

Clarion

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

Our schools and communities



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***THE TRANS CULT: CRACKS IN THE EDIFICE?
NEERLANDIA SOUTH WELCOMES REV. LUDWIG***

Clarion

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

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvlüwer, E. Kampen, C. Van Dam, M. VanLuik

ADDRESS FOR MAGAZINE CONTENT



Clarion
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J5
Email: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

CLARION
Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: 204-663-9000, Fax: 204-663-9202

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Our issue is led with an article from Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, "Open the School Doors?" With our Reformed Christian schools being such a blessing to our community, the question is asked: should we not make this blessing available to our neighbour?

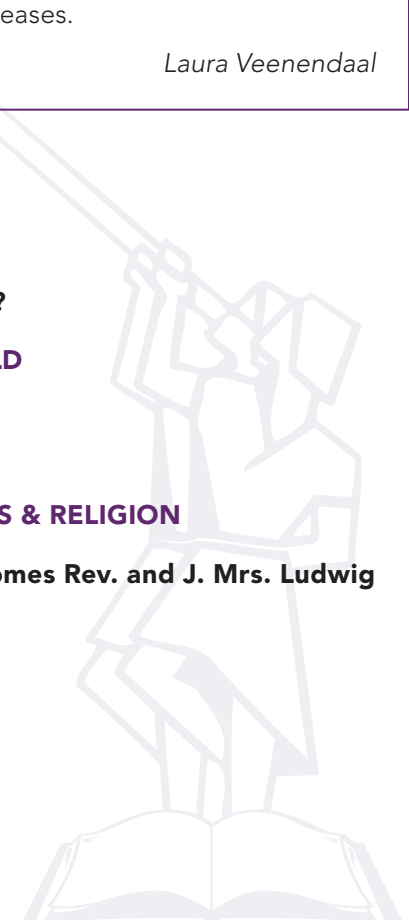
At the fiftieth anniversary CRTS open house, Dr. John Smith gave a mini lecture on the Old Testament Cities of Refuge. In this and the next issue readers will find a written version of that lecture.

In federation news, Issue 23 reports on the welcome of Rev. Ludwig and his wife to Neerlandia South. This issue brings readers the following columns: Treasures, New & Old, Clippings on Politics & Religion, You Asked, and *Clarion Kids*. We also have a canticle and two press releases.

Laura Veenendaal

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Open the School Doors?

*Has enough thought been given to what would be lost
if the confessional basis of our schools is taken away?*

In many Canadian Reformed communities across the land, we enjoy the privilege and blessing of Reformed, Christian education in our day schools. With the Three Forms of Unity as the basis, parents, children, staff, and teachers all belong to the same church community¹ and the kids are instructed in line with the church's faithful, biblical confessions. Generally speaking, most people have a high level of appreciation for the faithful, quality teaching that our children may receive in a loving, nurturing environment. In fact, the Lord has blessed us with such a good thing that sometimes voices are heard calling for the doors to open up to children from other denominations or even the community at large. There are various reasons offered, but the core of many of them is that we should not keep such blessings to ourselves.

However, if we did so, what would that do to the confessional basis of the school? If the desire is to freely admit children either from other churches or those just getting to know the Christian faith, the commitment to the Three Forms of Unity would need to be removed, wouldn't it? In its place would likely arise a more general statement of faith which would be palatable to those interested in a Protestant, Christian education. Over time this would transform our schools from being Canadian Reformed to being interdenominational or simply general Christian schools.

Is this the way we want to go? Is this wise and responsible as we seek to train up our children in obedience to all the ways and commandments of the Lord (Prov 22:6; Matt 28:20)? Would it be for the best? I wonder if enough thought has been given to what would be lost if the confessional basis of our schools is taken away. Consider with me the following concerns:

1. Reduced connection between church and school

The three-legged stool of church, home, and school would have one leg cut out from under it: the church. Without a confessional tie, with membership in the school society being pulled from multiple denominations, the bond with and support of the local CanRCs would weaken and diminish. It would only be one church among many. Board and staff would be drawn from many church fellowships and so a close bond with the founding CanRCs could not be kept up for long. For example, the cooperation between teachers, principals, parents, and office bearers when it comes to challenging behavioural situations would be hampered, if not severed. Also, whereas presently some ministers teach catechism in our schools during school hours, that would no longer be possible. Where songs from the church's *Book of Praise* are currently sung daily in the classroom, the singing would have to come from a variety of sources. Our schools and churches presently have a very close relationship because it's mostly the same people making up both communities. Because of that, each community is constantly looking out for the best interest of the other (think of how each other's properties and assets are often shared or used without difficulty). This harmonious and mutually advantageous situation would gradually disappear.

2. Bypassing of certain Bible truths

In a school with teachers, parents, and students coming from different backgrounds, Bible teaching would have to stay general to be satisfactory to the majority. The problem here is not so much what would be taught (though there

is danger there too – see the next point), but rather what would not be taught, the topics simply avoided because they are controversial or not generally accepted. A doctrine like the covenant of grace, which Reformed believers hold so dear as a major theme of Scripture, will largely go unmentioned in a general Christian school. To say the least, that would be sad and ironic since knowing God's covenant promises and understanding our covenant obligations has been a huge factor in starting up Reformed schools. Other doctrines would also be left largely untaught, such as God's decree of election, the sacraments (especially infant baptism), and the Ten Commandments to mention a few. Outside of Reformed churches, these Bible truths are little known or even outright rejected. Thus, in an interdenominational school the Board will direct teachers to steer clear of these topics, impoverishing the learning of the students.

3. Open door for erroneous teaching

With only a general statement of faith guiding the Board, staff, and teachers, the school is much more at risk to see errors being taught and promoted at the Christian school. Without the check and balance of a confessionally Reformed philosophy of education as overseen by the Education Committee and Board, teachers could unwittingly bring in ideas and practices from secular education philosophy. For example, the dramatization of Scripture stories (like the birth of Christ, or the stories of Esther or Daniel) is very popular among non-Reformed Christians but has been rightly rejected by Reformed parents and educators.² Given how attractive theistic evolution is among evangelicals, as well as the idea that women may be ordained as office bearers, it is not a stretch to see such errors being promoted in a general Christian school. Further, Arminian concepts such as the freedom of the will and that Jesus died for the whole world (unlimited atonement) are the default beliefs in many non-Reformed churches. One could only expect these errors, too, to quietly infiltrate the thinking of staff and students over the years.

4. Disappearance of Psalm singing

Reformed churches have always treasured psalm-singing and for good reason have given preferential treatment to singing the Psalms over hymns.³ It is regular practice in our CanRC elementary schools to have students memorize the Psalms as versified in our *Book of Praise*. The benefits of

PEREMPTORY EXAMINATIONS

Candidate Mark ten Haaf sustained his peremptory exam at Classis Alberta, and classis approbated the call extended to him by the Providence Canadian Reformed Church (Edmonton).

Candidate Eric Onderwater sustained his peremptory examination in Classis Northern Ontario and classes approbated the call extended to him by Grace Canadian Reformed Church at Brampton.

CALLS

Carman East calls Rev. Carl Van Dam

The Canadian Reformed Church at Carman East has extended a call to Rev. Carl Van Dam of the Houston Canadian Reformed Church.

Rev. Carl Van Dam has accepted the call to the Canadian Reformed Church of Carman East.

Chilliwack calls Rev. John Louwerse

The Chilliwack Canadian Reformed Church has extended a call to Rev. John Louwerse of the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario.

CHURCH NEWS

this are enormous: the Word of God is hidden in the hearts of the students; the unique songs inspired by Christ's Spirit and specially gifted to his people for their comfort and edification as well as to sing back to him are being committed to memory; the singing of psalms in church on Sunday is greatly aided by how well the kids learn them over the years; memorizing and singing the Psalms strengthens the bonds between the generations as Grandpa and Grandma can sing along with their children and grandchildren the Psalms as they once learned them. All of that would stop in an interdenominational school. Outside of Reformed and Presbyterian churches, psalm-singing is virtually unknown and so any singing at school would be limited to hymns⁴, whether traditional or current.

Conclusion

With all of that in mind, I would like to urge the members of our churches to keep our schools confessionally Reformed. There is too much to lose in removing their confessional underpinnings. Our forefathers made great sacrifices to establish these schools for the purpose of faithfully educating the children of the church in accordance with the Reformed faith (which is nothing other than the biblical faith). Those in the community who are serious about wanting to have their children attend our schools will find the door to the school open in the local Canadian Reformed church (or sister church). If they do not share the Reformed confession or have no wish to join a Reformed church, then

can it really be said that we are keeping them out of our school? Is it not rather that they, by their own beliefs and choices, keep themselves and their children out?

By God's grace our Reformed schools have served not just our church community well for decades but by extension also the communities in which we live. Our students eventually become graduates who enter the workplace and find their way in the general population as faithful Christians, serving God as salt and light to those around us. They are well-trained in the doctrines of Scripture, in the subjects of the curriculum, and in looking at this world in a Reformed manner. It's that Reformed worldview that equips them with the incentive and the tools to both develop culture and evangelize our neighbours. As it may please the Lord, that very influence on our neighbours is something he may use to draw his elect into the kingdom and church of our Lord Jesus Christ – and thus also into our school communities. So, let's keep our schools Reformed and pray for their ongoing long-term blessing on our society.

¹ To be sure, members of sister churches (who, of course, share the same Reformed faith) are generally also permitted to be members of the school society as well as instructors. The point is that the confessional basis of membership keeps a close-knit unity among those involved in the school and also a strong connection to the local church.

² See Rev. J.L. van Popta's in-depth article on this topic, "May My Four Sons Play the Lord Jesus, Judas, Peter, and Pilate in a School Easter Play?" in *Clarion*, Vol 44, No 22.

³ See. Rev. D. Wynia's article, "Why Do We Sing Mostly Psalms?" in *Clarion*, Vol 68, No 8.

⁴ Granted, some classic hymns are versifications of parts of psalms. While there is much to appreciate about such hymns, yet such songs are not full-on psalm-singing in that only portions of the psalm (i.e. not the whole psalm) are set to music and quite often a great deal of poetic license is taken in forming the lyric. They are often faithful interpretations of a psalm rather than just being the psalm itself. See for example *Christ Shall Have Dominion* (Hy 46, *Book of Praise*), *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* (Hy 53), and *O God Our Help in Ages Past* (Hy 54). Psalm-singing is to sing the words of entire psalms as closely as possible to what's in the Bible.





Confusion at Babel

Genesis 11:1-9

Summer vacations are by now a distant memory and many of us are in the swing of things again, either on the job or at school. But for what? So often it's about our own accomplishments and building our own little kingdoms – much like at the tower of Babel.

After the flood, the LORD had given *promises* that never again would he destroy everything, the seasons would continue, and mankind would have supremacy over animals (Gen 8:21, 22; 9:1-3). The LORD had also given a *command* to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen 9:1).

After some time, however, rather than spread out and fill the earth, mankind “settled” on the plain of Shinar (11:2). They were afraid of being dispersed over the whole earth (11:4) and disobeyed the LORD’s *command* because they didn’t believe the LORD’s *promises*. They were going to build a civilization there.

The tower of Babel reflected that fallen mankind no longer had an eye for God’s kingdom and instead wanted to establish their own kingdom. It was about trying to build an existence from the earth upward, rather than letting God provide for an existence from above. As they said, “Come, let us build *ourselves* a

city and a tower. . . and let us make a name *for ourselves*. . .” (11:4).

This is the spirit evident in the great empires of the world, as expressed by Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire: “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” (Dan 4:30) We see this spirit also in our own society today. And this spirit manifests itself in our own sinful hearts as Christians too, a spirit which runs counter to the words of our Saviour: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt 6:33). The causes of God’s kingdom ought to be our priorities as Christians, and we ought not to pursue material things at the expense of God’s kingdom.

The LORD “came down” to see the city and the tower (11:5), indicating that God was about to take action. God was going to prevent worse from happening (11:6). This ungodly initiative would only escalate over time if left unchecked, but God wanted to work out his plan of salvation and send the promised Saviour (Gen 3:15). Therefore, God caused confusion at Babel by introducing different languages which led to the abandonment of the project and the dispersal of the people. In

this way, God put the brakes on this development to allow time to work out his plan of salvation, thereby safeguarding the kingdom of Jesus Christ! God *came down* at Babel with *many words* for man by confusing their language, so that one day God could *come down* at Bethlehem with his *one Word* – the Word made flesh to bring salvation (John 1:14)!

Jesus Christ gathers, defends, and preserves a church out of the whole human race in the unity of the true faith (LD 21, Q/A 54). With Christ the Saviour on our side, we don’t have to be afraid. At Babel unbelievers sought false unity, but in Christ believers of all languages experience true unity as they are made one in Christ (Eph 4:4-6). Pentecost makes clear that the division of Babel is bridged in Christ because believers spoke the gospel in different languages and were understood (Acts 2:11).

One day, the New Jerusalem – the city of God – will come down from heaven and God will dwell among his people (Rev 21:10). We don’t create the New Jerusalem, but it *comes down* from God. That will mean the fall of Babylon, the city of man (Rev 18:2, 10). Until that day arrives – or we die and go to be with our Saviour – as Christians we live and work to the praise and glory of God.



For further study

1. When the LORD said, “Come, let us go down. . .” (11:7), who is meant with “us”?
2. What does Ephesians 4:4-6 say about unity in Christ?
3. How will the manifestation of “the man of lawlessness” (2 Thess 2:3, 4) be in the spirit of Babel?



The Cities of Refuge

(Part 1 of 2)

Forty-eight years ago, in 1971, Prof. Heinrich M. Ohmann became professor of Old Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). He gave his inaugural lecture on “Blood Vengeance, City of Refuge, and the Death of the High Priest” – rather a dark title for a first lecture!¹ Now that we are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Seminary, I thought it would be a good time to revisit this topic. In this article we will consider the location of the cities of refuge, their function, and the meaning of the death of the high priest. Then we will draw out some lessons for the church today.



Where were they?

The Bible speaks about the cities of refuge in Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 19, and Joshua 20 and 21. But the first place of refuge is mentioned in Exodus 21:12: “Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate.” What is that place? The next verse explains it: “But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death.”² So the first place of refuge, when the Israelites were in the wilderness, was the altar of the Lord. After they settled in Canaan, the Israelites spread out across the land, many of them far from the tabernacle and the altar, so they would need other places to escape from the avenger of blood. Therefore, the Lord set aside six towns to which a murderer could flee for refuge. Yet the horns of

the altar continued to be used as well. Think of Joab, who was guilty of murdering Abner and Amasa. “He killed them, shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle, and with that blood he stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet,” said David to his son Solomon. “Deal with him according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace” (1 Kgs 2:5-6). Joab fled to the tent of the Lord and took hold of the horns of the altar, but Solomon sent Benaiah to execute him there (1 Kgs 2:28-34). It seems, then, that the cities of refuge had the same purpose as the horns of the altar: they were places where a manslayer could appeal to God not to hold the guilt of bloodshed against them.

In Numbers 35, Moses instructed the Israelites to choose six towns, three on either side of the Jordan, to be cities of refuge for the murderer. These were towns that were given to the Levites to dwell in. The people had to make sure that the towns were accessible, as Deuteronomy 19 makes clear: “Set aside for yourselves three cities centrally located in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess. Build roads to them and divide into three parts the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, so that anyone who kills a man may flee there.” The names of these six towns are given in Joshua 20 and 21: west of the Jordan there were Kedesh, Shechem, and Hebron, and on the east side Bezer, Ramoth-Gilead, and Golan.

How did they work?

The purpose of the cities of refuge is given in Deuteronomy 19:10: “Do this so that innocent blood will not be shed in your land, which the LORD your God is giving you as your inheritance, and so that you will not be guilty of bloodshed.” Numbers 35:33 tells us more: “Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it.” Yet the Lord is a gracious God, and in the case of accidental homicide, he provided an alternative to capital punishment: the manslayer could seek admission to a city of refuge.

How did this work? We read in Joshua 20:4-6:

When he flees to one of these cities, he is to stand in the entrance of the city gate and state his case before the elders of that city. Then they are to admit him into their city and give him a place to live with them. If the avenger of blood pursues him, they must not surrender the one accused, because he killed his neighbor unintentionally and without malice aforethought. He is to stay in that city until he has stood trial before the assembly and until the death of the high priest who is serving at that time. Then he may go back to his own home in the town from which he fled.

At the trial, the assembly had to consider the instrument that killed the victim, to determine whether the death could have been prevented. They also had to listen to the testimony of witnesses; the testimony of two witnesses was needed for an execution. If the assembly decided that the murder was accidental, the manslayer would be brought back to city of refuge, and there he was to stay for as long as the high priest lived, but if the murder was deliberate, he would be turned over to the avenger of blood for execution (Num 35:16-31).

In our modern society, we might be inclined to do it differently

Now, we might wonder, if the death was accidental, then is the man not innocent of murder, and should he not be allowed to go free? And if it was deliberate and the man is guilty, does another death at the hands of an avenger of blood really solve the problem? In our modern society, we might be inclined to do it differently: let the innocent man go home to his family, and let the guilty murderer be imprisoned in the city of refuge for a while! Yet we should not impose our modern legal categories of guilt and innocence on biblical justice. Regardless of whether the victim was killed by accident or on purpose, someone had been killed, a life that belonged to God had been lost, a family had suffered loss, and thus something had to be done to compensate for the loss. There was no sacrifice that could atone for murder: "Atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it." Even in the case of accidental death, a wrong had been done and there was blood on the ground. Yes, the Lord graciously provided a safe haven for the manslayer to stay, but that safe haven was also a prison that prevented him from walk-

ing about freely on the land, and so the Lord hemmed in the pollution of the land.

In the case of outright murder, the avenger of blood acted both as instrument of God's justice and as representative of the family which had suffered a great loss and had to live with the consequences. God provided atonement for the land by the blood of the one who shed it (Num 35:33), and he also provided a way out of the helpless outrage that a family can feel in such a situation. Both provisions, the avenger of blood and the city of refuge, were designed to prevent blood feuds between families: justice was done. In a recent study, Kathryn Imray goes a step further: she suggests that the "redeemer of blood" did not bring justice for the family but for the deceased himself, who cries out from beyond the grave and whose blood had to be brought back out of the manslayer's control.³ There may be some truth to this. Think of Genesis 4:10 where the Lord said to Cain, "Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground." Or think of Revelation 6:10, where the souls under the altar cry out, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" In this Old Testament institution, we see not only divine justice and mercy, but also divine wisdom.

God devises ways

Were the cities of refuge actually used? We know from Joshua 20 and 21 that the six towns were set aside, but the Bible doesn't tell us whether they were actually used as places of asylum. Yet the Israelites knew about this institution. In 2 Samuel 13 we read that Absalom murdered his brother and fled out of the country to seek refuge with his grandfather, the king of Geshur. His was of course a deliberate act of murder, so Absalom would not have been eligible for asylum in a city of refuge. But in the next chapter Joab sent a wise woman to David to convince him to bring Absalom back. She came to David with a pretended case of manslaughter:

I am indeed a widow; my husband is dead. I your servant had two sons. They got into a fight with each other in the field, and no one was there to separate them. One struck the other and killed him. Now the whole clan has risen up against your servant; they say, "Hand over the one who struck his brother down, so that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed; then we will get rid of the heir as well." They would put out the only burning coal I have left, leaving my husband neither name nor descendant on the face of the earth (2 Sam 14:5-8).

When David promised to help her, she replied, “Then let the king invoke the LORD his God to prevent the avenger of blood from adding to the destruction, so that my son will not be destroyed.” Again the king promised to help her, this time with an oath: “As surely as the LORD lives, not one hair of your son’s head will fall to the ground.” But then the wise woman revealed her true intentions:

Why then have you devised a thing like this against the people of God? When the king says this, does he not convict himself, for the king has not brought back his banished son? Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him (2 Sam 14:13-14).

In other words, God is more merciful than you are, David! Her remarkable words remind us of the function of the cities of refuge: *God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him.* It seems that the people still knew of ways to escape from the avenger of blood.⁴

We see not only divine justice and mercy, but also divine wisdom

We do not know to what extent the cities of refuge were used, but we do know that these towns were affected by unfaithfulness. It was in Hebron, a city of refuge, that Joab murdered Abner (2 Sam 3:27). And Hosea 6:9 has this to say about Shechem, another city of refuge: “As marauders lie in ambush for a man, so do bands of priests; they murder on the road to Shechem, committing shameful crimes.” Imagine that! Priests who were supposed to shelter the manslayer in their town had become murderers, lying in wait for approaching travellers. The cities of refuge were also affected by warfare. Though they were given to the Levites in Joshua’s day, the Israelites were not able to hold onto them. As one scholar writes, “It was only during the united kingdom [under David and Solomon] that all six cities were under Israelite control. Only Shechem and Hebron had continuous Hebrew control until their destruction in 722 and 587 B.C respectively.”⁵ In short, the unfaithfulness of God’s people often made it impossible for them to use the good law of the cities of refuge.

The cities of refuge did not function anymore in the New Testament age, when the Jews were under Roman rule. Yet the principles of God’s law endured, and the Lord

Jesus taught the people to live according to them. In that light, his trial and crucifixion are all the more appalling. The people should never have been allowed to choose for Barabbas; he was a murderer (Luke 23:19), so God’s law required that he be put to death. Yet the chief priests – experts in the law and rightful heirs to the cities of refuge – persuaded the people to call for Barabbas to be released and Jesus to be put to death. As Peter later told the people, “You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you” (Acts 3:14). And Stephen said to the Jewish leaders, “You have betrayed and murdered him.” Jesus himself also called them murderers when he said, “Upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar” (Matt 23:35; cf. 2 Chron 24:20-22). Notice the place of Zechariah’s murder: near the altar, the place of refuge! That made their sin all the greater.

Next time we will consider the meaning of the death of the high priest and draw out some lessons for the church today.

This article is an expanded version of a mini lecture given at the Fiftieth Anniversary Open House of CRTS on September 7, 2019.

¹ H.M. Ohmann, “Blood Vengeance, City of Refuge, and the Death of the High Priest,” *Canadian Reformed Magazine* 20 (1971), issues 23 and 24. For the arrival of Prof. Ohmann, see C. Van Dam and J. Van Vliet (eds.), *Your Word is Our Light: Celebrating Fifty Years of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary* (Hamilton: Lucerna CRTS Publications, 2019), 62–64.

² For a Dutch study of this passage, see C. Houtman, *Het altaar als asielpaats: beschouwingen over en naar aanleiding van Exodus 21:12-14* (Kampen: Kok, 1990).

³ Kathryn Imray, “Posthumous Interest in the [go’el haddam] Legal Tradition,” *JSOT* 43.4 (June 2019): 509–24. The Hebrew phrase *go’el haddam* is usually translated as “avenger of blood,” but the word *go’el* in fact means redeemer.

⁴ Think also of the prayer of the sailors who threw Jonah overboard: “O Lord, please do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased.” They recognized the principle of life for life, and they asked to be considered exempt.

⁵ S.G. de Claissé-Walford, “Refuge, Cities of,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ed. G. W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:67.





Cracks in the Edifice of the Trans Cult?

Last time we began reviewing an article written by Jane Robbins in the journal *Public Discourse*. She called it, “The Cracks in the Edifice of Transgender Totalitarianism.”¹ Robbins made the case that the transgender movement is totalitarian because its adherents are requiring every segment of society to follow its teaching that gender is purely a social construct.

Let me give two examples to make clear what is at issue: People now speak of “sex assigned at birth,” as if society, not God, decides a person’s sex and gender. The doctor holds up the newborn and waits for the parents to say whether it is a boy or girl, as if the parents are “deciding” and “assigning.”

Some school teachers now tell the children that there are no “boys” and “girls.” Each child is to explore what gender he or she is. Logically, there could be as many genders as there are people in the world. But we observe then that without a binary definition of gender as male and female, the very term “gender” is losing meaning altogether.

Robbins is astonished by the power and the speed of transgenderism’s success. But she also sees cracks in the edifice, as the title of her essay says.

Two big crevasses

What are these cracks? Fundamentally, Robbins has noticed two things: She suggests, first, that the transgender movement can’t last because the damage inflicted upon perfectly healthy bodies is immediate and obvious. Perfectly healthy body parts are removed and replaced by non-functioning or sub-functioning look-alikes of the opposite gender. Will surgery recipients accept such results? Second, statistics clearly indicate that for many of those who go through the transition greater mental anguish results, rather than promised peace. In her view, as more people are confronted with these realities, they will realize that the movement is doing more harm than good.

Adverse side effects

Not to be forgotten are the undeniable statistics that show how harmful are the various drug treatments for gender transitioning, at any age. Robbins writes: “According to massive research compiled by the American College of

Pediatricians, administering cross-sex hormones and puberty-blockers carries enormous risks: heart disease, blood clots, strokes, arrested bone growth, osteoporosis, cancer, crippling joint pain, depression, and suicidal ideation.” Will we see class action lawsuits in the future, based on the argument that those approving and administering the drugs knew of all these risks but minimized mention of them?

How did the movement become so powerful?

One might wonder how, in the face of the risks as just mentioned, the transgender movement could have become so powerful. Robbins identifies seven steps or points in the explanation.

First, she writes, the trans movement is a natural result of the sexual revolution of the 1960s. With birth control, sex was unhooked from reproduction, then from marriage, then from biology altogether. Instead of the intimacy of two hearts, two lives deeply committed to each other in loving marriage, sex is just about two mere bodies that have a concentration of nerve endings in certain places. Being male or female became irrelevant to parenthood, and eventually maleness and femaleness became irrelevant altogether.

Second, society at large says that the “narcissistic autonomous Self” is now entitled to whatever it wishes. When a person desires something, he or she should be able to satisfy that desire. Denying that would, in all circumstances, be harmful (apparently). Personal consent is all that matters. Consider this quotation that she provided earlier in the article from Dr. Stephen Levine, who was critiquing the movement: “The new model asserted that patients know best what they need to be happy, generally meaning that patient autonomy is the singular ethical consideration for informed consent.... This includes children and adolescents.”

Third, the idea that patients rather than doctors should become the primary or even sole determiners of their treatment is gaining ground. The doctor becomes the patient’s tool. People think, “If I want this or that done to my body, a doctor has to do it for me; it’s my right!”

Fourth, the “cult of experts” expects everyone, including parents of troubled children, to bow to their decisions. Thus,

parents do not even have to be informed when their child has hormone blockers administered or maybe even life-changing sex change surgery.

Fifth, the physicians who are doing sex changes have developed a great hubris about what they are doing. People are telling them that their work is liberating and life-saving.

Sixth, religious faith is in serious decline and has left a vacuum. If God was recognized as God, and his creational norms were acknowledged, little or none of this would happen.

Finally, she suggests that greed may also play a role – there is a lot of money to be made in the pharmaceutical and surgical industries as more and more people pursue this war with their bodies. The conflict of interest that this creates for the “experts” should be obvious.

More cracks in the edifice?

What other cracks does Robbins detect in the great edifice of transgenderism? She finds some encouragement in noting the creation of the American College of Pediatricians (ACP), which formed in 2009 in reaction to the “increasingly politicized American Academy of Pediatricians.” Indeed, if one checks the website of the ACP, one can find a lengthy article entitled “Gender Dysphoria in Children,” published in November 2018. This article clearly states that the treatment results in “the sterility of minors” and that “this protocol is founded upon an unscientific gender ideology, lacks an evidence base, and violates the long-standing ethical principle of ‘First do no harm.’”² Their website includes a host of very fine scientific papers on issues of sexuality, parenting, health, society (e.g., marijuana), and life, as well as helpful posters for doctors and families. You may find it helpful.

Many other movements are affected by the destruction of a binary male-female understanding of gender. For instance, feminists depend on the category “woman,” and in fact one of the most prominent feminists of the twentieth century, Simone de Beauvoir, emphasized that one’s body constitutes one’s self, and a woman’s body is central to her selfhood. Many feminists therefore hotly oppose transgenderism because it calls into question the very category of “woman.” Such feminists think this is dangerous for women (in response, transgenderists label such feminists “Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists” – TERFS, for short).

We see the danger faced by women when transgenderism holds sway in sports. Recently, rugby referees were warned “not to challenge bearded or heavily muscled players appearing for women’s teams.” In response, referees quit, for fear that women in the game were going to suffer serious injuries.³ This is just one of hundreds of such stories. Other women are resisting the inclusion of transmen in women’s private spaces such as change rooms.

Groups of parents are uniting to help each other. So are doctors. “Detransitioners,” such as Walt Heyer, who have

transitioned from one gender to the other and then returned to their God-given gender, may be regarded as another crack in the edifice. Heyer maintains a website and has written books to help others with gender dysphoria. He is a Christian, and I would recommend his books.

Some government entities have also registered concern. For instance, in Great Britain, the Minister for Women and Equalities launched an investigation into the skyrocketing number of gender transition requests from/for children. In the USA the Department of Health and Human Services proposed to turn back the clock on Obama-era legislation, arguing for a “scientific definition” of “sex” in federally funded health programs, a definition that excludes sexual orientation and transgenderism.⁴

Three points of a Christian response

In response, caring Christians should acknowledge the pain and confusion of our fallen world. Our hearts should break when we read about transgenderism. Fundamentally, we are talking about people who are unhappy with their identity, particularly with their bodies. Let us show compassion and understanding. They need to find meaning and life in our Saviour Jesus.

We should also be careful that we not make a big deal when some of our girls play with cars and guns or our boys turn out to be sensitive types. Although our views of gender should be tied to sexual differences – apart from intersex abnormalities, every person is either male or female – we should not have such fixed and stereotyped views of each gender that our girls would rather be boys and vice versa. We must affirm both as created in God’s image, and allow that each will have a range of expressions and presentations.

Finally, we should always affirm that our God ultimately upholds the structures of his creation in all its aspects, including the physical and moral. Our world, led into self-destruction by the devil, cannot create an alternative world. Sin can only create chaos. We are seeing this. Let us, as an alternative to the chaos, live by faith in God’s Word, practice love, and radiate hope.

¹ See <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/07/54272/>. Accessed 26 September 2019.

² See <https://www.acped.org/gender-dysphoria-in-children-summary-points>. Accessed 2 October 2019.

³ See <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/injury-fears-over-rugby-trans-women-drive-referees-off-pitch-877hjsfz0>. Accessed 2 October 2019.

⁴ See <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/1557-nprm-hhs.pdf>. Accessed 2 October 2019.



Neerlandia South Welcomes Rev. and Mrs. John Ludwig

Installation

September 22 was a joy-filled day for the Neerlandia South congregation. We are a newly instituted church, with just under 300 members. After three years of being vacant, we are thankful that God answered our prayers and provided us with a pastor and teacher, Rev. John Ludwig. He was installed on September 22, with Rev. G. Veurink officiating, whose sermon was on 2 Timothy 2:15: "Present yourself to God as an approved worker." He started off by saying, "Sundays are always a joyful day of worship and instruction, but today we have an extra amount of joy!" He spoke about the effort that is required, how important it is that

we do our best to present ourselves to God as one approved, and the importance of seeking approval from God and not from man.

Rev. Ludwig led his first service as minister of the Neerlandia South in the afternoon following his morning installation. His sermon connected well with the morning one, and was on 1 Timothy 3:15, titled "You are the pillar and buttress of the truth." He reminded us that a pillar is very important and can hold up an entire structure. We are a pillar of God's truth and are called to be strong, unshakable and firm. A coffee social in the Mellowdale Hall was organized to celebrate this special day.





Welcome celebration

On the evening of Saturday, September 28, our congregation welcomed Rev. and Mrs. Ludwig with a big dessert celebration at the Fellowship Hall in Neerlandia.



Most of the congregation attended, and there was a lot of fun entertainment by young and old. Rev. G. Veurink, from Neerlandia South, Rev. C. Vanderlinde from Barhead, and Rev. B. Beukema, from the Neerlandia URC all spoke welcoming words on behalf of the neighboring churches, and some letters were read from other congregations as well. With the help of our MC, Arnold Viersen, the evening ran smoothly. Some of the entertainment included: A gift basket with produce and gift cards from the congregation business people, a choir performance and the presentation of Neerlandia's history book, a *Furrow Laid Bare*. Each society contributed skits, some of which were hilarious, and a county map was presented with every member's location pinned onto it. The Reverend's new truck was referred to, and we hope he finds joy in taking his clean white Ford down the back-dirt roads to make visits. Throughout the evening there were breaks so that everyone could enjoy the wide spread of delicious food. Rev. Ludwig ended the evening by expressing his thanks and closing with prayer.

"The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy." Psalm 126:3





Zion's Daughter, Sing your Song!

1. Zi - on's daughter, sing your song! Praise the Lord God all day long.
2. Have no fear, Je - ru - sa - lem, but break out with psalm and hymn.
3. God will take de-light in you. With his peace he will re - new

Shout a - loud, O Is - ra - el! Let your voice with prais - es swell.
Do not let your hands hang limp for God holds you in his grip.
his dear Zi - on whom he loves, all his daugh - ters and his sons.

For God has re-moved his judg - ment and blest you with full con-tent - ment.
God dwells with his sons and daugh - ters, strong to save from rag-ing wa - ters.
God re - joic-es in his peo - ple; o - ver you he is so glee - ful.

He has turned back all the wick - ed, all your foes whom you once dread - ed.
He's the might - y King of Is - rael. Trust in him and all will end well.
He will sing his song, ex - ult - ing in his love, for you a - bound - ing.

Text: Zephaniah 3:14-17; vers. George van Popta, © 2018
Tune: Geneva, 1551; Harmony Claude Goudimel, 1565

77 77 88 88
GENEVA 29



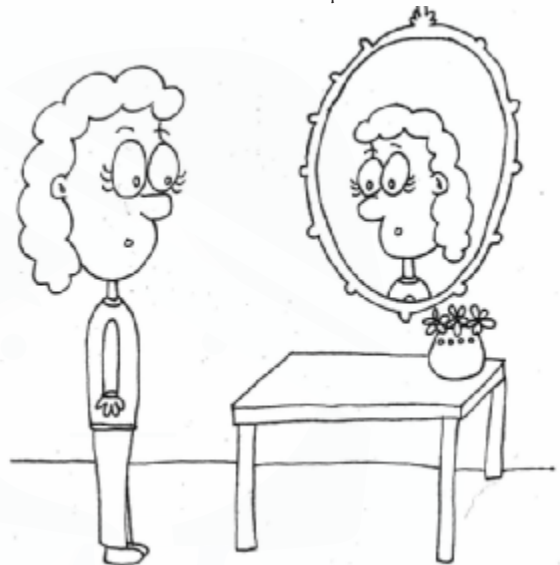
Clarion Kids

Listening and Doing

James 1:19-27

Every Sunday we go to church to hear God's Word. We sing songs and pray and listen to the minister talk about parts of the Bible. But how much do you think about the Bible during the week? It can be hard to think about how God wants us to act when we are with our friends or at home. But James says that we must be doers of the Word. If we hear God's Word and don't do anything, we are like someone who looks into a mirror but immediately forgets what he looks like when he walks away. We must act on what we hear in the Bible, showing love to all those around us and obeying God.

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



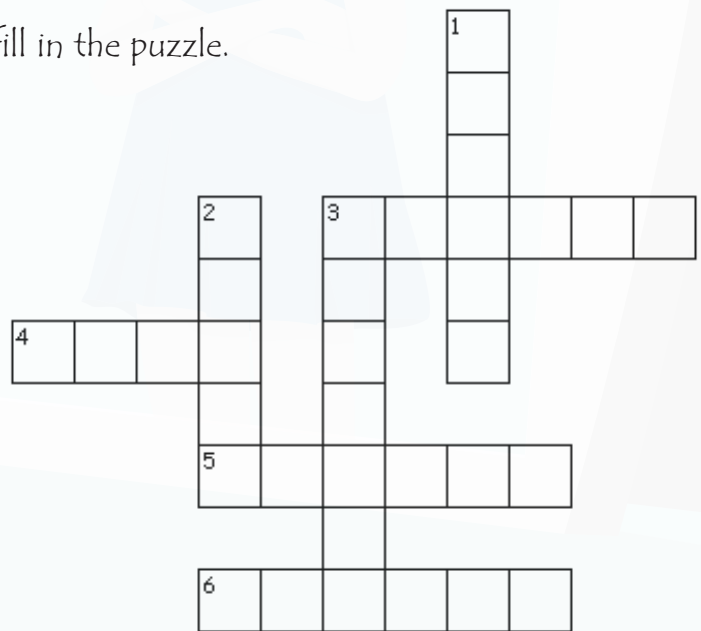
Crossword Puzzle: Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.

Across

3. We must not _____ what we hear in the Bible.
4. One way to do what God wants is to show _____ to those around us.
5. The day we go to church each week.
6. Every week we _____ to the minister talk about the Bible.

Down

1. James compares it to looking in a _____.
2. James says we must be _____ of the word.
3. It can be hard to think about God when we are with our _____.



by Emily Nijenhuis



Q What About Door Prizes, Draws, and the Like?

As Christians should we be entering our names for door prizes, etc.? The argument that is used quite often says: As long as you don't have to pay for it, it's okay. But, pay for it or not, it is all a matter of "luck" as to whose name gets drawn. Since we don't believe in luck, some have said, it is in God's plan. How must we look at this?

A The issue underlying these questions is the matter of covetousness and the tenth commandment. In our present-day society, we are confronted with lotteries everywhere; the possibility of winning a prize here or there is also a common phenomenon. There are the gimmicks of "scratch and save," the appeal of "roll up the rim," or the attraction of door prizes on Black Friday or at the opening of a new store, to mention a few. From a merchant's point of view, these are ways to get the customer to the store, attracting them with a prize for being the 100th or 1000th customer, or with a "draw" that offers a free gift, a shopping spree, or the like. Most of these gimmicks and attractions aim at the customer's interest in a deal, a surprise gift, or an unexpected bonus. The criterion in these examples is the question of what the *motives* are. As long as it is a matter of chance and greed for the prize, it's covetousness, while it could also be the fun of a surprise gift and the joy of the excitement at the opening of a new store.

The variables of the above, however, are many. The believer certainly needs to use his spiritual discernment to distinguish between fun, amusement, entertainment, the excitement of a surprise, or the desire to have something

big for giving little. The question is not whether you have to pay for your ticket or draw (at the auction for the school, for instance), the criterion should be whether you participate for the *joy* of participating and the *surprise* of winning. As soon as the prize becomes important, you're on the wrong track. Then you bring yourself into temptation of greed for gain. Also in the matter of raising money for a good cause, we must discern whether we are interested in supporting this cause or participating for the big prize; the good cause can easily take a back seat to the prospect of a tempting prize. We should not show charity for the purpose of winning a prize (which is covetousness), but for reasons of benevolence and support.

Finally, the questioner also brings into the picture the providence of God, even the plan of God. Of course, as we confess, God is everywhere present and God is involved with everything that happens. God is in everything: "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). We always have to discern his will and law, in the greater and smaller matters in our life. Yet, there are many things in our life in which we could overstate the aspect of chance or luck (as this used to make the throwing of a dice or the picking of letters in Scrabble taboo). In many a game, a bazaar, a gimmick, there is the aspect of fun, surprise, and unexpected "luck," which gives our entertainment a sense

of joy and amusement. We need not evade all these matters just because God in his providence is involved in everything; “Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise” (Eccl 7:16). We do have to use our Christian discretion, discernment, and even spiritual intuition, to determine whether we are motivated by greed and covetousness or just by the fun of the game.

*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. den Hollander
denhollanderw@gmail.com

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0



PRESS RELEASE

Press Release of Classis Manitoba convened in the Canadian Reformed Church of Carman East on September 27, 2019

1. On behalf of the Canadian Reformed Church of Carman East, the chairman elder Talbot Begsma called the meeting to order. He read from Acts 15:1-12, requested that the brothers sing Ps. 133, spoke some appropriate words, and led in prayer.
2. The credentials of the delegates were examined by the brothers from the convening church and reported to be in order.
3. Classis was declared constituted.
4. The following officers were appointed:
 - a. President: Rev. S. Vandavelde
 - b. Vice President: Rev. J. Poppe
 - c. Clerk: Elder G. van Dijk
5. For memorabilia it was mentioned that Carman East’s call to Dr. J. Temple was declined, that Carman East remains vacant, and that Carman West also has a vacancy for a second pastor.
6. The chairman welcomed all present, in particular Rev. J. Vermeer from Doon, Iowa who was present as fraternal delegate from Classis Central of the URCNA. Rev.

J. Vermeer was seated and given the privileges of the floor available to fraternal delegates. Rev. J. Zekveld was welcomed as advisor to Classis. Brothers J. Kuik and P. Veenendaal were also seated as Deputies of Classis for Neighbouring Classes and Presbyteries. Rev. J. VanRiet-schoten and Rev. J. de Gelder (emeritus ministers) were also welcomed. The chairman led in prayer thanking the Lord for allowing a fraternal delegate to be present and praying for a blessing over this meeting.

7. The agenda was adopted.
8. The Deputies for Contact with Neighbouring Classes and Presbyteries presented written reports on their work. They reported on visits to the OPC Presbytery of the Dakotas in Denver, Colorado (Sept 25-26, 2018); the Northern Plains Classis of the RCUS in Aberdeen, South Dakota (Mar 18-19, 2019); the OPC Presbytery of the Dakotas in Salt Lake City, Utah (Apr 2-3, 2019); and Classis Central of the URCNA in Rock Valley, Iowa (Apr 2-3, 2019). Classis expressed its thankfulness to these brothers for their diligence in maintaining contact with churches in ecclesiastical fellowship. Intercessory prayer was offered for the work of the deputies.
9. The Committee for Aid to Needy Churches presented a report. A question was asked if the classical support for Denver meets the guidelines of the Canada Revenue

Agency for money being sent out of Canada. The Committee will be asked to investigate. The suggested assessment for 2020 remains at \$50. Classis approves this level of support. The church of Denver expressed their sincere thanksgiving for the on-going support of the churches in Classis Manitoba. The Church for Auditing the books for Aid to Needy Churches (Winnipeg Redeemer) reported that the books were found to be in good order.

10. The Committee for Students of Theology presented its report. The churches continue to encourage our men to consider studying for the ministry. A former student from our Classis, Jeremy Segstro, graduated from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS), and has received and accepted a call to Cloverdale, BC. We currently have three men from the Manitoba churches studying at CRTS, and two more young men have expressed interest and are being mentored. The ministers and elders are encouraged to continue encouraging our young people to consider the work of ministry. These students and CRTS were remembered in prayer.
11. A church visitation report on a visit brought to the church of Denver was read. Intercessory prayer was offered for this church.
12. On behalf of Deputies for Contact with the Manitoba Provincial Government, brother W. van Beek proposed that their mandate be removed from the classis regulations. One of the main tasks of these deputies has been to Contact Vital Statistics Manitoba in order to arrange for our ministers and others from out of province to be registered so that they could perform weddings. The deputy reports that there has been a change to the application process which no longer uses denominational governing authorities (deputies) to make an application for ministers to perform weddings, and that they are now expected to do that themselves directly. Classis was unsure about the developments at Vital Statistics and will ask the deputies to investigate further.
13. The church of Denver proposed to add Classis South West of the United States (SWUS) of the URCNA to our Neighbouring Classes and Presbyteries, and to appoint Rev. S. Vandeveld as a Deputy for Contact with Neighbouring Classes and Presbyteries. On the basis of their research it appears that Classis SWUS does not have any contact with any of our Canadian Reformed Classes. Denver is within their classical area, and from Denver it would not be expensive to attend their meetings. Classis decided to adopt this proposal.
14. Rev. J. Vermeer passed on greetings on behalf of Classis Central of the URCNA and he gave an update on some

matters in their churches. He expressed thanksgiving for being able to be present and witness the work of Classis and expressed much joy at being able to meet face to face. An email was received from the Providence Reformed Church of Winnipeg indicating they would not be sending a delegate and passing on greetings and the Lord's blessings on our meeting. An email was also received from clerk of the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church indicating they would not send a delegate and wishing the Lord's blessing on our meeting. A letter of greeting was received from the stated clerk of the Northern Plains Classis of the Reformed Church of the United States. Rev. H. Bowen passed on fraternal greetings and outlined some of the blessings their classis has experienced in seeing a mission church being instituted at Dickenson, North Dakota, and in having all their churches have their own pastors.

15. Question Period according to Art. 44 C.O. was held. One church asked for and received advice in a matter of the government of their church.
16. Appointments.
 - a. The convening church for the next classis is the Canadian Reformed Church of Carman West. Classis is scheduled to be held, the Lord willing on December 13, 2019, at 3:00 pm. Alternate date: March 27, 2020 at 3:00 pm.
 - b. The suggested officer for the next classis is:
 - i. President: Dr. A. J. Pol.
 - c. Various standing committees, examiners for ecclesiastical exams, classical deputies, and church visitors are appointed.
 - d. The following delegates were appointed to Regional Synod West, November 4, 2019: As ministers, Dr. A.J. Pol and Rev. J. Poppe, with Rev. H.J. Vanderhorst and Rev. S. Vandeveld as first and second alternates; as elders Richard Buist and Martin Leyenhorst, with Mark den Hollander and Len Bergsma as first and second alternates.
23. Personal question period was held.
24. No censure according to Art. 34 of the Church Order was necessary.
25. The Press Release was approved for publication, and the executive officers were asked to finalize the Acts of Classis.
26. The president requested that the brothers sing from Ps. 134 and led in closing prayer.

*For Classis Manitoba, September 27, 2019
J. Poppe, Vice-president at that time*

Press Release of Classis Pacific West held on October 1, 2019

On behalf of the convening church, Rev. Doug Vandeburgt welcomes all the delegates. He reads 1 Thessalonians 2, leads in prayer, and invites all present to sing Psalm 16:1, 4.

The credentials are examined and found to be in order. Classis is declared constituted and the following officers take their place. Rev. Doug Vandeburgt is the chairman, Rev. Karlo Janssen clerk, and Rev. Carl Van Dam vice-chairman. Rev. William DenHollander is present as advisor. After some modifications, the agenda was adopted.

Candidate Jeremy Segstro presented one of his sermon proposals. The sermon proposals he submitted were deemed sufficient to proceed with the examination. Candidate Segstro is examined in the topics of Old Testament exegesis, New Testament exegesis, knowledge of Scripture, doctrine and creeds, church history, ethics, church polity, and pastoral ministry. With much thankfulness, Classis decides to sustain the examination of Candidate Segstro. The deputies from Regional Synod give their concurring advice in agreement with this. The way is open for Candidate Segstro to be ordained as minister of the Word and sacraments at the church of Cloverdale. It was confirmed that all the documents were in good order. Classis appoints Rev. Vandeburgt to represent Classis at the ordination of Candidate Segstro on October 20.

The chairman asks the questions re Article 44 of the Church Order. Two churches ask advice regarding matters of the governing of their church and pastoral oversight. In closed session, advice is given.

In closed session, Rev. Van Dam presents the church visitation report brought to the church at Langley on April 8, 2019 and to the churches at Surrey and Willoughby Heights

on April 9, 2019. Rev. Janssen presents the church visitation report brought to the church at Cloverdale on April 10, 2019. These reports are received with thankfulness.

Rev. Janssen reports on a visit made to the Northwest Presbytery of the OPC held on September 27 and 28, 2019. It was a good visit.

Opportunity is given for the churches to share the status of any mission projects they are involved with. Pastor Tim Schouten reports on the mission work in Prince George. God is blessing the work in many ways, but a plea is expressed for some members to move to Prince George to further strengthen the work. Rev. Jerome Lee reports on the work of the Korean outreach committee, whose intention is to integrate Korean Christians with the Reformed faith. Rev. Jerome Lee has been hired as a part-time mission worker and financial assistance will be requested from Classis Pacific West churches and possibly beyond.

The convening church of the next classis is Smithers; place of meeting to be determined. The date is scheduled for December 10, 2019 with an alternate date for April 14, 2020. The suggested officers for the next classis are: Rev. Carl Van Dam, chairman; Rev. Karlo Janssen, vice-chairman; and Rev. Ben Schoof, clerk.

Two new members for the committee for appeals are needed. Br. Kent Dykstra and Rick Vandergrindt are appointed as new members. Question period is made use of.

The chairman notes with thankfulness that nothing censurable was said or done during the meeting. The Acts of Classis are presented and adopted. The press release is presented and approved. After closing the meeting with prayer, the chairman invites the delegates to sing Hymn 52:1, 2.

*For Classis,
Rev. Carl Van Dam, vice-chairman at that time* 

