

Clarion

A smiling man with dark, curly hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and red tie, is holding an open book. He is standing in front of a bookshelf filled with books. The background is slightly blurred, focusing on the man.

Mentorship for beginning ministers?

CHURCH SNAPSHOT

CLARION KIDS

YOU ASKED



Arjan de Visser
Professor of Diaconology at the
Canadian Reformed Theological
Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
ajdevisser@crtcs.ca

Help for Beginning Ministers

There is a difference between surviving and thriving

The Canadian Reformed Churches have always recognized the importance of good seminary training for future pastors. Over time, the training offered at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) in Hamilton has been developed and expanded to meet the needs of the students and the churches. One aspect of seminary training that has received a boost during the last fifteen years is preparation for ministerial *practice*. This was provided by way of establishing the so-called Pastoral Training Program (PTP). Two important components of this program are a short mission internship (after the second year of study) and a lengthy summer internship (after the third year of study). This program has been highly appreciated by the students and by the churches in general.

At the same time, when a student enters the ministry, there is still a steep learning curve. Everything is new, you are on your own, and it's not easy. One aspect is the workload: preparing one or two sermons every week, teaching Catechism classes, leading consistory meetings, making pastoral visits in the congregation. Another aspect is that every congregation has its own character and its own challenges. Where do you find the wisdom to deal with each and every situation? Thankfully, there are good elders with lots of experience. Most importantly, the Lord is faithful and the Holy Spirit provides guidance and wisdom. But still. . . .

In my observation, most beginning ministers adapt well to their calling. They might initially struggle with the workload; they might stumble into unforeseen challenges; they might make beginner's mistakes; but usually they get to be established within a few years. When I ask former students how they are doing in the ministry, the answers range between "hanging in there" and "really enjoying it." At the same time, while there is much to be thankful for,

things do not always go well with beginning ministers.

I'm writing this article to raise the question whether as churches we could do more to help beginning ministers get off to a good start. I would like to share with the readers of *Clarion* what other church federations are doing in this regard. I will describe two systems of mentoring beginning ministers which have been developed, one by our sister churches in New Zealand, the other by our sister churches in The Netherlands.

Vicariate

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) have established a kind of apprenticeship for candidate ministers which they call a *vicariate* (*vicar* is a name for junior clergy in the Anglican tradition).

The vicariate is a one-year apprenticeship which every candidate minister needs to complete after finishing his studies at seminary and before being declared eligible for call. It is similar to an internship required by other professions such as medicine and law where graduates are required to spend up to a year as a hospital intern or an articulated clerk before they can be registered as practitioners in their respective professions. In short, it is a form of on-the-job training.

An important reason for the RCNZ to establish this program was the fact that they do not have their own seminary. Their students go to Australia or the USA to study theology. It is understandable that the RCNZ wanted to have the opportunity to "influence" their own students before they enter into the ministry.

The way the system works is similar to a student internship. The new graduate will commence pastoring and preaching under the supervision of an experienced minister. He will accompany the minister on some of the home

visits, observe how consistory meetings are run, receive some sermon supervision and evaluation, become familiar with the church order, and generally hone his skills whilst preparing for the preliminary classis examination.

The churches have appointed a committee to arrange these apprenticeships. In addition, a central fund has been established to provide financial support to churches that have a vicar. Churches may

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Our editorial is from guest writer Dr. Arjan de Visser. Dr. de Visser, who directs the Pastoral Training Program at CRTS, reviews several ways in which other federations address the need for mentorship or apprenticeship for newly graduated seminary students entering the ministry.

From Dr. Karlo Janssen, there is an article on sister-church relations. There are privileges and obligations involved; and the question of how far we go with pursuing and continuing these relationships.

From the federation we have a Church Snapshot from Spring Creek and a graduation report from CCRTC. Issue 16 also has a number of its regular columns: Treasures New and Old, *Clarion* Kids, and You Asked. There is also a press release and a letter to the editor.

Laura Veenendaal

- 430 GUEST EDITORIAL**
Help for Beginning Ministers
- 433 TREASURES, NEW & OLD**
Why Does God Swear So Much?
- 434 Sister Churches**
- 437 CHURCH SNAPSHOT**
- 439 Report of Covenant Canadian Reformed**
Teachers College
- 441 CLARION KIDS**
- 442 YOU ASKED**
- 443 PRESS RELEASE**
- 444 LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvlieter, E. Kampen, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR MAGAZINE CONTENT

Clarion
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J5
Email: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

CLARION
Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: 204-663-9000, Fax: 204-663-9202

Subscriptions subscriptions@clarionmagazine.ca
Advertisements ads@clarionmagazine.ca
Website www.clarionmagazine.ca

2016 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

			Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada			\$49.00*	\$ 82.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds			\$69.00	\$102.00
International			\$98.00	\$171.00

***Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra.**
GST/HST no. 890967359RT

Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

2016 ADVERTISING RATES


Advertisements: \$20.00 per column inch
Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch.
We reserve the right to refuse ads.

PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

We acknowledge the financial support of the 
Government of Canada through the Canada
Periodical Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

apply to the Vicariate Fund for up to two thirds of the costs of the vicariates. Married vicars receive about two thirds of the recommended salary of a minister. Single students receive half of the recommended salary.

Going by anecdotal feedback which I have received, the system works well. Instead of having all the responsibility for a congregation right after graduation, the vicar is eased into congregational work during the vicariate. In addition, if there are any outstanding problems they can be remedied before ordination.

I suggest that some of our own graduates would benefit from doing an apprenticeship like this. I said “some” because many of our students are ready to enter the ministry when they graduate from seminary. We do not need to make it a standard expectation that all graduates should do an extra year-long apprenticeship. There are graduates, however, who feel insecure about themselves and who are, for whatever reason, not quite ready for the ministry. In such cases, it would be good if there was an opportunity to do a year-long internship with an experienced minister.

Mentorship

The Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt in The Netherlands (GKV; Reformed Churches Liberated) have also recognized the need to help beginning ministers get off to a good start. They have developed a mentor system which is obligatory for beginning ministers. Every beginning minister gets a mentor for the first two years of his ministry. The process is supervised by a committee that is appointed by synod, called Steunpunt Kerkenwerk (SKW; a kind of advice office for church councils).

When a candidate has accepted a call, his church will receive a letter from the afore-mentioned committee with information about the mentorship system. The church will then request the committee to find a suitable mentor for their minister. The mentor must be a minister who has at least five years of experience and who has completed a training program which is organized by the committee. The mentorship is supposed to start one month after the ordination of the new minister.

Mentor and mentee are expected to meet regularly (once every four to six weeks) for about one and one half to two hours. This comes down to six to ten meetings per year with a total of fifteen contact hours per year. The main task of the mentor is to help the beginning minister discover and reflect on his personal strengths and weaknesses, help him apply his growing insight and experience in pastoral practice, and stimulate him to function in a way that is effective and balanced. After a half year, a

year, and again after two years the mentor and his protégé report back to the bodies who have commissioned them.

I am not sure how well the system works. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a lot depends on the chemistry between the mentor and the mentee. If they hit it off well, the two-year mentorship can be a great help for the beginning minister. If they are not very compatible, it can easily happen that the mentorship peters out and not much is gained.

Lessons

I think that most of us would agree that every beginning minister would be well served by having an experienced colleague who functions as his mentor during the early years of his ministry. I’m not saying this because large numbers of beginning ministers crash out of the ministry. Thankfully, most of our young ministers find their feet soon enough and many are flourishing in the ministry. But there is a difference between surviving and thriving. Some younger men have a hard time settling in, developing a good routine, finding direction, etc. Being able to regularly sit down with an experienced colleague can mean so much for them.

If we agree that some form of mentorship is good for beginning ministers, the question is whether this should be arranged formally (by the churches) or whether this can be left to develop informally (between the ministers themselves). If we look at the two models that I have described in this article, it is clear that in both cases mentorship is arranged formally. The Canadian Reformed Churches probably do not need to go that far at this point in time. At the same time, I think we can learn from both models.

From the churches in New Zealand we can take the idea that for some students it can be very beneficial to do an apprenticeship of one year before entering the ministry. This does not need to be arranged by way of a regulation from synod. A church could simply make an agreement with a graduate from the seminary and have him work for a year in the congregation. In fact, this approach has already been used by the Fellowship CanRC in Burlington, with good results.

From the churches in The Netherlands we can take the idea that it can be beneficial to arrange some form of mentorship for beginning ministers. This does not need to be arranged by a committee that is appointed by synod. We could make a start at the classis level. When a graduate from the seminary is ordained, his church could ask classis to appoint an experienced minister to be his mentor for two years. I recognize that details need to be worked out, but I believe it would be good if the churches could start thinking in this direction.





Robert Schouten
Minister of the Canadian
Reformed Church at Aldergrove,
British Columbia
schouten61@gmail.com

Why Does God Swear So Much?

Hebrews 6:13-20

One of the lesser known truths of the Bible is the great frequency of divine swearing. I haven't counted, but references to God's oaths are in the hundreds. Sentences like, "As I live, says the LORD," and, "The LORD swore," abound.

Some of God's oaths pertain to judgment. In those cases, he swears by himself that some dire consequence will be coming upon the unbelieving and disobedient. A case in point would be God's oath that the adults who were delivered from Egypt but doubted God's power to bring them into the land of Canaan would perish in the wilderness (Ps 95:11). In this case, the oath of God means judgment is inescapable.

The great majority of God's oaths, however, are related to his work of salvation. Such oaths communicate the certainty and irreversibility of his plan of redemption. The foundational oath of God is surely the one given long ago to our father Abraham. To the patriarch, God said: "I

swear by myself that I will bless you and multiply you and I swear that all nations will be blessed through you" (Gen 22:16-18).

Because of this oath, Abraham had a double ground of certainty. He had God's unchangeable promise and now he also had God's unchangeable oath. During the long centuries of covenant history following the death of Abraham, God remembered his oath. Indeed, we can say that God's oath is the driving force of covenant history.

For example, when God delivered his people from Egypt, he said to them repeatedly, "Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD sword to your fathers. . . to give them." Because the Lord promised and swore, things happen. They have to happen because God's own Name is at stake. What kind of God would he be if he didn't keep his oaths while nonetheless requiring his people to keep theirs?

Later, in the gospel of Luke, the oath of God again shows its presence

and power. The angel Gabriel told the aging priest, Zechariah, that the Christ is coming. Through the Spirit, Zechariah responds by saying, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people. . . to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham."

Hebrews 6 tells us that God's promise and oath have continued relevance for believers in the new covenant. These "two unshakeable things" have been partially but not wholly fulfilled. There remains for us who believe a hope of greater things to come. As God's sure Word has already been fulfilled in the Ascension of Jesus Christ into the "inner place behind the curtain," so his promise and oath will become evident in the coming of Christ "a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Heb 12:28). The future is guaranteed!

For Further Study

1. Why does God add an oath to his promise of salvation?
2. In the midst of suffering and disappointment, how does God's oath encourage us?
3. How is baptism related to God's oath?



Sister Churches



Karlo Janssen
Convener and Secretary
of the CRCA and Minister
of the Canadian Reformed Church
at Abbotsford, B.C.
rcjanssen@shaw.ca

General synods spend a lot of time on relationships with other churches. Like previous synods, Synod Dunville (hereafter GS 2016) was asked such to consider whether the energy, time, and money spent on this is responsible. GS 2016's agenda have become acta; four committees for inter-church relations were appointed. Now is a good time to reflect on the matter: Why sister churches? What should it take? What is it worth?

EF or SR?

First, something about terminology. Where inter-church relations are the topic of discussion, the terms ecclesiastical fellowship (EF) and sister-church relations (SR) are used. It has been said, "the two terms 'ecclesiastical fellowship' and 'sister churches' are synonymous. The former being the official name and the latter being the popular or common name" (GS 2007 Art. 142 Cons. 3.2).

This consideration overlooked the fact that our Church Order (Art. 50) says, "With foreign churches of Reformed confession a sister-church relationship shall be maintained as much as possible." One can hardly call a term used by the Church Order a "popular" or "common" name. The two terms are both official. That said, they are indeed synonymous: an SR is regulated by Rules for EF.

The value of EF

Sister-church relations seek to bring to expression a bond that is real, but cannot be efficiently practised because of distance and/or culture. Such relations regulate the privileges and obligations which churches have who share the same Reformed confession even though they belong to different bonds of churches.

Privileges

The privileges basically come down to the fact that churches will treat each other's members and officers as they would their own. Sister churches trust each other's word.

When church A belonging to denomination Y issues a testimony, sister church B in denomination Z will accept it without questioning it. Do not the churches A and B, even though belonging to different bonds of churches, hold to the same Reformed confession?

That testimony might be an attestation indicating a person is sound in doctrine and life and thus is to be admitted to the Lord's table. That testimony might be a declaration indicating a brother is sound in doctrine and life and thus is licensed to proclaim God's Word. Such testimonies are used for those who travel and for those who move from one place to another.

Basically the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship implies that the bond between two churches belonging to different federations is, where privileges are concerned, identical to the bond between two churches belonging to the same federation. In the Abbotsford CanRC an attestation from the Southern River Free Reformed Church Australia will be treated in exactly the same way as an attestation from the Smithville CanRC.

(As an aside: It is worth noting that in today's world there are few bonds of churches that are fine with just using attestations for receiving members. We'll leave that for another time, and focus on the CanRC principles and practice.)

Obligations

The obligations basically come down to the duty of mutual paraclesis. "Paraclesis" is a Greek word which means "to speak a right word at the right time." In English translations of Scripture we find it and associated words rendered with words such as comfort, encourage, admonish, urge, exhort, help, advocate. When Christ speaks of another "Comforter" coming, the word we find in the Greek text is "Paraclete."

Sister churches accept their responsibility of mutual paraclesis. They will inform each other when they

consider changes in doctrine, worship, and governance (the marks of the church mentioned in BC Art. 29). They promise to assist and admonish each other with respect to these matters when questions or concerns arise.

It is because of the obligation to mutual paraclesis that churches are to be united. Christ emphatically and explicitly prayed for the unity of the church (John 17). The Holy Spirit urged unity of the church even in view of diversity within the church (1 Cor 12, Eph 2 and 4).

Less EF?

Sister-church relations take a lot of time and effort and, especially overseas relations, cost quite a bit of money. Is it responsible to maintain the relations we have? Should we seek more? Should we seek to reduce the number we have?

Christ emphatically and explicitly prayed for the unity of the church

The problem here is that the privileges and the obligations bite each other. It is the obligations that create a lot of work. Just look at our relationship with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, the GKv. Since 2010 we've even had a separate committee of four men work on the Dutch "file," with all four travelling to The Netherlands at times. Our reluctance to pursue EF with other churches that are rather dissimilar from our own (e.g. the RPCNA) stems from the experience that it is a lot of work.

Hence, because of the obligations, we'd prefer our list of sister churches to be as short as possible.

More EF?

However, because of the privileges, we'd prefer our list of sister churches to be as long as possible.

We live in a time when many people travel. Could a minister serving in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales lead a Canadian Reformed worship service? Probably not: as there is no sister-church relationship it would be considered improper. The same thought is prevalent where Lord's Supper participation is concerned. True, the absence of an attestation is not necessarily an automatic no. However, the presence of an attestation does make things a lot simpler. The same is true the other way round. If a young person decided to

study at Cambridge or Oxford in England, where would they go to church?

The implied obligations encourage decreasing the number of sister churches, the implied privileges encourage increasing the number of sister churches.

In numbers

We currently have four committees consisting of – not counting the Church Unity Subcommittees – a total of twenty-two brothers.

The CRCA (Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad) consists of six brothers. They maintain eight sister-church relationships, a further three contacts named in synod decisions, and our membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).

The CCCNA (Committee for Contact with Churches in North America) consists of eight brothers divided over two subcommittees. They maintain three sister-church relationships and further contact with all churches that are part of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).

The CRCA-SRN (Subcommittee Relations with churches in The Netherlands) consists of four brothers who maintain one sister church relationship and a further two contacts named in synod decisions.

The CCU (Committee for Church Unity) consists of four brothers focused entirely on our sister-church relationship with the United Reformed Churches in North America.

According to the general fund of our churches, the costs of these committees between GS 2013 and GS 2016 were as follows: CRCA & CRCA-SRN – \$40,000, CCCNA – \$19,000, CCU – \$12,500.

Have we gone beyond the "as much as possible" of CO 50?

I personally don't think so. However, I do consider the question a valid one.

Regionalization

For many years now, I dare say decades, there has been a push to regionalize relationships. When I still served on the GKv committee for inter-church relations the thought among the "liberated Reformed" was: CanRC for the Americas, the Dutch for Europe and northern Asia, the South Africans for Africa, the Australians for South East Asia and Oceania.

The recent decision by the CanRC not to enter into EF with a church in Singapore follows this line of thought.

Back in 2007 some also wondered whether our relationship with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand was proper given the distance. The problem is, inter-church relations are never “simple” or “tidy.” Several individuals have studied at our seminary and the mission work of the Smithville CanRC has created our contacts in Indonesia. Where New Zealand is concerned, though geographically far away it is also geographically somewhat isolated, and culturally close to Canada. And Korea: some figure that Korea should be an Australian responsibility, but Perth and Vancouver are about equidistant from Seoul (as are Winnipeg and Launceston).

Multilateralization

There has also been talk of moving away from bilateral relations to multilateral relations. Bilateral relations are a direct relationship of EF between two bonds of churches, e.g. CanRC and OPC, or FRCA and FRCSA. Multilateral relations are a direct relationship with a group organization, and via that membership, indirect relations with other churches. That’s where the CanRC relationship with the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America is now at.

Organizations such as the ICRC and NAPARC could serve us well where multilateral relations are concerned. The challenge here is that membership in NAPARC and the

ICRC is not in CanRC control. Multilateralization works well where the obligations of EF are concerned. However, where privileges are concerned, it raises questions.

Decentralization

If ICRC and NAPARC can be a vehicle for meeting the obligation of ecclesiastical paraclesis, how else might the privilege of ecclesiastical unity be practiced?

One solution could be to make this a more local matter. The question of who may preach and who may attend the Lord’s Supper could be left in the hands of the local consistory and involve the classis if need be. The inter-church relations committee appointed by synod could facilitate this by providing a church (and classis) with the information requires to make a responsible decision. A general synod would then review the work the committee in this respect. Should there be an irregularity that raises questions, we have the institutions of broader assemblies, especially the deputies appointed by classes known as church visitors, to deal with these.

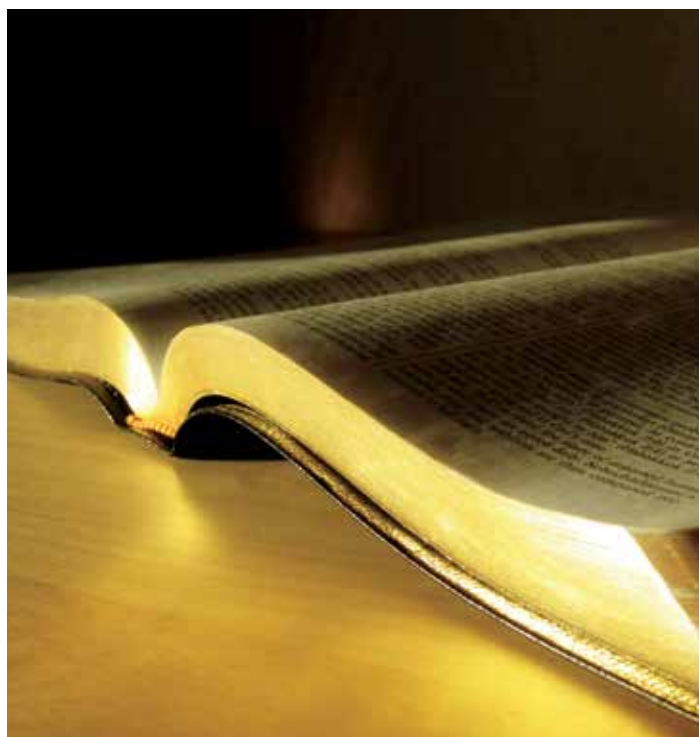
In a sense this has already happened. When a minister would preach outside his own bond of churches, it used to be the committee that would issue the attestation. That is no longer the case. If a ministerial attestation is required, the local consistory will issue it (GS 2013 Art. 175).

Now is not the time

At this point in time all this is, of course, a step too far. However, now is the time to start thinking about this. Though the echoes of submissions to GS 2016 are still ringing in our ears, before we realize it the deadline for submissions to GS 2019 will be upon us. Thoughts like those expressed above will have to travel down the ecclesiastical route. That means we’ll need some crystallization on this point in local churches already in two years from now. If we don’t, there will simply again be some letters, and synod will simply make the same kinds of decisions we’ve been making for decades now.

A tile on the wall of my parental home says (in Dutch): “When the tide changes, one has to move the beacons.” There was a time and place when the stipulations articulated in CO 50 made sense. In today’s global village with its buffet of “Reformed denominations” we might need to do things differently.

Hence we as churches and our committees for inter-church relations do well to give these matters careful thought.

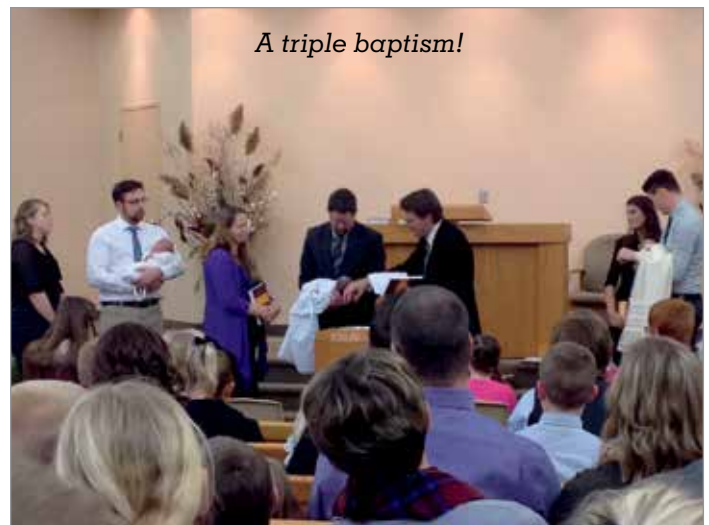


Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church

Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church is one of six CanRC churches in the Niagara peninsula located between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Our church building is located in a country setting in the hamlet of Tintern, Ontario, central to the homes of most of our congregation. Members of our congregation live in the surrounding villages and towns of Tintern, Campden, St. Anns, Vineland, Jordan, Fenwick, Fonthill, and further out, in the cities of Welland and St. Catharines. As the most eastern CanRC congregation in the peninsula, we are located nearest to Niagara Falls, Ontario. If you come to visit us (and tourists do occasionally) you will receive a warm welcome in the busy foyer of our church building where members gather for fellowship before and after our worship services.



*Three ministers helping to celebrate
our twenty-fifth anniversary:
Rev. C. VanderVelde, Rev. G. Wieske, Rev. P. Holtvlüwer*



We recently celebrated our twenty-fifth anniversary in January of 2016 with a dessert social and a well-attended informal evening program with contributions from our church council and various bible study societies. Together, we could remember and give thanks to how the Lord has been faithful to our congregation. We also had the opportunity to hear the preaching of our emeritus minister, Rev. Garrelt Wieske, (who served us from 1997 to 2003) and his successor and our former minister, Rev. Clarence Vandervelde (who served us from 2004 to 2009), both with their characteristic styles. Our current minister is Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, whose ministry for the past five years has been a great blessing to the congregation.

Instituted on December 31, 1990, with 221 (112 communicant) members from the Vineyard Canadian Reformed Church at Lincoln, we have since grown in size over the years to our current number of 384 (230 communicant) members. Approximately fifty families with

children, twenty-five married couples, and fifteen single members make up our congregation. There is also quite a variety of trades and careers held amongst our members: farmers, teachers, greenhouse operators, contractors, and sales people, to name only a few.

One of the most memorable events in our church life was to witness the baptism of five children adopted by a couple in our congregation. Recently, we have witnessed baptism on several Sundays in a row as our families are experiencing a baby-boom. We have relatively few elderly members in our congregation, but cherish the ones we have.

Our growth is mostly from within and from those who join our church when moving into our area coming from sister churches; although we have had the joy of witnessing adult baptism. Yearly, we typically witness five to ten young people publicly profess their faith. Once our intrepid Rev. G. Wieske convinced the consistory that a mere snow storm and a power failure should not delay public profession of faith, and so the service took place in the glow of camping lanterns (and no running water!!)

Our present building has been home for our congregation since 2004. Prior to settling in our own church building, we shared the Lincoln church building for worship and we worshipped for several years in the gymnasiums of Christian schools in St. Catharines and Jordan, Ontario. We have been blessed with a beautiful building for worship. Our congregational singing is accompanied by three gifted organists including brother Carl Oosterhoff who has served us as organist for many years. The

rural setting of our church building does mean that opportunities for outreach and evangelism nearby are more limited and we are focussing our efforts outside its immediate vicinity. The *Two Ways to Live* course is being offered to the congregation to assist us in our witness in our daily walk of life. For many years, members of our congregation have also hosted a social/devotional for the elderly residents of Albright Manor.

Our congregation is blessed with active Bible study societies and the usual active committees. Such committees include the Committee of Administration, Care and Share, Library, as well as local reps for the schools (John Calvin School in Smithville, and Guido de Bres Christian High School in Hamilton), mission, Anchor Association, *Clarion*, and Theological College. Many hands make light work of all the tasks required, and the communion of saints and willingness to share the workload is truly a blessing. Our church council includes our minister, eight elders, and four deacons. Catechism classes are taught by our pastor as well as Rev. Sikkema, a well-loved retired URC pastor living in our area.

There is lots to see and do in Niagara. Our area is typically known for its vineyards, fruit trees, and of course the Niagara escarpment. We also have lots of recreational opportunities and lovely countryside. We enjoy having guests worship with us on Sunday, so if you are in the Niagara region, please come by and visit! May our congregation continue to thrive and grow under the blessing of our faithful God and Father.

C



Report of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College Graduation

For with the LORD is the fountain of life. In his light do we see light. (Ps 36:9; CCRTC theme 2016)

On Friday, May 27, friends of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College joined the friends and families of the seven graduating students of Covenant's Class of 2016 for the annual graduation ceremony at Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton.

The evening was opened and a word of welcome given by the chairman of the Board of Governors, Ken Stel. A trio consisting of the registrar, principal, and chairman conferred the respective diplomas on the seven graduates. The Diploma of Education was granted to Tim Breukelman and Katrina Groen, and the Diploma of Teaching to Janita Bouwman, Heidi Breukelman, Erica de Haan, Chantel Jonkman, and Kristen Oosterhoff. This evening marked the last time that students would be able to complete their Diploma of Education programs in one year as this program has now been extended to two years, dovetailing with the new teacher education requirements of the province of Ontario. It was also noted with appreciation and thankfulness that all of the graduates have been appointed to teaching positions.

The keynote speaker was Hans VanDooren, recently retired from the teaching profession, with his most recent posting being that of serving as principal of Guido de Brès Christian High School in Hamilton. In this case, he stood as a person having completed his teaching career speaking to those ready to begin their teaching careers. However, the graduates and the presenter shared the common goal to "Follow the Path." Mr. VanDooren encouraged the graduates to keep in mind the words that were read earlier from Romans 11: "Oh the depths and riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God . . . his paths beyond tracing out. . . ."

Keynote speaker:
Hans VanDooren



He then stressed to the graduates that their career is not an event but a path blessed by the Lord as they explore his glorious creation with their students. He emphasized the importance on this path of being a Christian rich in the knowledge of our faithful Father, as well as being a teacher. Always being a teacher, the word "PATH" was turned into a mnemonic device with the breakdown as follows:

- Perseverance
- Acknowledgement
- Trust
- Hope

Each of these elements was then unpacked with and for the graduates.

The presentation was concluded as follows: "Graduates, you are on the threshold of a wonderful, challenging, and rewarding career. Build on the teaching skills that you have learned at the Covenant Canadian Reformed



Graduating class 2016: Erica de Haan, Kristen Oosterhoff, Chantel Jonkman, Janita Bouwman, Heidi Breukelman, Katrina Groen-Jongsma and Tim Breukelman

Teachers College but remember you are a Christian first, a teacher second.

“May every day of your teaching career follow the path of perseverance, acknowledgement, trust and hope. We can then together share with the author of Psalm 119:105, ‘Your Word is a lamp before our feet, and a light for our path.’”

The annual presentation by WATCH also took place, culminating the work done over the past year. A cheque of \$5,500 was presented to Covenant for use on “non bud-

get” items. A very large thank you was and is extended to all those who contributed to this drive.

As the evening was concluded, we could once again reflect in thankfulness that the LORD has allowed Covenant Teachers College to function for the past thirty-five years, training teachers for our covenant children. Looking ahead, we see challenges, with the largest being a push towards government accreditation. Yet in all this we know that *the LORD is the fountain of life. In his light do we see light* to follow his path in all that we do. C



Clarion Kids

The Ten Plagues

Exodus 8-11

God sent Moses to set the Israelites free from slavery in Egypt. He used 10 plagues to make Pharaoh let the people go.

1. Nile River turning to blood
2. Frogs
3. Gnats
4. Flies
5. All the livestock died
6. Boils on all the Egyptians
7. Hail on the land of Egypt
8. Locusts destroy the crops
9. Darkness in Egypt for 3 days
10. Death of Egypt's firstborn

Only after the 10th plague was Israel allowed to go free.

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



Wordsearch: Find the words listed below!

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

Boils	Firstborn	Gnats	Locusts
Blood	Flies	Hail	Livestock
Darkness	Frogs		

Matching

Match these words and phrases about what happened during the plagues.

Nile	Darkness
3 Days	Flies & Gnats
Number of plagues	Locusts
Firstborn & livestock	Blood
Two insects that came	Ten
Crops	Died

by Emily Nijenhuis



William den Hollander
Minister emeritus of the
Bethel Canadian Reformed
Church of Toronto, Ontario
denhollanderw@gmail.com

Q People often complain that they do a lot for the church but no one ever thanks them. How do you thank a minister for an excellent sermon; it is really the Lord who works it in them? Should we congratulate men when they get voted in as elders or deacons? Should we congratulate our children when they make profession of faith or even graduate from school?

A This question addresses the matter of the work that is done in the Lord's service, with the Lord's gifts and talents, and by the Lord's Spirit, yet inquiring how we express our gratitude and congratulations to those who did the work. Then it is appropriate, indeed, to first of all acknowledge that the work in the church and kingdom of God is done through God's help and strength, by his Spirit, and to his glory. Then we must observe in the Word of God that God is blessed, praised, and glorified for his work in them and through them. As the Apostle Paul puts it in Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do, in word and deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." At the beginning of this same epistle (and in most other letters as well), Paul "gives thanks to God for all of you. . . remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." So indeed, all work is done "Soli Deo Gloria!"

Having observed and said this, however, we may also note in God's Word expressions of thanksgiving and praise for what people have done. Also in his letters, the Apostle Paul acknowledges with gratitude work, service, and favours that others have done to him. In Romans 16 Paul mentions Phoebe whom he recommends as someone who "has been a *patron* to many and of myself as well." Regarding Prisca and Aquila also, Paul writes, "who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks

as well." In 1 Corinthians 16 he mentions many a helper who "refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give *recognition* to such people." Yes, also to those who work among us Paul exhorts us to give such recognition: "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor" (1 Tim 5:17). So there definitely is a place for honour, praise, and thanksgiving in the church for those who labour among us! Even if all they have done is only their duty (Luke 17:9), the Lord Jesus also shows that there is room for praise, "Well done good and faithful servant!"

The Scriptures in Old and New Testament give ample attention to such praise and thanksgiving, and we see for instance the book of Psalms start out with such a saying: "Blessed is the man. . . whose delight is in the law of the LORD." As the Psalmist does in other psalms, "Blessed are those who dwell in your house . . . blessed are those whose strength is in you" (Ps 84:5) including also our young people who are blessed when they profess their faith: "Blessed are those who seek him with their whole heart." Then the word for "blessed" really is: *congratulations*, which is confirmed in Proverbs 8:32, "And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways," and verse 34, "Blessed is the one who listens to me." The Lord Jesus uses the same word when He says in Luke 11:28, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" And in John 20:29 he says, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed [to be congratulated] are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Hence, there is definitely a place for the expression of thanksgiving for the work done in the service to the

Lord. In my own experience I know that members who served in one committee or other received a letter of appreciation for their service. And they should! Of course then such expression of appreciation may also be given whenever a certain activity was successful and worthy of praise. Our children and young people are to be congratulated when they develop their talents (musical talents or other) and receive an acknowledgement for this, as they must be at their graduation when their efforts are crowned by the Lord with a diploma that might open other doors! Since it is an honour to be chosen for the office of elder or deacon, we may certainly congratulate our office bearers at the time of their installation, and also thank them for their work well done at the end of

their term. It is encouraging to a minister of the Word also, when at the end of a service a member shares with him how the Lord has blessed him or her by the sermon in that service. Then the minister will thank God for blessing him in his ministry and he will thank the brother or sister for the encouragement!

*Is there something you've been wanting to know?
An answer you've been looking for?*

Ask us a question!

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



PRESS RELEASE

Classis Ontario West, June 15 and 16, 2016

On behalf of the convening church at Glanbrook, Rev. R. Vermeulen welcomed the brothers and opened in the meeting in a Christian fashion. In his prayer, he remembered the work of the recently completed General Synod Dunnville, the six candidates presenting themselves for their preparatory exams, the work of the Theological Seminary and the needs of the current faculty, the health and families of the retired faculty, the continuing vacancies at Pilgrim and Providence Canadian Reformed churches, and the convening of the United Reformed Churches in North America's synod. The delegates from the church at Glanbrook examined the credentials and found that all the churches were properly represented. Classis was declared constituted and the executive suggested by the previous classis were invited to take their place. They were: Rev. J. Louwerse as chairman, Rev. K.A. Kok as vice chairman, and Rev. J. Ludwig as clerk.

Brs. J. Chase, Wm. DenHollander, H. Jagersma, H. Lee, D. Pol, and J. Torenvliet presented themselves, with the proper documentation, for preparatory exams. Each of the brothers presented a sermon proposal, which was discussed in closed session. All of the sermon proposals were deemed sufficient to continue with the examinations. Each of the brothers was examined in Old Testament Exegesis, New Testament Exegesis, and Doctrine and Creeds. The examination of each brother was then discussed in

closed session. Classis judged that all of the brothers sustained their examinations and, upon their promise not to teach or preach anything contrary to Scripture as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity, they were, with thankfulness, declared eligible call.

An overture from Blessings Christian Church was discussed in closed session. After hearing the discussion, the delegates from Blessings Christian Church withdrew the overture to take it back to their consistory.

Brs. I. Borst and D. Winkel both requested that their permission to speak an edifying word would be extended. Classis extended this permission for a period of one year.

The church visits reports to all of the churches in the classical resort were discussed and received with thankfulness. The report of the classical treasurer and the report of the audit of the classical books were both received with thankfulness. The report of the inspection of the classical archives was received and certain suggestions about passing along material for the archives were discussed. Various classical appointments were made.

Personal question period was held. The preparing of the Acts and the Press Release was delegated to the executive. The chairman determined that nothing censurable was said, or done in the course of the meeting. He then closed the meeting in a Christian manner.

For the Classis,
Rev. K.A. Kok, Vice Chairman, e.t.



Dear Editor,

In *Clarion*, April 6, 2016, Pastor Peter Holtvlüwer disqualified the process outlined in Matthew 18 in the context of alleged teacher misconduct or perceived incompetence. He claims that the Lord clearly stated that this is part of an ecclesiastical process to be initiated when someone sins against you. The process Jesus described could potentially lead to repentance, or a total severance of relations, i.e., excommunication.

Br. Ron deHaan (*Clarion*, June 17, 2016) attempted to salvage this process in the context of school conflicts by suggesting that “the principle of Matthew 18 at least *suggests* that a parent go directly to a teacher to seek clarification, etc.” There are other Bible texts that also imply a direct approach, e.g., Ephesians 4:25, 26. (Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.) No, this text does not specifically provide an imperative for aggrieved parents to speak first face-to-face with a teacher. Again, there is a principle. Paul also writes about speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15), another principle that undergirds all our Christian relationships. But, according to Rev. Holtvlüwer, a parent would speak the truth in love about the teacher to a principal.

The ninth commandment speaks to this issue and also adds another Christian principle. Again, there is no specific imperative that says aggrieved parents should first speak with the accused (teacher).

A school community is made up of many teachers, students, and parents. Most by far are reasonable, considerate, and loving people. Yes, there are teachers who may be difficult to engage in a positive discussion. In such a situation, the *second* step in this conflict would be addressing the issue with the principal. Rev. Holtvlüwer knows, though he does not mention it, that there can be very unreasonable and inconsiderate parents too. From my many years of administrative experience in our schools, I have witnessed the damage that has been done to a teacher’s professional and Christian credibility when parents sow unsubstantiated and unreasonable accusations. (If these are brought to the principal, then at least I would hope that he/she would know what to do in such situations, i.e. send them to the alleged source.) Unfortunately, before these accusations come to the principal, well-meaning parents have often circulated their grievances in other social contexts, sometimes to solicit the

support of similar minded parents. Being well-meaning in this context does not cut it, however.

When schools lack clearly articulated policies that outline the proper protocols for conflict resolution, then many parties end up being hurt: students, parents, and teachers. Therefore, in British Columbia, the Ministry of Education mandated that *every* school had to have a clearly articulated conflict management policy that outlines all the potential scenarios that could result in conflict: student/teacher, teacher/parent, teacher/principal, etc. This policy statement also outlines the appeal process if resolution cannot be achieved at one or another level. Finally, if all levels of appeal do not provide resolution, the aggrieved person may seek recourse to an appointed ombudsman. Where, however, does that process have to start? *At the source*. In other words, if the teacher is the source of the grievance, (e.g., alleged incompetence, insensitivity, dishonesty, etc.), then the aggrieved parent *must* go to the teacher first. Failure to do so invalidates the process. Every independent school in British Columbia has such a conflict management policy, tailored to the unique needs of its community. In this context, several Christian school policies that I have read refer to the *principle* stated in Matthew 18.

Why was the B.C. Ministry of Education so adamant about incorporating such a policy in every school? Many of these situations may appear to others as an issue of common sense and fairness. But a failure to articulate and implement such conflict resolution policies undermine the credibility of students, teachers, or parents, or the school as a whole. In the wake of improperly resolved disputes there is potential for professional, emotional, and spiritual destruction.

In a church community we *must* seek recourse via the Matthew 18 process in the case of an alleged sin. Why? In Christian love we must ascertain the validity of the sin by going to the accused first, and if the sin is confirmed, then we give such a person an opportunity to change, repent. Why would this be different, in principle, in a Christian school community? Isn’t incompetence, laziness, etc. a sin? Give the teacher an opportunity to hear the complaint, explain his/her point of view, and if necessary change.



CALL ACCEPTED AND CALLS DECLINED

Accepted the call to serve as second minister to the Langley Canadian Reformed Church and declined the calls to the Calgary, Neerlandia (South) and Ottawa (Jubilee) Canadian Reformed Churches:

Candidate Dr. William den Hollander

CHURCH NEWS

Rev. Holtvliüwer's argumentation to short-circuit the process undermines this basic Christian principle of fairness as it is also well-articulated in our catechism (LD 43) that warns us that "I must not. . . condemn or join in condemning anyone rashly and unheard." The first person to hear a parent's complaints should be the teacher. Anything less does not support the edification of the professional growth of our teachers or Christian schools. Finally: If these complaints were about the catechism teacher (i.e., the minister) would it be fine if parents went straight to the consistory? I don't think so! Go to the source. In love.

Pieter Torenvliet, Abbotsford, B.C.

Response

I thank Br. Torenvliet for engaging me on this issue. It may be helpful to summarize my initial and basic point: no school administration has the right to turn away a concerned parent who has not first spoken to the teacher merely with an appeal to "Matthew 18." I hope that every school has on file a just and fair policy for such concerns and parents should follow that policy. I suspect in many instances it will be best to direct the parents to first speak to the teacher. But in other cases – e.g. worries about a teacher bullying a child, or sexual misconduct – I can't imagine that going to the teacher first would be best *for either party*. Since the parent only has his/her child's say-so, wouldn't a discreet investigation be needed and wouldn't the teacher's supervisor be the best one to investigate? However, that is secondary to my basic point. Br. Torenvliet has not shown how Matthew 18 or any other biblical text *demand*s that in every instance a parent must first discuss the matter with the teacher before going to the administration. Matthew 18 is not about parents' concerns with teachers in a school environment nor is it about employer-employee dynamics nor is it about inter-personal conflict resolution. It is about rebellion against God within the local church. A so-called "principle" can only be extracted from a text and applied to similar and analogous circumstances but here we are dealing with apples and oranges.

I think Br. Torenvliet really gets off track when he brings in the ninth Commandment and Lord's Day 43.

Certainly parents should not gossip about, much less slander a teacher. And vice versa. But does this commandment forbid speaking (in private, understood) to an employer or supervisor about the conduct of an employee? When a parent – deeply concerned for her child that she fears is being bullied by a teacher and yet wanting to do right by the teacher – discreetly approaches the principal for help in seeking to fairly work through this sensitive and very charged issue (for both parties), is that "condemning" or "joining in condemning" the teacher? Hardly! That is showing love for the neighbour by involving the proper people to get to the bottom of the issue (clarifying the facts) and addressing the right parties appropriately. Maybe it's the child who's been lying or maybe the teacher has been abusive. Or maybe there's been a terrible misunderstanding. Or all of the above. The school administration is the party that can figure that out and take the appropriate steps while guarding the reputation of all.

As for Catechism instructors, for most issues (as with school teachers), it will be best to approach the minister directly. But if a parent ever felt the need to first speak privately with an elder about a minister's teaching ability or class-room conduct and ask the consistory to look into it, why should the elders refuse that out of hand? It's their responsibility to ensure that the minister is acting properly in every respect. And why should I as minister be upset by those who speak to the elders first? As a minister, I would want the concern investigated and addressed for the up-building of the church and glory of God. If my teaching is poor or if I've been abusive, I need to be corrected and perhaps disciplined. I should have nothing to hide. If the parent is off the mark and the concerns unfounded, then he/she needs to be instructed in how to work with the instructor. In both cases, the elders are in the best position to do that. Why wouldn't teachers and ministers want this kind of accountability, openness, and transparency?

Peter H. Holtvliüwer

*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.*