

# Clarion



# What's Inside

Our issue leads with Dr. James Visscher's article, "Let the Word Speak!" In so many instances, churches and preachers are using God's text as the pretext of what men want to say. This editorial insists that preaching must be focused on God's Word – and that preachers and congregations alike must hear this message.

This issue also includes an article from Rev. Julius Van Spronsen, "A Demon-Possessed Man? You Decide." This will be the first of several articles bringing stories that the author experienced in his work in South America to our readers.

Issue 23 contains an article from Rev. Karlo Janssen regarding our contacts with churches in the Netherlands. There is a MERF newsletter, the Treasures, New & Old column, and a press release.

*Laura Veenendaal*

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# Clarion

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## EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

**Editor:** J. Visscher; **Copy Manager:** Laura Veenendaal

**Coeditors:** P.H. Holtvliwer, E. Kampen, J. Van Vliet, M. VanLuik

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### CLARION

8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert AB T8N 5J5

Email: [editor@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:editor@clarionmagazine.ca)

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LEAD ARTICLE



**James Visscher** *Minister emeritus*  
Canadian Reformed Church  
Langley, British Columbia  
[jvisscher@telus.net](mailto:jvisscher@telus.net)

# Let the Word Speak!

One of the things that I have been doing in my retirement years is leading preaching workshops for overseas students. This arose because I have been regularly visiting a certain very large country where I now have many friends and connections. In the process of teaching and mentoring them in the Reformed faith, it became obvious from their remarks that they needed help when it came to preaching the Word, and they asked me to assist them.

**N**ow, let me issue a word of disclaimer here. I was asked not because I am such a great preacher or have all the answers, but because in more than fifty years of preaching I have learned a few lessons and gained some modest insights. So, keeping in mind those reservations, I have tried to help my foreign friends.

What have I observed? What has been the major difficulty for these students and budding preachers? It has to do with a rather simple but perhaps not so obvious thing, which is sticking to the text. How hard it is for any number of preachers or would-be preachers to focus, concentrate, and explain the Bible in front of them on Sunday morning. Instead of leading the congregation



in expositing that part of God's Word, they are soon distracted and heading off in all sorts of different directions.

### An illustration

Let me give you a concrete illustration. Some years ago, I was in that large country mentioned above and my companion and I went to church on Sunday (it was in those days when a foreigner could still go to church there). Since my knowledge of the language used there is rather limited, I relied on his translation. That means that I had to sit there and listen respectfully while not really understanding much. Still, I sat there in the hope and expectation that my partner would soon convey to me the message that was preached. So, on this particular occasion I sat there and waited, and waited, and waited. The preacher went on and on for almost two hours. Not knowing exactly what he was saying, I noted his facial expressions, his gestures, and his posture. On the whole, it was a rather impressive outward display. If I was evaluating his presentation and style, I would have given him an "A" for delivery.

When the service was finally over, I commented to my companion that the man was a rather lively preacher and then asked about the sermon. My companion replied in one word, "Nonsense!" Apparently, the man had preached for two hours and had not once turned his attention to the text. Of course, he read it at the beginning of the service, but then he promptly forgot about it and spent hours giving the congregation a

boatload full of his own homespun wisdom and insights. My friend said, "What a waste of time! Stones for bread!"

Now, this is only one illustration, but it could easily be multiplied a hundred or thousandfold. In so many places, preachers are using the text as a pretext to say whatever they want. This world is infested with preachers who do not really preach the Word. They may read it and refer to a Bible text, but solid exposition is sadly lacking. In the end, their preaching is not really about God and what he reveals to his people in his Word, but about themselves and how they can talk for an hour or more and impress people with their oratory.

As a result of this disturbing trend, the first thing that I try to drum into my students is the fundamental need to open, explain, and apply the Bible text before them. It is about the text, the text, and, once more, the text! In other words, it is not about you, the preacher. It's not about your wife or your family or your experiences. It's about God! The people before you need to be fed spiritually by the living Word of God and you should not pretend as if your life or experiences are able to nourish them. Only God's Word, filled with God's Spirit, can do that.

### How then?

But, of course, that raises the question, "How? How does a preacher stick to the Word?" This involves a process, and that process calls for six things: reading the actual text frequently, carefully, contextually, believingly, pastorally, and prayerfully.



# Preachers are using the text as a pretext to say whatever they want

## Read it frequently

The first thing, then, is always the text, and nothing but the text. Read it frequently! I always urge my students to read it over, over, and over again. Read it slowly, read it fast. Read it and ask questions. Read it and reflect. The natural tendency is to read a passage several times and then proceed to breaking it down. After that one heads off to consult countless commentaries, many of which say the same thing. But not so fast! First, spend a lot of time with and in the text. Do not be in such a big hurry to move on.

Over the years I am at times left to wonder whether a particular preacher that I am listening to has really done this and familiarized himself with the text and identified its central message. He emphasizes this but overlooks that. He goes on and on about this aspect but totally ignores another. Or, he is preaching, but the results are muddled, and the hearers are left to wonder, "Where is he going? What is he saying? Just how much time did he spend with the text?" If the text is not clear to the preacher, it will not be clear to the hearers either. At bottom it usually means that he has neglected to read the text often and failed to come to grips with what it is really saying.

## Read it carefully

In addition to frequent reading, there is careful reading. What I mean by that is examining the words, sentences, and expressions found in the text. It has to do with determining whether one is dealing with a narrative, poetic, prophetic, or apocalyptic passage. It has to do with flow and structure, tense and syntax. At times I will also encourage my students to break down the text into a schematic diagram.

Since most of my foreign students are not familiar with the original biblical languages of Hebrew (OT) and Greek (NT), much less Aramaic (parts of Daniel), they are at a disadvantage here. Fortunately, we are in the computer age and that can help them a lot. In that regard, I envy modern students. During my student days in the late 1960s and 70s, we had to do things the hard and often time-consuming way of consulting

numerous dictionaries and grammars. Many a late night was spent with Brown-Driver-Briggs (Hebrew Dictionary), as well as with Arndt and Gingrich (Greek Dictionary), not to mention Gesenius (Hebrew grammar) and Burton (Greek grammar). Whereas today, a student finds the right computerized Bible program, runs his cursor over the word, and up pops the pertinent linguistic information relating to mood, tense, and all the rest. So, armed with a computer and a good Bible software program like Logos or Accordance, a student can go a long way. It may not make him a linguistic expert, but it will give him the tools needed to do some diligent and profitable digging in the text.

## Read it contextually

Another thing that should be mentioned has to do with reading in context. Every text in the Bible exists in a certain context, and the preacher needs to be aware of that. The first order of business when it comes to context is to determine who wrote this, when did he write this, where did he write this, and why did he write this. Of course, it will not always be possible to answer all those questions. Take the Psalms as an example. At times we are told the name of the human author of a particular book, and we can even identify the situation that led to what he wrote. At other times this is difficult, if not impossible. Still, as much as we can, we need to identify the setting of a text or passage. Only in that way will you do it justice and will you, in due time, be able to make a proper application for your audience.

## Read it believably

All of that brings us to another thing. How does one approach the Bible? Some people regard it as little more than a famous literary work. It's like Shakespeare, only more religious. Others regard it as a textbook that contains information that people need to know and master. And then there are those who treat it as a strawman, meaning that they think it their duty to attack it and expose what they deem, with their puny minds, to be its faults and shortcomings.

## This conviction must fill the preacher

Yet, none of that will do, and all of it will lead to nothing more than dead and lifeless preaching. Indeed, there is only one correct way to approach and treat the Bible, and that is as the living, infallible, error-free Word of God. In short, this is a book unlike any other. The Belgic Confession, Articles 2-7, is foundational here. At bottom this is not an anthology of human writings, but a unique revelation of the Triune God. It comes to us from the Father through the Spirit and brings us to the Son.

Hence where does the preacher begin and end? With a holy reverence for the Bible as the Word of God. With the realization that the Bible represents, as it were, God's living letters to his people. This is the awareness that must undergird his study of it. It is this conviction that must fill him. He can only "thus says the Lord" if he is certain that the Lord speaks to us even today through his Word.

### Read it pastorally

Still, for a sermon to really land, the preacher needs to keep another thing in mind. It has to do with what my old teacher, the Rev. Gilbert VanDooren, taught me. He was fond of saying that a minister has to have three ears. One for the text, one for the world, and one for the congregation. In other words, the preacher needs to take into account what the text is saying, what the world is thinking, and what the congregation is feeling.

So, preaching does not happen in a vacuum. It has to be directed to the congregation as the people of God and to what they are experiencing as they live their lives in this world. Preacher, do not forget their struggles, their burdens, their diseases, and their temptations. Make sure that your sermon lands in their lives and hearts.


### Read it prayerfully

We come finally to the last thing, and in some ways the best thing and the most necessary thing. One must call on the name of the Lord and ask him to open up its holy treasures to you. Prayer is a vital part of preaching preparation. Indeed, it is all prayer. Pray as you read. Pray as you exegete. Pray as you

prepare. Pray as you type. This whole process of sermon preparation needs to be coated in prayer! Without it, there is no light, no insight, no understanding, no conviction. So, I urge my students, "Pray your way through the entire sermonizing process. Pray and you will be given light. Pray and you will be blessed! Pray and your people will be blessed!"

Alas, being sinful people, we often neglect to do that. At times we approach the Bible and sermon preparation in much the same way as we would approach any other job that needs doing. We allow it to become routine. We work our way through an established set of procedures. It becomes all head work, and we neglect the heart. Yes, and then when the sermon falls flat, we are left to wonder and ask, "What happened? How come it was such a dud? Here I thought that I had an exegetical masterpiece on my hands, and it went nowhere – no comments, no feedback, nothing?" Well, any number of factors may be at play here, but most often it comes down to a lack of prayer and petition. We assume that we can do this in our own strength and based on our own insights and expertise.

At other times the reverse may happen. You are working on a difficult text, and it requires a lot of effort. It's like a nut that is hard to crack. You pray about it, work on it, wrestle with it, and the results still do not impress you. You have a sense that you failed to get a handle on the text. But Sunday is coming and there is no time to start over. Hence, with a heavy heart, you go on the pulpit and as you do so you pray, "Lord, I have done my best, but I feel in my heart of hearts that I have failed." You proceed to deliver it with hesitation. But then something happens. You come off the pulpit and countless people come to you to thank you for speaking so well to their hearts through this particular passage. So, what happened? The Holy Spirit happened! He heard your prayer, and he turned a dud into a diamond. It happens! Yes, it still happens, *but* without prayer.

In closing, this is a plea to preachers and congregations alike. Make sure that it is the Word of the living God that feeds your souls. 

## TREASURES NEW &amp; OLD :: MATTHEW 13:52

# Jesus Sighed Deeply

*“And he sighed deeply in his spirit” (MARK 8:12)*


**T**his is the only time in the New Testament that this word for “sigh” is used. Sighing is closely connected with groaning (which tends to be slightly more audible), and it communicates that a person finds his or her situation unpleasant and difficult to bear. When we let out an audible breath as a response to something we’ve heard or seen, it sends the message that we are saddened by what we are experiencing and perhaps weary of dealing with such a situation.

When we are weary of too many “dad jokes,” we often sigh. We sigh when we have to do or teach the same thing over and over again because the person or pet we’re addressing just doesn’t seem to get it. By sighing, we want the other person to know that we are getting tired of their ignorance or refusal to do things the best way. We sigh when the burden we have to bear goes beyond what we can silently endure. In Mark 8:12, we read that Jesus sighed deeply in his spirit.

Our Lord Jesus had just fed about four thousand people with only seven loaves and a few fish, and there were seven baskets full of broken pieces left over. Nevertheless, when some Pharisees came out to Jesus in the district of Dalmanutha, they were not amazed at all. They came in a confrontational mood to argue with him. In their estimation, the miracles were not enough proof that his ministry had God’s approval. Seeking to discredit him, they dared him to produce a sign from heaven to prove his authenticity. The Pharisees’ demand for a sign from heaven made it clear that they did not agree with the people who said he was a great prophet, much less with the disciples who confessed that he was the Christ (cf. Mark 8:27-29).

Our Lord Jesus sighed deeply in his spirit, because he knew that he was looking into the faces of men who were ashamed of him and his words, and who would be punished if they did not repent before the Son of man returned in glory (cf. Mark 8:38). Two times in his answer, Jesus refers to the Pharisees with

whom he is speaking as “this generation,” echoing the song that the Lord gave Moses to use as a witness against his people when they reject him (cf. Deut 31:19-22; 32:5, 20; cf. Mark 8:38). Their desire for signs from heaven as proof of Jesus’s authenticity blinded their eyes to the truth so that they did not believe. Jesus sighed deeply in his spirit because he was grieved to see people turning away from their only hope of salvation.

Jesus’s sigh reveals that, because of his love, the hardness of people’s hearts added to his suffering while he was on the earth. Jesus later cautioned his disciples to watch out, to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees (Mark 8:15). Jesus had not come to destroy the church’s enemies with force and mighty signs from heaven, but to save sinners by satisfying God’s justice through his suffering and death for us and in our place. Jesus sighed deeply in spirit, not just because of unbelief, but also to assure all those who follow him that they would never have to experience that same burden. We praise God that Jesus died for us. We praise God that Jesus sighed for us. “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). 

## For Further Study

1. Read Mark 8 to notice in how many ways Jesus was misunderstood in his ministry.
2. Read 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:15 and compare it with Mark 8:11-12.



**Julius VanSprosen** Minister  
Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church  
Edmonton, Alberta  
[julius.vansprosen@gmail.com](mailto:julius.vansprosen@gmail.com)





# Igreja Reformada

Cultos aos domingos  
Manhã: 09:00  
Noite: 18:00





# A Demon-Possessed Man?

# You Decide

## Some stories from South America

**A**fter a busy day of visiting and preaching, we were just sitting down for a late evening meal when the phone rang. The elder I was staying with answered the phone, spoke for a while, and then asked if I could join him to help a man who had just visited the Reformed church for the first time. His friend Luciano was possessed by a demon and had tried to throw himself into the well. Thankfully they had managed to stop him from killing himself. On our way to Luciano's house, I let the elder know that I'd never seen a person possessed by a demon before.

### **“The pastor has arrived”**

As I made my way into the little, sweltering bedroom at 10:00 that Sunday evening, I was taken aback to see a small crowd of children and teenagers, an elderly woman holding a two-foot cross in front of her, and a group of three younger women

holding hands and repeatedly muttering “Jesus.” I looked at the sweat-covered, well-built man in his late twenties who was lying peacefully on his bed in just his shorts. It was quiet in the room except for the rhythmic squeaking of the ceiling fan, and some hushed sounds of appreciation as the occupants of the room praised Jesus that a pastor had arrived. Before I could ask the elder what they were expecting of me, the man on the bed let out a deep growl, looked around with wild eyes, and tried to sit up. As he started to shout, the four men nearest to the bed quickly held down his arms and his legs, the Roman Catholic woman with the cross held it up and started shouting something back, and the three praying Pentecostal women maneuvered their way closer and started to trace little crosses on his exposed skin. When the wild man freed one arm from the restraining hold and started to sit up, several in his little audience screamed and pulled back. The man laughed and

## We felt compelled to pray that God might have mercy on this man

used his free arm to point around the room in a mocking way, telling everyone that they were pathetic. Then, as suddenly as he had sat up, he laid back down again and appeared to be sleeping.

The little crowd looked at me expectantly and laughed at my ridiculous question, “Has anyone called a doctor?” Since no one could be so naïve, they assumed I must be a very funny man. The problem was, I wasn’t joking. My mind was having trouble interpreting what was happening in that little room. Twice mocked. Twice pathetic.

### A tormented soul

I looked imploringly at the elder, who led me further into the room, through the parting crowd, until I was standing by the head of the sleeping man and the elder was standing by his legs. As I was trying to recall the NT passages that spoke of interactions with demon-possessed people, the man suddenly jumped up again and his minders instinctively reached down and pinned him back on his bed. My hand ended up being the one responsible for holding his sweaty forehead down. I won’t quickly forget how I pressed down harder as he growled and tried to bite me. His ringing laugh filled the room as he told us how much he enjoyed watching us bruise Luciano’s body, while he couldn’t feel a thing. The elder with me shouted and asked the man on the bed what his name was. Speaking quietly in response, the voice told us that his name was Alexander, and that he would tell us what he had made Luciano do when his wife wasn’t around, if we gave him a bit of whiskey. Hearing his reply, some of the teenagers began loudly urging Alexander to tell them what Luciano had done, the women started shouting Jesus’ name again, and the man held down on the bed started laughing and promised to kill us all in about fifteen days. I just wondered if the man had a split personality. The overwhelming

noise and my sweat-soaked clothes did not provide a good environment for my theological assessment of the situation. I was relieved when Luciano’s friend ordered everyone out of the room, except for the Reformed office bearers. The man on the bed stopped fighting against my hand that had still been pressed tightly against his sweaty forehead. The rhythmic squeaking of the ceiling fan could be heard again, and no one spoke for a while. I prayed silently for wisdom. I prayed that God might have mercy on this tormented person. The elder read passages of Scripture about the power of Jesus Christ who cast out demons with a word. I thought that, if this was a demon, it was powerless before my Saviour, and certainly earning his eternal punishment by the way he was tormenting this poor man.

Suddenly the man on the bed stirred again. Everyone tensed up, until we noticed he was crying this time. When we asked him his name, he said he was Luciano. He looked at us and begged us to help him. The elder told him that he needed to confess his sins, repent and believe in the Lord Jesus whom we had taught him about earlier in the day. Luciano got up, went to the bathroom, came back and sat on the floor with his back against the wall, weeping and crying with his head in his hands. However, just when we thought it was over, he looked up again with wild staring eyes and growled “not so fast.” Not wanting him to continue with his threats and foolish claims, I tried to take control of the conversation and asked him why he was here and when he had come. I guess I was still having trouble believing that this was a real demon, and I was looking for some clarity. Who knew, maybe someday I’d write an article about it. Still sitting on the floor, the voice told us that he had taken possession of Luciano while he was driving and listening to his heavy metal bands. He had come to kill Luciano so that he could use him for a long time afterwards. That’s when he jumped up and ran out the bedroom door and into the next room.

## When things returned back to normal

From inside the room, we heard the screams of the visitors who had filled most of the common living area. By the time we got into the kitchen, the crowd had stampeded out the front door and it was silent. The man who had called us to come and help went first. He walked slowly, we walked slowly behind him. He picked up a kitchen chair and held it out in front of him. We picked up kitchen chairs and held them in front of us. I wondered if I had missed the class in seminary when they taught us about this stuff. When we got to the small concrete covered space behind the house, Luciano was lying still on the ground. His friend checked his pulse. I checked my watch; it was 12:15 a.m. and I had to catch the 6:30 a.m. flight back to Recife to be in time for the Hebrew class I was scheduled to teach at 9:00 a.m. I was getting tired of this stubborn demon that we obviously could not convince to leave anytime soon. When I suggested we leave, the elder agreed, and, as we walked through the front door, he told some of the neighbourhood men to go to the backyard and make sure Luciano didn't hurt anyone. The crowd that followed them in were soon running out of the house again. The sounds of women screaming, wild growls, and teenagers laughing drifted down the street and grew silent as we drove away. Luciano must have woken up again – or was it Alexander? It was a lot for my tired mind to absorb in one night.

As you can imagine, I needed to debrief. The elder had seen something like this several times before, but in those times the tormented people had returned to normal when they prayed and read the Bible to them. The elder explained that the fact that they had managed to help was just another sign of the amazing mercy of God toward tormented souls, because God had never promised to deliver people who didn't worship him from the evil one. As we walked back into the elder's home, our hearts went out to Luciano as we remembered his distress and cries. We felt compelled to pray that God might have mercy on this man and free him from the clutches of the evil one so that he might cross over from death to life. I hardly slept that night. Was the man just really drunk or stoned? Was he psychopathic? Did he have a split-personality? Why was he going to wait fifteen days before killing us? What would a North American doctor have diagnosed him with, or prescribed for him? Wasn't it strange how well this man fit into the stereotype of demon-possessed men that I had formed in my mind over

the years? He certainly wasn't any more difficult to hold down than any other man his size and weight would be, so it wasn't like he had super strength. Was he just acting? 4:45 a.m. came quickly. When I sent a text before I boarded, the elder told me that the visitor who had invited us over had told him that the demon had left his friend Luciano shortly after we had gone home. I think that was when we were praying.

## Not as strange as you might think

As my friend drove me home from the airport, I peppered him with questions. He had seen several demon-possessed people and he had no doubt that the scene I described to him was just another example of a very common occurrence in his experience. He wasn't dissuaded from his conclusion to hear of the man's lack of physical strength, explaining that he had concluded that different "entities" manifest themselves in different ways. I noticed that he used the word "entity" instead of demon. When I was back in the seminary at 9:00 a.m., a lively discussion replaced the regular Hebrew lessons. I learned that two of the five students had never seen a demon-possessed person. Of the three students that had seen such cases, one student confessed that his own father was plagued with an "entity" that returned often to torment him. Was "entity" the politically correct, kind of neutral, term to refer to demons? The student explained that his father had the strength I had heard about and was able to cling to the 2 x 2 studs on the ceiling with his fingers and toes as he crawled from one side of the room to the other upside down and suspended. You can be certain that this student was not making this stuff up.

After a week of classes, I was needed in another city in Brazil, where I stayed with the pastor of a church that had recently become Reformed. The church we were working with was composed of many upper class and wealthy citizens of a very modern city that had been greatly influenced by "missionaries" of the Toronto Blessing (you may want to Google that). When I asked about his experience with demon-possessed people, the pastor explained that when they started up, his own church was also influenced by a hunger for physical manifestations of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The pastor believed that this particular background made many of the members of his church "easy prey," and before his church became Reformed, the Thursday evening Bible study night had been regularly interrupted by demon-possessed people. He was frustrated that instead of teaching the Scriptures, he ended up spending all his time driving out demons.



# Evil spirits and devils lie in wait to ruin the church


## What would you have done?

It was clear that if I wanted to be ready for the next time I was asked to drive out a demon, this was the pastor I needed to learn from. Being a practical man, I asked him to give me step-by-step instructions for driving out demons. He warned me that in his experience he thought that about ninety-five percent of the people were just pretending they had a demon because they wanted some special attention in the church or had some other psychological disorder. He said they were easy to “heal” because they played along with any remedy he chose that night, which was usually just a simple order to the demon to leave, followed by an appointment with his wife who was a medical doctor. I pressed him because, like you, I noticed that there were still five percent left. What did he do? He told me that he knew he really couldn’t do anything, and so he always prayed to the One who created the heavens and the earth. Slightly embarrassed, he said that after praying he would try and imitate the apostles and order the demons out in the name of Jesus. When that didn’t work, he would try having a conversation with them to learn their name and show them that they could not manipulate anyone to do what he wanted.

When the pastor fell silent, I asked what he would’ve done if he had been the man walking into the sweltering room with the squeaky, rhythmic fan? After listening to the story of what I had seen, he told me that it would be hard to know if the big-talking, mocking, life-threatening “Alexander” was a demon, or if Luciano was just a man tormented by guilt who was seeking some attention. In either case, he assured me that the best strategy in this case was to ignore them so they didn’t get what they want. It would explain why things improved once everybody went home to bed. The pastor ended his “Demonology 101” lesson by saying that he wouldn’t have gone to this house in the first place.

## Why this story matters

The pastor’s final words made me wonder why we had gone. Was it just for the excitement and the new experience? Had I made light of this spiritual warfare that we are in? It’s not good to be overly fascinated with the pathetic attempts of these depraved enemies of God, who are already sentenced to eternal damnation and daily expect their horrible torments. It’s also not good to pretend they don’t exist. Evil spirits and devils lie in wait like murderers to ruin the church and all its members and to destroy everything by their wicked devices (cf. Art 12, BC).

So, why did I write this article? As the title suggests, I wanted to give my North American readers a bit of an idea about some different aspects of life and culture in South America. I hope that this article will stimulate some further discussions about the reality of the spiritual warfare we are in (cf. Eph 6) and also help us to truly appreciate the blessings of being citizens of God’s heavenly kingdom with Jesus Christ our gracious Saviour as King. As we learn about some of the unique challenges that are faced by Christians in other places in the world, we also can pray fervently for one another. And, finally, I thought that this article might encourage the CRTS to add a course about how to properly hold a dining room chair as you pursue possibly demon-possessed men through dark kitchens. 



**Julius VanSprosen** Minister  
Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church  
Edmonton, Alberta  
[julius.vansprosen@gmail.com](mailto:julius.vansprosen@gmail.com)



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# METF News

Middle East Reformed Fellowship—"Declaring the Whole Counsel of God"

October 2021



## Serving in Pakistan



above: Pastor Emanuel Gill  
left: Ordaining ministers and elders  
below: Pakistan map



**P**astor Emmanuel Gill, a key leader in the congregations with which MERF partners in Pakistan asked the question. "What on earth are we here for, as God's people?" His biblical answer is simple – it is to bear witness to Christ by carrying out His "Great Commission." Yes, Scriptures from beginning to end give us this definitive answer. We are to bear witness to who God is, what He has done and what He continues to do. This comes to its fullness in Christ. In Him we know who God is and what He is like – Almighty Creator, Holy, Wise and Self-giving, Provider and Sovereign Savior. The Shorter Catechism puts it beautifully – we are "to glorify God and enjoy him forever." The gospel of God's grace in Christ transforms our lives – mind and

heart and gives us the priority of seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness. So we pray: *Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* The gospel is about a world and life view of divine reconciliation, peace, justice, holiness and self-giving love. Living and proclaiming this is not only our biblical duty, but also the message that our confused and troubled world desperately needs.

### They Need Christ

Pakistan represents the ongoing powerful tension among all Muslims in the 21st century. It is the tension between radically different viewpoints. The Pakistani Taliban and other Jihadist groups vehemently desire

to reclaim and enforce the beliefs and world and life view of 7th century Islam in Arabia. Others desire to make their religion palatable to the educated. They opt for varying degrees of modernized versions of Islam which reinterpret the Koran and Hadith (sayings attributed to Mohammad). Still, a growing number prefer a totally secular world and life view that is free from the imposition of any religious beliefs or practices. All three groups need Christ's saving grace. Romans 10, confronts us with the question: How can they hear the good news without someone sharing it with them? Pastor Gill's says: "It is God's plan for each of us to have a part in reaching out together, whether that is conversing or inviting others to attend wor-

ship in the churches, encouraging, supporting, praying, teaching or preaching."

### Growing Work

In joint partnership MERF, WESTMINSTER BIBLICAL MISSIONS and the LAHORE BIBLE BELIEVING CHURCH are committed to faithful gospel proclamation and it is bearing fruit. By God's grace, pastors and evangelists continue to be called and locally trained and equipped for the expanding church ministries. They proclaim the gospel and establish multiple new congregations which continue to grow in God's Word and in number. These, in turn, have planted other daughter congregations in neighboring villages, towns and even cities



Annual Convention

far beyond Lahore.

## Light In Darkness

“The Lord has put us here in this part of the world”, says Pastor Gill, “for this special purpose. God wants His people to be His witnesses in the land of Pakistan.” The population of 220 million is made up of many different ethnic groups, but over 95% are Muslim. Urdu is the national language, but there are many other ethnic languages. Confessing Christians are only a little more than 1%. Many of these are nominal and most come out of the economically and socially disadvantaged segment of the population. It is a very small, but a bright candle of light in darkness.

## Effective Witness

Pastor Gill says: “We can bear witness to Christ in many ways. Leading godly lives is vital. It manifests His love to others, as well as to



WBM+MERF Clinic

one another.” He goes on to explain that if it is to be truly blessed, this must accompany and reflect speech faithful to God’s Word, beginning with in the household of faith.

We praise God for preachers like Pastor Gill and pray for more to be raised up, as Pakistani Christians desperately need to grow in God’s Word. As they do, they not only endure more pressures from a culture deeply steeped in Islam, but also more effectively bring the gospel to the Pakistani community.

About half the Pakistani people are illiterate. This makes the church Bible Literacy classes for adults very effective for reaching the growing number of inquirers. The classes also build up the faith of young believers. Many of the church congregations began as Bible literacy classes. Calvin schools, in four different communities, aim at grounding children and youth with a biblical world and life view.

## Despite Covid19

Praise God that the pandemic did not stop the annual summer camp. Again the camp brings many families from several churches together. God’s Word is taught and there are opportunities to tactfully share the love of Christ with neighboring Muslim in the mountain communities.

*Please pray especially for the Lord’s protection and blessing of the upcoming annual church conventions. They are scheduled for the end of October and the beginning of November, in 6 different communities. Conventions*

have a strong focus on the core message of the gospel. These special gatherings are usually well attended by local congregations plus many from the surrounding community. In this way, there are wonderful opportunities to build up the faithful in God’s Word and bring the lost to Christ.

## Ministry of Mercy

Both Muslims and Christians in the needy communities of Asif Town-2 and Muridke benefit from the medical care provided in Christ’s name at



Calvin Academy students

two free clinics. Schools and churches were closed earlier this year for several weeks due to COVID 19, but the clinics never stopped providing free medical care to the needy. We are thankful for MERF’s support to establish the Muridke clinic. *Please pray that a third clinic can be established as a witness to Christ next to Calvin High School-2 at Wandala Dial Shah to meet great needs in that area.*

## Urdu Literature

We thank God for MERF’s initiative for publication of solid biblical and theological projects in our Urdu language. Our pastors and

*“Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that is in us, yet do it with gentleness and respect.”*

— 1 Peter 3:15

evangelists need such tools in their ministry. The younger generation taught in our seminary will have these additional resources to help in

their preparation for gospel ministry. *Please pray for the Lord’s blessing on these projects. Also, pray for the Lord of the harvest to raise up more Christ-like harvest workers in Pakistan.*

## MERF-Canada

Thank you for your faithful support! Please make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.

Online donations can be made to Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Canada) Inc. through [www.merf.org/support](http://www.merf.org/support)

e-transfers:  
[merfcanada@gmail.com](mailto:merfcanada@gmail.com)



# Contacts in the Netherlands

**A**s Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) assembled at General Synod Edmonton-Immanuel 2019, we decided to end our sister church relationship with the Reformed Churches (liberated) in the Netherlands (GKv). We further decided to continue contact with two other federations of churches in the Netherlands, *The Reformed Churches* (DGK) and the *Reformed Churches the Netherlands* (GKN). Both have their origins in our former sister churches and one of them, the GKN, has requested a sister church relationship with us.

So where are things at today? How have the GKv reacted to our decision? Where are the DGK and GKN at today? By mid-November an official report from the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) on its activities will be submitted to the churches for consideration at General Synod Guelph-Emmanuel 2022. This article presents a stock take while that report is being drafted.

Our judgment  
was the GKv were  
interpreting Scripture  
through the eyes and  
desires of culture

# The gospel is sometimes countercultural and will cause offense

## The GKv

Synod Meppel 2017 of the GKv decided, among others, to allow churches to ordain women to the office of deacon, elder, and minister. The GKv were convinced their decision was in line with Scripture. The chairman of Synod Meppel, the Rev. Dr. M. Oosterhuis, presented that case to our Synod Edmonton. However, we were not convinced. Our judgment was that the GKv were interpreting Scripture through the eyes and desires of culture.

Briefly (and somewhat simplistically), the GKv argument is as follows. Scripture teaches that the presentation of the gospel should not be offensive. Since the culture of the first century Roman Empire did not allow women to have authority over men, Paul argued that women should not exercise authority over men in the church. Since in today's western culture men and women are considered equal, today women should be allowed to serve in positions of authority over men.

Our counter argument, again very brief, is as follows. When Paul says that women are not to exercise authority over men (1 Tim 2:11-14), he draws on the opening chapters of Scripture to make his case. "Scripture" and not "culture" prompted Paul (inspired by the Spirit) to write as he did. The gospel is sometimes countercultural and will cause offense.

There were other concerns with the GKv as well. In their inter-church relations, the GKv were proving to be less confessional and more tolerant. Among others, they sought reunification with the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NGK), which had already made allowance for women in office in 2004. The GKv were also becoming more tolerant in questions of ethics such as living common-law and even same-sex marriages.

Thus it was that our Synod Edmonton 2019 considered that "the marks of the true church cannot with confidence be said to be consistently present in these churches" and decided "with sadness to discontinue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship (EF) with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

(GKv) and to implore the CanRCs to continue in prayer for the GKv." Synod Edmonton wrote a letter which was sent by the second clerk to every single GKv. The same letter was also to be presented, in person, by the CRCA to the next synod of the GKv.

That synod is Synod Goes 2020. The CRCA delegated me, Rev. Karlo Janssen, and requested that, for the sake of continuity, a member of our former "Dutch" committee join me. That former member was br. Gerry Nordeman. The two of us spent a week at Synod Goes in early January 2020 (that's still before the pandemic).

We were at Synod Goes during the Foreign Delegates' Week. Together with many delegates from many other churches, we were well received. In view of the concerns the foreign delegates were seeking to express, the schedule of the week was even changed somewhat. Most foreign delegates felt the need to express grave concerns about the direction of the GKv, and time was freed up for this to take place.

There was good consultation and close cooperation between the foreign delegates. This was not only true for the "daughters" of the GKv: the CanRC, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), and the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA), but also for the CanRC with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and Koinon Presbyterian Church in Korea (KPCK). This consultation also meant that for the most part, the foreign church delegates acted in concert and affirmed each others' concerns.

Foreign delegates expressed concerns with respect to the question of hermeneutics and the matter of inter church relations. Many foreign delegates were alarmed to learn (during the week itself) that the GKv was entertaining associate membership in the National Council of Churches, implying associate membership in the World Council of Churches.

The foreign delegates were given plenty of opportunity to speak and were certainly listened to. However, the words spoken seem to have had little impact. As later Synod sessions, which

# Re-establishing a sister church relationship is no longer possible

are mostly held just on Fridays and Saturdays, were repeatedly interrupted by restrictions imposed because of the pandemic, it took a very long time for this to become clear. Even as I write, Synod Goes has not yet ended.

However, with regards to our concerns, the direction of the GKv is clear. Synod Goes has upheld the decision of Synod Meppel to allow women to serve in office. All foreign churches that submitted letters to Synod Goes received a response. (With the permission of Synod Goes, this response is also being published in *Lux Mundi*, the online magazine of the International Conference of Reformed Churches. See: [www.icrconline.com/lux-mundi](http://www.icrconline.com/lux-mundi).) Synod Goes also decided to go ahead with reunification with the NGK, to remain involved in the National Synod, and to seek associate membership in the National Council of Churches.

With thankfulness we note that the GKv heard the admonition from many of its (former) sister churches, including us. With great sadness and regret we note that the GKv did not heed the admonition. Since the GKv will now be merging with the NGK, *re-establishing* a sister church relationship is no longer possible.

## The DGK and GKN

The DGK were formed in 2003, the GKN in 2009. They left the GKv over different issues, which is one reason why the churches that formed the GKN did not join the DGK. As of recently, both consist of ten churches, and both have a membership of roughly 1500.

During the week br. Nordeman and I spent in the Netherlands, we also met separately with delegations from the DGK and GKN. Both meetings were also attended by the FRCA delegates, and the one with the DGK also by the FRCSA delegates.

Both meetings were very positive. The GKN and DGK were convinced of their calling to seek unity with each other and reported quite readily about where things were at. In seeking unity, they were doing so carefully and thoroughly.

They have continued to do so carefully and thoroughly. The GKN and DGK have recognized each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ and are currently determining what needs to happen as they work towards unification.

Broadly speaking, there are several matters that need attention. The first is the reality that the DGK is more homogenous, especially in liturgical practices, than the GKN. For example, the DGK (like the CanRC) have a restricted hymnal for worship, while the GKN (like the URC) leave the question of hymn choice with the local consistory.

The second is the fact that in some locales there have been issues within the DGK that saw an exodus of members from the local DGK to the local GKN. Reunification requires a measure of reconciliation at the local level. The DGK and GKN are to be lauded for the care with which they seek to address this.

A third matter that requires attention is the sister church relationship the DGK has with the Liberated Reformed Church in Abbotsford, BC (LRCA). The LRCA considers the CanRC a false church because of its relationships with churches that hold to the Westminster Standards (e.g. the OPC). We as CanRC have indicated to the DGK that as long the DGK has a sister church relationship with the LRCA, there can be no sister church relationship between the DGK and the CanRC.

With respect to this third matter, there have been developments. The DGK decided that the Westminster Standards are to be considered a Reformed confession. This decision has put them at odds with the LRCA. According to a public press release from the DGK committee on Relations with Churches Abroad, there have been frank discussions with the LRCA. There have also been frank discussions with the CanRC (via the CRCA). The DGK committee is recommending to their Synod Lutzen 2021 that the relationship with the LRCA be suspended where table and pulpit fellowship are concerned. That recommendation is similar to the decision we as CanRC took with respect to the GKv at our Synod Dunnville 2016. The DGK committee is also



recommending that Synod Lutten call upon the LRCA to repent and to return to the CanRC. From our perspective, that recommendation is something to be very thankful for. By the time our CRCA report is submitted to the churches, we may know what Synod Lutten actually decided.

## Looking ahead

Besides the DGK and GKN, there are also three churches that have left the GKv and currently exist as independent Reformed churches. These churches are in correspondence with both the DGK and GKN. A measure of table and pulpit fellowship exists with them. A merger of the GKN and DGK will no doubt make it easier for those who leave the GKv to find a new church home.


Speaking of pulpit fellowship, I myself had the privilege of leading a worship service in the GKN Zwolle while in the Netherlands (my parents-in-law are members of this congregation).

In 2017, the ICRC suspended the membership of the GKv. This past summer the OPC adopted an action to move that the ICRC terminate the membership of the GKv. That will have to be considered by the ICRC when it meets, the Lord willing, in

October 2022. It is quite possible that the same ICRC will also be considering admitting the GKN as a member church. This is not all that surprising, as one member of the GKN committee for Relations on Churches Abroad is Rev. A. de Jager, chairman of the 1993 ICRC (and some readers will recognize his name, as he served as minister of the Neerlandia CanRC from 1983-1987).

## Sadness and joy

With deep sadness, we see the GKv continuing to approve of developments contrary to the Lord's instruction in his Word. With great joy, we see the DGK and GKN seeking to be faithful to the Lord in doctrine, worship, and governance. Especially encouraging is the fact that both DGK and GKN are seeking unification and, to the best of their ability, are actively engaging in inter church relations.

May the Lord bless those who remain faithful to his Word. 



**Karlo Janssen** *Minister*  
Willoughby Heights  
Canadian Reformed Church  
Langley, BC and Secretary for the CRCA  
[minister@whcanrc.com](mailto:minister@whcanrc.com)



# ASK A QUESTION

Is there something you've been wanting to know?  
An answer you've been looking for? Send us your  
most thought provoking questions to explore  
in our **You Asked** column.

Please send questions to **William den Hollander**, *Minister emeritus*  
Bethel Canadian Reformed Church, Toronto, Ontario

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0 | [denhollanderw@gmail.com](mailto:denhollanderw@gmail.com)

## PRESS RELEASE

# Classis Pacific West

## September 9, 2021 (Cloverdale)

On behalf of the convening church, Cloverdale, Rev. J. Segstro opened the assembly with the reading of Psalm 35:1-18, the singing of Psalm 35:1, 11, and prayer. In prayer we remembered the fact that Rev. Veurink declined a call to Houston and gave thanks that Rev. and Mrs. Schoof could receive from the Lord a healthy baby girl. We also remembered the many people in Smithers congregation who are dealing with COVID-19 or symptoms indicative of COVID-19.

The delegates of Willoughby Heights reported that all the credentials were in order and Classis was declared constituted. Rev. K. Janssen was appointed to Chair, Rev. R. Visscher as Vicechair, and Rev. J. Segstro as Clerk. Two delegates from Smithers participated in Classis via Zoom. The other delegates were present in person.

Rev. A. Plug and Rev. R. Visscher signed the Form of Subscription.

The agenda for Classis was adopted with minor changes. No correspondence was received.

Smithers requested approval to extend a second call to Rev. Hendrik Alkema from the Free Reformed Church of Albany, Australia, in accordance with Article 4 C of the Church Order. Smithers explained some of the background behind this request and answered questions from Classis. Classis approved their request. Pulpit supply will continue to be provided for Smithers and Houston each at a frequency of one Sunday per month.

A report was read from the Committee for Financial Aid to Needy Churches.

Church visitation reports were received for the churches of Maranatha, Willoughby Heights, Smithers, Refuge, Houston, and Langley. Classis also received a report regarding a visitation to the church plant of Prince George as Prince George anticipates instituting in the future. All reports were received with gratitude.

Question period in accordance with Article 44 of the Church Order was held. All churches could respond "yes, yes, no," for which gratitude was given.

The churches then had opportunity to report on outreach activities. Cloverdale could report that they continue to support the work of Rev. Dong and the worship services of the Chinese Reformed Church have resumed in the Cloverdale church

building. The Asia Mission Board is currently underfunded, and they have asked the Cloverdale congregation for additional support. Houston reports that they have used a budget surplus to allow the deacons to make sizeable contributions to Word & Deed, CRWRF, and other causes. Langley reports they continue to support Night Shift and conduct Christianity Explored. They continue to support the Asia Mission Board and Mission in Mexico. Refuge reports that they have hosted several Park Kids Day Camp events at local parks. Smithers reported that they continue to support the work in Prince George, the Aldergrove Brazil Mission Society, and the Asia Mission Board. They also hosted a barbecue for families who had participated in First Nations Bible camps in previous years. Surrey is giving to various causes by way of assessments and special collections. Willoughby Heights has been involved in many foreign mission projects such as the Aldergrove Brazil Mission Society, Asia Mission, etc.

The following appointments were made:

Next classis: To be convened by Langley, DV, on December 9, 2021 (alt. April 7, 2022). Suggested officers: Chair Rev. B. Schoof, Vicechair Rev. J. Segstro, Clerk Rev. T. Schouten.

The members of the Committee for Appeals were reappointed to their positions.

Smithers requested that Rev. K. Janssen be appointed as church counsellor. Classis agreed to the request.

The following brothers were appointed to serve as delegates to Regional Synod West (Smithers), November 1, 2021.

Ministers: Rev. K. Janssen and Rev. D. Vandeburgt were appointed with alternates being Rev. B. Schoof and Rev. J. Segstro.

Elders: K. Dykstra and H. Moes were appointed with alternates being G. Gunnink and J. Lengkeek.

Opportunity was given for personal question period.

The chairman ruled that none of the brothers behaved improperly and thanked the brothers.

The Acts of Classis and the Press Release were adopted.

The chairman closed Classis with prayer.

***R. Visscher, vicechair 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:

**C**onfessionally Reformed

**L**oving in manner

**A**ttuned to current issues

**R**eadable and Reliable

**I**n Submission to Scripture

**O**pen to constructive criticism

**N**urturing Christian living

