

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

V 67 N 22 NOVEMBER 2 2018



Spiritual care for the elderly

TRUE NEED IN AN AGE OF ENTITLEMENT
NEW COLUMN: CHURCH NEWS REVIEW

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

Cancellation Agreement

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

2018 ADVERTISING RATES

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

PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

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

We acknowledge the financial support
of the Government of Canada.



Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

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

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Issue 22 begins with an article from editor Matthew Van Luik, "Nursing Home Ministry." Rev. Van Luik has had the opportunity to observe such a ministry in action and shares this model for ministry within the senior community.

From Rev. Peter Holtvliwer we have the first of a two-part article that was originally a speech delivered to a deacon conference: "Discerning True Need in an Age of Entitlement."

Our magazine is pleased to introduce a new column, Church News Review. The intention of the column is to focus on ecclesiastical developments primarily in ICRC and NAPARC churches. Thank you to Rev. S. Carl Van Dam for taking on this column. His first article can be found in this issue.

In addition, Issue 22 contains Treasures, New & Old, Clippings on Politics & Religion, Education Matters, *Clarion Kids*, a letter to the editor and a press release.

Laura Veenendaal

CONTENTS

- 583 Nursing Home Ministry**
- 586 TREASURES, NEW & OLD**
Eutychus Raised to Life: The Hope of Faith confirmed
- 587 Discerning True Need in An Age of Entitlement (1)**
- 590 CHURCH NEWS REVIEW**
- 593 CLIPPINGS ON POLITICS & RELIGION**
- 594 EDUCATION MATTERS**
- 596 CLARION KIDS**
- 597 LETTER TO THE EDITOR**
- 599 PRESS RELEASE**



Nursing Home Ministry

The elderly often feel that they are a forgotten segment of the population

Sometimes we have experiences that make us think about what we are doing and look at opportunities that we may be missing. This summer, I made arrangements to spend a day during our holidays visiting, “Christ the King Anglican Church,” a Reformed Episcopal Church in Dayton, Ohio. This denomination was founded in 1873 in New York City with the intent of preserving “Protestantism within the Anglican identity.” It did not take long to discover in our conversation a common bond of faith. That bond was expressed by their deep appreciation for the Heidelberg Catechism, and although they have not formally adopted it as their standard, they use it in their worship services. Liturgically we are quite different, as they follow the High Anglican liturgy for worship. The reason for this visit was that this congregation is involved in Nursing Home Ministry (St. Lazarus Mission) and they became aware that the Word and Spirit Institute offered a certificate program on “Ministry for the Aging.”¹ They were excited about this program as a tool to equip their members for their Nursing Home Ministry.

Background

Some years ago, this congregation made a commitment to move from the suburbs to the inner city, recognizing that the church has a calling to serve in the city. They bought their building from a church group who had decided to move out of the city to the suburbs. The congregation is small in number, having about a hundred members, and yet it manages several ministries within their community: helping refugees (many live in the neighbourhood of the church) to adjust to a new country and culture, supporting single mothers within the community, and operating a kindergarten through a high school charter school that upholds the values of the church. In addition they have a nursing home ministry. They hold weekly services in four

nursing homes and they have received requests from nine other nursing homes in the city for this ministry. There is a great need, but the reality is that such a small congregation does not have the human resources to meet it.

Church programs

Many of our churches have had a visitation program for many years in a nursing home in their community. This indicates that there has been an awareness of a need among those who are living in nursing homes. To my knowledge, in most instances a few members, mostly from the youth group, will go to a home to sing some songs, read Scripture, and deliver a short message. The experience most nursing homes have with church groups who come to visit is that they lose interest over time and such a ministry does not really build the strong bonds that people need in these homes.

An innovative approach

The approach taken in Dayton is that the church treats each skilled nursing facility as a congregation, so that each home comes under the pastoral care of an elder, often, and ideally, in their view, an ordained priest in the REC. These elders are working men who have a heart for the elderly in their community, and they are given the task for the spiritual care of the people in these homes. Every Sunday they lead a worship service in the home that is appropriate for the residents, usually a simple and short message. They have adapted their liturgy and have communion each week as well. During the week the elder sets aside time to make pastoral visits to people in the home. He will also have some members of the church assist him in this work.

They had to think outside of their own ecclesiastical rules and regulations in order to develop a ministry that works effectively in a nursing home setting. It is unrealistic

to expect residents in such homes to be able to regularly attend the worship services in the church on Sunday, so instead they hold services in the homes. If we were to follow the same model in our Reformed ecclesiastical context, a consistory would recognize each home as a house congregation over which the consistory appoints an elder for its spiritual care.

A sense of church community

How will this approach impact the residents of these homes differently from the approach currently used by many churches? The most important impact is that it develops a sense of church community within the nursing home. There is the expectation among the residents that there will be a service every Sunday where they can worship God in song and a gospel message of encouragement is received. The residents feel that their spiritual needs are taken seriously because the elder and those who assist him are available for spiritual help and encouragement. When the gospel message is consistently heard on a weekly basis and the elder is able to give spiritual counsel on a consistent basis, many who have grown up with some knowledge of the Christian faith have their faith awakened and seek to establish a relationship with God. The residents who come to faith, and are able to, begin to visit one another not only socially but also to encourage one another spiritually. It encourages the residents to experience a flavour of what it means to enjoy the communion of saints. They do not just see each other as fellow residents but greet each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Those in whom the Lord awakens a new sense of communion with Christ will also reach out to their fellow residents who do not have faith, encouraging them to come to the services and find their hope and salvation in Jesus Christ. The benefit of this approach is that we show these elderly people that we take their spiritual needs seriously. The elderly often feel that they are a forgotten segment of the population. They are shunted off to the nursing home to live out their last days and occasionally people come in to do a program to entertain or amuse them. They need and deserve² much more than that. When church groups come for a few hours once or twice a month to tell the people some gospel message, it does not build the spiritual bonds that are so important for these residents, nor does it help them to build spiritual bonds within the home. We should expect that in such a community, the Spirit is also able to gather his people and his church.

Broader outreach

Another important benefit to this approach is that the care of elderly parents opens relationships with other family members, for they will appreciate believers who take the time to care for their elderly father or mother. Caring spiritually for the older generation opens opportunities to connect with the younger generation about the gospel. One of the results in Dayton is that some families of the residents in the home come and attend the Sunday service with their family member and think about this community as their church. Another benefit is that many of the care givers in these homes become part of this spiritual community, so they also become active in the Sunday service. When we touch the lives of the vulnerable with the gospel, others notice and many recognize the power of the gospel to give hope and change attitudes in the lives of those who felt they no longer had any purpose in the last years of their life.

Improved care

Surveys taken in these homes with this new approach show that there have been vast improvements in the care of the residents. When a resident is only seen as a client, someone who just needs care to get dressed and fed and medicated, we destroy the soul of such a person. Our greatest human need is not food, drink, and medicine, but it is to be treated with love, care, and dignity. We destroy people when we do not treat them with dignity and do not address the deep issues that live in their heart (soul). In the nursing home we meet people who must prepare themselves for departure from this life, but many do not know how to prepare their soul for that day.

The surveys show that when these residents are being cared for spiritually, it leads to an improvement in the satisfaction they experience in their care. They no longer feel as if they are just a number, but they are treated with respect as real human beings. Even more important, they are able to deal with the struggles of their soul, addressing important issues of the past and preparing their hearts for the future. When they come to be at peace with themselves, with their family and their Lord, it leads to joy in the last days of their life.

Not only does this lead to a change of attitude in the residents, but the staff of the home also become much more caring toward the residents. They no longer see the residents as a number, but as someone with real cares and genuine concerns. The practical result of this ministry is that the home becomes a caring community.

Our challenge

I have reflected on a situation in Dayton where nursing homes are asking for such a program in their residences because they have seen the survey results. We may wonder, is it possible for such a ministry model to work in Canada, since we often perceive Canada to be a more spiritually hostile environment than the United States? I have learned from the Ministry for the Aging certificate program that

In the nursing home we meet people who must prepare themselves for departure from this life, but many do not know how to prepare their soul for that day

all Canadian government programs for the aging stress in their policy formulations the need for the *spiritual care* of the elderly. The missing piece is that governments do not know how to deliver that spiritual care.

Many nursing homes will hire chaplains to care for the spiritual needs of their residents, but often these positions go unfilled. In this context a chaplain is not an ordained office, but someone who has a love for the elderly and desires to help people with

their spiritual care can apply for these positions. There is a recognition by the government that the spiritual care of the elderly is important and therefore as churches we should look for opportunities to fill that critical need in the lives of many who live lonely lives in the nursing homes of our

villages and cities. We may need to look for unique ways in which we can effectively minister to such needs in the lives of people living right in our community. It is our calling as believers to show the loving care of our Lord to those who live without hope and direct them to the God of all comfort.

Our mission

Ministry among the elderly in our society is a growing mission field. Over the next twenty-five years a quarter of the population in Canada will be over the age of sixty-five. Already those over sixty-five are more in number than those fourteen and under (Census 2016). The Spirit is setting before us a fertile mission field, one where the elderly face the uncertainty of the future and are open to speaking about the struggles in their lives. They are dealing with the reality of death and struggle with the great uncertainty about the life hereafter. It is the responsibility of the church and of God's people to speak the wonderful truths of the gospel into this darkness and give hope to those who now live without hope.

While there is this great need in every community, we often live without any real awareness of these great needs. The Scriptures command God's people to care for the vulnerable, widows, and orphans and to care for the elderly who are often despised by society. It is good to be reminded both about the needs in society and the opportunities that exist for the church.

Next time we will look at the lonely in your community.

¹ See <http://www.wsinstitute.ca> for more information on the Certificate Program on Aging.

² Not that anyone deserves anything, but as Christians we are called to show love and care also for the vulnerable in our society so that by our good deeds we may glorify God (1 Peter 2:12).





Eutychus Raised to Life: The Hope of Faith Confirmed

Acts 20:7-12

Some might say this passage teaches that ministers shouldn't have long sermons. After all, the apostle Paul preached long and Eutychus fell asleep, and because Eutychus was seated at the window he even fell out of the window to his death! It's true that recent research shows the attention span of an adult male today is twenty minutes, and preachers do well to keep this in mind. I aim for twenty-five to thirty minutes. If people are going to tune it out, I might as well edit it out.

Be that as it may, that's not the message of this passage. The raising of Eutychus to life is about the hope of faith being confirmed!

The occasion was the church at Troas, gathered for Sunday worship to hear the Word and to celebrate the Lord's Supper (20:7; cf. Acts 2:42). Sunday is a festive occasion because we may celebrate Christ's victory over sin and death. It was extra special that Sunday in Troas because the apostle Paul was in town and was leading the worship service. Paul had much to say and he "prolonged his speech until midnight" (20:7).

Eutychus fell asleep. Was he bored and disinterested? There is no evidence

of that. In fact, the passage mentions that there were many lamps in the room (20:8), and this suggests that the heat and smell generated by these many oil lamps led to stuffiness and stale air causing drowsiness. Because Eutychus was sitting at the window – which was often no more than a hole in the wall – when he fell asleep, he ended up falling three stories to his death.

Imagine the shock! The joy of the festive gathering suddenly turned to sorrow. Of all times and places for this to happen, that is, during a worship service!

Isn't that how it is in our lives too? Our lives turn on a dime. One moment we have intense joy; the next moment we have intense sorrow. One moment we celebrate a birth; the next moment we grieve over a tragic death. Sometimes we also say today: Of all times and places for this to happen.... Our faith can sometimes be sorely tested.

But that is where the raising of Eutychus comes into the picture. Paul took three crisp actions: he went down, threw himself on Eutychus, and put his arms around him (20:10, NIV). He who was dead became alive! The rais-

ing of Eutychus from death confirmed the hope of faith; it underlined the gospel of life Paul preached at Troas. They gathered at Troas to celebrate in the preaching and the sacrament that Christ is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25), and it was confirmed by this miracle!

The striking thing in this passage is that then everything continued, almost as if nothing had happened! After he had raised Eutychus, Paul went up again and continued preaching to them (20:11). The whole narrative suggests that the raising of Eutychus was an intermezzo, a bracketed event, and that the main focus is not on the raising but on Word and sacrament. That's important because the church no longer experiences such miracles today, but the church does have Word and sacrament today and that is what we are to focus on.

This passage shows us the victory of Christ over death. Eutychus was raised to life because Jesus Christ was raised and lives! And this underlines the biblical teaching that all those who belong to Jesus Christ will be raised and will live forever!

For further study

1. What two Old Testament accounts does this passage remind you of? Look up 1 Kings 17:21, 22 and 2 Kings 4:34, 35.
2. Look up Hebrews 2:3, 4. What significance does this text have in relation to Acts 20:7-12?





Discerning True Need in An Age of Entitlement (Part 1 of 2)

Note: This is a slightly edited version of a speech first presented at a Deacons' Conference in Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church several years ago. Some aspects of the oral address have been maintained in this written version. To get the most of out it, I would suggest first reading 1 Timothy 5 and keep that passage open for consultation.

Current challenge

One of the challenges facing deacons in our day is how to help people asking for assistance who may in fact not be needy. Or they may not be needy in the way they think they are. It was not that long ago that deacons faced the problem of people having a genuine need but refusing to call the deacons. Very likely there still are church members who would rather struggle through their financial difficulties on their own or suffer in silence rather than call the deacons – there's too much shame in that, they think.

That was not and is not a good thing. Keeping our true needs a secret stunts the extension of mercy and compassion which Christ calls the church to give to those in difficulty. It prevents grace from being shown or received which is not how the Lord would have it. The children in God's family are to reflect the image of their Father in heaven. Preaching and pastoral care should encourage such members to let the congregation and the deacons in to help.

But it seems that there are less and less of such people and more and more members who don't hesitate to call the deacons and are quick to have their hand out. Such members do not have malicious intent – let me be clear about that. As a rule, I don't think they are trying to abuse the system or get something they have no right to receive. With a clear conscience, they invite the deacons to come but then they have the full expectation that they will not only be heard but also helped with a cheque.

The point is, the new generation of needy church members does not have a sense of holding back. The concept of

not “daring” to phone the deacons is increasingly foreign to them and they tend to feel quite confident not only to ask but to receive. There is a feeling from their side that runs along these lines: “If I run short in meeting my monthly budget, I call the deacons, the deacons supply my needs – and everyone is happy.” They do not believe they are *abusing* the system, but they feel they are making *good use* of the system. What seems to have changed is the understanding of the very idea of what deacons are called to do, the very concept of what defines a person in need.

Entitlement

It seems to me that this confidence and ease of asking for financial help from the deacons comes out of an environment of entitlement, and we need to reckon with that. It's no secret that our culture fosters the perspective of “rights” – everybody has rights. An employee has rights to certain benefits like sick leave or maternity or paternity leave or medical coverage. It is the norm to ask for and receive such things, no questions asked. Workers don't always think about whether they *need* them, but they take what is coming to them. They presume upon their “rights.”

This idea of taking what is owed you no matter whether you've really earned it or much less whether you *need* it or even whether the party giving it to you can actually afford to give it, is a problem that has existed for years, for example, in the Federal Government of Canada. Cries have been heard about the “gold-plated” pension programs for MPs and the tremendous benefits Senators receive, far and above what the private sector provides. This mentality of ensuring that you receive your benefits was made famous by former MP David Dingwall when he stated at a hearing into his expense claims as head of the Federal Mint, “I am entitled to my entitlements” (2005).

Adults in their 20s, 30s, and even 40s have grown up in this kind of setting, and that perspective is starting to

shape our thinking. We're seeing a resistance to *sacrificial giving* and an insistence on *pleasure spending*. Parents in the 1960s and 70s who began our schools more easily gave a portion of their much smaller incomes to support the schools, whether they had children or not in the schools, while parents today tend to put it off as long as they can. More than one set of parents in our time has said, after their last child has graduated from the local Christian high school, "That's it. I'm done. I've paid my share. Now I can spend that money how I really want!" As a generation we feel entitled to our pleasures and perks – our vacations, our two vehicles, our kitchen renovation, our RRSPs, etc.

Blurred lines

As we grow accustomed to this way of thinking, our sense of what is needy begins to shift. The line between need and extra, or need and luxury, becomes blurred and before we know it, people are looking at all their present creature comforts as *necessities*. Life simply *can't* be lived without them. And so, when money runs tight and the bills can't be paid to keep up this lifestyle, the deacons are called in with the natural expectation that the deacons will provide for them to maintain the lifestyle they have grown accustomed to. In the minds of more and more of our people, that is the "need" of the twenty-first century.

And you can imagine how this can challenge the deacons. Instead of being asked to cover a temporary shortage in *groceries* (with first fruits having been given and all other bills covered), now they are being asked to cover a shortage in making the mortgage or school payment in part because the many other bills which sustain their lifestyle get paid first – usually on the credit card, which is often maxed-out! And many times there's been no giving of first fruits either. In those circumstances, it takes nothing for deacons to start writing cheques for hundreds of dollars one month only to come back to do it all over again next month. One household can eat up tens of thousands of dollars very quickly if the deacons don't put their foot down and sort things out from a biblical perspective (let me hasten to add: with due care, concern, and genuine love, of course).

Scripture on the poor

For the Scriptures do teach us discernment in this matter. To begin with, the Lord speaks very often about our obligation to help the poor and needy. Our Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons summarizes this well: we are to love the members of the church who have fallen into hard times and share with them of the good things God has

given us. We are to imitate God's love for his children and follow the example of Christ in showing mercy and compassion to the afflicted. In short, deacons are to see to it that, "No one in the congregation of Christ may live uncomfortable under the pressure of sickness, loneliness, and poverty" (*Book of Praise*, p. 613). It is our honour to help fellow children of God in their time of need, knowing that the Lord has placed them in our path.

What is "needy"?

The issue facing us today is: what constitutes poverty? At what point does a church member become financially needy so that it is good and proper for the deacons to provide financial relief for them? 1 Timothy 5 helps us find some answers. As Paul does in other letters toward the end, here too he begins to address specific groups of people within the congregation. At times in his writings he addresses family groupings – husbands, wives, and children. But here he speaks to Timothy about more general groupings within the church: older and younger men as well as older and younger women. And then he comes to speak about widows, the lengthiest passage in all of Scripture on widows.

And what he says here about how widows are to be treated is instructive for us with respect to how all those in financial need are to be treated, because in Scripture the widow is normally one of the neediest people in Israel. A widow was a typical poor person. Let me give but one example from Exodus 22:21, "Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt. Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan" (NIV). Yahweh has an eye for those in distress and genuine poverty or need. We can sing of it too in Psalm 68, "He, Father to the fatherless, defense of widows in distress" (stanza 3, *Book of Praise*).

Widows in genuine need

Widows were often left in a very vulnerable position. In a society where the husband was the sole bread-winner and women did not normally enter the work-force outside of the home, a wife whose husband died was suddenly left without an income. The status of a woman was tied to her father or husband and if both were gone, she was often at the mercy of the community for day-to-day living. It was common for widows to be dirt-poor. Think of the widow whom Jesus observed putting her last pennies in the temple treasury. And if a widow had small children to feed and care for, her plight would only be worse. This was the typical experience of a widow in Bible times: a person alone and with little money, without provider or defender – and yet God cared for her!

God defends the widows and if God protects and helps the widows, then his people must do the same.

Only, the church must be discerning about which widow has genuine need requiring help. That's the point of Paul's words in verse 3, "Honor widows *who are truly widows...*" (ESV). Or it could be translated: "Widows who are *really in need*." Paul then breaks off into the duty of such a widow's family members to care for her so that the church might not be burdened with her support. We'll come back to that in a moment, but from verse 3 to verse 16 Paul is sorting out the kinds of widows that warrant help from the church from the kind that do not.

He speaks in verse 9 of only enrolling widows on a list – and I take him to mean a list of widows to be cared for by the church.¹ The church is only to enroll them if they meet certain conditions: above the age of sixty, having a reputation for doing good works, showing hospitality, caring for fellow Christians, etc. Young widows or those without a respectable reputation (i.e. for ungodly behaviour) were *not* to be put on such a list. Paul rounds off the discussion in verse 16 by coming right back to where he started, "If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care

for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows."

There is a call here for the church to be discerning in helping those who ask for assistance and I think it applies right across the board. Surely if the church must discern among the widows, the most obvious and vulnerable group of needy adults, then it must do so with single adults, single moms, and families who present themselves as being in need.

¹ I realize there is some debate as to the nature of this "list," since Paul does not spell it out in so many words. Since v. 3-16 is clearly a distinct subsection with an *inclusio* in v. 3 and v. 16 indicating that the topic of this section is discerning which widow is truly a widow in need whom the church is to care for, and since Paul feels no need to define the nature of this "list" on which such widows are to be enrolled (v. 9), I think it is simplest to understand him as referring to a list of truly needy widows whom the church will care for. Other widows are not to go on such a list and are understood to either have the means to look after themselves or should be looked after by their family members. Whether such a list of godly, needy widows implies that they in turn would serve the church in certain capacities (as some suggest) is not clear to me. This is not evident from the context and no duties for such widows are stated either. See George W. Knight III, *NIGTC: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) p. 222-223 for a good (but technical) discussion.





Growing Acceptance of Homosexuality in Dutch Sister Churches

This past June, the Dutch magazine *Onderweg*, which means “En route,” published a theme issue on gender (*Onderweg* Vol. 4, No. 12, June 9, 2018). *Onderweg* is the magazine that has replaced *De Reformatie*, which was basically the equivalent to *Clarion* for our Dutch sister churches (the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands-liberated, hereafter RCN) and whose last issue appeared at the end of 2014. *Onderweg* is a joint venture with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken, with whom the RCN are seeking unity.

The intent of this special issue was to let the various perspectives of the issues of gender and sexuality be heard in this church periodical. I find this already to be problematic, for it should be the intent of a church periodical to provide direction on current issues on the basis of God’s Word, not simply to air various opinions which may be out there.

Creation order

One of the articles in this issue was entitled “God Made Me This Way?” written by Dr. Hans Schaeffer, former minister in the RCN, currently a lecturer in Practical Theology at the Theological University in Kampen. At the beginning of the article, he notes that it is difficult to let everyone have their say on these matters because “some think that homosexual relations are unnatural and strange, and others think that it is confusing if, in the classroom of their child, the impression is given that you still need to discover whether or not you are male or female. Others become estranged from the church because being heterosexual is the only possibility” (6). These are difficult and emotional issues to deal with.

After these preliminaries, Schaeffer goes on to describe that God’s good creation has been deeply affected by the fall into sin. It is only through God that we can be redeemed from the effects of sin. So far so good, but then Schaeffer calls into question the usefulness of the “creation order,”

for instance, that men and women have received different roles and gifts in their very nature as male and female. He finds the notion of the creation order as something which has been determined for all time to be unworkable and quickly dismisses it with some simplistic examples such as whether or not women are allowed to wear pants or do paid work (7). The implication is that men and women are essentially the same, without any inherent differences grounded in the creation order. Such a view is in line with secular main stream media but is at odds with the testimony of Scripture, our own lived experience, and much scientific research as has been highlighted recently by figures such as Jordan Peterson and Heather Heying.

Further, Schaeffer writes,

Whoever wrestles with her or his gender or sexual disposition (*geaardheid*) does not have it easy. But as far as we know, this has never been any different. In the past homosexuals didn’t have it any easier than today. But the personal journey has changed. As far as society is concerned much more is possible and more or less accepted. As far as sexuality goes, *not* living as a homosexual has become much less normal. The problem of the church is that we thought there were quick answers to all sorts of difficult questions, that following a certain lifestyle was easy for everyone. Heterosexual, married, man/woman: that’s all good. Homosexual and transgender: that’s not permitted, that was sinful.

Now we know that this is not the case. Being married is not easy and staying married isn’t either. Just being woman or man is also not easy. We cannot simply hold to a creation order and then act as if everything is clear. Some homosexual relations in love and faithfulness are a better reflection of God’s love than some marriages (8).

This long quotation is quite revealing of the mindset which is becoming more prevalent in the RCN. In our post-Chris-

CALLED

Called by the Canadian Reformed Church at St. Albert, Alberta:

Rev. J. Sinke

of the Bethel United Reformed Church in Woodstock, Ontario

CHURCH NEWS

tian society, it has become accepted to live as a homosexual and therefore it is more difficult to resist a homosexual lifestyle. Then Schaeffer claims that the problem the church has is that it is still trapped in the (now out-of-date) thinking that it is easy for everyone to live as a heterosexual and that living as a homosexual is sinful.

I don't think it has ever been claimed that it is easy to resist sin. This has been a fierce struggle for thousands of years, ever since the fall into sin. This struggle takes different forms in different people as we struggle with different sins. Contrary to what Schaeffer claims, we do need to hold on to the clear teaching of Scripture that, for example, practicing a homosexual lifestyle is sinful in God's eyes because it clearly goes against his created order and intention for sexuality. To hold that this is no longer clear is simply to submit to contemporary post-Christian cultural pressures. Further, to state that some homosexual relations are a better reflection of God's love than some marriages might be trivially true in that you might point to a homosexual couple that gets along and is nice to each other, but is deeply and fundamentally flawed since homosexual relations are condemned by God. How can something condemned by God be a reflection of his love? Such an idea grieves God deeply.

Schaeffer concludes his article by saying that concerning these issues of homosexuality and transgender, the church is best off admitting that it is "searching and does not yet know" (8). I would contend that this is a very damaging approach, because the Lord has given us clarity on these issues in his Word. Yes, there will be the personal struggles of individuals and this will not be easy or simple. These brothers and sisters in their struggles will not be assisted by a church which does not know how to find God's will on these matters. God's Word is truly a lamp to our feet and a light on our path (Ps 119:105).

Marginalization

Another article in this *Onderweg* issue is entitled "God's Story Would Never Have Been Possible Without the Marginalized," written by Frans Blokhuis, a master's student in gender studies at the University of Utrecht and also associated with various Christian LGBT organizations. He describes his youth, growing up as someone who experienced homosexual attraction, during which time no positive words were ever spoken about homosexuals and they were treated as monsters (11). He felt pressure to make his homosexuality invisible to everyone around him. He writes, "Heterosexuality was seen as normal. This becomes

a problem when normal is elevated to norm because then the homosexual becomes the other" (11). According to him, this environment can lead to great suffering among homosexuals and even to suicidal thoughts.

Blokhuis also comments on gender identity. He believes that gender is a social-cultural counterpart to sex, which is biological. Gender is "not so much bodily related but is about inner identity and outward expression: on the inside people feel male or female or both or neither or something in between and express themselves as such" (12-13). Further on, he writes, "In my experience, the categories of male and female exist at best because cultures have invented them." According to Blokhuis, "God did not create such categories" (13). His reason for saying this is that God sometimes uses both male and female metaphors for himself, Paul refers to there being neither male nor female in Christ (Gal 3:28) and we are all together the bride of Christ.

He concludes the article by saying that the undesirability of the normativity of heterosexuality is seen in the notion that the church would welcome homosexual and transgender people into their heterosexual world. This is wrong, thinks Blokhuis. Rather it should be as follows, in line with liberation theologian Janneke Stegeman, "The church is where there are homosexual and transgender people. That is where we have to be. If you are too comfortable, you are probably not in the church" (13). To back up this assertion, Blokhuis refers to the example of Jesus who "sought out those who were marginalized and placed them in the centre" (13). Blokhuis longs for the day when the fellowship of believers will give the leading part to those who are marginalized, when love will be celebrated in all freedom and when "we do not group ourselves around the prevailing norm but move to the margins because that is where we find Jesus" (13).

I have no doubt that Blokhuis' experience as a youth was unpleasant for him, and that is most unfortunate. It was not, however, the timeless norms of God's Word concerning sexual relations as designed for being between a man and a woman within marriage which was the cause of the difficulties. Rather, it was the inability to be able to share his struggles and receive encouragement from those who would come alongside him and help him to live a holy life in accordance with God's good law. We need to acknowledge that

this can be a problem in our own circles as well, that those who struggle with various kinds of sexual sin are fearful of opening up for fear of ridicule or excessive shaming. We are all sinners, and we need to create an atmosphere of listening to one another in a spirit of showing love, grace, and mercy as our Lord Jesus does to us. None of us should be made to feel as an “other” or a monster because of our struggles with sin. When we confess our sin, we are restored and made whole in Jesus Christ.

Blokhuis’ comments on gender reflect the thinking of radical gender study departments at secular universities. To posit that gender is a social construct severs it from the reality of creation and makes it into something purely subjective and fluid. The alignment between biological sex and gender is identical in the overwhelming majority of people. It is only the condition of inter-sex which is ambiguous and this is very rare; this condition is also biologically apparent in the physical brokenness which occurs in those cases. Blokhuis’ use of biblical metaphors to justify an undermining of God’s creation of mankind as male and female is most unconvincing. Furthermore, using Galatians 3:28, “There is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” to advocate for gender fluidity completely misreads the text; the point is that it doesn’t matter whether we are male or female as we all equally share in Christ.


Blokhuis finds that the centre of the church should consist in the most marginalized groups in society. Therefore, in his view, it is wrong for heterosexuals to think that they are the centre of the church, welcoming in homosexual and transgender people into their world. He wants love to find freedom from existing norms. He says that Jesus is our example for this approach of moving from the norm to the margins.

Blokhuis is in serious error in these views. It is noteworthy that in his comments about Jesus he never mentions the word “sin,” which is prominent in the gospel narratives about Jesus visiting and eating with the tax collectors and sinners. When the Pharisees asked Jesus’ disciples why Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, then Jesus responded in Matthew 9:12-13, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” Jesus went to them because they were sinners and needed salvation. Jesus always upheld the norm and standard of God’s holy law and called people to leave a life of sin. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Love does not find freedom apart from God’s law but in God’s law.

What is the most disconcerting about this article is that the passages in Scripture directly related to the matter of homosexuality are completely ignored. The apostle Paul writes, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality. . . will inherit the kingdom of God.” All sexual immorality is condemned by God whether it is of a heterosexual or homosexual variety, but we have a Saviour, Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us from these sins and given us a new identity in him. Paul continues, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 9:11). Our hope in the struggle against sin does not lie in changing the norms of God to fit our (sinful) preference, but rather in confession of sin and looking to Jesus Christ for forgiveness, cleansing, and renewal. In the end, changing God’s law in the name of freedom and love undermines the work of Jesus Christ our Saviour for then, in effect, his work is not needed.

It is important for us to be aware of what is happening in our Dutch sister churches. Sadly, there is a growing acceptance of homosexual practice and lifestyle. Another indication of this trend is an article in *Nederlands Dagblad* (Dutch daily Christian newspaper) of September 4, 2018 which reported that an RCN minister, Jan-Peter Kruiger of Utrecht (North West), said in a public meeting that “homosexuals must marry” because the Bible forbids sexual relations outside of marriage. The fact that Scripture condemns homosexual relations as sinful is ignored. This article pointed to the growing trend of acceptance of homosexuality among Christians in The Netherlands. Less and less are speaking out from an orthodox, biblical perspective.

One of the real tragedies of a climate of acceptance of homosexual practice and lifestyle is that the group which becomes truly marginalized and unsupported are those struggling with homosexual attraction who desire to live a celibate and holy life. When church leaders are stating that homosexuals should marry, it becomes very difficult for a homosexual to resist sin in the particular struggle he has. If the sin he is fighting against is being condoned by his church leadership, where does he go for support?

It is deeply distressing to report and witness these ungodly trends happening in our Dutch sister churches, but we need to be informed and stay alert in these days. 



The European Union versus Hungary

On September 12, the European Union (EU) Parliament voted to begin disciplinary action against Hungary because that country had allegedly been contravening the EU's fundamental values of "liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law." The vote by a margin of more than two-thirds was the first time that such action was taken against an EU member. It could ultimately result in Hungary losing its EU voting rights.

The rule of Hungary's Prime Minister Victor Orbán is far from perfect. Legitimate criticisms can be made, for example, of the corruption found in high places. The EU Parliament vote resulted from a report by Judith Sargentini, a Dutch Member of the European Parliament, which accused Hungary among other things of corruption and of having patriarchal stereotyped attitudes with respect to the position of women in society and other such grievances against Hungary's cultural realities. But Bruce Bawer reported, what really got the EU upset was:

Orbán's refusal to heed EU directives requiring Hungary to accept Muslim migrants. It's this battle, in fact, that has been at the very center of Orbán's fraught relations with the EU. Like the leaders of Poland and the Czech Republic, Orbán is fully aware of the apocalyptic horrors that mass Muslim immigration has unleashed upon Western Europe, and he refuses, quite simply, to inflict the same havoc upon his own people – who, overwhelming supportive of this position, have voted his party into power three times in a row.

Bawer went on to note that Hungary was the first European country "with a government office dedicated to addressing the Muslim persecution of Christians. Orbán has argued that Europe should put its energies into helping those persecuted Christians rather than aiding their Muslim persecutors." For championing this priority, the EU has criticized Hungary for breaching EU values, which do not consider the security and interests of your country to be of vital importance. And so, Bawer notes: "In the view of

the unelected EU technocrats, the proper reaction to such a head of state – someone who obeys the popular will rather than orders from Brussels, and who cares more about the welfare of his people than about the superstate – is obvious: he must be crushed." The September 12 EU vote against Hungary is part of that attempt to crush Orbán.

Prior to the vote, Orbán addressed the EU Parliament and expressed his bitterness that the EU would denounce Hungary, which "has belonged to the family of Christian European nations for a thousand years" and which "rebelled and took to arms against the biggest army in the world, the Soviet Army." He also pointed out numerous factual misrepresentations in the Sargentini report and vowed that "we will protect our borders and we will decide whom to live together with. We have built a fence. We have stopped illegal migrants, hundreds of thousands of them. We have defended Hungary and we have defended Europe." He asserted that Hungary will not be a country of migrants and he rejected what he called "the threats, the blackmailing, the defamation by forces supporting immigrants and migrants against Hungary and the Hungarian people. . . . Hungary will protect its borders, stop illegal migration, and will defend its rights if necessary." It was, Bawer noted, "a stirring declaration of national self-determination."

In response to Orbán's speech, an EU official tried to put Orbán in his place with a stern lecture. Nigel Farage noted how absurd it was that democratically elected Orbán should be lectured on democracy by someone who had never been elected by anyone.

Bawer observed that whatever Hungary's present failings, it has something that other European countries, however lovely and liberal and loyal to EU "values," do not have. Hungary "has a future."

Sources used: Bruce Bawer, "Playing Hardball with Hungary" and Søren Kern "Hungary Defiant in the Face of EU Censure" on the websites of FrontPage Magazine and the Gatestone Institute respectively. **C**



English Conference 2: Pathways to Teaching Excellence

This report is the second installment covering a first-ever, two-day English Conference for teachers from Christian schools, supported by the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches.

Presentation by Dr. David Slomp

On Friday evening, Dr. David Slomp shared his presentation entitled “Pathways to Teaching Excellence.” Board members and Education Committee members of Dufferin Christian and Immanuel Christian Schools joined us. Dr. Slomp told us not to learn the “tips and tricks” of the teaching the trade, but to focus on four dispositions and habits of mind: Curiosity, Courage, Reflection, and Nurture. He used a series of short videos to highlight each disposition. To give our readers some depth, and to do justice to Dr. Slomp’s presentation, I will summarize each.

Video 1: Along with students, teachers must remain “curious learners.” They need to teach new material for new challenges. They should update courses whether or not the new way may be successful. They need to be curious about building relationships with each student. By knowing what the students like and how they learn, teachers can foster the love of learning in the classroom and beyond.

Video 2: Teachers are often inhibited by *fear*. An example of this truth is the typical teacher who designs and plans for ultimate classroom management rather than ultimate learning. Do teachers have the confidence to go beyond management? Teachers must obviously cover curriculum, but they should also allow for flexible unplannedness. “Outside-the-box” can cause anxiety or fear in the teacher, forcing him or her to reject novelty for the sake of control. A teacher should seek to embrace “learning-chaos.” In project-based teaching, for example, teachers should work with each student as an individual. Also, just like any good parent, a teacher should not be scared to tell the students that he/she doesn’t know the answer; teachers should engage and encourage students to develop a path to find the answer together. Lastly, teachers must recognize that many

students can be motivated by fear too, which would be an inhibitor to learning. Cultivate openness. Be courageous.

Video 3: Students and teacher should *reflect*. Metacognition for students is important; have them think with you about better work environments to achieve your goals for the class. Intentionality gives control. Reflect on the learning – are they learning? Are they motivated to learn? Are they going beyond? Are you listening to students (in their journals, exit cards, or conferences), and incorporating their suggestions? Are you genuine with them? Do you love them?

Video 4: Nurturing – know your students’ names and *interests*. Build relationships of trust. Show that you are invested and committed to helping students. Interact with students – be partners in learning so that your students are willing to put in the effort and be successful. Share and show that teaching is your passion – wanting to have kids learn, to ask “stupid questions.” Provide extra help and encouragement.

Nurture builds a relationship of trust. Demonstrate that you are willing to help them learn in a concrete way. Classrooms should be a safe place to try and fail in a task. Failure should not be a terrifying thing. By letting kids fail, Dr. Slomp says, we build resilience and their ability to get themselves out of failure. Help them through that struggle. Build the *right* kind of scaffolding for students so they can climb out successfully.

Dr. Slomp then shared two key perspectives for teaching excellence. The first is: Teaching is consequential. Students are living in a changing world. Give them skills to handle change. Connect research and learning to life in the world. Connect abstract to real. What are we trying to do in our schools? Have our students thrive in their culture, to be critical of their culture, to shine strongly in this culture. “Why do I have to learn this?” is a very critical question.

The second perspective is: Teaching is transferable. He highlighted seven transferable skills: 1. Critical thinking. 2. Ability to work with others – very important. 3. Be cre-

ative and ask questions to learn more – that’s a life-long skill. 4. Asking the right questions is so important. 5. Making a mistake is a good thing. You learn more from a mistake. 6. Seek alternative perspectives. 7. Show sensitivity to others.

Dr. Slomp, and we with him, shared some implications. Four that I took away from our discussion are:

1. Teaching is very personal – what works for you may not work for others. Know what bores you, interests you, and engages you.
2. Focus PD on cultivation of dispositions. Reward those who struggle and are working hard to change. Don’t reward the coasters. Talk about failures. Build a mentorship program for new teachers.
3. Have teachers do curriculum reviews and share them with Education Committees. Do not have Education Committees do reviews.
4. Build these dispositions into our schools. Foster trusting, caring, creative, and positive learning.

“Writing as Problem Solving”

On Friday morning, the participants, after being fed a hearty breakfast by the Winnipeg school community, were led to what I think was an “eye-opening” highlight for me. Dr. Slomp spoke again. His topic was “Writing as Problem Solving.” He urged us to get “outside the box” and engage students in meaningful writing situations as much as we can, even at elementary levels, because in the real world, he argues, people write for their real situations. A meaningful situation, he argues, is a real situation. Most of our most consequential writing is for real (and often crisis) situations.

The best writing experiences then, are writing for real audiences beyond the teacher, an audience that can interact with and respond to your writing. Some suggestions were: staff, grandparents, seniors, neighbours, mayor, town council, MP, newspapers, and even businesses. Students should write proposals for requesting a new event, for effecting change, for fundraisers, for sharing opinions and views, for anything that is meaningful and real. The writing experience would not simply be the final letter, but would include any research, studies, data collecting, planning, or even video-making that would all be integrated into the final product. Students would have to identify and succinctly explain the problem/purpose; provide necessary statistics or resource to prove credibility, share a well-studied budget (if necessary), provide solutions and alternatives, and incorporate empathy into their writing. Obviously, drafts of writing will be written before the publishable copy goes out. Obviously, the request/proposal may be rejected, altered, or even denied. That’s part of the real world too, and the students need to learn to graciously accept that.

Students need to learn, says Dr. Slomp, not simply how to write, but more significantly, that they need to learn to

write across this ever-changing constellation of technologies, modalities, and contexts. This kind of writing is consequential, and thus, memorable. He shared that Coaldale Christian School students were successfully involved in this kind of problem-solving writing. Students at all elementary and secondary levels should try it, confirming that this kind of writing will easily fulfill specific expectations of all provinces’ ministry curricula.

I do not believe that Dr. Slomp is suggesting that all other writing is of no value. Students are asked to write in journals, to write poetry or short stories, to write reports or essays, reflections, letters-to-the-editor, and the like. What he is exploring, I believe, is the question of meaningful, memorable, game-changing writing. What writing, he asked us, was of consequence to you? He wants teachers to include writing experiences that truly transfer beyond the classroom into the real world. Also, this type of writing experience is comprehensive: it is not merely a polished proposal or letter, but involves talking, planning, questioning, surveying, interviewing, recording responses, adding charts, making video as well as the well-planned written proposal. Oral, written, and visual media are all included.

Collaboration

On Friday afternoon, teachers met in two groups to collaborate about their Language Arts programs. Much was gleaned from one another. Programs, philosophies, jargon, methodologies, and the like were shared and discussed. Camaraderie among teachers was developed and enhanced.

Will this conference affect any drastic change in the curricula in our Christian schools? It could, but that wasn’t the intent of the conference. RCDC wanted Christian teachers to collaborate together, to share “their knowledge and expertise, and to interact with two experts in their field. . . .” All that, we certainly accomplished. Since we spent much time on issues quite specific to teaching Language Arts or English, participants could grow in working through these issues. Many of us are still collaborating via email, and thus, are still benefiting from the conference. Perhaps we did not spend enough time on more foundational aspects (e.g. How and why is our Language Arts program different from the programs of public and Catholic schools? How do we incorporate the hallmarks of Reformed education practically into our teaching? How do our Reformed schools work with Ministry documents in our Language Arts programs?) These more foundational questions should also be addressed, but perhaps better at the annual teacher conferences, or among schools of like provinces. Again, much thanks to RCDC for setting up and financing this conference, and to Dufferin and Immanuel Christian Schools for hosting this conference.



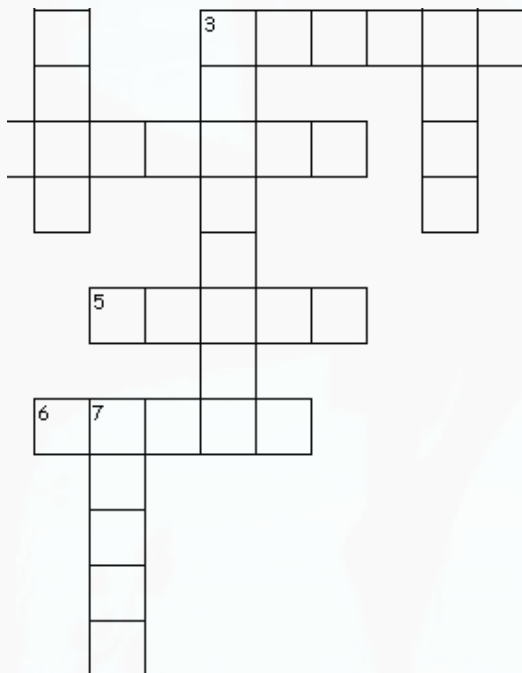
Clarion Kids

Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus went to Jericho, where a rich man named Zacchaeus lived. He was a sinful tax collector, and no one liked him. Zacchaeus really wanted to see Jesus, but he was very short, and there was a large crowd. He climbed up a sycamore tree so that he would be able to see him. When Jesus passed by, he told him to come down from the tree. He wanted to go to Zacchaeus's house for supper. Some of the people watching were angry, but Zacchaeus believed in Jesus. He gave half of his money to the poor and promised to pay back anyone he had cheated. Jesus came to save sinners like us and like Zacchaeus.

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



Crossword Puzzle

Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.

Across

3. Jesus came to this world to save _____.
4. City where Zacchaeus lived.
5. Was Zacchaeus tall or short?
6. What Zacchaeus collected.

Down

1. Zacchaeus returned all of the _____ he had stolen.
2. Zacchaeus believed in him and was saved.
3. The kind of tree Zacchaeus climbed.
7. How some people felt when Jesus wanted to visit Zacchaeus.

by Emily Nijenhuis

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Thank-you for publishing the articles by Revs. Bill De Jong and James Visscher concerning the Blessings Christian Church. It's good to discuss these things in public, otherwise too much depends on hearsay. Allow me to direct my questions to Rev. De Jong.

Concerning a Baptist minister on a CanRC pulpit. The discussion quickly begins to revolve around various church order articles regarding eligibility for the ministry (Arts 4-5) and the consistory's responsibility for supervising its own pulpit (Art 15). As such those articles are relevant, but we need to go even deeper and speak about ordination vows and subscription. Among other commitments, all office-bearers subscribe to this: "We also declare that we reject all *errors* conflicting with the doctrine expressed in these confessions [Three Forms of Unity] and promise to oppose, refute and help prevent such *errors*" (p. 661, *Book of Praise*). I highlight the word "error" because that is exactly the word used in the Belgic Confession, Article 34, when it says, "we reject the *error* of the Anabaptists who. . . also condemn the baptism of the little children of believers." To be specific, then, my first question is this: how are we doing our utmost to oppose, refute, and help to prevent this error by allowing a Baptist preacher on one of our pulpits? Someone may think, "Well, so long as that Baptist preacher does not condemn infant baptism from the pulpit, it should still be OK." However, would we apply the same logic for other errors? Would we allow on our pulpits a preacher who is publicly known to hold to the error of the Epicureans, or its modern version called Open Theism (BC Art 13), or the error of Pelagius (BC Art 15), so long as they don't preach on God's providence or original sin? I certainly hope not.

Furthermore, we have agreed together as churches that we admit to the Lord's Supper "only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life" (CO Art 61). Obviously, this Baptist minister has not publicly professed the Reformed faith, otherwise he wouldn't be a Baptist minister anymore. So, my second question is: if we would not admit him to the Lord's table in a worship service, how can we admit him to the Lord's pulpit? After all, the preaching of the Word is still the primary means of grace and the sacraments are there to confirm the Word.

Paraphrasing forms. Rev. De Jong says that Blessings has decided to contextualize and reformulate the forms because some guests in worship do not understand certain words, such as "covenant." But, again, we need to go deeper. Blessings also reformulates some of the wording of the vows. I double-checked with Rev. De Jong and he confirmed that Blessings refers to the Apostles' Creed or "the articles of the Christian faith" in the vows made at public profession of faith or baptism rather than our present wording. Yes, at one time we had that language in our forms, but Synod Cloverdale 1983 (Art 145) adopted the wording that we have now: "The doctrine of the Word of God, *summarized in the confessions*." Not everyone was happy with that change. There was a letter at the Synod Burlington-Waterdown 1986 (Art 144) and various appeals at Synod Winnipeg 1989 (Art 161), asking to return to the old wording, but each time the wording of Synod 1983 was upheld. My last question, then, is this: at the regular classis meetings, how do delegates from Blessings state that they are honouring the decisions of the major assemblies (CO Art 44), when their regular practice does not uphold this decision made by three consecutive general synods?

Please understand the spirit in which these questions are asked, namely, in brotherly love and genuine concern.

Dr. J. Van Vliet

Response

Dear editor,

Thank you for permitting me to write a response to Dr. Jason Van Vliet. As I understand him, Dr. Van Vliet first opposes with two lines of argumentation the decision of Blessings to permit the retiring pastor of the Stanley Avenue Baptist Church the opportunity to deliver a farewell sermon to his longtime parishioners in the context of a worship service called by the Blessings consistory. Dr. Van Vliet's first argument references ordination vows and confessional subscription. For Dr. Van Vliet, it seems contradictory for Blessings office bearers to permit a Baptist to preach when they have vowed to refute, and eschew the promotion of, errors conflicting with the doctrine taught in the Reformed confessions, especially when the "error of

the Anabaptists” is explicitly rejected by the Belgic Confession (Art 34). The resolution to this apparent contradiction is simple: the Baptist preacher understood that he was not to critique much less condemn infant baptism. Knowing this is so, Dr. Van Vliet asks whether such logic could be conscripted to permit an open theist or a Pelagian to preach so long as he did not promote heresy.

I would first remind Dr. Van Vliet that, other than a rejection of infant baptism, there is little historical connection between 16th century Anabaptists and present-day Baptists on a whole host of issues including how one ought to regard those who affirm infant baptism. I imagine Calvinistic Baptist pastors such as Alistair Begg, Mark Dever, and John Piper would be horrified to be identified with the Anabaptists. I would point out secondly that the Blessings office bearers are all convinced and public advocates of infant baptism who do precisely what the subscription vows demand: they promote infant baptism and endeavour to expose the rejection of infant baptism as unbiblical.

I discern behind Dr. Van Vliet’s questions a failure to distinguish “error” from “heresy.” To reject infant baptism *per se* is not to put oneself beyond the pale of Christian orthodoxy. Such rejection belongs to a category (i.e., error) entirely different from Pelagianism (i.e., heresy). One would hope that Reformed theologians and pastors today would finally admit that gospel-believing Baptists ought to be cherished as daughters and sons of our Father and sisters and brothers in Christ from whom we can learn so much. Lastly, I observe without commentary that Dr. Van Vliet’s concern is one that emerges uniquely from a Canadian Reformed ecclesial context and is largely absent in both the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Free Reformed Churches in North America, both federations with the same confessions, similar church polity, and similar ordination vows, which have in their own ways permitted Baptists to preach on occasion.

Dr. Van Vliet’s second argument references a particular interpretation of Church Order Article 61 – namely, an interpretation which favours the exclusion of Baptists from the Lord’s table. I believe this interpretation fails to respect the decision of Synod the Hague (1914) which judged that

the rejection of infant baptism *per se* ought not to be considered grounds for barring someone from the Lord’s Table (Art. 138) and more importantly fails to grapple with the apostle Paul’s argument in Galatians 2 that to establish a bar of admission to table fellowship higher than faith in Christ is to deny the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Dr. Van Vliet also takes issue with the decision of Blessings to contextualize the liturgical forms, and especially the vows. While the vows are essentially left intact in the contextualization of these forms, it is true that the older language of “articles of the Christian faith” (or synonymously, “Apostles’ Creed”) is preferred at Blessings to the term “confessions” in the vows for profession of faith and baptism. To understand the significance of the phrase “articles of the Christian faith,” I recommend N.H. Gootjes, “The Articles of the Christian Faith” (*Clarion* 48:5 [1999]) and “Once More: Articles and Confessions” (*Clarion* 48:6 [1999]).

Moreover, the decision to revise the terminology in the vows from “articles of the Christian faith” to “confessions” was made at Synod Cloverdale (1983) significantly without overture from any church and apart from a recommendation from the Committee for Liturgical Forms (which had recommended “creeds”). When this decision was disputed by a number of individuals and churches, Synod Burlington (1986) argued that this modification was not a substantial rewording but merely a “linguistic revision” (Art. 144), a judgment reaffirmed by Synod Winnipeg (1989; Art. 161) and by Synod Lincoln (1992; Art. 122). If this change really is merely a “linguistic revision” which has not altered the meaning of the original phrase “articles of the Christian faith,” no one can lodge a complaint to a church for preferring the older language even though formal attempts to reincorporate this language have so far failed.

I appreciate Dr. Van Vliet posing the questions he did in a fraternal spirit and in genuine concern, and I offer my response in the same spirit. My prayer is that together we can grow towards greater maturity in Christ as leaders among churches of our Lord.

Dr. Bill De Jong

*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.*



PRESS RELEASE

Press Release of the Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary held on September 6, 2018

Opening and roll call

The Board of Governors met at CRTS on September 6, 2018. All the governors were present except B. Hordyk. Rev. R. Aasman opened with Scripture reading and prayer. Leanne Kuizenga was present to take the minutes of the meeting.

Memorabilia

The following brothers and sisters were remembered in prayer: Mrs. K. Deddens, Mrs. M. DeJong, the Faber family, Dr. N.H. Gootjes and his wife, Dinie, as well as the two emeriti professors, J. Geertsema and C. Van Dam.

Minutes and agenda

The minutes of the Board meeting held on January 11, 2018 were approved. The agenda for the meeting was established.

Receipt of decisions, reports-material agenda items

1. Committees that had been appointed at the Strategic Planning Meeting held on September 6, 2017, to deal with the present and future operation of the seminary gave preliminary reports. One of those committees, mandated to explore distance education, presented information on the following topics: the present and future needs of the churches and mission projects in Canada, Australia, and South Africa; accreditation (parameters and options of CRTS's present accrediting agency); pedagogy (different models available for distance education); technology (the hardware and software that educational institutions use for distance); the integrity and quality of program (training preachers and pastors at a distance).
2. Since a new self-study needs to be ready by 2020 for the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) so that CRTS can receive re-accreditation, various committees were appointed to work through the institutional, educational, and degree program standards of ATS and assess how CRTS is fulfilling those standards and where improvements can be made.
3. Report of the Executive Committee. The chairman and vice-chairman met with all staff and faculty members

to review the assessment of the principal, and then met with the Principal. They reported that there is a good working relationship between principal, staff, and all the faculty members.

4. The report on visits to the lectures at CRTS on March 13-14, 2018 was received. This report gave reason for thankfulness since the students are being taught in faithfulness to the Word of God and the Three Forms of Unity.
5. Dr. J. Van Vliet reported on visits he made to churches in Korea and China. This report was received with thankfulness.
6. Report of the Finance and Property Committee: The Board approved the 2019 budget. The assessment per communicant member remains at \$90. The 2017 Audited Financial Statements were also approved.
7. Report of the Senate: The Board approved the sabbatical proposal of Dr. T. Van Raalte, which he will enjoy this fall, and received with gratitude a positive evaluation of Dr. J. Van Vliet's sabbatical (January 15 – July 15, 2018).
8. Search Committee: The Board reviewed the report of the Search Committee for a professor of New Testament to replace Dr. G. Visscher and gave further direction.
9. Annual Reports from the Registrar, Librarian, CRTS Website, Convocation Committee, Faber-Holwerda Bursary, Publication Foundation, Foreign Bursary, as well as from the faculty on course work and attendance at conferences were received with thankfulness.
10. Report to General Synod 2019: The Board approved a draft report which will be edited and a final version sent to the Board members before being sent out in October to the convening church of General Synod.

New business

The date of the next Board Meeting was set for January 17, 2019 at 1 p.m.

Press release and closing

The completion of the Press Release was delegated to the Vice-Chairman in consultation with the Executive and the Principal. Rev. J. Slaa closed the meeting with prayer and thanksgiving.

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary,
Rev. J. Ludwig, Vice-Chairman/Corresponding Clerk 