

# Clarion



# What's Inside

**T**his issue is led with Rev. Matthew Van Luik's editorial, "Christ-Centred Preaching from all Scripture." His focus is the challenge and importance of finding the gospel message of Christ and salvation in every part of the Bible. Issue 9 also commemorates Ascension Day with the Treasures, New & Old meditation from Rev. Calvin Vanderlinde.

Another of our editors, Dr. Jason Van Vliet, has written an article in which he asks what we have gained spiritually during the troubles of the past year's pandemic. Certainly there have been some spiritual gains in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ! But there are tensions and a deficit in unity that are showing too. I pray that his article, "Listening Wisely," is as much a blessing to our readers as it was for me.

Issue 9 profiles each of the graduates of the 2021 class at CRTS. There is an article of encouragement from one of our sisters in Christ. We also include a letter to the editor, a book review, and a press release.

*Laura Veenendaal*

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# Clarion

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LEAD ARTICLE



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# Christ Centred

## Preaching from all Scripture

Christians believe that God speaks to us through the Bible, but there are parts of Scripture that present us with challenges to understanding God's message. For many the narrative stories in the Old Testament are a real challenge. What do these stories mean, and what is the message for me? What does God want me to learn from the story about David and Goliath? If we believe that the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ is central to understanding Scripture, how do the Old Testament stories teach us about Jesus?

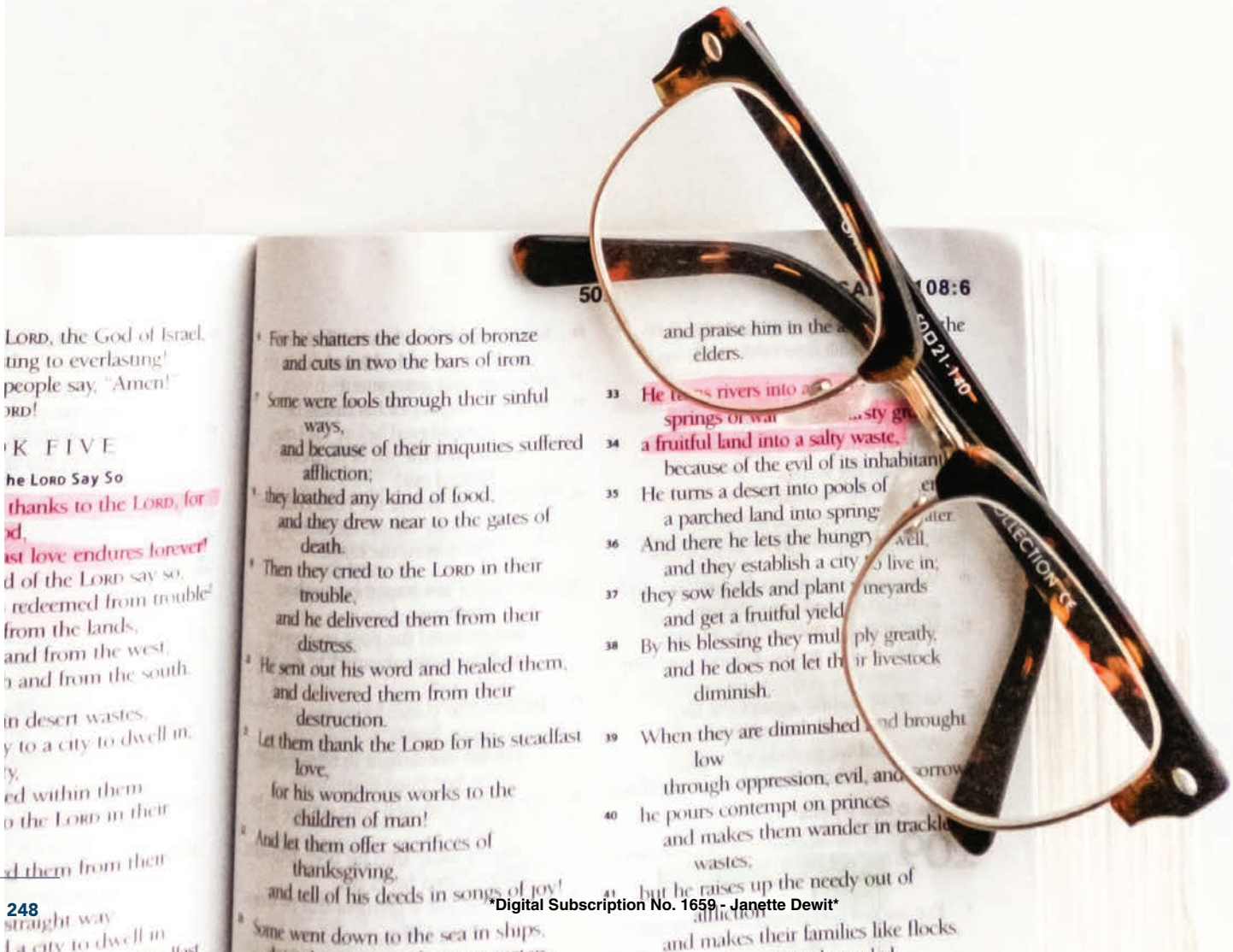


## Can Christ be preached from all of Scripture?

There is general agreement that Christ is the focus of the entire New Testament, for the gospels are about the life of Jesus and the letters of the apostles deal with his saving work. There is greater controversy in the Christian world around preaching Christ from the Old Testament. Dispensationalists argue that God deals with the Old Testament people differently than the people of the New Testament church, and therefore they do not see Christ in all of the Old Testament. Dispensationalism teaches that God's people in the New Testament must be distinguished from the people of Israel, the old covenant from the new covenant, circumcision from baptism. This explains why you may have felt frustrated when talking with a Baptist friend. They believe that you think God deals with the Old Testament people in the same way as his New Testament people. You, on the other hand, may feel they are not doing justice to the Old

Testament as the background for understanding God's work in the New Testament. The issue really is understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

Dispensationalists<sup>1</sup> do recognize that Christ is found in the Old Testament, but tend to limit the connections to Christ only to those texts where the New Testament clearly makes a connection to Christ. Clearly Melchizedek is directly connected to Christ in Hebrews 7 and Psalm 110 is quoted as a reference to Christ in Matthew 22:43f. One cannot deny that the Old Testament speaks about God's promise concerning the coming of the Saviour. It is a promise that has been kept and wonderfully fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ. Hence Paul writes, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Cor 1:20). He says that the promises God made to his people in the Old Testament are now fulfilled in the life of Christ. The Old Testament reveals how God is leading all the events in the life of his people to the coming of Christ.



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# The greatest challenge that faces a preacher every week is to faithfully preach Christ well, from the text

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## How is Christ to be preached from Scripture?

Even among those who are in agreement that all Old Testament preaching should be Christ-centred, there is much discussion on how that should be done. The greatest challenge that faces a preacher every week is to faithfully preach Christ well, from the text. A quote from Charles Spurgeon reflects the challenge for the preacher, "I have never yet found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it, and if I ever do find one that has not a road to Christ in it, I will make one; I will go over hedge and ditch but I would get at my Master, for the sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savor of Christ in it." Every preacher has wrestled to bring Christ into every message and has often resorted to making a road to Christ that was not relevant to the text.

To preach Christ is more than simply mentioning him in the sermon and making some tenuous connection to him. The

connection to Christ must flow properly from the passage. The preacher must naturally lead the congregation to a deeper connection with their Lord and Saviour. As well, the purpose of preaching is not to present the congregation with plenty of good information, but to help people grow in their relationship with Christ. The congregation needs to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd from the passage, a voice that cares for the flock, a voice that warns the flock of dangers and that brings joy and gives encouragement to all who listen in faith.

## Methods used for preaching Christ

Preachers have used different methods to make their preaching Christ-centred. A common method already used by some of the early church fathers was the use of allegory. It is one of the easiest ways to bring Christ into a text. In an allegory, some element in the story directly represents Jesus Christ or an aspect of his work.<sup>2</sup>

Other preachers will use a moralistic approach to the text. In the case of David and Goliath, David is like Christ, for he is a man after God's heart and we all need to be more like David, ready to stand up against the Goliaths in our life. There may be elements of truth in this approach. Who doesn't desire to be more like David, and who doesn't want to be more like Christ; after all, we are commanded to be imitators of Christ! And yet such a message is not a gospel (good news) message. What is the encouragement for the man or woman in the pew who wants to be like David but fails every day? Is spiritual progress in our life the result of working to be more like David? No, such an approach will only lead to greater failure and despair in the life of God's people.

## David and Goliath

So how does one legitimately preach Christ from the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17? The temptation is to approach the story with the question, "Where is Christ in this story?" The result is that we begin to look for direct connections to Jesus Christ. That is what the allegorical approach does. It asks, "What elements in the story represent Jesus Christ?" And so one may conclude that David represents Jesus Christ and Goliath represents Satan. You can understand the appeal to this approach for it does reflect the battle between Christ and Satan later in history. But it does not do justice to God's message in this passage.

# The preacher cannot leave the congregation there in the Old Testament story

## Understanding historical context

To preach Christ effectively one must first understand the story itself within its historical context. Only then is it possible to see this story in the larger context of Christ's work. The first question is not "Where is Christ in the story?" but "What is God doing here in relationship to his people?" So, what is the situation in Israel at this time? Goliath, who is a giant, is taunting the people of Israel, challenging them to fight him. The Philistines, as enemies of Israel, are emboldened because Goliath is fighting for them while King Saul and the people of Israel tremble in fear before him. When David comes to visit his brothers who are in the army and hears the taunts of Goliath, he immediately sees the situation correctly. He asks the crucial question, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

The key to living as a child of God is to see the world through the proper lens. King Saul and the people of Israel were looking at the situation through Goliath's lenses. They saw his might and power and trembled before him. David, through the lens of faith, looked at this situation from the perspective of God. "How does this man Goliath dare to defy the armies of the living God? Is Goliath crazy to think he can defeat the armies of God? Who does he think God is? Does he not know about the power

and might of Israel's God?" So David says to King Saul, "Don't lose heart on account of this Philistine, your servant will go and fight him." Is David crazy? Is he acting as one of those arrogant young people who do not see the risks of what they are doing? No, he speaks from faith, he believes that the living God is on the side of his people. No one can stand up to the living God, not even Goliath.

There is a spiritual battle taking place in this world, a battle for the hearts and minds of mankind. This spiritual battle is not new but has raged from the beginning (Gen 3:15). In Israel the powers of darkness have overcome the people of God, but God is never defeated. God raises up David, a shepherd boy in Israel, to deliver his people. His own brothers mock him. "Who does David think he is, go home!" they say. And yet God raises up that which is weak in the eyes of mankind to deliver his people. God is a God who fights for his people and gives them the victory even in what seems to be the face of defeat.

## Drawing connections to Christ

Just understanding the story begins to help us outline the gospel message. In this Old Testament story we already hear the good news of God's grace in which he delivers an undeserving people. So how do we draw the connection to Christ in this story? There are important elements in the story that reveal how God is working for the salvation of his people. God does not save a people who are strong in their faith and worthy of his salvation, but he raises up David to deliver a people who lost sight of the living God. Later Paul will say that Christ came to deliver us while we were yet enemies of God. God did not raise up a man who is mighty in stature in the eyes of Israel, but a shepherd boy who is scorned by his own brothers to deliver his people. Later, Jesus will come to this world, not in power and might and glory, but in weakness and dishonour. He is scorned and despised by his own people and yet he delivers them.

While there are similarities between David and Jesus, yet we must also have an eye for the differences. David is not the Christ. He is not able to defeat Goliath in his own power, but he does so only through faith in God. Jesus Christ is much greater than David, for although he comes with the appearance of weakness and dishonour, yet he defeats Satan and overcomes sin and evil through his own power. David's victory is only possible because of God's promise of the Saviour who will one day win the great victory over the powers of sin and darkness. David's victory foreshadows the great victory of his son, Jesus Christ.

## Moving from the Old Testament story to the present


Therefore, the preacher cannot leave the congregation there in the Old Testament story. Much has happened since the events in David's life. David trusted that the living God would protect his people and today the preacher is able to open up a much richer vista for God's people. We have one who is greater than David, we have Jesus Christ, who has won the great victory. And so the goal for the believer is not to become like David, it is not to be strong like David was strong. In fact David was only strong in the Lord, and so our strength is not found in ourselves, but today we only find our strength in the Lord Jesus.

What an encouragement for the man and woman in the pew. Are you struggling spiritually? Do you feel despair because you are unable to overcome sin in your life, or despair because you see the overwhelming might of the powers of darkness around you in this world? This is not a battle that you can win in your own strength. The people of Israel despaired because they felt that the power of Goliath was too great for them and they were lost. They had taken off the lens of faith and therefore lost hope.

David's strength was not that he was so powerful but, through the lens of faith God had given him, that he saw the power of the living God. And so, the encouragement for us is not to be

strong in ourselves, for then you will fail, but to see the world through the lens of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has won the victory. The victory is assured and therefore we may live with the firm hope that in Christ the great enemy will be destroyed. In Christ alone we have the courage to face the troubles in our life. We are never alone, for our Saviour lives and in him we have the assurance of the great victory.

## Conclusion

Moralistic preaching encourages God's people to be like David, to be strong and fight for the Lord. As David stood strong against Goliath, we need to stand strong against the spiritual powers of this world in our lives. Christ-centred preaching, on the other hand, reminds us that we are not strong, we are weak beggarly sinners who depend on the power and strength of Christ. David won the victory over Goliath through faith in the Lord his God and so today we can only win the victory over the spiritual forces of darkness through faith in Jesus Christ. We are in no way morally superior to anyone else, our only hope rests in the power of our Lord Jesus. By faith we learn to entrust our life to Christ, certain that he will protect us and give us the strength and perseverance to walk boldly and confidently in the ways of God. In Christ I have no need to fear, for in his power my life is eternally secure. 

<sup>1</sup>Dispensationalism divides the history of the Bible into different periods. Just to mention a few common divisions, Abraham ushered in the period of promise, Moses at Mt. Sinai the era of the law, and with Christ comes the era of grace. God administers his plan of salvation differently in each period, and each period reveals a progression in God's work so that each period is disconnected from one another. Therefore, Israel is considered to be clearly distinct from the church in the New Testament, for in the Old Testament God gives salvation to a nation while the Church is a gathering of individual believers. The Old Testament, therefore, is not really relevant for understanding the New Testament.

<sup>2</sup>In an allegorical approach one looks for elements in the text that can represent Jesus Christ. The scarlet cord in Rahab's window is often understood to represent the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that saves Rahab, or the man in the Song of Songs represents Jesus Christ and the woman, the New Testament church. In the story of David and Goliath, David represents Jesus Christ while Goliath represents the giants in our life. These giants may be our spiritual enemies, our fears, addiction or some other affliction.

If a preacher is faithful to Scripture, there is usually an element of truth in such preaching. Rahab indeed is saved by God on the basis of Christ's sacrifice in the future; the relationship between the man and woman in the Song of Songs does reflect to some degree the relationship between God and his people, between Christ and his church. David is indeed the one from whom the Christ will come, and Goliath represents the spiritual powers of darkness. The problem is not that the preacher is necessarily preaching a biblical fallacy, but that he is not preaching the meaning and purpose of the text. Unless Scripture itself gives a clear indication of what the elements in the story represent in an allegorical way, the preacher is simply using speculation to give each element in the story a meaning.



# A Glimpse of the Exalted Christ

*“And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.” (LUKE 24:50-53)*

One clue that the ascension is significant is the fact that this singular event is covered twice by the same author writing to the same person. Writers normally avoid this kind of repetition. But Luke, at the tail-end of his gospel and again at the outset of Acts, gives Theophilus two separate accounts of Christ's ascension. If that does not beg some questions, what will?

We do well, therefore, to understand the magnitude of this moment in world history. The risen Christ and his closest followers were not on some aimless expedition. Intentionality is implied when Luke tells us that Christ “led them out” to the vicinity of Bethany. Why there? We know that Bethany was the hometown of his good friends – Mary, Martha, and Lazarus – a place where Jesus had often enjoyed human hospitality, friendship, and conversation. It is to this place where he best expressed his humanity that he would also give the greatest witness to the glory of his divinity!


Here, in contrast to the resurrection which no human eyes were permitted to see, all the disciples were allowed to get a glimpse of the wonder, glory, and majesty of their exalted Lord as he departed for his heavenly kingdom. Humanity had never ascended to such heights before or since. Before their very own eyes, a human body ascended above the dignity of all other creatures, straight into the glorious presence of God, to take the highest position of rule and authority at the Father's right hand on heaven's holy throne.

The disciples could not see the full extent of this. Only the heavenly angels were able to witness the fullness of Christ's glorious entrance into heaven, his coronation, and the commencement of his reign. We can be sure the excitement of this heavenly scene would have been uncontainable.

Indeed, the excitement spilled over to earth, for Luke describes the disciples as having “great joy.” Only after two angels finally dislodge them from their spot staring into the

heavens do the disciples return to Jerusalem, where they do something Christ's followers had never done before. For the very first time they began worshipping their Lord whom they could not see.

Fathom that. They had just witnessed Jesus leave them, but there are no tears. Their hearts were not crushed; their spirits were not devastated or even dampened. Why not? Because they understood that he left for their advantage (John 16:7). They knew that though they could not see him, he could still see them. They knew that though they could not hear his voice, he could still hear theirs. For such reasons, it was good and appropriate for them, as it is for us, to lift their prayers and petitions and praises to him.

The disciples responded by blessing God. But even greater blessing comes their way! Instead of giving a final speech or writing a parting letter, the ascended Christ left his church with a glorious picture: the posture of hands uplifted in bestowing blessing. The message was clear: the great High Priest had rendered the perfect sacrifice for redemption and now his blessing extends to all his people throughout the world and will continue to rest upon them until he returns in the same exalted way. 

## For Further Study

1. Why did Christ's ascension fill his disciples with great joy? Is this true also for you?
2. Christ's ascension reveals he is Lord not just in name but also in nature. Give thought to what this means in a world that seems so dark and down, and in despair.



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# Listening

## Wisely in Troubled Times

**F**or more than a year now we have been dealing with COVID-related restrictions. These restrictions vary from province to province, and from country to country, but they have impacted our lives deeply. Some have struggled intensely with loneliness. Some have lost sleep over questions of conscience. Some are exhausted after exerting so much effort to keep peace in their families and congregations. Many have wrestled with all the above... and probably more.

We are living in troubled times. Even if the vaccine rollouts eventually reduce the number of COVID cases, they will not instantly take all our troubles away.

### **Gains and losses**

Spiritually speaking, though, what have we gained through this all? Our God teaches us that trials produce endurance,

steadfastness, character, and hope (Rom 5:3-5; James 1:3). So, after more than a year of these troubled times, have we grown “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18)?

On the one hand, I think we have. We have certainly learned not to take in-person, inside-a-church-building corporate worship for granted. From the pulpit I have seen tears of joy on the faces of brothers and sisters as they once again join in congregational singing, even with reduced capacity in the building; I have shed those tears myself. During lockdowns we have been prompted to do more “little things” for other people. Even an unexpected text message filled with Christian love does so much to brighten a dreary day. We have also found new opportunities for outreach. For example, for two Easters in a row my home congregation has handed out Easter lilies, resulting in

opportunities to build relationships with our neighbours and share the true meaning of our Lord's atoning work.

On the other hand, not all has been well. In troubled times we should pull together all the more tightly as the family of God, standing shoulder to shoulder and soul to soul in Christ-centred love, supporting each other and working on the challenges "in full accord and of one mind" (Phil 2:2). But this has not always happened. On top of everything else, we are suffering from a unity deficit right now. Let us be honest, differences of understanding as to how we should respond to government directives concerning COVID have caused no small amount of tension among us.

What does our Lord call us to do in these tense and troubled times? One good place to start is by *listening wisely* to our God, to each other, and to all the COVID-related information that floods into our ears from different (social) media sources.

## Listening wisely begins with reverence

Recently, I was reading the end of Proverbs 1: "Whoever *listens* to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster" (v. 33). After more than a year of hearing news reports filled with dread of disaster and of experiencing unease within our church community, these familiar words spoke with fresh meaning.

More specifically, who is this "me" to whom we should listen, that we might dwell secure? Our first reaction may be that it is our God; ultimately, of course, that is true. To be precise, though, here in Proverbs 1 it is *wisdom* who is crying aloud in the street, beckoning us to incline our ears and open our hearts to her message (Prov 1:20-27). Not surprisingly, then, listening wisely starts with listening to wisdom – not worldly wisdom but divine, spiritual wisdom (1 Cor 2). But what is the central point of wisdom's instruction?

The beginning of wisdom, as we know, is a deep-seated reverence, or fear, of our LORD (Prov 1:7). We do not fear the world nor the future, instead, we revere our God. This reverence extends not only to who he is but also to what he does, including his gracious work of knitting us together as members of the church, the precious body of his much-beloved Son, Jesus Christ (Eph 1:22, 23). At all times, also troubled times, we exist 24/7 as members of Christ's own body. Therefore (and it is a big "therefore"), all our discussions, debates, and disagreements, yes, every single syllable of our communication with each other concerning COVID, is uttered *within* the holy, blood-purchased, and Spirit-renewed

body of our faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ. That is an awe-inspiring truth to confess with heart, mouth, and action.

Let us make this concrete. Suppose one brother hears another brother talking about government restrictions, or masks, or consistory decisions. The more he hears, the more he disagrees. Like steam building up pressure in a kettle, the urge rises inside him to say, "*That* is wrong ... or incomplete ... or so short-sighted!" Sooner rather than later, urge gives way to utterance, and the second brother verbalizes his objection.

As such, the objection may be correct. But especially in stressful times when emotions are frayed, we need to be even more diligent that we do not skip a step. Even if *that* is wrong, our first priority is recognizing *who* made the mistake or *who* expressed an incomplete view. This *who* is not just a holder of a position that is different than mine. Within the church, this *who* is an adopted child of God, just as weak and sinful as I am and just as blood-redeemed and Spirit-renewed as I am. Moreover, *recognizing* God's work in my spiritual sibling's life should lead to *deeply heartfelt respect* for our Lord's grace to both of us, and that, in turn, will lead to a *significant transformation* of how I say what I feel I need to say. Venting disagreement gives way to edifying correction.

**Communal reflection point:** *Have we focused too much on what others are saying at the expense of cherishing who they are in Christ? If so, how can we begin to tip the balance back in the right direction?*

## Listening to other members

Taking this further, consider how the apostle Paul describes the church in 1 Corinthians 12. By divine design, there are *different* members in the body: ears *and* eyes, more presentable parts *and* less presentable parts. Normally, we apply this to talents. One member is good at meticulous administration while the other is better at compassionate caring (see also Rom 12:3-8).

But there is more to it than that. Different members also have a different sense of things. With our physical bodies, that is literally true. The eyes pick up on things that the ears would simply never sense, and vice-versa. It is similar within the body of Christ, the church. The fact that one sister in the church sees the matter of wearing masks in a different way than another sister does not necessarily, from the start to finish, have to be a bad or sinful thing. One sister, like an eye, may be picking up

on certain aspects of masking wearing than the other sister, like an ear, is not seeing at that moment.

What becomes sinful and divisive, though, is when ears and eyes stop, or never even start, listening to each other thoroughly, patiently, respectfully, and lovingly, all the while leaning on each other's respective strengths to gain the most Scripture-based, well-rounded, and wisdom-infused approach to the topic at hand. In this respect, it is striking that the apostle says that God has so designed and arranged the different members of the church so that "there may be *no* division in the body but that the members may have *the same care* for one another."

***Communal reflection point: Have we let a virus, and our government's reaction to this virus, cause us to care about each other less and divide among ourselves more? If so, that would be the very opposite of our God's design for the body of Christ.***

## Listening to reproof

Turning back to the book of Proverbs, some searching with a concordance reveals another buried gem. More than once the Holy Spirit teaches us that listening to advice, and especially reproof, is the path to becoming wiser. Here are a few examples:

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice" (12:15).

"A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke" (13:1).

"The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise" (15:31).

And finally, and most poetically,

"Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear" (25:12).

Three things keep appearing together: wisdom, listening, and reproof.

Particularly when we are under stress our natural inclination is either to nurse our frustration in silence or to vent our spleen into the nearest set of ears. We either talk too little or talk too much, but we often forget to listen enough. Our Lord directs us otherwise. In troubled times, we first need to listen wisely to each other. Quickly observing their actions or hearing their position and then jumping to conclusions is not enough. We need to listen to each other and ask the right questions until we also understand the *intentions and motivations* in their hearts. What is the cry of their soul? What do they really want to say,

even if it is coming out with too much strong rhetoric or too much one-sided argumentation?

Listening wisely is hard enough, let alone when someone else corrects us. We tend to take reproofs as personal indictments. If someone says, "Your position is, at best, incomplete, or, at worst, totally wrong," then we are eager to pull the reactionary trigger and shoot back, "Well, what about your position? Look at this, that, and that. Your position is anything but perfect as well!"

Significantly, our LORD teaches us to *listen* to reproofs. Take time and take pause. Let the reproof sink in. Is that other member of Christ's body sensing something that I'm not picking up on? Am I the ear that needs to gain fuller insight from the eye, which God has placed in his Son's church? Let us all be quick to hear and slow to speak ... especially in the fast-paced exchanges of social media and text messaging.

***Communal reflection point: Have we listened wisely and deeply enough to each other to really understand where the other is coming from?***

## Listening wisely to media

So far, we have considered how we should listen to each other within the church. But what about the information we take in about COVID from the media? Every (social) media source has a bias. Unbiased media is almost an oxymoron.

The bigger question, though, is *what kind of bias* does a media source have? On the political spectrum, it might be more right-leaning or left-leaning, but almost all the major media outlets have a decidedly *secular* bias. They simply do not write their articles and posts with the underpinnings of a biblical worldview and with the assured trust that our sovereign God will take care of his creation and his church until the new creation appears. This is nothing new. The church has been living with secular media for centuries. The pressing question, though, is this: how can we best work together to discern what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable (Phil 4:8)?

Both within and beyond the church, the proverb holds true, "The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him" (Prov 18:17). There are important "cases" that need further attention. Different media sources provide very different perspectives on how severe the COVID pandemic is in comparison to other pandemics and diseases. Different media sources give conflicting information on how

effective or ineffective public health measures such as physical distancing and masking are. The list of “cases” could be expanded.

What shall we do? Is there any way to judge the cases fairly, wisely, comprehensively, even if still imperfectly? Or do we throw up our hands in the air and declare, along with Pilate, “What is truth?” Better said, what is our LORD calling us to do? One thing is sure. We will need each other. The task is too big for one person or one perspective.

Wisdom is calling out, also in the streets of Jerusalem. She calls us to listen to each other, willingly, wisely, and lovingly. She calls us to *combine* our respective insights and hone each other’s understanding. She calls us to be so deeply respectful

of the Lord’s work in redeeming his church out of darkness that we stand shoulder to shoulder and soul to soul, helping each other discern the times and fulfill our God’s commandments.

**Communal reflection point: Wisdom is calling. Are we willing and ready to heed her call?** 



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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### To the Editor,

We hope it is acceptable to question the premise of the article written by Rev. M. Van Luik titled, “Led by the Spirit and Not Under the Law.”

Had Paul not been converted from Judaism by the risen Saviour himself and come to understand rightly that all the Old Testament laws pointed to Christ, as pointed out in his sermon on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27)? Was he not challenging Peter and the new Christian church to understand that since the inception of the ceremonial law it had always been understood that this was a covenant which was rudimentary, a foreshadowing, a tutor, and was passing away to become obsolete (Heb 8:13)?

This old covenant was to be replaced by the new covenant, no longer in the blood of bulls and goats, but was to be confirmed by Christ’s death and the shedding of his blood. It was to be confirmed as the new and eternal covenant, the covenant of grace, the covenant “in my blood.”

Had Jesus not warned of these Pharisees that they had not circumcised the foreskin of their heart as it says in Romans 2:29 “No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written

code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God.” He warned in Matthew 23:3, “So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.”

Our Catechism asks in Q&A 115, “If we cannot keep the commandments, why do we have them preached so strictly?” Is it not to rightly know ourselves and lead us to seek Christ?

Is not the standard of God’s moral law unequivocally grounded and fixed in the unwavering and impeccably holy character of the I AM, Israel’s God? Rather than simply wearing phylacteries on their foreheads and hand, God’s chosen were told in Hebrews 8:10: “This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Is the gospel not only that we have been forgiven all our sins by his blood, but also that we will be sanctified, made holy and conformed to his image through the power of his blood? We just question if it wise to appear to pit the law against the gospel.

Sincerely,  
*Kevin and Christian VanderZyl*



# Graduating Class of 2021 at CRTS

**H**ere at CRTS the academic year is racing toward the finish line at the end of April. This year we anticipate having five graduates: four from our MDiv program and one from our BTh program. We pray that the Lord will bless each of them as they prepare for the future that he has in store for them.

Here is a brief overview of their plans. One of the MDiv students, Ruurd Offringa, has asked to be examined by Classis at the beginning of June to become eligible for calls from the churches. One

MDiv student, Timothy Veenstra, is taking an opportunity to do a six-month internship before going to Classis, and another student, Kevin Star, is looking for a similar opportunity. Raoul Kingma has prayerfully decided not to enter pastoral ministry at this present time. Kim Lapiz, who is finishing up the BTh program, will continue his ministry in the Philippines. But who better to explain all the details than these men themselves? On the following pages, you can read a series of profiles written by our graduating students. We hope you enjoy them!



## Raoul Kingma

Hello everyone! My name is Raoul Kingma, and this is my wife Sara and our sons, Rory, Matthias, and Owen.

I was born and raised in the Niagara Peninsula in rural southern Ontario, spending my childhood romping through the forests and fields near our house. My dad was a butcher, and I spent many summers working in his shop, as did both my younger brothers. After high school, I went to university to become a mechanical engineer and later moved to British Columbia to finish my engineering education. During that time, I met Sara at Stepping Stones Bible Camp and was rather enamored. Because she lived in Alberta, that kicked off two years of us travelling between the Fraser Valley and the Edmonton area before we were married in 2012.

After I finished studying, I began work as an engineer in the Vancouver area and continued that for five years. As I transitioned into the workforce, however, I had developed a love for theology and a dear couple in our congregation suggested that I consider pastoral ministry. Over the next couple of years, I studied Greek, Hebrew, and Latin and we moved with our two boys in 2017 to Hamilton to attend CRTS.

Our time at seminary has been a rich blessing and time of immense growth, intellectually and spiritually. Being busy with God's Word has worked it into my heart more deeply than ever. My love for the heritage of the Reformation has deepened. And my classmates and professors have sharpened me in more ways than I can count. Moreover, through summer internships, I was blessed to learn from the experience of several pastors – Rev. J. Louwerse in Hamilton, Rev. E. Watkins of Covenant OPC in Florida, and most recently from Rev. D. Wynia in Lincoln. As a family, we welcomed a third son in 2020, and have experienced the love and support of the communion of saints throughout our four years.

Yet this growth did not come painlessly. That was true on a broad level – seminary life, like everything else, was thrown for a loop because of the COVID-19 pandemic. But it was true on a personal level as well. As seminary progressed, I began to increasingly sense that the Lord was not leading my heart toward pastoral ministry, at least not at present. And so, after much reflection and prayer, I made the difficult decision not to go before Classis after I finish. I hope and desire to use my training in other ways for the glory of God's kingdom, although exactly what that will entail is not yet clear. That comes with its own challenges, but we rest in God's providence as we look to the future, for although his providence may be inscrutable, it is always good.



## Kim Lapiz

Hi, I am Kim Javier Lapiz from the Philippines. Although we have many international students in CRTS, I am the first Filipino. In saying this, I also hope that I am not the last. Interestingly, my journey for ministerial training is unique but not unusual. This is to say that I am a recipient of the on-going reformation in my home church.

Initially, I had no idea that I would play a major role in this endeavour. So, my path towards ministerial function is better understood through how our church was converted into Reformed faith. Therefore, I will be sharing not only my story but our journey as a church. I grew up

in an Evangelical-turned-Pentecostal church. This is the only upbringing I knew until early 2000. "Reformed" is not even in the vocabulary among Filipino Christian churches. This may sound like a strong statement to you, but this was the reality of how we thought in the association of churches in which I grew up.

The Philippines is a Roman Catholic territory; the remaining twenty percent belongs to other religions. One hundred years ago, the first group of American missionaries came bringing Evangelicalism. It took a long time for Reformed churches to have an interest in coming to the Philippines. When it was introduced to us, we thought it was a brand new form of Christianity. By then, we learned the TULIP and five solas. A few of us decided to separate in order to form a new group and to share our newly found faith. This was a challenge for us, since there was no local model church. We were longing that more Reformed people would come with increasing frequency. However, it was a slow journey, but God meant it for good for us. Amazingly, over the years, even though we only have a little to teach, more churches started to associate with us. We are seeing a version of the reformation period in the Philippines.

It was also during those years that God is molding me. At first, I only wanted to be a person in the pew. Little did I know, I was slowly directed into the path of preaching the gospel on the pulpit. God called me into the ministry five years ago. I knew I was not fully equipped, but it happened. Many of the ministers around me said that I will pick up more learning along the way. I agreed because I knew that this enterprise is of God. Sure enough, out of nowhere at that time, early in 2013, Providence (Hamilton) formed TAP (Theological Assistance for the Philippines). They visited the Philippines and in 2017 Joe Bontekoe and John Langendoen told me what seems impossible. For me, it was an unimaginable possibility to get training at CRTS. Thinking about how tedious the process might be, it would have been natural to hesitate. Thankfully, many prayed and encouraged me to continue. Sadly, three times I was denied a student visa. I wanted to give up, but then the Immigration Office emailed me that they were reopening my case and eventually he granted me the necessary visa. This, then, was also a guarantee that the work happening in our home churches would increase in knowledge.

I am grateful and privileged to receive training in CRTS. This is where I see how dedicated the professors are in preparing men for the ministry. I am also impressed with my fellow students' discipline to study. My family name "Lapiz" is the Cebuano translation

for a pencil. It is then appropriate to say that my three years at CRTS have "sharpened me" to preach the pure gospel message for God's people. Therefore, what remains ahead for me is to find comfort from Paul to the Philippians, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6).



## Ruurd Offringa

Hello! My name is Ruurd Offringa and I'm married to a wonderful woman named Tara. We have been blessed with two children, Daniel (2) and Anna (1), and are looking forward to receiving another child from the Lord's hands in September.

The four short years of our marriage have been a whirlwind of changes. We married in November 2016, making wedding plans and immigration plans at the same time. In August 2017 I left behind my enjoyable job as a teacher, and we said goodbye to Australia and said hello to Canada. Shortly after seminary life began, our family started to grow. Daniel was born in May (a bit earlier than expected), followed by Anna fifteen months later. At the same time, I was spoiled to be a full-time student again, leaving the teaching to others.

The (almost) four years at seminary have been a busy four years, doing more reading and writing than I have ever done before. At the same time, it has been a blessed time as I have



been introduced to a wealth of knowledge and experience. Besides all the knowledge and experience that the professors have ably passed on, I have been blessed to learn from other ministers as well. Included in this are the three internships, spending two weeks with Rev. R. Vermeulen at Trinity CanRC, two weeks with Rev. P. Aasman at Streetlight, and ten weeks with Rev. K. Janssen at Willoughby Heights CanRC. The knowledge and experience these men have passed down has been a great blessing from God.

I was born in The Netherlands and moved to Canada when I was four. I grew up on dairy farms in Manitoba, with a brief stint back in The Netherlands. It was during these years in Manitoba when I first felt the desire to go into the ministry. When I was seventeen, my family moved to New Zealand, where I did a business degree, not really believing that God could indeed be calling me to the ministry. During this time I also became a NZ citizen. We then moved to Australia, where I taught part-time at John Calvin Christian College for about ten years. As I still felt the desire to study for the ministry, I also started studying the languages at this time. It was in Australia that I met my wife, Tara. Tara grew up in Australia and enjoys being a mom, cooking, and crocheting. Daniel is our oldest, a quieter boy who loves books and playing with shovels outside. Anna is our lively, outgoing girl who loves being around people.

Although we are enjoying our time in Hamilton, we are also looking forward to what God has in store for us in the years to come. I have asked to be examined by Classis in June to become eligible for call. Beyond that, the future is unknown. We do not even know which country we'll be living in next year, yet we know that wherever the Lord leads us we will be joyfully serving him. Soli Deo Gloria.

## Kevin Star

Greetings! My name is Kevin Star, and I am a fourth-year student at CRTS.

Allow me to begin this introduction by addressing the elephant in the room: yes, my last name is Star. Not Staar or Starr or even VanderStar. And yet, I can sing the Genevan tunes with gusto and make homemade croquettes with a passion. *How can this be?* Legend has it that a wayfaring British sailor once made his way to the fair shores of The Netherlands and, won over by the stamppot and stroopwafels, decided to make his home there. Generations later, his descendants would immigrate to British Columbia, and that's where my part of the story begins.

I grew up in the city of Surrey, BC, attending William of Orange and Credo Christian schools. As part of my post secondary studies, I attended the University of the Fraser Valley and the University of British Columbia. During most of my teenage years I worked in the fields of Two EEs farm. Planting literal vegetable seeds inspired me to pursue planting seeds of a more metaphorical kind and, in the summer of 2017, I packed up my trusty red Mazda and journeyed through the real mountains for "The Mountain," as they call the escarpment here in Hamilton.

Over the course of my studies, I have been able to participate in three internships (and somehow inherited a cat). I did my orientation with Rev. De Jong and Rev. Jagersma in the Blessings congregation. My mission internship was spent with various ministers in the ERQ churches of Quebec. Although my French remains limited to four or five critical phrases, this experience opened my eyes to the immense need for the gospel in an increasingly secular and hostile culture. In the summer of 2020, I spent ten weeks in Dunnville, Ontario, working under the guidance of Rev. John VanWoudenberg. During the summer I was once again reminded of the priceless value of the gospel of Jesus Christ – what a comfort and joy this gospel provides us in both "fruitful and barren years"!

My time at CRTS has been a pleasure and I am grateful for the friends, professors, and fellow students I've come to know along the way. I am also thankful for the support of the churches, and above all else the care of our Almighty and Loving Heavenly Father. Now, the Lord willing, I am looking ahead, with no small amount of trepidation and prayer, to whatever the Lord has in store for me. May it all be to his glory alone.







## Tim Veenstra

Hi, I'm Tim Veenstra. This is my wife Kristen and our one-and-a-half-year-old son, Ezra.

While it feels like most of my peers are from far-away places, I grew up right here in Hamilton, ON, not far from CRTS. For the first two decades of my life, I lived with my family of six above my parents' fish and chips store. I am deeply grateful for my wonderful, godly father and mother who worked hard so that I might be blessed with a wonderful Christian education, first at Timothy Christian School and then at Guido de Brès Christian Highschool. After high school, I enrolled at McMaster University, where I majored in philosophy, while dedicating my electives to learning Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.


By God's grace, during my high school years, I had the pleasure of meeting and falling in love with Kristen, the wonderful woman who is now my wife. She is kind-hearted, an incredible mother, and my treasured friend. We both often reflect on, and thank the Lord for, the way that he has led us – even carried us – through our lives thus far. Through the good and the bad, the Lord has taught us to have a firm confidence in him. He has shown us time and again that his words are true: the LORD is good, and there is nothing that can separate us from his love.

I have been told that I started proudly proclaiming my desire to enter into the ministry around the age of four. During my

teenage years that feeling waxed and waned at times, but overall, as my knowledge of who God is and what he has done to save sinners grew, so did my desire to enter the ministry in order to proclaim this good news far and wide. Of course, if this is the desire that God lays on your heart, then there is no better place to go than seminary.

Starting at the seminary was a fairly nerve-racking experience – it is a lot of work! – but it has been a huge blessing for both me and Kristen over these past four years. We are thankful for all that we experienced during my time in seminary, but especially the internships that I was a part of with Rev. Tony Roukema at Ebenezer CanRC in Burlington, Rev. Richard Bultje at River of Life URC in Niagara Falls, and Rev. Matthew Van Luik at Grace CanRC in Brampton. I am also grateful for the time that I could spend teaching catechism at Redemption CanRC in Flamborough. Through this time in seminary, by God's grace, my wife and I learned so much about our Saviour and our God. And, of course, the more he opened our hearts to know him, the more he brought us to love and adore him and his perfect Word.

I am so thankful for my time at CRTS. In particular, I am grateful for the wonderful, godly men and women who work and teach at the seminary. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to learn from them and to look to them so that I might, God helping me, learn to imitate them as they imitate Christ. I am also incredibly thankful for the support of the churches. Thank you for all of your encouragement, support, and prayers!

It is bittersweet that my time at the seminary is coming to an end, but Kristen and I are excited that we have been asked to do a six-month internship with our own congregation, Mercy CanRC, while Pastor Ian Wildeboer is on sabbatical. We are looking forward to that experience and to everything else that God has in store. True to his nature, he has been faithful, loving, patient, merciful and gracious through it all, and we know that he will not stop now. May he use our ransomed lives in any way that he should choose, so that our every moment and our every breath might bring glory to his great name. 



## Jason Van Vliet

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# Mutual Encouragement in the Church *Titus 2*

**R**ecently we were once again joyfully permitted to attend worship services, though with many regulations in place. Thanks be to God! Although livestreaming is a Godsend, it is not the same as physically gathering to worship. I have been a church-goer for over seventy years, and have never experienced such a difficult time in regards to church life, and life in general, as the years 2020-21. I suppose I, as well as many other people, thought nothing would or could ever change. Surely we were living in the most blessed time in

history! We were healthy and wealthy, and enjoyed such peace in our country and world, never before surpassed in length and quality! But suddenly in 2020 the world changed.

The point of this is not to discuss what we lost, or conspiracy theories, vaccines, or whether the government overreached into our lives. Because although it seemed like we all lost much in the past year, we also gained. Families were forced to isolate together and become reacquainted with each other. Many parents say that although school at home was difficult, they enjoyed

reconnecting with their children, talking, playing games, and exercising together. Hopefully it was a time when children and teens were encouraged to put away their devices and relearn how to fellowship with siblings once again.

We certainly realized that during the forced isolation that the world has drastically changed. People are no longer polite to one another in public, and anger and frustration and agitation is commonplace. The pandemic caused a fundamental change in how elections are held in the world, causing distressing upheavals and violence in many places.

At home, among church people, meetings were held virtually, where men and women stayed home and met via Zoom or similar avenues, reducing travel time and fuel expenses. Consistory, council, committees, school boards, and study societies all stopped meeting physically. And churches and Christian schools did not disintegrate! In fact, some deaconries reported that they experienced an influx of donations in anticipation of layoffs and unemployment among church members.


But the one thing that was possibly lacking was fellowship among peers, and practical concern for those who might be suffering. Moms of small or teenaged children suddenly had their lives completely disrupted. Add to that difficult marriages and troubled children who acted out at home, and Mom is suddenly wondering about her sanity. Some dads, who had old habits of not helping moms much at home, or simply being a silent bystander, did not always change and step up to help their spouse. After all, they had never needed to step up before. Even in the church community, abuse was showing up. Some moms are at the ends of their ropes, wanting nothing more than to simply walk away. (These are general statements and not necessarily true in all communities.)

One Sunday as I recently sat three rows behind a young mother alone with her youngsters in the pew, I read despair on her face. Her husband was at home with the baby because the nursery was closed. After the service, I contacted her and asked if I could help in any way, but regulations restricted what I could do. As an elderly woman, I was unsure if I could actually handle one of her squirmy children beside me in the pew, but I knew I should offer anyway.

She was tearful and ashamed. Why was she ashamed? What expectations have we laid on our young wives/mothers, that they feel they need to perform flawlessly? Why had her husband not offered to have the second youngest stay home with him, so she could at least get something out of the service? Is it a weakness to admit you can't do it all? Have Facebook and Pinterest caused an inferiority complex among our young wives/mothers?

Another time a story came to me of a mother appealing to her pastor to help her in her difficulties of managing a difficult husband and several teens. She was told to go to a counsellor, that he was not best equipped to deal with her issues. The pastor probably did not realize that if her husband was difficult, she would not be able to see a counsellor, as their services come with a price-tag he would not be willing to pay. Or that possibly her husband would never allow her to get counselling as it may reflect on his reputation. It was a neat hand-off, if somewhat unhelpful. I am not saying that the pastor was wrong, however it was an appeal for help for which he possibly could have found another resolution.

These situations are more visible during a pandemic. The devil is going about like a roaring lion, seeking those he can devour. We as believers are not immune. We are in the end times, darkness is encircling us. However, we need not be afraid, God is still firmly in control and his plan for the world is unfolding. However, is it not now that we need to be vigorously supporting one another? Let us put away all distractions and make an effort towards our fellow believers; that young Mom or Dad, that lonely senior, or troubled teen. If we have the time, offer to mentor a youngster who is having trouble coping with his stresses and problems. Take him to McDonalds once a month and get him to talk to you. It doesn't take much, and the rewards are great.

Father God gave his Son Jesus Christ to redeem us from the darkness and sin. Let us reflect gratitude for that redemption, by loving our neighbour. Diligently practice the communion of saints, and he will use us to become a blessing to others. 

*A Sister in Christ*

## BOOK REVIEW

# gedenkbundel 70 JAAR

## Vrije Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Africa



### A memorial book

Last year, October 2020, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa celebrated and commemorated the seventieth anniversary of their federation of churches. October 8, 1950 was the official date of the institution of the *Vrije Gereformeerde Kerke* in Pretoria. For this momentous occasion a memorial book – *Gedenkbundel 70 Jaar Vrije Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Africa* – was published by two of its ministers, Dr. P. G. Boon and Dr. H. H. van Alten. At the occasion of the celebration, the Rev. Dr. H. H. van Alten delivered a festal address, *Feesrede*. He based his speech on the words (and context) found in Ezra 3:13. In analogy of this Scripture passage, he characterized the commemoration as an antiphonal song by young and old, a song for the generations. The elderly call upon the younger generation to study their church history and see that “the LORD has been good,” with the younger generation coming to a covenantal response, “his steadfast love and faithfulness endures from generation to generation.”




## Contents

In his *Voorword*, the Rev. Dr. P. G. Boon echoes the message of this celebratory address by introducing a book that contains both the joyful shouts over the blessings of the LORD mixed with the crying and tears shed over the sins and shortcomings of the people. This certainly summarizes the overall impression of this memorial book. The contents, however, work this out in great detail and with an impressive variety. The many and diverse contributions give the readers a true and living account of the heartbeat and energies of the members throughout these seventy years. The *Gedenkbundel* is organized in a wonderful and effective way of a decade-to-decade account, and each decade is reported on and reminisced about by members young and old. Each decade also includes a “chronicle” of events, informing the readers regarding the developments in the churches in the north (Pretoria-West, Pretoria Maranatha, and Johannesburg) and in the south (Cape Town, Belhar, Bethal). This well-structured book also includes clear and informative chapters about the history of reformed education, a history of missions in and by the FRCSA, and an overview of the ecumenical activities.

## An exemplary work

In a review like this only an overview can be given to whet the appetite of the readers. Although I have had the pleasure and privilege of visiting (Cape Town) and working among the churches (both Pretoria and Johannesburg congregations) as interim pastor – *leen predikant* – the reader of this memorial book does not need such special exposure. Anyone who is able to read

Dutch will be able very well to read, relish, and reflect on this compilation of stories, accounts, summaries, and conversations, written in Afrikaans, and become impressed and overwhelmed by the manifold blessings and mighty works of the LORD in his church gathering work in these sister churches of ours. There will be much that one can recognize in the history of our (sister) churches in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, yet there also is much that’s unique in this historic account. In my experience as interim pastor among all these sister churches I have read similar memorial books, as we have also seen them published by many an individual church here in Canada, yet I may say in honesty and appreciation that this publication exceeds them all in many, many ways!

What makes this *Gedenkbundel* so unique and excellent is not only the contents of stories, conversations, and accounts that are so well-written, it is especially the layout of the book. The wife of Dr. Boon, Jenny Boon, who is an accomplished artist, has applied all her artistic skills and talents to the lay-out and illustrations of this book. Hence it has become such a pleasant and attractive exercise and experience to read it and to leaf through it and study the pictures and impressions of a great variety of activities. Though a “page turner” usually applies to a novel or detective story, to me this book was a page turner for sure. 



**William den Hollander**, *Minister emeritus*  
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**To order** So, anyone who would like to order this *Gedenkbundel* can do so through me. Send an email to [denhollanderw@gmail.com](mailto:denhollanderw@gmail.com) within a month from the date of this issue of *Clarion* and I will order you a copy. The price will depend on the shipping and handling of the order in bulk from South Africa, which will be divided over the number of copies ordered (the price of the book is \$35.00, postage in Canada included).

## PRESS RELEASE

## Classis Alberta Taber, March 9, 2021 Convened via Zoom

On behalf of the convening church at Taber, Rev. Tyler Vandergaag opened by reading from 1 Peter 5 and requesting the singing of Psalm 72:1, 4 and led in prayer mentioning the following matters: vacant churches of Devon and Barrhead, who extended a call to Rev. Joel Vanderkooi which was declined, the call to Rev. Tyler Vandergaag from Guelph-Emmanuel, the Theological College in Hamilton, also in light of the health concerns of Dr. Ted. Van Raalte and the upcoming retirement of Dr. A. De Visser, as well as the current situation in our province. All those present are welcomed, including Br. Lloyd Van Eeden Petersman from the Trinity URC in Lethbridge.

The convening church examined the credentials and found them to be in good order. Classis was declared constituted and the suggested officers from the last classis took their place with Rev. J. Huijgen as chairman, Rev. G. Veurink as vice-chairman, and Rev. J. Van Spronsen as clerk.

After the agenda was adopted, reports were presented from standing committees and deputies. Barrhead requests pulpit supply monthly, Devon requests the same beginning in July. The chairman asked the questions from Article 44 (CO), with each church affirming that the ministry of the office bearers is

being continued and the decisions of the major assemblies are upheld. Two churches requested advice for assistance in the government of the church. A letter from the Classis Treasurer is received for information.

Appointed to convene the next classis was the church at Barrhead. The suggested date is June 8, 2021 with September 14, 2021 as the proposed alternate. The following officers are suggested: Rev. J. Van Spronsen as chairman, Rev. J. Huijgen as vice-chairman, and Rev. G. Veurink as clerk. Standing committees, classical deputies, and church visitors are also appointed.

On behalf of the Trinity URCNA in Lethbridge and Classis Western Canada, Br. Lloyd Van Eeden Petersman took the opportunity to address Classis. Rev. Van Spronsen spoke fitting words of response.

Personal question was made use of. The chairman observed that brotherly censure (CO Art 34) was not necessary. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved. The chairman requested the singing of Hymn 8 and closed in prayer.

*On behalf of Classis,*  
**Rev. Gerard Veurink**  
**Vice-chairman at the time**

# Clarion

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

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