

Clarion



Clarion

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What's Inside

Our issue leads with Rev. Eric Kampen's latest article, "Climate Change." The article suggests using the topic of climate change to start a broader dialogue with our neighbours.

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam's series on Children and the Lord's Supper continues in part 3 of 4: "Children, Lord's Supper, and 1 Corinthians 11."

Issue 3 has an article written by Anna Nienhuis from We Need A Law, a report on the welcome of Pastor Eric Onderwater to Brampton, a Treasures, New & Old meditation, a Canticle, a book review, and a press release.

This issue also marks the close of a column that Clarion has run for twenty years: Education Matters. We are very thankful for the content that these contributors have organized and written on the topic of Reformed education!

Laura Veenendaal

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Climate *Change*

Daily we are bombarded with warnings about climate change and how the world is on the brink of collapse. We are told that if we don't go all out to halt rising temperatures, we are going to get more extreme weather, with devastating consequences for people affected by hurricanes, fires, and famines. So, the cry has gone out that we should all band together to save the planet. Type in "save the planet" in Google, and you will quickly find many websites raising the alarm and suggesting things that everyone can do to save the planet from being destroyed. The most recent activist preaching radical action to save the planet is Greta Thunberg, a seventeen-year-old Swedish girl, who was given an opportunity to chastise the world leaders at a United Nations conference on climate change, as well as speaking on many other occasions.

Stewardship of creation

Now, we may be repulsed by the theatrics of many seeking to save the planet, and we may question many of the facts presented, and perhaps we contribute a little to rising temperatures by heated arguments, but we should grant the basic point. That point is that man is not the most responsible steward of creation. In fact, we can speak of creation abuse. One only has to think of the polluted water and air in many parts of the world as a result of mining operations and many factories. Man's efforts have left many ugly scars on the face of the earth. In the 1970s, indifference in having factories belch forth noxious fumes and expel wastewater into rivers and lakes led to some of the Great Lakes reaching the point of being

unable to sustain fish, and many forests dying because of acid rain. It took much effort to reverse the damage, but damage

to the environment continues to be done in different ways. Much of this is fueled by consumerism and greed, as people have an insatiable desire for more things.

Beside this abuse of creation by ruthless economic activity, the earth has suffered much because of the atrocities of war. The last century saw the development of technology that gave a whole new meaning to a "scorched earth" policy in warfare. In previous ages, invading armies may have burned down cities and towns and put fire to the crops. They may have put salt on the land, to reduce its fertility. All that was nothing compared to what bombs can do

We do well, then, to consider the basic point behind the "save the planet" cries, namely, that man has not been a good steward of creation.

in a second. Nuclear technology makes it possible to turn fruitful land into uninhabitable territory for a very long time. If one thinks of the many terrible wars, it is remarkable that there are still livable places on earth and that there are people left on this earth, and it hasn't been left just for wildlife.

We do well, then, to consider the basic point behind the "save the planet" cries, namely, that man has not been a good steward of creation. We need to look at ourselves to see if we are good stewards of creation, or whether we are caught up in the consumerism of our age, eager to get, get, get, squandering the earth's resources on selfish pleasure, rather than using the resources as part of our calling to glorify God in all that we do.

Evangelistic opportunity

At the same time, this talk about climate change and saving the planet presents us with an evangelistic opportunity. We can agree on the need for being good stewards, but then switch the conversation to speak about a far more serious climate change facing the world. We can even say that the planet is headed for global warming that will be so severe and quick, that all this talk about a rise in temperature of a degree or so will appear to have been no more than a tempest in a teapot. The planet is headed for destruction.

You will realize that I am speaking here about what will happen at the end of the age. The apostle Peter writes in his second letter that "the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly" (2 Pet 3:7). A little further, he writes about the way the "heavens will pass away with a roar and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed" (v. 10). This ties in with prophecies in the Old Testament about the great day of the LORD, where he will come to judge the earth. That judgment includes images of consuming fire. We have an example in the way he rained fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed those cities for their wickedness.

All this talk about climate change gives us a point of contact, a conversation starter about the far greater warming that will make the fires that burned in Alberta and British Columbia a few

years ago, or the recent fires in Australia, look like nothing. You could run from those. You can't run from this one. You can't extinguish it. The earth will be cleansed by fire.

Escape plan

Scripture shows, however, that there is a way to save yourself from the wrath of God that will be revealed. Various "save the planet" sites will give ten or twelve or eighteen things you can


do to save the planet. The way to save yourself from the coming destruction is first by looking to Jesus Christ. The fire will not touch those who belong to him.

The apostle Peter mentions some other things. He writes, "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness." A little further he writes, "Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace" (v. 11, 14). In terms of responsible stewardship, we can say, "Don't produce so much garbage." In terms of preparing for the

last day, we can say, "Don't produce so much moral garbage in your lives. Clean up your lives. Seek to live in peace and harmony with others."

A warning and warming voice

With respect to climate change, we hear young people scolding the older generation for not taking this matter seriously and therefore jeopardizing their future. With respect to this severe warming that will destroy the earth, there will be a lot of children that should be angry at the older generation for not warning them. It is the task of the church to be this warning voice. Paul made it part of his preaching. We read, for example, in Acts 17:31, how he called the Athenians to repent, "because [God] has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed."

At the same time, that warning voice is also a warming voice, as it declares that all those who believe in Jesus Christ will not perish but have eternal life. To avoid giving unnecessary offence, we do well to adorn that message with a godly life, which includes being good stewards of God's creation. 

"Don't produce so much moral garbage in your lives. Clean up your lives. Seek to live in peace and harmony with others."

Peace

"Peace be upon Israel." (Psalm 125:5b)

Psalm 125 ends with an encouraging benediction: "Peace be upon Israel." You are both greeted and blessed by similar words every Lord's Day as you gather for worship. The words are familiar: "Grace to you and peace ..." and "The Lord bless you ... and grant you his peace."

Psalm 125 is a pilgrim song, one of the songs of ascent that the children of Israel would sing as they gathered from the four corners of the Land of Israel at Jerusalem for one of the three great pilgrimage festivals commanded in the Torah. There they were, in Jerusalem, at the temple, united under the peace of God. The peace of God was upon them.

"Jerusalem" means "city of peace." The Hebrew word "shalom" is the word for peace. You see it in the last two syllables of "Jerusalem." Sometimes the city was simply called "Salem" ("peace"). Peace was to be found in the city of peace. The blessing of peace for the people of God was pronounced at the temple in the city of peace.

This shalom-peace was more than the absence of war. When a conflict ceases between two warring nations, the new situation is termed *peace* and they may sign a peace accord. Yet both countries may lie in ruins, their inhabitants in mourning, their economies devastated, and their futures uncertain. Some peace!


How different is the relationship between God and sinners when peace is made by Jesus Christ! Instead of lying in ruins, the redeemed sinners leave the wreckage behind them. Instead of mourning their losses, they now rejoice in the relationship they have with God and each other. Instead of being poor, they become immeasurably rich. Instead of having an uncertain future, they begin to enjoy the security that comes from the promises of God.

People of peace – who are themselves at peace with God – will bring that peace into their human relationships. Jerusalem will be a city of peace. It can be no other way. The heavenly

Jerusalem that the apostle John saw in his vision coming down from heaven to earth was a city of peace. The earthly picture today of the final city of peace must also be a city of peace. It can be no other way.

This is the Shalom that Jesus brings about for all who repent of their sin and trust in him and the sacrifice he brought on the cross for sinners. Jesus was born as the peace child, the one God the Father sent into the world to bring about peace with us who, by our sin, had declared war on God. Throughout his ministry Jesus called people to be at peace with God and, and by faith, to gain citizenship in the peaceable kingdom. He brought about peace by the blood of the cross. As Colossians 1:20 says, through Christ God reconciled himself to us by making peace through the blood of Christ shed on the cross.

This is the peace that Jesus brings into your midst. If you would have it! *Would* you have it? A peace that unites you with God. A peace that knits you together as brothers and sisters.

Pray that Jerusalem be blest. May peace prevail within your walls and citadels. May the Jerusalem below already be like the one above – a place of rest for those who love her. May lasting peace be yours to cherish. For God is in your midst. Peace be upon Israel. 

For further study

1. **Read up on the peace (or fellowship) offering in Leviticus 7:11-36. Some of the offering was burned on the altar, some given to the priest for him and his family, and some the worshiper ate.**

What is happening here?

What conclusions do you reach when you think about this shared meal and the name of the offering?

2. **How, according to Romans 12:18, are we to live with one another?**



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Children, Lord's Supper and 1 Corinthians 11 (Part 3 of 4)

The classic passage of 1 Corinthians 11 that restricts access to the sacrament occurs in the context of the apostle Paul admonishing the Corinthian believers for their reprehensible behaviour at the Lord's Supper.¹ After his rebuke, he rehearsed the institution of the Lord's Supper and then reminded them that "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). These words are followed by this admonition and instruction:

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. (1 Cor 11:28-31).

Notice how the apostolic instructions are not limited to only the Corinthian believers in their particular situation. He gives general guidelines that are applicable to all times and places wherever the Lord's Supper is administered, as indicated by his use of terms rightly translated as "whoever," "a person," and "anyone."

For our purposes, we will briefly consider two elements that are inter-related: the need to examine and judge oneself and the need to discern the body.

Examine and judge

To avoid coming to the Lord's Table in an unworthy, that is, disrespectful and sinful way, one must examine oneself. "Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor 11:28). The reason for this self-examination is that "anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Cor 11:29).

The word translated "examine" in the original Greek means to critically examine something to determine its genuineness. In this case, those contemplating going to the Lord's Supper need to do more than a simple introspection. They need to examine themselves with respect to their understanding, attitude, and way of life so that they can genuinely share in Christ. The apostle Paul sheds further light on the self-examination when he more or less equates it with judging oneself. After enjoining the Corinthians to examine themselves (1 Cor 11:28), he later elaborates by saying: "If we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged" (1 Cor 11:31). Examining oneself is thus like judging oneself to make sure that one measures up to Christ's expectations. The Greek word for "judge" used here (1 Cor 11:31) is the same as that translated by "discern" in the requirement "to discern the body" (1 Cor 11:29). So, the requirement to examine oneself and the requirement to judge and discern are all closely related.

The point that the apostle stresses in the immediate context is that if they rightly examine and judge themselves, they will be able to break with the practices of disorderly conduct at the Lord's Table which he had condemned (1 Cor 11:21). More generally, such self-examination means that they see their sins,

¹This article is part of a shortened and popular version of a chapter that will appear in the forthcoming publication of the speeches of the 2019 CRTS conference which had the theme: "'Do Not Hinder Them:' Children and the Church."

ascertain whether the fruits of faith are evident in their life, and be committed to a life of holiness in the Lord. Such demands are more appropriate for adults than for children. There is no evidence of children participating in the Lord's Supper in Corinth, and the question can be fairly asked whether children have the necessary discernment to follow up on the apostolic exhortation.

Discerning the body

Besides examining and judging oneself, another requirement for attending the Lord's Supper is to be able to discern the Lord's body. Participants must be able to distinguish the Lord's Supper clearly from other meals and treat it as holy. Discerning the body therefore includes being able to appreciate the reality of Christ's presence at this sacrament and to act accordingly. The weightiness of this responsibility is evident from the fact that "anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Cor 11:29).

Such discerning has traditionally been understood to mean seriously considering the significance and implications of the Lord's Supper. This requirement demands a certain level of maturity and so this passage has been a long-standing argument against paedocommunion.

A more recent and increasingly popular interpretation of this passage, however, argues that "discerning the body" does not refer to the sacrificial body of Christ, but the body of believers. Justification for this identification is sought in the fact that the previous chapter speaks of the congregation at Corinth as "we who are many are one body" (1 Cor 10:17). Since the apostle admonished this church about divisions in connection with the Lord's Supper, he now asks them to "discern the body," that is (according to this interpretation), to recognize it and pay attention to each other's welfare. So, the use of the term "body" by itself (in v. 29) can refer to the congregation. If discerning the body indeed means to recognize and be mindful of each other, then a traditional reason for excluding children from the Lord's Table is removed.

Although some are convinced by this reasoning, the vast majority of commentators remain with the traditional interpretation which is, as noted above, that Paul is admonishing the Corinthians that they must distinguish the Lord's Supper from

their everyday meals and recognize its holiness. There are at least two good reasons for staying with this interpretation. In the first place, a critical problem with the non-traditional interpretation is that in order to understand "the body" as referring to the congregation the verb "discern" must be understood as to be mindful of each other as the body of Christ. But that is not the meaning of the verb translated "to judge" or "discern."

The second major problem with identifying the body in 1 Corinthians 11:29 with the congregation is the immediate context. The reference to the body (in "discerning the body") is too far removed from the reference to the body of believers in the preceding chapter (1 Cor 10:16-17). With an entire discussion of women's head coverings intervening, it is expecting too much for the reader to readily connect the "body" in chapter

11 with that in chapter 10. The immediate context (1 Cor 11:24-27) refers to the body and blood of the Lord and this context should and can be expected to determine the meaning of "the body" in verse 29 as that of the Lord. As a result of these two factors, the language used and the context of the text, the vast majority of scholars understand "discerning the body" to refer to Christ's body.

Are children capable of doing the necessary judging and examining of them-

selves, as well as adequately discerning the body of Christ at the Lord's Supper? The classic Reformed liturgy for this celebration assumes that children are not able to judge and discern in the manner Paul enjoined. The traditional form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper has therefore understood this self-examination as calling upon all participants to consider their sins and accursedness that they may humble themselves before God; to examine their hearts whether they believe the sure promise of God that all their sins are forgiven them only for the sake of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is freely given them as their own; and to determine whether they intend gratefully to serve the Lord with their entire life and to live in true love and harmony with their neighbour. Even an author in favour of paedocommunion admits that the assumption of the Reformed liturgical form is that such self-examination means the exclusion of children.


It is telling that since the time of the Reformation until mid-way through the twentieth century, the almost unanimous view

Those...going
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among Reformed churches was that children were not able to examine themselves and to discern the body of Christ and thus were barred from the Lord's Supper.

Who attends the Lord's Table?

We have considered the matter of paedocommunion from the way it is often brought up: its proponents argue that children attended Passover and therefore they should attend Lord's Supper. We have, however, seen that the Lord's Supper is a new sacrament and is not a Christian Passover. Indeed, the

background of the Lord's Supper is much more than the Passover. Consequently, applying the analogy of those attending the Passover to the Lord's Supper does not hold. Furthermore, Scripture speaks of needed discernment for those attending the Table of the Lord, a requirement never mentioned with Passover attendance. At this point, one could start quibbling about what the age of discernment is. It seems that often any discussion on paedocommunion can be quite vague as to exactly which children are in view. Whom are we discussing? *More about that the next time.* 

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Watchmen: Responsible Christian Citizenship in a Secular World

We live in a society that increasingly marginalizes objective truth in favour of subjective emotion and experience. Christians in Canada are right to feel ignored or even unwelcome in many public discussions, with words like *hateful*, *intolerant*, and *bigoted* quick to be thrown at any principled attempt to address issues relating to gender, abortion, marriage, or pornography, to name just a few.

Yet it is worth considering what responsible Christian citizenship looks like in our current context here in Canada. The political world is not as far from our personal world as it may seem, and Christian political action plays a valuable role in our secular society, regardless of measurable results.

In Ezekiel 33, God calls Ezekiel to be a watchman in Israel. A watchman does not defend the city by strength, but he watches for danger and warns of impending attacks.

The word of the LORD came to me [Ezekiel]: "Son of man, speak to your people and say to them: 'When I bring the sword against the land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not heed the warning and the sword comes and takes their life, their blood will be on their own head.... If they had heeded the warning, they would have saved themselves.'"

Ezekiel

The Living Creatures and the Glory of the LORD

1 In the ^athirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions.

word of the LORD came to the son of Buzi, & by the land of the Babylonians the LORD was upon him. I looked, and I saw

The responsibility, then, falls on both the watchman and on those over whom he keeps watch. If the watchman fails to alert people to the danger he sees, he is at best selfish and at worst guilty of murder. But if he does issue a warning and someone chooses to ignore it, the watchman is relieved of responsibility. He has done his part.

True love for our neighbours necessarily includes concern for their eternal soul. We are called by God not to be silent in the face of a culture that would love to silence us. We are called to speak the good news of the gospel, and the truth of a holy God with standards for holy living. We are called to keep watch.

The Word of the Lord to Ezekiel continues:

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them a warning from me. When I say to the wicked, 'You wicked person, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade them from their ways, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood."

We have a calling that should keep us engaged in the politics of our nation, and keep us far from comfortable: *keep watch, and call out the warning.*

This chapter in Ezekiel can be deeply convicting. Do we see danger and talk about it amongst ourselves as Christians, shaking our heads at those less enlightened? Or do we share the truth and knowledge we have been blessed with out of love for those around us, even when it means we are hated, ostracized, even persecuted?

While convicting, this passage is also deeply comforting in the truth that our calling is not to change the hearts of our neighbours. Only the Holy Spirit has that power, and we should not presume to feel responsible for salvation.

Our calling is not to change hearts – our calling is to charge them. We look forward to the day when every knee will bow and

every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:11). And we know we serve a just God who is also merciful, who will hear and answer a humble and contrite heart. Ezekiel 33:11 tells us that God takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live."

At the end of the day, in the work of political activism, we often ask ourselves, what did we accomplish? Why did we write this report for Parliamentarians, provide recommendations that are likely to be ignored, organize an event that got little or no media attention, issue a press release that reporters could use against us, do this flag display drawing attention to the injustice of abortion? And the list goes on.

We can answer that we do it as those working for the Lord, not for men (Col 3:23). We do it because we truly believe God's law is good, not just for believers but for all people, all who are made in his image. And we do it to fulfill our calling as watchmen. As God's call to Ezekiel continues: "But if you do warn the wicked person to turn from their ways and they do not do so, they will die for their sin, though you yourself will be saved."

As Christians, we live in the already of Christ's coming, and the not yet of his future coming. In these uncertain times,

we have certainty: though battles are still being fought, the victory has been won. We live by an objective truth that we are called to share with our neighbours and our leaders. We share a warning that comes with a promise: "Turn from your evil ways and you will live" (Ezek 33:11).

Leaders have a special responsibility to use their authority well and will be held to account for leading others astray. There are many secular evils that our leaders have allowed, condoned, and even embraced. They will have to answer for that; but we do not want them to be able to say that they did not know, because we will have to answer for that. **C**

We have a calling
that should
keep us engaged
in the politics
of our nation



The ordination of
Pastor Eric Onderwater

Ready to serve together
(L to R): Matthew VanLuik,
Eric Onderwater and
Gerhard Visscher



A cake to congratulate Pastor Onderwater

Amazing Grace at Grace Canadian Reformed Church

Pastor Eric Onderwater and family arrive at Brampton

Our new church building opened five years ago. At the time, little did we realize the blessings that would come with it! It didn't take long for curious visitors from the community to come and see who we were. Throughout these years, God allowed many people to come and worship with us, resulting in special classes for those seriously considering membership, as well as several new members joining Grace.

The interest from the community soon led to more serious endeavours to spread the gospel to our great urban area. Well, with faith, and many prayers, we connected with Bethel in Toronto to finally extend a call to Pastor Eric Onderwater as co-pastor at Grace, to facilitate this work in local mission projects.

Our God is amazing, because Pastor Eric, with his variety of background work experience, felt the call by God to enter the ministry. And so, God caused us to merge with Pastor Eric's plans. When Pastor Eric accepted the call and passed his peremptory exam at classis, we, at Grace, performed a marathon of workdays to help Pastor Eric, Lisa, Hudson, Eva, Ruby, and Pippa settle into their new dwelling!

Ordination service

God's grace never fails, and so on Friday, November 1, 2019, the ordination of Pastor Eric occurred in a packed church full of guests, members, and friends and family. Rev. van Luik preached from 1 Timothy 4:11-16, where Paul advised and exhorted Timothy to his task amidst very difficult circumstances.

Pastor Eric is also a young man, facing a difficult but rewarding task. His focus must be on God's living Word. Pastor Eric must preach the Word boldly through the means of the Holy Spirit, knowing that God has given him the authority to do so. In word and deed Pastor Eric will be an example of Christ, being diligent in his conduct, knowing that love is the decisive quality needed. As Pastor Eric meets challenges, he can be confident

because of the faithful relationship he has with Jesus Christ.

Through the laying on of hands by many ministers and elders, the Holy Spirit will equip our co-pastor with all he needs. It will be a lifetime of work in the Lord.

Inaugural service


Pastor Eric's first sermon as a minister of the Word was on Sunday, November 3, 2019. He preached from 2 Corinthians 4:13-18. From this text, Pastor Eric said he is encouraged because his Saviour Jesus Christ will one day raise us all from the dead into glorious eternal hope. This hope motivated Paul to endure a great deal for the gospel, and this hope will motivate Pastor Eric in his ministry as well. With the fire of the Holy Spirit in his bones (Jeremiah 20:9), Pastor Eric is emboldened to preach the hope of his new calling.

Our belief in the resurrection powers our daily living, which will include many sacrifices for the sake of the mission in Brampton. But these sacrifices and the suffering will not steal our joy, because the Holy Spirit grants us renewal into an eternal glory which surpasses all joy known on this earth.

Therefore, Pastor Eric is ready to serve God through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Service of commendation

That same afternoon, Dr. G. Visscher commended Pastor Eric to his calling by preaching from John 4:26. Our Saviour identified himself as I AM to the Samaritan woman. Jesus Christ showed his patience and compassion, as a great evangelist to this woman. He even stayed in Samaria for two days. Amazing grace!

During this time, he demonstrated that the need for a Saviour went beyond the Jews. So, Pastor Eric can go boldly to all those whom he will meet, preaching the great I AM. Our Saviour is Lord of life! 



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Smartphones: *Out or In* *Our Christian Schools?*

In 2015, our local high school changed its school cellphone policy. We had a “no phone” policy; now we have a phone-use policy that allows students to use their phones between classes and during lunch. Meanwhile, students no longer have flip phones, and we hardly speak of cellphones, but rather the smartphone (or the smartwatch). Few students have data plans, but all students have access to the school Wi-Fi. It’s governed by a data-censoring device called Securly, but almost all students get around the security system with a VPN, so they basically have unlimited Wi-Fi (a best kept secret among teens). True, the IT personnel can track a student’s usage path if he or she uses the school’s Wi-Fi system, but who is going to take the time to do that? Parents trust their children to just text and use a little social media.

While some teachers ask students to place their phones in a basket during class, other teachers allow phones on desks and may even ask students to take out their phones to do a Google

search. Whether we like it or not, smartphones are a reality and are here to stay. Those nay-sayers like me will simply have to conform to the new reality of the iGeneration of students, the ones who have never been without Internet in their lives.

Is our present cellphone policy the best it could and should be? Are the students served best by the guidelines we have in place? Are the parents served best by this “accept it and conform” policy making? Have we made a pragmatic policy, or a principled one? I’m afraid we have gone pragmatic.

Lately, in the media, more noise is being heard about the ill effects of too much cellphone use, or too much screen time, or too much social media. Public schools are rethinking their policies in the US, in Canada, and in England. In France, the government has had a “no phone” policy in schools since September 2018. Ontario now has a “no phones in the classroom” rule. Why all the fuss?

As our schools assist the parents in educating their children

¹Marshall McLuhan said the same thing of an earlier form of media. He said, “TV sucks the brain right out of the skull.”

to gain knowledge, skills, and wisdom that students need to fulfill their cultural mandate, they should not exclude but include some wisdom on the proper use of technology. Specifically, the smartphone.

The more perceptive parent and many in the health services recognize issues surrounding the smartphone. Are the issues big? Are the issues bad?

Issues surrounding the smartphone

One issue is depression among teens. Since 2010, depression and suicide attempts among teens have increased tremendously, and many professionals link this increase to smartphone usage. Jean Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University, and well-known author of *I-Gen*, published a study that links hours of smartphone usage to loneliness, hopelessness, depression, and suicide attempts. In an article "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?" printed in the *Atlantic Monthly*, she writes: "It's not an exaggeration to describe iGen (our teens) as being on the brink of the worst mental health crisis in decades. Much of this deterioration can be traced to their phones."

Another issue is lack of sleep. Many teens spend far too much time in the evening on their smartphones. If not spending too much time, the content viewed or the social interaction they are involved in doesn't allow for mental downtime and, in turn, doesn't allow the brain to turn off and the body to have a deep sleep. Teens who don't sleep enough are prone to depression and anxiety. "All screen activities," Jean Twenge writes, "are linked to unhappiness..." and she has the evidence to prove her statement.

What are some other issues related to the smartphone that can affect teens' performance at school? Social ineptitude. When you feel excluded from a group, you turn to your phone; however, when the group sees you on the phone, they will exclude you, because you "want to be alone." Then you feel more left out. It can become a vicious circle. For many smartphone teens, social interaction skills have declined.

Many iGen teens show less ambition, are less focussed, and don't want to take on adult responsibilities. These are three other related problems. Psychologists link these issues to the smartphone. They do not say that the smartphone is the sole

cause of all these issues, but the research closely links these issues to smartphones.

Clive Thompson, author of *Smarter Than You Think: How Technology is Changing Our Minds For the Better*, admits that "we have turned young people loose into this world where very big corporations – you know, Facebook and Twitter – are committed by marketplace dictates to trying to suck their users in and get them to stare at it as much as possible. That's their mission."¹ This quote brings us to the content of smartphones. True, smartphones can be used for good purposes, and much content is good or useful, but teens have open access to the Internet. And which teen isn't wired to try and explore? Our smartphone-toting, innocent teens are being fed for hours per day by many professionals who want their money, loyalty, and blissful ignorance. Our innocent teens have the uncensored world in their pockets and are not only psychologically attached, but spiritually attacked. We are taught to believe in individualism, consumerism, secrecy, and eating freshly forbidden fruit. Tony Reinke, author of *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*,

writes: "The clicks of our fingertips reveal the dark motives of our hearts, and every sin – every double tap and every click – will be accounted for." Are our teenagers any better than every other teenager in our North American world?

A call to action

I hope that my first point is clear: smartphones are affecting our teens, and more so than we think. If we really admit it, are

they also not affecting us – parents of our tweens and teens? What should we do? My second point is not asking parents to address the smartphone in the home—although they must, because the home is the primary place where Christian nurturing action should take place—but to urge school communities (parents, grandparents, and friends) to call our schools to offensive action.

About eighty percent of our high school students have cell phones—oops, smartphones. Thankfully, most parents do not provide them with data packages. That's great. To benefit our teens, however, and to assist our parents, what are our Christian high schools obligated to do? We are obligated to assist the parents in educating our students with knowledge and skills to serve God and their neighbour. So, what does that mean

Each school
community
needs to discuss
the place of
smartphones

Some guiding principles

As we discuss the smartphone in our homes and communities, we need to have biblical or Christian worldview principles to guide us in our discussions. If not, we will be making pragmatic decisions.

To get us started, I offer the following:

1. God's Word is normative for our lives; therefore, staff and students need to be students of the Word which comes to us in two formats - the printed word (the Bible) and the spoken word (the preaching).
2. That God gives man the ability to use, develop, and subdue the earth is God's purpose for man. He gives man the ability to discover technologies. Satan, however, uses whatever God allows man to create against his archenemy, who is God.
3. We are placed on earth to glorify God. Our smartphones must therefore be used to glorify God only.
4. Only by God's grace can we serve him. Every tap and double tap are visible to God.
5. The picture technologies in our smartphones overwhelmingly attract us. Phone picture technology tends to pull us away from thinking rationally and deeply.²
6. Many gospel truths cannot be pictured, nor does God want them to be.
7. Adversely, print or text technologies of our smartphones allow us time to reflect, analyze, and discern.
8. Man, by nature, constantly falls for the technology imperative (the concept that new technologies are inevitable and essential and that they must be developed and accepted for the good of society³). We are aware of some technology that was and is not for the good of society (e.g. atom bomb, nuclear weapons, vaping, etc). Do we consider smartphone technology "for the good of our society"? Good is anything that benefits us and society to live rightly before God and our neighbour.
9. Parents are given the responsibility to nurture their children in the fear of the Lord. They, and therefore the Christian school by extension (*loci parentis*), need to set a Christian culture for their children, and in that Christian culture they give age-appropriate guidelines for smartphone technology just as they have guidelines for the use of other technologies (e.g. giving a child the knife or a hammer, using motorized tools, driving a car, use of television, use of medicinal drugs, etc.).
10. As children must be educated to use a vehicle safely on the road by taking drivers training, so children must be educated to use smartphones safely. The issues and responsibilities of using a smartphone are greater than the children can bear without proper, age-appropriate controls and training.

²Media gurus, like Marshall McLuhan and Derrick Kerkhove, mentioned this years ago, as they discussed the negatives of TV and radio and highlighted a positive about the Internet. See "An Interview with Derrick Kerkhove." *Echoes* 12. Oxford, 2002.

³R.W. Francis writes a book about this concept. *The Technological Imperative in Canada: An Intellectual History*. UBC Press, 2009.

for phones? We are obligated to have smartphone policies that prevent misuse of phones. Most of our schools have them already. But should we not do more? We need to help parents implement an offensive strategy for a stewardly, competent use of the smartphone. I'm surprising myself by writing this, but after researching and pondering the major effects of the smartphone, which is here to stay, I've become convinced that teachers, education committees, and parents, along with the next generation, need to openly talk and strategize how to use our smartphones to the glory of God. We also need to do this sooner rather than later, because our children are generally way ahead of us in the use of this technology.

Once we have some key guiding principles in place, it is much


easier to decide what to do with the new reality of smartphones. Each school community needs to discuss the place of smartphones in school and come up with a collectively agreed-upon policy for their school. That policy should benefit the purpose of the school, the education of the students, the teaching of the staff, and the disciplining of administration. It should bring, above all, praise and glory to God.

Allow me a side comment. When a child or a teen receives a smartphone, he or she does not really know what he or she is receiving. He thinks he does. His or her knowledge of the smartphone is taken from their world of experiences that the homes have provided or allowed, from what the friends have shared, or from the innate drive to have one simply because

“everyone my age” or “everyone in high school” has one. He or she does not know the smartphone is a very influential world, attached to the hip; it is a world that can create an alter-identity of him or herself and that can harm him or her emotionally and spiritually.

I’m convinced that we need to distinguish between younger and older children as we establish our smartphone policies. Because we have a natural distinction in our schools between elementary and high schools, perhaps we should simply not allow smartphones at all in elementary schools, but acquaint students with good rules for appropriate Internet use. On the other hand, we should allow restricted, wholesome use of this technology in high schools.

Perhaps Christian school communities should do more. Why not offer a compulsory media course, or at least a unit of a media course, to the new high school students that will show students what wholesome use of smartphone technology means, theoretically and practically? The smartphone goes beyond any other technology that we have had. It is more powerful than a standard laptop, more individualistic, and more influential. It’s a powerful world that we place in their hands and in their pockets. We and the next generation need to use it wisely.

The new technology is here to stay. If we can use this technology to glorify God, let’s learn to do it, and to do it well. Let’s also teach that to the next generation. 

Education Matters – *Closing Note*

Dear readers,

Education Matters began in late 1999 and started publishing articles in *Clarion* in January 2000. We began this work with a sincere purpose to encourage unity among the Canadian Reformed Schools across the country, and to keep the readership of *Clarion* abreast of educational issues that staffs, boards, and parents were discussing. In previous years, other educators have maintained a similar column in *Clarion*.

As we reflect on our work, we cannot easily gauge whether or not we have fulfilled our mission. We trust that many have read our articles and have gained and learned from them. We can only humbly say that we are thankful to God that he has allowed us to contribute in this way for the last twenty years.

We have decided to no longer run the *Education Matters* column in *Clarion*. For most of the editorial team, personal commitments to our teaching or to our administrative tasks have only increased, and that has caused some editors to leave *Education Matters* or to feel somewhat guilty for not being able to contribute more.

We thank all who have written articles over the years which we could publish in this column. We hope that others in our Canadian Reformed community will carry this educational torch in *Clarion*, will feel free to contribute articles that discuss the joys, struggles, and changes in our schools, or will share articles that speak to foundational issues of Reformed education.

We thank you, *Clarion* editors and staff, for all the work that you have done to support us. Special mention should be made to former editor Dr. Van Dam and to the late Mr. Bill Gortemaker, who both encouraged us in the beginning. Thanks to Laura Veenendaal, who so faithfully and for so many years communicated with us and took care of the typesetting, formatting, and accompanying graphics and pictures for so many years.

May the Lord continue to bless *Clarion* and all those who write for it and who work to maintain it. May it truly remain a magazine that purposefully seeks to build up and support faithful doctrine and life in our churches.

Chris Deboer
(Carman, MB)

Jordan Ellens
(Komoka, ON)

Arthur Kingma
(Fergus, ON)

Derek Stoffels
(Smithers, BC)

Richard Veldkamp
(Edmonton, AB)

The Prayer of Manasseh

Part 3 of 3: *Supplication of Pardon*

This prayer, though apocryphal, is a classic prayer of repentance attributed by tradition to Manasseh, a wicked king of Judah (2 Chr 33:1-11), who pleaded God's forgiveness for his many sins, and was shown mercy (2 Chr 33:12-20).

George van Popta, 2019

(Tune: Ajalon)

Richard Redhead, 1853

1. Now I fall up - on my knees, on your grace I rest my pleas.
 2. Let your wrath no long - er burn. Do not from this sin - ner turn.
 3. Man - i - fest in me your love, mer - cy, kind - ness from a - bove.

I beg you for mer - cy, Lord, for your kind for - giv - ing word.
 Par - don each and eve - ry fault. Wash me clean of all my guilt.
 I'll ex - tol you all my days, of - fer you un - end - ing praise.

I ac - knowl - edge all my sin and my dark - ness deep with - in.
 Do not thrust me to the side. Let me near you safe - ly hide.
 Hum - ble, thank - ful, I will sing and to you my trib - ute bring.

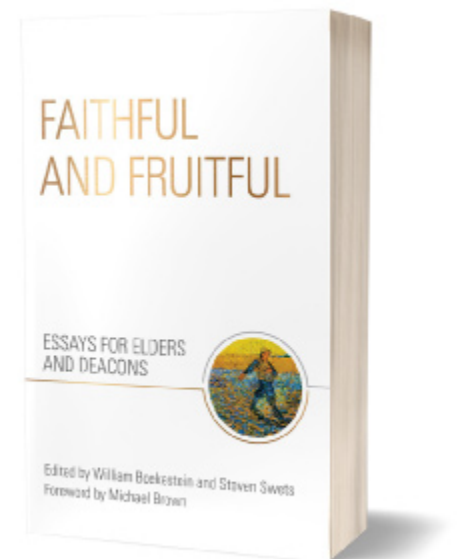
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Faithful and Fruitful: *Essays for Elders and Deacons*

Over the years, the Reformed churches have been blessed by a number of good books that assist pastors, elders, and deacons to become better equipped in their callings. Because shepherding Christ's flock is such an important and challenging responsibility, office bearers long for all the help and guidance they can get. *Faithful and Fruitful: Essays for Elders and Deacons* is a welcomed addition. The editors William Boekestein and Steven Swets have brought together sixteen experienced, capable churchmen to tackle a number of timely, practical issues that confront office bearers on an everyday basis. Some topics have not been covered before in such a comprehensive and easy-to-read book such as this.

Some essays are wonderfully practical and straightforward such as "How to Be a Clerk, Navigating the Broader Assemblies," and "Managing the Offerings of God's People." But others tackle the very heart of what it means to be an elder or deacon in Christ's church. We see that in the opening essays. The first essay written by William Shishko, "Training Church Officers," intends to get the local church to rethink office bearer training. The church needs to start early by finding, training, and engaging suitable men well before their election and ordination to office. Shishko's organic approach to office bearer training is something that local church councils could think about, and consider whether to implement something along these lines.

In the second essay, by Jeff DeBoer, "Practicing the Mission of the Church: Apostolicity in Action," the need is expressed to train and evaluate men to be elders and deacons to be examples and leaders in having an intentional missional church. DeBoer makes the sobering point that a church that fails to seek the lost is opposed to her Saviour: "As God withdraws his blessing from that church it will become stale, self-congratulatory, and eventually irrelevant. The youth will leave first and their parents will follow." This ties in closely with chapter 3 by William Boekestein, "Positive Leadership: Leading Like Jesus (Not Rehoboam)," where he calls for positive, warm, cheerful leadership in the congregation. Positive leaders are driven by faith, humility,



Faithful and Fruitful:
Essays for Elders and Deacons

Edited by William Boekestein
and Steven Swets

Reformed Fellowship, 2019
306 pages; paperback US \$16.99

Purchase online at reformedfellowship.net
email: sales@reformedfellowship.net
or your local Christian Bookstore

and forethought that encourage and inspire the congregation. Two chapters later Boekestein has another chapter, "Elders and Deacons as Hospitality Leaders." He makes the point that inhospitable leaders will lead to an inhospitable church. These two essays along with many others in this book make clear that a church that is not positive and welcoming, following the example of Jesus Christ himself, will neither attract strangers nor maintain a living, joyful communion of saints. At the end of the book in Appendix B there is a proposal for "The Role of Guest Sponsors in Churches." You must sense at this point that these chapters are a must read.

Between these two chapters by Boekestein is one by Daniel R. Hyde, "Continuing in Prayer." Office bearers need to be men of prayer. It is the only way for God to be in the midst of the church, and for Jesus Christ to be ruling in the church and in people's homes. Hyde's point is echoed throughout the entire book. It is something that you will deeply appreciate: the church will flourish under their shepherds when they are men of continuing prayer and men who keep in step with the Holy Spirit.

An interesting essay by Andrea Ferrari deals with "Avoiding Burnout." He is talking about pastors, elders, and deacons. Ferrari makes the provocative statement, "When it comes to the problem of ministry burnout, the problem is profoundly spiritual in nature. The culprit is the power, deceit, and prevalence of indwelling sin." I am thankful that the editors added as a footnote to this, "There can be a number of different causes of burnout and exhausting, not all of which can be traced to spiritual backsliding." There are other essays in the book that also indicate burnout is not necessarily a matter of indwelling sin. Nevertheless, Ferrari makes good points. In our consumerist, performance-driven culture, office bearers may focus less on the fact that they are instruments of Christ and more on their performance and the recognition of that performance. It becomes a narcissistic preoccupation with one's reputation. That can lead to burnout and abandoning of a joyful, passionate serving of the flock of Jesus Christ.

Peter H. Holtvliwer has two essays that deal with the honourable provision, sabbaths and sabbaticals of pastors. This will be good for church councils to read and to reflect on as they consider not just the spiritual needs, but also the physical needs of their pastor.


Christopher J. Gordon has an excellent essay on "How to Evaluate Your Pastor." Gordon writes "If preaching is the primary means of grace through which God chooses to save people,

what are the consequences of mediocrity in preaching?" Gordon makes a good case for the necessity of pastor evaluation and gives lots of practical guidance on how to do it. At the end of the book in Appendix A, there is "A Sample Pastoral Review" that could be used or adapted for use in a local church.

Jonathan Landry Cruse has an essay on a topic that might catch a few office bearers by surprise, "What Every Elder Needs to Know about Congregational Singing." Cruse shows the importance of congregational singing, and the fact that as believers we have a lot to sing about. He makes the point, "The elder should be the model worshiper in the church." Don't worry, brother elders, you are not called for some virtuosic performance during congregational singing. Read the chapter and see what a blessing you can fulfill in this role.

The book closes with two excellent essays: R. Scott Clark on "Encouraging Lay Witnessing," and Michael G. Brown on "Promoting the Work of Missions." The call to witness to our neighbour can instill fear in our hearts. It's something like the fear of public speaking. But knowing that this is the work of the Holy Spirit, and that the victory has already been won by our Lord Jesus Christ, we have nothing to fear. These two chapters provide practical advice and inspire confidence.

I have only highlighted several chapters in this book. This is not to diminish the value of the other chapters. I appreciated and received benefit from all twenty chapters.

In Appendix C there are Study Questions for all twenty chapters. This seals the wonderful practicality of the book. I highly recommend that all office bearers own this book (in fact it is great for all believers), and that local councils go through the book chapter by chapter, also interacting with the questions. This will be a blessing to the office bearers, to the local congregation, and to our Lord Jesus Christ who gathers, defends, and preserves his church. 



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Classis Pacific West Contracta, held December 6, 2019, in Smithers, BC

CLASSIS PACIFIC WEST CONTRACTA was convened on December 6, 2019, in Smithers, BC, in order to deal with the request of Houston Canadian Reformed Church to approve Rev. Carl Van Dam's release in view of his accepting a call to the Carman East Canadian Reformed Church (see Article 9 of the Church Order). In addition to the two churches properly represented in person (the convening church of Smithers and the neighbouring church of Houston), at least one delegate from all the other churches of Classis was present via Zoom. All the credentials from the delegates were sent to the convening church in advance of the meeting and were examined by the delegates from Smithers.

Classis Contracta was declared constituted. Rev. James Slaa (Smithers) was appointed chairman and elder Richard Plug (Smithers) was appointed clerk.

Since all the supporting documents were in order, Classis approved the request of the church of Houston and prepared

a classical certificate of release for Rev. Van Dam. As further requested by Houston, Rev. James Visscher was appointed as counselor for Houston CanRC. Classis further granted Houston's request for pulpit supply one Sunday per month starting in January 2020.

In personal question period, Rev. Van Dam thanked the brothers for the great working atmosphere in Classis Pacific West. Rev. Slaa in turn thanked Rev. Van Dam for the work he did in Classis Pacific West for the past seven and a half years. Rev. Slaa also wished Houston CanRC the Lord's blessing in their upcoming vacancy.

The chairman ruled that censure Art. 34 of the C.O. was not necessary. The Acts were adopted. It was decided that the press release will be prepared by the officers of Classis.

Rev. Karlo Janssen (on Zoom) gave thanks in prayer and the chairman closed the meeting.

The drive into Smithers, BC



