one of the articles that will no doubt receive considerable attention is Article 110 re Women's Voting for Office Bearers. It has been a longstanding, contentious issue that Synod has sought to settle once and for all. One can certainly appreciate that Carman attempted, also in light of mail received, to settle this issue once for all. Wrestling with the biblical, confessional, and church government issues at a forum such as synod with a plethora of opinions and views is far from easy. This series of articles will attempt then to engage the various views prevalent in the churches, expose some fallacies, and search for a way which should allow a federation to live together harmoniously while acknowledging, as we often need to do, that within a federation of churches a variety of approaches is acceptable. The unity of the churches is not dependent on uniformity on all points.

Over a number of issues, I will attempt to answer a number of questions.

- Is voting advising or governing?
- Is there such a thing as "the headship of man"?
- Is a synod to be governed by democratic principles?
- Is this really to be considered as a matter of the "churches in common"?

A very central question in the whole discussion of who should vote for officebearers is: when a person votes on nominations presented by the consistory of their church, does this person *advise* the consistory, state a preference, or is this person actually involved in *governing*?

Synod Carman 2013 observed¹ that several congregations "regard voting not merely as advisory but as an exercising of authority." Carman also considered that, according to Article 3 CO, the election has a "binding character" and "cannot be seen as advisory only." Very striking here is the fact that in this *consideration* 3.3, Synod said: "By allowing the congregation to vote, the

consistory gives the congregation influence in the process of calling brothers to the office and the consistory shall abide by *this decision of the congregation*."²

It is noteworthy that here the Synod even spoke about "the decision of the congregation," as if the congregation forms an ecclesiastical assembly itself. Ultimately, any view which suggests that members of the congregation are doing more than giving advice or stating a preference to the consistory is working out of a framework which suggests that the congregation is a decision making body in itself. And then the question is pertinent: are we not veering away from a Reformed church polity in which the authority of the officebearers is viewed as being received directly from the head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ (BC, Art 31) towards a congregationalist church polity in which the congregation is the decisive decision making body? We have often been reminded by the late Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene that a classis, regional synod, and general synod only exists when and for so long as it receives its authority from the officebearers of a local church through a credentialed process. Because of these principles, whenever in Reformed church life the consistory calls together the congregation for a meeting, it is careful not to entertain motions but to receive advice and to promise that it (the consistory or council) will make a decision on the basis of this advice. But here churches speak about more than advice, and a Synod even talks about a "decision of the congregation."

More than thirty years ago Smithville 1980 already warned against this wrong path when it wrote in its considerations:

If voting can indeed be considered comparable to governing, we have in essence a Fifth Assembly in the Church, namely the meeting of the eligible voters which "in a sense" governs the Church or at least is involved in the governing process of the Church. This "form" of democratic rule is basically strange to the

stipulations of Article 22, Church Order. It must be noted that participation in an election does not necessarily mean partaking in the government itself (*Synod Smithville 1980*, Article 83, Consideration 3, p. 57).

As Rev. VanOene has said in his Church Order commentary: “The leadership, the government of the church, and the final decisions rest with the officebearers as a body; but they are always to remember that they are nothing without the congregation. . . .”

The assertion that taking part in elections is an act of governing is definitely incorrect. The consistory gives the congregation the opportunity to advise the consistory by means of an election, but ultimately the consistory is not bound by this advice, although it must have very good and compelling reasons to deviate from it. It is the congregation that elects; it is the consistory with the deacons that appoints and calls. Advising is still not the same as governing.³

At bottom, I believe that we need to be more aware of the fact that *every step in the voting process is part of a decision process that is initiated, governed, and completed by the consistory*. Article 3 of the Church Order makes it clear that the congregation is only involved insofar as the consistory wills it to be. A consistory can decide, for example, to provide as many names as there are positions to be filled, in which case there is no vote

Every step in the voting process is part of a decision process that is initiated, governed, and completed by the consistory

but only the opportunity for the congregation to object to a nomination. This procedure is followed quite effectively in small congregations. But also when a consistory presents twice the number of men for nomination, it is the consistory that presents the names, the consistory that supervises the meeting process, and the consistory that makes a final decision to appoint based on the nomination and voting process that it has initiated and overseen. Yes, the consistory will in almost all cases appoint the persons who have been chosen by the congregation. Why? Not because the congregation has authority; how

did it get authority from the Source of all authority? The consistory will appoint those chosen by the congregation simply because the consistory promised to do that already when it nominated the brothers for office and because already then the consistory said: “All these men are faithful and suitable brothers. We will gladly appoint the ones you choose.” At the same time, the appointment process is not a mere formality, for if it becomes evident (as it sometimes does) that a certain brother has done something that actually disqualifies him from office, the consistory can refuse to appoint him and reconsider the matter. But it is important to maintain that even when the congregation is asked for its vote, that vote is not an authoritative act but simply a matter of members of the congregation stating a preference so that the consistory can exercise its God-given authority in a process that begins and ends with the consistory under the rule of the only Head of the church.

The act of voting is not in any way an act of governing

Perhaps an example, suggested by a colleague, would be helpful. Pardon me if it sounds a little trivial, but it makes a relevant point. Suppose on one warm summer day, I wish to treat my grandchildren to a round of ice cream cones. No one is compelling me. I am the one governing this situation, as challenging as it might be. When I then ask my grandchildren what flavour they prefer, have I then transferred the decision making over to them? Does this mean that they are now doing it, and that they must pay? Not one of my grandchildren would draw that conclusion, especially the latter. And of course when I go to the counter and place the order, I will keep their preferences in mind. After all, that’s why I asked them.

The same principles are at work in the election of officebearers. The consistory says to the congregation: “Here are the men whom we deem fit to be in office. Barring unforeseen circumstances, we will appoint whom-ever you prefer because they are all capable, godly men.”

In this way, it should be clear that *the act of voting is not in any way an act of governing*. It is simply a matter of stating a preference – a preference that a consistory will listen to *as it completes its governing process*. The

governing of the church remains in the hands of Christ through his officebearers. When Synod 2013 states that voting is a decision-making act, it has regrettably veered off in a direction that contradicts the federation's foundational Reformed principles.

Seen in this light, one has to ask then: why should women not be allowed to express their preferences here? They are allowed to do so when it comes to suggesting brothers who could serve; they are allowed to object to brothers who are nominated; no one bars women from speaking up at a congregational meeting when they have views about the life of the church. Why not then in elections? This is all an election is: the stating of a preference. Because there are too many people for the consistory to ask individually, by means of a ballot in their hands, they are asked to provide input so that the consistory can properly exercise *its* task of governing.

Scriptures are sufficiently clear that women should not exercise authority in the church (1 Tim 2:12); but the

Reformed churches do well to maintain that voting is not such an exercise of authority.

1 In *Observation 2.2.2*. Those who are new to Synod procedures and to such documents as the *Acts of Synod Carman 2013*, should realize in reading what follows that when a Synod speaks about “observations” and “observing,” it is doing no more than noting things that have been said by churches and others. However, when the article below speaks about “considerations” and how synod “considers,” it is beginning to voice its position with words that have more clout as the Synod moves to its actual decisions. While *observations* are interesting, the *considerations* are more noteworthy as they anticipate the eventual *decisions*.

2 *Consideration 3.3*. Emphasis added.

3 *With Common Consent: a Practical Guide to the use of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Premier Publishing, 1990) p. 16, 19. Interestingly, Van Oene also says (p.18) in the same context that no one can accuse a consistory of violating the Church Order if it permitted women to vote, that it is fear that prevents this from happening, and that fear is a bad counselor.

C



Cloverdale Celebrates Sixty Years of God's Goodness

Celebration is crucial to thankfulness. That became abundantly clear as Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church's celebrated its Sixtieth Anniversary Celebration with the theme: "The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy!" (Ps 126:3). On the evening of March 7, 2014, the church parking lot filled early as interested folk from as far away as Vernon streamed in for the occasion.

Remembering!

The focus was the early decades – the 1950s and 60s. An exquisite vintage gallery in the foyer highlighted life in the early years: wooden toys, hand tools, old books, Bibles and magazines, a rotary phone, a "brood trommel," a grandma chair, children's clothes, vintage jewelry, and a wedding dress worn by both mother and daughter. In one corner a video played scenes of the van Popta arrival at the Sapperton train station; in another, viewers crowded around a monitor hoping to recognize themselves at an early children's Bible camp at Crescent Beach.

The fellowship hall was decorated with photos – digitally scanned originals blown up to 11x17s. On one wall, pictures of all the buildings in which Cloverdadians had worshiped. On another, photos of the early pastors and their families: Vanderboom, van Popta, and Mulder. And in between pictures of a Victoria visit by Queen Juliana, and various portraits of young people societies, choirs, pioneer families, and their vintage automobiles and vans. And of course there was food, lots of food, also vintage: gevulde speculaas, almond filled mocha tarts, stroop wafels, and bowls of droppies and peppermints!

Reflecting!

Promptly at 8:00 p.m. we gathered in the church auditorium. Guests were treated to a historical retrospective by Siebe DeJong and greetings from former pastors both in person (the J. Visschers) and from afar (the Moeskers)



*The three charter members: Betty Vreugdenhil,
Jane Bysterveld, and Alice Bosscher
with the Anniversary Mosaic*

– pastors through the 1970-1990s. In her inimitable style, Ann Bysterveld related a humorous story based on all the surnames of our present membership. City councillor Barinder Rasode expressed appreciation for our church's contribution to the community, reminding us that God gives life as a gift and we return it to him by the way we live.

Pastor Theo Lodder focused on the later decades. He noted that Cloverdale's growing ethnic diversity should come as no surprise; church is where that happens. The desire to become diverse was evidenced in the earliest donation collection box – a red-roofed miniature church – that had painted on its roof in both Dutch and English, "Preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Six decades later, our church directory reflects welcome variety with

names like Chang, Burongo, Jubenvill, Shei, and Dong nestled comfortably among the Vans, Velds, and Hofs.

Rejoicing!

And yes, there was music, lots of it: a specially commissioned version of the theme Psalm 126 by Kent Dykstra; a Bluegrass Steve Bell rendition of the same Psalm, arranged by the talented Marina Lodder and performed energetically by the catechism students; cheerful anthems by the choir; harmonious hymns by the Young Peoples; a Mandarin translation of Psalm 84 sung to the traditional Genevan melody by our Chinese members – ethnic diversity at its best; and a roof-raising rendition of “O Canada.” Glorious music of thanks and praise!

But in the end, everyone in attendance would likely agree that the celebration’s highlight was the unveil-

ing of the Anniversary Mosaic. A collective gasp shivered through the auditorium when Mrs. Jane Bysterveld (our one charter member who is still a member) deftly slipped the cover off for the big reveal. The mosaic had been a collaborative effort, designed by Sheila Vandelft with the input of many. Congregation members had contributed dishes from their homes; the mosaic team took those dishes, broke them into shards, and meticulously glued them into place. Truly, the mosaic represents the reality of our congregation: broken, sinful people from diverse backgrounds made one in Christ, dwelling in love, fellowship and unity. The mosaic is on permanent display in our church foyer, a reminder that the Lord indeed has done great things for us and we are filled with joy!

C



Genevan Psalm 84 in Mandarin



William den Hollander
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Q

Is it correct to say in any way that fallen man still bears the image of God?

A

It is in God's creation account in Genesis 1 that we find this expression of man being created "in the image of God." There we read, "Then God said, 'Let us make man *in our image*, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'"

We also read how "the LORD God formed the *man* from the dust of the ground and *breathed* into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." "So God created man *in his own image*, in the image of God he created him; *male and female* he created them." Prior to God's creating *man*, male and female, *in his image*, the Triune God took counsel and said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness." *Man* was made in a special way by God's divine hands; *man* received in a special way God's divine breath of life! God made *man* his representative on earth, his vice-roi, whom he appointed to rule over the earth as his ambassador, his Governor-General.

This clearly shows how special and unique man was and is. He was special in the way God created him, and he was unique in the gifts God bestowed on him: his form, his thinking, his abilities, and his spiritual life. Hence man received a unique position in which to show himself the image of God, his representative and steward on earth, who received from the spirit of God for this unique and high function. Therefore, when we see a man, we see God's image and likeness. God created him with special care and competence. Of course, he's still only a man and not God himself; yet, in his existence, his being, his body, his beauty, and his abilities of heart and mind we see some of the glory and majesty of God our Creator. We see this in both man and woman, for both were created in God's image: in man and his being, in man's work and strength, we see some of the majesty and kingship of God; in woman and her care, her ability to bear children, we see some of God's creative energies and of God's cherishing loving arms! That's how man is God's image, showing each in

their own gifts and potential some of the greatness and wisdom and powers of creation of the Triune God!

Then we read of this image of God not just in Genesis 1 but also in Genesis 9:6, after the flood. Indeed, even after the flood of God's judgment over mankind, the LORD God still speaks about man as made by God in his image! True, man fell into sin and therefore quite often resembles more the image of the devil than of our heavenly Father; yet God still considers man as made in his image. Yes, we could add that when you observe man you can still recognize in him that he was created a little lower than God. That's why the image is used sometimes of man as an empty temple. Man was created a temple of God, beautiful and impressive in its architecture, yet after the fall the Spirit of God disappears from this temple. He's an empty temple that's become filled with evil spirits quite often. Yet, from the form of his building and from the potential of this building, you can still recognize the temple that he was.

Man still is image bearer, which means that we can still see impressed on man's being the imprint of God himself! It's this divine imprint that makes us into living people. Now if you make scratches on that imprint or if you wipe out this imprint completely, then God takes that as an act against himself. As we read in Proverbs 17:5, "He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker" (cf. Prov 14:31; Lev 19:14). With acts that hurt or damage our neighbour we touch the LORD. In his epistle, James also shows that when we curse someone with the tongue we curse a man who was made in God's likeness. Even though man has fallen into sin, this image hasn't disappeared completely; as we confess (CoD), there still are clear traces that remind us of this beautiful man whom God created. Yes, especially when we live in unity with the Lord Jesus in his New Testament church, his Spirit restores and renews us in his image more and more!

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. den Hollander
denhollanderw@gmail.com
23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0



Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:3-5

A number of important days that have passed by and those that are still coming. . . birthdays! I wish a very happy birthday to you all. May the Lord bless you with health and strength and a desire to live for him! I hope you have had or will have a marvelous day celebrating with family and friends. Some of us who celebrated birthdays in April will remember that our birthdays were just before Easter or just after that wonderful Sunday. Easter is a time where we remember that Jesus conquered death and sin. Jesus has risen from the grave and has ascended into heaven. We have a wonderful inheritance being kept safe for us in heaven. We also know that we are being kept safe here in this life while we wait for Jesus' return. As we celebrate the life that God gives us let us also remember the living hope and new birth that Jesus resurrection gives us.

April

2 DEREK KOK will be 44

653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

23 ARLENE DEWIT will be 53

31126 Kingfisher Drive
Abbotsford, BC V2T 5K4

29 BRYCE BERENDS will be 39

653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

May

1 CLARENCE ZWIEP will be 60

653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

4 DEBBIE VEENSTRA will be 40

4238 2nd Concession Road
Sherkston, ON L0S 1R0

10 ROB DE HAAN will be 49

c/o Anchor Home, 361 Thirty Road
RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

30 BERNIE DE VOS will be 39

361 Thirty Road
RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

21 EDDIE VAN ROOTSELAAR will be 21

1488 Highway 3 E
Dunnville, ON N1A 2W7

Hymn 36

*The God and Father of our Lord
be blest for evermore.*

*Great is the mercy he has shown:
him honour and adore!*

*He caused us to be born anew:
a living hope he gave
through Jesus Christ, who rose again
triumphant from the grave.*

*The inheritance in store for us
is free from all decay;
it cannot spoil or be defiled;
it will not fade away.*

*It's safely kept in heaven for us
whom God's own power will shield,
Till full salvation is at last
on his great day revealed.*



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: Patricia Gelms

5080 Airport Road East, Mount Hope, ON L0R 1W0

Phone: 905-692-0084, email: henri.trish@sympatico.ca

**Jon Nielson, *Bible Study: A Student's Guide*.
P&R Publishing Company, 2013.**

**Additional information: Paperback,
207 pages, \$12.99**

Recently, we had the opportunity to study Nielson's book in our Bible Doctrine class at Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College. We found the book very helpful in giving us a fresh look at the importance of studying the Bible, as well as providing some practical tips for doing Bible study.

In the first half of the book, Nielson lays the foundation for why we need to do Bible study. Nielson first reminds us that *the Bible is God speaking*. "Bible study should be intensely personal, because we know that a person – God himself – is behind the words that we read and study together" (24). *The Bible is also powerful*, convicting our hearts, uncovering our sins, and making us wise for salvation. *The Bible is understandable*. While it will sometimes take hard work to understand and apply the riches found in Scripture, it is absolutely worth it. Nielson also reminds us that the *Bible is a literary work*. He gives a very helpful overview of the six main literary genres found in the Bible, namely narrative, prophecy, wisdom/poetry, gospel, epistle, apocalyptic writing. He outlines some of the distinctive features of each genre, and gives tips for how to interpret and apply them in Bible study. Lastly, Nielson stresses that *the Bible is one big story* about God's kingdom, climaxing in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This has implications for how we read every part of the Bible. "We need to read any piece in relation to Jesus, while still understanding the details and meaning of each specific section, and their contribution to the developing pattern of God's kingdom" (130). What becomes clear in the first half of the book is that we should not just read the Bible so that we can "get something" out of it. It's so much more! Bible study is meant to help God's people hear his voice, so that they can live faithfully as followers of Jesus Christ in this world.



Joanna Hutten,
Marise de Visser,
Maria Koolsbergen,
Janelle Kottelenberg,
Dianne Visscher, and
Michelle Veldhuizen

The authors are in their final
year of study at the CCRTC

In the second half of the book, Nielson gives practical advice on how to conduct Bible study. He suggests that Bible study leaders need some training to have a good grasp of the storyline in the Bible, to have a solid understanding of the message of the gospel, and to be given the tools to lead and direct a Bible study. Nielson outlines some very helpful approaches to Bible study, such as the Five C's (creep, context, Christ, crux, call) and the COMA method (context, observations, meaning, and application). He also gives some clear genre-specific discussion questions that can help us as we study books or passages in those genres. "The very reason we work so hard to understand God's Word accurately is so that we will come to better know our God, understand his ways, and live for Jesus, our Saviour" (150).

Nielson stresses the importance of giving our young people the proper training to read, understand, and apply the Bible. This is in fact one of the greatest gifts we can give them. As a class, we have found this book helpful, not just in our training to become teachers, but also for our own lives. Through the study of this book, we were reminded of the importance of the Bible's place in our lives, and we also found that Nielson gives some great tools and tips on how to move forward in Bible study. Each chapter has an easy-to-follow sequence starting with an example, an outline, supporting details, and a conclusion. While the examples are geared to high school-aged readers, we would recommend this book for readers of any age. Teachers, parents, youth leaders, or anyone who finds that they or their Bible study group is struggling with Bible study will find this book a very helpful and encouraging read.



Press Release of Classis Manitoba held on Mar. 28, 2014 in the Grace Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg

Opening

On behalf of the convening church of Winnipeg Grace, Rev. R.J. den Hollander opened the meeting by requesting the singing of Psalm 66:1, 7, reading from Ephesians 3, and leading in prayer. He welcomed all present, particularly the fraternal delegate, Rev. Todd De Rooy, and the Deputy for Contact with Neighbouring Classes and Presbyteries, Br. W. Gortemaker.

Examination of credentials and constitution of Classis

The credentials were examined by the convening church and found to be in good order. It is noted that all the *primi* delegates are present except for one due to illness. Upon the examination of the credentials, Classis was declared constituted.

Appointment of executive officers

The suggested officer from Classis Manitoba September, 2014, Rev. S. Vandeveld as president, was received and he was duly appointed. Nominated and appointed to serve as vice-president was Rev. R.J. den Hollander and as clerk Rev. J. Poppe.

The president thanked the convening church for the organization of Classis. As memorabilia it is mentioned that Rev. R.J. den Hollander received and accepted a call to the Covenant Canadian Reformed Church at Grassie. Encouragement was offered to the church at Winnipeg Grace in their search for a new pastor and teacher and to Rev. R.J. den Hollander as he prepares to take up the work in his new congregation in June. Since the last classis the church at Winnipeg Redeemer had extended a call to Candidate Calvin Vanderlinde for Mission Manitoba which he declined. Encouragement was also offered them in their search for a missionary. Dr. A.J. Pol is currently enjoying a Sabbatical for the purpose of some further study. Encouragement was also offered Carman West as they fill the extra tasks.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted as received at Classis.

Seating of fraternal delegates

Rev. Todd De Rooy from the Redeemer United Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa was welcomed again and seated as fraternal delegate. He was informed that he had all privileges of the floor except voting. Br. W. Gortemaker was welcomed as Deputy for Contact with Neighbouring Classes and Presbyteries.

Reports

The treasurer for Classis Manitoba, Br. Henry Veldman from the church at Carman East, submitted his report. The recommendation to keep the assessment at \$10 per communicant member was approved. Travel reimbursement is set at 75% of CRA standards which is 47 cents/km. Gratitude was expressed for the report received.

The church appointed for inspecting the books of the treasurer, Carman West, reported that two brothers examined the books and found them to be in good order. The report was received with gratitude.

The church appointed for inspecting the Classis archives, Winnipeg Redeemer, reported that two brothers examined the archives and found them to be in good order. It was noted that there were a few missing documents. These have since been tracked down and inserted as necessary. The report was received with gratitude.

The Deputies for Contact with the Manitoba Provincial Government reported that over the past year authorization to solemnize a marriage in the province was requested and granted for Rev. J.G. Slaa of the Smithers Canadian Reformed Church and for Rev. J.D. Louwerse of the Neerlandia Canadian Reformed Church to perform marriages in the Winnipeg Redeemer and Carman West churches respectively.

In closed session, church visitation reports were given of visits held at the Canadian Reformed Churches at Carman East, Carman West, Winnipeg Grace, and Winnipeg Redeemer and the Emmanuel American Reformed Church at Denver. It was noted with gratitude that all reports could conclude with thankfulness that things are being done according to the Word of God, that the office-bearers are fulfilling the duties of their office and calling faithfully and that the Church Order is being observed. Each church was brought before the Lord in prayer by one of the delegates following the respective reports.

Question period (Art 44 CO)

The president asked the questions according to Article 44 of the Church Order. Each of the churches indicated

that the ministry of the office-bearers was being continued, and the decisions of the major assemblies were being honoured. Both the church at Carman West and the church at Winnipeg Grace requested advice in a matter of discipline. Classis then entered closed session to deal with these requests. Advice was given to Carman West and concurring advice was given to Winnipeg Grace to proceed to further announcements. Winnipeg Grace also requested classical pulpit supply one Sunday a month during their upcoming period of vacancy starting, D.V., June 1, and that Rev. J. Poppe be appointed as counsellor. Pulpit supply was granted and the appointment made.

Address by fraternal delegate

Notification was received from the Providence Reformed Church in Winnipeg of the URCNA expressing regret that they were unable to have any delegates in attendance.

Rev. Todd De Rooy of the Redeemer United Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa was given the opportunity to address Classis on behalf of Classis Central US and CERCU (as an alternate on that committee). He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be here. They always appreciate the invitations which unfortunately they have not been able to act on until now. He gave an update on the upcoming CERCU report to the General Synod of the URCNA to be held D.V. June 2, 2014. They will inform Synod that they propose a movement to Phase 3A of church union as of 2016. They also will be holding a colloquium between two professors of the URCNA and two from the CRTS. He noted with thankfulness that Rev. W. den Hollander visited their classis (as well as all the other classes) and that it was an opportunity to develop some greater understanding between the two federations. He also gave an update on some of the activities in their own classis, noting with thankfulness the passing of a candidacy exam as well as some recent positive developments in the work at the Danville Correctional Facility. He requested prayers for one upcoming vacancy in Chicago Heights. Br. W. Gortemaker brought these churches before the Lord in intercessory prayer.

Correspondence

Rev. R.J. den Hollander requested a certificate of honourable release according to Art.5 of the Church Order. The following documents were provided:

1. Letter of call from Covenant Canadian Reformed Church at Grassie

2. Letter of acceptance of call from Rev. R.J. den Hollander
3. Letter from Covenant Canadian Reformed Church at Grassie affirming acceptance of responsibility
4. Certificate of honourable release and ecclesiastical attestation from the Grace Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg.

After the documents were examined and found to be in good order, Classis issued a Certificate of Honourable Release for Rev. R.J. den Hollander. The president thanked him for his work in Winnipeg Grace and Classis Manitoba and encouraged him in his future work in the Covenant Canadian Reformed Church at Grassie. Rev. R.J. den Hollander received and took the opportunity to say a few words in response, expressing his thankfulness for the good harmony and brotherly love experienced in the classis and for the privilege of being of service to the churches here.

Appointments

The church of Winnipeg Redeemer will serve as the convening church for the next classis. It will be convened, D.V., on June 27, 2014 (or, if deemed not necessary then, Sept. 19, 2014). The suggested president for next classis is Rev. R.J. Kampen.

Classis made various appointments as necessary for the standing committees and church visitors, particularly with a view to the pending departure of Rev. R.J. den Hollander.

Personal question period

The church at Winnipeg Grace requested a representative of Classis to be present at the farewell evening for Rev. R.J. den Hollander to be held, D.V., on May 18 at 7:00 p.m. Rev. J. Poppe was appointed.

Brotherly censure (Art 34 CO)

With gratitude it was deemed not necessary.

Adoption of the Acts and approval of the Press Release

The Acts were read and adopted and the Press Release approved for publication.

Closing

The president closed the meeting by leading in prayer.

*For Classis Manitoba,
R.J. den Hollander, Vice-president at that time* 