

# Clarion

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



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**FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF CRTS  
CONVOCATION 2019**

# 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:

**C**onfessionally Reformed  
**L**oving in manner  
**A**ttuned to current issues  
**R**eadable and Reliable  
**I**n Submission to Scripture  
**O**pen to constructive criticism  
**N**urturing Christian living

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

This year, our Thanksgiving issue coincides with the annual coverage of "the College Evening." How appropriate! The theme of thankfulness certainly weaves through every article on these pages.

The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) celebrated a milestone this September at Convocation: their fiftieth anniversary! There were also seven graduates, to whom we extend our congratulations: the Master of Divinity degree for Chauncey Knecht, Eric Onderwater, Jeremy Segstro, Filip Sylwestrowicz, Mark ten Haaf, Nathan Zekveld, and the Bachelor of Theology degree for Leana Van Amerongen.

Issue 20 is filled with reports on the convocation and anniversary celebration, the keynote speech from Convocation, as well as a Thanksgiving meditation, a letter to the editor, and *Clarion Kids*.

Laura Veenendaal

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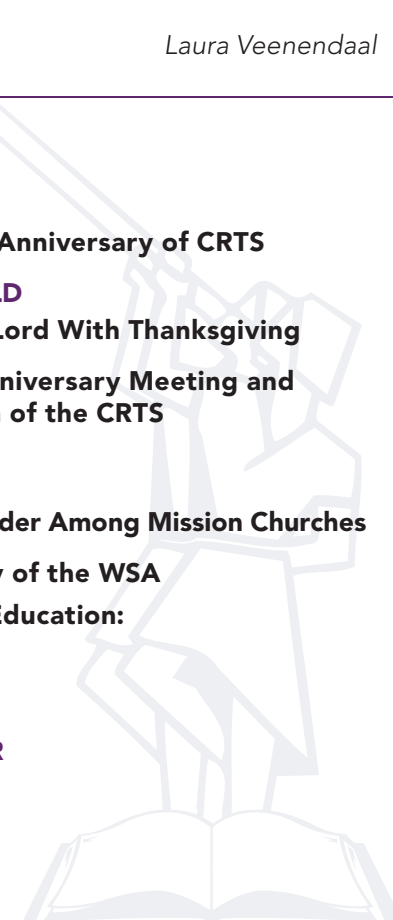
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# Thanksgiving – Fiftieth Anniversary of CRTS

*There is increasing need for faithful preachers of the gospel  
to serve both existing churches and the work of mission*

For the past fifty years, many pages of *Clarion* have been dedicated to the work of the Canadian Reformed Seminary in Hamilton (CRTS). Many pages of the magazine have been graced with numerous articles from her professors. For fifty years the seminary has been a blessing for the Canadian Reformed Churches as men were trained for the ministry of the gospel. Its influence has been felt not only in Canada, but a special bond is felt with the Australian churches and in recent years stronger bonds are being forged with the churches in South Africa. Its influence has also extended to other parts of the world as students from Asia, Africa, and Europe have been trained at this biblical institution of learning.

The seminary arose from humble circumstances. It became a reality because of an early vision within a new federation of churches in Canada. Many Reformed believers from the Liberated Reformed Churches of The Netherlands immigrated to Canada in the 1950s. When they could not find a church to call home, a new federation of churches named the Canadian Reformed Churches was established across Canada, with a few in the US. The name itself indicated a desire on the part of its members to become part of the country they had adopted as their homeland. While there was still a close bond with the churches in The Netherlands, there was also a desire to become Canadian and for the churches to develop a better understanding of the theological climate in North America. Quite quickly the churches made a deliberate decision to transition from the Dutch language to English in the worship services. The first ministers came from The Netherlands, and these men faced the challenge of transitioning quickly to the English language.

The very first synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches held at Homewood (Carman) Manitoba (1954) already dealt with the training of men for the ministry. The realization

arose from the very beginning that the churches would need to train men to become future ministers and therefore it was decided that the churches should begin to collect money for a seminary. At first a number of ministers were appointed to train men for the ministry. Those who wanted to study were mentored by these ministers, but it required them to travel from place to place. The alternative was to study either at the Seminary in Kampen (The Netherlands), or at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.

In 1962, Synod Hamilton made the decision to establish a Theological College, but it was not until Synod Orangeville 1968 that professors were appointed. The opening of the new seminary took place on September 10, 1969. The vision expressed by the churches at its first synod finally came into reality under the Lord's blessing fifteen years later in 1969. This was an occasion of much thankfulness for a small but growing federation of churches.

A new milestone was reached in 1981, when the legislature of the Ontario Government passed the "Canadian Reformed Theological College Act." This Act allowed the seminary to grant the graduates the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree. While the degree itself did not make the graduates more competent ministers, it gave the institution greater recognition as a legitimate place of learning for the ministry.

## Professors

The most critical requirement for a seminary is qualified professors. A number of ministers in those first fifteen years continued their studies and received Master of Theology degrees, some at Knox College in Toronto, so there were then a number of qualified men who could teach at the seminary. The seminary began with a few serious challenges. Rev. J. van Popta was appointed as professor by Synod but he passed



away before Synod ended and Rev. F. Kouwenhoven passed on to the Lord within a month of beginning his teaching at the seminary. Rev. H. Scholtens also suffered serious health concerns. The task was left to the three remaining professors, Dr. J. Faber, Rev. L. Selles, and Rev. G. VanDooren, to carry on the work with extra teaching responsibilities. The seminary finally had a full complement of professors in the 1972-73 school year with the appointment of Dr. H.M. Ohmann. During the fifty years the seminary also faced serious challenges when the health of Dr. DeJong and Dr. Gootjes made it impossible for them to continue teaching; but, by God's grace, the training of men for the ministry continued unhindered.

For many years the seminary operated with four full-time professors and in 2013 Synod Carman added a fifth professor. This was a real blessing for two reasons; first, it helped make the teaching load of the professors more reasonable, and, secondly, it gave the professors time to do important research to better fulfill their calling to train men for the ministry. Professors need to understand the developments in the world of theology so that when the graduates go into the ministry, they are equipped to face new ideas and challenges with good biblical insights.

## Students

What is a seminary without students? There was no certainty that this small federation of churches, made up of recent immigrants who, from my perspective, largely did not see the value of higher education, could count on enough students for the seminary. The Lord provided so that in that first year four students were enrolled. One, Dr. C. VanDam, would continue his studies and later become Professor of Old Testament. For the first number of years the class sizes remained small, but steadily the student population began to grow so that now the seminary has an enrollment of twenty-four students. Today the seminary is reaching out into the church community to encourage gifted men to consider the ministry. In the past fifty years over 142 people have graduated from CRTS's programs, most of whom are men who have gone on to serve as ministers within the Reformed churches.

We are thankful that the student body has become diverse. They have come from the Canadian and Australian churches and, in the near future, the South African churches also hope to send students to the seminary. The student body has become more international, coming from countries like New Zealand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Korea, China, Sudan, Russia, Poland, and Italy. We are thankful that the seminary is able to fill the needs not only in the Canadian churches that it serves, but the Lord has also used it to promote the gospel in other parts of the world. The Lord's saying that "the harvest is plentiful but the workers are

few" is still true today. There is increasing need for faithful preachers of the gospel to serve both existing churches and the work of mission.

## Building facilities

A seminary needs a place for instruction. In 1969, a large house or mansion was purchased on Queen St. South in Hamilton. Two large rooms on the main floor were used for a classroom and chapel, while the upstairs rooms housed the professors' offices and a small classroom for the freshman year. The library was spread throughout the rooms of the house and in the old musty basement. The old servant's quarters on the third floor served as housing for up to four seminary students. After sixteen years, a new property was purchased (in 1985) on Hamilton's West mountain. This was a larger building in a quiet neighbourhood that could accommodate a growing student body. The building was renovated so that first a wing with offices was added for the faculty and later another wing was added to house the library. We may be thankful that the Lord has provided these facilities to serve the needs of the seminary. With twenty-four students, the classrooms are becoming more crowded, but the building should be able to fulfill the seminary needs for the foreseeable future.

The reality for many seminaries in North America is that bricks and mortar buildings are being replaced by distance education with the use of video conferencing. A committee with input from the faculty is exploring the option of distance education. While technology makes it possible for people living far apart to be connected in learning environments, the reality is that it creates more work for the professor and the best learning environment is always face to face instruction in the learner community. Students need to be able to interact not only with the professor but also with one another in order to have a dynamic learning environment. It is unlikely that the seminary will go in this direction, but there may be aspects of distance education that can be implemented.

## Fifty years of development

Over fifty years, important changes have taken place to the program of study. In the first years the professors discussed which courses would be taught (within the framework given by Synod) and they developed the content of the courses themselves. While that is still largely true today, the seminary has developed tools to help evaluate the courses that are taught. The entire MDiv program now has Program Learning Outcomes (PLO) that speak about the students learning to understand, communicate, and radiate the Word of God, while each course has particular Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) that show how that course is designed to contribute

to the program outcomes. Selected student artifacts are examined afterward by other professors to see if the goal for the course has been achieved. Students also hand in course evaluations at the end of the year and the Alumni are given a survey a few years after graduation to evaluate the effectiveness of their studies for their work. We may be thankful that the professors are able to use all this information to make important adjustments to their course of studies.

The seminary has also implemented a Spiritual Formation Program. The seminary is an academic institution of learning, but wishes to assist the students in spiritual growth and leadership formation, so that all the learning takes place in a healthy spiritual atmosphere. In this program, students write self-evaluation papers and meet regularly with a professor who has been assigned as their mentor. The student is able to speak about his own spiritual journey, receive encouragement, and together they pray for his needs. In the past, professors cared about the well-being of their students, but they were not as intentional about inquiring after their spiritual life. We may be thankful that the professors are now more in tune with the needs of their students. As the student population grows, this program will help the professors to identify problems and give encouragement when needed.

Another important change has been the Pastoral Training Program (PTP). It is now a requirement that a student does a summer internship in one of the churches under the direction of an experienced minister. In my own experience, I entered the ministry having made fewer than ten sermons, and these were all delivered in the seminary setting. Today, in addition to sermons presented at the seminary, students spend about twelve weeks in a local congregation, preparing a sermon each week that they are able to deliver to a congregation for their spiritual edification. This program helps the student to develop his preaching skills and it gives him an important insight into the work of the ministry of the gospel. For many, it confirms their desire for this ministry and some may realize that it is not where they see their calling.

The purpose for the program is to better prepare men for the ministry, but we also need to be realistic about the outcome of the course of study at CRTS. The men who come out of the seminary and begin their ministry receive the tools they need to expound the Word of God and minister to the flock of Christ. It is not until they enter into the ministry that such men really begin to develop their skills in preaching and pastoral work. In a very real sense, every man who enters the ministry is never finished learning nor developing their skills. A faithful preacher of the gospel is someone who continues to grow, both in knowledge and wisdom, throughout his entire ministry.

## Accreditation

In 2013 CRTS became a fully accredited member of “The Association of Theological Schools” (ATS) in the United States and Canada. The College Act of 1981 gave the seminary the legal right to grant the Master of Divinity degree. The accreditation with ATS means that the degree granted by CRTS will also be recognized by other Theological schools in North America and by extension in other parts of the world. For example, one of the graduates this year had his application accepted in four prestigious theological schools in Europe.

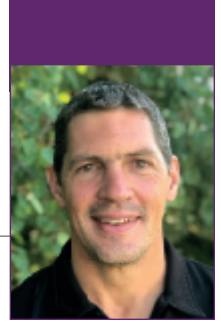
There are two benefits that come to mind for the accreditation. The first is that every seven years the seminary needs to do a self-study to identify strengths and weaknesses. It will build on its strengths and improve on its weaknesses. This self-study begins with a look at the “Statement of Institutional Purpose.” This statement lays out the basis (which is the Word of God as summarized in the confessions of the church) and the purpose for the seminary (the training of men for the ministry of the Word). Everything that the seminary does, including the courses being taught, must align with those principles. That is a real blessing as the seminary needs to consciously think through whether it remains faithful to its basis. The seminary needs to remain true to the calling the Lord has given it through the churches.

Another important benefit of this accreditation is that it makes it possible to accept foreign students from Australia, South Africa, and other nations in the world. It was providential that at about the same time the seminary received its accreditation, the Canadian government changed its rules for foreign students. Because CRTS had ATS accreditation, it was much easier to be accepted as a Designated Learning Institute with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and thereby to receive foreign students. Thankfully the Lord granted the accreditation in a timely manner.

## Thanksgiving

As we reflect back on fifty years at CRTS, we thank the Lord that he has so richly blessed this institution of theological learning that began from very humble beginnings. He has blessed the seminary with faithful professors who have taught future generations of ministers. Without ministers of the gospel, the churches would have floundered. The church needs faithful shepherds of the flock to direct God’s people in the way of life and salvation. We may be thankful for the many positive developments over all these years, so that the program of study has grown and improved. We praise the Lord for the positive impact the seminary has had on the churches in Canada and other parts of the world. We pray that the Lord may continue to bless the work at CRTS and that it may continue to be faithful to the work of the Lord for the next fifty years.





# Yet, I Will Magnify the Lord With Thanksgiving

***“But I am afflicted and in pain; let your salvation, O God, set me on high! I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.” Psalm 69:29-30***

Imagine if you were called upon to lead the congregational prayer on Thanksgiving Day. How would you word your prayer? Although we may have health, good relationships, a steady job, security, food, clothing, and shelter (and it is good to be grateful for the blessings you receive), many fellow Christians are experiencing a much harsher reality. Can the healthy “eye” or “arm” or “foot” in the body of Christ be truly thankful while other parts of the body are beaten, wounded, and abandoned? Even if you changed your approach in your Thanksgiving Day prayer, and focussed on the faith that unites believers and distinguishes them from the world, what would you say to the LORD who knows about our folly and the wrongs that we have done (Ps 69:5)? “Thank you, LORD that we have such strong faith and are not like other people who are sinning all the time” (cf. Luke 18:10)?

God gives us a thanksgiving prayer in Psalm 69 that does not ignore the sins of his people or the harsh realities of the Christian life. Prophesying

the suffering of Christ Jesus himself, Psalm 69 speaks of the loneliness (69:1-4; 19-21), weariness, despair, distress (69:3, 17), shame (69:6), persecution (69:5, 10-11a), and ridicule (69:11b-12) that God’s people all over the world continue to experience. Psalm 69 makes it clear that God knows about our tear-stained eyes, our anxious hearts, our anger at injustice, our overwhelmed feelings, and our desire for God to protect us from his enemies in his covenant wrath (69:1, 6, 13-15, 22-28). Since the LORD knows that we are afflicted and in pain (69:29), we also can be sure that the words of thanksgiving at the end of Psalm 69 (vv.30-36) are not meant to be spoken with fake smiles and hypocritical worship as we stutter our way through an “at-least-we-have” superficial thanksgiving prayer that ignores the hardships.

So what do we see in Psalm 69? We see a thanksgiving prayer that both acknowledges hardships and magnifies the Name of the LORD God of hosts (Ps 69:6). Psalm 69 gives us

a thanksgiving prayer that looks through hardships to see the powerful hand of God still sustaining us underneath it all. The broken, weak, and suffering church uses the prayer of Psalm 69 to express our calculated, deliberate decision to take a magnifying glass and focus our attention on God’s Name and his promise to save and deliver his people (69:35-36). Although our eyes may be red with tears, our hearts afraid, and our families mocked and ridiculed, since we know that the Lord GOD of hosts is faithful, we will praise the Name of God with song! With tears streaming down our faces, we are determined and say, “Yet, I will magnify him with thanksgiving” because I believe that he is my LORD, that all things are in his control, and that he will restore the fortunes of his people. Yes, by God’s grace we can follow the Holy Spirit who lead us to “rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess 5:16-18).



## For further study

1. Read Psalm 69 and take note of the different kinds of suffering it mentions.
2. Write out a prayer of thanksgiving that follows the model of Psalm 69.





# Report of the Fiftieth Anniversary Meeting and Forty-Fifth Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) September 6, 2019

On the day of the Convocation one could sense a spirit of anticipation as people came for the Fiftieth Anniversary Meeting. People came not only from Ontario but from across Canada, some as far away as British Columbia. The program reflected the special character of this celebration, in which honour and thanks was given to the Lord for his faithfulness to CRTS for the past fifty years. The convocation was well attended with the audience overflowing into the balcony of the Redeemer University College auditorium in Ancaster, ON.

## Opening

The chairman of the board, Rev. John Louwerse, welcomed everyone to the Fiftieth Anniversary meeting, and in his prayer he gave thanks to the Lord for this blessing. He also remembered sr. G. Deddens, the widow of the late Dr. K. Deddens, sister Margaret DeJong, the widow of the late Dr. J. DeJong, Prof. J. Geertsema, Prof. N.H. Gootjes and his wife Dinie, and he gave thanks for the work of Dr. C. Van Dam and his wife Joanne, noting that Dr. Van Dam is still very active in his retirement. After prayer the chairman invited Mr. Bruce Huizinga to speak on behalf of the Australian Deputies for theological training. Bruce passed on some memories from his father, Rev. W. Huizinga, about those first years when he was a member of the first class to graduate from CRTS. On behalf of the Deputies of the South African churches for theological studies, Mr. Gerard Hagg brought greetings and expressed the delight of the small group of South African churches with the growing relationship with CRTS. The chairman then read from Scriptures, Colossians 1:1-10, in connection with the topic of the keynote address.



*Mr. Bruce Huizinga brings greetings from Australia*

## Principal's report

The Principal of the Seminary, Dr. Jason Van Vliet, began his report with a dramatic reading of Rev. G. Van-Dooren's reporting on Synod Orangeville 1968. He reported, after a couple of days of suspense, since Synod met behind closed doors, the decision was finally announced to set up a "regular *theological college*, with *three* full-time professors and *two* part-time lecturers." This was the genesis of the CRTS fifty years ago. Another highlight from his report was the Campus Visit Day in Hamilton and the Timothy Conference in Australia that together attracted almost sixty men who indicated serious interest in pursuing study at the seminary. He also reported that the seminary

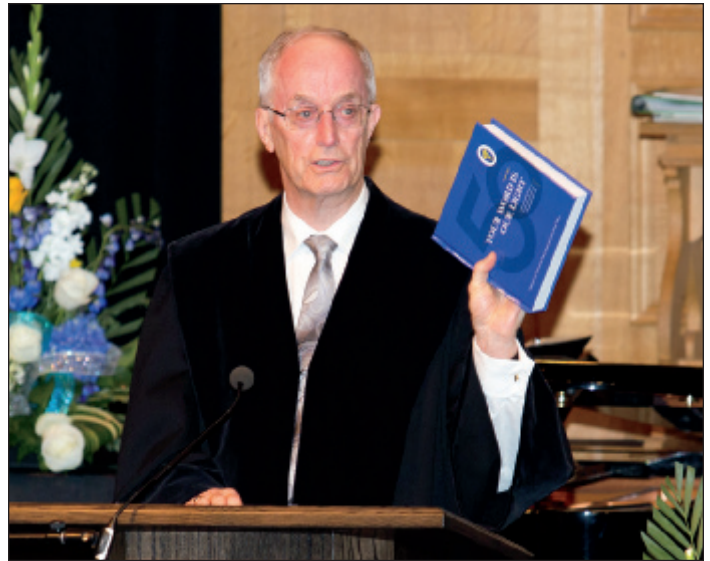
welcomed six new students to the M.Div. program: Caleb Kos (Neerlandia, AB), Mark Vanderlinde (Winnipeg, MB), Adam Werkman (Winnipeg, MB), Matthias Schat (Mundijong, WA), Timothy Slaa (Smithers, BC), and Faustin Emadjeu (Cameroon). There is also one new student in the B.Th. program: Dan Dery (Brantford ON). The principal's full report can be found in this magazine.

### Commemorative book, lectern

For this occasion, a commemorative book was created to tell the story about fifty years at the seminary with words and pictures. Dr. Van Dam presented a copy of the book for the seminary to the chairman of CRTS. Much appreciation was expressed for the work that went into its publication. The principal then pointed to the new lectern that was being used this evening. It was donated to CRTS by the alumni of the seminary as a fiftieth anniversary gift. Although the lectern was intended for the senior classroom, it is so well crafted and beautiful that reports suggest it may end up in the chapel at CRTS and be used for CRTS conferences. The alumni in attendance for the evening were asked to stand and it was a visible reminder that many men (there were many more who could not be present for the evening) have graduated from the seminary.

### Keynote

Dr. Theodore Van Raalte then gave his keynote address on the topic, "The Hunger for Good Order in Mission Churches." Before he began speaking, he showed everyone that, with a twist of a knob, the lectern can be raised to Dr. Smith height and pushed down to Dr. Visscher height. He then pointed to the school logo on the front of the lec-



*Dr. C. Van Dam introduces the commemorative book*

tern that has the Latin motto, "My lamp, your word." These words describe the starting point for every course that is taught at the seminary, for the Word of God is the light by which the Lord restores order in the life of the church. Examples were given of mission churches that fell apart because leaders used human wisdom rather than the divine Word to direct them to establish new churches. The blessing that Reformed churches enjoy is that they have a church order to give good order, under which the church can flourish. Order in the church arises from God's Word and is a response of faith. For that reason, a church order is never imposed on a church, for the church seeks to submit to the Word of God and to keep its word with fellow churches.

### Conferral of degrees

The address was followed with the singing of Psalm 119:40, 42, "Your word, it is a lamp to guide my feet, a lantern shining on the path before me," capably led by the organist for the evening, Mr. Peter Ravensbergen. This was followed with the conferring of the degree of Master of Divinity on Chauncey Knecht, Eric Onderwater, Jeremy Segstro, Filip Sylwestrowicz, Mark ten Haaf, Nathan Zekveld, and the Bachelor of Theology degree on Leana Van Amerongen. The Selles Book Prize was presented to Filip Sylwestrowicz. He will continue his studies at Cambridge University in the UK. On behalf of the graduating class, Mark ten Haaf spoke words of appreciation for God's care, and for the work of the professors and staff at the seminary. He related a number of interesting and humorous stories

### A snippet from the greetings of the Free Reformed Churches in Australia and South Africa

*Today in 2019, by worldly standards, the CRTS is still a small institution. Nevertheless, for the Head of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ, numbers do not count, but faithfulness to him and his unchanging Word. Today we can testify that he has kept his promises, and sustained CRTS in its training of theological students in the true faith. Through you he provides pastors for his flocks all over the world, pastors who have been thoroughly equipped in all aspects of the ministry.*



to give everyone a better insight into the character of the students, as well as some of the professors and staff. While serious work takes place at the seminary, the students can still see the humour in life.

### The WSA surprise!

The Women's Savings Action (WSA) gave a short video presentation. The WSA has been in existence from the very beginning and therefore reflected on fifty years of service to the Seminary. The work of the WSA is to financially support the library, so that books and periodicals can be purchased to support the work of the faculty and students. On average, an academic book purchased by the seminary costs fifty-eight dollars. The WSA set a goal this year to collect \$50,000 dollars for the fiftieth anniversary of the Seminary. The women succeeded in this goal and it was matched by a generous donor so that the library received \$100,000. This gift was accepted by the principal with great appreciation.

### CRTS choir and closing

This year a special presentation was given by the CRTS male choir. They gave beautiful renditions of "Ma Navu"

(How Beautiful upon the Mountains) and "Your Word, it is a Lamp to Guide My Feet." The latter song was newly composed by Mr. Martin Jongsma for the occasion. This was a beautiful way to bring the evening to a close. A collection was then taken to support the "Publication Foundation." This foundation funds the publication of books written by faculty members for the benefit of the churches.

Rev. Matthew VanLuik closed the evening in prayer, expressing gratitude for a wonderful evening of fellowship and praise. He asked the Lord to bless the future endeavours of the graduates and prayed for the Lord's blessing over the new year of study at the Seminary. The assembly then concluded the evening with the singing of "O Canada." After the program, everyone, including family and friends, had the opportunity to congratulate the graduates. The evening was a time of great fellowship. The presence of the Spirit could be felt in the words that were spoken and the heartfelt singing coming from the hearts of all present. A video of the College evening for your viewing is available at on the CRTS website welcome page (later it will be moved to the resources section of the website).



*CRTS male choir sings, directed by Rodney den Boer, accompanied by Arjan de Visser and Rianna Slaa*



## Principal's Report 2019

On convocation evenings there is usually “A Word from the Principal.” But this evening, as we celebrate our fiftieth anniversary, we’re going to call it “*Some Words from Some Principals and Some Others, too.*” Don’t worry, I think you’ll catch on as we go along.

Let’s begin in 1968, before our seminary even existed. General Synod Orangeville was in session, and Rev. G. van Dooren was busy reporting for the *Canadian Reformed Magazine*. Remember, no Twitter feeds or livestreaming back then. But this is what he wrote on November 25: “. . .the matter of the Training for the Ministry has proved to be the big issue. At this moment we cannot say much. There has been a meeting of the Governors the whole day. Tonight there is a session with closed doors. Suspense is in the air!”<sup>1</sup> Then on November 27 he continued the story:

After two days of “secret session,” Synod finally opened its doors to the public, consisting at that moment in only *one* lady, our faithful Jennie [the Synod’s typist] who, representing the whole Canadian Reformed community, heard the following proclamation by the President of Synod: After extended discussions and deliberations Synod has decided to replace the present, provisional set-up of the Training for the Ministry by a regular *theological college*, with *three* full-time professors and *two* part-time lecturers.

It’s hard to imagine fully the kind of excitement that must have rippled through the federation after that “presidential” proclamation. But it was there in 1968!

Now the *first hour* of any span of history is always unique, and we cannot turn back the clock. By now the so-called “regular Theological College” has become a *regular* part of our ecclesiastical furniture. Still, by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, may our *first love* for this seminary continue to burn brightly.

Because I’m sure that during those two days of “secret session” the delegates at Synod Orangeville were thinking a lot about “the elect lady and her children,” as the apostle John writes at the beginning of his second letter. This elect

lady is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it was *by* this beloved Lady and *for* this beloved Lady, the church of Christ, that this seminary was started and still continues to exist. And all of that only, and always, under the indispensable blessing of her majestic Lord, our Creator and Redeemer. *Without him*, CRTS would have never started. *Without him*, CRTS would not be here today. *Without him*, CRTS cannot go forward. But *with him*, our seminary can step forward and that future is also something to be excited about.

Next, let’s turn to some words from our first principal, Dr. Jelle Faber, at the official opening of the Theological College on Wednesday, September 10, 1969. In his inaugural speech Dr. Faber argued persuasively that a seminary that fully submits to the Word of God, as also summarized in the creeds and confessions, will, by definition, also be catholic. Dr. Faber said it this way:

Is the establishment of this seminary a continuation of sectarianism? . . . [No, not] when we consider the



Mr. Gerard Hagg brings greetings from South Africa



foundation of our seminary. [In the context, JF refers to the confessional foundation of the seminary.] It is our truly ecumenical task to maintain that foundation in all our teaching. Then we are not narrow-minded but find ourselves in the world-wide and age-old communion of the catholic church.

Almost thirty years later, another principal, Dr. N.H. Gootjes, worked with this same conviction when he said: “In our postmodern, anti-dogmatic time the College should maintain its confessional stance.” If we do not stand firm with the creeds and confessions of the church, we will soon find ourselves adrift, floating aimlessly on the restless seas of postmodernism.

By the grace of God, after five decades, CRTS still stands on the same foundation. Our official basis, posted on our website, is this: “CRTS submits to the doctrine of the infallible Word of God as summarized in the ecumenical creeds and the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.”

And look how the Lord has blessed this with a truly catholic, that is worldwide, opportunity to serve. CRTS has been privileged to train students from many different countries including Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Korea, China, South Africa, Sudan, Russia, Poland, and Italy. These students come from various Reformed federations, including a number from the United Reformed Churches in recent years. Fifty years ago, at the opening ceremony, who could have ever imagined such a thing? Today the LORD is accomplishing it.

In part, the Lord is doing this through a most remarkable co-operation between federations of churches that are separated by thousands upon thousands of kilometres. Yet they are “joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith” (BC 27). Here I’m referring in the first place to our co-operation with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and secondly to our more recent collaboration with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. Here’s another quote from Dr. Faber back in 1988.

In the course of the years we have already received moneys collected by Australian brothers and sisters. Now this financial support has been formalized in a generous manner. But more important than the financial help is the fact that in the last decades the sister relationship between the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and our Canadian Reformed Churches has been strengthened.

Indeed! In the past few years I have had the immense privilege of visiting our sister churches in Australia and South



*Chairman of the Board Rev. J. Louwerse receives the commemorative book*

Africa. What a blessing! Words can hardly capture how encouraging, how beautiful it is to speak with brothers and sisters who hold all the same heartfelt convictions about training for the ministry of the gospel and the Reformed faith.

Perhaps you will allow me to wax just a bit emotional here for a moment, but those discussions in those two countries were sweet to the soul, “sweeter than honey to my mouth,” as the psalmist says (119:103). Yes, there were important items on the agenda. How can modern technology be best used in training for the ministry so that the training is not compromised in any way but its reach might be extended? How do we best cooperate closely with three federations that separated by oceans and time zones?

No, we did not come up with all the answers. We’re still working with all these things. But allow me to highlight *the atmosphere* in which we could grapple with these questions. That atmosphere is so clearly formed and fashioned by the Holy Spirit – a clear sense of harmony, cooperation, and self-sacrificial love for the glory of God and the benefit of his church. And the presence of delegates from both of these church federations here this evening warms and encourages our hearts profoundly.

But what is a seminary without students? That’s why I’m thankful that some years ago the principal before me, Dr. G.H. Visscher, published some comments from our international students in *Clarion*. Here’s one sample: “I am





*Mark ten Haaf speaks on behalf of the graduates*

learning a lot of things being at the College, both from the classes and outside. Sometimes, I feel as if it is the first time I hear about theology. I can't wait to go back and to apply everything I have learned at the College." This is a comment from an international student, but I have heard many similar, positive things from many other students as well.

Speaking of students, this year the seminary is pleased to welcome seven new students. Six of them enter the M.Div. program to train for the ministry of the Word: Caleb Kos (Neerlandia, AB), Mark Vanderlinde (Winnipeg, MB), Adam Werkman (Winnipeg, MB), Matthias Schat (Mundijong, WA), Timothy Slaa (Smithers, BC), Faustin Emadjeu (Cameroon). We also extend a warm welcome to one new student in the B.Th. program: Dan Dery (Brantford, ON). With a total of seven new students coming in, and seven graduating this evening, our student body remains stable at twenty-four. We praise and thank the Lord for this.

At the same time, as we review the history of our seminary, we must also acknowledge the difficult moments. In 1968 Rev. Jules T. van Popta was appointed to be the first professor of Dogmatics. In the Lord's plan, Rev. van Popta never delivered his first lecture. Instead the LORD took his servant into glory. Another appointment was made and, yes, the Theological College opened its doors on September 15, 1969.

However, not even three weeks later, on October 4, 1969, the seminary community was again shocked with grief. The Lord took another professor, Francois Kouwenhoven, out of his earthly labours and into heavenly rest.

Decades later, in another heart-wrenching series of events, first Dr. Jack De Jong, and then Dr. Niek Gootjes, had to stop teaching at the seminary, both due to dementia. Yet also through these hardships, the sovereign Lord has sustained us and continued to provide for us.

So, we need to wrap up this "Word from the Principal," or more accurately, "Some Words from Some Principals and Some Others, Too." Let me close with two more quotes.

We return to the beginning: Synod Orangeville 1968, the synod that decided to start this seminary. After the sudden death of Rev. J.T. Van Popta, the chairman, Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene, spoke to the assembly. Here are the final sentences of that moving address:

But the Lord did not deem it necessary that [Rev. Van Popta] knew of his appointment, that he decided about it, and that he did any work for it. We shall have to *continue* without him, knowing and trusting that it is the Lord God who bids us to *continue* and who will take care of his church. Thus we shall *continue*. . . following after our King and Saviour Jesus Christ. His mercy we implore. His help we ask.

The second quote comes from the apostle Paul. It sums the entire fifty-year history of our seminary in just one verse, Romans 11:36: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

<sup>1</sup> All of the quotations in this article can be found in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication, *Your Word is Our Light: Celebrating 50 Years of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary* (Hamilton: Lucerna CRTS Press, 2019). More information about this book can be found online: <https://www.canadianreformedseminary.ca/Anniversary-Book.html>.



*Photos of the graduating classes over the years*



# The Hunger for Good Order Among Mission Churches

Good order in mission churches – and all churches, for that matter – is greatly needed, and many stories, both positive and negative, could be told. Lately, mission churches in a number of different countries have asked me to lecture on church polity and that led me to think about this topic. But before the stories, I would like to begin with Psalm 119:105, “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and light for my path.” That verse provides the motto of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, “Your Word, my light.”

## Psalm 119

There is no chapter of the Bible that praises God’s written instructions more highly than Psalm 119. The Psalmist treasures God’s law, obeys his decrees (v. 8), hides God’s Word in his heart (v. 11), rejoices to follow his statutes (v. 14), meditates upon his precepts (v. 15), considers God’s ways (v. 15), and delights in God’s instruction (v. 174). He calls God’s Word his counsellor (v. 24), his delight (v. 143), full of wonders (v. 27, v. 129), true (v. 160), righteous (v. 62, v. 138, v. 164, v. 172), eternal (v. 89, v. 160), boundless (v. 96), more precious than thousands of pieces of silver and gold (v. 72), sweeter than honey (v. 103), and a lamp to his feet and a light for his path (v. 105). This is just a smattering of the highly positive things he says about God’s Holy Word.

His heart overflows with the joy of a freed man. The NIV translates verse 32, “I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.” He enjoys a settled and peaceful conscience in his heart: “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws. Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble” (v. 163-4).

At the just-completed General Synod 2019 of our churches, the chairman presented the convening church

with a large signboard displaying this text, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” (Psalm 119:18, ESV).

Sometimes Psalm 119 seems over-zealous or overly optimistic about God’s instructions. Especially if you approach it by wrongly dividing law and gospel and think Psalm 119 is only about the law that accuses us, you could never make sense of it. But if you read Psalm 119 with a heart of faith, with love for God filling you, with the heart of Jesus who said, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4), then as you read this Psalm, your heart will sing, it will soar into the heavens, it will rest in the bosom of the Lord.

I submit to you that this is the right place to begin when speaking about good order among mission churches. If I said that I was going to talk about the topics that my colleagues at CRTS teach, such as the Old or New Testaments, theology or dogmatics, or even ministry and mission, you would all readily expect me to begin with God’s Word being the lamp to our feet and the light to our path. But good order? Church government? Handling problems with your pastor? Personality conflicts? Different opinions about the use of liturgical forms and songs? Does the Bible have anything to say about that? How is it even possible to derive good order from the example of the mission churches of the New Testament, so long ago, and in a totally different culture?

## Pragmatism

Rick Warren’s bestseller, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, says that the Bible teaches us the contents of the faith, but we get to figure out the methods. His pragmatic approach leads him to say, “When a church continues to use methods that no longer work, it is being unfaithful to Christ!” (p. 65). He also states that his church called everything an

“experiment,” and tried more things that didn’t work than things that did (p. 29). We agree there is room for trying this or that outreach project, but is God’s Word so silent that our basic approach is to be pragmatic? When we read that God’s Word is a lamp to our *feet* and a light for our *path*, doesn’t that mean that it shows us the way we should go, the practices we should follow, the methods to use?

### Young, restless, reformed

That leads me to some stories, some of which are unfortunately negative. First, from the North American movement of the young, restless, and reformed, as Collin Hansen memorably described it in 2008. This movement considered itself to be missional within North America. For some time, the fine work of D.A. Carson, R.C. Sproul, John Piper, and John MacArthur had paved the way for the movement (I am not endorsing everything they taught or teach, just saying that they pushed evangelicalism in a broadly Reformed direction). By 2008, and in the eight years that followed, other prominent leaders were publishing books as fast as possible, appearing at conferences all over North America, directing the affairs of their mega churches, and forming new mega-organizations. Churches – even our sister churches in The Netherlands at the time – sent pastors and elders to learn first-hand the great successes of these men and their “mission” churches.

However, in the last few years six very prominent leaders of the movement have been disgraced in one way or another, and very publicly.<sup>1</sup> At least three of these men had about zero theological education. Some of them were making scads of money in the “business” of religion. At least one learned his ministry methods from the stage and from business leaders as much as from the Scriptures. It turned out that behind the scenes at least half of them were power hungry, controlling, and manipulative. The adultery of one was only discovered after he told the world that *his wife* had committed adultery. Another tried to get his wife to take the fall for his temper tantrums by saying that she had not been there when he needed her. It makes me angry just remembering that interview. Another is alleged to have been using posters of his elders’ wives for pellet gun target practice. The most honest one of the bunch has left the faith altogether and said so. The others have all been disgraced for various reasons, ranging from adultery to fraud, plagiarism, mishandling of abuse cases, and controlling behaviour. Two have tried to claw back and start a new church and a third has hinted at the same. Each case is a story all on its own, and thankfully the Christian press,

such as *World* magazine, has been exposing these men and their ministries. We must critique our own (our own in the broad sense), and be ahead of the world in discovering sin among ourselves. We need good order.

### Reformation and order

Long ago, the young churches of the Reformation were very focussed on helping people out of the darkness and into the light of Scripture. They would assign groups of believers without a consistory to nearby churches for spiritual care. They also warned each other in their acts of provincial and national synods about men who wandered around claiming to be preachers but teaching error, living in sin, or simply trying to fleece the churches of money. Prior to cameras, text messages, and the Internet, the churches would describe these men, sometimes memorably. For instance, one of the men in a list of twenty-four vagrants and deposed ministers provided by the French Reformed Churches at their national synod in 1563, is described as, “A great lubberly Franciscan Fryer, who abandoned his flock in the Castle of the Lord de la Martiniere; he is called La Motte.” These young churches loved to spread the gospel but also abhorred disorder.

Why did the churches take such care? They knew how the faith of so many under the influence of bad men – sometimes even when they meant well – has been hurt or destroyed. These men brought chaos into the church instead of order. Some were inventing the structures of their churches as they grew, sometimes to benefit themselves, and lacking accountability. Each example is the opposite of Colossians 2:5, where the apostle wrote, “I delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.” Good order and firmness of faith go together, just as disorder and weak faith go together. Those left behind are crying out for good order.

### Hunger for order in mission today

I don’t have time for a series of further examples, but let me mention positively that in Brazil there are former Pentecostal churches that have discovered the Reformed faith and will tell you over and over what a difference it has made for their church life and structures to join the Reformed Churches of Brazil. The young pastors of the Reformed churches also make a point of translating material regarding church polity. It is very important to them. In addition, there are churches overseas that ask us to come and lecture about church polity in particular. The house churches desperately need to work together and need structure as protection against false teachers and against the mistakes



of ill-informed but zealous men. Other young churches send their students to CRTS not just for a theological education, but to experience an orderly church life. There is a hunger for good order among mission churches, for accountability, protection of the pastors and the flocks, and for meaningful cooperation and assistance among churches.

### **A church order suitable for all times and places**

By God's great mercy we must humbly acknowledge that he has blessed the Reformed churches with a very stable understanding of the principles of church government, taken from Scripture itself, and worked out in a way that can be used in virtually any time and culture. Our church order is not merely our own Canadian Reformed church order, but the order that God has allowed our forefathers to discover in his Word and that has been adopted by churches all over the world. With scriptural roots, patterns from the early church, and the rediscovery of these things in the Reformation, we have an order that can function very well. Especially because our church order arose out of persecution heavy France and The Netherlands, it is suitable everywhere, whether the churches enjoy government favour or not.

### **Is it overbearing?**

At the same time the spirit of the age in North America wants us as Reformed churches to stop being so overbearing and regulative. Relax! Give freedom!

Two things should be said in response: first, the church order of the Reformed churches quite simply records the decisions and desires of those very churches about how they want to govern themselves. No one is being overbearing or overly regulative – that's a fundamental misunderstanding of what the church order is. If your church is in the federation, it's *your own* church order.

Second, Reformed churches have always implicitly recognized in their church orders the propensity for the sins of pride, greed, and personal dominance. Charisma-oozing pastors may look and sound great in our era of soundbite theology, but the church is run in the day-to-day grind of simple but faithful pastors, elders, and deacons doing their tasks in a sacrificial way. This is why we have many checks and balances in the way that office bearers work together, and in the way that churches mutually guard each other. This is why the path to the ministry is long and arduous – the churches want as much assurance as possible that these men are well equipped, have learned from our forefathers how to handle rightly the Word of God, and are willing to submit to what we have agreed in our church order.

### **Hunger for good order is a faith response**

And what is the bottom line for why we approach things this way? "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" – that's why! Psalm 119:105 guides us in our church polity as well. Whatever God's Word addresses, it addresses with divine authority, and we must live – also, and especially, in our church life – by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. The hunger for good order emerges not just from bad experiences due to human sin, but especially from the Spirit of God working in God's people, moving them to seek maturity and peace, by loving good order. Positively, the hunger for good order is a faith response of the believer to the Word and Spirit of God.

### *Good order and firmness of faith go together, just as disorder and weak faith go together*

The fundamental principles of the Reformed church order come from the Word of God. There Christ teaches us that he is the only Head of the church. He shows us that there is no intermediary authority between himself and the local consistory. This local consistory consists in a plurality of elders ruling together, not one man. Thus, no office bearer rules over another, and no church rules over another (the first article of the first French [1559] and Dutch [1571] church orders). Christ rules over all. Situations of persecution helped the churches of the Reformation *recognize* the biblical nature of these structures, but their source is clearly biblical.

Other parts of the church order depend more upon our common agreement than upon express scriptural direction. In these cases, we must abide by our agreement, keeping our word like good Christians (Matt 5:37).

### **Order, instruction, maturity, and unity**

At the same time our Lord clearly teaches us that these churches will be filled with rejoicing when they find churches of like faith and will recognize these churches as God's work. God himself has put them together as churches and now they must govern their lives together for the good order and firmness of faith of all their members (Col 2:5). This is the proper beginning of all church federation. It is rooted in the unity of faith. In the context of good order, instruction becomes possible, and in the context of good instruction, maturity and unity can follow (Eph 4). And of this, by

God's grace, there are many positive examples. I think of the brother who joined one of our churches after spending years going from one charismatic church to another and always being faced with disorder. He was deeply thankful to have found a true home with us. When I pointed out to him that there is no perfect church, he agreed, but was also deeply concerned that I not minimize the riches he had found with us. We must humbly thank God for our good order.

Thus, to all of us, and to our CRTS graduates in particular, I may repeat the apostolic words of Colossians 2:5-7, "I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order the firmness of your faith in Christ. Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus as the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."

God's Word is our light. That's the CRTS motto, taken from Psalm 119:105. I had the privilege back in July 2019 to teach eight young men in South Africa, all of whom we hope to receive in the programs at CRTS in due time. For five days we studied what God's Word says about good or-

der in the church. That did not by far exhaust all that he teaches us in Scripture about this, but we made a good start. We finished with deep thankfulness to God that he did not leave us on our own in this important matter, but has shone light on our path, also our path as churches. We have a way forward.

The Psalmist says in Psalm 119:45, "I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts." What a wonderful attitude, bringing together exactly what God has put together! God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, preventing chaos, and providing good conditions for us as individual believers and as churches to flourish.

<sup>1</sup> These six are among the "other" prominent leaders mentioned in the previous paragraph. I am thinking of men like Mark Driscoll, Bill Hybels, James MacDonald, C.J. Mahaney, Joshua Harris, and Tullian Tchividjian. Tchividjian was in the PCA and was lawfully deposed in good order, but the others had, for the most part, invented order for their newly-founded churches, often to their own personal advantage. Many critical articles about these men have recently appeared in *World*, *Christianity Today*, and other magazines.



*Graduating class of 2019: Standing: Leana Van Amerongen, Filip Sylwestrowicz, Chauncey Knegt, Mark ten Haaf; Seated: Jeremy Segstro, Nathan Zekveld, Eric Onderwater*

# The Golden Anniversary of the



## WOMEN'S SAVINGS ACTION

FUNDING THE SEMINARY LIBRARY

Approximately seventy years ago, soon after the ecclesiastical Liberation, a Women's Savings Action for the library of the Theological College was established in The Netherlands. About twenty years later in 1969, coinciding with the opening of our Theological College, a similar organization was set up here in Canada.

In celebration of our golden anniversary, the Women's Savings Action Committee, along with the Library Committee and the help of a one Mr. very talented Joel Hordyk, put together a six-minute video to share with our audience at the 2019 Convocation. We have transcribed the video-to-text for our Clarion readers below. It gives witness to God's abundant blessings over the years. (You can also view the video on the CRTS Facebook page and website, under the "Library" tab.)

### *Janet Van Vliet, President of the WSA:*

The Women's savings Action is celebrating fifty years. Fifty years of God's blessing to the seminary, to the Women's Savings Action, and to the seminary library.

How did it all start? It takes a lot of money to institute and operate a school. The League of Women Societies in Ontario wanted to know, "How can we help?" They recognized that access to current solid Reformed literature is essential to the operation of a seminary. They unanimously decided to organize the Women's Savings Action. It was established in 1969 with the purpose of purchasing books and periodicals for the library. In each Canadian Reformed congregation, the Women's Savings Action reps would collect pennies and loose change that were deposited into a special tin, or any homemade container. Then, volunteers would spend evenings rolling and counting the change. At an annual convocation a cheque might be presented to the principal for the library.

Giving and collecting continued, and in 1985 new facilities were purchased for the seminary. The Women's



*Karen Schuurman and Janet VanVliet present for WSA*

Savings Action collected \$125,000 for the cost of this new building. Our books finally had a proper home. Space for a real library.

If you ever stop by the seminary, have look at the plaque beside the library door. It acknowledges the contribution of the Women's Savings Action. In 1990 the women decided, "Let's build up a reserve." The library had expanded and by the year 2000, \$80,000 has been collected and with the Lords blessing the new library was officially opened on September 9, 2000.

Over the years, funds have also been collected for various teaching aids, electronic upgrades, and computerization of the library. We acknowledge God's goodness to us over these past fifty years. God's goodness is given to us through our dedicated reps who faithfully encourage their brothers and sisters to support the seminary library, and we are so thankful for these reps.



### *Jeremy Segstro, graduating student:*

You know, I really love our library. It's quiet, it's comfy, it's tired and worn in parts, but aren't all of us? Students spend hours here in the library, whether early in the morning or really late at night. And you know what? Our students love our library so much that last year they gave it a 9.3 out of 10 rating. Our seminary library is such a blessing to us. We have new translations of books that have been purchased; translations that we can use a whole lot better in our preaching and in our teaching, to really apply it to the people. We have access to literature that we didn't twenty years ago, as well as the newest books that are written by professors, ministers, and scholars. They are right there, within hands-reach, for the scholar or the student to grab and use and apply. Here at CRTS we are equipped and instructed by authors of the past and the present. That's because we can never stop learning, we can never stop reading, we can never stop purchasing books. The library is such a vital part of the life of the seminary and the churches around us and it needs ongoing support to function. So, we're so thankful for the support of the churches and the Work of the Women's Saving Action. On behalf of the seminary I thank you for your help and support. We couldn't do it without you.

### *Dr. Ted Van Raalte, faculty member and Associate Librarian*

The WSA – Women's Savings Action – is absolutely vital to the existence and well-being of our library. As the associate librarian, and as a faculty member at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, I want to urge you to support WSA fundraising.

You know, nothing stands still: Ideas, objections, defenses, they all keep changing. Arguments shift and deepen. That's why books, journals, databases, and commentaries – not to mention technology – are all constantly updating, hopefully being improved, and definitely costing more money. Yet they're essential to what we do, much like new tools would be to a mechanic. They allow efficient and up-to-date research.

Over the past fifty years, the WSA has donated almost one million dollars for the building, upgrading, and maintenance of our library.

We have access to 33,000 print books, sixty-four periodical titles, and a brand-new database called the Digital Theological Library.

Now, you need to know that academic books are expensive. The average cost per book in our library for the last while is fifty-eight dollars. The annual cost of our

database subscriptions is over \$22,000.00. No modern library does without these, least of all when serving Masters-level students. But... exchange rates have not been in our favour and giving for the WSA has not kept pace with inflation – so you see we have a challenge.

That said, we are deeply thankful for what we have. It's really a wonderful resource. We even see students and professors from other institutions utilizing our library. We like to keep it that way, but we do need support.

All the faculty and students of the past fifty years are deeply appreciative of your support and we deeply appreciate the love of the hard-working women of the WSA. Thank you.

### **The WSA: Funding the Seminary Library**

Perhaps you remember that last year we surveyed a number of people asking them what WSA stands for. Since many seemed unsure about its meaning, we as Women's Savings Action board wondered whether we should change our name.

After consulting with our reps, our church community, families, and looking into what the legal implications of making a name change might be, we decided to keep our name "Women's Savings Action," but to add a tagline: "Funding the Seminary Library." This will keep us connected with our history of fifty years past, while adding clarity to our mandate.

The reps can use this new tagline to help their congregations, especially the youth, to understand the purpose of WSA. Maybe we can even come up with a jingle for our tagline!

Forty-nine years ago, at the one-year anniversary celebration, Mrs. Geraldine Selles presented a Gestetner Stencil Machine and a cheque for the amount of \$500.00 to be used for the library.

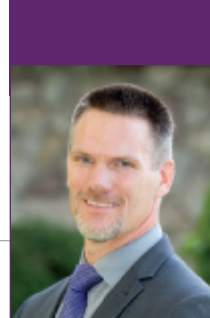
Last fall, we encouraged our reps to help us meet a fundraising goal of \$50,000 for the fiftieth anniversary celebration. With great thankfulness and praise to God, we not only met the goal, but exceeded our expectations with a grand total of \$51,569.84 raised for the Women's Savings Action.

In addition to this, late last spring we were approached with an exceedingly generous offer to match all donations received to a maximum of \$50,000.00! And so, it is with great thankfulness that we can present on this fiftieth anniversary celebration evening, a gift of \$100,000 to the Theological Seminary Library for the 2019/2020 academic year!

We hope and pray that this gift may provide the funds necessary for maintaining the current academic standards of our library and for some necessary upgrades to help make our library a little less tired.

All praise and thanks to our God!





## A Flavour of Seminary Education: the CRTS Open House



The day after Convocation, on Saturday, September 7, the seminary opened its doors to the public for an open house. From 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. some 100 guests mingled with each other and followed a modest program to get a taste of life (and food) at CRTS. Highlighted throughout was a tone of thanksgiving to God, with many visitors remarking that this was their first time in the building and that they truly enjoyed the learning and fellowship.

In his opening words, the principal, Dr. Van Vliet, focussed upon Psalm 48, the same psalm that had been used in the opening singing fifty years ago. Then it was time for everyone to go back to school. . . . Four classes were held, and it was possible for our guests to visit all four classes on a rotating schedule.

### A taste of the curriculum

Dr. John Smith presented a mini lecture on the cities of refuge in the Old Testament. He asked, "Why did the Lord give his people these cities? Where were they? And why

could an accused murderer only go free after the high priest died?" At the close of the lecture he showed us how the high priest's death could not atone for the guilt of any Israelite, but the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ does release us from guilt.

Dr. Jason Van Vliet let in the crowds for his dogmatics class, holding the first-ever *Saturday* disputation. During the semester, on Fridays, students engage in what is often a vigorous debate about the finer points of doctrine. While the professor moderated, one of the students presented his thesis about prayer as a means of grace and then defended it well, in spite of many challenging questions from the audience.

What about the highlight of the week at CRTS – the practice preaching classes (we call this "sermon session")? Dr. Arjan de Visser had two of his students present sermon proposals, though time was available only for the introduction with the theme and division. The student then



*Seminarian Raoul Kingma defends his thesis*





*A class of “seminary students” takes in Dr. Van Raalte’s lecture on Church History*

received some evaluative comments, some encouragement, and some points for improvement, to the great interest of the crowd.

To encourage everyone to remain faithful to the Lord of the church, Dr. Ted Van Raalte presented the story of the first Reformed community in the Americas, and its Guanabara Confession (1558). The authors were all craftsmen in their early 20s, the primary one being a knife maker. After their governor turned against the Reformed faith, he demanded a statement of faith. They complied (1 Pet 3:15), and their signed confession sealed their deaths.

### **A taste of the fiftieth-anniversary cake**

A special event of the day was a cake-cutting ceremony in which retired faculty were honoured. After Dr. Gerry Visscher led in thanksgiving prayer and introduced the event, Dr. Keith Van Dam cut the cake with his wife Joanne at his side. Sister Marg DeJong represented Dr. Jack DeJong, who passed away in 2017, and sr. Dinie Gootjes represented Dr. Niek Gootjes. Professor Geertsema was able to be present. This cake was said to mark the last fifty years and the next fifty years, if our Lord tarries. Everyone enjoyed the cake, and then stayed for an hour and a half of fellowship over various catered foods.

As part of the fiftieth-anniversary celebrations, the new lectern, given by the alumni, was used. We have decided to keep it in the chapel rather than a classroom, since it is so beautiful. Our thanks to the alumni! New flooring

and fresh paint had been applied in much of the building this past summer, as well as some new furniture and some very special wall plaques. One of these was a new sign at the lower entrance, given by a local business. We greatly appreciate this! The other two plaques showcased Scripture texts, and one of these was a gift from the staff at the seminary. It appropriately quotes, “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:58). This text has been appropriately hung in the lounge where students, staff, and professors get together every morning for coffee.



*Dr. C. Van Dam cuts the cake;  
behind him: Mrs. Dinie Gootjes, Mrs. Marg DeJong,  
Mrs. Joanne Van Dam, Prof. Jakob Geertsema,  
Dr. Gerry Visscher*





### A taste of the neighbourhood

On the theme of the building and its grounds, this year CRTS will receive its fourth Trillium award – an acknowledgement from the city that the flowers, trees, and grass around the seminary are well selected (by Catharine) and beautiful. Guests strolled through and admired these. One couple from

the neighbourhood, who has also won many Trillium awards, received a special tour of the facilities. They left a card from which I quote (it will show that they too are Christians): “Congratulations on fifty years of God’s faithfulness to you and your faithfulness to him in the ministry of his Word, training students in the proclamation of the Word of God. You have been a very welcome neighbour to us as your staff and students take their walks on their breaks around the neighbourhood, some stopping to chat when we are out working in our yard. Your grounds, lawns, flower beds, building, and parking lot are all an enhancement to our neighbourhood. May the Lord continue to bless your ministry in the next fifty years or however long he leaves us to do his will on earth.”

### Thanksgiving

We thank our hard-working staff, Catharine Mechelse, Leanne Kuizenga, and Margaret Alkema, for the gift of the plaque, for organizing the day, and conducting library tours through the rare book room. We thank our students for lots of able practical assistance. Above all, we thank our heavenly Father for giving us such a privileged task as training men for ministry, for blessing us with good health, and for letting us strive to serve as faithfully as our illustrious predecessors. May God be praised!



*Seminarian Aidan Plug delivers a sermon in “Sermon Session”*

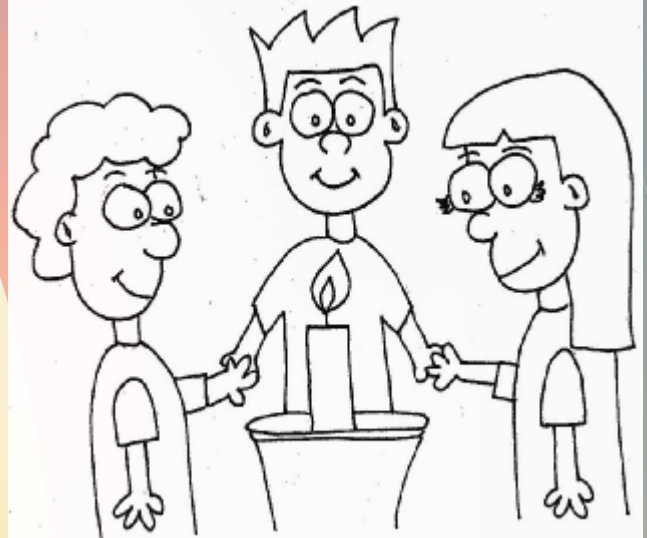
# Clarion Kids

## Living as Children of Light

### Ephesians 4:17-64

The Bible tells us in many places that living without God is like living in the darkness. If you live in darkness you can't see where you're going and you won't do the right thing. But if we live as God wants us to live, we are children of light. In Ephesians Paul tells us to be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving, because Christ has forgiven us for all our sins. Paul even talks directly to children in this passage. He tells children to obey their parents, which is an important part of the ten commandments. When we live in this way, we also shine light to the world. People should be able to see how we live and know that we are Christians.

Go to [www.clarionmagazine.ca](http://www.clarionmagazine.ca) to print and colour this picture!

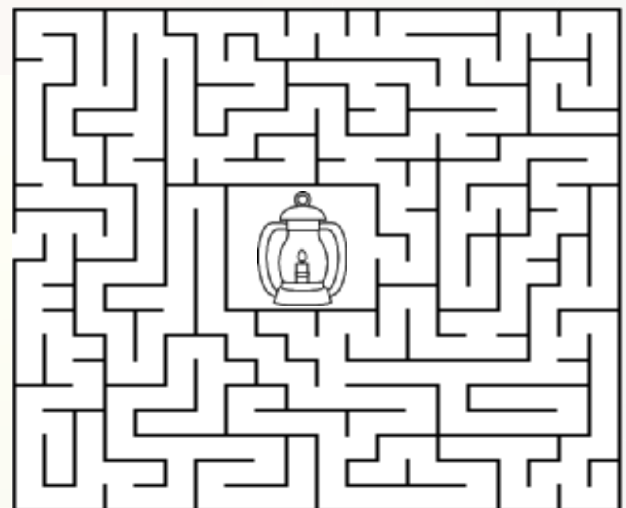


#### Word Search

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

Children	Darkness	Ephesians
Forgiving	Light	Obey
Parents	Paul	World

**Maze:** Find your way to the light at the centre of the maze!



by Emily Nijenhuis

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

**Dear Rev. J. Visscher (Editor),**

I would value it if you would grant me the opportunity to respond to the article by Professor Arjan de Visser, entitled, “Impressions from a Visit to the Dutch Churches (GKv),” July 26, 2019. As a subscriber, I value the insights gained through your magazine and I thank the author for the six drivers he identifies as likely causes of the serious decline in the Dutch churches. May we take the implied warnings to heart, and also heed the call to pray for these churches. I am, however, at a loss to understand what Professor de Visser is saying when in his concluding paragraph he tells readers: “I won’t say it has become a false church, but I will say it has become a church that is in serious decline.” Article 29 of the Belgic Confession speaks of the marks of the true and the false church. Are we in danger of creating an in-between “in serious decline” church category? Alternatively, if contrary to the impressions outlined in the article we conclude that the marks of the true church are still present, then how do we to understand the decisions of the Canadian Reformed Churches and of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia to sever the sister church relationship with the GKv? And having cut our own ties with these churches, can we, in all honesty, maintain the view that believers in The Netherlands have the “duty to join” and the “duty to remain” members of this federation? I do hope that Professor de Visser is willing to instruct and guide us back to the confident conclusion of the aforementioned article: “That these two churches (‘true’ and ‘false’) are easily recognised and distinguished from each other.”

*With Christian greetings,  
Joh Swarts  
Darling Downs, Western Australia*

### Response

I thank br. Swarts for his question. The reason I refrained from calling the GKv a false church is that I would have to be able to prove that the GKv shows the marks of the false church as outlined in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession.

One of those marks is that (quote) “it persecutes those who live holy lives according to the Word of God and who rebuke the false church for its sins, greed, and idolatries.”

There is ample evidence that true believers have a difficult time in the GKv. They grieve over their Synod’s decision regarding women in office. They see signs of deformation all around. But to the best of my knowledge they are not being *persecuted*. There is still room to speak up and submit appeals against the GKv Synod’s decision. The churches are allowed to ordain women to the offices, but they are not forced to do so. Therefore, if we take Article 29 seriously, we cannot say that the GKv has become a false church.

At the same time, the GKv’s decision regarding women in office is a sign of disobedience to God’s Word, which is a very serious matter. Therefore, it is understandable that the synods of the FRCA and the CanRC have decided to sever ties with the GKv. But I found it interesting that the CanRC synod did not do so on the grounds that the GKv has become a false church. Rather, in a carefully worded statement Synod argued that “the marks of the true church cannot with confidence be said to be consistently present” in the GKv (Acts of CanRC Synod Edmonton 2019, Art. 41).

Article 29 of the Belgic Confession states that the true church and the false church are easily recognized and distinguished from each other. We all agree with that, but I think we also understand that a true church does not become a false church *overnight*. When deformation creeps into a church, there will be a phase during which the church can no longer be said to fully display the marks of the true church while on the other hand that same church does not fully display the marks of the false church either. It usually takes years for the process to reach the point where you say: now this church has clearly become a false church.

Thankfully, the GKv has not reached that point yet. By the grace of God, the GKv might still repent from its decisions and reverse its direction. Synod Edmonton has asked the churches to continue in prayer for the GKv. May we be diligent in doing so.

*Dr. Arjan de Visser*

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.  
Submissions can be sent to [editor@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:editor@clarionmagazine.ca) and need to adhere to a 750-word limit.*

