

Clarion

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE: TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

The Nashville Statement



VOLUME 68 • NUMBER 3 • FEBRUARY 8, 2019

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION
THE REFORMATIONAL STUDY CENTRE

Clarion

**Clarion: a trustworthy
and engaging magazine,
widely spread and read
in Canadian Reformed
households and beyond.**

To equip God's people for his glory, in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized in the Reformed confessions, Clarion adheres to the following core values:

Confessionally Reformed
Loving in manner
Attuned to current issues
Readable and Reliable
In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvliuw, 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

2019 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.

2019 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

Our issue begins with Dr. James Visscher's lead article, "The Nashville Statement: A Coalition for Biblical Sexuality." The statement, drafted and signed by a large coalition of Christian leaders from all over North America, seeks to define sexuality in a biblical way, with the preamble asking, Will we lose our biblical conviction in this secular age, or hold fast to God's ways?

A four-part series from Rev. Rob Schouten is underway, "Is Scripture Enough?" In his second part, Rev. Schouten looks at the importance that the Roman Catholic Church places on tradition.

In news, we have an article from Rev. Ryan Kampen on the Reformational Study Centre (located in South Africa), Church News Review from Rev. Carl Van Dam, and Mission News from MERF. Issue 3 also contains a Treasures, New & Old meditation, Education Matters, and *Clarion Kids*, as well as a letter to the editor and a press release.

Laura Veenendaal

CONTENTS

- 59 The Nashville Statement
- 62 TREASURES, NEW & OLD
- 63 Is Scripture Enough? (2)
- 65 The Reformational Study Centre
- 69 CHURCH NEWS REVIEW
- 70 MISSION NEWS
- 72 EDUCATION MATTERS
- 75 CLARION KIDS
- 76 LETTER TO THE EDITOR
- 77 PRESS RELEASE

Cover photo: Nashville, Tennessee





The Nashville Statement

A Coalition for Biblical Sexuality

In late August of 2017, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention met in Nashville, Tennessee and drafted a statement on human sexuality. This statement has since become known as “The Nashville Statement.” Initially, it was signed by 150 Christian leaders from all over North America. Since then more than 22,000 more have added their signatures to it. Recently this statement has also been translated into the Dutch language and in a very short time it has garnered upwards of 250 signatures.

So, what is this statement all about? Negatively, it states its opposition to homosexuality, LGBT sexuality, same-sex marriage, polygamy, polyamory, adultery, and fornication. Positively, it supports the opposite-sex definition of marriage, argues for faithfulness in marriage, chastity outside of marriage, and biological male-female distinctions.

As for the statement proper, it opens with a preamble that begins:

Evangelical Christians at the dawn of the twenty-first century find themselves living in a period of historic transition. As Western culture has become increasingly post-Christian, it has embarked upon a massive revision of what it means to be a human being. . . . This secular spirit of our age presents a great challenge to the Christian church. Will the church of the Lord Jesus Christ lose her biblical conviction, clarity, and courage, and blend into the spirit of the age? Or will she hold fast to the word of life, draw courage from Jesus, and unashamedly proclaim his way as the way of life? . . . Therefore, in the hope of serving Christ’s church and witnessing publicly to the good purposes of God for human sexuality revealed in Christian Scripture, we offer the following affirmations and denials.

In total there are fourteen affirmations and denials. They include the following:

Article 1

WE AFFIRM that God has designed marriage to be a covenantal, sexual, procreative, lifelong union of one man and one woman, as husband and wife, and is meant to signify the covenant love between Christ and his bride the church.

WE DENY that God has designed marriage to be a homosexual, polygamous, or polyamorous relationship. We also deny that marriage is a mere human contract rather than a covenant made before God.

Article 2

WE AFFIRM that God’s revealed will for all people is chastity outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage.

WE DENY that any affections, desires, or commitments ever justify sexual intercourse before or outside marriage; nor do they justify any form of sexual immorality.

Article 3

WE AFFIRM that God created Adam and Eve, the first human beings, in his own image, equal before God as persons, and distinct as male and female.

WE DENY that the divinely ordained differences between male and female render them unequal in dignity or worth.

Article 4

WE AFFIRM that divinely ordained differences between male and female reflect God's original creation design and are meant for human good and human flourishing.

WE DENY that such differences are a result of the Fall or are a tragedy to be overcome.

Article 5

WE AFFIRM that the differences between male and female reproductive structures are integral to God's design for self-conception as male or female.

WE DENY that physical anomalies or psychological conditions nullify the God-appointed link between biological sex and self-conception as male or female.

Article 6

WE AFFIRM that those born with a physical disorder of sex development are created in the image of God and have dignity and worth equal to all other image-bearers. They are acknowledged by our Lord Jesus in his words about "eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb." With all others they are welcome as faithful followers of Jesus Christ and should embrace their biological sex insofar as it may be known.

WE DENY that ambiguities related to a person's biological sex render one incapable of living a fruitful life in joyful obedience to Christ.

Article 7

WE AFFIRM that self-conception as male or female should be defined by God's holy purposes in creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture.

WE DENY that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God's holy purposes in creation and redemption.

Article 8

WE AFFIRM that people who experience sexual attraction for the same sex may live a rich and fruitful life pleasing to

God through faith in Jesus Christ, as they, like all Christians, walk in purity of life.

WE DENY that sexual attraction for the same sex is part of the natural goodness of God's original creation, or that it puts a person outside the hope of the gospel.

Article 9

WE AFFIRM that sin distorts sexual desires by directing them away from the marriage covenant and toward sexual immorality – a distortion that includes both heterosexual and homosexual immorality.

WE DENY that an enduring pattern of desire for sexual immorality justifies sexually immoral behavior.

Article 10

WE AFFIRM that it is sinful to approve of homosexual immorality or transgenderism and that such approval constitutes an essential departure from Christian faithfulness and witness.

WE DENY that the approval of homosexual immorality or transgenderism is a matter of moral indifference about which otherwise faithful Christians should agree to disagree.

Article 11

WE AFFIRM our duty to speak the truth in love at all times, including when we speak to or about one another as male or female.

WE DENY any obligation to speak in such ways that dishonor God's design of his image bearers as male and female.

Article 12

WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ gives both merciful pardon and transforming power, and that this pardon and power enable a follower of Jesus to put to death sinful desires and to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ is insufficient to forgive all sexual sins and to give power for holiness to every believer who feels drawn into sexual sin.

Article 13

WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ enables sinners to forsake transgender self-conceptions and by divine forbearance to accept the God-ordained link between one's biological sex and one's self-conception as male or female.

WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ sanctions self-conceptions that are at odds with God's revealed will.

Scripture references*

Gen 1:26-28; 2:15-25; 3:1-24; Exod 20:14; 20:17; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Deut 5:18, 21; 22:5; Jdg 19:22; 2 Sam 11:1-12:15; Job 31:1; Ps 51:1-19; Prov 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27; Isa 59:1; Mal 2:14; Matt 5:27-30; 19:4-6, 8-9, 12; Acts 15:20, 29; Rom 1:26-27; 1:32; 1 Cor 6:9-11, 18-20; 7:1-7; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 5:24; Eph 4:15, 20-24; 5:31-32; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:3-8; 1 Tim 1:9-10, 15; 2 Tim 2:22; Titus 2:11-12; Hebr 13:4; Jas 1:14-15; 1 Pet 2:11; Jude 7.

**Scripture texts are not a part of the original document but have been added subsequently for reference.*

Article 14

WE AFFIRM that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners and that through Christ's death and resurrection forgiveness of sins and eternal life are available to every person who repents of sin and trusts in Christ alone as Savior, Lord, and supreme treasure.

WE DENY that the Lord's arm is too short to save or that any sinner is beyond his reach.

Conclusion

This statement was initially signed by the following notable leaders in North American Christianity: Albert Mohler, Rosaria Butterfield, Ligon Duncan, Kevin DeYoung, John Piper, J. I. Packer, Sam Alberry, Alistair Begg, Mark Dever, James Dobson, Wayne Grudem, D. A. Carson, R. C. Sproul, Marvin Olasky, R. Kent Hughes, Thomas Schreiner, Michael Horton, John Frame, and many others.

As one would expect in today's climate of opinion, the Nashville Statement has also garnered a good deal of criticism. Counter statements have been issued defending the rights of those in the LBGT community. Even the mayor of Nashville got involved and declared that this statement does not represent the inclusive values of the city and people of Nashville.

Recently, as mentioned above, the statement was released in The Netherlands and there, too, it has unleashed an avalanche of criticism. We are even led to believe that the Dutch governing authorities are taking a closer look at those who signed it and whether or not they are contravening laws relating to discrimination. That such a reaction has arisen in The Netherlands is not surprising seeing that it has been in the forefront of the movement to alter traditional views of marriage and sexuality. At the same time,

the fact that some "Reformed leaders" are adding their voice to the cries of outrage is not a surprise either seeing how they have chosen to either ignore or reinterpret clear biblical givens.

But be that as it may, the question may be asked as to whether this statement accurately reflects biblical norms? To this, a great many conservative Christian leaders have said a resounding "Yes!" At the same time, some have dissented, and others have remained silent.

For the most part, I think that this statement merits a closer look by all Bible-believing Christians. At the same time, it would have been helpful if there had been an additional article on the fact that disapproving of homosexual behaviour does not mean that one should automatically be deemed to be a bigot or a hater. As Christians we are not to hate our neighbours but, as our Lord commands, to love them. Yet that love does not mean toleration of all forms of non-biblical behaviour. It is possible to disagree and disapprove and yet not hate. The fact that a father disapproves of his children drinking and driving is not a manifestation of his hate for them, but of his love and concern for them and for their lives. Similarly, our disapproval of so much modern misguided sexual expression is not a proof of our hatred and bigotry but of our concern for the well-being of our neighbours and the future of our country.





From Strength to Strength

“They go from strength to strength” (Psalm 84:7)

In Psalm 84, the Sons of Korah, the authors and first singers of this Psalm, spoke about making the pilgrimage from some far-off place to the temple in Jerusalem. Often it was a difficult journey. They mention, in verse 6, the Valley of Baca.

Baca means “weeping.” The valley of weeping. A Lebanese barber I went to many years ago told me that the Baca Valley is in Lebanon, to the north of Israel and Jerusalem. He was a Lebanese Christian who came from that area. The Baca valley, he said, is a dry valley, but when it rains it is covered with puddles and pools of water. He told me that is the imagery used here in verse 6. It is amazing what you can learn from your barber.

Often, as we are travelling through life, we are weeping for any number of reasons. You might be crying because of the death of a loved one, due to an illness, or because of pain caused by a chronic condition. But as you travel toward your heavenly Father and your

Lord Jesus, the place of weeping becomes a place of joy and refreshment.

Let us go to Zion, to Jesus, who will wipe away our tears and refresh us.

Today travel is quite easy. We motor along in our cars and stop at one of the many Tim Hortons or Starbucks along the way. But in the days of this psalm, travel was often difficult. It could be so very hot and there were not many places to rest. And yet they went from strength to strength.

From the late Rev. Van Dooren, my first professor of preaching at CRTS, I learned that the expression “strength to strength” should make us think of oases in the desert. The children of Israel, wandering in the desert, went from oasis to oasis, and at each one they were strengthened. Instead of getting weaker along the way, they grew stronger.

How will you become stronger and stronger as you travel life’s journey? Only by following the Lord Jesus. If you do not follow Jesus, you will be-

come weaker and lose your way. But if you follow him, you’ll grow stronger and stronger, until you appear before God in Zion.

Believers who die appear before God in Zion. That is where they now are: before God in the heavenly Zion. They went from strength to strength.

Though they may have become mentally and physically weak, yet they went from strength to strength, because they always stayed close to Jesus.

Both my mothers became very old. At the time of their death they were like little birdies – weak and frail – but they knew where they were going: to Jesus!

Parents, teach your children about the importance of following the Lord Jesus on their pilgrimage through life.

You who are weeping, follow Jesus and you will travel from strength to strength.

Follow Jesus and you will arrive at the good destination – before God in Zion.



For further study

1. Consider Elim, an oasis mentioned in Exodus 15:27. How would it have been a place of refreshment for the children of Israel?
2. Why was the Psalmist, in Psalm 42:3, weeping?
3. Who will wipe away the tears from your eyes? See Revelation 7:17 and 21:4.



Is Scripture Enough? (Part 2)

In the first installment, we compared the Reformed doctrine of *sola Scriptura* to the commitment of the Catholic Church to scripture and tradition. We will now continue by taking a closer look at what the tradition of the Catholic Church really consists of and whether it can actually bear the weight that is placed upon it.

Tradition as the unwritten teaching of the apostles

One of the recurring questions arising from perusal of Catholic material is this: *What, exactly, is the tradition?* In many Catholic writings, the word “tradition” refers to “unwritten teachings or practices of the apostles” which were

In the early Christian church, a period before the New Testament was complete, the church relied quite a lot on orally-communicated teaching of the apostles and other Christian evangelists

supposedly handed down to subsequent generations by a continuous succession. To undergird such an understanding, Catholics point to passages in the New Testament such as 2 Thessalonians 2:15, where the apostle Paul writes, “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the *traditions* that you were taught by us, either by our *spoken word* or by our *letter*” (see also 2 Thess 3:6; 1 Cor 11:2, Gal 1:14). In verses like these, Catholics seek to find support for an “oral tradition,” which they claim was passed down to the church along with the written documents of the New Testament.

As used by the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, the word “tradition” refers to a body of teaching that had first been delivered by Jesus Christ, as Mediator, to his apostles and by them to the churches of Christ. This is unchangeable body of truth. Scripture refers to this body of tradition as “the faith delivered once for all to the saints” (see Jude 3). It stands to reason that in the early church this “tradition” of divine truth was communicated both orally and in writing. For instance, in Paul’s work as a church planter, he would convey to his hearers the “tradition” of the gospel which he had received from Christ and from the other apostles. In his preaching and teaching, both publicly and privately, Paul “passed on” the tradition. Later in time, the apostle committed these same sacred “traditions” to writing. In whatever way this “tradition” was communicated, there was an obligation for believers to “hold to the traditions.” Instead of letting them go, they were to retain them carefully and consider them normative for doctrine and life.

So, we can imagine that in the early Christian church, a period before the New Testament was complete, the church relied quite a lot on orally-communicated teaching of the apostles and other Christian evangelists. Later, however, as the apostolic age came to a close, the importance of orally-communicated teaching decreased and was replaced by a growing reliance on the writings of the apostles which were acknowledged as sacred Scripture (see 2 Pet 3:16). Even in the period of the early church, however, there could be no question of a contradiction between oral and written tradition. What the apostles taught in person was in harmony with what they wrote. To say it more strongly, the Scriptures are the written form of the “tradition.”

Tradition beyond apostolic teachings

In many other Catholic writings, the word “tradition” means something considerably broader than merely “unwritten apostolic teachings and practices.” The term is used

CALL ACCEPTED/DECLINED

Accepted the call to the Vernon Canadian Reformed Church, BC and declined the call to Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Church, ON:

Candidate Iwan Borst

CHURCH NEWS

as a sort of catch-all to describe the accumulated teachings and interpretations of the Bible as found in the statements of popes and councils over the course of many centuries. Far from being a fixed repository of “unwritten apostolic teachings,” tradition in this sense is something alive and growing. Because the “Spirit of truth” resides in the church’s leadership, the church is considered to be capable of giving authoritative and infallible pronouncements about any number of matters of doctrine and life. As far as I can tell, this broader meaning of the word “tradition” is the one most commonly intended in contemporary Catholic literature.

When Catholic tradition contradicts Scripture

Catholics frequently say that tradition “fills out” Scripture or “draws out” its meaning. In other words, they claim that Scripture and tradition are always in harmony. In reality, however, the content of tradition frequently contradicts Scripture. Examples include the following:¹

- The Bible says that Christ offered his sacrifice once for all (Hebr 7:27, 9:28, and 10:14). Tradition, however, teaches that the priest sacrifices Christ on the altar, albeit in an un-bloody fashion.
- The Bible teaches that all have sinned except Jesus (Rom 3:10-12, Hebr 4:15), but tradition says that Mary was sinless.
- The Bible says that all Christians have eternal life and can know that they have eternal life (1 John 5:13) but tradition says that it is a cursed heresy to teach that believers can have such assurance.
- The Bible teaches that the offices of bishop and presbyter are the same office (Titus 1:5-7) but tradition says they are two different offices. This is important because it led to the development of the Bishop having authority over other office-bearers (hierarchy).
- The Bible says that Jesus is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5) but tradition says Mary is co-mediator with Christ.
- The Bible teaches that all Christians belong to a royal priesthood. Tradition teaches, however, that there is a special priestly group within the church which possesses mediatorial powers.

- The Bible teaches that in Christ there is a perfect, once-for-all cleansing from the guilt and pollution of sin. Tradition, however, teaches that even believers require further cleansing in Purgatory.
- The Bible says that a bishop (elder) must be blameless and “the husband of one wife.” Tradition, however, teaches that priests are to remain celibate throughout their entire lives.

When Catholic tradition contradicts itself

A real problem for Catholics arises when there are contradictions within the tradition. Only a couple of examples will be given here. To begin, the tradition of the Catholic Church teaches that the Pope is the Head of the Church, a bishop over all bishops. However, Gregory the Great, pope in the sixth century, said that such a teaching about a “universal bishop” came from the Antichrist! Clearly, there is a contradiction in the teachings of the Catholic Church on this point. The conclusion must be that the tradition is not, after all, infallible.

For a second example, consider the matter of having Scripture available for church members. We learn from history that Pope Pius IV in 1559 stated that reading of the Bible by common people should be carefully controlled by church leaders to the point that it was forbidden to do so without special permission from a bishop (in writing). In contrast, the Second Vatican Council stated: “Easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful. . . . The Church. . . sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages. . . .”²

Many more examples could be given, but for the sake of charity we will not do so here.

¹ Most of these examples are drawn from Dr. W. Robert Godfrey’s essay, “What do we mean by Sola Scriptura?” as found in *Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible*, ed. by Don Kistler (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000), pg. 13.

² Ibid, pgs. 15-16.

To be continued **C**

The Reformational Study Centre

Double debt

According to the apostle Paul, preachers of the gospel are always in the red. Oh, he may not have known the book-keeping practice of writing outgoing funds in red ink, but he certainly knew what it was to be in debt – permanently. In Romans 1:14-15 he explains, “I am *under obligation* both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.” The KJV renders the first words, “I am a debtor.” That’s very intriguing! For the truth is, Paul had never been in Rome, he had never met these saints, nor for that matter had he ever bought anything there. So how could he be indebted to people he had never seen?

There are two ways you can be a debtor. The more common is when someone lends you money, putting you in their debt for as long as you have it. The other way is when someone gives you money with the instruction, “When you see Mr. So-and-So, please give him the money.” This effectively makes you a double debtor! For as long as the money is in your possession, you are in debt to both the lender and Mr. So-and-So. And it is this double debt that Paul has in view when he self-identifies as a debtor.

For he understood the good news of salvation as something like a vast treasure, entrusted by God to his servants. As stewards of this sacred trust, Paul and his co-labourers knew it was theirs to invest wisely in the lives of others. Thus, all gospel preachers have the awesome responsibility of passing on the whole counsel of God as a way of discharging their double debt to both the Master and all whom he shall call. And with the enormous spiritual wealth that we as Reformed have received from the Lord, our double debt to him and his own is bottomless!

Change of course

It was with a view to helping to alleviate this debt and publish abroad our spiritual wealth that the Reformational Study Centre (RSC) was established. It is my joy and privilege to make you more familiar with this special work for which I have been called.

Located near Pretoria, South Africa, the RSC has existed now for some ten years. As far as humble beginnings go, this ministry easily qualifies. It emerged from an enormously hard providence from the Lord. In his youth, Rev. Jopie van der Linden had aspired to the ministry, and after completing his theological studies, he received and accepted a call to serve the Free Reformed Church of Johannesburg, South Africa. Not long after his arrival there, however, even before his ordination, he developed breathing difficulties. Time passed, but the health struggles persisted and increased. In due course it was determined that the gold dust prominent in Johannesburg was adversely affecting his lungs. Yet the more serious assault on his overall health would come from the medications used to treat his lungs, preventing him from functioning consistently in his ministry. In time, these compromised his immune system, such that his lungs were quickly impacted when temperatures would sink below twenty degrees Celsius.

This very distressing development forced him to take preventive measures in order to avoid the medication. He had to alter his lifestyle, remaining indoors nearly all the time in a safe, climate-controlled environment. Within such restrictions, he could carry on a full day’s work. This meant, however, that a hugely sorrowful decision had to be made: after relatively little time in the ministry, Rev. van der Linden could not sustain the work, but had to retire!

So now what? What could a young man do who had a strong theological training and many special gifts for the

ministry, but was now mostly confined to the indoors? What good could the Lord bring out of such a devastating turn of events?

Preaching library

Well, where the Lord closes one door, he often opens another in his time. The FRCSA, itself a small federation of five congregations, has always been active in its mission work, with several local black mission churches. These churches were busy developing indigenous leaders, but their pastors, whose financial resources and theological education were limited, needed guidance in and material for sermon preparation. Rev. van der Linden, along with his wife, Jennie, became aware of this great need, and so approached the leaders of the mission churches and the mission committees with the offer to help the pastors with digital resources for sermon preparation. This offer was gladly accepted. And so they started on this path, filling what requests they could from week to week. The two of them put his scanner through its paces, scanning pages from his commentaries and other study books, and then emailing them to the missionaries, to help them better understand the Scriptures, for their own sake and that of their churches.

"Every time I think I understand the text, you help me see much more that God wants to communicate to his beloved. I hope you will always do sermon outlines on many other passages, and even on the whole Bible. I cannot thank you enough for this great help!"

E. Armado, The Army of Christ, Paraguay

This role, from the van der Lindens' perspective, was intended to be a stop-gap measure. But the Lord took this ministry and, in his providence, multiplied the work exponentially. Before long, the need was far greater than at first reckoned. It just so happened that other African pastors well beyond the frontiers of the FRCSA mission churches caught wind of the work and started submitting their requests as well. And these were not strictly Reformed ministers; they were anywhere from Roman Catholic and Anglican priests to Seventh Day Adventists and Pentecostal ministers to those who were ministers simply by virtue of being the only males in their congregations with the ability to read. The common denominator was that all were in dire need of help in studying the Scriptures.

It's all a sober and stirring story, how our sovereign Lord turned a hard providence into an unexpected opportunity for Rev. van der Linden to discharge his double debt by way of serving not simply one local congregation in Johannesburg, but hundreds, thousands of churches in Africa and Asia. And so, there developed a growing digital database of Reformed sermon preparation materials, which came to be called the Preaching Library.

In time, however, it became clear that more was needed to guide these pastors in their contexts to preach the gospel. For although they preached the gospel with sincerity and love, they did so as those who remained untrained preachers. So, the Preaching Library alone could not take them the distance.

Living Word

Enter the sermon outlines. In a project that has come to be known as the Living Word project, trained and qualified pastors are providing sermon outlines containing the building blocks for the untrained preachers to make their own sermons. This is another exciting work of the RSC, aiming to supply the young churches with simple but comprehensive expository and application notes on a Scripture passage.

Also by way of some statistics, the need for the Preaching Library and Living Word projects becomes very apparent. The number of those who could benefit from this is legion. Even if the number of ministers who would use the Library and sermon outlines had been only twenty, each of those ministers is preaching to 100 listeners (and in many cases significantly more). That would mean that each week, well over 2,000 people are sitting under preaching that has been enhanced by orthodox, Reformed material originating from the Lord via the Preaching Library! As it happens, this library now receives hundreds of weekly requests for sermon preparation resources. Through the faithful labours of some employees and many volunteers alike, over 7,900 English-speaking ministers are benefitting from regular use of the Preaching Library and the growing number of sermon outlines. And that suggests at least 790,000 listeners are benefitting from the Library and sermon outlines every week, with the number only growing!

For, to stress further the need and opportunity, there has been a major uptick in the growth of Christianity in Africa, Asia, and Latin America over the last 100 years. In Africa alone, statistics suggest that in about a hundred years, Christianity has grown from 7.5 million Christians to 504 million. That means there are 10,000 converts a day. And so, the need for new pastors is frightfully massive! Yes, the need and opportunity for the Preaching Library and



REFORMATIONAL STUDY CENTRE



"I like how these outlines explain to me every bit of the text I am wondering about. I love to study the Word of the Lord, and I love to do it with your material. May the Lord bless you as Centre!"

S. Tigresse, Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Guinea

Living Word projects is greater now than ever before. And with their availability, our trust remains in the power of the Word and Spirit to use also this resource to great profit in God's kingdom!

And yet, there are still more projects to speak of!

Christian Library

Before long, it became obvious that the need was equally great for material on all kinds of Christian subjects. From the start, the Centre received dozens (later hundreds) of requests for material on subjects like pastoral care, ethics, and church government. In time, also these requests could be addressed. This led to the creation of the Christian Library website (christianstudylibrary.org).

The aim of this project is to build a digital library of Reformed material for all subjects under the sun. The RSC has organized it in such a way that the user can find the right material as quickly as possible. There are hundreds of categories that can help the user make his search very specific. And every article that is uploaded has a summary with keywords, to facilitate good searches. Each article is also set at a specific difficulty level: basic, popular, semi-technical, and technical.

What kind of material is made available? All kinds! We upload material from Reformed and Presbyterian ministers; we process articles from back issues of church magazines; we make links to material from websites with Reformed material; we provide translated material and

transcribed audio files. If you have any other suggestions, we would love to hear from you!

This website has been live since 2012 and we have more than 11,000 articles and transcribed audio files available at present. One of the benefits of this service is that the user does not have to search through fifty different good websites or get lost in Google search results, but only needs to search on the Christian Library website to find biblically sound material all over the Web. Many of the ministers we are helping have their day jobs, working from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., and thus have to do their work of ministry in the evenings. The quicker their search for helpful material, the better.

We believe our website is unique. We are not just making available our own self-produced, in-house material, which is what most websites do. We are trying to build a full library, all in one spot, and to that end we draw from all over the Reformed world. Please check out this resource, and witness the value it holds, not only for Africans and Asians, but North American Reformed folks as well! It holds material pertaining to theological issues, ethical questions, Bible study, and a growing list of more!

The Timothy Project

Also as of 2012, the RSC has been busy with another service that makes use of the same technology as The Preaching Library: the service known as The Timothy Project. The name comes from what Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, "What you have heard from me in the pres-

ence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

The Timothy Project aims to provide a comprehensive library of theological resources, derived from theology handbooks, reference works, and other books, as well as articles. Copyright laws are such that up to ten percent of a book’s contents may be copied and distributed privately.

The CanRCs in the Niagara region were apprised of this work at a classis in 2013, and received the request that one of the churches concern itself with fundraising to support the work. The Vineyard CanRC of Lincoln took up the charge, and has since been raising funds for a couple of theologians to head up this project.

My role

With the above sketch of the main projects of the RSC, it becomes apparent that there are many ways to be involved in the work. When it comes to the task I have currently been assigned, the designation “gatekeeper” has been used as a job description. It denotes the responsibility of ensuring that the various materials submitted for publication on the Christian Library are Reformed. I myself am also involved in the very endeavour of seeking out good material for publication. Furthermore, I am involved in the editing of translated material, to ensure both biblical faithfulness and literary readability.

“I am impressed with all the great articles that you have gathered. I have been using this library for three years now, and every time I ask for material on other topics, you have material ready. Thank you for how you have helped my ministry through the years!”

Z. Liao, Taiwan

For some time, the church of Dunnville had been looking to either take on its own mission project or realign support for existing projects of churches in the classis. In the Lord’s providence, our paths crossed and the congregation supported a proposal to call me for this work, in which I was by then already involved. So as a new kind of initiative among our bond of churches, I am serving as a minister of Dunnville in a special ministerial task (see CO Art. 6), as its foreign mission worker who labours remotely from the churches benefitting from the work. This setup also makes possible the opportunity to provide a measure of preaching and teaching help in the local congregation.

Free of charge

The RSC offers its services free of charge to the young churches. This has led to the question of why we bear all the costs ourselves. The reality is, the users already bear a financial burden to access the services. As earlier noted, most are men who have their own day jobs, and can only get to their ministry work in the evenings. They have to travel by taxi for half an hour to get to an Internet cafe, where they have to pay for every minute that they use the Internet. Then they have to pay again to have the pages printed. Hence the free service for those who truly need it. And we consider it a joy and privilege to sacrifice our possessions for this need, for the sake of fellowshiping with the saints (2 Cor 8:4).

This does mean that as an organization we are fully dependent on donations to sustain the work. And the Lord has always provided. We make this known so that you too would consider sacrificing for the needs of these pastors and their churches. Donations may be sent and made out to the Dunnville Canadian Reformed Church, indicating on the memo line of the cheque that your gift is for the RSC.

Prayers

That just about captures the work we as organization are busy with. Yet in another respect, this is not even the half of it. We have a staff of about sixteen people, and more than seventy volunteers from all parts of the world. And at the moment we are working with 7,900 ministers in more than sixty-five developing countries. Both our work and our reach, however, are completely in vain without the guidance and blessing of the Lord. So, we ask also you to prayerfully support this work. If it is our heavenly Father who opens doors for the spread of the gospel, and instills the desire for people to grow in the riches of Christ, then we must be on our knees. There are still many more pastors across the world who really want to study the Word. Since our Lord sees and guides everything, please wrestle in prayer with us. Pray that the Lord would guide us as workers to provide the right material and find more of his servants in the young churches. Pray that the ministers would benefit from our labours and grow in faith and the ability to preach the pure gospel. Our double debt is enormous, and thus we also need the prayers of the saints to help discharge this debt.

May the Lord of the church preserve and increase the spiritual wealth of his gospel, according to his exquisite grace and kindness in Christ Jesus!





Some FRCNA News

Dr. David Murray installed as Professor of Theology in the FRCNA

The November 2018 issue of *The Messenger* (the official publication of the Free Reformed Churches of North America, hereafter FRCNA) reported that Dr. David Murray was installed as Free Reformed Professor. The Grand Rapids Free Reformed Church had been instructed by the Free Reformed Synod 2018 to call Dr. Murray to the office of professor of theology. This was done at the evening worship service on September 16, 2018 in Grand Rapids Free Reformed Church.

The FRCNA have their origins in the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands and are sister-churches with them. In North America, they have not had their own seminary. In the early years after the immigration from The Netherlands, they made use of the Protestant Reformed seminary and Calvin Theological Seminary. But after a while, in the last two decades of the previous century, the Theological Education Committee of the FRCNA decided that students were to study at the CRTS. I remember with fondness studying with John Koopman in the mid-1990s, who is now minister in the FRCNA in Chilliwack, BC.

In 1998, after the establishment of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS) in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1995, the Theological Education Committee decided that FRCNA students were to study for the ministry at PRTS. While the PRTS was started by Dr. Joel Beeke and the Heritage Reformed Congregations, it soon also came to be supported by the FRCNA as well. At that time, Dr. Gerald Bilkes became Professor of Old and New Testament Studies, the first professor of theology to be installed in the FRCNA.

While Dr. David Murray joined the faculty at PRTS in 2007 as Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology, it is only now that he was officially called to the office of professor of theology in the FRCNA. Dr. Murray has previ-

ously pastored Free Church congregations in Scotland, the latest being the Free Church (Continuing) congregation at Stornoway. In addition to his duties as professor, Dr. Murray is also an active blogger at www.headhearthand.org. He addresses many practical issues which we face in our life as Christian believers. He has also written various edifying books meant for the general Christian reader, such as *Christians Get Depressed Too*, *The Happy Christian*, and *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture*. These titles speak for themselves. His writings are heartily recommended and have encouraged and benefited many.

Rev. Cornelis Pronk: Fifty years in the ministry

The Messenger issues of November and December 2018 carried a two-part article written by Rev. Cornelis Pronk, entitled, "Some Personal Reflections after Fifty Years in the Ministry." In the first part, he gave an overview of his life as a minister, serving in Aldergrove/Pitt Meadows, BC, Grand Rapids, Michigan, St. Thomas, Ontario, as well as Brantford and St. George, Ontario. While each congregation had its own unique situation and circumstances, the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ is what gives true spiritual nourishment and growth everywhere. Rev. Pronk writes, "Throughout my ministry, I have tried to bring the Gospel in a balanced way, offering Christ unconditionally – without money and without price – yet at the same time point out that such offers are appreciated and received only by hungry and thirsty souls, made so by the Holy Spirit. As the Saviour Himself said, 'they that are made whole [or healthy] need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' (Luke 5:31-32)" (November, 25-26).

May the Lord bless the faithful service of Rev. Cornelis Pronk and be with him and his wife Ricky in the years to come.





www.merf.org

MERF News

Middle East Reformed Fellowship—"Declaring the Whole Counsel of God"

December 2018



More Joy in Heaven

By PASTOR TIMOTHY BURDEN

Nov 2018 MERF International Council



At MERF's recent International Council, it was a delight to share in heaven's joy -- the joy of hearing of souls saved. Reports told of many East African students at MERF's **Lokichoggio, Kenya** biblical training center who were new to the faith. We saw photos of groups of **Ethiopian** men, converts now being trained to preach and lead the Lord's people. We heard of various groups in other places who had been baptized and of those preparing for baptism. The whole gathering was moved

by the personal testimony of a well-educated Muslim convert who seeks to win to Christ antagonistic family members. It is always edifying to learn of what the Lord is doing in different lands.

Media Developments

The internet has become a vital means for evangelism, especially in communities closed to direct gospel witness. MERF has dedicated teams who constantly develop their output. The **Arabic** media ministry continues to expand. It targets millions. The team has produced several new programs including: *In Brief*, *The Root of the Story*, and *What They Said About Jesus Christ*. They also added new live programs and interactive features to engage with listeners. The *Dardasha7.com* Arabic gospel website now receives

about 100,000 visits each month, 60,000 have downloaded its phone app, while its Facebook page has over a million followers. Some responses are negative. They seek to preach Islam or hurl insults. The majority, however, are encouraging -- people wanting to know more of Christ, requesting Bibles or seeking help because of the dangers in following Jesus.

The **Farsi** media work has had dramatic increases this year in the numbers of visitors to its sites. The husband and wife team are now assisting by another couple. They have produced 55 videos and launched a YouTube channel. It is good to learn of numbers from **Iran** who are being converted and baptized.

In **Indonesia**, a new language program is being developed for reaching Selayar island. For all of Indonesia internet

radio is getting underway and the number of listeners has increased. Preaching is also done over the internet in the Urdu language of **Pakistan**. Shortwave gospel broadcasts continue to give hope to **South Sudanese** Nuer speakers and Amharic, Oromo and Somali speakers in **Ethiopia** and other parts of East Africa.

Rising Generations

Prayer was requested several times for younger generations: those in **Pakistan** to "become strong in the Christian faith because of rising persecution," children of **Sudan** and orphans in **Somalia** placed in Muslim families. It was encouraging to have positive reports of the Holiday Bible Clubs in **Indonesia**, and the outreach work to children and families in **Bethlehem**. In **Pakistan** prayers have been answered as young men have





*"But we
will devote
ourselves to
prayer and to
the ministry of
the word."*

— Acts 6:4

been raised up to preach. In **Egypt** MERF's Sunday School teaching materials are being used more and more.

Church Extension

The Lord's promise to build His Church is being fulfilled. We heard of five new churches established among refugees in **Lebanon**. Two of the five pastors are Muslim converts. In **Egypt** the number of churches is expanding, especially where the government allows the building of church buildings. The congregation in Limassol, **Cyprus** has doubled in size this year. In Addis Ababa, **Ethiopia** a Bible study group gathers on Sunday afternoons as the start of a church. Church planting work in

villages south of Lahore, **Pakistan** has been reinvigorated and two graduates of the Seminary in Lahore are planting churches through Bible Literacy classes.

Biblical Training

Indonesia:

On the island of Java, Pastor Eric conducts biblical training with churches. This included courses for elders and Christian parenting conferences. On Sulawesi island Pastors Armin Sukri and Henk DeWaard trained pastors, evangelists and other spiritual leaders in remote villages. The MERF center in Makassar conducts regular training programs.

Middle East:

Pastor Samuel Kharrat holds regular Bible teaching,

including training **Syrian** refugee women to help those suffering from trauma. The vision of the MERF committee in **Egypt** for 2019 is to extend the training of Sunday School teachers to more cities and villages.

Africa:

Those doing biblical training in **Ethiopia** are progressing towards having training courses which extend several weeks. This is a big step forward from the excellent three and four day courses they have been running.

Pastor Tim Burden recently became Coordinator of MERF's Augustine Program. He focuses on the biblical training course in MERF's center just over the border from **South Sudan** at Lokichoggio, Kenya. He is

working on study materials to enhance the training in other MERF fields.

Moving Forward

Pastor Bruce Powell impressed on us from Acts 6 the fundamental need of prayer in the Lord's work. Then in a second season of prayer, Pastor Iain Wright opened up Exodus 33 where Moses pleaded: "if Your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here." Passionately he reminded us of God's glory, a glory shown in His grace which unites us to Christ and the reality that we can only truly move forward in proclaiming God's saving grace by His grace.

Let us all give ourselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer.

The Augustine Program



Looking
To God
As we
Learn
From
His Word



*Pastor Timothy
and Rosalind Burden*

MERF-Canada

Thank you for your faithful support!
Please make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.
Online donations can be made to Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Canada) Inc. through www.canadahelps.org



CRTA-East Teacher's Convention 2018 – *I Can Do All Things in Christ who Strengthens Me*

On a beautiful October day, teachers from all over Ontario came to Grace Christian School, the new (Burlington) school in Flamborough, for the annual CRTA convention. This year, due to the dismantling of the Canadian Reformed Teachers Association (CRTA), the convention was only a one-day convention, but definitely a worthwhile one.

After all of us had our caffeine energizer, muffins, fruit, or yogurt, we gathered in the gym, where Mr. Mike Vandervelde, principal of Grace, opened the convention. Did you ever hear a gym full of teachers singing psalms and hymns? Exuberant and majestic. You should have been there. After reading Ephesians 4:4-20, a passage which connected to the devotional speech, Mr. Mike Vandervelde asked for a blessing over the convention.

Devotional

Rev. Jake Torenvliet, pastor of Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church at Flamborough, shared his devotional on Philippians 4:13, the theme passage for the convention: "I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me." Being a teacher's son and a principal's son-in-law, he began by sharing the struggles and difficulties that teachers wrestle with (quite accurately), and then concluded that yes, teachers too need to find encouragement "in Christ who strengthens me."

Like our public school teacher counterparts, teachers in a Christian school are teaching students to grow in skills and knowledge so that they can be good citizens in our society. But there is a fundamental difference. It's a difference of foundation and perspective. Our foundation is God's Word. All creation is his – every square inch. Christ has everything to say. Our perspective is one of faith: it's a Christ-centred perspective. We, teachers, represent Jesus Christ in our classrooms.

Teachers build community. Our school communities or our classroom communities need to be gospel-revealing

communities, not gospel+ communities. Gospel+ communities are not built on Jesus Christ, although they may look like they are. In a gospel+ community, people are a community because they primarily share a class, an interest, a hobby, a sport team, and then Christianity is tacked on top of that. Gospel+ communities can continue without gospel. That kind of community is following their tower of Babel. A gospel-revealing community, however, doesn't have a tacked-on religion, or a religious veneer. It defies human logic because it is a supernatural community. It is constituted of people who do not gather around an ethnicity or a sport or a club, but who are glued by the gospel.

Each teacher was asked to consider what kind of classroom community he or she is trying to cultivate. Does the gospel and is the Christian worldview integrated into what we teach and into how we communicate in our classrooms? Is Christ clearly present or is subject-matter taught, and





then – oh yeah – God created it? In our schools, whether in the staffroom, the classroom, the club, or the team, God wants teachers to reveal his goodness, his gospel, his grace, and his love. Pastor Torenvliet reminded us that we are not just teaching information or prepping citizens, but preparing disciples – the next generation of God’s church.

Like the apostle Paul, teachers may have thorns. Teachers may feel that they are just coping. They may feel weak in mind, in body, or in spirit. Paul felt that way too. In Ephesians 4, Paul shares that God’s grace and power are readily available and sufficient. It is a power for each of us. It adequately and sufficiently prepares us for service in the strength of Jesus Christ. To build gospel-revealing communities, Pastor Torenvliet urged us to be constantly immersed in the Word and in prayer. Through him who strengthens us, we can go on.

Workshops

After the devotional, a general happy hub-bub ensued. All teachers took time to chat and laugh (the one louder than the other), eat muffins, drink water, juice, tea, or coffee, and search for their workshop locations. The organizers had scheduled three workshop timeslots for the day, so by 10:15 teachers had to hustle to their respective

classrooms. Twelve workshop leaders were eager to share their knowledge and educational experience with us. Topics ranged from “Story Bricks in Literacy,” “Daily Five in the Classroom,” and “Understanding Mental Health in Youth,” to “What to Expect When You are Inspected,” and “Educational Care Theory.” Some were led by esteemed colleagues; others were led by professionals in their fields.

I attended a workshop on PBL – Project-Based Learning. PBL is the fad in education. Laurie Koning, a teacher at Guido de Brès Christian High School, began by sharing how students like it because it stimulates active and interactive learning. PBL also enables students to practice skills and make decisions which will help them in real life later. (If anyone desires to know more about PBL, check out www.bie.org). According to the website, PBL helps students tremendously: “By presenting students with a mix of choice and responsibility, cognitive concepts and practical activities, within an environment of real-world authenticity, projects engage students in learning that is deep and long-lasting.” Laurie showed the workshop participants how to make PBL projects. After participating in the fast-paced workshop, and after having discussed PBL with some teachers, I need more questions answered: It’s great for motivational learning, it’s wonderful for empowering students to participate and direct their learning, but isn’t a lot of precious school time lost in the process? How does the teacher cover curriculum goals and expectations? Most importantly, does this method complement our philosophy of Reformed education? Is it fitting with our Christian worldview? Laurie stressed how important it is for teachers to be very knowledgeable about this method of learning and to be very comfortable with it before they attempt it in their classrooms. Also, the administration and parents need to be “on board” for the teacher and students to experience success. After ensuring myself that the PBL philosophy and methodology are fitting with Christian education, I would like to try a PBL project. Implementing a well-designed PBL project for a certain unit or for a certain period of time (say three-five weeks) seems like a good way to have a successful PBL experience in the classroom.

Another informative workshop discussed students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). ASD refers to a range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviours, speech or non-verbal communication, and unique strengths and weaknesses. It is known to have both neurological and genetic causes. It is more prevalent in males, and seems to be increasing. It is generally linked

to anomalies in both the structure and the chemistry of the brain. Obviously, there is a wide spectrum of ASD, from children who have Asperger's to Rett's. Primary teachers should know about ASD because they may detect in a student ASD symptoms and will urge parents to seek professional help to validate their observations. More importantly, both parents and teachers will benefit by knowing what is troubling the student's learning or behaviours, and will be better equipped to care for and instruct the child. Treatment can involve behavioural intervention, vitamins, diets, medications, different methods of teaching, specific exercises, or physiotherapy. Most students who have ASD are identified by the time they reach upper elementary levels, but even those teachers and high school teachers will benefit from know which teaching methods to use for that particular ASD student. And just to rest assured, autism cases are not necessarily increasing, but more students are being identified with a type of ASD. And for the sceptics, are some students mislabelled? Perhaps, but knowing that each child is created uniquely by God himself, those supporting the child with ASD always need to seek to do what is best for that child with their given strengths and limitations.

I shared two examples of workshops. Other teachers said that the math one was great too. Thankfully, all teachers can come away from the convention revitalized. Hope-



fully, the workshops will stimulate more discussion in the staffroom, more implementation in classrooms, and more extensive learning throughout the year.

In conclusion

The League of Canadian Reformed Schools Societies has willingly undertaken to encourage another two-day convention for 2019. A little restructuring has transpired over the last year at the CRTA-League levels, and, thankfully, this means that Canadian Reformed Teachers conventions have not been dropped, but are encouraged. Conventions like these help staff members to unite, collaborate, and encourage one another. Perhaps here is the place to publicly thank all teachers who put many hours of service, love, and dedication into the CRTA. The western schools have followed a different structure, but they too realize the need for unity among schools and staff members – displayed visibly and felt at their Canadian Reformed Teacher's conventions. May the Lord bless teachers in their roles of instructing covenant youth. May they continue to be equipped for Christ-centred education.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma akingma@echs.ca.



Clarion Kids

The Resurrection

Matthew 28, Mark 16, John 20

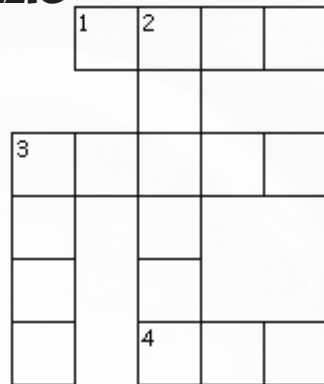
After Jesus had been dead for three days, two women named Mary and Mary Magdalene went to see the tomb where he had been buried. When they got there, the large stone in front of the tomb had been rolled away. There was an angel sitting on the stone. The angel told the women not to be afraid – Jesus had risen from the dead! The women were very happy and ran to tell the disciples what had happened. Just as God had promised, Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. Still today we celebrate the resurrection with great thankfulness.

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



Crossword Puzzle

Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.

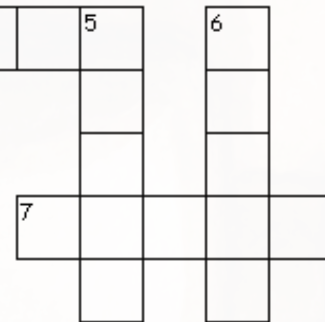


Across

1. The name of the two women who found the empty tomb.
3. How many days Jesus was buried.
4. The women told them what they had seen.
7. Who the women found sitting by the tomb.

Down

2. The angel told the women not to be this.
3. A place where someone is buried.
5. What was rolled away from the tomb entrance.
6. Jesus had _____ from the dead.



by Emily Nijenhuis

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Thank you for the opportunity to react to an article by the Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, entitled, “Discerning True Need in An Age of Entitlement” (November 2, 16, 2018). I want to concentrate on the two main points in this article.

(1) Rev. Holtvlüwer writes: “It seems that there are more and more members who don’t hesitate to call the deacons and are quick to have their hand out. . .,” and again: “The concept of not ‘daring’ to call the deacons is increasingly foreign to them and they feel quite confident not only to ask but to receive.”

(2) He further suggests that those who ask for help do not always distinguish between what can be called “true needs” and the desire “to keep up with the Joneses or to maintain their chosen standard of living.”

While agreeing that we live in an age of entitlement, and while assuming that the author has experienced the phenomena he describes in his own congregation, I do suggest that we must be careful in suggesting it is common, and even universal. My own experience as a deacon is that people nearly always call the deacons “too late” and often after their credit cards are maxed out, after they have stopped tithing, after the school payments are behind, etc. Even then they do it not “with their hand out,” but with

much hesitation and even shame. It is not easy for anyone to open up and it can be very hard to admit that one’s finances are a mess. For nearly every person we visit, the first visit is very difficult. It was hard to ask for it, to prepare for it, and also to receive advice in dealing with the problem and in looking for priorities.

Although the Rev. Holtvlüwer makes some valid points, I have serious concerns about his general approach. My first problem with the article is that it may discourage needy brothers and sisters from calling the deacons as early as they should for fear of being considered people who insist on their “entitlement” and who want to keep luxuries at the expense of others. My second problem concerns the givers. To help the poor among us is a duty, but also a privilege. I am afraid that the implied criticism of those who ask for help may discourage church members from contributing. I personally for many years enjoyed the teaching of the late Rev. Clarence Stam, who taught us not to view putting money in the deacon’s bag as a sacrifice but rather a giving back to the Lord some of what he has blessed us with. Then as deacons we can distribute this money in Christ’s name and encourage and comfort and instruct with the Word of God those who receive the gift of *Christ’s love*.

Hank Vanderbrugghen

*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: Classis Ontario West, December 19, 2018

On behalf of the convening church, the Trinity Canadian Reformed Church of Glanbrook, Rev. R. Vermeulen began with the reading of John 1:1-18 and asked those present to sing from Hymn 15. He led in prayer and remembered the following: Rev. Darren Feenstra was ordained into ministry in the Cornerstone Church, Candidate Arjen Vreugdenhil received and accepted the call to the Eben-Ezer Church, the Providence Church and the Ancaster Church remain vacant, Br. Jeff Temple is serving as an intern in the Providence Church and is preaching among the churches of Classis Ontario West, and CRTS is receiving a good response to an upcoming seminary day for potential students and to their annual conference scheduled in January 2019.

The officers took their place: Rev. R. Vermeulen as chairman, Rev. K.A. Kok as vice-chairman, and Rev. J. Louwerse as clerk.

The chairman asked the questions set out in Article 44 of the Church Order. The Providence Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton requested that Rev. J. Louwerse be appointed as counselor (Art. 45 C.O.) and Classis agreed. Classis was asked to give advice in two matters of discipline. Advice was given.

A letter from Daniel Shin, a third-year student at CRTS, is received. He requested to be examined at the next classis,

scheduled for March 2019, in order to receive permission to speak an edifying word. His request is granted.

In closed session, Classis answered four appeals against a consistory. The answers will be sent by the clerk to the appellants and to the consistory.

Classis returned to open session. The church visitation report to Ancaster for 2017-2018 was received.

The Classis appointed Revs. K.A. Kok and J. Louwerse to the Committee for Examinations, with Rev. R. Vermeulen as alternate.

The convening church for the next classis will be the American Reformed Church of Grand Rapids. The suggested date is March 20, 2019. The suggested officers are: Rev. K. A. Kok (chairman), Rev. D. Feenstra (vice chairman), and Rev. J. Poort (clerk).

The use was made of the personal question period. Rev. Kok reminded the churches to send the evaluations of the sermons of Br. Temple to the Committee for Examinations.

The chairman determined that nothing censurable was said or done in the meeting; he thanked the brothers for their cooperation. The executive was charged with finalizing the Acts and Press Release.

The chairman closed Classis in prayer.

*For Classis Ontario West, December 19, 2018,
Rev. K.A. Kok, Vice Chairman (e.t.)*

