

Clarion

**Are we
so powerless?**

FAMILY VISITATION

CLARION KIDS

YOU ASKED



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Musings on Remembrance Day 2016

War comes at great costs

Friday, November 11 is Remembrance Day in Canada. It's that time of year when as a nation we stop and consider the sacrifices of our men and women in arms, both past and present. Across the land crowds gather at cenotaphs to watch parades of veterans, police, and dignitaries, to listen to speeches and prayers, to sing songs to the music of the bagpipes, and to lay wreaths. In some provinces the day is a public holiday; whereas, in others citizens are allowed some time off work around 11:00 a.m. for a time of silence and reflection.

All in all, Remembrance Day has become part of the fabric of our nation. Wedged as it is between Thanksgiving Day and Christmas, it is one more event that stands out and defines us. Canadians have not forgotten those who died or were injured or survived the horrors of World War I and II, the Korean War, Afghanistan, and countless other conflicts. Nor have they forgotten those who took part in so many peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the United Nations.

And that is good. For a nation to have true character it needs to be connected to its past. In particular it needs to remember and learn from its history and its more traumatic experiences. Indeed, where would our country be today without young people willing to rise up and defend our values and freedoms at great personal cost?

War is ugly

In saying this, we do not want to glorify war. War is ugly. It always has been and it always will be. In spite of the fact that young men frequently go off to war filled with bravado, smiles, and sunny dispositions, it is no picnic. It comes at great costs.

As a result, nations need to exercise great care before they call on their young people to take up arms. Unfortunately, that has not always been the case. History is littered with cases of bad wars, unjustified wars, misguided wars, failed wars. In our more recent past Canada refused to join other nations in invading Iraq but it joined the so-called "NATO effort" in Afghanistan.

Iraq and Afghanistan

I know that I will open myself up to criticism in saying that I am grateful that we never joined the Iraq invasion force. To me the evidence presented at the UN and elsewhere was never convincing and the thought of invading a country about which so little was known, made it all a dubious affair. It's fine to get rid of one dictator but how do you guarantee that the next leader is any better?

Yet may I be so bold as to wonder about the validity of that other conflict where we did jump in? Of course the Taliban who used to control Afghanistan, and are seeking to regain it, are a ruthless, extreme, and murderous bunch. Attempts to export their extremist brand of Islamic terror are to be resisted at all costs. But was going in there with soldiers and tanks the only way to do that? Has it been worth the cost of more than a hundred Canadian lives and many more injuries? After all the years of fighting and bombings is that country and its citizens any safer and better off?

The point is that it is easy to find places in this world that need straightening out. Every continent has its share of corrupt regimes and tin-pot dictators. If we want to take them all on we will know no end of war and no end of death.

I suppose what I am arguing for is the return to the "just war" concept. This really means that you only go to war when your nation is attacked directly or when an ally nation with whom you have treaties finds itself under siege. In that connection I have no scruples about defending our involvement in World Wars I and II, the Korean and Kuwaiti wars. Some wars are sadly necessary and the bitter costs need to be borne. But there are others that have to do with protecting our economic interests, promoting our type of government, exporting our Western values and freedoms and they are suspect, to say the least.

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This issue begins with an editorial by Dr. James Visscher with his thoughts on Remembrance Day 2016. On the same theme, we have a Treasures New and Old meditation from Rev. Cornelius VanSpronsen.

There is an article entitled, "Family Visitation: The High Calling of an Office Bearer," which was originally printed in *The Messenger*. Dr. Karlo Janssen finishes his two-part article on the Reformed Churches in South Africa.

In new we have an report on the welcome of the Roukema family to Burlington Ebenezer. There is also the Clippings on Politics and Religion column, *Clarion Kids*, and two questions for You Asked.

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Syria

And then there is Syria. What shall one say about Syria? The death and destruction there have been and continue to be enormous. It is enough to make one weep, and weep much. The Russians are backing that murderous despot Bashar al-Assad and raining down bombs on any and all places and people that back the opposition. The United States wants him gone and is backing some of his opponents. Meanwhile, the casualty list is in the hundreds of thousands and the devastation spreads on a colossal scale. Where is the end?

Yet there is another question that needs to be asked, which is: how to bring about peace? For that to happen, it will not come through nations like Canada sending troops to fight on one side or the other. Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan have surely taught us that more soldiers are not the answer. Invading those countries has only increased the instability and ratcheted up the suffering of the people. Indeed, there are times when even such old dictators as Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi look good compared to the depravities of ISIS.

The only way forward in Syria is for all parties to sit around the table, to adopt a peace plan, and to chart a way forward. Whether it is under the auspices of the United Nations or the Arab League does not so much matter. What matters is that there be a strong and sincere desire to beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (Isa 2:4).

The changing face of war

Thus far we have restricted our comments to wars and conflicts that have always been, but warfare is changing. Today we have what is often called “cyber warfare” in which one nation seeks not so much to invade another country’s territory as to steal its secrets. Whether they are business, trade, military, or scientific secrets, this kind of war and theft is being waged on a massive scale. It is not unusual to hear the so-called experts claim that there are more soldiers in China’s Internet army than in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army. Is that true, and if so, what about Russia, the United States, and even Canada? Is there a war going on between nations that no one wants to talk about?

The same cannot be said about another kind of war, the war of terrorism. It is being talked about constantly and experienced in so many different places. The increasing movement of people, the modern means of transport, the steady stream of data on the Internet, the ever ex-

panding multiculturalism of nations, have all played into the hands of extremist Muslim factions. The result is that war is no longer a contained development. It is not just “over there” and far away. No, it is everywhere. No country, no city, no town is safe. Speak to people in Paris, Brussels, Orlando, Istanbul, Lahore, Kampala, Ottawa, and elsewhere, they will tell you that you need to be on your guard no matter where you are or where you live.

Unlike ancient wars that were often about territory, these modern wars are about ideas, inventions, ideologies, and false religions. This makes them so much harder to confront and combat. Many years ago our Saviour spoke about “wars and rumours of war” (Matt 24:6). It would appear that he was speaking about more different forms of warfare than we ever dreamed about.

Hopeless?

Of course, in the face of all of this doom and gloom it is easy to become depressed, to throw up one’s hands in despair, to declare that the world is “going to hell in a handcart” and that there is nothing we can do about it. Yet, is that true? Are we so powerless? I think that here we need to connect with some ancient words written by the Apostle James. He asks a pertinent question in chapter 4 of his letter, namely “what causes fights and quarrels among you?” (4:1). The answer he gives is instructive, “Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” (4:1)

Our natural tendency when it comes to war and conflict is to “blame the other guy.” James tells us, however, that we should not look next door but inside ourselves. Each of us is by nature a warmonger.

Depressing? Indeed, but also enlightening, for it teaches us that peace begins in each human heart. When the heart is changed and no longer produces wrong desires, then peace will arise.

But can the heart be changed? How will the heart be changed? Is that even possible?

The profound faith we confess states that indeed it is possible. Through the power of God the Holy Spirit, it is possible to experience a heart transplant, a heart renewal, a heart makeover.

So as to go about your Remembrance Day activities in 2016 take some time to remember and reflect on past sacrifices but also to pray for the Holy Spirit and his great heart work. Pray that he will penetrate Taliban hearts, ISIS hearts, Boko Haram hearts, North Korean hearts, and yes, even Canadian hearts.





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Remembrance Day: “How Long, O LORD?” Psalm 79:5

***“How the mighty have fallen!
The weapons of war have perished!” (2 Samuel 1:27)***

There we stand or stood again around a cenotaph or a memorial to remember those who have fallen in an unending series of wars and battles. Remembering the courageous soldiers, those who returned wounded and disabled, the families who suffered the loss of beloved ones. Remembering, lest we forget! What has been accomplished? There is something very tragic about all these remembrance days, knowing that these will continue and that the so sought after peace will never be realized through this inhumane warfare.

Yet we must remember those who have fallen, and not only them but also why this will continue until the end of the world. The text quoted above is part of a song David wrote after the death of Saul, the anointed king of Israel, and David's intimate friend and brother in the Lord, Jonathan, in a fierce battle with the Philistines. David ordered the men of

Judah be taught this lament in order to remember, lest they forget. We understand that there was also personal grief involved. After all, there was a very close relationship between David and Jonathan. But Saul? The man who persecuted David and wanted to kill him? But David sets aside his personal feelings and continues to see Saul as God's anointed king who was to point forward to the great Anointed One, the eternal King, Jesus Christ!

Yet the lamentation is for both, Saul and Jonathan, “How the mighty have fallen! The weapons of war have perished!” The tragedy goes far beyond these particular people in that specific battle. It is the failure of human efforts to bring about and maintain peace, even if they muster all the weapons and means at their disposal. That is the history of the world after the fall into sin, and will remain that till the Lord comes again! The true

Prince of Peace. “Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end” (Isa 9:7).

Pity those who on Remembrance Day do not have this perspective of Christ's final victory. Yet we can be grateful that even in our society today there are still remnants of the Christian faith and hope. Often at the ceremonies we can still hear the well-known melodies and sometimes even the words of moving hymns like “O God, our help in ages past,” or “Abide with me; fast falls the even-tide.” May the Lord reignite these glowing embers of our Christian heritage. May we be instrumental in directing the focus on the one and only hope in today's chaotic unrest, the one who said: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27)

For Further Study

1. Compare David's song in 2 Samuel 1 and Asaph's Psalm 79.
2. Can pacifism (opposition to war and bearing arms) be defended with Scriptures?
3. Could the churches use Remembrance Day as an occasion to reach out? If so, how?



Family Visitation – The High Calling of an Office Bearer

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This is highly sensitive work, of crucial importance to the well-being of our churches. In The Netherlands the practice of family visitation or what is known as *huis-bezoek* is considered to be of fundamental importance for church life. Yet one might ask whether the practice of family visitation meets the standards of God's Word.

Its function

More than fifty years ago an investigation was launched within the Dutch Christian Reformed Churches (GKN) regarding the functioning of family visitation. Sad to say, already in those days the results of this investigation were quite discouraging. The majority of church members who were questioned, expressed the desire for a better functioning family visit. The main complaints were that family visitation was little more than a social visit and that there was hardly any room for a personal, heartfelt conversation. Matters regarding the personal life of faith were hardly touched. People complained that elders were poor listeners and showed no genuine interest in the members they visited. A more serious complaint was that elders could not be trusted because they often breached the confidentiality to which they should be held.

If today such a poll would be taken, what would the results be? We may well ask the question: How does family visitation function among us? For the well-functioning of family visitation there needs to be a relationship of trust, providing an atmosphere in which people can freely express themselves. They need to know that they will not be misjudged, interrupted, or unduly rebuked. What a relief it can be when one may be able to unburden

his or her heart. In this way office bearers will have the opportunity to provide biblical guidance.

A biblical institution

Family visitation is a biblical institution. We read in Acts 20 that the Apostle Paul says to the elders of the church at Ephesus: "I taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Here we see that the Apostle Paul visited homes and we also find what the content was of these family visits. He spoke of *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*. This must also be the general thrust of our family visits.

In Genesis 3 we find the first family visit recorded, immediately after man's rebellion against God. The Lord spoke to Adam and Eve. During this visit the Lord pointed out their sin, but he also proclaimed the gospel and opened the way of repentance. Here we have a short summary of what family visitation should constitute.

We see that the Lord is focused upon the individual person. The Lord Jesus was also concerned about individual souls, even with one specific lost sheep. Therefore during family visits the elders should also focus on the individual persons. Elders need to be *apt to teach* the members of the congregation (1 Tim 3:2) and they need to *admonish* them (1 Thess 5:12). In meekness they need to *instruct those who oppose themselves* and the gospel (2 Tim 2:25).

Family visitation was also practiced in the early church. The famous Church Father, Chrysostom (354-407), wrote that when elders neglect to visit the homes, all kinds of difficulties will arise, for not only the sick, but also healthy members desire and need to be visited.

The heart of this work

The work of family visitation has everything to do with maintaining oversight of the congregation. This is the heart of the work of an office bearer. It is a high calling. During family visitation these ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ come to our homes to speak on behalf of Christ. Christ is our only Priest, our highest Prophet and our everlasting King and therefore we can expect that family visitation on behalf of Christ will also contain these three aspects.

The priestly aspect of family visitation comes to the fore when questions are asked regarding the spiritual and the temporal needs in the families. Only then will office bearers be able to speak with priestly compassion. The prophetic aspect of family visitation is displayed when the visiting brothers admonish and comfort according to the Word of God. It is their task to proclaim and teach the Word of God. The kingly aspect of family visitation is displayed by the authority that characterizes the instruction of the office bearers. This authority can only be found in and supported by the Word of God.

Subjects of family visitation

During family visitation questions need to be asked regarding the use of the means of grace. Is there faithful attendance of the preaching of God's Word and a biblical participation in the sacraments? Is family worship being conducted by family members who regularly read and meditate on the Word of God, together with personal prayer?

Family visitation focuses on the souls of the members of the congregation. How are the various members of the family faring in relationship to the Lord? Is there a personal knowledge of guilt, grace, and gratitude? Is Jesus Christ at the centre of their lives as the Surety who removes our guilt? Is there personal sorrow because of sin? Do we know of a burning love in our lives to the Lord? Do the members of the congregation who are visited know of personal conversion? The covenant promises, resting upon the members of the congregation, need to be personally applied in the way of faith and repentance.

The office bearers need to explain the need of the new birth. Sinners must be encouraged to flee to the Lord Jesus, expecting full salvation from him alone. Is there evidence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their life?

During family visitation inquiry needs to be made about the instruction that takes place in the family. Does the father fulfill his role as a prophet, priest, and king in his family? Do the parents see to it that their children are faithful in attending Sunday school and catechism classes?

It is very wrong for an office bearer to use family visitation as an opportunity to display his own spiritual life. The aim of family visitation is not to preach or discuss specific topics; not even to conduct a Bible study. A family visit must focus upon the needs of the soul. The crucial question is whether the family members have become living members of Christ.

Does the practice of family visitation meet the standards of God's Word?

It is important that all the members of the family are present at family visitation and that the office bearers speak to each family member, inquiring about their spiritual state. Children should be addressed on their level of understanding and office bearers should recommend the Lord and his service to them. Allow the family members, including the children, to raise personal questions. If an office bearer is not able to answer a difficult question immediately, he can always promise to get back with an answer through e-mail or by phone.

Procedures

We envision the proceedings of a family visit as follows. After an initial inquiry about the outward matters in the family, the conversation will turn to spiritual matters. The time allotted to a family visit is restricted and therefore it should not be wasted with frivolous matters. The family visited expects a spiritual conversation and therefore office bearers need to inquire about spiritual realities in their lives. It is of paramount importance that office bearers exercise the ability to listen. They should listen in order to ascertain how the family members are faring spiritually. Only then can spiritual guidance from the Word of God be given. Towards the end of the visit we should solicit questions. The family visit should be closed by reading a suitable portion of God's Word, leading in

prayer, and commending each individual member of the family to the Lord and his grace.

In order to have a good conversation it is necessary to connect with the person being addressed. Therefore patience and tact are needed. The use of many words does not indicate that a real conversation occurred. It is most essential to exercise love to the members of the congregation who are visited and to have a genuine desire for their spiritual well-being. Therefore it is most necessary that office bearers prepare themselves for a family visit by prayer. Then it will be experienced how God, the Holy Spirit, gives words and wisdom in difficult circumstances. An office bearer must realize that the members he is visiting are members of the church of Christ. They are to deal respectfully and lovingly with them. When an office bearer knows God's patience and his lovingkindness in his own life, he will also be loving and caring towards others.

Self-watch

It is essential for an office bearer to practice personal self-watch, that is, to exercise himself in the mysteries of

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CHURCH NEWS

faith. An office bearer must not only give to others, but he must also receive. Actually, he needs to receive as much as he gives. This will keep an office bearer from becoming worn-out and burned out. It is through personal communion with the Lord that an office bearer will receive grace for grace from the fullness there is with the Lord. God himself will continually replenish his spiritual life. Therefore it is essential that the office bearer takes time to be alone with God, and do that daily. He also needs to read practical Reformed and Puritan literature. In this way he will exercise himself to godliness (1 Tim 4:7).

What a high calling office bearers have; for they will have to give an account of their office! What a blessing for a congregation to be gifted with faithful office bearers! And what joy it shall be for an office bearer to one day hear the Lord Jesus' words: "Well done, faithful servant."



The Reformed Churches in South Africa (Part 2 of 2)



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This past summer the URCNA, meeting in Synod Wyoming, decided to proceed with entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GKSA. This decision comes on the heels of the GKSA decision regarding women in office taken earlier this year and in spite of their continued relationship with the CRCNA. Since we as CanRC are eager to merge with the URCNA, a decision like this should have our attention.

In the course of two articles we are coming to know the GKSA a little better. The previous article looked at the GKSA: who they are and where they have been. This time we will consider the URCNA decision and the issues that relate to it.

Women in office

The roles women can fill in the church of God has been a contentious issue in the GKSA for many decades. In 1988 the GKSA decided that women were not to hold office; at the same time, it commissioned a study on what roles women could fill in the church. In 2003 the GKSA determined that women could serve as deacons. It should be noted that the GKSA church order determines that the consistory is the ruling body of the church, never the consistory with deacons as we in the CanRC have it.

In 2006, upon appeals, the GKSA overturned this decision. In 2009, upon appeals, the GKSA overturned the decision of 2006. At the same time the GKSA commissioned new study on the issue.

There has been much debate in the GKSA not only on the issue itself, but also on how to deal with the issue in keeping with Reformed principles of church government. There were many appeals on process before the substance could be discussed. Things came to a close at an extraordinary synod convened in January 2016. At this synod the GKSA reaffirmed its position that women are not to serve in the office of minister and elder. I have been informed, though, that in some local churches women do continue to serve as elders.

GKSA – CRCNA / URCNA

Following the breaking of ties with the GKN in the mid 1970s, the GKSA closest sisters were the CGKN and the CRCNA. In subsequent decades the GKSA had indicated it was increasingly uncomfortable with the confessional direction of the CRCNA. Consider this contrast: the GKSA was building ties with NAPARC members, and left the REC to join the ICRC, while the CRCNA was evicted from NAPARC and continues to be a member of the WCRC (the successor of the REC).

In the 1990s churches began leaving the CRCNA and in the course of time formed the URCNA. It thus made sense for the GKSA and URCNA to seek closer ties. The URCNA was unsure though. Who was to say the GKSA would not go down the same route as the CRCNA? After all, the GKSA was not cutting ties with the CRCNA.

The Recommendation

When an extraordinary synod was convened early in 2016, the URCNA decided to delegate Rev. R.J. Sikkema, a man with much experience in inter-church relations, to the GKSA synod. The CECCA recommended to the URCNA Synod Wyoming that they to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKSA. The following grounds were provided for this recommendation:

- 1) With this decision the main obstacle for having full ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKSA has been removed. Scripture prohibits ordaining women into the office of pastor and elder and, thus, being part of the governing body of the church.
- 2) With this decision the GKSA clearly distances itself from the CRCNA with which it is still in fellowship. Moreover, with this decision, the GKSA is able to be a clear witness to the CRCNA regarding the prohibition of ordaining women into the teaching and ruling offices of the church.¹

Acronyms

(To avoid ambiguation, church names are in English while acronyms are in the predominant language used by the church.)

CanRC:	Canadian Reformed Churches
CECCA:	Committee for Ecumenicity and Contact with Churches Abroad (of the URCNA)
CGKN:	Christian Reformed Churches in The Netherlands
CRCNA:	Christian Reformed Church in North America
CRTS:	Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary
DRC:	Dutch Reformed Church
ERQ:	Reformed Churches in Quebec
FCS:	Free Church of Scotland
FRCA:	Free Reformed Churches of Australia
GKN:	Reformed Churches in The Netherlands
GKv:	Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated)
GKSA:	Reformed Churches in South Africa
ICRC:	International Conference of Reformed Churches
NHK:	Dutch Reformed (Hervormde) Church (South Africa)
NGK:	Dutch Reformed (Gereformeerde) Church (South Africa)
NGK(N):	Netherlands Reformed Churches (in The Netherlands)
OPC:	Orthodox Presbyterian Church
PCA:	Presbyterian Church in America
RCA:	Reformed Church in America
RCNZ:	Reformed Churches in New Zealand
REC, RES:	Reformed Ecumenical Council renamed Reformed Ecumenical Synod
RPCNA:	Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America
URCNA:	United Reformed Churches in North America
VGKSA:	Free Reformed Churches in South Africa
WARC:	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCRC:	World Communion of Reformed Churches (merger of REC and WARC)

- 3) With this decision the GKSA clearly demonstrates that having women deacons, who are not part of the ruling body of the church, is not a slippery slope that inevitably leads to the ordaining of women into the teaching and ruling offices of the church.²
- 4) Having women deacons who are not part of the ruling body of the church does not disqualify churches from becoming members of the ICRC.³ In fact, the ICRC considers that churches who have women deacons also “faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the [its] Basis” (Article IV.1).

The decision

However, though the URCNA did enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKSA, the grounds were amended. The adopted grounds were:

Grounds:

- a. The decision of the GKSA January 2016 Synod confirmed by a substantial majority their practice of prohibiting women from the offices of Elder and Minister. This reflects their Scriptural conviction that women should not participate in the governing body of the church.
- b. With this decision the GKSA clearly distances itself from the CRCNA (with which it is still in fellowship) on this issue. Moreover, the GKSA continues to give a clear witness to the CRCNA regarding matters relating to the authority of Scripture, including the prohibition of ordaining women into the teaching and ruling offices of the church.

A third ground had been proposed by the Advisory Committee but it was struck. That ground read:

- c. This recommendation is consistent with past synodical decisions regarding other federations such as the RPCNA and the ERQ (which have women in the office of deacon), as well as with the practice of the ICRC where having women as deacons who are not part of the ruling body of the church does not disqualify churches from becoming members of the ICRC.

This decision does yet require ratification by a majority of the individual URCNA. If that approval is gained, the sister church relationship will be a fact as of January 1, 2017.

In short: the URCNA are entering into ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKSA because the GKSA had determined that women cannot serve in the office of elder and minister. Synod Wyoming did not consider the fact

that the GKSA continues to have ecclesiastical fellowship with the CRCNA an impediment to ecclesiastical fellowship. It remains to be seen whether the majority of URCNA consistories agree.

CanRC – GKSA

Where does a decision like this leave us as CanRC? That question is not easily answered.

There is a desire that inter-church relations be stable and simple. They never are. Churches are continually changing, deforming, reforming. This movement creates a grey area where wisdom often dictates doing nothing is wisest. As long as there was no clarity on the GKSA position on women in office, the URCNA declined to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKSA.

For us as Canadian Reformed, the complicating factor is our relationship with the VGKSA. Now, we have been in this pickle before. The CanRC entered into ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCNZ before the FRCA did, and the concerns the FRCA had with respect to the RCNZ were in some ways similar to those the VGKSA has (had?) with respect to the GKSA. We do well to watch closely what the VGKSA will now decide. At this point in time it is noteworthy that the VGKSA, rather than send its theological students to Potchefstroom, prefers to use the services of our CRTS.

At the same time, there's also the reality of the sister church relationship between the GKSA and GKv, to which the VGKSA did not object. The URCNA (at least, Synod Wyoming) are confident the GKSA will be a clear witness to the CRCNA on the issue of women in office. The same witness should go from the GKSA to the GKv. It's interesting to realize how in the first decade of the 2000s the GKv organized a conference in South Africa on the topic of hermeneutics with a view to the GKSA and

VGKSA, as well as the CGKN and NGK(N). The GKv once helped the GKSA; will the GKSA now help the GKv?

I do believe, though, we should be realistic. I understand there is an Afrikaner culture of "*moenie seermaak nie*" ("we should not hurt each other"). Afrikaners apparently prefer to be non-confrontational. Especially among themselves. The way in which the "three sisters" co-exist in South Africa suggests this is true. As such, I do wonder where things will go from here. The Lord knows, and time will tell.

Finally, should the GKSA decide to break its ties with the CRCNA, it will increasingly turn to the URCNA as its most similar sister in North America. One can anticipate that the GKSA will also to seek closer ties with the CanRC. Moreover, over the years the GKSA has produced many worthwhile resources in Afrikaans which will quite possibly also become available increasingly in the English language.

In closing

CanRC ties with the GKSA are increasing. We belong to the same branch of Reformed churches world-wide, we have been connected for some ten years now through the ICRC, and now the GKSA is (almost) a sister of one of our closest sisters in North America. May the ties that bind serve the furtherance of our Saviour's Kingdom.

¹ The GKSA having fraternal relations with the CRCNA was an impediment at Synod London for moving from Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II).

² The GKSA having women deacons was an impediment at Synod London in moving from Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II).

³ See, e.g., the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Koshin) and the GKSA.



Tetons mountain range, Wyoming, USA





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A Change to the Oath with Big Consequences?

A major event took place last year which does not seem to have had the attention and coverage in the media that it deserves. Raymond Ibrahim reported some time ago on the *FrontPage Magazine* website that the Obama administration changed the Oath of Allegiance to the United States to make it conducive to Sharia or Islamic law. This is the oath that immigrants must take before becoming American citizens. The original oath demanded that new citizens will “bear arms on behalf of the United States” and “perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States” when required by law. With the changes a newcomer “may be eligible to exclude these two clauses based on religious training and belief or a conscientious objection.” Furthermore, new candidates may be eligible for “modifications based on religious training and belief, or conscientious objection arising from a deeply held moral or ethical code.”

Ibrahim notes that “these changes serve incoming Islamic supremacists especially well. For, while Islamic law allows Muslims to feign loyalty to non-Muslim ‘infidel’ authorities, it bans Muslims from living up to the pretense by actually fighting or killing fellow Muslims on behalf of a non-Muslim entity, such as the United States.” It was for this reason, for example, that Nidal Hassan, a U.S. army major and observant Muslim, became a murderer when he had to bear arms on behalf of America. He was terrified at the thought of fighting against Muslims in the Middle East. That’s when he went on a shooting spree in Fort Hood, killing thirteen Americans in 2009. The change in the oath of citizenship would have made it possible for him to refuse to serve in the Middle East and thus fits neatly with Sharia law.

That Muslims can pretend to give allegiance to America while giving the oath and not really mean it is clearly authorized by Islamic tradition and the Qur’an. Ibrahim references, for example, Qur’an 3:28 which says, “Let believers not take for friends and allies infidels rather

than believers: and whoever does this shall have no relationship left with Allah unless you but guard yourselves against them, taking precautions.” The words “guard yourselves against them, taking precautions” are related to the Arabic *taqiyya*, the Islamic teaching that a Muslim is allowed to lie. Muslims are permitted to deceive non-Muslims whenever they are under their authority even to the point of cursing Islam and not really meaning it. Islamic experts support the right of such duplicity by quoting Mohammed’s close friend, Abu Darda who reportedly said: “Let us grin in the face of some people while our hearts curse them.”

All of this raises the question what the approximately three million American Muslims think about these issues. According to a 2011 Pew Research Center report nearly half of the Muslims attend religious services at least weekly. The devout can be expected to honour the key teachings of Islam. Not surprisingly then a recent poll by the Center for Security Policy, Washington, D.C., found that more than half (51%) of Muslims in America believe that they should “have the choice of being governed according to Sharia [Islamic law]” and only 39% said that American Muslims should be subject to American courts. Nearly 25% believed that “it is legitimate to use violence to punish those who give offense to Islam.” Given these statistics, it is no wonder that Pew Research found that almost half (48%) of Americans said that relations between Muslims and themselves were bad.

Is it justifiable for a nation to jeopardize its own Judeo-Christian heritage by watering down its oath of allegiance so that people of a totally different culture and heritage can become full citizens of whom not a small number will work against their new homeland by trying to establish Islamic norms and conceivably use violence in the process?



Burlington Ebenezer welcomes the Roukemas, Sunday, August 21, 2016

"A longing fulfilled is sweet to the soul." (Prov 14:19)

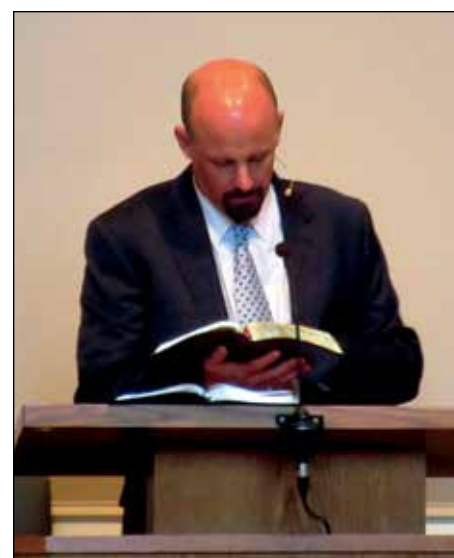
It was twenty-five years ago that we last welcomed a ministerial family to Ebenezer and that made our joy more pronounced.

The morning service was punctuated by the expected formalities of an installation. We were exhorted and congratulated by representation from each church in Classis Central Ontario. Rev. George van Popta was there from Ottawa with a kind greeting and a timely reminder of our new pastor's obligations to the Jubilee congregation following his retirement. With so many of the churches of central Ontario in such close proximity, it was easy to share

the joy of Rev. Tony Roukma's arrival with his wife and six children.

During the three-year vacancy that preceded the arrival of the Roukemas, we were well counselled by our emeritus pastor Gijsbert Nederveen. He guided us through six calls and shared in our joy when the sixth man said "Yes." During the morning service he directed us to Colossians 1:9-12, where we are taught that God's church is built up through prayer for the saints by the saints. We need to pray for knowledge of God's will and walk in it joyfully.

To punctuate the day further, we began our afternoon service an hour early to ensure that summer sun remained for a trip to Hidden Valley Park. During our 2:00 service, Rev.



Roukema called us to live without fear of what the secular world will think or do when we distinguish ourselves as Christians. As Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:15, we need to set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts and make that obvious in our words and actions.

The sweetness in our souls after hearing our new minister for the first time was heightened by the administration of baptism to Titus Harsevoort. With the birth of their sixth child, Rick and Alicia have matched the Roukemas with the congregation's largest family. Following the benediction, several gifts were presented to Tony and Alisa, Kennedy, Annelise, Jonah, Miriam, Layla, and Gideon.





To help them understand Burlington more fully, we presented them with a photographic book, “Images of Burlington,” which illustrates some of our city’s history. We offered them a more exhaustive lesson about Burlington and the surrounding area via a one-year membership to Halton Conservation Parks. The elevation of the Niagara escarpment affords some nice views of Burlington and Halton’s parks showcase that view nicely.

To fully integrate the Roukemas back to the east from St. Albert, Alberta, we also presented them with some vouchers for Toronto Blue Jays tickets. This gift was accompanied by a baseball glove for Rev. Roukema, signed by members of our youth group. The appropriateness of these gifts was shortly evident to all who witnessed softball being played in the park after our picnic dinner. Our new minister is an old hand at softball.

Following all of the presentations, Mike Vandasseelaar and nine other musicians helped us sing hymns with percussive force. After that, our newly installed minister made a few personal remarks and closed with prayer. Among his remarks were thanks for the work that was completed on the manse. Although Kennedy returned to Alberta for post secondary study later in the week, the manse can now accommodate a family of eight. It had housed five previously. We suspect their new kitchen is a busy place on school mornings with five children passing through. Two travel to Guido for secondary and three go to Grace for elementary.

We look forward to seeing them all each Sunday and our first was a memorable day. It was filled with prayers for our new minister and his family and for God’s blessing on his work among us. It was a day sweet to the soul. C



Clarion Kids

Jael and Sisera

Judges 4 & 5

The Israelites did not always listen to God like they should. Sometimes God sent bad people to punish them. One of these people was Sisera, who led a large army and hurt the Israelites. God felt sad for his people, so after a while he let the Israelite army defeat Sisera's army. But Sisera ran away and tried to hide in the tent of Jael. He thought that she was his friend. She gave him a drink of milk and let him lie down and go to sleep in her tent. Then, when he was fast asleep, she killed him using one of the tent pegs. God used Jael to save the Israelites from their enemy.

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



Crossword Puzzle: Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle!

Across

1. Tried to hide in Jael's tent.
5. What Jael gave Sisera to drink.
6. Killed Sisera with a tent peg.
7. What Jael used to kill Sisera.

Down

2. Sisera had a large ____.
3. Jael let Sisera go to _____ in her tent.
4. God used Jael to _____ Israel from their enemies.

by Emily Nijenhuis



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Q Where Are the Souls of Unbelievers?

We know and we believe without any doubt what we confess in LD 22, that at death our soul immediately be taken up to Christ, my Head, and that is where we shall be till our Lord returns. Where is the soul of an unbeliever when he dies till the time the Lord returns?

A Just as the details about “our intermediate state” (LD 22) are few as far as God’s revelation is concerned, so here we have only a few indicators that could be applied to answer this question. First of all, there is the parable of the Lord Jesus in Luke 16, where we read, “The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.” Although this is a parable, we may conclude that the insight the Lord Jesus gives here, conjures up to us a reality of a divided (believers and unbelievers), conscious, and continued existence in the time between death and resurrection. That’s all we can derive from this parable, since it’s not the Lord’s intention to give revelation regarding the intermediate state of the believer and/or unbeliever but to exhort us to listen to Moses and the prophets in this life. Yet, we do learn as well that immediately after death their condition too is fixed. In Matthew 8:12, as well, the Lord foretells that the unbelievers (even if and when they had belonged to God’s people or could be considered “sons of the kingdom”) “will be thrown into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The Apostle Peter, too, speaks about this in his second epistle (2:9): “The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.” The Lord is constantly

holding these unrighteous ones under punishment until the day of judgment. They are “held” in custody that is, as the word denotes, in remand, and their final prison is reserved in the nether gloom of darkness. The Lord keeps those who are his. That’s not the only “keeping” he is doing though. God’s “keeping” connotes a reserving by the Owner, by the Lawgiver, who keeps his subjects and his property according to his will. Well, says Peter, the unrighteous are held in custody in order to be subjected to his verdict later on.

In another epistle, Jude 6, we read about angels sharing in the same judgment: “And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.” Angels that did not keep their original glorious position are now kept for judgment. Discontent as they were with their heavenly dwelling they are now remanded in their subterranean place of darkness. They exchanged the light of heavenly glory for the judgment of fear and darkness. They may have kept some power on earth (though shackled nonetheless and restricted); they lost their freedom. Constantly they have to live in fear for the impending judgment (Matt 8:29) due to the curse and wrath of God which will be poured out in the final judgment. Hence unrighteous people and unbelievers, unfaithful angels and their instigators, they are kept in remand, shackled to the realm of darkness, and kept carefully for the judgment on the last day!



Why Did Paul Re-baptize?

In Acts 19 some people who had been baptized by John were re-baptized by Paul. Does this mean that all those who were baptized by John had to be re-baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?



In the gospel accounts the baptism of John is connected to the coming of the kingdom of heaven. John called people to repent and be baptized because the kingdom of heaven had come near. This call to repentance, therefore, was not just a general call to an incidental

repentance, but it was unique in its call to prepare for the coming of the kingdom of heaven. The baptism was a profession of faith in the truth and reality of this coming of the kingdom, as prophesied by the OT prophets. It was a baptism of repentance and for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). This, again, was not just a general promise of forgiveness but forgiveness as prophesied by the OT prophets, e.g. Jeremiah 31:34. Hence the baptism of John was a proclamation of the coming of the new covenant. John did indicate, however, that his baptism was inferior to the baptism of him who would come after him, who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire! That's the limitation of the baptism of John.

Jesus' baptism on the other hand denotes judgment, a message of life and death. The baptism in the NT church is the fulfilment of the baptism of John; hence, it's *not* re-baptism but a new baptism in the NT church. It's a baptism which portrays a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ and the promise of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. That's why Paul inquires in Acts 19:3 whether they received the Holy Spirit, i.e. whether they were true believers, and already knew the Lord Jesus Christ as he had revealed himself and whether they had heard of the Holy Spirit

and how he was poured out on the whole congregation. Paul brought them up to date and when they believed the preaching of Christ and him crucified, and they accepted the gift of the Holy Spirit by faith, Paul baptized them. The baptism in Acts 19, therefore, is *not* a re-baptism; it points at Christ and the Holy Spirit, who must have worked this faith in Christ, signifying what they have in Christ!



**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. denHollander

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