

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

V 66 N 24 DECEMBER 1 2017



**Bellstone
101**

**CLARION KIDS
YOU ASKED**



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Living with a Vision for Service in the Kingdom of God

*Faith can easily feel like something that we just
paste onto our life*

How does your faith in the Lord impact your life? Is there a danger that you become so busy with the daily routines of life that your focus on Christ becomes lost? Faith can easily feel like something that we just paste onto our life. When we lose our focus on Christ, we no longer have a clear vision for service to the Lord. As members of Christ we are called to lead productive lives in the kingdom of God. Only with a clear vision for God's calling can we actively direct our life in his service and for his glory.

We are living in a difficult time for God's people. The spiritual attacks against believers are intensifying, but the need for the faithful witness of the gospel message has never been greater. While opposition to Christ grows, there are also greater opportunities to fill the void in our culture with the good news of salvation. That means there is an urgent need for faithful ministers of the gospel. We pray that the Lord may lay on the hearts of godly men a heartfelt desire to serve in the ministry of their Lord.

A sacrificial love

I suspect that in our culture the pursuit of the ministry does not hold much appeal when we consider the personal sacrifices it involves. There are many years of study and, once in the ministry, there are many challenges in preaching to sinners and ministering to people struggling with messy lives. So, who are the kind of men who will think about pursuing such ministry? They are men who have a heart for their Saviour, Jesus Christ, and are concerned for those who struggle with the cares of life. They are deeply concerned about the lives of those who are lost.

Ministers of Christ need to have a passion for their Lord. I recently heard a speaker tell about many young French men

who, after studying in Geneva for the ministry in the time of the Reformation, returned to pastor churches in France. They left Geneva saying to one another, "I will see you in glory," for they had no expectation to see each other again. On average a French minister had a life expectancy of two years before they were martyred for the faith. These men lived with a whole-hearted commitment to their Lord and Saviour and were willing to give the ultimate sacrifice for their Lord.

I would hope that Christ's church today continues to be filled with men and women who have a heart for their Lord and earnestly seek to serve him sacrificially with their whole life. Not everyone has the skills nor the opportunities to pursue a calling in the ministry, but being active in the service of the Lord should resonate in the hearts of everyone. I do think that in our western culture the devil undermines this enthusiasm for Christ, for there are so many careers that allow us to pursue other desires of our heart. Jesus writes to the church in Laodicea that "you are lukewarm." They have lost their first love and Jesus identifies the reason: they are rich and have acquired wealth, therefore they say they do not need a thing from the Lord (Rev 3:17). Jesus identifies how our wealth and riches and opportunities for great careers can undermine our passion for him as Lord.

A heart for service

So how can the church be filled with men and women who have a passion for their Lord? How can our seminary be full of men filled with a passion for the ministry? By becoming a people filled with a vision for service to the Lord. God's people cannot coast through life, but through the power of the Spirit we are called to challenge ourselves to better serve our Lord to his glory. Too easily our vision becomes short

sighted, as we focus on earthly goals that will all pass away rather than longing for the coming of the Kingdom.

God himself gives the example of living with vision and purpose. Jesus Christ told Nicodemus in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Then he concludes, God's purpose is not to condemn but to save the world. To save the world is the vision that directs the whole life of Jesus Christ. His whole focus is to do the work his Father has given him to do. At a certain point during his ministry the disciples were astonished that Jesus was setting out for Jerusalem because they knew there was great danger in the city. Christ knew what was waiting for him there, for he says in Mark 10:33 that in Jerusalem he would be betrayed

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Does your faith impact your life? Does it change how you live? What are your priorities? These are the questions asked in our editorial, "Living with a Vision for Service in the Kingdom of God" by Rev. Matthew Van Luik

Next we have "A Brief Comparison of Charismatic and Reformed Views of Church Music" by Paul Munson, which was originally published in *Modern Reformation*.

Issue 24 has a Treasures New and Old meditation, Clippings on Politics and Religion, Education Matters, *Clarion Kids*, and the You Asked column. There is also an article from Bellstone Christian School, and a letter to the editor.

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Cover Photo: Students of Bellstone School

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and condemned to death and killed. He sets out for Jerusalem with purpose. He says, "I did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom for many."

Christ did not focus on his own needs. If he had listened to his disciples, he would have turned away from Jerusalem to spare himself the suffering and pain of this life. He did not focus on the short-term goal of making his own life as pleasant as possible, but he kept his focus on the much greater goal, the life and salvation of his people.

The greater focus

The Lord Jesus reveals that there is so much more to this life than the short-term goal of making our earthly life as comfortable as possible. In our society people only live for the material things. But Christ constantly warns us that the material things, our money and possessions, they will all pass away. And yet we get pulled into the false narrative that our material goods are what really matter, that they are the things most necessary for my life. Therefore we lose sight of the greater narrative of God's work in our life.

The wonderful result of the gospel is that it gives us an eternal perspective. It changes the vision I have for my life, for the question is no longer, "What is good for me?" but "How do I serve the Lord my God?" That is our new vision. Without this vision we will walk about aimlessly without accomplishing the work of our Lord.

A vision for service

As parents we want to instill this vision into the lives of our covenant youth by teaching them about the saving work of Jesus Christ for them. Our concern is not only that they look to Christ for their salvation, but that they also prepare themselves for God's calling in his kingdom. We want our children to develop a vision for how they may serve their Lord, since he has bought them with his blood.

Husbands and wives also need to develop a godly vision for how they will serve one another. There is always the danger that our vision is focussed on the here and now. Husbands and wives so easily put all their energy into providing for the material well-being of their families. From a human perspective, the material things seem to be the most pressing and yet the greater need is the spiritual one. Therefore we need to develop a vision in which we seek to serve our spouse as Christ sacrificially served us. Serving Christ must be reflected in how we serve our spouse and care for our family.

As members of Christ, we need to develop a heart for service. Christ calls men to develop themselves to serve as leaders in their families and in the church. Developing the gifts for Christian leadership is only possible through developing a loving relationship with Christ. Women need to develop a vision for service within the church, so that all the members feel that they are loved and being cared for.

No retirement in the Kingdom

This new vision must go beyond our family and church community. When the kingdom of Christ becomes the new focus in your life, it will impact every square inch of your life, including our retirement. In our culture, retirement has become the goal for which everyone strives. Many see retirement as the golden years when we deserve to enjoy a life of leisure and pleasure. Christians too are easily pulled into the false narrative that this is our time, and that we now have the right to enjoy life as we desire. The reality is that in the kingdom of God there is no period of retirement. God does not call us to serve him for sixty-five years and then suddenly says, "You have done enough, you are free to do whatever you like." It is important even in retirement to develop a vision of service to the Lord. In our society, the Lord gives seniors the opportunity to enjoy freedom from the daily grind of life that allows them to focus on other activities of service in his kingdom.

When Christ came to this world, he never lost sight of his Father's calling to save his people. He directed his whole life to fulfilling his saving work. At the end of his earthly life, he called his apostles to go and make disciples of all nations. The apostles never lost sight of the vision Christ gave them. They faithfully proclaimed the gospel to the world, even in the face of great hostility. Through the faithful work of his apostles, Christ caused his kingdom to spread through the whole world. Today the Lord sets before his church the same vision, to go and witness his name in all the earth.

Reflection

If we understand that Christ's purpose for us is to serve him, then we need to think through how we will do that. Parents need to think about how they will parent, office bearers how they will give spiritual direction to their sheep, ministers how they will serve the sheep under their care, and as people living in this world, how we will serve those who are lost in our community. The Lord does not call us to do heroic acts, but to simply serve our brother and sister in love, and to show care and compassion to those who live without hope in this world.

We need to think about what gifts the Lord has given us so that we may serve him to the glory of his name. Do I have the gift of hospitality or the ability to visit the lonely in my community? Do I have the skills to assist my neighbour with some project that needs to be done? There are so many opportunities to build relationships with others both in the church and in the community. If we live with the vision Christ gives, we will look for those opportunities in which we can share the most important thing in our life, and that is our relationship with Christ, my Saviour. If he is the focus in your life, then you will seek every opportunity to encourage others to make him the focus in their lives. Our ultimate vision is to bring glory to our Lord. He must be the passion of our heart.





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The Sceptre Will Not Depart from Judah

"The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his."

Genesis 49:10

The words above were spoken by Jacob when he was in Egypt and near death. He addressed his sons with a special message for each one of them. As it turns out, the message for Judah was outstanding. To understand this properly, we need to keep in mind that these were not the best of times. Jacob's family had gone through a lot of turmoil with his own sons committing many atrocities. The fact that Jacob and his family were in Egypt was even indicative of the need to get out of Canaan for a while because Jacob's sons were living too much like the pagan world around them. If it were up to Jacob and his sons to secure salvation and favour with God, they did not stand a chance. But then, it has never been up to man to secure his own salvation. From the time that man fell into sin, God made clear that he would provide the seed of the woman to crush the head of the serpent. And Jacob himself had wrestled with God at Peniel and refuse to let him go until the Lord blessed Jacob. He knew that he lived by grace alone. He knew that he depended utterly on God's gift of a Redeemer who would one day stand on earth and secure salvation for his people.

In this context it is significant that Jacob makes a prophecy about his son Judah: "The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his." The image here is of a king: a king who holds the royal sceptre and staff. These two terms signify not only rule and power, but also the keeping of the law. This is a true king who rules in power and righteousness. And equally significant, it is an everlasting dominion that cannot be taken from him.

At this early stage of the history of redemption, it is made clear that the seed of the woman will come from the tribe of Judah. Somewhat later it is also made clear that the Redeemer-King will come specifically from the house of David, in Bethlehem. The Lord said to David in 2 Samuel 7, "When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom." The promises of God become steadily clearer in the Old Testament, indicating that the Son of David will establish a new kingdom that wrests the power from Satan and moves over the face of the earth causing men from every nationality to

hear the gospel, and by God's grace, to be washed in the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ.

If we look at the footnotes in the NIV or at an older translation, then we see that our text can also be translated as, "until Shiloh comes." This word speaks of peace and security. We can see it as something of a title or a name for the coming Redeemer: the Peacemaker! It reminds us of another prophecy in Isaiah 9: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." The great victory of the coming Christ would not be with swords and military strength. It will be reconciliation with God through the shedding of his blood.

Our brothers and sisters in the Old Testament already had sufficient revelation to believe and to find peace in the coming Christ. We have the prophetic word made more sure. All who hear about the birth, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ and believe in him will know a peace which passes all understanding.

This meditation was originally published in this magazine in 2005.





Paul Munson

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A Brief Comparison of Charismatic and Reformed Views of Church Music

On Christmas Day some years ago, a dear saint in her eighties sat at our fireplace and regaled us with stories of what it was like to be a Christian in twentieth-century America. The conversation took a melancholic turn as she described the problems in the Reformed communions of which she had been a part. Her lament culminated with words that made me uncomfortable, partly because I wasn't sure what they meant and partly because I heard in them a note of belligerence I did not expect from one so sanctified. "The charismatics have won," she said. "We are all charismatics now." We are all charismatics? It reminded me of Shelley's famous claim that "we are all Greeks." Sociologists do report that the Pentecostal and charismatic segment of the church has been the fastest growing (globally speaking) for many decades, but surely its influence has not been so pervasive as to affect the identity of us all? I don't think anyone in this woman's congregation spoke in tongues or performed miraculous healings. What was she talking about?

Sometime later, a conversation with a young relative helped me to understand. After attending our service, she said she needed a more "emotional worship" than ours. I was surprised because I think of myself as an emotional person and am never more emotional than in the Lord's Day services of my church. As I pressed her to explain, it became apparent she was referring to music. Now, it's true: the emotions I feel in corporate worship are not usually a response to the music as music. Music is a tool we use to say certain things to God and to one another, and my emotions are a response to what's being said. I'm unmoved by the songs our niece likes to sing because their substance isn't of a kind to stimulate an emotional response in me. But clearly the music of these songs was itself an emotional stimulant for her.

Even more perplexing to me than her statements about music were her statements about emotion. She seemed to be saying that corporate worship is a matter of how we feel in the assembly – not just that God requires worship to be sincere, or that joy and peace often result from worship, but that worship is essentially a feeling. She knows that God is real and that he is present and blessing her when she feels a certain way. As a music historian, I know that the contemporary worship music in the Evangelical Free Church where she grew up originated not with the Swedish immigrants who founded it but with the charismatic movements of the late twentieth century. Now I was discovering that its theology of worship, too, was largely charismatic.

The ways of worship in the twentieth century

Through most of the last century, traditional evangelicals resisted Pentecostal theology. Some still do, while others have come to accept the idea that miraculous gifts can be practiced today. Even more dramatic, however, has been the musical influence. Late in the twentieth century, the two great wellsprings of praise-and-worship music, with its overhead projectors and worship teams, were the neo-charismatic Maranatha! Music of Calvary Chapel and the Association of Vineyard Churches. Their influence is hard to overstate. It's my perception that most ordinary practitioners of contemporary worship music are charismatic in their theology of worship.

They believe the point of corporate worship is to affect human hearts with an experiential awareness of God, and they design it to that end. Writing in *Christianity Today* back in 1989, Charles H. Kraft said,

While I have always enjoyed singing in the church, it wasn't until I freed myself from the exclusive use of the hymnal that I experienced what praise and worship can

be. And it is the new music, sung with eyes closed for 10, 15, or 20 minutes at a time, that makes that experience possible. These short, repetitious songs with memorable choruses help me focus on God.¹

The music gave Kraft a new experience of God – one that was direct, personal, and uncluttered by facts about God as normally found in hymnals. Twenty years later, Bob Kauflin's *Worship Matters* made the point that worship leaders combine God's word with music to motivate the gathered church.² Listen to just about any Christian today – even yourself – and you may unearth this assumption: the purpose of music in corporate worship is to generate authenticity; to kindle love, sincerity, and a more immediate experience of God.

This is why songs in the church sound the way they do today. The most popular avoid saying much – there's a biblical image here and a biblical title there, but these aren't connected into a biblical train of thought. The verbal emptiness leaves room for a musical experience that touches the heart. Repetition, coercive rhythm, and a climactic use of loudness generate happiness (even ecstasy) like a rock concert. Contemporary Christians identify these musically driven emotions as worship, and they associate them with the presence and blessing of God.

All the (biblical) feels

In the Bible, intense emotions are often a product of motivation to corporate worship, but never are they its essence. When we study the Hebrew and Greek words translated in the English Bible as “worship,” and identify the contexts in which they occur, it's clear that worship is the reverence and service due to God. We pay homage and kneel before him; we attend to his majesty; as priests, we “offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5).

According to Paul, the purpose of singing in the assembly is to communicate. We use songs to teach and admonish one another and to convey thankfulness to God, as the word of Christ dwells in us richly (Col 3:16). This is confirmed by the parallel passage in Ephesians and by the rest of Scripture. The salient point in almost all biblical allusions to music in corporate worship is that someone is saying something to someone. We sing to communicate, not to feel a certain way. This isn't to say that biblical worship is necessarily devoid of experiential depth or emotion – quite the contrary. When we follow the biblical

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model, our church music will in fact be the most beautiful and astonishingly emotional. The music will be beautiful precisely for the way it helps to convey the Bible's message of who God is and what he has done, and the emotions will be all the more robust for being a response to the reality of that message.

Such was the belief and practice of the Reformers. They, too, were surrounded by Christians itching to experience God in extraordinary ways beyond what he revealed. “Let the man who would hear God speak, read Holy Scripture,” said Luther.³ The songs he wrote and promoted for congregational use were saturated with the substance, language, and aesthetic values of Scripture. They were also pedagogical, enabling his congregants to teach and admonish one another with spiritual songs. Early on, he echoed Colossians 3: “I intend to make vernacular psalms for the people, that is, spiritual songs so that the Word of God even by means of song may live among the people.”⁴ As for Calvin, behind his famous injunction against letting our ears be “more attentive to the melody than our minds to the spiritual meaning of the words” lies a recognition that the biblical purpose for church music competes with other purposes, which are legitimate in other contexts.⁵ A Reformed understanding of worship teaches us that we don't have to produce an encounter with God. It's right there in word and sacrament – in its own way as beautiful and effectual as when “the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Exod 40:34). All we have to do is respond by faith.

¹ Charles H. Kraft, “The Hymnbook Is Not Enough,” *Christianity Today*, 7 April 1989.

² Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 55.

³ *Wider das Papsttum zu Rom, vom Teufel gestiftet* (1545), *Weimarer Ausgabe* 54, 263.

⁴ Luther to Georg Spalatin, 1523.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.20.32.

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Is Christianity Dying in Europe?

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It is difficult for us today to imagine that what is now Turkey was once Christian with cities there receiving letters from the apostle Paul and from Christ himself (Rev 1-3). Today's Istanbul was once Constantinople, the seat of Eastern Christianity, comparable to what Rome and the Vatican was to Western Christianity. But now the great Christian cathedral in Istanbul, the Hagia Sophia, had become a mosque, is now a museum, and will likely become a mosque again. What is currently Algeria and Tunisia once produced Christian scholars like Tertullian and Augustine. Two hundred years later, northern Africa became Islamic and still is. History shows that what was once Christian can become Islamic within a relatively short time. Can the same happen to Europe?

Giulio Meotti has gathered some sobering statistics which show that Christianity is dying in Europe and Islam is growing and could become dominant. Between 2010 and 2015 "Christian" or non-Muslim "deaths outnumbered births by nearly 6 million during this brief period." Furthermore, church attendance is plummeting and atheistic propaganda is also weakening Christianity.

"After a nationwide advertising campaign by the Atheist Society thousands of people left the Church of Denmark. Norway's state church lost more than 25,000 members in a month. Last year, more than 90,000 people chose to drop out of the Church of Sweden – almost twice as many as the year before. Meanwhile, in one year, 163,000 migrants, most of them Muslim, entered the country."

The trend is the same in Germany. "There were an estimated 1.4 million more Christian deaths than births between 2010 and 2015." Meanwhile hundreds of thousands of Muslims refugees have entered the country.

The future of Christianity in the United Kingdom is no better. "Across Greater Manchester, 20 churches will soon close. According to some reports, Anglicanism will disappear from Britain by 2033." The Roman Catholic "Church's Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh is planning to cut the number of parishes from more than 100 to 30. The

Archdiocese of Glasgow, by far the country's largest, will soon – within two decades – have only 45 priests and probably shut down half its parishes. Imagine, a huge Catholic community will close half its churches."

Christianity is also languishing in The Netherlands. "Cardinal Willem Eijk, Archbishop of Utrecht, announced that by 2025 about a thousand Catholic parishes would close. 'We predict that a third of Catholic churches will be closed by 2020 and two-thirds by 2025,' he said." Belgium is no better. Most churches in Brussels, 108 of them, will be closed. The Roman Catholic's "Vienna Archdiocese in Austria will also liquidate most of its parishes – 660 of them – in the next 10 years. Instead, the Archdiocese will merge them into 150 larger parishes." The trend is the same all over Europe.

Meotti quoted Canadian philosopher Mathieu Bock-Côté: "The Western world has long gotten used to the persecution of Christians in the Middle East, as if their bad lot is inevitable and has to simply be accepted. Shouldn't the issue of Middle Eastern Christians wake up European civilization to its core identity? Shouldn't we in Europe and the West be telling ourselves that these attacks are also aimed at us?"

Throughout history some in Islam have used physical violence and war to further its influence. Today they use terrorist tactics to influence and to try to dominate the West. Christianity has an even more powerful weapon, the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, the gospel of the risen Christ who comes again and whose kingdom is forever. May the Lord bless the mission work now being done in Europe. Amidst the gloomy statistics there are also reports from other quarters of conversions to the Christian faith. May the Lord have mercy on Europe and may also there be gathered those who belong to the innumerable multitude of the redeemed.

Source of quotations: Giulio Meotti, "Europe: What Happens to Christians There Will Come Here" April 30, 2017 on the Gatestone Institute website.



Clarion Kids

John the Baptist

Matthew 3, Mark 1:1-8, Luke 1

Zechariah was a priest. One day, while he was serving in the temple, God told him that he would have a son. Zechariah did not believe him because Zechariah's wife Elizabeth had not been able to have any children yet. Because of his doubt, God made Zechariah unable to speak until his son was born. Zechariah and Elizabeth were very happy when they had a son, and they named him John. John was sent as a messenger to tell everyone that Jesus would soon be born. He lived in the wilderness and ate locusts and honey. John warned everyone to repent, because he baptized with water, but Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

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



Word Search

E	K	P	I	A	R	B	K	Q	T
L	J	F	K	W	L	F	E	I	S
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Baptist	Doubt	Elizabeth
Holy Spirit	Jesus	John
Messenger	Repent	Zechariah

by Emily Nijenhuis

Double Puzzle

Unscramble the words, then use the numbered letters to solve the final word.

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Parkland Immanuel Christian School Celebrates Forty Years

Ken Leffers
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Parkland Immanuel Christian School (PICS), situated in Edmonton, Alberta, recently celebrated its fortieth year of operation. PICS is a K-12 school, and provides Reformed education to families of five local churches. Over the last four decades, the school community has experienced significant growth and overcome many challenges. Looking back, the changes undergone appear quite remarkable. In order to more fully appreciate how the LORD has blessed PICS over the years, it may be helpful to review the past, reflect on the present, and look forward to the future.

The past

Although PICS opened its doors in 1977, the Canadian Reformed School Society was established well before, in 1952. Initial enthusiasm was high, but it took twenty-five years to overcome a multitude of challenges, one of which was to secure a suitable property. In time a thirty acre “farm” was purchased on the outskirts of Edmonton for some \$54,000, and construction of a six-classroom building began in 1976. The school was completed on schedule, and passed its final inspection with rave reviews. As a result of the hard work and dedication of many society members and volunteers, the cost to build the school was \$15/ square foot, which was about half the going rate at that time.

Prior to opening the school’s doors, the Board was busy looking for qualified staff. In due time they were successful in hiring the school’s first three teachers: Mr. Rainier Van Delft, Miss Ann Wierenga, and Mr. Bernie Van Raalte, who would also serve as school principal. Thirty-six students were enrolled in grades 1-9, and a single bus, to be driven by Mrs. Jenny Stel, was purchased to provide necessary transportation. On opening day, the society’s oldest member, Mrs. De Nijs, had the honour of cutting the ribbon. A Scripture passage was read, the Lord’s blessing was prayed for, the flag was raised, and the hand bell was rung to let students in. With gratitude and thankfulness to God, after a great deal of patience and hard work, the dreams of those early visionaries were realized.

Growth over the years was steady. Kindergarten was added in 1978. By 1980, the school board decided to look at adding a high school. At this time Mr. E. VanderBoom became Parkland’s second principal, as Mr. Bernie Van Raalte decided to return to teaching elementary full time. Mr. VanderBoom only stayed on for one year, after which Mr. Rainier Van Delft became principal, and would remain in that position well into the next century. The high school was soon added, and student numbers began to grow. The need for more space soon became evident, and Phase Two

School building in 1977



construction began in 1980. A gym, kitchen, laboratory, staff room, and five additional classrooms were added. As the years went by, enrollment continued to rise. By 2001, PICS had around 170 students and fifteen staff. Growth remained steady, and before long the existing building would prove to be inadequate.

By 2004, future projections began to forecast the arrival of double grades in the lower elementary, so available space was once again going to be an issue. After much planning and discussion, a two-story addition was decided upon, and construction began in 2009. This major project would prove to significantly change the look of the school, and by adding special rooms such as a shop and music room, allow for more course options. By this time school culture was also changing. No longer “the little school in the woods,” PICS had experienced significant growth in areas such as enrollment, staffing, operational complexity, professionalism, parental expectations, programming, extra-curricular activities, community events, and special education.

Over the years PICS certainly experienced its fair share of challenges and problems, and many struggles and failures had to be met. Some of these challenges remain the same today, such as securing the necessary financial resources for operational expenses and expansion, locating qualified staff, interacting with the greater community, and maintaining good relations with the government. Despite all of this, God has continued to guide and richly bless the school society in Edmonton. Those who were involved with PICS’s humble beginnings can perhaps see this most clearly.

The present

The school has changed significantly over the years. PICS currently has more educational staff than there were students enrolled in 1977. The school now has 360 students, nearly fifty staff (including teachers, EAs, bus drivers, building maintenance, office, etc.), a board of eight members, and a supportive school society with many dedicated volunteers. Double grades are beginning to enter junior high, and high school is beginning to prepare for this growth as well. The transportation system has expanded from one bus to six, and continued growth is expected over the foreseeable future.

Along with the standard range of courses, students can enjoy Band, Leadership, Construction, Art, Home Economics, Religious Studies, French, Outdoor Ed, and Computer Studies. As student numbers climb, course options in junior and senior high will continue to develop. The Learning Assistance program also continues to mature, providing support to students with diverse needs and special abilities.



School life is enhanced by a variety of special events, extra-curricular activities, and programs. Field trips are organized to locations near and far (e.g. southern Alberta, Jarvis Lake, Fort Edmonton, B.C., Kananaskis). Students can participate in various clubs such as ARPA, Leadership, Drama, and Outdoor Ed. PICS also has a strong athletic program involving cross-country, volleyball, basketball, soccer, and track and field. Much loved school events include Mission week, Reading month, open house festivals, school concerts, and special occasions such as Grandparents’ Day.

The future

What does the future hold for PICS? Where will the school be in five, ten years? The last forty have certainly been eventful, filled with both disappointments and reasons to celebrate. As the school begins to run short on space once again, new challenges and opportunities will present themselves. Perhaps the greatest challenges will come from the governing authorities and our ever-changing culture.

While no one may know the future with any certainty, it is comforting to know that the LORD is in firm control of all things. The LORD has a plan for his people, including PICS, its members, staff, and students – and his plans are good. The path may seem uncertain, but the ultimate future of God’s people is sure. In light of this, it is important to remember why Reformed schools were started in the first place – to assist parents in teaching their children the ways of the Lord, to impress God’s commands upon them, so that they may know and fear the LORD (Deut 6:1-9). The most important goal for PICS is to assist parents in the raising of their covenant children, keeping God’s Word central, and maintaining the truth of the Scriptures in all activities. With his continued blessing, and to the honour of his Name, may PICS continue to thrive in 2018 and beyond!

C

Bellstone, 101

Keith Sikkema
Photo credit Arie den Hollander

*The purpose of Bellstone Christian School is
to educate God's covenant children
to be thankful, humble, discerning kingdom citizens
who shine as lights in the world
by serving their LORD and their neighbour.*

On September 21, 2017, the Grateful Opening of Bellstone Christian School, between Ancaster, Binbrook, and Caledonia ("Glancaster"), took place with well over 300 pre-schoolers, students, parents, relatives, friends, and politicians. Psalm 101 wasn't mentioned, but the event was abuzz with gratitude: "I will sing of steadfast love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will make music."

When the Post World War II population boom led to school consolidation, the Bell and Stone Public Schools, south of Hamilton, also amalgamated. They continued in 1964 as Bell-Stone Public School in a new building with eight rooms and 207 students. A gym and library were added in the 1990s. As per the Ontario Government's 1950 Hope Report, it forcefully pursued the "virtues. . . of honesty and Christian love. . . as eternal verities" (p. 27ff). When, by 1968, the subsequent Hall-Dennis Report called for a *secular* focus on "man's unending search for truth," (p. 9) this "small school with a big heart"¹ adjusted but slowly. In 2015, the boom was over, declining enrolment rendered Bell-Stone surplus, and it was put up for tender. With the Lord's blessing, the Glancaster School Society (GSS) placed the winning bid, and kept the ring of Bell-Stone's name. With reference to Scripture, and especially Psalm 78:4b, it aimed for a foundational pursuit of the "eternal verities" the Hope Report could only hint at.



Since 1973, the Hamilton area had been well-served by Timothy Christian School. Timothy's growth had first necessitated expansion of its building (now Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College), and then two relocations. Increased population prompted a prudently commissioned "Vision Report" by 2010. It advised that current trends projected growth from 273 to about 400 students by 2016, which again pushed the school's capacity. Actual population by 2016 was 351, but the report presented three options to address the challenge: Adding to the building, forming two school societies, or establishing a middle school nearby. Each option found support, but the second one gained eager grass-roots traction among "Glancaster" members. Timothy's Board supported this as a viable, and even cost-saving solution to the imminent issues.

"Reformed education is based on a particular view of the child "on the way to" maturity. The Word of God, the view that a child is a Covenant Child, and an understanding of our Cultural Mandate form the basis for education at Bellstone."

Along with this encouragement to organize, GSS continually sought and experienced the direction and blessings of the LORD. They shouldered and persevered in the challenges of starting out as an independent daughter, with the inherent support and benefits of well-oiled Timothy. Despite imperfections, the overriding refrain from inception to opening was a joyful awareness of blessings received. Community-building came in productive meetings as society, committees, and workgroups. It was enhanced by steady progress on budgeting, fundraising, incorporation, charitable recognition, mission-development, and building acquisition and restoration. There were many gifts the LORD provided, with a role for all: Managers, thinkers and doers, book-lovers and mactackers, plant-lovers and other fundraisers, avid savers and prudent spenders, designers and painters, educators and curriculum-developers, mess-makers and cleaners. There was unity in purpose of having a school for covenant children so they might learn of the mighty deeds of our God in the creation and preservation of the universe, in the gifts and tasks he gives them, and of his salvation for sinners through Jesus Christ. All this would encourage them to sing and speak boldly of God's care at all times, as they prepare to serve God and their neighbour as kingdom citizens shining as lights in this world.

The enthusiasm and love present in the preparations for the school now resound through the building and are evident on various displays. On the hall's bulletin board, student work illustrates the essence: "Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious Name." There is a dedicated staff to lead the children on the charted path with this year's theme text: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt 6:33). There is evidence of acknowledging the LORD's words in Deuteronomy 6:

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might. And



these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise.

In short, here is a school that vigorously pursues unity of purpose between home, church, and school in the context of the supportive covenant community (Eccl 4:12). It is a school that wants this purpose to fit with and obey the covenant God established with believers and their children (Deut 6), a school that wants to confess the LORD's great deeds in everything, and a school that wants to help its students discern between what is right and wrong in God's eyes (Ps 101; Eph 6:10ff).

Bellstone's Grateful Opening had a pleasant rhythm of short speeches punctuated with prayer, and fitting psalms, hymns, and Scripture passages. Representatives of Timothy, the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies, Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College, the Staff and Students, the City of Hamilton, and the local MPP and MP all spoke of the blessings of a school such as this, and expressed the wish that it may continue to be blessed. The program was concluded with Hymn 85, prayer, our National Anthem, and a ribbon-cutting event, followed by refreshments and opportunity to wander through the building.

Pray for all involved in BCS. May they all, including Bellstone's 101 students, bring praise and music to God, letting his light shine in response to his steadfast love and justice in Christ.



¹ Ontario commissioned the Hope and Hall-Dennis Reports to help set policy for public education. Available online. For the history of Bell-Stone Public School, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6ZliFKp-gg>.

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Q Do we need a dress code for the Sunday?

Regarding formal dress, what is acceptable and pleasing to God? Earlier everyone dressed in suits and ties and dresses, then the jacket came off, dresses were replaced by pants, while now besides suits and dresses people dress very casual when coming to church. What does the Lord require of his people? How does he call us to dress when coming to worship him?

A The short answer to this question is: No, we do not need a dress code for the Sunday. The Bible does not contain such a dress code; not *a specific* standard for attending the worship services anyway. That's not to say that having a dress code is a wrong thing, though.

When speaking about a dress code for going to church, often the example is used of one receiving an invitation to join the Queen at Buckingham Palace for an afternoon tea, and everyone would know that you dress up for it. Even though there may not be an official "dress code" for Buckingham Palace, there is one for attending a (New Year's) reception with the King and Queen of The Netherlands. Besides, dress codes are not all that strange when considering that for playing golf at courses for the elite a certain dress code is required. Attending a wedding ceremony and reception as well, wearing formal attire is a matter of course. However, we can learn from these examples that a dress code has everything to do with one's understanding of the occasion, of the event; namely, its meaning and significance and how we project this understanding in the matter of formal dress!

So even though we cannot answer the question by saying what the Lord *requires*, or how he *calls* us to dress, according to a specific dress code, we can observe that this is a *spiritual* issue. We are living in the age of the Holy Spirit

and God has revealed in his Word the significance of our formal attire for when we worship him. We may not receive any rules or details concerning "our holy array" for worship to God, we do have the *principles* spelled out in his Word. "Worship the LORD in the splendour of holiness," we read in Psalm 96:9, and as we confess in Belgic Confession Article 25, with the help of the Holy Spirit we can "use the testimonies taken from the law and the prophets to order our life in all honesty, according to God's will and to his glory." Then we should *submit* ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit, however, in our heart and mind, in our thinking according to God's will. We will then also do this when it pertains to the way God has revealed in his Word how he is pleased to be worshipped, honoured, and praised when we come together as covenant assembly on the Lord's Day.

First and foremost in our consideration of the matter of our "holy attire" is our awareness and understanding of the occasion of worship. We come together in worship before God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Almighty One, who demands respect, awe, and worship of his creation! As New Testament believers, especially, we have the privilege of entering upon the presence of the LORD, of worshipping the King of kings and Lord of lords. It's a tremendous occasion of divine grace that we may begin each week by going to church to worship our God and King, and as his people sing our praises, articulate our thanks, and listen to him

speaking to us through the Word read and proclaimed. God is holy, the only true God who expects his special (holy) people to approach him with the deepest respect and awe, according to the *principles* articulated in the Old Testament for his people, the priests, and high priest! “Guard your steps when you go to the house of the LORD,” also requires our self-examination today in our manner of worship, including our appearance and apparel in worship!

Then what are these principles? Scripture teaches us that God does care about what we wear when we appear before him and worship him. In Exodus 19:10-11, the Israelites who appeared before the LORD had to be washed and clean. God is holy and his people are holy, which shows in their consecration to the LORD, including their clothes as holy (washed and clean). In Exodus 28, we find an elaborate dress code for the high priest when approaching God, on the Day of Atonement especially; also for the ordinary priests their linen clothes were designed for dignity and honour. Their clothes had to reflect how holy and honour-

able it was for them to be in God’s presence as they served in tabernacle or temple!

As New Testament people of God we all are a holy and royal priesthood as well (1 Pet 2:5, 9), and thanks to the sprinkled blood of Christ we may have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus (Hebr 10:19-22). Just as the OT high priest wore his holy attire to enter the holy presence of the LORD in the splendour of holiness, so we all may now worship and call on the name of the LORD, reflecting the *principle* of the priestly dress in clothes that project “dignity and beauty” in God’s presence! Thus we prepare ourselves for worship in the face of heaven (Hebr 12: 22-24), also paying serious attention to the clothes we wear when going to worship God! Thus our “Sunday best” projects our *attitude* in worship, a spiritual attitude which takes the choice of attire seriously because we know that it is very important for God to see how we enter upon his holy presence for worship!



**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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Teach Us to Grow Trees

Dear Editor,

Professor VanRaalte's article titled "Send Us Wood" in the October 6 issue of *Clarion* was cause for serious reflection. His admonition to "call upon God without ceasing until he sends us marksmen equipped with sharp arrows and coals" reminded me of something Chuck Swindoll said once: "We often pray for good, strong men who will lead the Church of Christ with integrity. But God doesn't give us men. He gives us boys."

Along these same lines, VanRaalte says: "We need churches that nurture the young men in their midst" and later, in the conclusion of his article, VanRaalte contends that "we can't force our young men to become pastors; rather, we have to live and breathe the gospel so deeply that the question and the desire to pursue the ministry simply cannot be avoided. It has to be organic and real."

I agree with the professor on all of this but would like to add that it needn't *only* be an organic process. I think we can be much more intentional about it.

It may be true for some that "we are guilty of not having as fervent and zealous a desire for the progress of his gospel as we should," as VanRaalte admonishes, but more than zeal I think we struggle with the strategies, tactics, and practical application of "nurturing" ministerial, pastoral, and leadership qualities in our young men. I know of many in our community who wish we were doing more for the cause of the gospel but who simply don't know what to do about it. The church actually offers few options when it comes to ministry. Zeal seems to be the lesser of our problems.

How many of our churches have mentoring/discipleship programs, leadership training, or formal office bearer training? The educational institutions are starting to step it up in this area (the Student Leadership Team at Guido de Bres High School and Campfire! Bible Camp would be shining examples of this) but as churches we seem content to hope this nurturing is happening organically in the home.

Ministry in our community also seems to be an all (seven years of post-high school education to become pastor of a 400+ member congregation) or nothing proposition. A young man in our community can go twenty years without ever being invited to assume some sort of ministry role or leadership responsibility. For such a person the leap to becoming a pastor is, perhaps, just too big? Does a lack of "ministry" options hold some back from considering ministry altogether?

Could we commission our youth as Bible story teachers, summer camp counsellors, and youth group organizers? Could we ask the young men of the congregation to actively mentor even younger members? Could we expect more men to help with teaching catechism, facilitating small groups or cadet programs? Could we make room on our agendas and budgets for hiring youth pastors, associate pastors, media ministry leaders, music leaders?

Maybe if we allowed for, and encouraged even, a larger variety of ministry positions within the church and actively supported, mentored, and trained [young] members for those roles, we'd cultivate a culture where ministry permeates all of life and where, to use VanRaalte's words once more, "The question and desire to pursue ministry [further] simply cannot be avoided."

Thanks for considering these additional thoughts.

Jason Bouwman

Response

Dear brother Jason Bouwman,

I'm delighted to read your letter, as you have generated exactly the sort of response I have been praying for. It may help you also to know that around the time I wrote the article, the Board of Governors of CRTS was guiding the seminary through some strategic planning exercises, and that one of the results was that I, along with three others, was tasked by the Board to look into the question of how to encourage increased enrolment. Further, as part of our considerations we will be thinking through exactly the sorts of issues you have raised, and not just thinking about how to run prospective student days at the seminary. We need to be intentional and purposeful about raising up leaders for all walks of life, though our concern as committee particularly regards the ministry. If we can come up with solid practical ideas that give guidance to parents and churches, all the better!

Not long ago, in one of those wonderful church parking lot conversations, I had another father of four young boys ask me what he should do to encourage his sons toward the ministry. Someone else corresponded with me. I found that very encouraging. But rather than go on about it, I want to thank you for sharing your ideas. Perhaps our little committee will contact you in the future. Wishing you God's blessing!

Sincerely,
Ted Van Raalte 