

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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A photograph of a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a checkered shirt, sitting in a red armchair and reading a dark blue book. He is in a library or study, with tall wooden bookshelves filled with books in the background. A laptop is open on a wooden table in the foreground, and some papers are scattered on it.

What is a sabbatical?

BLESSINGS AND THE MISSIONAL CHURCH
BANNING THE BURQA

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Issue 19 begins with Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer's "Sabbatical Blessing." He takes a look at the ways in which a minister and his congregation may benefit from such a rest.

Rev. Bill DeJong has written an article from which I quote: "Two of my senior colleagues, whose counsel I value, have encouraged me to use the pages of *Clarion* to provide an apologia (a defense, however modest) for some of Blessings' initiatives, in the hopes of generating discussion and possible understanding." There is also an interaction with this article from Dr. James Visscher.

On these pages you will also find our Treasures, New & Old meditation, Clippings on Politics & Religion, You Asked, *Clarion Kids*, Ray of Sunshine and a DVD review.

Laura Veenendaal

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Sabbatical Blessing

Burnout is a real phenomenon among pastors

Sabbath rest

Many times in conversation with busy people (and who isn't busy?) I've heard the comment: "I am so thankful for Sundays. If God hadn't commanded a day of rest, I'd probably work seven days a week!" There is a sense of relief in a remark like that. Many of us, it seems, work to the edges, pushing out the margins of our days, and so the weekly sabbath rest is a welcome refresher, both physically and spiritually.

But what about your minister? Does he receive (and take!) one full day off each week to physically rest from his labours? He has to work Sundays, of course, and in itself that is a pleasure and an honour for him. But make no mistake, preaching and pastoring on the Lord's Day takes energy, a great deal of it, so much so that by the end of Sunday he is pretty tired. Some will say: wiped out. But for him to take a full day off at some other point in the week will take an act of will and discipline, since it will be out of the public eye. Is your consistory encouraging this and insisting upon it? The pressure is always on to keep working, and ministers easily feel guilty for "not doing enough" – and so they can rob themselves of a day of rest.

Do you as congregation member know which day is his weekly sabbath and do you make an effort to let him rest on those days? He too needs that weekly recharger. Burnout is a real phenomenon among pastors and the first line of defense against it is regular periods of rest: nightly rest, weekly rest, annual rest (vacations), and also once every so many years a longer rest or what we call a *sabbatical*.

What's a sabbatical?

Although we do hear this term more in our circles, it's not yet widely understood. The root word indeed comes from the familiar "sabbath," which means rest. On top of the weekly sabbath day, the Israelites were commanded to have a sabbath year once every seven years (Lev 25), and that seems to be the root concept behind "sabbatical." Nowadays it refers to a period of some months (typically three to six months) off of a person's regular duties, but yet it's not a vacation. On a vacation anything goes: have an adventure, sit around, or entertain yourself with no one to account for how you spend your time. A sabbatical is rest from a person's regular work in order to do other work related to his field which would at the same time be refreshing to him. The employer offers this sabbatical and expects that it will be used for the agreed-upon purpose.

For example, a professor might take a sabbatical from his teaching load in order to do research in his field, possibly to publish his findings in a book. A teacher might receive a sabbatical in order to teach at another school altogether for a semester (same courses, different environment). A doctor could use a sabbatical to leave his practice for six months in order to do medical work in a very poor area of the world. The point is that the person is still active, doing something related to his line of work. This period away from the pressures of their regular duties gives them time to reflect and refocus on their main labour. When they come back, they feel invigorated by the change and the break and are renewed for a longer stretch of their primary work.

Pastoral sabbatical

This is the kind of vocational rest that I think would be excellent for our ministers once every seven years. There are different ways of doing it, and each pastor and his consistory can chart their own course according to the pastor's needs, interests, and the available opportunities. The main principle will be to ensure allowance for ample physical rest alongside of a constructive use of the time. For example, the minister could use the opportunity to read more widely and deeply than a minister usually has time for, and/or to take a course related to some aspect of his work

*Sitting in the pew
weekly made
me appreciate
the way my
congregants
experience pulpit
ministry and the
worship service*

like preaching, counseling, or exegesis. Self-reflection and thinking about the work of ministry with the help of a Christian counsellor or by attending a Christian conference on those topics might also be very helpful.

Another approach could be to find an opportunity to physically be away from the pastor's home church to preach in another church far away, for a total change

of pace (and without the pressure of pastoring a flock). If the minister enjoys researching and writing (for publication, something there is little time for normally) then the sabbatical could be used for that. Whatever avenue is chosen, with prayerful reliance on the Lord and care to use the time for the intended purpose, the minister should come back with renewed energy and focus, and a zeal to love and serve God's people again.

Lighten the load

I recently enjoyed a sabbatical for the first time and found it both restful and revitalizing. For pastors, much of their work is dealing with people, listening to their struggles, and walking alongside them in difficulties. It's beautiful work, but it does wear on you over time. The sense of responsibility for peoples' souls and the desire to help (when often little can be done on a human level) is a burden to

bear. Situations stay on your heart and roll around in your mind for weeks or months on end. Discipline cases or other pastoral challenges only add to the weight of this shepherding work.

To be sure, elders experience these things too. I've heard a number of elders say to me at the end of the term: "I need a break. I'm so glad we only have three-year terms. I don't know how you do it year in and year out!" It wasn't until I went on sabbatical and experienced several consecutive months where all the pastoral work was lifted from my shoulders that I really understood what those elders meant. When elders go out of office, they can leave the weight of that office behind for they know that others are carrying the load. A minister doesn't get that respite unless he's given a sabbatical and to me, that lightening of the pastoral load is one of the sabbatical's main benefits.

Pressure relief

Another huge benefit is to experience relief from the relentless pressures and commitments of the ministry. First, there is the weekly pressure of having to prepare sermons. A sermon needs to be well-researched, thoroughly biblical, and rich in its explanation and application of the gospel. It should be clear and concise as well as engaging. And for most pastors, you have to make two of them. Weekly. That pressure is surely relieved (thankfully!) by a monthly pulpit exchange Sunday and by a vacation, but those are always short-lived. To have four or five months without having to think about sermon preparation was a very refreshing experience! Sundays became a whole new day of rest.

Next to the steady pressure of sermon writing is that of teaching catechism, making pastoral visits, chairing (or attending) consistory meetings, serving at classis, functioning as a church visitor, and more. It was a strange and lovely feeling last September (2017) when I suddenly didn't have to do any of these things – how liberating! All of these are good and mostly enjoyable tasks in themselves, but I have to say that when they were taken away from for a time, it felt very good. Again, I hadn't realized how much these duties weighed on me until they were set to the side. When I came back to them four months later, I was looking forward to resuming them all.

Family benefits

I should also stress that giving your pastor a number of months of sabbatical is equally refreshing for his family.

CALL EXTENDED

Called by the Canadian Reformed Church in Cloverdale, BC:

Rev. R.J. den Hollander

of the Covenant Canadian Reformed Church in Grassie, Ontario.

CALL DECLINED

Declined the called extended to him by the Eben-Ezer Canadian Reformed Church in Chatham, ON:

Rev. B. Schoof

from the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church in Surrey, BC.

CHURCH NEWS

A minister is often gone in the evenings. It takes nothing for me to be out three or four nights every week for pastoral work (teaching, visiting, or a meeting) and I think most ministers experience the same. It is relentless. But suddenly from September through December I was home *every night!* My family had to get used to this “stranger” being around so much! Not only was this physically very restful for me, but my wife and children enjoyed having a husband and father home nightly *without distraction*. I was free to spend time with them, even if it was simply hanging out. Not only did I enjoy this immensely, but, as a family, we felt more relaxed and free. For once Dad was not under the gun to be somewhere or to finish something or to have someone in for a visit.

As an aside, that’s one reason I would advocate for sabbaticals to be held in the fall, winter, or spring rather than in the summer, so that the minister can experience a total relief from the full burden of his ministry. Summer time is already a partial relief from some of the ministry pressures after eight months of intensive weekly work. You can catch your breath a little. It’s also a good time for a vacation with the family. For the pastor and his family to really feel and notice a lengthy breather from his regular duties and have energy to do something “other” for several months, the sabbatical should be held during the season of his regular duties.

Church benefits

All of this isn’t just for the minister’s benefit or even that of his family. If the minister and his family experience a longer concentrated time of recharging the batteries, that can only mean the pastor will be healthier and stronger in body and spirit for his service in the congregation. It’s the difference between doing the work of ministry *merely* out of a sense of duty, sometimes dragging yourself along, and doing it with a spring in your step – which would you prefer for your minister?

The sabbatical period, if it is well-planned, can also be a very refreshing endeavour for the congregation. A variety of guest preachers can be lined up or perhaps a retired minister or two could be brought in to more isolated churches to preach and teach for longer stretches. In Spring Creek church, we had seventeen Sundays in a row with mostly different preachers, and the variety was welcomed. A different catechism instructor with a different style was brought in and that also was stimulating and enjoyable for the students. At the same time, by the end people were ready to have their own pastor back (and he was ready to be back!) and so resuming regular preaching and teaching felt to both parties like a fresh beginning, the second chapter in “our story” as minister and congregation.

Reflections

Having several months off from preaching allowed me to sit in the pew and learn to be a listening congregant again, a worshipper. I certainly learned from my colleagues who came through to preach and that in itself was beneficial. Having other “cooks” serve up the “meal” of the gospel was invigorating and edifying.

But something I wasn’t expecting also occurred: sitting in the pew weekly made me appreciate the way my congregants experience pulpit ministry and the worship service and made me sensitive to their needs. My eyes were opened to the families with wiggly children, to teenagers who need the word at their level, and to seniors who require time to take in what is being said. I felt what it was to fight off sleep and distraction, and that made me more sympathetic to those with such struggles. Sitting there gave me an awareness of how long a Lord’s Supper or baptism service can feel like from a listener’s point of view. Or how the liturgy is experienced week after week and what might be done to keep it fresh and meaningful for the congregation. I also was struck in how reading a consistory press release as a church member comes across when you haven’t sat in the meeting and know the context of the brief report.

In short, I came off my sabbatical with fresh insights and ideas along with new energy and commitment to serve in the congregation. Time for reflection, time (in my case) to write, and the unexpected experiences along the way all contributed to a revitalized pastorate. Who wouldn’t want that blessing for their minister and church?





Deadly Pride

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

(Mark 2:17)

If you've been delaying a visit with your doctor, then one of two things must be true: either you are one healthy specimen, or you are down-playing, perhaps denying, your need to get checked out.

In Mark 2:17, Christ alluded to this dynamic while confronting the Pharisees and one could say simultaneously established his own clinical practice. He makes clear who should come to him for treatment: the spiritually sick, the proud, sinners. That's all-inclusive! Christ was not saying that there are any who are truly well, truly righteous. Those who flatter themselves with such thoughts are already displaying the debilitating symptoms of pride.

The Scriptures give frequent warnings against pride. Consider the example of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:28-37, and if that was not enough, both James and Peter warn us that "God opposes the proud" (James 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5).

Yet pride can be difficult to diagnose. It is not as easy as looking for

someone with a "big head" as the euphemism would suggest. Though pride may sometimes be overtly expressed through the celebration of sinful beliefs and behaviour, it can also conceal itself in feelings of moral superiority, in the conviction of holding to correct doctrine, or in a sense of achievement in academics, athletics, or business. Pride may even cloak itself in the guise of humility.

So how does one detect pride? By looking where acknowledgement of grace is absent. For, where one is conspicuously silent about grace, there pride has taken root. Pride takes credit for what God has done. But the gospel of grace in Christ is the power and remedy to humble even the proudest soul (take Paul for example). For those who know they are sick, even dead, without a righteousness of their own, no news is sweeter to the ears.

Christ is of no help to those who are self-assured and confident in their own righteousness. It was never his

aim to come to this world in order to find a noble army of dignified, decent, put-together people. Those people do not even exist, certainly at the heart-level. Besides, those who thought themselves of such high-esteem esteemed him not. But those who went to him were the sick and marginalized, the distraught and disenfranchised, the weak and wounded; in short: sinners who recognized they were in desperate need of help and a righteousness not their own.

By God's grace the good news for the proud is that the confession of pride signals the beginning of the end of pride. Recognizing and acknowledging pride is an indication that the war is already being waged. And pride is ultimately uprooted when the gospel humbles us to our knees, so that we see ourselves clearly, correctly identify our sickness, and embrace by faith the gracious cure that is found only in Christ who died, the righteous for the unrighteous, to reconcile us to God.

For further study

1. If pride is found where acknowledgment of grace is absent, where might pride be manifesting symptoms in your life?
2. Is a sense of pride ever justifiable in the life of a Christian?
3. How do Christ's words have implications for outreach?





The Challenges of Being Reformed and Missional

There's a healthy trend observable in Reformed churches across North America. Increasingly, church pastors and leaders are becoming convicted by the calling of Christ to reach their communities with the gospel. What might be dubbed "the missional turn," within Reformed churches at least, has been spawned in large part by the fruitful ministry of Tim Keller, the long-time pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.¹

For years Reformed churches have attempted outreach, and some have enjoyed modest success. What distinguishes the new movement is a particular missional ecclesiology (i.e., the doctrine of the church) in which every component of church life is recalibrated with missional intentions. Worship services, Bible study groups, church education classes, etc. all envision the unchurched in attendance.

Several Canadian Reformed churches are captivated by this movement, including Blessings Christian Church (hereafter, Blessings), where I serve as one of the pastors. Much to my chagrin, however, Blessings has become for some in the federation a controversial church. The concern, so far as I can tell, is not that Blessings is acting contrary to the gospel or compromising doctrine or engaging in something sinful. Its shortcoming, for some at least, is a perceived failure to comply with the church order. Interestingly, some who have accused Blessings of church order infractions have also praised the church for its worship atmosphere, sound preaching, and intentional outreach.

Though subordinate to Scripture, the church order is an important document, and though it doesn't function for the existence (*esse*) of the church, it does serve its well-being (*bene esse*). In recognition of the apostle Paul's exhortation that everything in the church "should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor 14:40), the church order functions to ensure "good order in the church of Christ" (Art. 1).

Two of my senior colleagues, whose counsel I value, have encouraged me to use the pages of *Clarion* to provide an apo-

logia (a defense, however modest) for some of Blessings' initiatives, in the hopes of generating discussion and possible understanding. From the side of Blessings, we are always interested in feedback and certainly open to correction.

A Baptist pastor at a Reformed pulpit?

Where is Blessings faulted for allegedly violating the church order? The most notorious example would be the decision of Blessings to invite a Baptist pastor to preach in a worship service. This decision has occasioned a series of questions including, why would Blessings invite a Baptist pastor to preach? Given that Blessings already had two pastors, why invite one who does not affirm infant baptism, an important doctrine in a Reformed church?

As one might guess, this unusual invitation is situated in a story. The Blessings congregation was outgrowing its worship venue and the facilities team was tasked with finding a new location. Discussions with the folks at Stanley Avenue Baptist Church (hereafter, SABC) went so well that not only did SABC invite Blessings to regard their historic building as their new home, they decided to discontinue their own worship services and to join Blessings for Sunday worship instead.

All of this occurred while SABC's pastor was on verge of retirement, having already purchased a house elsewhere in the province. The Blessings leadership was immediately interested, out of love for the SABC saints and in recognition of their enormous hospitality, in finding ways to have their pastor preach a farewell sermon or two prior to his relocation. After prolonged deliberation, the elders thought it best to invite him to preach in a Blessings worship service. The pastor is an individual we have grown to love and respect and, recognizing his doctrinal integrity as a gospel preacher, we happily extended him the invitation.

Not too long after the news spread, it was alleged that Blessings had violated the church order (Arts. 4, 5, 21, 26)

which, among other things, stipulates that eligibility for a call in the federation is determined by classis (i.e., a regional assembly of delegates from local churches) and that subscription to the federation's doctrinal standards is required of all ordinands.

One can readily concede that by inviting a Baptist pastor to preach, Blessings did something unprecedented in the federation. It is far more difficult to ascertain what church order article, if any, is violated in this unprecedented move. The church order only addresses scenarios where an individual is seeking ordination or eligibility for a call within the federation, scenarios where the involvement of classis and confessional subscription are understandably required. One local church should not have the authority to judge one's eligibility for a call when there are clearly implications for all the churches in the federation. Were Blessings, in other words, to give a Baptist pastor a license to preach in any church in the federation, the church order would be violated.²

On the other hand, is it unreasonable that elders should have jurisdiction over the pulpit of the church they oversee? Or should a classis oversee who can and cannot preach in a local congregation? To argue that latter is seemingly to endorse a hierarchical polity that contradicts the very basis of the federation's polity (see Art. 74). Though unprecedented, it seems Blessings has acted in full compliance with the church order.

Contextualizing the liturgical forms

Another cause of concern for some is the decision of the Blessings leaders not to read the liturgical forms verbatim but to contextualize, crystalize, and sometimes abbreviate their content. This practice, also largely unprecedented, allegedly violates Article 56 of the church order which stipulates that the sacraments shall be administered "with the use of the adopted forms."

One wonders, why would Blessings see the need to rewrite forms that have not simply endured through the centuries but have functioned quite effectively? It may seem as if Blessings is fascinated with novelty or worse as if its pastors are ecclesiastical mavericks, making up rules as they go, or church cowboys flaunting their disregard for authority. In fact, the decision not to read the forms verbatim was borne out of a prolonged and thoughtful discussion.

Given our emerging sensitivity both to the unchurched and to Christians from other theological traditions, the Blessings leadership observed that the content of the forms, while theologically sound, often makes unfortunate

assumptions about its audience in terms of biblical literacy or lacks nuances in formulations or invokes terminology that's inaccessible or confusing for contemporaries. We therefore purposed to retain the content of the forms while reformulating them in ways that are, among other things, intelligible in our contemporary and geographical context.

In the form for baptism, for example, the crucial term "covenant" is largely left undefined and so the Blessings pastors carefully clarify and explain the concept with contemporary categories. Moreover, when an infant is baptized, an attempt is made, however brief, to shore up the biblical basis the form provides for this important practice. Sensitive listeners would note that little of the content of the form has been dismissed though its terminology has been carefully revised. The forms, in other words, are not discarded or ignored but "used" in the administration of the sacraments, as per Article 56.

Furthermore, we have discovered in our interactions with seasoned Reformed missionaries that rarely, if ever, are the liturgical forms read verbatim on the foreign mission field. Why would one insist that they be read verbatim on the domestic mission field (i.e., Canada)? If one insists that mission outposts or church plants are afforded liberties an instituted church is not and that, once instituted, a church plant must shift its practice to reading the form verbatim, one must admit that no instituted church can see itself as a missional church. To reach such a conclusion is not simply embarrassing; it is dangerous and wrong. Efforts must be expended to demonstrate that well established churches can and should be missional churches.

Conclusion

I would hope, in conclusion, that readers of *Clarion* would recognize the attempts, however feeble, of Blessings to become increasingly missional while adhering to the principles of Reformed church polity.

¹ One might also attribute the shift to the emerging popularity of the missional publications of Michael Goheen, a Reformed missiologist.

² Some have also argued that since pulpit exchanges are a privilege of sister-church relations, the pulpit is thereby closed to those from non-sister churches. This is true so far as federation-wide access to pulpits is intended; it does not restrict a local church from making a particular provision to permit a pastor from a non-sister church to preach. Moreover, some URCNA churches, with which the Canadian Reformed churches have close ecclesiastical ties and whose church order varies little from ours, have Baptist pastors preach on occasion. Incidentally, Free Reformed Churches in North America have also made special provisions, albeit through a synodical committee, to have Baptists preach on occasion.





Interacting with Blessings

Elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion* our readers will come across an article by the Rev. Bill DeJong, one of the pastors of Blessings Christian Church (an inner-city church in Hamilton, Ontario and a church in the Canadian Reformed federation) on the challenges of being a missional church. I read his article with interest and would like to make both some general and specific comments.

The Church Order

First, let me make some general comments. The first relates to the Church Order (CO). How should we view the CO? On the one hand, it is not inspired and inerrant. Also, it does not have confessional standing or authority. My old teacher in church polity at CRTS, the Rev. H. Scholten, would repeatedly say in class, “Boys, remember the Church Order is not a law of Medes and Persians.” In other words, it is not some indestructible, incontestable, inspired law, neither should it be used as an ecclesiastical straitjacket.

It is perhaps best described as a document that is based on biblical principles, and that seeks to regulate church life in a manner consistent with those principles. At the same time, the CO is also a common agreement between the churches in which certain promises are made as to how we will do things together as churches.

One might say that, in a way, the CO is part of the glue that holds a church federation together. If the confessions summarize what we believe, then the CO describes in broad strokes how we operate and function. It defines how we do things together in terms of offices, assemblies, worship, sacraments, ceremonies, as well as discipline.

Now, of course, I realize that people are sometimes critical of the particulars. There are those out there who believe that the local church should be able to make up its own rules and develop its own practices. Nevertheless, that describes the road of independentism and fragmentation. If we want to function as a true federation of churches, there has to be respect for the promises we have made and the regulations we have adopted.

As such this does not mean that no changes may even be made in the adopted regulations. The way of change, however, is the way of sitting down together at a classis, regional

synod, or general synod and there persuading one another that certain changes need to be made for the good of the federation and the promotion of the Lord’s great name.

Being a missional church

The second general comment that I would like to make relates to the challenge of being a missional church. For quite a few years now I have been following developments in other church federations in different parts of the world that seek to be both Reformed and missional.

Missional in America

The first one that comes to mind is the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). When that federation began to emerge in the 1970s out of the ashes of liberal Presbyterianism in both the northern and southern parts of the United States, it was mostly well-established churches in the south that led the charge. Yet it did not take long for church planting to become the new normal and for a strong missional emphasis to rise in this new federation as well.

Over time something else also came along, namely a degree of tension between the more traditional churches and the church plant/missional churches. Why did this happen? Well, on the one hand you have churches that have been around for a long time. Some of them simply moved over. They left the old, southern, liberal, Presbyterian church behind and joined the newly minted Presbyterian Church in America. In so doing they also came in with their long-established Presbyterian ways of doing things. There was even a certain tidiness about them in that many things were done among them in a very organized, defined, well-structured manner.

But then along came these new church plants or missional churches, and they were not nearly as tidy or as organized. They often challenged deeply ingrained ways of doing things because such ways simply did not work or help them as they reached out to the unchurched.

Why, to this day there is still a certain tension in the PCA between local churches. Visit a PCA church in the deep south of America with a long history of being Presbyterian and then visit a new PCA church plant whether in Canada or the USA and you will encounter different approaches to being

church. The former is much more formal and structured, whereas the latter tends to be more flexible and adaptable.

Missional in Scotland

Now, let's switch to another church scene, this time in Scotland. There we have the case of the Free Church (FCS) and the Free Church Continuing (FCSC). The immediate cause of the split between them may have been a certain seminary professor, but there is no doubt that beneath the split there was a different dynamic at work. If today you worship in a FCSC congregation you will come face to face with the traditional Scottish Presbyterian approach to worship and being church. In the FCSC no hymns are sung and no instruments are used. The church procedures are very carefully defined and maintained. The manner of dress by clergy and laity alike very much adheres to a certain pattern.

In the FCS, however, there has emerged since the split a greater degree of variety. In the Highlands the ancient traditions and procedures of the church tend to prevail, but in the larger cities there is a new spirit brewing. Local FCS there are opting for a liturgy that includes hymns, both ancient and modern. They are turning to the use of a variety of musical instruments. They are actively reaching out to the local community. In short, the FCS is seeing the rise of church plants and missional churches in its midst. The result? It is revitalizing a church federation that was in decline and drifting towards a sure death.

Is this new development a smooth one? Is it without comments and criticisms? Not always. In the FCS, as in the PCA, tensions often arise between doing things the old traditional way or the new missional way.

Now, I think that as Canadian Reformed Churches we need to be aware of these developments and realize that our church plants and missional churches (Blessings, Chinese Reformed, Fellowship, Prince George), as they increase in number, will create talk and some tension too from time to time. As such this is nothing new.

Comments relating to specific issues

Now it is on to specifics. In his article, Pastor Bill DeJong cites a few things that have happened at Blessings that appear to have created some discussion and disagreement locally and further afield.

A Baptist minister?

The first issue has to do with inviting a Baptist minister to preach to the congregation. For those who know us Canadian Reformed people, this is, to say the least, a departure from the norm. Our practice has been to invite only min-

isters in our own federation, as well as ministers of sister churches, to our pulpits.

What about someone who is not a CanRC minister and not a minister of a sister church either? Does the Church Order allow such a person to preach in our churches? It depends on how you read the Church Order. Those who take the traditional approach will say "definitely not;" whereas, others may say, "I am not so sure." The point is, though, whether the CO addresses this matter specifically or directly?

My reading of the CO is such that I am not convinced that the CO addresses such a development in particular. What the CO does do is make it crystal clear that the consistory of the local church controls access to the pulpit (Article 15). At the same time, it does not stipulate precisely who is allowed and who is forbidden.

Now, it is true that in our rules for sister churches (or more accurately, Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship) we speak about giving the ministers of sister church access to our pulpits. Nevertheless, the principle remains that it is the local consistory that rules in this matter. Even if a minister of a sister church is in the area, a consistory is not under obligation to invite that minister to occupy its pulpit. It has every right to ignore his presence and not deal with the matter. It also has every right to say "No," whether for language or other reasons.

But getting back to Blessings and the Baptist minister; it is my understanding that here the local consistory was dealing with a very special situation and felt obliged to accord him the right to address the congregation (which, by the way, included part of his old congregation) before he departed. Did the consistory overstep its rights in doing so? Strictly speaking, not according to the CO. If that Baptist minister, however, used the occasion to promote doctrines contrary to what Blessings espouses (and no one claims that to have been the case), then we would have a different situation.

At the same time, I am not aware if Blessings asked for the advice of Classis in this matter. Perhaps there was not enough time for this or there was the perception that it would be wiped off the table without due consideration. Anyway, to my way of thinking, this sort of special circumstance would have been a good opportunity to seek the input and feedback of the delegates. It forces them to realize that not everything is cut and dried in the church, or covered by the CO, but that there are often difficult questions that arise and call for discussion, debate, and consensus-building.

Presbyterian practice

In connection with this, it should be acknowledged that some of our Presbyterian and Reformed sister churches will

from time to time invite a Reformed Baptist minister to hold forth on one of their pulpits. For many years I was a member of the Committee for Churches Abroad and the Committee was instructed by General Synod to deal with this matter on several occasions. When asked about it, the response that we received from our Presbyterian brethren was, “Yes, we do invite such men to preach from time to time.” “But then,” we said, “what about if they use the pulpit to preach against infant baptism?” The answer that we received was blunt and to the point, “Then that will be the very last time they receive an invitation from us.” In other words, be sensitive to our doctrines and do not abuse the privilege.

A Langley decision

I may also relate another situation. In the 1980s, the Langley Canadian Reformed Church held long, detailed, and intensive discussions with several local Free Reformed Churches in the area in the hope that we could remove barriers and move towards greater unity. In the course of our discussions, we heard it said over and over again that while we as Canadian Reformed talked a lot about the pursuit of unity, it was empty talk. As proof they cited the fact we would not even invite their men to hold forth on our pulpits.

After a lot of reflection, discussion, and study, the Langley CanRC then made a decision to allow the local minister of the Abbotsford FRC to preach occasionally on its pulpit. Needless to say, it was a bold step. It also put some noses out of joint, but the consistory decided that in this particular situation, it could and should act in this way. Oh, and let it also be said that to this day, almost forty years later, we are still waiting for a positive reply and for the Abbotsford FRC minister to make an appearance on the Langley pulpit.

The use of the forms

Another issue that Rev. DeJong brings to the fore has to do with the use of the Liturgical Forms in the *Book of Praise*. He cites the fact that from time to time Blessings will make some changes when the forms are read. It does so in order to make these forms more intelligible to hearers who are unfamiliar with words, terms, and expressions.

Is that a violation of the CO? Again, it depends on your view of the CO and the forms. Personally, I think that some flexibility is permissible. I also know that I, as well as any number of other ministers, have in the past taken some liberties with the forms. For example, when a number of members with special needs made profession of faith during my time in the churches of Cloverdale and Langley, the questions addressed to the candidates were rephrased, with the

approval of the consistories, to suit their level of understanding. In addition, the Form for the Solemnization of Marriage may regularly be used in our churches but parts of it, like the vows, are often revised or reworded in the process.

Of course, there are limits to all of this. I would urge a pastor who has real difficulty with this or that form, and who thinks that a radical restructuring is needed, to speak with his consistory and to make use of the church orderly way to bring about changes.

The Chinese Reformed Church

To cite a case in point, locally we have the Chinese Reformed Church that meets in Cloverdale. Their worship services are held in Mandarin. This means that they use neither the ESV nor the *Book of Praise*, both of which are in English. So, what to do? The churches of Cloverdale and Langley went to Classis Pacific West and explained the situation. As a result, Classis agreed that exemptions could be applied. While the Chinese Reformed Church promised to pursue the translation of the *Book of Praise*, it was not required to sing the psalms and hymns or read the forms from it, as they are all in English. (In the meantime, progress is being made as a number of psalms and hymns, as well as all of the forms, have now been translated into Mandarin.)

I think that the above example is a good illustration of how we as churches can move forward and maintain our unity. It would be regrettable if one church with special challenges decides to chart its own way forward without seeking the good counsel of the brothers. We need each other. We need to respect one another, to listen to one another, and to help one another.

We also need established churches to realize that many are operating in an environment consisting of members with a common background, with a long history and with established practices. Such a realization should make members thankful and keep them humble. It should also make them sensitive to the challenges of churches that do not share these commonalities.

In addition, we need newly established church plants to realize that they are part of a federation that will not always understand their particular challenges. Patience, persuasion, prayer, as well as consultation and a commitment to follow the church orderly way, will need to be in rich supply here.

In the end, may the Lord grant us the necessary qualities to move forward together, shunning both the ways of rigid conformity and maverick independence.





Banning the Burqa

Country after country has been banning the burqa and the niqab. What are they? A burqa is a garment that completely covers from head to toe the body of a woman, with mesh cloth covering the eyes. Because the burqa completely isolates the wearer from the outside world, it has been called a walking coffin. The niqab covers the head except for an opening for the eyes. There is a segment of Muslims who insist that their wives wear these garments when outside their home.

The first European country to ban such Islamic clothes in public was France in October 2010. It was considered a form of enslavement and incompatible with the principles of liberty, equality, and human dignity affirmed by the French Republic. Since the French decision, the burqa has also been banned elsewhere in Europe: in Belgium, The Netherlands, Bulgaria, and Austria. Regional bans are in effect in Bavaria (Germany), Catalonia (Spain), and Ticino (Switzerland).


The ban was typically justified by underlining the incompatibility of such body covering with the values of a free and democratic society that expects to be able to see people face to face. Underlying much of the support for the ban was the need to resist the Islamization of their country. With the Dutch ban, the emphasis was on promoting open communication and public safety.

As one could expect, there was opposition. For example, after Denmark voted for the ban on May 31, Amnesty International immediately responded that the ban “violates the rights to freedom of expression and religion. If the intention of this law was to protect women’s rights it fails abjectly. Instead, the law criminalizes women for their choice of clothing and in so doing flies in the face of those freedoms Denmark purports to uphold.” However, challenges to the ban have twice resulted in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruling that burqa bans are legal, citing among other things the need for social communication as being indispensable for life in a democratic society.

What about Canada? It is interesting to note that Tarek Fatah, a Muslim author, columnist, and broadcaster, has long argued for the ban in our country and in the West generally. Already in an article in the *Toronto Sun* back in September 17, 2013, he noted that “the Muslim Canadian Congress said in 2009, ‘there is no requirement in the Qur’an for Muslim women to cover their faces. Invoking religious freedom to conceal one’s identity and promote a political ideology is disingenuous.’” Indeed, “no less an authority than Egypt’s late Sheikh Mohamed Tantawi, dean of alAzhar university, stated the niqab was merely a cultural tradition and that it had no connection to Islam or the Qur’an.” He also noted that when Muslims pray at their most holy place, the grand mosque in Mecca, the Ka’aba, “female visitors have been explicitly prohibited from covering their faces,” a rule that has been maintained for more than 1,400 years.

Another Muslim journalist, Farzana Hassan, noted in her *Toronto Sun* article (June 21, 2018), that the burqa has little to do with the Islamic religion. It is “more political than religious.” She too favours banning the burqa, not only because it is a security threat but because it is an oppressive garment and is inherently misogynistic, “rooted in the conviction that women are a source of evil if they are left unshielded from the male gaze.” She called on the fundamentalists, the Islamists, the mullahs and the rabid clergy to help ban the burka.

Quebec has passed a law banning the burqa in October 2017, but for a second time (on June 28, 2018) a Quebec judge has ruled that the law cannot go into force until it is subjected to a judicial review.

Sources used: Apart from the sources mentioned in the article, Søren Kern, “Denmark Approves Burka Ban” and “the Netherlands Approves Burqa Ban,” both on the Gatestone Institute website. 

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32

Jesus told the people this parable: There was a man who had two sons. The younger son told his father to give him his inheritance, and then he went away and spent all his money. When he ran out of money he couldn't buy food, so he had to get a job feeding pigs. He was very hungry and no one would give him anything to eat. He knew he had been a bad son, so he decided to go and beg his father to let him be a servant. When his father saw him, he was so excited that he hugged him and threw a big party. This parable shows us that even when we sin and do bad things, if we truly are sorry God will take us back with open arms.

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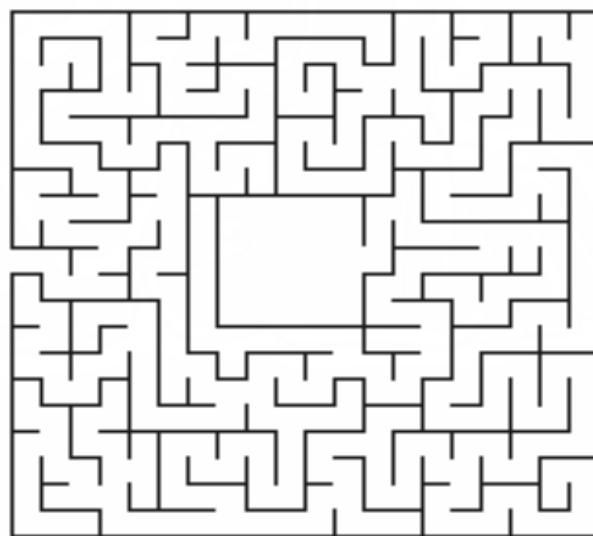
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Father	Parable	Prodigal
Hungry	Party	Servant
Money	Pigs	Sorry

Maze:

Help the prodigal son find his way home.



by Emily Nijenhuis



Jeanette Wierenga

Hi, my name is Jeanette Wierenga, and I was asked to tell something about myself (I'm getting a little help from my dad). I live in Fergus, Ontario, with my mom and dad, one brother, and two sisters. I love them very much but I love to tease them too. We have lots of fun together because I love to be sassy.

I have a few jobs that keep me busy. I volunteer one day a week at the Mission Thrift Store in town. I clean household knickknacks, sort books, and stock shelves. During the school year I volunteer one morning a week in the kindergarten classroom at Maranatha Christian School. In the winter I sometimes help the kids put on their boots and mitts when they go outside for recess. This way I get to know lots of kids from the church.

My favorite place to work is at "the turkey farm" (I get a paycheck for working there). I go there three times a week to gather eggs and wash them and sort them so my boss can sell the eggs. It's fun to work at the farm because my mom and sister and brother work there too. I even learned how to drive a quad!

I have hobbies too. I go swimming with a friend almost every week. I love camping with my family and kayaking and fishing, even if I don't catch a lot of fish.

On Sunday I love to hear my dad preach. I like to sit close to the front of the church to keep an eye on him. I love reading the Bible, and I do that every morning with my breakfast. I read a devotional at night before I go to bed. The Lord is good to me and even though I have Down Syndrome there are lots of things that I can do. I hope you enjoyed reading this.

October Birthdays

3 JANELL DEBOER will be 28

6311 Silver Street, RR 2, St. Ann's, ON LOR 1Y0
Email: janell.db90@gmail.com

3 JEANETTE WIERENGA will be 23

610 Belsyde Avenue East, RR 4, Fergus, ON N1M 2W5

6 HENRY VANDER VLIET will be 51

c/o Anchor Home, 361 Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2

8 LINDSAY KOTTELENBERG will be 28

c/o Lighthouse, 6528 1st Line, RR 3,
Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

12 LEONA BARENDREGT will be 34

Box 2601, Smithers, BC VOJ 2N0

13 NANCY SCHIPPER will be 62

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

17 ALAN BREUKELMAN will be 52

2225, 19th Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4

21 CAMERON DANTUMA will be 26

c/o Lighthouse, 6528 1st Line, RR 3,
Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

22 NELENA HOFKINK will be 58

Bethesda Clearbrook Home
32553 Willingdon Crescent, Clearbrook, BC V2T 1S2

28 MARY ANN DE WIT will be 62

#4 6560 Vedder Road, Chilliwack, BC V2T 5K4

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

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Q Is there a danger that we will lose our beloved Anglo-Genevan Psalter?

Is there a danger that we will lose our beloved Anglo-Genevan Psalter? Talking to the younger generation, they like the psalms and hymns in different tunes of the new Trinity Psalter Hymnal of the OPC/URCNA. Since we are sister churches, will they be influenced by their way of giving praise to God? I love the Genevan majestic tunes and it is also part of our heritage from the Reformation.

A This questioner evidently is aware of a developing trend of appreciation for what is being sung in our sister churches and beyond. It should not be too difficult to observe this trend. Judging by what is being sung at weddings, funerals, Christian school assemblies, and other celebratory events, people find joy in singing hymns and spiritual songs which are not currently found in our *Book of Praise*. This is not just a trend among the younger generation; members of the Canadian Reformed Churches of any and all ages show the evidence of this trend and development! There is a desire within our churches for other musical expressions of their faith in alternate arrangements of psalms and a wider variety of traditional and contemporary hymn selections. This does not mean that there is “a danger that we will lose our beloved Anglo-Genevan Psalter,” but it means that there is a measure of discontent in our congregations concerning the *exclusive* use of Genevan melodies in the singing of the psalms, and that we should *expand* what we may sing in the worship services.

The questioner expresses love for the Genevan tunes and mentions their origin in the Reformation. I surmise with great certainty that these sentiments are widely shared by the members in our churches. Yet, the (catholic)

church has a longer history than just the Great Reformation, and in every generation there have been poets, composers, and hymn writers who expressed the rich truths of the Scriptures in poetry and song. These expressions of faith and praise have found their place in the history of the church as well, also on our American continent. Since our churches have become established on this continent, and have become closely associated with sister churches in Canada and the United States (e.g. OPC, URCNA, RCUS), it would be good to use in worship some of the psalm settings and melodies that are more broadly familiar in these sister churches and in the Christian world. The *Book of Praise*, on the other hand, sets us in a class apart within North America, causing some unnecessary isolation. The Genevan tunes are in many ways unfamiliar to most North American Christians. Even the hymn section of the *Book of Praise* has very few of the classic North American hymns.

I sense another “concern” expressed in the question: “Will they be influenced by their way of giving praise to God.” This should be a concern indeed if and when what is sung and proposed to be sung were of an unscriptural nature or in conflict with the confessions of the church. When we consider, however, the history and principles underlying the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*, we should not be concerned in the least about its “influence” on the “younger generation.” The psalms in the TPH are also faithful poetic renditions of

the biblical psalms (some of which are taken from the *Book of Praise*!). According to the *principles* applied, the songs had to be scriptural, faithful in content and form of the inspired text, faithfully expressing the teaching of Scripture as summarized in the confessions. These psalms and hymns as well are a sacrifice of praise, aesthetically pleasing, intelligible and edifying, free from artificiality, sentimentality, individualism, and suitable for congregational singing, to mention some of the principles that were applied strictly during the long process of composition of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*. Besides, the TPH was approved by the General Assembly of the OPC as well as by the General Synod of the URCNA, our sister churches; if we have confidence in our sister churches, such approval should carry much weight for us.

A final consideration to be receptive and open to this increase of an additional psalm and hymn selection such as available in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* is the reality of receiving more and more guests and “inquirers” to our services. This positive and gratifying development in most local churches, together with our increased involvement in church plants, inquirers classes, new members’ courses, and other forms of outreach, alerts us to the difficulty these guests and new members have in appreciating and singing



the psalms set to Genevan tunes. If a person has not been raised with these tunes (and learned to love them, as our questioner does!), it can be difficult to learn to sing them let alone truly love them. Having a broader selection of familiar hymns and spiritual songs would benefit us as we seek to be churches in which new Christians and inquirers can find a church home!



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
denhollanderw@gmail.com**

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0



Origin: Design, Chance and the First Life on Earth. Illustra Media, 2016

This forty-seven minute video is a follow-up of the 2002 Illustra Media DVD, *Unlocking the Mystery of Life*. Its purpose is to show that scientific materialism, which excludes any notion of intelligence or design, utterly fails in trying to prove that simple chemistry produces life through random undirected processes. Through beautiful and powerful animation, this movie takes the viewer from grand perspectives of the universe into the most elemental workings of a living cell, all of which can only leave one in great awe of the Creator.

This is an excellent systematic demolition of the theory of evolution at the most basic and most important level,



namely, how did life actually begin? It is simply impossible for life to have started spontaneously by chance. Some scientists are consequently turning to other theories such as panspermia, the notion that life on earth originated from microorganisms or chemical precursors of life present in outer space. But, as the movie shows, that is a cop-out and an abandonment of science. Ultimately, the question of the origin of life concerns us all. Where did we come from? We need to look to the Creator.

This high quality and informative video is highly recommended, especially for science teachers and students. **C**

