

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

V 67 N 6 MARCH 23 2018



**We need to be made
a new creation**

*THE EMPTY TOMB
STRATEGIC PLANNING AT CRTS*

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

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

ADDRESS FOR MAGAZINE CONTENT



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

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

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

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

2018 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

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

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2018 ADVERTISING RATES

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Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch.
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PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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We acknowledge the financial support
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Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

With Easter coming up, our editorial from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam is on the topic of resurrection. Our Treasures New and Old meditation was also specifically prepared with Easter in mind.

In this issue we reprint "Billy Graham: The Last of the Great Revivalists" by Dr. Wes Bredenhof, shared with permission from his blog.

Issue 6 brings readers an article from Rev. Richard Aasman on Strategic Planning at CRTS. We also have the regular columns Clippings on Politics & Religion, Education Matters, *Clarion Kids*, Ray of Sunshine, a letter to the editor, and a couple of press releases.

Laura Veenendaal

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Created and Recreated for Life with God

*The God of life who made all things
did not create human life to be temporary*

By God's grace, we as Christians may confess the resurrection of the body. When we lay a loved one to rest in a grave, we do so knowing that one day the graves will be opened and the dead will rise: the godly to eternal life with God, the evil to eternal condemnation away from the presence of the Lord (John 5:29; 2 Thess 1:9). The God of life who made all things did not create human life to be temporary.

The body and God's breath

It is striking that when God created the first human being, he did not simply call him into existence. No, he began with personally making a body; he "formed the man of dust from the ground." The fact that God personally shaped the human body from the earth underlines the significance of the physical body of flesh and bones in which we all dwell. Only after God had made the body, did the Lord God breathe into the nostrils the breath of life, and "man became a living creature" (Gen 2:7). Divine breath vivified the body made from dust. This breath from the Lord God underlined that man's identity is from heaven and that he was designed to be in communion with the living God. To be in such a close relationship with the Lord of life is to experience life in the fullest and truest sense of the word! This is human flourishing as God intended. Adam was created as "son of God" (Luke 3:38) to live forever in God's presence.

God placed him in the garden which the Creator had planted so that Adam might live in fellowship with him. To that end, God had caused the tree of life to grow in the middle of the garden (Gen 2:9). Tasting the fruit of this tree was to help Adam remember that his life was from God and to encourage him to live in communion with God forever. But Eve and Adam first ate from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their disobedience disrupted

the communion and life in fullness with God their heavenly Father and so they experienced the essence of death, separation from the God of life, and so died that very day. Consequently, they would eventually die a physical death and return to the dust from where Adam had been taken. To prevent them from remaining in the state of sin forever, God graciously evicted them from the garden lest they "take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (Gen 3:22). In his mercy, God wanted to restore them to full life and communion with him. To that end, the Lord put enmity between the evil one and the seed of the women and promised victory over the devil (Gen 3:15).

As God guided history on to its climax in the coming of the promised Saviour and his triumph on the cross and on Easter morning, there are indications in Scripture of the hope of the realization of those promises. One such indicator is the account of Enoch who did not experience death because God took him. It is good in this Easter issue of *Clarion* to dwell on that event for a moment.

Enoch's uninterrupted life with God

After the fall into sin, the note of death was sounded again and again. People may have lived a long time, hundreds of years as a matter of fact, but at the end it is said of one patriarch after another: "and he died. . . and he died. . . and he died" and so on and on (Gen 5). However, the repetition of those words was broken when it came to Enoch. "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him" (Gen 5:24).

Enoch's life was characterized as walking with God. This fact is mentioned twice within three verses (Gen 5:22-24). Walking with God points to a life of close fellowship with the Lord. It is a life in spiritual oneness with

God, a life well-pleasing to him, following his will and being loyal to him. Also, Noah is described as walking with God (Gen 6:9). Enoch did what later the prophet Micah would exhort God's people to do: "Walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

It was not easy for Enoch to do this. He lived in ungodly times and must therefore have faced opposition. He was married and had sons and daughters but apparently his life of faith made him a target of unbelievers. After all, he "prophesied, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness

Those who go through life with the Lord experience a fellowship that will not end

that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him'" (Jude 14-15).

Enoch walked by faith in close communion with God. We read in Hebrews that "by faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and

he was not found, because God had taken him. Now, before he was taken, he was commended as having pleased God" (Hebr 11:5). Enoch experienced in a very special way that life with God here on earth never ends. The close fellowship which believers experience in this life continues in the hereafter. In Enoch's case, he was taken directly and apparently bodily into the very presence of God. His life did not end in death. He was suddenly and supernaturally taken from this world.

Besides conveying the message that life with God does not end, Enoch's being bodily taken away to glory also shows that God is sovereign and he can shut the mouth of the grave for whomever he wishes. Elijah was later similarly taken into heaven without seeing death (2 Kgs 2:11). Death is not inevitable. God is Lord also over death and grave. Our God can therefore also resurrect the dead. Physical death does not have the last say.

Old Testament believers knew these truths. To die as a believer is to enter into God's presence. "God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol [the grave], for he will receive me" (Ps 49:15). Life with him is unbroken. "I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory" (Ps 73:23-24). To be buried in the grave is not the

end. As David confessed: "My heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol [the grave], or let your holy one see corruption" (Ps 16:19-10). Job triumphantly affirmed: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25-26). Isaiah prophesied: "Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!" (Isa 26:19)

In a way, Enoch's being taken away into glory and not experiencing death is a foreshadowing of what will happen to believers living in the days of Christ's coming again. They too will not die but will be caught up "in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we will always be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17).

Raised as a new creation

Enoch's life dramatically illustrates the biblical truth that those who go through life with the Lord experience a fellowship that will not end. As Christians we may also know this reality if we live out our lives in close communion with our God and Saviour. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). That eternal life starts now. Did the Lord Jesus not say: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). And as the apostle Paul affirmed: "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16).

We must never underestimate the enormity of this miraculous transformation. For us to have that everlasting fellowship with God we need to be made a new creation! And so, as the Spirit renews us and daily turns our hearts to God, he raises us up to a new life and indeed recreates us after God's image (Eph 4:24). This work of the Spirit in raising us up a new creation is so far-reaching that it can also be described as being resurrected to a new life in Christ. Resurrection, the raising of what was once dead in sin to a new and everlasting life in Christ! We rightly confess in the Canons of Dordt that conversion is "the new creation, the raising from the dead, the making alive, . . . regeneration is not inferior in power to creation or the raising of the dead" (III/IV, Art. 12). The God who created man in the beginning to live in holy fellowship with him now raises up men and women everywhere as a new creation to walk through life with him in holiness. He will

not let his creation work be undone. He raises believers up to a new life through the Word through whom he had also created the world (Hebr 1:2).

It is an enormous miracle of God's grace to experience such a resurrection. For it is a present reality. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17). Already in this life we as Christians may experience being a new creation and so being resurrected to the life with Christ that never ends. As we confess in the Heidelberg Catechism, we may now already "feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy" (Q/A 58) and "begin in this life the eternal Sabbath" (Q/A 103).

All this is a prelude to that final great day of Christ's appearing.

That great day

There is an untold number of graves all over the world. To them have been committed bodies worn by sin and strife, bodies of the old creation that return to dust (Eccl 12:7). They are the sad result of Adam's fall from the perfection with which God had once made him from the dust of the earth.

But on the great day of Christ's return, those who dwell in the dust will awake (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2). And those who

have trusted in the second Adam will be raised a new creation, incorruptible in new and glorified bodies. But believers who are still living in the body on that great day will be caught up to be with Christ (1 Thess 4:15-17). All things will be made new.

And there will also be on the new earth, the renewed creation, the tree of life. Actually, it will be many trees of life, since the text shows that the reference to a singular tree is a collective noun for many trees lined along the river of life (Rev 22:1-2). There will be no cherubim with flaming swords preventing access to their fruit. According to Christ's promise, we will have his permission "to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Rev 2:7; 22:14). There to enjoy the full fruits of forgiveness and experience God's intimate presence. What joy! And that joy and life with God can by God's grace start now!

The Heidelberg Catechism asks what comfort we receive from the article about the life everlasting in the Apostles' Creed. Those living in communion with the Lord of life can by God's grace answer: "Since I now already feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, I shall after this life possess perfect blessedness, such as no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived – a blessedness in which to praise God forever" (Q/A 58). May our Easter celebration be filled with that joy.

C



Correction

In *Redemptive-Historical Preaching Today* (Part 3), which was published in *Clarion* Vol. 67, No. 4, there is a small error which makes a big difference! A sentence in the second paragraph reads, "It is worth nothing that there is a redemptive-historical view of hermeneutics in North America." The sentence should in fact read: "It is worth *noting*. . ."



The Empty Tomb

"...and he saw and believed." (John 20:8b)

The empty tomb is a powerful sign of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A dead man cannot walk out of his tomb. Moreover, the Jewish authorities also made sure that no one could steal the body.

Mary Magdalene was the first one to discover that the tomb was empty. She right away jumped to the conclusion that Jesus' body had been taken and moved elsewhere. She ran to Peter and John in a panic. She had not actually looked in the tomb.

If she had looked in, she would have noticed something very peculiar. When John arrived at the tomb, he did look in, and "saw the linen cloths lying there" (John 20:5). John didn't go in. He was rooted in his place, trying to process what he was seeing. What did it mean that the linen was still there? Where was Jesus' body that had been wrapped in that linen?

Peter was bolder and went right into the tomb. He saw not only the linen cloths, but also the face cloth which had been on Jesus' head. It was folded up neatly by itself.

Grave robbers don't neatly fold burial cloths. And if they had stolen the body, they would have taken everything. Robbery was certainly not the answer to the mystery of the empty tomb.

Gradually the truth dawned on John, who had now also gone into the tomb. "He saw and believed." He saw the evidence of the linen and the neatly folded face cloth and believed that the one who had been wrapped up in those linens had risen from the dead. There could be no other explanation.

The tomb is empty. The last thing the disciples did for Jesus was wrap him in those linens. And now the first thing that they see on Easter morning are those same linens. By seeing those linens without the body, they see both Jesus Christ's suffering and victory at the same time! Jesus had really and truly died, but now he has also really and truly risen from the dead and left the tomb. The tomb is empty because Jesus lives! Jesus had triumphed over death and now lives forever!

John saw and so believed. In John 20:29, Jesus said, "Blessed are those

who have not seen and yet have believed." We have not seen and yet, by God's grace, we believe. Yet our faith is not a blind faith, a mere hoping for the best, but it is a faith rooted in trustworthy witnesses. We believe on the basis of the testimony of those who have seen. John wrote down what he saw, including this account of the empty tomb, in order that we might believe the fact of the empty tomb.

Of course, the empty tomb does not receive its importance from itself, but because it bears witness to the reality of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. John recorded this in his gospel "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

By faith we share in Jesus Christ and all his benefits, including being justified before God and being raised up to a new life, a life of holiness with a view to perfect righteousness in the life to come. What a glorious perspective we may have because of Christ's resurrection!

For Further Study

1. How does the empty tomb with its linens illustrate Romans 4:25b?
2. Discuss how Peter works out the theme of seeing and believing in 1 Peter 1:8-9.
3. How does Hebrews 11:1, 6 speak about faith?





Billy Graham: The Last of the Great Revivalists

Without a doubt, Billy Graham has had a huge role in shaping American Christianity. His death on February 21, 2018 signals the passing of an era. American revivalism was a movement of spiritual awakening that began in the 1700s with Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. It carried on with celebrity preachers like Billy Sunday and Dwight Moody – but it really reached both its climax and end with Billy Graham.

He was born and raised in a Christian home. His parents were members of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. His wife Ruth was also a Presbyterian. He dates his conversion to 1934, when he was sixteen years old. Billy Graham says his conversion happened during an evangelistic campaign. Before he became a full-time evangelist, he served as a pastor of two churches and was also the president of a Bible College. By this time, he was a member of the Southern Baptist Church. Many Southern Baptists are monergistic in their doctrine of salvation, but sadly, Billy Graham is not.

Let's be up front with this fact: Billy Graham was an Arminian. The "Statement of Faith" of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association signals this clearly when it says: "Repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ results in regeneration by the Holy Spirit." Rather than regeneration resulting in faith (the biblical view found in Reformed theology), the BGEA says faith results in regeneration. First you believe (using your free will) and then you are born again. Regeneration follows faith, rather than preceding it. That's Arminianism and it was also evident in Graham's 1977 book, *How to be Born Again*. Ever since that book was published, Reformed critics have pointed out that you can't lay out steps for people to follow to be born again – regeneration is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit who works this, as the Canons of Dort say, "In us without us" (III/IV, Art. 12). Telling someone how to be born again is just as absurd as telling a baby in the womb how to be born.

Graham began doing evangelistic work in about 1944. The first few years were spent in obscurity in the United States and England. But this changed dramatically in 1949. It happened in Los Angeles, where Graham was doing a series of revival meetings. William Randolph Hearst was the head of an American newspaper chain. Somehow word about Graham reached him. He liked what he heard. Graham was patriotic and young people were attracted to him. Hearst was also an American patriot, and because this was the time of the Cold War, he was deeply concerned about the communist threat from the Soviet Union. He saw Graham as a figure who would encourage and support American values. Graham could be helpful in shielding America from the Soviet Union's plans to dominate the world. Hearst sent a two-word telegram to all his newspapers to "puff Graham." And they did. Newspapers all over the United States were covering Graham's crusade in Los Angeles. He soon appeared on the cover of leading American news magazines. His crusade in Los Angeles was planned for three weeks, but because of the news coverage, Graham extended it to eight. And this is where the story of Billy Graham's celebrity status begins.

In 1950, he started the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. The Association started organizing crusades around the world. It also started a radio broadcast called "The Hour of Decision," and eventually that led to his appearance on television as well. When I was a boy, I can remember watching the Billy Graham crusades on television sometimes. I grew up in a church of Dutch immigrants and I wasn't used to hearing a preacher without a Dutch accent. He preached clearly. He often had a Bible in his hand, and he seemed to be preaching about what the Bible says. Billy Graham was a skilled communicator. He was simply a preacher, a man who preached with sincerity and seriousness.

Over the years, Graham did over 400 crusades in 185 countries. His largest event ever was in Seoul, South

Korea in 1986, where one million people attended a single crusade evening. His last crusade was in 2005. Through television and radio, he has preached to *millions* of people. Consider this fact: more people have heard Billy Graham preach than any other single preacher in the history of the world. That's amazing.

So what were some of the features of Billy Graham's revival ministry? He preached for individual decisions for Christ. Following in the footsteps of revivalists before him, public relations campaigns were crucial. So was getting the sponsorship of local churches. Graham also made efforts to involve churches by having them send volunteers for his crusades. They would work as counsellors and in other capacities. Local churches would also be involved with follow-up. Billy Graham wanted to make sure that the people who made decisions would be contacted by local churches soon afterwards. Graham even said this was the most important aspect of his work.

This became controversial in the late 1950s because of who he was working with. He worked with evangelical churches, but he also worked with the large mainline churches that were friendly to liberal theology. Converts from his crusades would be directed to become members of these liberal gospel-denying churches. That caused many fundamentalist Christians to become angry with Graham.

Eventually Billy Graham even came to cooperate with Roman Catholic Churches. If someone would come to a crusade and make a decision and identify as a Roman Catholic, then they would be directed back to the Roman Catholic Church for spiritual care. Billy Graham was surprisingly open to Roman Catholicism. At one point he said, "I have no quarrel with the Catholic Church." In another place, he said, "I feel I belong to all the churches. I am equally at home in an Anglican or Baptist or a Brethren assembly



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CHURCH NEWS

or a Roman Catholic Church." He was invited to worship alongside Pope John Paul II at a service in South Carolina in 1987, and he would have if not for an unexpected invitation to China.¹ Doctrinal differences were minimized and became irrelevant.

Carrying on the tradition of previous revivalists like Dwight Moody, another important feature of the Billy Graham crusades was the music. Especially at the "moment of decision," it was important to have the right music played and sung by skilled musicians. Billy Graham had a long-standing relationship with George Beverly Shea. Shea began working with Graham in 1947. Shea would sing a solo before Graham gave his message. That was to prepare the crowd to receive his words. After the message, however, Shea turned the singing over to the choir. They would sing the well-known hymn "Just As I Am" and people would be invited to come forward and make their decision. The music set the mood.

Billy Graham retired from active ministry in 2006. Since then, there hasn't really been anyone to replace him in American revivalistic evangelism. His son Franklin has done some crusades, but he's not as popular as his father was. The phenomenon of revivalism appears to have run its course. Revivals as big events with preaching and music can hardly compete with television, movies, and the Internet. With Graham's death, the era of American revivalism definitely seems to have drawn to a close.

¹ All of this from Iain Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided*, 68-69.

This article originally appeared on Dr. Bredenhof's blog, www.yinkahdinay.wordpress.com, and is printed here with permission.





Is Xi the new Lord and Saviour of China?

The oppression of Christians in China takes many forms. Now poor Christian villagers are urged to “replace religious artefacts in their homes with posters of the Communist Party leader if they want to benefit from poverty-relief efforts.” Thus Nectar Gan reported in *South China Morning Post*, an English language Hong Kong based paper.

She wrote that “thousands of Christians in an impoverished county in rural southeast China have swapped their posters of Jesus for portraits of President Xi Jinping as part of a local government poverty relief programme that seeks to ‘transform believers in religion into believers in the party.’” The county in question is Yugan in Jianagxi province known both for its poverty as well as the large number of Christians. According to official data “more than 11 per cent of its 1 million residents live below the country’s official poverty line, while nearly 10 per cent of its population is Christian.”

As efforts are made to alleviate poverty, “many believers have been told to take down the images of Jesus, the crosses and the gospel couplets that form the centrepieces of their homes, and hang portraits of Xi instead – a practice that harkens back to the era of the personality cult around late chairman Mao Zedong, whose portraits were once ubiquitous in Chinese homes.” The pressure exerted on these poor Christians seems to be paying off for the government at least in some cases. One report indicated that “more than 600 villagers ‘voluntarily’ got rid of the religious texts and paintings they had in their homes, and replaced them with 453 portraits of Xi.” In another area, more than 1,000 portraits of Xi had been distributed and all had been hung in homes. Elsewhere believers with gospel couplets or paintings of the cross on their front doors have had them forcibly torn down. The believers “didn’t want to take them down. But there is no way out. If they don’t agree to do so, they won’t be given their quota from the poverty relief fund.” Officials insist that Christians “still have the free-

dom to believe in religion, but in their minds they should [also] trust our party.” To that end, crosses are also being removed from churches in this area of China, following the pattern of cross removals elsewhere.

The attempt to replace trust in the gospel with trust in the Communist Party was blatantly expressed by one official’s comments as reported by Gan. “Many rural people are ignorant. They think God is their saviour. . . . After our cadres’ work, they’ll realise their mistakes and think: we should no longer rely on Jesus, but on the party for help.” Another report stated: the officials successfully ‘melted the hard ice in their [Christian] hearts’ and ‘transformed them from believing in religion to believing in the party.’”

In some respects, Christians in China are in a position similar to that of Christians almost two millennia ago. The Roman Empire got nervous when Christians affirmed “Jesus is Lord!” He is the highest authority and is to be worshipped and not the emperor. Today, the Chinese Communist Party challenges that confession by insisting that *the* authority to be obeyed is Xi Jinping, the President of China.

China fears the growing number of Christians. But there is relatively little they can do. According to a *Reformatorsch Dagblad* article, Fenggang Yang, an expert on the situation of Chinese Christians, does not think there will be a return to the open persecution of the days of Mao Zedong. It did not help and the number of Christians has continued to grow. He predicted that by 2030 China will have more Christians than America.

The Son of God continues to gather his people in China. He cannot be stopped. He is Lord!

Sources used: Nectar Gan, “Want to Escape Poverty? Replace Pictures of Jesus with Xi Jinping” (Nov 14, 2017) on the website of *South China Morning Post*; Mark Wallet, “Christendom China niet meer te stuiten” *Reformatorsch Dagblad* November 15, 2017. C



Strategic Planning at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

Historical background

One of the benefits of seeking and receiving accreditation from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) is that CRTS is spending more time on self-evaluation and planning. The primary purpose of the Seminary is to train students to serve as faithful, effective ministers of the gospel. A secondary purpose is to produce scholarly and popular resources which will serve God's people throughout the world. It is with this purpose in mind that the CRTS initiated ongoing strategic planning.

Strategic planning is something familiar to the business world. Initially, at the CRTS, we wondered whether this business model of strategic planning really fit with a Seminary that is all about spiritual and theological training. Perhaps the members of our supporting churches have wondered about that as well. However, once the Seminary started with its first strategic planning exercise, it quickly became clear what a blessing this would be to fulfill our purpose as a Seminary. Our heavenly Father has presented us with something that would be a real blessing to the development of the Seminary.

On September 4, 2014 the CRTS had its first strategic planning exercise. The intent was, during a day of brainstorming, to develop a One Page Strategic Plan that would be visible for all to see, supported by data and actions plan. We looked at things like "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats" (SWOT), the purpose and core values of CRTS, and what might be our long-range goal for our seminary. From this we developed five 3-5 Year Priorities that we called "Key Thrusts/Capabilities," and eight Annual Priorities that we called "Key Initiatives." These various thrusts and priorities were assigned to individual professors, board members, and CRTS staff. For example, one of the Key Thrusts was assigned to Dr. T. G. VanRaalte to "Investigate 2nd year preaching consent and other internship opportunities for students and have recommendations on

how to implement." One of the Key Initiatives was assigned to Dr. A. J. deVisser to "Determine best program beyond M. Div." All of this was published on one page and became known as the One Page Strategic Plan. This is a public document that helps all shareholders to remain accountable and to close the loop on what we had decided to do.

That was a little over three years ago. All reports on the Key Thrusts and Initiatives were submitted to the Board of Governors and acted upon. For instance, in the most recent CRTS Board Press Release of January 11, 2018 we read that "Dr. T. Van Raalte submitted a finalized proposal. . . regarding the possibility of 2nd year students to receive preaching consent. . . . The Board adopted it and directed Dr. T. Van Raalte to submit this proposal to a church so that it can be dealt with following the ecclesiastical route: local church to classis to Regional Synod to General Synod." From this we see that our strategic planning has culminated in the distinct possibility that after Synod 2019 students at our seminary may seek preaching consent after their second year at the seminary. Clearly the strategic planning at CRTS has brought focus and direction to the seminary.

Second strategic planning day

On September 6, 2017 the CRTS had its second strategic planning day. Present were the Board members, senate, staff, and a student of CRTS, as well as a few ministers from the neighbouring community. Our facilitator was Kevin Hutchinson who capably led us through the day's agenda. We reviewed what had been accomplished in the past three years and we started looking ahead. We took a good look at our One Page Strategic Plan from 2014, refreshed some things, and developed new Key Thrusts and Initiatives. This One Page Strategic Plan was approved by the Board of Governors at its January 11, 2018 meeting. Let me share some parts of the One Page Strategic Plan 2017.

Purpose

The primary purpose of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) is to train students to serve as faithful, effective ministers of the Gospel. A secondary purpose is to produce scholarly and popular resources which will serve God's people throughout the world.

Basis

CRTS submits to the doctrine of the infallible Word of God as summarized in the ecumenical creeds and the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.

Core Values

- Serving our supporting churches
- Pursuing academic excellence
- Cultivating pastoral effectiveness
- Promoting the Reformed heritage far and wide
- Growing in godliness
- Showing the fruit of the Holy Spirit in all conduct and communication
- Exercising good stewardship

Key Thrusts and Initiatives

Starting in September 2017 we have one Key Initiative: Further develop Spiritual Formation Program with a focus

on prayer development. This is assigned to Dr. T. Van Raalte (Dean of Students).

We have six Key Thrusts; here is a sampling:

KT-1 Distance Education

KT-2 Encouraging Enrollment

KT-3 Explore ways to expand the PTP

KT-4 Study ways that CRTS can improve training for mission/church planting

The six Key Thrusts were assigned in such a way as to involve Board members, professors, seminary staff, and a student of the Seminary. The task of the chairman of the Board is to contact the members of the committees to explain to them their job description. He will also maintain contact to make sure goals are being met.

Conclusion

Strategic planning at CRTS is keeping the professors, staff, Board members, and also students quite busy. But the benefits are obvious. Our long-range goal is "To be one of the most faithful, effective institutions worldwide for the training for the ministry of the gospel." We know that all our planning and efforts require the blessing of our faithful God. Strategic planning at CRTS confesses that we will do this or that if it is the Lord's will.





Anyone Can Lead

Leadership gap

In my line of work, I have the luxury of participating in much discussion about what is shaping the learning of our students currently and what will powerfully influence them in their future. Fellow principals, teaching colleagues, elders, ministers, and parents seem to talk about a gap that continues to be growing in our schools and churches. Schools are experiencing a shortage of teachers; congregations are having a hard time creating a list of names that can stand for the positions of elder and deacon. Also alarming is the fact that as our churches continue to grow in number, there will be more vacancies in our federation, due to the shortage of men who have the desire to pursue the ministry as a profession. A recent *Clarion* issue (October 6, 2017) also highlighted this concern. Mention was made in Dr. Van Raalte's article entitled "Send Us Wood!" that if the seminary student numbers, the retirement of pastors, and new openings continue to follow the same trajectory as the last decade there will be staggering fifty-five vacancies in the URCNA and CanRC federations in the near future. There seems to be a growing number of leadership opportunities in both our schools and churches, yet there seems to be fewer leaders who are willing to step up and fill these openings. We see a leadership gap expanding.

What is causing this leadership gap? What can we do to encourage our children and students to become leaders? Why is this gap increasing? I don't have answers to these questions, but I have a proverb that sheds much light on the solution. I would argue that we have to start early, remembering the old proverb: "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it" (22:6). So at Covenant Christian School (London, Ontario) we have begun the process of shaping the leaders of

**What is
causing this
leadership gap?**

the future. We have done this by creating a culture in which leadership thrives at the grade 7 and 8 level.

How have we gone about creating this culture? We have done this by embracing the philosophy that leadership is not innate; instead, we believe that leadership is something that is learned and needs to be taught. This belief leads us to being intentional about the teaching of leadership skills. We began to do that by empowering and mandating all students at the grade 7 and 8 level to become leaders in their school community.

In your respective school communities, you have a valuable resource of leadership whose potential in many cases has not been tapped – students in the upper grades. Many students have wonderful ideas, have great enthusiasm, and want their voices to be heard. So why not find a way to harness this resource and share it with your school, local, and global communities? Why not challenge them to lead? I am a firm believer that these students, when guided and challenged, can show courage, lead with humility, shape consensus, and bring the school community together. This may seem like a daunting task, but I will illustrate how we have gone about challenging these students to lead. I will also shed some light on how the leadership program functions at Covenant Christian School in London, Ontario.

Leadership program

It is always wise to highlight the context of the origin of a program before describing its functionality. During my first year as principal, I attended the National Principal's Conference in Sumas, Washington. It was at this conference that the keynote speaker really challenged us as principals to think of ways in which we can challenge our school communities to be more missional-focussed on sharing our light with the world. It was also during this convention that I had many a conversation with some principals about the SALT team model that they were using at their schools.

I thought that if it could work well at the high school level, it could work at the elementary level. And so that

is how the leadership teams were spawned at our school. It was one way in which our students could be challenged more to think about their community and to share their salt and light with it.

This program is radically different from the standard Student Council Program. That program of course had its successes but also its pitfalls. The biggest pitfall to that program was that those on the council were often elected as a result of popularity. At our school all students are on a leadership team, which removes the popularity component. This also adheres to the philosophy that all students can lead; they just need to be trained to do so. Every single student in our grade 7 and 8 classroom at our school will be challenged to lead and, as a result, will be stretched to think less about the individual and more about their community.

Since initiating this program some five years ago, we typically spend the month of September talking about this program with the students, hyping it up, and getting them excited about being on these leadership teams. By October the students are chomping at the bit and are eagerly awaiting their opportunity to sign up for their leadership team. We create a culture that looks forward to making a powerful impact in their school community. So how do we decide what student to place on what team?

The application process works as follows. The students are given a worksheet that gives them a brief description

of the teams. After this, we discuss with the class and give the students class time to prioritize their top three choices. Grade 8 students are not permitted to choose the same team that they were on in grade 7. Once the students have filled in their applications, the grade 7 and 8 teacher and I go over the applications and decide which student is on which team. Each child is put on one of their three choices. We take into consideration which grade 8 students were together while in grade 7. Once this is done, an announcement is made in the class to the students, which is usually received with exuberant cheers.

The final crucial ingredient for success is having one or two teachers facilitate each leadership team. So, having these teams does involve a certain level of commitment from both students and teachers. What typically happens is that the leadership teams meet during a regular time slot each week. During this time, the team discusses ideas, sets goals, and makes plans to implement the goals and ideas. During our monthly staff meeting, each teacher has an opportunity to discuss what each team is working on. It is also an avenue to seek approval for bigger ideas.

Leadership is something that is learned and needs to be taught



Outcomes

It is wonderful to sit down and reflect upon the outcomes and productivity of these groups after having run them for some six years or so. Over the course of these years of implementation, the students have been busy with a host of different ideas. These include the following:

Sports Team

1. A variety of intramurals for grades 5-8; hand-baseball, mini-stick hockey on scooters, soccer, basketball, hockey
2. Organized, structured playtime with the students in K-4

Spirit Team

1. Organize and create special theme days; Western Day, Colour Day, Water Afternoon, Crazy/Clash day, Career Day
2. Spirit Workshops

Talent Team

1. Talent Assembly/ CCS Has Talent 2016
2. Sharing Talents with the seniors next door
3. School Logo Contest
4. Putting on skits

Mixed Media Team

1. School Newspaper
2. School Movie
3. Yearbook
4. Pictorial Timeline of the History of the School (40 Year Anniversary)

Mission / Outreach Team

1. Prayer Cards
2. Raise awareness for our sponsored child
3. Food Drive
4. "Bookcandy" Fundraiser and "Spelling Bee" Fundraiser for CRWRF

At the end of the year, the staff spends some time reflecting upon how the leadership teams went that year. We then make recommendations for fine tuning and improvement. Over the course of the six years we have made changes that have led to further success amongst the teams. Some of the leadership teams have delegated two teachers instead of one to help with the decision-making. We have made the decision that every teacher will choose to be a member of a new leadership team, so that they too are stretching their

leadership skills. We have also rebranded some of the team names to make them more appealing to the students.

Conclusion

I have entered my sixteenth year of teaching. Before I began this illustrious career, I spent much time pondering my life, and I looked at a number of people who had a powerful influence on my life; what came to mind were some wonderful teachers who filled a void for me and showed me what true leadership looks like. They had a genuine interest in their students, demanded respect, and pushed their students to be gritty and persevere. As I reflected on their impact, I felt the Lord leading me to a life of leadership.

It is crucial that we as a Reformed community start long-term planning to address the leadership gap that exists currently in our school and church communities. At Covenant Christian School we have begun to do that by creating a program in which leadership is fostered amongst the youth in our grade 7 and 8 classroom. The ultimate goal is that these students continue to develop their leadership skills over the duration of their secondary and post-secondary years so that they will be able and willing to embrace the role of leadership as adults in our Reformed community. Our schools, homes, and churches must own this problem and think about ways in which we can shrink the leadership gap that exists. The question that we need to ask ourselves is the following: how can the triangle of home, church, and school prepare future leaders among our covenant youth?

C



Clarion Kids

Love Your Enemies

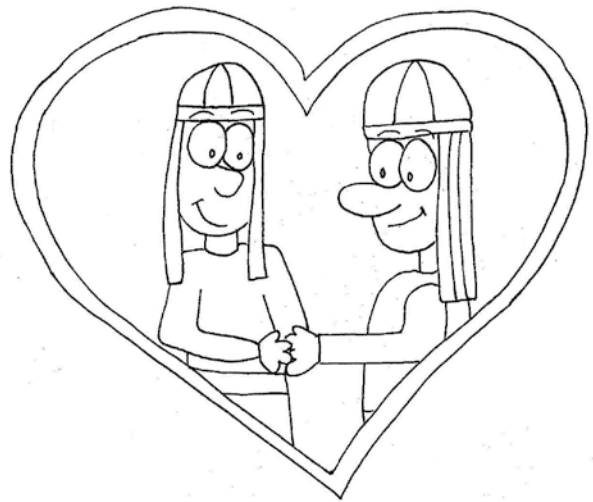
Matthew 5:38-48

It's very easy to love people who are nice to us, but did you know that God wants us to love people who are mean, too? That can be a very hard thing to do, but God has told us that it is important. We are told to pray for people who hurt us, and ask that God will work in their hearts.

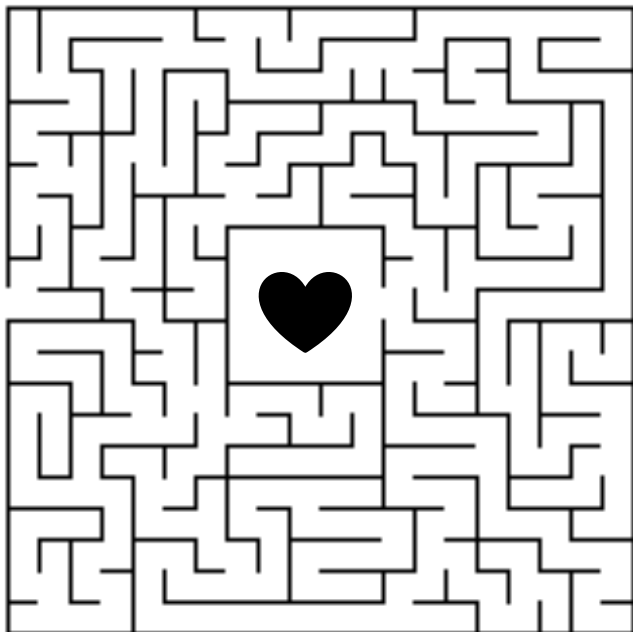
"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."

Matt. 5:43-45

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



Maze: Loving our enemies is hard!
Follow the maze to get to the heart!



Word Search

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

Easy
Heart
Nice

Enemies
Jesus
Persecute

Hard
Love
Pray

by Emily Nijenhuis

Easter: He is risen!

“But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come see the place where he lay’” (Matt 28:5-6).

On April 1 we are able to celebrate Easter, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ! We can be so thankful for this gift that has been given to us. Our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead to be with his Heavenly Father. He has fully conquered sin and Satan so that we can be saved. Let us show our thankfulness to him every day of our lives. Let us proclaim and confess his name to all of those around us, having the joy of Christ in our hearts!

Some days may be hard days. Some days you think you may not be able to get out of bed; but let us remember every day that we have so much to live for! Life may not always be easy, but we have a Father in heaven who is in control. From the beginning he has taken care of us, he sacrificed his only son for us! Pray that the Holy Spirit may guide your life that you may fully serve him and proclaim his glorious name!

“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” (Rom 10:8-10).

April Birthdays

- 2 Derek Kok will be 48**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8
- 23 Arlene DeWit will be 57**
31126 Kingfisher Drive
Abbotsford, BC V2T 5K4
- 29 Bryce Berends will be 43**
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line, RR #3
Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

Congratulations to all of you celebrating a birthday in April! May you have a wonderful day celebrating with family and friends. We wish you the Lord's blessing in the year to come in all of your specific tasks and roles at home, work, and church.



A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

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

Rachel Vis

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



PRESS RELEASE

Press Release: Classis Ontario West, January 10, 2018

On behalf of the convening church, the Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Kerwood, Rev. R. Vermeulen began with the reading of Romans 5:1-5 and having the brothers sing Hymn 61:1, 2. He opened in prayer, remembering the needs within the classical region and the federation. After the examination of the credentials, Classis was declared constituted. It was noted that Rev. J. Poort was not present because of an urgent pastoral need in his congregation; he was properly replaced by an alternate delegate.

The brother suggested as chairman by the previous Classis, Rev. D. De Boer, had accepted a call and was no longer available to serve as chairman. Rev. R. Vermeulen volunteered to be chairman and this was acceptable to the body. The officers took their place: Rev. R. Vermeulen as chairman, Rev. K.A. Kok as vice-chairman, and Rev. J. Louwerse as clerk.

The chairman asked the questions set out in Article 44 of the Church Order. The church at Chatham requested that Rev. J. Poort be appointed as counselor (Art. 45 C.O.) and Classis agreed. The church at London requested that Dr. G.

H. Visscher be appointed as counselor (Art. 45 C.O.) and Classis agreed. The church at London also requested and was granted monthly pulpit supply through September 2018.

A proposal from the church at Glanbrook to invite the Classis Southwestern Ontario (URCNA) to hold concurrent classes in September 2018 was tabled. This proposal was adopted and the clerk will send a letter to the stated clerk of the Classis Southwestern Ontario (URCNA) with the invitation.

A letter from Blessings Christian Church of Hamilton, Ontario was received for information.

The convening church for the next classis will be London. The suggested date is March 21, 2018. The suggested officers are: Rev. K.A. Kok (chairman), Rev. J. Louwerse (vice chairman), and Rev. J. E. Ludwig (clerk).

The personal question period is made use of. The chairman determined that nothing censurable was said or done in the meeting; he thanked the brothers for their cooperation. The Acts were read and adopted. The Press Release was read and approved.

Rev. J. Louwerse closed Classis in prayer.

*For Classis Ontario West, January 10, 2018,
Rev. K.A. Kok, Vice Chairman (e.t.)*

Press Release of the Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary held on January 11, 2018

Opening and roll call

The chairman, Rev. R. Aasman, led in opening devotions. All governors were present with the exception of Rev. J. Slaa, who was absent with notice. Both Dr. J. Van Vliet as Principal, and Dr. A. de Visser as acting Principal, were present since Dr. J. Van Vliet is going to be on full sabbatical this coming semester. Sr. Leanne Kuizenga was present as requested to take the minutes of the meeting.

Memorabilia

Information was shared about the personal circumstances of emeriti professors, as well as widows and families of professors. Concerns and reasons for thankfulness were brought before the Lord in prayer.

Minutes and agenda

The minutes of the meeting held on September 7, 2017 were approved. The agenda for the meeting was established.

Decisions, reports, agenda items

1. In September 2017 the Board took the following decision: to appoint an ad hoc committee to study how

CRTS could use the possibilities and potential of technology within the context of distance education with a primary focus on serving our supporting churches, as well as their mission works, in the best possible way without sacrificing the integrity and quality of training for the ministry. This committee, with representatives from Australia and South Africa, had its first meeting via Zoom on Dec. 6. Its proposal of a more detailed mandate was accepted by the Board which covers six basic areas to be further investigated: primary focus – the needs of the churches, secondary focus – the needs of mission work, accreditation, pedagogy, technology, integrity, and quality of program.

2. Dr. G.H. Visscher informed the Board that it is his intention and desire to retire from the ministry and from fulltime service at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary as of the summer of 2020. The Board accepted Dr. G.H. Visscher's request for retirement with thanksgiving for all the years he has served at the seminary. The Board discussed the process of appointing a new professor of NT studies. A search committee was appointed for that purpose.
3. The One-Page Strategic Plan of 2017 was approved and a discussion was held on exploring ways to make this Strategic Plan known to the churches.
4. Another Satisfaction Survey will be administered to the churches.
5. The Board accepted the recommendation of the Academic Committee (AC) and approved the trial implementation in Semester 2 of a proposal to further the spiritual formation program with a focus on prayer development.
6. Dr. T. Van Raalte submitted a finalized proposal, via the AC, regarding the possibility of 2nd-year students to receive preaching consent. This was a key thrust that arose out of a strategic planning meeting in 2014. The Board adopted it and directed Dr. T. Van Raalte to submit this proposal to a church so that it can be dealt with following the ecclesiastical route: local church to classis to regional synod to general synod. The concluding recommendation is that General Synod mandate the Committee for Pastoral Training Program Funding (administered by Guelph-Emmanuel) "to continue with its present man-

date by funding one full-summer internship for each M.Div. student of CRTS who aspires to ministry in the CanRCs, whether the internship occurs after the second or third year of a student's studies at CRTS."

7. Revs. J. Ludwig and R. Aasman reported on visits they had with the three staff members.
8. The Board adopted a recommendation by the Finance and Property Committee to appoint "DBK Accounting" as auditors.
9. A report on lecture visits to CRTS on Nov. 9-10, 2017, and reports on the attendance of faculty members at various conferences were received with thankfulness.
10. The Board approved a "Memorandum of Agreement" drawn up by the Foreign Student Bursary Fund Committee of CRTS and Deputies Curators of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA) regarding financial support for theological students of the FRCSA who plan to come to CRTS for their training for the ministry. The Board agreed that the Foreign Student Bursary Committee has the authorization to make changes to the Memorandum as needed and to accept students from South Africa should any apply for funding.


New business

1. 50th Anniversary of CRTS. The Senate is working on a commemorative volume edited by Dr. C. Van Dam and Dr. J. Van Vliet. They hope to have it available for Convocation 2019. The Board appointed a committee to find other ways to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of CRTS.
2. The date of the next Board Meeting was set for September 6, 2018 at 1:00 pm.

Press release and closing

The completion of the Press Release was delegated to the vice-chairman in consultation with the Executive and the Principal. Peter Vandersluis closed the meeting with prayer.

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary,

Rev. J. Ludwig,
Vice-chairman/Corresponding Clerk 

Passing the Bag

The editorial (*Clarion*, Vol.67, No. 4) about church collections was read with anticipation, for I had observed similar behaviour in our church services. The Rev. James Visscher, however, mainly deals with the “problem” from a money management point of view, stressing five key principles that show how man must return to God what is his. Regrettably only towards the end does he show the liturgical aspect of collections in church services.

In our congregation, the bag is apparently passed for several reasons, such as being ill prepared for church (no change, no wallet on me) or an attitude of indifference. Most explained that they were giving a large amount off and on, for a tax receipt. However, as also the editorial notes, “it is an important and integral part” of our liturgy.

An apparent tendency to refer to the assembly of God’s people as “worship” is increasingly eroding the concept of a Reformed worship service. It seems that the weekly gathering, as elsewhere, becomes just worship or “praise and worship.” But it is much more than that. It is service, a fellowship interchange, a church service. We are privileged to

meet the LORD every week as his chosen people. Weekly we are reminded to live by his Ten Words of the covenant. We hear the proclamation of his holy Word and for this ministry we offer him our triple thank offerings in prayer, songs, and monetary gifts.

Church collections are not to be used as just a means to raise money. No, it is an offering to God, a liturgical act and not an opportunity to chat. The OT Israel knew the freewill or burnt offerings which were not required by law. The NT church practices the same. Therefore, passing the bag for any reason is simply *not participating*, similar to not singing along, or instead of praying along, planning tomorrows schedule. Attitudes of indifference are insulting our Creator and Redeemer. With the benediction and the blessings of the LORD that follow our thanksgivings in a church service, we can again face our weekly problems, challenges, and tasks in comfort and confidence. So let’s not fail to join in and participate.

Dennis Teitsma

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*

