

Clarion



**On the way to
eternal song**

FAREWELL TO REV. J. VANSPRONSEN

CHURCH SNAPSHOT

CLARION KIDS



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Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!

*Singing praises to God is done in fellowship
with other believers*

An important part of our worship on the Lord's Day is singing praises to God. Indeed, this element of our liturgy is something we will one day continue to do in God's presence! Someone once noted that the congregation of God is not en route to an eternal sermon, but it is on its way to eternal song. Our singing in holy worship therefore should entail a foretaste of that eternal joy. All of this makes singing a tremendously important part of our Sunday liturgy. It is therefore worth reflecting on some aspects of our singing.

A sacrifice of praise

It is noteworthy that God's Old Testament people when approaching the Lord for worship were exhorted to do so with singing and praise. "Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs!" (Ps 100:2). Praise is central when singing before the LORD. This fact is also evident from the many times that "hallelujah," the Hebrew equivalent of "praise the LORD," is used in the book of Psalms. Indeed, the Psalter ends with the repeated exuberant hallelujahs of Psalm 150.

All this praise was only possible because of God's forgiving grace by which he blotted out the sins of those who came to him confessing their iniquities. This grace was evident in all those bloody sacrifices that were ultimately fulfilled when our Saviour offered himself on the altar of the cross. The author of Hebrews alludes to this reality and then exhorts: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Heb 13:15). Thus, in response to Christ's sacrifice and on that basis ("through Jesus") we may present to God our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

It is striking that our singing is called a "sacrifice of praise." That reminds us of the peace offering which was

also called the "sacrifice of praise" (in the ancient Greek translation) or, as the Hebrew can be translated as well, the "sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Lev 7:12). In other words, our singing which gives thanks and praise to God for his redemption is considered by God to be a sacrifice pleasing to him (cf. Ps 50:14). Indeed, it is part of our giving our entire life to God as a thank offering (cf. Rom 12:1). And so when we approach God today, we don't come with animal sacrifices as in Old Testament times, but we present ourselves sacrificially to him and we do so with "the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips that confess his name" (Heb 13:15). The singing at worship can therefore not be missed. And that singing must therefore be to his praise and glory!

This means that our singing includes proclaiming God's great deeds of salvation.

Declaring God's great deeds

Indeed, David sang: "I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. . . proclaim among the nations what the Lord has done" (Ps 9:2, 11). Similar exhortations are found throughout the Psalms. "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts" (Ps 105:1–2; similarly, e.g., Ps 71:16; 145:5, 12).

Such a declaration in song is also described in Scripture as prophesying. Thus when Miriam, Aaron's sister, led the singing and dancing declaring their praise to God for his deliverance from Egypt, she is called a prophetess (Exod 15:22). Likewise, the music ministry of the temple, was called a "ministry of prophesying" (1 Chron 25:1). This ministry included the sons of Asaph and their prophesying included the composition of Psalms 50 and 73 to 83 (cf. 1 Chron 25:2).

All of this means that when we in the course of our worship sing of the great deeds of God, then we are prophesying in the biblical sense of the word. Surely this aspect is also part of the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy that the day would come when God would pour out his Spirit on all people and "your sons and daughters will prophesy" (Joel 2:28). Moreover, one can think here of how the Heidelberg Catechism defines our prophetic task as confessing Christ's Name (Q.A. 32). Confessing Christ must include confessing God's great acts of redemption in our Saviour. If that is the case, then we also do need to take note

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

What is the importance of our Sunday singing? What should we focus on? What makes it meaningful? Dr. Cornelis Van Dam discusses such aspects of singing in our worship services in his editorial, "Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!"

Every three years a general synod convenes for our federation. We are publishing the press release in this issue. It is shorter and more brief than usual, as the *Acts* have already been made available at www.canrc.org. The vice-chairman, Rev. Rob, Schouten, writes that this may possibly mean that in the future press releases are not necessary. The congregation at Dunnville, who hosted Synod, also took the opportunity to write their Church Snapshot to publish at the same time.

In other news, we have an article on the farewell to Rev. Julius VanSpronsen as missionary. Regular columns Treasures New and Old, Clippings on Politics and Religion, Education Matters, *Clarion Kids*, and Ray of Sunshine appear on these pages, as well as two letters to the editor.

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of the biblical exhortation to sing a new song! “Sing to the Lord a new song!” (Ps 96:1; also, e.g., Ps 33:3; 98:1).

Singing a new song

Reformed churches have followed the early Christian church by focussing their singing in their worship services on the Psalms. However, the early church also sang the New Testament hymns. After all, God’s great deeds continued in Christ! Scripture has given us the Song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55), the Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79), and the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32). Hymn-like passages are also found in Philippians 2:5-11 and Colossians 1:15-20. Furthermore, the New Testament also records the song of the angels. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests” (Luke 2:14). There are also heavenly hymns in the book of Revelation such as: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty, who was, and is, and is to come” (Rev 4:8). There is evidence that the early Christian church produced hymns, but most of them disappeared, probably because it was recognized that they were not inspired. Reformed churches have therefore gone back to the early church’s practice of prioritizing the inspired Psalms and biblical hymns in worship.

At the same time, there was also the recognition that in this final age of the Spirit we may “Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things” (Ps 98:1). Churches of the Reformation have therefore also sung hymns which were not inspired but which conformed to biblical norms, especially that they offer the sacrifice of praise to God.

It is remarkable that although Scripture teaches us that our singing should be directed in praise to God, yet, it is also a fact that in singing there is another aspect, namely that we address each other as members of Christ.

Speak to each other with psalms

The Apostle Paul after exhorting his readers to be filled with the Spirit notes that such a condition results in “addressing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph 5:19). These apostolic words show that our singing praises to God is done in fellowship with other believers. Although our worship has very important personal aspects, it is not individualistic. There is an important corporate aspect. Filled with and united by the one Spirit of Christ we praise God with our singing, but in the process also address each other. This speaking to each other is clarified in the Apostle’s words to the Colossian Christians. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and

as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16).

With our singing, we remind each other what God has done for us in Christ, rejoice in the purpose of God for our lives, and share in the joy of redemption. At the same time, the Apostle says the singing of biblical songs with gratitude in our hearts is one way in which we can teach and admonish each other. Since the psalms and hymns of Scripture speak of Christ and the redemption to come, singing these songs means that we let the word of Christ dwell in us fully. This being the case, such singing will serve to remind, instruct, and indeed admonish if our life does not conform to what we are singing.

This reality adds to the meaningfulness of our singing in Sunday worship. But such singing is not restricted to the Lord’s Day but should characterize our entire life as Christians so that the biblical lyrics fill our lives. The Spirit uses singing the psalms and biblical hymns to mould, sanctify, and equip our lives so that we can be equipped for all circumstances of life in a fallen world. Being filled with the Spirit and having the word of Christ live in us with biblical song, also enables us to teach and admonish each other with all wisdom.

And we may do so in expectation of that great day!

Singing has a glorious future

As we worship and praise God today, we may do so in anticipation of the perfect worship that will one day take place on this present earth completely renewed. Then we will have entered the true Sabbath rest (cf. Heb 4). That perfect worship will include singing God’s praises in new songs celebrating the complete redemption of all creation. Scripture gives us some tantalizing glimpses of that heavenly worship. Around the throne of the Lamb a new song was sung in his honour (Rev 5:9-10). The elect are also pictured as singing a new song before the Lamb’s throne (Rev 14:3). We also read of a great multitude in heaven shouting and rejoicing in worship and praise that the wedding feast of the lamb has come. “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear” (Rev 19:6-8).

But all these glimpses and images of that perfect worship in song is not enough to satisfy our heartfelt longing to know more of that coming reality. As a wise pastor said years ago: Don’t speculate. Just wait and see! It will be better and more than we can imagine! “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).





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Dominion Day

"He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth." (Psalm 72:8)

On "Canada Day," July 1, Canada turns 149. The day used to be called "Dominion Day" because our country was the "Dominion of Canada." It is a name derived from Psalm 72:8, "He will rule [have dominion] from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth." When Canada came into existence her citizens regarded God as Ruler Supreme and Jesus Christ as King of kings.

Psalm 72 is titled, "Of Solomon," designating he wrote it either about himself or for the son who would succeed him. It can also be translated, "For Solomon," indicating David wrote it for his son, the future king. Either way it is a prayer that under the king's rule there would be peace, righteousness and justice, and that there will be right conditions for God's people to flourish and be fruitful. It is an appeal for an enduring and universal kingdom. Prophetically it is a supplication for the King of kings and Lord of lords, that all nations under the sun will one day serve and worship the Son Jesus Christ.

At the time of Canada's confederation (1867) our fathers had to decide what to name this new country. The story goes that New Brunswick pre-

mier Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley proposed "Dominion of Canada," the idea of which came from reading Psalm 72:8 during morning devotions. Thereby our founding fathers expressed the hope that Canada would accept the peaceful dominion of Jesus Christ, the second Solomon, the true Son of David, from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the St. Lawrence River to the North Pole. They desired that God be regarded as Ruler Supreme, the one who would keep our land strong, glorious, and free.

For a hundred years this same hope filled most Canadians. At the base of the Peace Tower (1927) of the Parliament buildings in Ottawa are some Scripture texts, including Psalm 72:8. Two other equally inspiring texts are Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision the people perish," and Psalm 72:1, "Give the king thy judgments O God and thy righteousness unto the king's son." Our Coat of Arms (1923) has the Latin motto which translated says, "From sea to sea." The preamble of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1981) states, "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law. . . ."

Today many are departing from this heritage, removing God from his rightful place as God over us. They desire a secular society rejecting God and Christianity in public life. Others promote a pluralistic society with many belief systems, insisting we cannot impose only Christian beliefs upon society.

As believers we have to teach our children and remind all citizens of our country's heritage. We must communicate with our leaders, encouraging them to do what is right. We should vote for those who reflect biblical standards and principles. Above all we must evangelize and preach Christ-crucified, calling people to faith and repentance. The backslide in public policy is a reflection of decline in the spiritual health of the citizens. A return to biblical policy will be the natural result of an increase in spiritual health. Christ will only be recognized as King and Lord in this country when its citizens do.

With all that discourages us today with respect to our country, so much so that some of us even don't want to celebrate Canada's birthday, let's recall that we have a scriptural heritage to build on. Let's remember and respond to the place of Psalm 72:8 in our nation's history.

For Further Study

1. Why was Canada's birthday first called "Dominion Day"? What is a possible reason it was changed to "Canada Day"?
2. Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley's proposal for "Dominion Day" originated out of his personal morning devotions when he read Psalm 72. Are personal daily Bible devotions one of the aspects of our Canadian heritage which you are maintaining and also passing on to your children?
3. What connection exists between our evangelism/proclamation of the Word and the revival of our country's scriptural heritage?



Press Release of Synod Dunnville 2016

On the evening of May 9, 2016, Reformed believers from many congregations in southern Ontario gathered for a special worship service prior to the convening of General Synod Dunnville 2016. Rev. Clarence Bouwman, the chairman of the previous synod in Carman, Manitoba (2013), led the worship service. In his sermon, he focussed on verse 6 of Psalm 122 where the psalmist exhorts his fellow believers to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” Putting the work of the upcoming synod in the perspective of this verse was encouraging for all the worshippers and provided a strong motivation for the delegates to indeed work in such a way that the well-being of the churches would be served.

On the morning of May 10, twenty-four delegates arrived at the beautiful and spacious facilities of the Dunnville church. Twelve had been delegated by Regional Synod West and twelve by Regional Synod East. For many delegates, serving at a General Synod was a first. Only two of the twenty-four men were repeat delegates from Synod Carman. At 9:00 a.m., the delegates were seated and officially welcomed by the convening church. After opening devotions led by the minister of the convening church, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, the credentials were examined. With two exceptions, all the primary delegates were present. Through a free vote, Rev. Richard Aasman of Edmonton, Alberta, was chosen as chairman. Rev. Rob Schouten became the vice-chairman, Rev. R.C. (Karlo) Janssen the first clerk, and Rev. Eric Kampen the second clerk.

A committee of the convening church had done a large amount of work to make the work of Synod possible. Each delegate had received a fully hyper-linked agenda. Access to any document of the agenda was available through a single click. As a result, delegates were spared the challenge of carrying about numerous large binders filled with synod documents. Apart from receiving and organizing hundreds of documents, the host church also arranged lodging and transportation for synod delegates.

Additionally, it had the responsibility of providing three meals a day for at least twenty-four men and often more when delegates of sister-churches were present. This task was accomplished with amazing efficiency and with a high degree of gustatory satisfaction for each member of Synod. Not only this, Sr. Jane Oosterhoff, a member of the host church, was present every day from 7:00 AM – 9:30 PM, making herself available for a wide array of administrative work which she accomplished cheerfully and for the benefit of all.

Agenda

The agenda was composed of a variety of elements. First, there were reports from various committees appointed by the previous synod. There were eight such reports in all: from the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad and a Subcommittee on relations with the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands, the Committee on Relations with Churches in North America, the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise*, the Committee on Bible Translations, the Committee for the Website, the Committee for Needy Students Fund and the Committee for Funding of the Pastoral Training Program. These committee reports were sent out to all the consistories of our federation six months before Synod for their scrutiny and feedback. Additionally, every synod receives a lengthy report from the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. Many of the consistories took the opportunity by way of a letter to Synod to express agreement with the various reports or to convey concerns about them.

Besides committee reports and related letters, Synod received many appeals against decisions of previous synods (mostly about the issue of women participating in the election of office-bearers) and also against the decisions of previous regional synods. Additionally, there were two overtures from Regional Synod West seeking changes in regard to financial support and examinations of semi-

narians. All in all, the workload looked quite heavy but not as onerous as some other recent synods. Several matters stood out immediately as difficult and challenging. The delegates knew their work would not be easy.

Manner of working

Once Synod was convened, the executive made a proposal for the appointment of five advisory committees and assigned to each committee a section of the agenda for Synod. Much of the work of a synod is done at the level of these advisory committees. After a process of discussion and analysis, these committees prepare reports or proposals, which are then presented to Synod during a plenary session. In the early stages of a synod, most of the time is devoted to meetings of the advisory committees. As times goes on, there are more and more plenary sessions. Things seem to speed up dramatically and delegates have to read and digest one report after another. If a delegate were to come to Synod without significant investment of time and energy to prepare, he would not be able to keep up with the pace of the deliberations and decisions.

Typically, when a report or proposal is discussed during plenary session, a lot of changes are made. In some cases, they are quite minor, pertaining to matters of word choice, formatting, and general flow of thought. In other cases, discussion on the floor results in a whole-sale change of direction. When this happens, advisory committees take their report for further deliberation and eventually make a new presentation to the whole body of Synod. Working together in an advisory committee is a very intense experience. For large portions of two weeks or more, you work very closely with three or four other delegates. There is a long process of pondering, discussing, arguing, and persuading. Slowly but surely, proposals take shape and are further refined. Suffice it to say that the men serving on these committees become very familiar with each other. They also become experts on the issues before them.

In the next paragraphs, the major decisions of Synod Dunnville will be reviewed, not necessarily in the order they were made. Anyone who wishes to have further detail can explore the *Acts of Synod* which have already been published on our federation's website and will be released in printed form in the near future. Due to the rapid availability of the *Acts*, this press release will be shorter than some have been in the past.

Ecumenical relationships

Interfacing with other sectors of the body of Christ is perhaps the most exciting aspect of General Synod. As we deal with reports about other church bodies and hear their delegates address us, sister churches are transformed from mysterious acronyms into living entities. We were privileged to receive quite a number of delegates from churches in North America and further abroad. Delegates from churches in ecclesiastical fellowship were granted privileges of the floor and many availed themselves of the opportunity, especially when discussion focussed on their own churches. Mr. Mark Bube spoke to us on behalf of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, taking us through the history of the OPC over the past three years. Rev. George Horner addressed Synod on behalf of the Reformed Churches of the United States, describing the recent history and current state of the RCUS. Rev. John Bouwers addressed Synod on behalf of the United Reformed Churches of North America. Rev. Bruce Backensto was present at Synod as an observer from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. He passed on greetings to Synod and expressed his understanding for the hesitancy of the CanRC to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the RPCNA. Most of these delegates were present for large portions of Synod and also sat in on the advisory committees which were dealing with their respective churches.

Synod also received fraternal delegates from beyond North America. It was a joy to have Rev. Dirk Boersema of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa present among us. This was his third visit to our synods. In his address to Synod, he shared the struggles of the South African churches and also affirmed the great value of the growing relationship with the CanRC. Present from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia were Rev. Stephen 't Hart and Br. Peter Witten. Br. Witten addressed Synod, giving the body an update on the life and activities of the Free Reformed Churches and expressing warm appreciation for the living connection between our two federations. Present from the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated) were Rev. Kim Batteau and Br. Peter Bakker. They brought greetings to Synod on behalf of our Dutch sister churches and asked Synod to continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCN despite the grave concerns in Canada about developments among our Dutch sister churches. Synod also received letters of greeting from the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), the Reformed Churches of New

Zealand, and the Reformed Churches of Indonesia (GGRI-NTT). Also present among us in an unofficial capacity was Rev. Bram DeGraaf, missionary of the Cornerstone Church of Hamilton working in Brazil in cooperation with the Reformed Churches of Brazil.

It was heartwarming to hear about the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in many countries and church federations. It was also a joy when Synod decided to maintain relations of ecclesiastical fellowship between the CanRC and all these various church federations and to also maintain our participation in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) as well as the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).

In regard to the merger process with the United Reformed Churches of North America, Synod recognized that the work has proceeded more slowly than was originally expected when Synod Neerlandia 2001 initiated the process toward merger. Synod also took note of voices within the URCNA calling for a complete halt to the merger process. Nonetheless, Synod reappointed coordinators for the work of promoting unity with the URCNA and, in view of the workload and the importance of the issues at stake, even increased their number from two to four. In this way, our churches have said very clearly that we want to continue the unity process. We desire our present relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship to become one of ecclesiastical unity. We feel this is a matter of Christian love and obligation.

Another important decision of Synod pertained to the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. This small group of churches is a member of NAPARC and our Committee for Contact with Churches in North America was recommending to Synod Dunnville that we enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with these churches. Synod, however, decided “that the CanRC not enter into a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship” with the RPCNA. Even though Synod stated that the “RPCNA can be recognized for their fidelity to the Word of God and their strong Reformed convictions,” the practice of ordaining women to the office of deacon was a barrier to moving to a closer relationship.

In the case of the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands, Synod expressed “thankfulness and joy to the Lord for much faithfulness in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (GKv) as well as grief and disquiet over tolerance of deviations from Scripture and confession.” Because of Synod’s concern about our Dutch sister churches, the decision was made to “continue ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKv, with the temporary suspension of the operation of Ecclesiastical Fellowship rules 4 and 5.” This

CALL ACCEPTED AND DECLINED

Accepted the call to the Canadian Reformed Church at Neerlandia (North) and declined the call to the Canadian Reformed Church at Smithville to serve as second minister:

Candidate Gerard Veurink

EXAMINATIONS SUSTAINED

Examined by Classis Ontario West on June 15th, 2016 and declared eligible for call:

Br. Jonathan Chase, Dr. William den Hollander, Br. Hilmer Jagersma and Br. HanGil Lee

Examined by Classis Ontario West on June 16th, 2016 and declared eligible for call:

Br. David Pol and Br. Jake Torenvliet

CALLED

Called by the Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church in London, ON:

Candidate Hilmer Jagersma

CHURCH NEWS

decision means that the churches of our federation no longer automatically accept attestations from our Dutch sister churches and no longer call ministers of our Dutch sister churches without first seeking classical approval. The mood of Synod in coming to this decision was somber. After more than sixty years of close association and cooperation, it was painful to feel this separation from what is historically our “mother church.”

Appeals

Seventeen churches submitted appeals against Article 110 of the Acts of Synod Carman 2013 in which it was ruled that voting for office-bearers should be restricted to men only, thereby overthrowing the decision of Synod Burlington 2010 that the question of women’s voting should be left to the freedom of individual churches. Synod Dunnville sustained these appeals, judging that Synod Carman 2013 had failed to prove that the decision of Synod Burlington 2010 was in conflict with Scripture or the Church Order (see Article 31 of the Church Order). The upshot is that women’s voting is now once again a matter for local churches to regulate according to the wisdom given them by God.

Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

Synod received a lengthy report from the Board of Governors of the Seminary, including detailed financial reports for each of the three years since the last general synod. Synod recognized with thankfulness to God that the work of training future ministers and missionaries of the gospel could continue without interruption from 2013-

2016. In 2013, CRTS received accreditation from the Association of Theological Schools. Synod Dunnville officially approved all aspects of the work of the Board. It also appointed and reappointed governors and gave leave to the Board to grant tenure to Dr. J. VanVliet and Dr. J. Smith. Dr. J. VanVliet was appointed to a three year term as principal beginning in September 2017. Synod also expressed gratitude to the Free Reformed Churches of Australia for their ongoing and generous support of CRTS.

The work of the Committee for the Needy Students Fund was approved by Synod. An overture from Regional Synod West to give the original home church of theological students a greater role in assessing financial need was not taken over by General Synod because the overture did not really make a specific proposal. Similarly, an overture from Regional Synod West to have students of theology examined by their home classis instead of the classis in which they reside, was not taken over by Synod due to significant lack of clarity about what was really being proposed and how it would be implemented. The report of the Committee for the Pastoral Training Program Funding was also received with thankfulness for the work it had done.

Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise

The last two synods had a large amount of work to do in relation to the development and approval of a new edition of the *Book of Praise*. At Synod Dunnville, Rev. G.Ph. VanPopta presented Synod with an official copy of the *Book of Praise* published by order of General Synod Carman 2013. He gave a speech outlining the history of the various iterations of the *Book of Praise* and expressing thankfulness to God that the new edition was complete. Synod acknowledged with thankfulness the dedicated labor of the Standing Committee including the late Br. C. Nobels. The immense contribution of Dr. William Helder in writing new versifications for most of the psalms was also recognized.

In regard to the future of the *Book of Praise*, Synod Dunnville left the door open for future changes when it mandated the Standing Committee to “seek, receive, evaluate and recommend proposals for changes to the hymn section to be completed for possible submission to a future Synod.”

Bible translation

Synod decided to maintain the English Standard Version as the recommended translation for the churches of

the federation. Other translations approved in the past were the New International Version (1984), the New American Standard Bible, and the New King James Version. At the same time, Synod decided to “acknowledge that while it may not be possible to recommend the NIV2011, a general synod may not forbid churches to use it if they so desire.”

Website of the Canadian Reformed Churches

It was decided to increase the budget of the Committee for the Website to \$10,000 and to mandate an upgrade to the appearance and functioning of the website. A special concern was that the website would work well for people using smart phones and other mobile devices and that better searching capability would be built into the website.

Closing thoughts

Synod Dunnville turned out to be the shortest synod of our churches in recent times. Contributing factors included: the increased use of technology, a somewhat shorter agenda (especially in regard to the *Book of Praise*), high-quality reports from committees appointed by the previous synod, and a great unity of mind on most issues combined with deep respect for each other's opinion. Put all that together with a very experienced chairman, who kept the assembly on track with tactics of gentle pressure, add in the contributions of some very gifted thinkers and analysts among the delegates, and you have a recipe for a short synod. Leaving Synod earlier than expected was a new experience for me and quite delightful, if I may say so.

Thanks to the efficient work of our first clerk and his assistant at Synod, Rev. Ryan Kampen, the official *Acts* are already posted at www.canrc.org. If future synods are able to accomplish the publishing of the *Acts* in a similarly short period of time, this may be the last *Press Release* of a synod you ever read. In the meantime, if this overview of General Synod Dunnville 2016 serves to encourage you to delve into the *Acts*, then we can say “mission accomplished.”

May God bless the work of Synod Dunnville 2016 and may he also guide the churches as they scrutinize, evaluate, and implement the decisions that have been made. May our faithful Lord indeed preserve the peace of Jerusalem.

R. Schouten
Vice-chairman, Synod 2016

Dunnville Canadian Reformed Church

Now that the excitement of Synod Dunnville 2016 is part of our local history, it's our turn to present who we are in *Clarion's* Church Snapshot!

At 119 Inman Road in the beautiful town of Dunnville is a fairly new building where the church of our Lord gathers for worship twice every Sunday.

Our congregation instituted in 2003 with a membership of 260. We shared the building of our mother church, Attercliffe, for seven years. In 2010 we moved into our newly-built church building that was thought to be plenty big but here we are, just six years later, wondering what is next for our close-to-500 and growing membership! The average age in our congregation is 25.9 – we enjoy a membership of mostly young families (that keep moving in!) because the housing is quite affordable in Dunnville and Wainfleet. Our oldest member is ninety-nine and at the time of this writing, the great-grandfather of the youngest. This will change quickly because there are at least twenty-five (born and expected) babies in the balance for this year!

Even though we are growing out of our building, it still feels very new to us. It was exciting times while



building! It was built economically with much volunteer labour. The pipe organ came from an 1860s church in downtown Hamilton; the pews came from a church in Stoney Creek – the windowsills in the building are even built from those pews. We continue to be happy with the large foyer where we enjoy regular coffee socials. The outside of the building is lovingly attended to by one of our landscaping members, who, we are proud to announce, earned us a Trillium Award last year!

We enjoy a close relationship with the local URCs: Dunnville Grace Reformed Church and Wellandport Orthodox Reformed Church.

Our worship services are available by audio livestream on the www – by visiting www.dunnvillecanrc.org.

We are also blessed by our local Beacon Home residents. Their home is close to our church building. They enjoy special catechism classes and Bible studies and join us with many activities. We and they really enjoy our coffee socials, half-ward socials, and the annual church picnic. Our lives are blessed by the special needs brothers and sisters who live and worship with us.

We are blessed with beautiful musical accompaniment from three very talented musicians.



Since we are situated on the outskirts of town we are able to be active in our community. We annually host a Big Breakfast which is open to the community – all proceeds go to the local Food Bank. We also have a huge annual clothing exchange – also open to all. Our consistory encourages the congregation to be active in our community by looking for volunteer opportunities whenever possible. Our members volunteer and are board members at the Pregnancy Care Centre, Salvation Army Food Bank, the Youth Impact Centre, and more.

We are blessed with the preaching and pastoral work of Rev. John VanWoudenberg – he has been with us since 2013. We have many Bible study societies. There are lots of opportunities for growth in God's Word by attending men's, women's, couples', young adults', young peoples'. New to us are Cadets and Kingdom Seekers (a fruit of our relationship with the local URCs). This has been a wonderful thing to witness – many of our young men and women are active in this endeavour and the youth of our church love the activities! The children in our congregation attend ACRES while most of our teens attend Guido de Brès Christian High. An active Ladies' Auxiliary is busy with events that support our church and school – the most popular one being the SpringFest which is also open to all and held at our church building.

Communion of Saints support happens spontaneously in Dunnville CanRef but there is a Care committee under the auspices of our Deacons in place to make sure no one is overlooked! New babies, meals, visits, and showers are organized by this committee.



The town of Dunnville has an unusual mascot in the form of a Mudcat fish. A statue of the fish is situated at the west entrance to town. He hosts a festival every year – our members usually put together a float for the Mudcat Parade – we've even won best float at least twice!

Summer services are very full because Dunnville is south cottage country. Rock Point Provincial Park is a short drive away and we have the shores of Lake Erie and Grand River all close by. Many campers and cottagers visit us all through the vacation season.

Our congregation very happily hosted General Synod Dunnville 2016. Computer, Internet, photocopying, billeting, food, and even changing the setup of the church furniture all were being organized by the Synod 2016 committee already more than a year ago. Everything fell into place quite seamlessly and we were able to welcome twenty-four delegates and some foreign delegates into our lives for two weeks. It was an experience that we can look back on with gratitude to our Heavenly Father for allowing all things to go well. We witnessed how hard these men worked and how much detail went into all their deliberations and we like to think that Dunnville is partially responsible for the comradery the brothers were able to enjoy in their work.

If you ever find yourself on vacation in our area, we hope that you will stop by – now that you know who and where we are – we invite you to come and worship and visit with us!

Nigerian Tears



Cornelis Van Dam
Professor emeritus of Old Testament
at the Canadian Reformed
Theological Seminary in
Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org

Open Doors, an organization serving persecuted Christians worldwide, published a report in conjunction with the Christian Association of Nigeria on the violence against Christians in the northern part of that country. The report, *Crushed but not Defeated*, is available on the Internet. Given the way the report was researched, it passes on reliable information on the horrendous situation in the African nation. The situation is much worse than previously thought.

As is well known, the violence against Christians has a common religious denominator. It is northern Muslims defending their interests, Muslim identity, and the position of Islam. Not just radical Islam exemplified by the terrorist group Boko Haram is responsible, but also other Muslim groups attack Christians. A little historical background is helpful. The report notes that from 1857 to 2014, the Christian faith has grown exponentially. It was virtually nonexistent but grew to 31.2 per cent of the population. The Muslims see this growth as a threat to the dominance of Islam and therefore have reacted, especially more recently, with violence.

The violence against Christians has had enormous impact. It is worst in the twelve northern sharia states of Nigeria. A conservative estimate puts the number killed at about 11,500. Much property was destroyed including 13,000 churches that were either demolished or shut down. Over 1.3 million Christians have been internally displaced, seeking safety and security away from their homes. This means that in some places the Christian presence has become virtually extinct whereas elsewhere the number of Christians has grown. It is hard to imagine what these figures mean in terms of what actually happened and the human cost involved. Muslims, sometimes from neighbouring countries, would come in to occupy the empty places. They would buy destroyed property from harassed Christians who had little choice but to sell at low prices.

At the time of writing this article, it was reported (by *Christian Today* on April 8, 2016) that at least 500 people were murdered in new attacks on Christians in northern Nigeria. These attacks were not by Boko Haram, but by Islamic herdsmen. They also burnt down all the schools, health centers, and churches in the area, and even the police station for the region.

Life is obviously exceedingly difficult for Christians. Islamists, and especially Boko Haram, want to Islamize the whole of Nigeria and establish a caliphate based on sharia. There is absolutely no room for Christianity in their vision of the country. The teaching of Christianity is suppressed at many government schools. There is therefore constant pressure to convert to Islam. Typically, if you become a Muslim in Northern Nigeria, you will face no discrimination but you will be favoured in receiving promotions, jobs, and scholarships. You will have more ready access to doctors, clinics, and hospitals. Also bank loans on favourable terms will come more easily. Muslims dominate in northern politics, economics, culture, and the media. So, if you want to “get ahead” in life, then embrace Islam. If you want security for your family and home, become a Muslim.

However, in spite of such pressures, the Lord God is sovereign and he works and strengthens faith in the lives of those who belong to him. The report also mentions that those who have not fled, but stayed have “shown an increased commitment to their faith and church.” But the Lord not only strengthens those who are his, he also continues to gather the innumerable multitude. The report also notes that in spite of the anti-Christian violence, in several places in northern Nigeria “the Church is growing in numbers through a steady influx of new Muslim converts.”

As the tears of Nigerian Christians fall to the ground in that troubled African nation, may the prayers of God's people elsewhere join their prayers up to the throne of grace for strength, comfort, and relief.



Farewell to Rev. J. VanSpronsen and Family as a Missionary Family



Easter Sunday this year was special in more ways than usual. While in the morning we could hear the message of Christ's resurrection proclaimed by our regular pastor, Rev. R. Schouten, in the afternoon we could listen to the farewell sermon by Rev. J. VanSpronsen as our missionary to Brazil. This was the last opportunity for us to hear our missionary and to take the time to thank him and his family for their years of service abroad. Members of the supporting churches in the Valley, and from further away, had been invited to this special occasion as well. The result was a more than full house, with extra chairs brought in to seat guests, including a number of relatives of the missionary family. Even some Brazilian friends of the family who are now in Canada showed up for the occasion.

Farewell sermon

Rev. VanSpronsen chose as his text for this farewell sermon, a passage from 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2. The theme and points were as follows: "Live your new life according to your knowledge of the gospel! 1) The gospel compels the preacher; 2) The gospel transforms the be-

liever; 3) The gospel shines in the world." He explained what motivated the Apostle Paul to proclaim the ministry of reconciliation and how we too, whether serving directly as an ambassador of the Word or as believers in the church, have an obligation to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. As Paul said in verse 11, "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. . . ." Rather than trying to summarize the whole message here, I invite you to listen to it yourself by visiting our church's website (www.aldergrovechurch.com) and looking up the sermon for yourself. It will be well worth your while; it's a message we need to hear and be reminded of regularly. As Paul said in verse 20, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us."

The service was concluded with the singing of Hymn 79, "We come, O Christ, to You" from which the following quote (stanza 4):

You only are true life – to know you is to live
the more abundant life that earth can never give.
O risen Lord! We live in you:
in us each day your life renew!"





Farewell program

After the conclusion of the service, there was an opportunity for a coffee social in the Fellowship Hall for about fifteen minutes. We were then invited back to the auditorium for a more formal farewell program. The chairman of council, Br. Jim VanSpronsen, welcomed everyone back and had us sing a song of praise and opened the proceedings with prayer and Bible reading. Following that, we heard words of thanks and praise to God for allowing the VanSpronsen family to serve in the mission field in Brazil for almost nine years. These words were expressed in different ways via emails and letters from a number of the supporting churches in Western Canada who could not be present via a delegate. There were also words of thanks and encouragement spoken by Br. B. Vane, chairman of the Mission Board as well as by a member of the Mission Board from the days when the church at Surrey had the responsibility for this mission work. As many of you will know, the church at Aldergrove took over the task as sending church less than three years ago now.

Rev. Schouten spoke words of thanks on behalf of the council at Aldergrove and specifically addressed all members of the family as well, for being a missionary family is truly a team effort, requiring much from them as well.

Elder Hermen Geertsema led us through a rapid-fire slide show highlighting pictures of the family in their Brazilian surroundings from the early years to the latter years. A very interesting and rewarding trip down memory lane for all concerned, especially for the

VanSpronsen's we hope. Near the end of the program, Rev. VanSpronsen and family were presented with some appropriate gifts for their new home in Edmonton as well as a monetary gift to help them with the transition back to a far different climate from Brazil.

Rev. VanSpronsen was given the opportunity to speak at the end and he took advantage of that, thanking the churches for their support throughout the years. Above all, he thanked the Lord for opportunity given to serve in Brazil to help spread the gospel of our Lord and Saviour there. He hopes to continue to remain involved in some ways so that the churches may also benefit from his knowledge and experience there.

As supporting churches we thank God for a faithful servant (and family) who gave all he had to this work. It would be appropriate to repeat what he said in one of his last reports from Brazil published in the Brazil Reformed Mission Update (#25, 2016): "Once again kind words were spoken, and once again the church emphasized the urgent need for the work Canada is doing through her missionaries. Although they spoke their words of thanks directly to me and my family, their words really need to be directed to all the supporting churches who have so faithfully prayed for and supported their missionaries in Brazil. Keep up the great work, your support and encouragement means a lot and has been richly blessed!"

Thank you Rev. VanSpronsen for all you were allowed to do and thanks be to God to whom belongs all the glory.



Rev. VanSpronsen and Amryn draped in the Brazilian flag

Joel Slomp

My name is Joel Slomp, I am a new member in joining the Ray of Sunshine, and I was asked to write up a piece about myself. I am a pastor's son and when I was little, and still today I always wanted to be a pastor like my dad. I was not shy to preach off of my parent's deck when we were living in Neerlandia. Right after the afternoon service, I had many who enjoyed listening to me, and when I sang the songs there were many who sang along with me. They also heard my sermons and gave me compliments on my messages. When I moved way from Neerlandia many missed hearing me. Then my family and I moved to Edmonton and that is my home church. When I was twenty-three years old I moved out of my parents nest and I currently live in Spruce Grove. I have my own place that is a safe environment for me, set up by my loving parents under Rehoboth Christian Ministries. The things I love to do in my spare time are watching TV and playing my video games on Xbox. I love to draw, and paint drawings of animals and nature. I also love word searches and crossword. I am a very active member in my community. I am an athlete for Special Olympics; the sports I participate in are bowling, basketball, indoor soccer, and soft ball.

I also love watching sports, especially my favorite hockey teams: the Vancouver Canucks and the Toronto Maple Leafs. I also love to watch the CFL, and my teams are the Edmonton Eskimos and the Hamilton Tiger Cats. I also am a very active member within my congregation. I make my rounds to visit the seniors of the church and have visits with them on Sunday, either at my place or their house. I also have a part time job of almost three years, working for Wal-Mart Canada as a cashier. I also love spending time on outings with my girlfriend. I visit my senior friends, and I also visit friends of mine within my congregation, going to



their homes and having them over to my place as well. My favourite day of the week is Sunday where I may go and worship our Heavenly Father and hear the gospel. Most of all, I am thankful to the Lord for good health and my family that I have. I also love to spend time with many of my nephews and nieces when I get to see them. I also love taking care of my dog Schooner.

July

4 James Buikema will be 55

c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street W
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

14 Sarah Vandergugten will be 21

23 Jane Street, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

20 Charlie Beintema will be 41

29 Wilson Avenue, Chatham, ON N7L 1K8

20 Derrick VanderHorst will be 29

c/o Twin Oaks, 3217 Twin Oaks Crescent
Burlington, ON L7M 3A8
Email: derrickvanderhorst@gmail.com

25 Joel Slomp will be 31

316 Church Road, Apartment 102
Spruce Grove, AB T7X 0G2
Email: joelrslomp@gmail.com

25 Julie Ostermeier will be 28

c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive, Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3

29 Janine Kamstra will be 31

56 Tyler Bay, Oakbank, MB R2G 1J1

Congratulations to all of those celebrating a birthday this July. We wish you all the best in the coming year, and a wonderful day with family and friends.

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

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

Rachel Vis

731 Lincoln Street, Wellandport, Ontario L0R 2J0
tom.rachelvis@gmail.com • 905-329-9476



Joseph (Part 2)

Genesis 39-45

Even though Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave to Egypt, God took care of him and he became Pharaoh's right hand man. Then God made a famine come that lasted 7 years. Joseph's family didn't live in Egypt, but the famine reached them too. They came to Egypt looking for food, but they didn't recognize Joseph. Joseph did not tell them who he was. He sent them away and told them to return with their brother Benjamin. When they came back with Benjamin he told them who he was and he told them he was not angry for what they had done. Joseph knew it was all part of God's plan. Then Joseph's brothers and his father all moved to Egypt and lived there with Joseph.

Matching

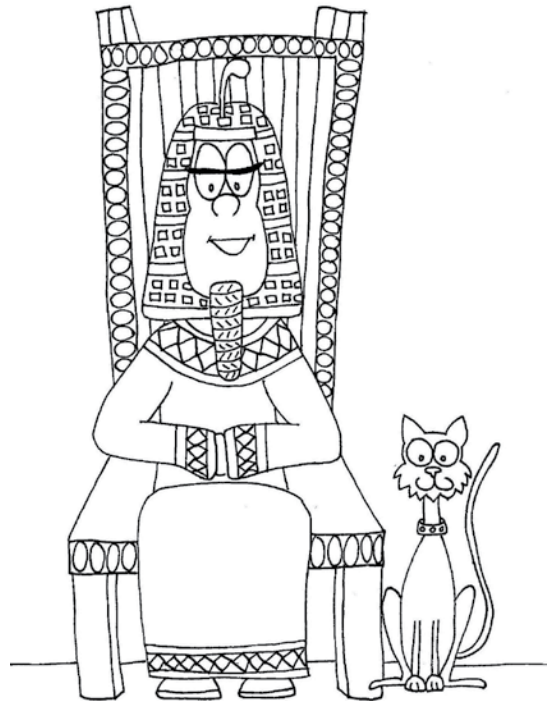
Draw lines to connect important words and ideas from the story!

Joseph's brother	Egypt
Years of famine	God's plan
Not enough food	Benjamin
Where Joseph's family went	7
Why Joseph wasn't angry	famine

Find these words !

Benjamin	Joseph	Recognize
Egypt	Pharaoh	Seven
Famine	Plan	Slave

Go to www.clarionmagazine.ca to print and colour this picture!



F	A	M	I	N	E	F	V	Z	H
J	N	A	L	P	O	F	S	P	O
E	Z	I	N	G	O	C	E	R	A
X	G	O	M	L	L	S	V	W	R
Z	J	Y	A	A	O	D	E	K	A
P	L	A	P	J	J	S	N	P	H
T	P	Q	P	T	L	N	J	H	P
L	R	V	B	A	Q	V	E	M	H
X	N	C	V	M	M	S	H	B	X
I	W	E	U	L	U	Q	E	M	H

by Emily Nijenhuis

Edu-Sketch



Chris de Boer
Principal of
Dufferin Christian School,
Carman, Manitoba

In this edition of Edu-Sketch, I hope to outline some of the challenges different schools face and some of the joys that are experienced. One of the blessings of sharing such things is that we can remember to hold the members of our sister-schools in our prayers. Each school society and each provincial jurisdiction faces unique challenges and experiences unique joys. I hope this Edu-Sketch will provide you with ample reasons for giving thanks to our faithful God and for drawing us nearer to him in our times of need.

Challenging contexts

In British Columbia, the Chairman of Ebenezer school in Smithers, observes: “With an election coming to BC in the next year or so, negative rhetoric concerning independent schools is starting to show up again ... FISABC [Federation of Independent Schools in BC] has asked us all, as members, to watch for letters ‘attacking’ independent schools and to forward those on to FISABC or to the Board so that responses can be given that better reflect reality.” On this same topic of funding, the Chairman in Neerlandia suggests, “It can be easy to worry about the future, and it’s a reminder how little control we have over so many things in our life. The board is happy to report that our funding is indeed increased slightly, as the government continues to fund growth in enrollment, and also to reinstate previously cut grants. It would be a good idea to send an email or phone call to [the] Education Minister thanking the government for continuing to fund private schools.” This topic of funding for independent schools will continue to be a challenge for our schools in particular, as politically challenging and biblically unacceptable practices may be mandated for our schools by intolerant governments. As long as other independent schools continue to hold biblically sound principles, we can work together, but we are not always united with these other schools on the foundation of God’s Word, and so when it is attacked, we may find ourselves increasingly isolated. Perhaps our courage and

leadership in standing up to unwarranted government foolishness will provide the courage for others to stay the course, as well. This is particularly true in Alberta.

In Alberta, the government released the document, *Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities, and Gender Expressions*. This document states: “All school authorities are advised to use these best practices to develop and/or revise policies, regulations, and procedures related to creating welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions” (p. 1) and then in a carefully crafted footnote defines school authorities “to denote public, separate, and Francophone school boards as well as charter schools and private schools” (p.1). There are some public school boards in Alberta that are refusing to implement these guidelines, so we will have to wait and see how this challenging scenario plays out. Meanwhile, our brothers and sisters in Alberta must surely be actively petitioning their government to re-examine these guidelines for use in any school (because they are truly without foundation and are not best practices), but especially for use in independent schools. The Chairman in Neerlandia also mentions something in this regard: “Our school has submitted the safe and caring policy to the government as of March 31. Our policy is very likely to fail the standard that the government has indicated they were looking for. We again ask for your prayers that those in authority over our school will allow the values we as Christians profess, to govern our school policies.”

In Ontario, our sister secondary schools are inspected by a Ministry of Education inspector whose task it is to ensure that government policies and curriculum are being followed. These inspections are often times of high stress in a school, as there is an even greater sense of tension between independent schools in Ontario and the Ministry of Education system than in other provinces. There seems to be a lack of trust between the two parties

in the Ontario context. In addition, some inspectors try to exert more authority and demand more compliance than allotted. “Compliance Officer” may be a better term for the inspectors that visit our schools in Ontario. School inspections in BC, Alberta, and Manitoba seem to have a much greater sense of partnership and cooperation than the inspections in Ontario. Certainly in Manitoba, schools can be very grateful for the leadership and cooperation experienced with government liaisons for independent schools presently, and in the past.

Every one of our provincial contexts is unique. As sister schools seeking to navigate the challenging and changing tides affecting our schools, may we remember to hold on to the Lord’s faithfulness and continue to hold each other in prayer before his throne of grace.

Jubilant joys

While many schools have or are busy taking on expansion plans at their local sights, Emmanuel Christian School is set to open new doors at their newly renovated campus on September 1. The chairman writes, “I know it needs no mention to say that there are 100s of people that are excited to converge on the grounds of the new Emmanuel Christian High School on September 1st for the Grand Opening festivities. We pray for the Lord’s continued blessing on the final months of renovation, construction and preparation!” This project increases the room for Maranatha Christian School in Fergus (who shared the present building with ECHS) and will undoubtedly give more breathing space for all students and staff involved. This is an exciting time for Reformed education in Fergus and the supporting church communities of Elora, Guelph, Grand Valley, Listowel, Orangeville, and Owen Sound!

Musically, this March noted another Mass Band concert for many of our high schools. This time, students travelled to and gathered in Abbotsford, British Columbia. Students from Edmonton, Winnipeg, and Fergus joined together with Credo’s band from Langley and took their audience on a special Voyage. Regina, Russia, Scotland, ancient Rome, and back to Canada again – quite the journey, indeed! If you are interested in experiencing

this voyage, search for “Mass Band Concert – Abbotsford 2016” on YouTube.

Covenant Christian School in Neerlandia is grateful to the Lord for being able to appoint Mike Nederveen as their new principal for the year 2016/2017. We wish him and all administrators in our schools the Lord’s continued blessings for the work that they do all year long in service to their communities.

One of the great blessings of covenant education is the unity we experience in assisting each other in instructing all the covenant youth using the unique talents with which the Lord has gifted them. In Ontario, the ASC Committee (Assisting the Special Child) writes in its February 2016 newsletter:

When our schools were set up, they were established for the nurture and care of our covenant youth. All of our children, irrespective of ability or handicap, belong to the community of the church. Therefore, as much as possible, all should receive the covenantal education desired for the children of the church. Experiences within our system of schools reveals that enrollment of special needs students is, indeed, a blessing for all the students of their grade, as well as for the school community as a whole. It also creates opportunities for children with special needs to be an integral part of the community of God’s children. This is a good reminder for our schools, and we can be thankful to the Lord when he does provide schools with the resources and expertise to educate all of God’s covenant children, including our children with special needs.

Although this edition of Edu-Sketch was broader than normal, I hope it provided you with things to remember in prayer, both in joyful thankfulness, and in persevering petitions as we seek the Lord’s continued blessings on our schools and on the training of his covenant children.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers’ Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma akingma@echs.ca.



Letter to the Editor

Ecclesiastical relations have a structure and a language that can be difficult to follow, even for the most experienced individuals. This observation is particularly true during general synod, where the threads of discussions (some spanning years) must get pulled together in a concise fashion for the digestion of the churches. I don't envy the clerks. At the best of times, the Acts of synod are a challenging read. I'd like to acknowledge the success of the latest instalment.

Synods and their reporting clerks serve us well with wise judgements and accurate reporting. Occasionally a subsequent synod needs to apply a correction or add a clarifying statement, but we never encounter an issue that leaves the churches adrift and uncertain. With one notable exception. Women voting has consumed our broader assemblies for decades. Synod 2016 will not put the matter to rest, if history is any indication. There is a good reason for this. I don't mean to suggest that the scriptural position is a difficult one to figure out. We've had greater doctrinal challenges that have consumed less time. The same is true for certain thorny ecclesiastical matters. Why is it that the topic of women voting is so difficult?

Quite simply, our church order is failing us in this matter. We appeal to a document that is very vague on the topic. Whether by design or omission, Article 3 provides very little guidance on how to resolve the matter. Even if the exclusion of additional detail was historically intentional, it should no longer be so. It is time to appeal for clarity. Our churches should declare how we want an election of officebearers to function, and the nature of the vote in that context. It is possible to do this without encroaching on the freedom of the churches.

Charles Spurgeon once said, in relation to doctrinal controversies in the Baptist Council of his day, that "whatever the Council does let it above all things avoid the use of language which could legitimately have two meanings contrary to each other. Let us be plain and outspoken" (1). If we develop a revised Article 3 that outlines what we commonly hold for truth in the matter of elections, rather than disagree on its current wording, I believe we can sidestep much unwanted debate. At the very least our synodical clerks will thank us.

David Schriemer

Dear Rev. Visscher,

I wanted to make a few comments regarding your editorial on "Calling a Minister" (*Clarion* Vol 65, No 10, May 20, 2016). As I whole, I appreciated the article; particularly the comments regarding the church counsellor.

I was hoping you would be willing to expand on how the calling committee should go about its task of gathering information, having established the importance of this work. There seems to be different schools of thought regarding when a minister should be contacted in this process and also whether questionnaires to members of the minister's congregation are appropriate.

I also wanted to express concern at the suggestion of including women in the calling committee (my apologies if I have misread this). I feel a compelling argument could be made that, due to the nature of the work and the direction it gives to consistory, it would be unbiblical to appoint women to the calling committee. My wife feels it sufficient to say that it goes against the general direction of Scripture.

That said, it is important to seek out the views of the entire congregation both in terms of evaluating potential ministers and seeking to understand the needs of your own congregation. Which leads the final request for elaboration: in which ways ought the calling committee seek the views and needs of the congregation and how should this affect their work?

Thank you for your consideration.

With brotherly greetings,

Joel Bosveld

(from the Free Reformed Church of Byford, Australia)



Response

Dear Joel,

Thanks for your response to my editorial.

With regard to how committees go about gathering information on a potential minister to call, you are correct that a number of different approaches are often taken. Some committees will contact a minister and ask

¹"Notes," *The Sword and the Trowel* (March 1888), 148.

him if there is anything major that would prevent him from considering a call at this time or in the near future. Other committees will not contact him directly. Both approaches have negative and positive elements to them.

If you contact him, you will right away get a sense of whether or not he is open to a call. A quick brush-off will indicate that he really is not interested and that perhaps the committee should not proceed to consider him any further. On the other hand, a more positive reaction may encourage the committee to investigate more and move forward.

If you do not contact him, there may be a greater measure of uncertainty on the committee's part as to his personal views on the matter.

Let me also assure you that even if the committee does not contact the minister directly, he will get to hear about it. Over the years members of my congregation would often tip me off to say that this church was asking for information on me. So in the end very few calls come as complete surprises.

On the matter of questionnaires, most committees seem to make use of them in one way or another. Some send them to office bearers only; other send them to both members and office bearers. The challenge here is come up with a good questionnaire that covers all of the bases in a proper way. I know of some questionnaires that are close to useless because they do not ask the right questions. I know of others that are far too intrusive into a minister's personal life.

By the way, some committees will even send out one or two members to investigate a local minister. I once had a brother come from the eastern part of Canada and he rambled around my congregation for two weeks asking all kinds of questions about myself and my wife. After a few days the young people in the congregation called him "the scout" and when he called to visit someone they would say "the scout is coming." I might add that after

he got home and reported to the congregation, he was roundly criticised for going too far in his investigation. He even contacted me and asked me if he had gone too far. I replied that I was not offended as he was only doing his job.


So in the end all sorts of approaches are possible, if not always advisable or wise. I would say that if a calling committee has questions about how to exercise its mandate it should go back to the church council and ask for feedback and direction. After all, a calling committee is only a temporary committee, responsible at all times to council.

In that connection, let me say that in the Canadian Reformed churches it is not unusual for a church council to appoint one or more women to such a committee. When asked why they do so, they will reply that (a) they want to involve the whole congregation in the process, (b) they think that it is important to have a woman's perspective on any minister to be called. At the same time they will staunchly maintain that this has nothing to do with women exercising any authority in the church whatsoever. The role of a calling committee member is purely advisory in nature. Just as women can nominate men for the office of deacon and elder, so there is no reason why they cannot have input into the calling of minister.

With regard to ascertaining the views of the congregation as to what kind of pastor to call, you might want to draft a questionnaire and send it out to the members for their feedback and input. I know of any number of churches here in Canada that have done this.

As you can see from the above, there is no standard procedure when it comes to calling ministers. Each local church seems to chart its own way forward.

I hope that this helps to clarify a few things.

Blessings,
Pastor James Visscher 

*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.*