

Clarion

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

Previewing General Synod



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HOW SHOULD WE RUN THE CHURCH?
CRTS STUDENT PROFILES

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:

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Issue 9 will be in the hands of our readers just before General Synod Edmonton commences on May 14, 2019. This issue begins with Dr. James Visscher's article introducing and summarizing the main agenda items of this synod.

We begin a two-part article from Rev. Jan DeGelder: "Church Polity. . . Does it Matter?"

It is also the time of year when *Clarion* dedicates a few pages to the student bios of the graduating class at CRTS. This year there are six graduating students – we wish them the Lord's blessings as they leave CRTS and move on to the next step.

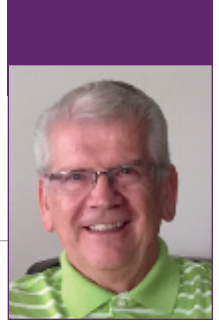
This issue includes regular columns Treasures, New & Old, Education Matter, *Clarion Kids*, and You Asked. There is also a letter to the editor and a press release.

Laura Veenendaal

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Cover photo: Edmonton Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church



General Synod 2019 Edmonton

*May the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the church,
bless the meeting of this assembly*

On May 14, 2019, the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches will convene in Edmonton, Alberta, as it meets every three years. The hosting church will be the Immanuel church in that city. The duration is not known, although a number of pundits have speculated that it could be the shortest synod on record.

A delegated body

Unlike many other churches in North America, the Canadian Reformed Churches have not adopted a representative model but a delegated one. What this means is that the delegates do not come from each church in the federation but are chosen by the regional synods of east and west. The way it works is that each church delegates two members to a classis, a classis delegates so many people to a regional synod, and a regional synod to a general synod. This means that in total twenty-four men (twelve from the east and twelve from the west) will be sitting around a table making decisions for the whole federation. Under the representative model it would mean a gathering of one hundred and twenty, if each of the sixty churches were to send two delegates.

The main agenda categories

From a study of past acts, it soon becomes apparent that the agenda of a general synod is fairly predictable. One can expect discussions and decisions to take place under the major headings of seminary training (CRTS), the songbook (*Book of Praise*), inter-church relations, and appeals.

A glance at the first provisional agenda confirms that Synod Edmonton will be no different.

Seminary training

The report of the Board of Governors contains a lot of information. From it, I have gleaned a few highlights.

The first has to do with student preaching or speaking an edifying word. At present, a student needs to have completed three years of training before he can approach a classis and request to be examined with a view to preaching in the churches. The Board is proposing that Synod change this requirement to two years.

It should be mentioned that before the curriculum was changed from three years to four years, a student needed only two years of study before applying. The Board, on the recommendation of the Senate, wishes to go back to this requirement.

If Synod agrees, it will mean that the churches will be seeing a larger number of students on their pulpits for a longer period of time. In light of the number of vacancies, this may not be a bad thing.

Another item on the agenda has to do with the appointment of a new professor of New Testament Studies. Prof. Dr. G.H. Visscher has reached the age of retirement and a successor needs to be appointed.

Interestingly, in the past this was something that was done almost completely in-house; however, a number of years back the procedure was changed. Churches are now asked to submit names of men whom they deem to be qualified. A special committee appointed by the Board receives, examines, discusses the names and makes a recommendation to the Senate and then to the Synod.

So, who will be the new NT professor? At the moment that may be the best guessing game in the federation and abroad.

The church at Guelph oversees the Pastoral Training Program and it has submitted a report, along with a financial statement. It disburses in the neighbourhood of \$40,000.00 a year in order that students may participate in summer internships.

The church at Grassie oversees the Needy Student Fund. I could not find its report in the list of documents, but I may have overlooked it. At the same time, Synod will need to discuss how and why it is that this committee is issuing charitable donation slips to the churches. Is this the start of a new trend?

Finally, some other interesting tidbits. Did you know that it costs a student \$2,300.00 a year in tuition to pursue an M. Div. degree? That has to be the biggest academic bargain on the continent! As well, did you know that the budget for CRTS is approaching 1.5 million dollars a year?

Book of Praise

The report of the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* makes for interesting reading. It includes an evaluation of the new *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* recently introduced by two of our North American sister churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the United Reformed Churches. It also gives you some idea as to how many *Books of Praise* have been published, and other data. There is a recommendation as well to change the word “expiation” in Article 34 of the Belgic Confession to “propitiation” or “satisfaction for sins.”

On a related matter, Synod will be dealing with an overture from Regional Synod West to approve the psalms and hymns in the Trinity Psalter for use in the public worship services as per Article 55 of the Church Order. I am not sure where this is going to go, but if Synod wants to make some progress in closer relations with the United Reformed Churches it might want to take a long, hard look at this. The two major issues that divide our churches (excluding the border) are probably what we sing and where we educate our theological students. A decision in favour of the RSWest overture would put at least one of those to rest.

Closely linked to the use of the *Book of Praise* is the matter of Bible translations. The Committee reports that, thankfully, the ESV publisher did not go ahead and make its current translation permanent. This would have meant no more changes. At the same time, it lists all of the changes made to the ESV 2016. It also included a review of the little-known Christian Standard Bible.

Inter-church relations

At the present time the Canadian Reformed Churches have what is called “Ecclesiastical Fellowship” (also known as EF or “sister church relations”) with twelve different church federations around the world. These churches can be found on all of the continents of the world. For a list, please consult the reports of the Committee on Churches Abroad (CRCA) and the Committee on Contact for Churches in North America (CCCNA).

Since there are at least four committees dealing with inter-church relations, Synod is being asked to give its deputies a mandate to examine and, if possible, propose some reorganization to the next synod.

Under highlights, mention can be made of the fact that the Committee on Church Unity with the URCNA is asking Synod to disband it and hand over its file to the CCCNA. At the moment our relationship with the URCNA is in a holding pattern, although locally across Canada relations between our respective churches continue to grow.

Synod is also being asked to add one more EF or sister church to the list, namely a church in Indonesia. In addition, the Free Reformed Churches of North America and the Heritage Reformed Congregations have offered a step one relationship to our churches. It is also proposed that contact be maintained with both the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

What may interest our readers is the fact that there is often a considerable size difference between your typical local Canadian Reformed church and a local Orthodox Presbyterian church. Currently, the OPC has a little over 31,000 members and 281 churches, whereas the CanRC has a little over 19,000 members and sixty churches. Do the math and what you get is the fact that an average OPC consists of 111 members and an average CanRC consists of 320 members. The ratio is three to one. May this give heart to some of our smaller churches.

The one thing that I have not mentioned, and it will no doubt consume a lot of time, energy, and emotion at Synod, is our relationship with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. The Sub-committee dealing with the RCN is recommending that the CanRC terminate its long-standing relationship of EF with the RCN. After many years of discussions and warnings about the direction of the RCN, the bridge has finally been crossed and the RCN has opened all of the offices in the church to women. Biblically speaking, this

CALL ACCEPTED

Accepted the call to Smithville Canadian Reformed Church:

Candidate Cody Swaving

CHURCH NEWS

is a bridge too far and will no doubt lead to a severing of that most prized of relationships. Our so-called ties with “the mother church” will be no more. Sad and distressing, indeed!

Appeals

One of the things that has consumed a lot of time at past general synods has to do with hearing and judging appeals. Although this may change, I have not heard that much in the way of appeals is coming to GS 2019. If that is true, it will help greatly in shortening the duration of Synod.

In closing

There are many other comments that could be made about the upcoming synod and its agenda, but as mentioned earlier, I have restricted myself to the highlights. May the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the church, bless the meeting of this assembly and may its decisions be in accord with Holy Scripture, with our subordinate standards, and with the adopted Church Order.





Enduring Persecution

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
 (Matthew 5:10-12)

The Beatitudes are not a matter of multiple choice. They come as a package describing *every* Christian, not eight different kinds of Christians. In a few ways the final beatitude is climactic: it comes last, receives extended treatment, employs repetition, and noticeably is the only beatitude framed in the second-person (“you”). Clearly Christ was emphasizing that persecution is important and inescapable. We have no trouble understanding what Christ was saying; the difficulty is in believing it.

Christ does not speak of persecution as a *possibility* but as a *certainty*. As his followers, we can expect resistance and hostility (cf. John 15:20, 2 Tim 3:12). To dodge those realities may signal that something is lacking in our life and witness. Christ says, “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you” (Luke 6:26). If all we get is good publicity because we willfully hide aspects of our Christian identity, then our witness is not truly Christian. Certainly, the intensity of persecution can vary,

ranging from a cold shoulder to verbal reviling to physical martyrdom. It may not always be overt but may tend to happen in quiet and subtle, yet personal, attacks on our character, integrity, and reputation, or in questioning our values and motives. We can expect this. It is not strange for us to be persecuted; it is strange when we are *not*.

This, however, does not mean it is persecution when we do something wrong, unkind, obnoxious, or abrasive which invokes the wrath of others. There is no blessing for those who act in un-Christlike ways. Rather, the blessing is for those who are persecuted “for righteousness’ sake” – for their commitment to God and his Word demonstrated through confession and conduct. To live this way is to swim against the tide of unfaithfulness and worldliness and will stand out and create offense. In addition, Christ pronounces blessing for those who are persecuted “on my account” – that is, on account of holding to the gospel and embracing the cross and Christianity’s

exclusive claims which the world considers divisive and infringements on their personal autonomy.

So, what is the blessing? First Christ says, “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This means persecution is a confirmation that we belong to God’s kingdom and offers assurance that we are in the good company of the persecuted prophets such as Jeremiah and Elijah, even if what we experience seems mild in comparison. Secondly, he speaks of a great and heavenly reward for the persecuted. In the midst of persecution here on earth it will seem like there is no reward. Only hostility, deprivation, and perhaps death. Faithfulness does not always garner applause. . . except for God’s. And this reward, as always, is of grace. Our ultimate victory is in Christ – against whom Satan’s greatest schemes and attacks could not prevail. Lack of success or progress in the *culture* war will not cripple us when we know the result of the *cosmic* war. And so Christ says, “Rejoice and be glad,” and that means exactly what it says.



For further study

1. With what attitude should a Christian respond to persecution?
2. Are you more inclined or disinclined toward persecution? Why? How do Christ’s words here encourage you?



Church Polity. . . Does It Matter? (Part 1)

“I don’t really care about the Church Order. What do we need all those rules for in the church? It’s boring and it’s not very spiritual anyway. I rather go by the Bible.”

Have you ever heard people say that?

Unfortunately, many in our Reformed churches react in this way when they hear about church polity and the Church Order. They don’t think it’s so relevant. The church is spiritual. Rules and regulations are not.

Do we need it?

It is an important question to look at, when we want to think about the document that we have in the back of our *Book of Praise* and how to approach it. And it is not a new question. It has often come up in the history of the church: Does it fit with the spiritual character of the church, to have rules and regulations for running the church? Do those rules not restrict the freedom we have in Christ and the freedom of the Holy Spirit?

In other words: Do we actually need to think about church polity and what a Reformed church order should look like? Or should we just forget about it? Can we fly by the seat of our (spiritual) pants when it comes to running the church?

It is true: the church is spiritual. Christ gathers his church by his Word and Holy Spirit. See for instance 1 Corinthians 3:16, Galatians 5:25, and Ephesians 2:22. But that does not change the fact that Christ is bringing together real people.

This makes the church a human organization with human activities initiated by the Spirit; things like worship, fellowship, and mission. Think of what happens in Acts 13:1-3.

When people are going to do things together, all participants have to agree on the set-up and stick to it. And if the

set-up needs to change, you do that together. Otherwise it won’t work. That’s the difference between order and chaos, also in the church.

Do we want to worship together? Great! But then we have to agree on when, where, how often, what we do, who is responsible for doing what. . . things like that.

A God of peace

All of this is common sense. But it’s more than that. There is also a biblical basis, not only for having a church order, but also for loyal application of the Church Order. How we run the church of Jesus Christ must reflect the character of God.

How does the Bible talk about this? In 1 Corinthians 12-14, the apostle Paul addresses the use of spiritual gifts in the church. At the end of this passage, he wraps it up by saying that “all things should be done decently and in order” (14:40).

Why is this so important? Otherwise things get messy and chaotic? Sure. But let’s dig a bit deeper. Look at verse 33, where Paul says something about God: “God is not a God of disorder, but of peace” (NIV).

The opposite of “disorder” is “order,” which is the word in verse 40. And so, you would expect Paul to say in verse 33: “God is not a God of disorder but of order.” But he doesn’t. He says “peace.” Apparently God prefers order over disorder because he likes peace. He wants things to be done in an orderly manner in his church *because* of who he is. We need a proper structure to promote peace and harmony in the church because the God of the church is a God of peace.

This implies that disorder, when everyone does his own things, will destroy the peace in the church. If we don’t agree on a structure, or we play fast and loose with the things we have agreed on, we ignore how Jesus Christ

wants us to run *his* church to promote *his* peace among *his* people. This undermines mutual trust and can – worst case scenario – lead to misuse of power and failure to maintain justice in the church.

What is church polity?

However, knowing why things should be done in an orderly way does not answer the question “how,” or what a church order with useful arrangements should look like. Enter the field of church polity.

What is church polity? We might say: Church polity describes the rules, regulations, and stipulations we have adopted to run the church, to organize our activities as local churches and as a federation of churches.

Do we actually need to think about church polity and what a Reformed church order should look like?

This is true, but not complete. Church polity does not only describe how we do things in the church. It also reflects on how we should do things in the church, and why that is so. In Reformed churches and for Reformed people this means that church polity must have a back-up in God’s Word, when we think of what, how, and why we do things.

At the same time, in the history of the church we see that any set of rules to govern the church has developed over time and in a particular church historical context. The late Dr. Jack DeJong, who for thirteen years taught church polity at the Seminary in Hamilton, brought it together in this definition: “In church polity we study the order and polity and government of the Church as required by Scripture and as it has developed in the history of the church.”

Developed in history

Let’s begin with the last part. I want to keep that brief.

From the very beginning of its history the church has developed rules, customs, traditions, and things like that. Worship services were held, sacraments were celebrated, elders were ordained, etc. Initially some of these things must have reflected Jewish traditions, but in the next centuries this evolved into the massive structure of the mediaeval church.

Fast forward to the sixteenth century. Since the Reformation, several systems of church government have developed. The one we are familiar with today in our churches¹ is a representative form of governing the church where the local church is in the centre, ruled by a council with a plurality of elders under Christ as the Head of the church.

This emphasis on the local church is balanced by the acknowledgment that those churches also have a responsibility to cooperate, support each other, and hold each other accountable. For this purpose, they meet in classes or presbyteries and synods or assemblies. In the Calvinistic Reformation this developed in two slightly different directions: “Continental Reformed” (The Netherlands, France) and “Presbyterian” (Scotland).²

This is how our church polity has come to us in the history of the church – also here in Canada. It is valuable to be aware of this history, but it still does not answer the question: Why do we do the things we do in our Reformed churches, and in this manner?

This brings us to the other aspect of DeJong’s definition of Reformed church polity: that it is about the order and government of the church “as required by Scripture.”

Required by Scripture

In 1 Corinthians 14:33 and 40 we found that agreeing to arrange things in good order in the church is important because of the God of the church. But what is the kind of order that God requires in his church? What does his Word tell us about this church? As Reformed churches we have this outlined in the Reformed Confessions.³ In this article we cannot go into all the confessional statements about the church, but let’s have a quick look at one of the most succinct summaries of what the church is about. That’s in Question and Answer 54 of the Heidelberg Catechism: *What do you believe concerning the holy catholic church?* In response to this we confess:

- ***I believe that the Son of God. . . gathers, defends, and preserves*** – Jesus Christ establishes the church and takes care of her. We must run the church as the body of Christ, respecting and obeying him as her Head.
- ***out of the whole human race*** – The gathering of the church transcends all distinctions of race, social class, and gender. This catholicity of the church determines her obedience to the Great Commission.
- ***for himself*** – The position, status, purpose, and destination of the church is determined by the fact that she is the Bride of Christ. He loves her, and the way we run

the church must also show our love and loyalty towards the church.

- ***a church chosen to everlasting life*** – When Christ cares for his church, his goal is eternal joy and salvation for all God’s children. This must be our perspective when we care for each other and call all people to repent and believe.
- ***by his Spirit and Word*** – The Holy Spirit uses the service of apostles and later on other office bearers to provide serving leadership with his Word, so that his church will fulfill her mission and reach her destination.

How we run the church of Jesus Christ must reflect the character of God

- ***in the unity of the true faith*** – Running the church as Christ wants us to does not require that we like each other, think the same, feel the same, or get along, but that we are one in true faith, built on God’s Word.
- ***from the beginning of the world to its end*** – Jesus Christ is an eternal King who governs an eternal kingdom, and therefore the church has not only existed from the beginning, but will also be present until the day that Christ returns.

A covenantal agreement

All these aspects of what we confess about the church help us understand the unique character of Reformed church polity in action. It makes the Reformed church order very different from the civil laws in public society. Although the laws of the land are much more elaborate and detailed than our Church Order, the purpose of civil law is much more limited. The rules in civil law, as practiced by the state, are meant to restrain human behaviour.

But Reformed church polity does not reach its goal when the people just keep the rules. There is more to it. The Reformed church order is a covenantal agreement that serves a pastoral and missional purpose. The goal is to provide directions, so that the members of the church may receive God’s gifts of faith, righteousness, and holiness, continue to grow in Jesus Christ, and be prepared to share the gospel with others.

For that goal, elders have been given the authority to work with the gospel of Jesus, God’s Word, in preaching, teaching, and pastoral care. These are the means through which the Holy Spirit works faith in human hearts. These means also seek the repentance of those who turn away from God’s grace in Jesus Christ. Thus, the elders must also work with God’s Word when they apply discipline. In this way, Reformed church polity is a tool to serve and promote the spiritual unity among believers and the peace of the church, and thus the holiness and glory of God.

Paul did not write a church order

These aspects of Reformed church polity are rooted in Scripture. The question is: how and where? The challenge is that the New Testament does not prescribe a particular church order. And it won’t be possible either to find a *specific* text for *every* rule or *every* article of our church order. But that does not mean that the Bible has nothing to say about the question of how God wants us to run the church. After all. . . it is *his* church!

There are only a few *direct* church political instructions, but you’ll find several fundamental principles that will help make responsible spiritual decisions that reflect how God expects us to run his church.

The next time we will have a closer look at the implications of four of these principles:

- The confession that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church
- The development of offices
- The autonomy of the local church
- The responsibility to join and cooperate with other local churches.

¹ Space does not allow me to elaborate on the development of other systems of church government: Episcopalianism, Erastianism, and Congregationalism. Baptist and many evangelical churches in North America today are governed according to the Congregationalist model. Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice, Revised Edition*, Judson Press, 1991, 52-55, 58-61.

² In North America, the result of immigration is that we have these slightly different structures right beside each other, which makes for interesting comparisons. But that’s beyond the scope of this article.

³ In particular the Articles 27 – 32 of the Belgic Confession, Lord’s Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism, and Chapter 25 of the Westminster Confession of Faith.





CRTS Student Profiles 2019

Introduction

It is my privilege and pleasure to say a few words introducing the men who will graduate from CRTS this year, the Lord willing. There are six of them and together they make quite a diverse group. Four are from Canada (one from BC, one from Manitoba, two from Ontario), one from the USA, and one from Poland. Four came to us from Canadian (or American) Reformed congregations, one from the URC, and, as you might have guessed, one from a small group of Reformed churches in Poland. Some had previous vocations before studying for the ministry, others came straight to seminary after their B.A. studies. Yet whatever their backgrounds may be, one thing presently stands out in the foreground: the Lord has knit them together as a close group of friends and brothers in the Lord who love our Saviour and his church.

All in all, we have much to be thankful for in this graduating class. May the LORD bless them as they present themselves to classis, or in the case of one of them, go on to further studies.

Chauncey Knegt

Hi! I'm Chauncey, and this is my dear wife Emily. Both of us are eagerly counting down the days as my seminary studies draw to a close. We look forward to serving our Lord Jesus and his church wherever he will call us!

Both Emily and I are the oldest children in our families. Emily is the oldest of seven. I am the oldest of nine children. My youngest brother is three. In my formative years, I spent a lot of time with the Oosterhoff side of the family, which is my Mom's side of the family. One thing this involved was a disproportionate amount of time spent on the farm for a town kid. There were many summers spent exploring the woods, building



forts, and feeding the imagination at that farm. The current Member of Provincial Parliament for Niagara West, my little cousin Sam, grew up on this farm as well. Another thing this involved was singing high-quality choir music with the Pro Musica Choir – the make-up of the choir was one-half Oosterhoff.

Another aspect of my growing-up years was my schooling. I went to John Calvin School in Smithville for grades 1-8, and then to Guido de Brès in Hamilton for high school. In elementary school, Mr. Jason Heemskerk taught me in both grade 6 and 8, and he inspired me with his excellent story-telling in the Bible and Church History classes. In high school, Mr. George Alkema introduced me to Christian world-view thinking through his history courses and encouraged me to pursue post-secondary studies in history.

In 2010 I entered Brock University and began a history degree. During the second year of my studies, I transferred to the linguistics program at McMaster University, thinking to pursue a career in Bible translation. It was during this time, however, that I also began to have thoughts about seminary training and pastoral ministry. I came to know a number of different people, both Christians and unbelievers, and through the practice of sharing the gospel became even more convinced of the beauty and glory and promise of the good news about Jesus Christ. I began to think: "Wouldn't it be wonderful to make preaching the glories of Christ my life's work!" I graduated from McMaster with a BA in History and Linguistics in 2015 and began at CRTS that same year.

My time at CRTS has been busy, and not always easy, but the Lord has provided for me (and us) each step of the way. I have struggled with loneliness at times, been lifted up by the love of God's people, battled through books and assignments, met and married my wife, and together dealt with the loss of our two children Jaida and Jaimen ("He knows" and "He is faithful") due to miscarriage. In between the academic terms, I was able to work in landscaping and participate in internships. After first year, I got a taste of the pastor's work by shadowing Rev. Mark Jagt in Fergus, ON for two weeks. After second year I was able to travel

to South Africa and see some of the Lord's work in the coloured community in Cape Town, and the work of the Reformational Study Centre based out of Pretoria. Most recently, after third year, I was able to serve in the Carman West congregation under the mentorship of Dr. Andrew Pol over a period of three months. These have been wonderful, encouraging opportunities, and have reaffirmed those earlier thoughts of "wouldn't it be wonderful to make preaching the glories of Christ my life's work!" With God's help, I hope to present myself to the churches for call this coming June.

Eric Onderwater

Hello everyone! Greetings to all of you from me and my family. My name is Eric Onderwater, and on the picture you can see my lovely wife Lisa, as well as our four children, Hudson (4), Eva (2), Ruby (1), and Pippa (5 mos). As you might assume, four in four years is a recipe for one loud and busy household!



As for me, I grew up in the Fraser Valley of beautiful BC, attended Credo Christian High in Langley, and began university at the University of the Fraser Valley before later finishing at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby with a BA in Political Science and History. This arts degree, remarkably, led to political work in Ottawa the next year for a Member of Parliament. Later, I moved on to Toronto for work in Ontario provincial politics. However, as dynamic and exciting as politics could be, I realized a long-term future in that world was not for me. After a campaign loss, I packed my life into a car, drove back to BC, and enrolled in business school at SFU. I thought maybe I could be an accountant or something. Right?

No. Midway through the first year I met this cute girl at Bible study. I asked her out for dinner the next day and she agreed. But I chose sushi and she, being an Alberta girl, hates sushi, so that didn't go so well. Nevertheless, I was sure about her and after waiting six more months she agreed again to another date. Thankfully, after planning this date around her interests this time, we began seeing each other and were married ten months later (when you know, you know!).

Backing up slightly, though, within a few months of seeing each other, after some oddly out-of-the-blue prompting from Lisa, I began to face the nudging feeling I'd been ignoring for a few years. Finally admitted, this "nudging" led to serious thoughts about pursuing ministry. This in turn

led to language courses at TWU and finally coming to CRTS roughly four years ago.

Four years at CRTS? It seems like just yesterday I was a wide-eyed first year, shocked by the frigid Ontario winter and wondering how on earth someone could memorize the entire catechism and pass Hebrew. But somehow, with divine intervention, these things could happen and be followed by more years of study, complete with seminary-organized internships in the Edmonton Immanuel congregation, Messiah's Fellowship in NYC (URC), and Langley congregation, plus catechism teaching at Redemption church in Flamborough. I also personally organized an additional internship with Grace Valley in Dundas ON.

These years have been a pleasure, and we especially thank our churches here in Hamilton for their welcoming hospitality. We also deeply appreciate our friends, colleagues, and professors at the seminary – the seminary community has been formative and enriching for me and Lisa. During this time, we've also been given four beautiful, healthy children. We lacked for nothing in the last years (except sleep), and we acknowledge in faith that the blessing of these years is only due to God's care and attention.

Now it's time to hit the real world, as they say. And this is fitting, for these years at seminary taught me the inestimable value and worth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and trained me in the depth and breadth of this gospel. It is transforming me, producing a desire in my heart to serve the churches for the sake of Christ, if it be his will, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to God's people and beyond. To him be the glory.

Jeremy Segstro

Hello all! My name is Jeremy Segstro, and I am finishing up my last year at CRTS. It has been a wonderful four years, each with different challenges and joys. I am eagerly anticipating presenting myself before classis, the Lord willing, this upcoming June to be eligible for a call to serve in God's church. I distinctly remember the day that I received the acceptance



letter in the mail, April 8, 2015. How excited I was, filled with anticipation and fear of the unknown! But this was a journey that started long before 2015.

I was born in a small kitchen during the bitterly cold winter of 1992 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, the second son in our small family of four. Already at a very young age, I felt

a tugging on my heart to serve God and his church in the ministry, and yet I resisted this prompting.

I was a handful to raise, so I'm told, always wandering off and exploring. Once my parents found me on a stage at a campground, singing "Jesus Loves Me" to those gathered around, already desiring to share my fledgling faith with all who would hear.

My childhood was fairly average, going to a Christian school, attending church, spending time with my friends, playing games, reading books, and riding bike. But something that I loved more than anything else was the Bible. I spent hours reading the illustrated children's Bible in my parents' basement and pouring over the maps in my parents' red leather Bible. Eventually I got my own as a gift from school. High school proved to be a difficult time for me, and my faith was sorely tested by those around me. But the grace of God prevailed, and I entered university with a faith stronger than ever. I was finishing up a degree in psychology, desiring to be a Christian counsellor, but once again began to feel the familiar prompting to pursue the ministry. After prayer and strengthening by the Holy Spirit, this second prompting was answered and psychology was traded in for theology. I've never looked back since!

After two more years of full-time education, and a year spent working in an elementary school while taking part-time Latin, I was off to seminary in Hamilton.

My time at the seminary has been so very challenging but at the same time rewarding beyond measure. God has truly blessed our federation with young men eager to serve the churches and older men eager to guide them. There has been much ink and tears, both spilled during my four years in Hamilton, but God was with me through it all. From my first paper, through teaching catechism classes for two-and-a-half years, and on to my preaching internship in Fergus, ON, God has been so faithful and loving through it all. It is his grace that has brought me safe thus far, and his grace will lead me in the next stages of my life, and eventually, his grace will lead me home.

May my every moment and every breath serve to glorify our amazing God!

Filip Sylwestrowicz

Hello! My name is Filip Sylwestrowicz (pronounced "Sylvestrovits") and I came to CRTS from far-away Poland. I guess that many of you wonder: How did it happen? After all, Canadian Reformed churches do not have ecclesiastical fellowship with any church in Poland, nor was there any CRTS student from my country before. It's my pleasure to introduce myself to you and, hopefully, clarify somewhat the mystery behind my coming to CRTS.

I grew up in Warsaw, enjoying its vibrant life, many coffee shops (a lot of good coffee!), and second-hand bookstores. I am also one of the less than one percent of Poles who grew up in a Protestant home. Our Lord has given me a great privilege of being exposed to the gospel since my childhood. My parents faithfully instructed me in the basics of the Christian faith and



taught me to read and treasure God's Word. Initially I was not planning to pursue the ministry; instead, I choose the math and physics track in high school in preparation for engineering studies. However, our Lord was gradually changing my mind. On the one hand, I was discovering a passion for biblical languages and studying God's Word in depth. On the other hand, I was more and more aware of the great need in my country for people who would be able to help others understand Holy Scriptures better. This lead me eventually to the University of Warsaw where I majored in Hebrew, but also took classes in Classical Greek, Latin, and history.

While I was studying at the university, the Lord was continuing to shape my theology. With a group of friends, we started a Bible study, first on our university campus and later in the coffee shop nearby. During the first year of my studies we read together Paul's letter to Galatians and this turned my theology upside-down. At that time, I was a Calvinistic Baptist. I read many popular preachers associated with the Young, Restless, Reformed movement, but I lacked a deeper understanding of God's covenantal dealing with his people. However, while studying Galatians with my friends, I realized that believers are truly "sons of Abraham" (Gal 3:7). Despite differences between the old and new covenant, there is also a deep continuity underlying the progression of God's plan of redemption. This discovery set me on the path which, several books later, lead me toward confessional Reformed theology.

As my graduation from the university was approaching, I had to decide what to do next. Since the Protestant community in Poland is very small, there are only very few options for Protestant theological education there. None of the theological schools in my country are confessional and Reformed. I knew that if I am to be well prepared for ministry, I needed to consider studying abroad. But I still didn't even know that CRTS exists! I'm still amazed how God providentially arranged things. As I was discovering Reformed theology, I met Dr. Bryćko, who is now an Asso-

ciate Reformed Presbyterian (ARP) missionary in Poland. When I told him about my desire to pursue theological education, he suggested to me that I might apply to the seminary where his friend Dr. Van Raalte was teaching. So, I did and now four years later I can't believe that I am almost done with my MDiv studies!

These past four years were a very unique time. I am deeply thankful to the Lord and to Canadian Reformed churches for making it possible for me to come here and study theology. Although I was so far from my beloved Warsaw and family there, I quickly realized that the CRTS community is bound together by unique comradery. I was warmly received despite my stubborn aversion to *dropje*! And I did contribute to that community by tirelessly trying to convince everyone around that there is no such a thing as "too much coffee."

As this chapter of my life is closing, I am looking forward to the next steps. I am planning to continue my studies by pursuing a graduate degree in the New Testament in the United Kingdom. Afterwards, I hope to return to Poland, and I am looking for Lord's guidance in how I may serve him there.

Mark ten Haaf



Greetings to all. I'm Mark ten Haaf, one of the fourth-year students at Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, and I would like to introduce myself and my family to you. My faithful, beautiful, and reliable partner in this life is my wife Stephanie (nee Kingma, for any bingo players). This May, we hope to celebrate eleven years of joyful marriage. During these years, we have been blessed with a lively home full of children and noise, we have had to make some serious and difficult decisions together, and we have had the wonderful privilege of getting to know many of our brothers and sisters in many different places in this family of God. We've especially enjoyed fellowship and growth during various internships. The first of these was in Hamilton (Cornerstone) with Rev. John Louwerse, next in Ni-

agara Falls with Rev. Richard Bultje and also at Campfire, and finally we spent last summer in Edmonton where I was able to learn from Rev. Richard Aasman. What a time it has been! Praise God from whom all these blessings flow!

We are a family of seven: Mark, Stephanie, Jaiva, Bauer, Creed, Oslo, and Viggo. Let me say a little bit about myself and each one of my loved ones.

I'm a bit of a late-comer to seminary life. I had a vocation in the concrete construction business in Grand Rapids, MI until I was guided to pursue the ministry. Working with my hands is something that I have always loved, and I hope to be able to keep up carpentry as a hobby. I also love to cook and set some time aside for sports, too.

My wife Stephanie has been a true God-given help and partner and friend. I'm always impressed by her because of everything that she does so well for us. She manages to be exactly the wife that I need while caring for our children and managing many other aspects of our home life. At the same time, she is able to find time and energy to keep up her photography business. She uses her skills to adorn the walls of our home with artistic memories of our family's short history, and she also volunteers as a photographer for the Heaven Bound charity in Hamilton (for families experiencing infant loss – something that God has also given us to experience).

~ Jaiva is nine years old. She is a voracious reader, and a skillful puzzle-solver. Jaiva also plays her part very well as the oldest and wisest of all the children. It's a big responsibility, and she does it with lots of love.

~ Bauer is eight. He loves hockey. Maybe his name has something to do with it, but that would be just a coincidence. As much as he loves hockey, he also loves being a big brother to the little guys, helping them in all their activities and, of course, teaching them stick-handling moves.

~ Creed is our warm-hearted, hilarious, animal-loving six-year-old. He could probably rattle off more facts about dinosaurs and sharks than your run-of-the-mill paleontologist or zoologist. The funniest thing about Creed is that he has no idea how funny he is.

†

~ Oslo is three. He is warm-hearted too, but perhaps a better description is "stout-hearted!" It's funny that someone who has only been alive for three years can be "set in his ways." Still, he seems to have unlimited patience and gentleness for his baby brother. Likes: anything with wheels.

†

~ Our littlest guy, Viggo, turned one a couple of months ago. He's quite the explorer and we're not sure if there's a section of cupboard space he hasn't discovered. Give him a smile, and he'll happily scrunch up his face in return.

As mentioned already, we are nearing the close of this leg of our journey, and it is a bittersweet thing to consider. On the one hand, the years seem to have slipped by quickly and we are suddenly on the cusp of what we have been striving for and praying for during these past years. On the other hand, we have made this place our home. Our hearts have been knit to some dear friends here in Hamilton, and we know that this is a year of farewells and changes – paths which have been plotted out for us by God, but which we have yet to discover.

We also would like to express our deep gratitude to you all – you have supported us in this pursuit in tremendous ways: with your prayers, with well wishes and encouragement, with material support, and you have contributed to the excellence of our institution here in Hamilton. It's truly a reflection of the love of God in the one body of Christ!

Nathan Zekveld

Hey! I'm Nathan Zekveld and I have my wife Ashley here beside me. Ashley and I started talking together following my first year of seminary. Realizing that Ashley would make an excellent companion and "team-mate," I asked her Dad what he thought, and he thought marriage was a good idea. I proposed to her that October. She said, "for sure," and we got married the following summer. Ashley has talents in the arts and has a background at Credo Christian High School and Langley Canadian Reformed Church. Her maiden name is Bulthuis for those who are interested in Dutch bingo. We have really enjoyed our time growing together at the seminary and in Rehoboth United Reformed Church over the course of the last couple years. We are expecting our first child to be born in June!



Let's rewind a few years. I was born in London, Ontario, lived in Brooklyn, New York for three years, and then grew up in Rexdale, Toronto from the ages of four to eighteen. Church and family have always been important to me since my Dad started out in Rexdale as a parachute missionary and then started to shift into the stage of church-planting around the time I was twelve. Meanwhile I had the opportunity to learn through the methods of homeschooling

and meeting a huge variety of people. I grew up with close connections and friendships in Hope Centre and in the United Reformed Church in Nobleton, just north of Toronto. I attended New Saint Andrews College for four years in Moscow, Idaho, and worked for nine months out of Grande Prairie, Alberta before showing up at my first day of class at CRTS.

Some people ask me what lead me to seminary and in particular CRTS. I first started to sense a desire to serve God in the work of preaching and pastoral ministry at the age of twelve. I expressed this desire throughout high school and college and "tested" it with a year of work in between. I can say that I have seen God's guiding hand through these years, and I trust that God will confirm this with a call from a church. As for choosing CRTS, it was useful that I had the language pre-requisites for CRTS from my college education. In addition, I knew both Dr. de Visser and Dr. Van Dam a bit, and I took the opportunity to learn from solid theologians in Canada (also in the context of ongoing unity talks between the URC and CanRC).

I am thankful for how God has used the professors at the seminary to help me speak more clearly about the gospel and write and think with increased clarity, depth, and integrity. I am thankful for Hope Centre URC in Toronto and Covenant URC in Wyoming who sent me. The support and encouragement of the congregation, consistory, and pastor at Rehoboth URC have been invaluable. I have had solid internships in the Ponoka/Lacombe URCs, Abbotsford URC, Sheffield URC, and Regina URC. I am aware that this is the just the beginning. If the Lord wills, we have many years of learning and growth ahead.

As we look forward expectantly to where Christ will lead us, my wife and I desire to serve Christ through serving his people. I love the message that the righteousness of God has been revealed in Jesus Christ. I am thankful for the Reformed tradition that God has brought us into in his sovereignty. I desire to see a proliferation of local churches in Canada and throughout the world and to see every church full of voices bursting with the praises of our Triune God. We look forward to the day when we will fall on our faces before the throne of the Lamb and sing to him: "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10).





The End of Teacher Education: Learning to Teach, Teaching to Learn

As long as the Lord continues to graciously provide Reformed Christian schools for our covenant children, there will be a need for faithful teachers. Responding to this need, young people – and some not so young – contemplate this calling through a number of reflective questions: Do I like to work with children? Have other people seen gifts in me and suggested that I consider teaching as a career? Am I committed to the vision of Reformed Christian education? Will the salary and benefits support my lifestyle and family? At this point, for many, an inclination may begin to develop that indeed, teaching may be for me. But then the next question: Is it all worth spending up to six years in university? For some, this question becomes a bridge too far. Across Canada, becoming a teacher generally begins by obtaining a prerequisite undergraduate degree, which is usually a three- or four-year process. Graduates then enter a teacher education program to earn their teaching degree. In Ontario, for example, this program is two years in length, which makes becoming a teacher a rather long-term commitment. Across the country, Reformed Christian schools struggle to find qualified teachers and as a supporting community we may be tempted to ask: Why is all of this post-secondary education necessary to become a teacher?

But teaching is a practical craft

To begin to answer this question, it may be helpful to acknowledge preconceived ideas that exist about teaching. It makes sense to us that a lengthy education process is necessary for those pursuing a career as a medical doctor or as a lawyer. Often people's lives are on the line in these professions. Even becoming a chartered accountant requires up to six years of post-secondary education and experience, but then you are dealing with people's finances. Yet teaching seems to be fairly straightforward and we all have twelve years of experience observing teachers to back that up. Teachers plan activities, teach lessons, mark stuff,

and hand things back. Teachers manage student behaviour, and occasionally they are called upon to discipline someone who has stepped out of line. In summary, teachers need some subject knowledge, organizational skills, pedagogical tools (e.g., making lessons and assignments, marking), and classroom management skills. Therefore, some teacher training seems prudent in order to equip teachers with the necessary skills and tools. But it would seem that teaching is more of a practical craft rather than a theory-based vocation, so six years of post-secondary studies would appear to be overkill.

Teachers must love learning

Our personal experiences aside, the myth that teaching is merely a practical craft can be traced back to the way teacher training programs qualified individuals in the past to be teachers. Compared to the legal or medical professions that date back millennia – paging Dr. Luke – teaching, as a formal vocation, is relatively young. In the past, the principle of supply and demand resulted in a variety of programs, often of short duration, that would qualify individuals to teach. For example, at the turn of the twentieth century, students could begin a five-year apprenticeship in a pupil-teacher system that began as early as age thirteen! During the Second World War, the demand for teachers led to emergency training sessions (two six-week summer courses) for temporary teacher certification of individuals who held a high school diploma. Suffice to say that under these conditions, learning was very practical in nature with little theoretical understanding. Yet, even before Confederation, our country's leaders recognized a need to train teachers well for their duty. Rev. Egerton Ryerson, the first

superintendent of education in Ontario, established the first Normal School for the training of teachers in Toronto in 1847. Over the next century, other such institutions would open, normalizing standards for teacher training with an emphasis on pedagogical skills and subject content. Their single purpose was teacher training, and they were often viewed as an extension of secondary education. Therefore, for the first half of the twentieth century, teaching was regarded as a practical occupation rather than a formal profession.

Teaching as a profession

A shift in this perspective began when teacher preparation programs moved onto university campuses. As early as 1906, the need for skilled labourers made the preparation of secondary teachers a priority and secondary teacher education was moved to the University of Toronto. Following the Second World War, the government of Ontario commissioned studies that resulted in opportunities for elementary teachers to earn a Bachelor of Education degree and the development of teacher education programs at the University of Western Ontario and Queens University. With the birth of faculties of education came the acceptance of “education” as a respectable university discipline worthy of academic study. Teaching, including elementary education, was no longer simply a job for anyone who had a high school diploma or who had attended a teacher training college. Teaching had become a calling and education a bona fide field of academic study. The view of teachers as technical practitioners shifted to that of teachers as professionals, grounded by a theoretical foundation in theories of education and learning.

A paradigm shift

While teaching earned the designation of a profession, the long history of teaching as a practical occupation continues to influence the perception that the required years of post-secondary education is a bit unnecessary. Therefore, the question remains: What is the rationale for such a rigorous program of study to prepare individuals to be teachers? The answer to this question lies within a paradigm shift in education over the past fifty years, a shift from a culture of teaching to a culture of learning. While a behaviourist learning theory dominated the first half of the twentieth century, advances in cognitive science reshaped our understanding of how children learn. Rather than passive

acquisition through repetition and memorization, learning today is envisioned as an active process of mental construction and sense-making. Moreover, if primary emphasis is placed on learning and each person is created uniquely, then ensuring that each child is learning and growing becomes imperative. If learning is for all, then all must be for learning. The implications of this focus on learning have been monumental for teachers. Today teachers must create an environment in their classrooms where everyone can learn. This means knowing their students well and crafting lessons that help students develop understanding and make connections to what they already know and have experienced. In a twenty-first century world that has been characterized as a knowledge society, teachers are called upon to equip the next generation to be able to learn, no matter where God calls them to serve.

Applying a metaphor

Watching someone teach has been compared to watching a conductor direct an orchestra. To the inexperienced observer, both appear to be relatively easy tasks. The conductor waves his arms around and the teacher simply implements curriculum. Yet, if we give it some thought, we know this is simply not the case. For a conductor, it begins with a love for music. A conductor will have studied music at length, learning how to play multiple instruments,

Becoming a teacher is a weighty calling

as well as music theory and composition. He will also know something about each member of the orchestra and be able to draw out their full potential so that when he brings it all together, with a wave of his arm, beautiful music is played. In a similar manner, teachers must love learning. Teaching in a culture of learning requires a depth and breadth of knowledge that develops through a number of years of academic studies. Teachers model a zeal for learning, assessing each student’s strengths, and identifying areas for growth, in order to bring out the best possible learning outcomes for all.

Becoming a teacher, therefore, is a weighty calling, one that requires a level of maturity and experience gained by

pursuing learning through academic studies and teacher education. Those who enter a teacher education program experience an encounter where their past, as students, meets their present, as student-teachers, and anticipates their future as teaching professionals. Teacher candidates begin to appreciate that like the aforementioned professions, teachers also impact lives. Every day children learn from their teachers, acquiring knowledge and developing skills but also growing in their faith and developing a worldview.

The calling for Reformed teachers

The end of teacher education, therefore, is inextricably linked to the end of education. Neil Postman, in his book *The End of Education*, argues that what is needed for education is a narrative that gives schooling a transcendent and honourable purpose. As Reformed Christian teachers we find that purpose in telling the next generation about the praiseworthy deeds of our God. Preparing for such a

calling involves learning about these deeds and wonders, as well as learning how best to tell the next generation. For those considering this profession it would be fitting to add one more question to the list we started with: Do you love learning? If so, then the required academic and professional education will be viewed as a blessing rather than a necessary burden. As a community, let us support and encourage those who are just starting out as well as those who are currently teaching who desire to pursue further learning towards an academic or teaching degree. Yes, that will take time, but our schools need teachers who love learning and can model such a passion for their students to the praise of our God.

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.



Peter's Miraculous Escape from Prison

Acts 12:1-19

There was a king named Herod who was persecuting the Christian church. Peter, one of Jesus's disciples, was being kept in prison. The night before he was supposed to be judged by Herod, he was sleeping in the prison. He was heavily guarded and chained. Then an angel of God appeared to him. He told Peter to get up and the chains fell off of him. Peter thought he was dreaming, but he followed the angel out of the prison. When he was safe, the angel left and Peter went to a house where many believers were praying together. Everyone was overjoyed and thanked God for this wonderful miracle.

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

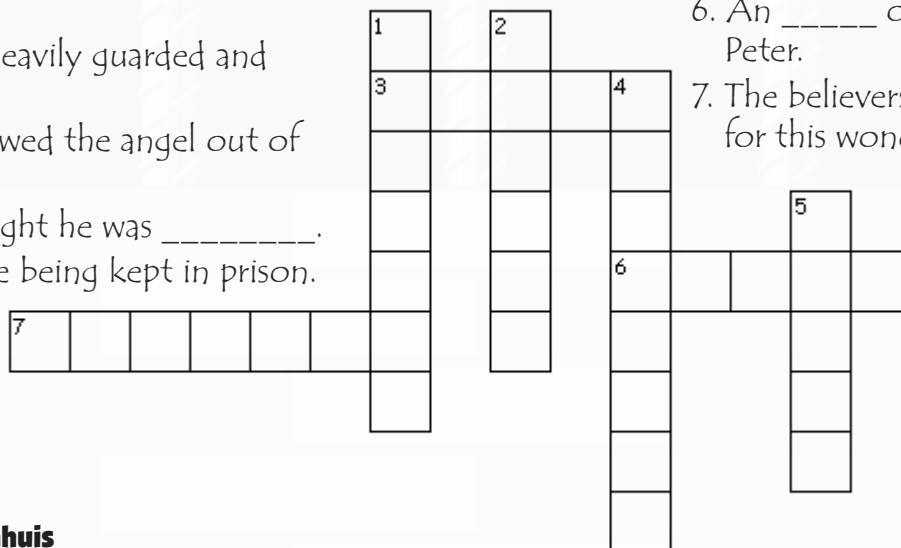


Crossword Puzzle:

Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.

Down

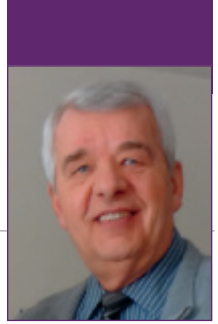
1. Peter was heavily guarded and _____.
2. Peter followed the angel out of _____.
4. Peter thought he was _____.
5. The disciple being kept in prison.



Across

3. The king who was persecuting Christians.
6. An _____ of God appeared to Peter.
7. The believers all thanked God for this wonderful _____.

by Emily Nijenhuis



Q What is the role of Christian counselling and Christian "self-help" books?

Please explain the role of Christian counselling and Christian "self-help" books. We are so quick to say "he or she needs counselling" or "books are the fountain of all knowledge" and yet when we do tap into these tools, it is often thrown back in our face with a blasé "all you really need is one Book" and "isn't that what the preaching is for every Sunday?"

It's hard enough to have it so bad that you need to reach out for extra help; does it need to be met with skepticism or disdain as well?

And if that were really all we needed, why then do we applaud the use of good devotionals, Bible study books, and, for that matter, the creeds and confessions?

A The matter articulated in this request for input is a delicate and sensitive one. The way it is expressed conveys that struggles like these still exist. It is, therefore, painful, to say the least, that there still are members in our churches suffering this kind of ignorance and insensitivity while going through the process of coming to grips with personal issues and afflictions due to the brokenness of life. Indeed, we know too well of members experiencing trauma in their life, having suffered abuse of one kind or other. We are aware as well of brothers and sisters afflicted with depression, anorexia, break-down in relationships, or those struggling with addictions to drugs, alcoholism, pornography, etc. These are just some of the trials also the children of the LORD experience in this broken world. It affects not only those who are afflicted by them, also caregivers, parents, siblings, and even the wider community enters into the picture of those trials!

It is with thankfulness that I may observe that much has changed over the past twenty or thirty years. Person-

ally, I have been very involved in the pursuit of providing counselling for those who are thus afflicted. In the early 90s I chaired the Counselling Services Networking Committee (CSNC), which worked to provide pastors and elders with names and addresses, book reviews, and vignettes, addressing these counselling needs as well. In the course of time the CSNC became connected to the Office Bearers Conference in Ontario and this pursuit for sound Christian counselling continued for the benefit and assistance of office bearers who needed such support to guide, advise, and assist those who were in need of such counselling. Thankfully during these years the Christian Counselling Centre (CCC) came off the ground, grew, and was readily available to provide Christian counselling services to the individual, the family, and the community.

Throughout these thirty years it has also been an important and much needed pursuit to change the mind-set, attitude, and approach toward the need for counselling. Therefore, it's sad indeed that still today some meet with the skepticism and disdain of which the questioner is speaking. Pastors and elders should know by now that there

are needs they cannot meet but which require an expertise they don't have. Office bearers should not dabble in these practices of counselling themselves either, assuming that a word from the Scriptures or a sermon on God's Word could remedy some of those serious conditions and situations. "Shared Care" has become a commonly understood principle which means that just as with people's physical ailments and diseases, members afflicted by emotional, mental, and psychological problems need specialized expertise and effective remedies (meanwhile being encouraged by the office bearers and fellow-members as we do those who are sick, hospitalized, or recuperating at home!). This is where the CCC is able to provide God's wisdom in his holy Word to bring hope, psychological, emotional, and spiritual healing and restoration while using skills and techniques that are clinically effective. Of course, if and when the nature of the problems exceeds the abilities of the professional and competent staff at CCC, there are other institutions (e.g. Home-wood in Guelph) for more advanced and specialized help!

An answer in this column would not suffice to make a plea that covers all the needs of which office bearers and fellow-members should be aware. The CCC, however, has been promoting its work in many a congregation (and church council) to highlight those needs and the reality of these people's suffering. Thankfully, the CCC also has been able to provide to many a congregation a "Plan for Assisting Congregations" (PAC, see their website!), which is a plan

that allows churches the ability to provide professional Christian counselling support to all their members. Thus, Christian counsellors are available who come alongside distressed people within their community context to offer scriptural wisdom with the goal of assisting their restoration to responsible living in fellowship with God and his people. These counsellors will then be able to give guidance and advice to their clients in case they (or their relatives, or fellow-members) would like to become more informed about the nature of particular afflictions or addictions, recommending certain trusted and reliable "self-help" books. Besides, the CCC has a wide range of courses, workshops, and presentations by which to inform, equip, encourage, and assist the wider community in a growing understanding of the needs of their fellow brothers and sisters!

In conclusion, I realize that I have answered this plea for input from my experience in Ontario, sharing my engagement in this work in the CSNC and presently as a director on the Board of the CCC. Readers may think, therefore, that this may be fine for the churches in Ontario – but what about those in Manitoba, Alberta, or BC? As far as the change of mind-set and attitude is concerned, the above applies across the country. I am also aware of similar services being available in other provinces and trust that office bearers there will direct their members in times of need to trustworthy and reliable Christian counsellors who will be able to provide the same and similar services!



Is there something you've been wanting to know?

An answer you've been looking for?

Ask us a question!

**Please direct questions to Rev. W. denHollander
denhollanderw@gmail.com**

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letter to the Editor

Another week, another *Clarion*, another rendition of a “wonderful” story written in Blessings Christian Church. Oh, to be the “spectator,” “free” to criticize. Much more daunting to become the “participant” and engage with venerable scholars. Ah well. . . .

Rev. Kampen comments that the actions and/or practices engaged in by Blessings church “have stirred up disillusionment, even a sense of despair in some members.” Perhaps add: disappointment!

Dialogue amongst those in Christ is good. It’s good to hear the various arguments and viewpoints. Disappointing, however, is that the dialogue takes place after the fact.

Blessings church appears intent on forging a new identity for itself as being a missional church. It’s the flavour of the day – “more missional.”

But what exactly is Blessings Christian Church? Are we not all “missional” churches simply by definition? Why Blessings “Christian Church”? Does “Christian” stand as in opposition to “Canadian Reformed”? Is membership really contingent on an interview re: my “missionality”?

A missional mindset is a good thing, even a necessity, but prerequisite to being a member of the church of our Lord? The spreading of the gospel is integral to our lives as God’s people and church, but the strength of a church lies in the diversity of its people. The Bible speaks clearly of the different parts of the body, each with its own particular place and task. As our bodies function best when all the various parts do their allotted task, so it is with the church. Missional mindset, yes, but if you are all so minded, why not be more missional in your previous local church. Perhaps that notion was not warmly received, even discouraged, but how does leaving your local church to join Blessings build up the brothers and sisters you left behind?

The doctrine of the covenant has always been central to what I was taught. It’s the very essence of who we are as God’s people. It permeates our thoughts and actions, taught to my children, now to theirs. God’s promises are “signified and sealed” through baptism. Our “I dos” place a great responsibility on our shoulders. The church, too, has an integral role. God is pleased to make himself known

through the preaching of the Word. To the preacher falls the wonderful task of fully expounding the mysteries of Gods will, including the riches of the covenant established with us and our children. Many have different concepts about the doctrines we adhere to. We need to be equipped and enabled to refute false teachings, also the false teachings about infant baptism. “Error” or “heresy”? I’m not sure at this time that it really matters. What does matter is that it’s simply illogical and inconsistent to allow a Baptist minister on our pulpit.

Dr. DeJong suggests that our local consistories are sufficiently astute theologically to supervise the “doctrine and conduct” (CO Art 22) of the pastors and so make prudent judgements about the pulpit access for their respective congregations.” Perhaps so, Dr. DeJong, but I ask you my brother, what of the weak member who struggles to discern the doctrine of covenant and baptism? What of our children? Assisting and building means that we strive to walk the same road, in the same direction, with the same measuring rod. Consistency – that’s what we and our children need, not a different rod for the guest than for the home grown.

The “wonderful” story would have been a truly “wonderful” story if the Baptist preacher, no doubt a sincere God fearing man, had come to know and embrace the Reformed doctrines of covenant and baptism. Now it’s simply an “emotional” story about a man who, while a man of faith, hasn’t come to know and appreciate the fullness of the riches we have in God. How can such a one preach the full gospel of salvation to the people of God?

It’s God who preserves his church, but it’s us here on earth that he uses for his purposes. It’s God who blessed us with the gift of a federation of churches, but, as Dr. Van Dam states, that federation is both a “blessing and a fragile gift.” And so my brothers and sisters in Blessings church, as you move forward, please do so carefully and considerately, keeping in mind that I am your brother and thus I need you and you need me. Failure to keep this in mind may bring us to experience how fragile the gift really is.

Dick Schouten
Yarrow, BC

Response

Mr. Schouten seems like a fine Christian brother, and I only wish we could meet face to face to address his concerns. I readily concede that some of the things missional churches do are novel and therefore potentially alarming to people, especially those far removed from us. It is not insignificant that many of our critics, after spending time with us, worshipping with us, or conversing with us about our missional endeavours, withdraw their criticisms. It often becomes clear to those willing to invest time with us that our objective is not to be mavericks or revolutionaries, but to be obedient

to Christ, not least in terms of the Great Commission. Some of our fiercest critics have by the grace of God become our strongest supporters. Mr. Schouten or any other interested party is welcome to call me on my personal number which I will make available upon an email request. Lastly, as a member church in the federation, Blessings is an active participant in Classis Central Ontario, where our full compliance with the Church Order and full adherence to the Reformed confessions are not being disputed.

Sincerely, Bill DeJong 

*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 of Classis Niagara held on March 6, 2019 in the Smithville Canadian Reformed Church

On behalf of the convening church, Rev. C. Bouwman opened the meeting by welcoming all present, particularly student Cody Swaving in attendance for his preparatory exam and guests there to observe. He requested that we sing Psalm 93:1, 4 followed by the reading of Ephesians 6:10-20. After reflecting on the message of this passage, he led in prayer, making special note of the decline of the call extended by Attercliffe to candidate Iwan Borst, the travels of Rev. J. Van Woudenberg, the sabbatical of Rev. D. Wynia, and the needs of the Seminary, particularly the de Visser family and the chemotherapy treatments of sr. Inge de Visser.

The credentials were examined by the convening church and found to be in good order. Upon the examination of the credentials, Classis was declared constituted.

The suggested officers from Classis Niagara Dec. 12, 2018, Rev. R.J. Kampen as chairman, Rev. R.J. den Hollander as vice-chairman, and Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer as clerk were appointed. The chairman thanked the church at Smithville for their preparations.

The proposed agenda was adopted.

Br. Cody Swaving submitted the required documentation for his examination (Church Order Art. 4.B.1). The necessary documents were present. Br. Swaving presented his sermon on Psalm 63 as assigned. Classis met in closed session to discuss the sermon proposal and the report of examiners who assigned the brother his text. The sermon was judged to be satisfactory and sufficient to proceed with the examination. Br. Swaving re-entered the meeting and the meeting was declared to be in open session. After a break, students of John Calvin School were welcomed to observe some of the proceedings. Rev. Kampen continued by examining the brother in OT exegesis, focussing on the text of Genesis 3. Rev. Bouwman then examined br. Swaving in NT exegesis, focussing on 1 Corinthians 6. Rev. Holtvlüwer examined the brother in Doctrine and Creeds, focussing on the given topic of "The Holy Spirit and the Means of Grace."

Opportunity was given for the members of Classis to ask questions of the brother. Classis re-entered closed session to discuss the examinations and decided to declare br. Cody Swaving eligible for call after the brother promised not to teach or preach anything that is not in accordance with the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity. Those present sang from Psalm 134 and Rev. Kampen gave thanks in prayer.

The chairman asked the questions according to Article 44 of the Church Order. Each of the churches indicated that the ministry of the office-bearers was being continued and that the decisions of the major assemblies were being honoured. One church requested advice in a matter of discipline. Advice was given. The others did not require the judgement and help of Classis for the proper government of their church.

In closed session, the church at Attercliffe sought concurring advice to call for a second time the same minister in the same vacancy (CO Art. 4.C). This was granted.

In closed session the church visitation reports of visits made to Attercliffe, Dunnville, Grassie, Lincoln, Smithville, and Tintern were given and received with thankfulness.

According to the schedule, the church of Tintern is appointed as the convening church for the next classis. It will be convened, D.V., on June 12, 2019 (or if deemed not necessary, then Sept. 11, 2019). The suggested officers are Rev. J. Van Woudenberg as chairman, Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer as vice-chairman, and Rev. R.J. Kampen as clerk. Personal question period was made use of.

With gratitude, the chairman noted the good harmony at the meeting and deemed brotherly censure not necessary.

The Acts were read and adopted and the Press Release approved for publication.

The chairman requested the singing of Hymn 82:1, 2 and asked the vice-chairman to lead in prayer.

*For Classis Niagara March 6, 2019
Rev. Rolf den Hollander, vice-president at that time* 