



Sheila Rae Van Delft

75 Years of the Canadian Reformed Churches!

Clarion

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what's inside

Happy 75th anniversary to the Canadian Reformed Churches! If one had to look for an official date of the start of our federation, it likely would be that of the first official gathering of the first four churches at Classis Canada on November 15, 1950, at the YMCA in Lethbridge—so our issue is a touch early ☺.

Clarion exists as “A Canadian Reformed Magazine” to help encourage, educate, engage, and unite our churches and the members who make up those churches in walking closely with the Lord to his glory, so in this special issue we pause to commemorate and rejoice in what God has done for our federation over these 75 years.

In reflecting on the past, there are always lessons to be learned for the future. While we certainly are grateful for how the Lord preserved us unto today, we do not wish to present a rose-coloured perspective, as if all was well all the time. There was sin in every heart through all those 75 years (including in our own still today!) and sinful actions did take place, and so we must humbly reflect on the good to hang on to, the bad to get rid of, and/or the hindrances which get in the way of serving God more purely and joyfully.

To help us with such reflection, we've invited several well-known contributors from within our federation to give us their seasoned thoughts on our history. We have a summary of actual letters from the early days in the 1950s as well as an excerpt from a first-hand account of what led to the founding of the first CanRC. Ilse Vandermeulen interviewed an array of folks who have joined our federation somewhere along the way and their voices provide a unique perspective on our churches. We also asked a close neighbour from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Mr. Mark Bube, to share his thoughts on the CanRC. Through all these points of view we hope that all of us may find much reason for gratitude and much food for thought. The Lord has been faithful, and we trust he will always be so.

A huge thank you to Sheila VanDelft for providing the painting for our cover! It's her rendering of a typical Sunday gathering at Lethbridge CanRC in the early days, where members came by walking, biking, driving, bussing, being pulled by a tractor, or even riding a horse! They were glad to go to church and so may we be every Sunday again.

There are other gems inside, but I'll let you discover them for yourselves. Enjoy!

Peter Holtvliuwer

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Clarion

A trustworthy and engaging magazine, widely spread and read in Canadian Reformed households and beyond.

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

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

WALK IN THE ANCIENT PATHS

This issue of *Clarion* commemorates the 75th anniversary of the institution of the Canadian Reformed Churches in 1950. In the context of the catholic (universal) church, seventy-five years amounts to a mere blip. In the context of those who experience this, though, it is a remarkable milestone. Early Dutch immigrants to Canada, scattered across the land, fresh with the physical and emotional scars of the Second World War and the spiritual scars from a church war, were able to find each other. They instituted churches based on the Word of God, summed up in the Reformed Confessions, and organized based on the Church Order of Dort.

To get a sense of why they followed this path, I refer you to the article about the Volendam chain letters, and the firsthand account from John DeHaas, among other articles. It was a familiar path. Keeping in mind the church struggle they had gone through in the Netherlands, one could say that they saw this as the “ancient paths” mentioned by Jeremiah, “where the good way is.” Those who walk in these paths will find rest for their souls (Jer 6:16). Under the blessing of the Lord, this humble beginning of a few walking down those ancient paths has grown into a federation of 71 churches with about 20,000 members across Canada.

STAYING OR STRAYING?

While an anniversary is an occasion to look back and reflect, it is also a time to ask ourselves if we are staying on the ancient paths. In Jeremiah 18:15, we read of God’s people who forgot the Lord, going after false gods who made them stumble and walk onto side roads. How do we guard ourselves against such stumbling? I would suggest that we need to stay focused on the three things that helped the founding generation stay on the ancient paths.

First and foremost, we must stay true to God’s Word. As God breathed life into Adam, he breathes life into all his children through his Word (2 Tim 3:16). Faith comes through hearing the Word of Christ (Rom 10:14-17). The Word of God is the seed of regeneration (1 Pet 1:23). The church must always be on guard against the serpent’s words to Eve, “Did God actually say. . .?” In the broader Christian world, we see many re-interpreting Scripture to fit the spirit of the time, justifying it by saying that God did not actually say what we read.

Second, we should stay true to the Reformed confessions. These are subordinate to the Scriptures, but they are aids to faith as they sum up the key teachings of Scripture. We should continue to appreciate the way the ecumenical creeds connect us to the

early church. We should appreciate the ecumenical character of the Reformed confessions, with one written in French, one in German, and one in Dutch, showing the Reformed faith is not limited by ethnicity. In these confessions, we hear the voices of those who have run the race before us telling us to stay on the ancient paths, not to stray when confronted with various winds of doctrine. While these confessions are not infallible, we must watch out for the serpent’s whispers, “Do they actually say. . .?” Attacks on the confessions are often the opening salvo of an attack on the Word of God.

Third, we should stay true to our Church Order. The beauty of the Reformed Church Order is its simplicity, helping churches live together while avoiding the extremes of hierarchy and independentism.

To be sure, a Church Order is a fluid document. At the same time, we must watch out for the serpent’s whispers, “Does the Church Order actually say. . .?” This can be an opening to undermine mutual accountability, and lead to undermining the unity of the churches, with each doing as it seems right in his own eyes to the point that the unity of faith becomes obliterated under a confusing cacophony of practices.

75 YEARS OF GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

As we mark seventy-five years as federation, we have reason for thankfulness for the Lord’s blessings. The present generation, however, does well to reflect on the ancient paths trod by the founding generation. It is easy to criticize previous generations and think their ways need reforming, but history is filled with examples of a generation realizing they needed reformation, going back to the ancient paths where the good way is.

So, dear reader, reflect: are you walking on the ancient paths or are you walking onto side roads? Only on the ancient paths will we find rest for our souls. 



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GIFTING FROZEN HOTDOGS?

When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? —Malachi 1:8

One of the most common ways to show thanks to someone is by giving them a gift. Maybe it is a gift for a teacher after a year of school. Perhaps it is a gift to a contractor after a renovation done well. Whatever the case may be, Christians are probably familiar with this concept because one of the ways that we show thankfulness to God is by giving him gifts. Sometimes that might be by donations to the church or with the giving of our time or our effort.

Many Canadians will look to spend time this Thanksgiving thinking about what it is they are thankful for, though rarely considering who it is that they should be thanking. As Christians, though, not only can we reflect on the fact that we have received all things from God, but Thanksgiving can be a time to think about how well we have been showing our thanks.

There is an example in Malachi 1 of the people of Israel getting skimpy in the gifts they were giving to God. Instead of the best from their flocks and herds, the Israelites were apparently offering animals that were lame, sick, or had physical defects. This caused God, through Malachi, to ask the question, “When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil?”

Living in a prosperous country, a lot of us know the difference between high-quality meat and low-quality meat. We know the difference between a top sirloin steak cooked to perfection versus a frozen hotdog. Could you imagine thanking someone by taking them out to dinner and instead of going to a premier restaurant, you dig around in the dumpster outside McDonald’s to find them something?

The LORD actually presents the same kind of argument to the Israelites: “Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favour?” The answer is obvious. Of course not! Why would the LORD, then, who is deserving of much more honour than the governor, accept your leftover scraps? You might as well be offering to give him a frozen hotdog as a gift of thanks. Malachi continues, “With such a gift from your hand, will he show favour to any of you?” (Mal 1:9). God’s people speak loudly by the quality of the gifts they give in thanks to their God.

Thanksgiving, then, can be a time to reflect not just on how much the Lord has blessed you and deserves thanks from you. It is also a time to reflect on the quality of thanks that you are offering.

Think first and foremost of what God has offered to you. He offered his only Son, his beloved Son, to take on human flesh and suffer on a cross as sacrifice for your sins. Should you not be willing to offer him your best in thanks? Whether that is your financial first-fruits, or the best of your time or energy, what would show him the most honour? Maybe it helps to think of what you would offer to the most prestigious person you would ever want to thank. Does what you are offering the Lord show that he deserves even greater thanks? After all, the gift of eternal life that he has given you is far more precious than anything someone else could give.

May this Thanksgiving be an opportunity for you to offer your best to the one who above all deserves it. 

FURTHER READING:

2 Corinthians 8:1–15

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. When is the last time you gave thanks to someone with a gift? How did the gift show honour to them?
2. Reflect on Paul’s words in Romans 12:1 to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.” In what way can you make this sacrifice the most fitting display of thanks to God?

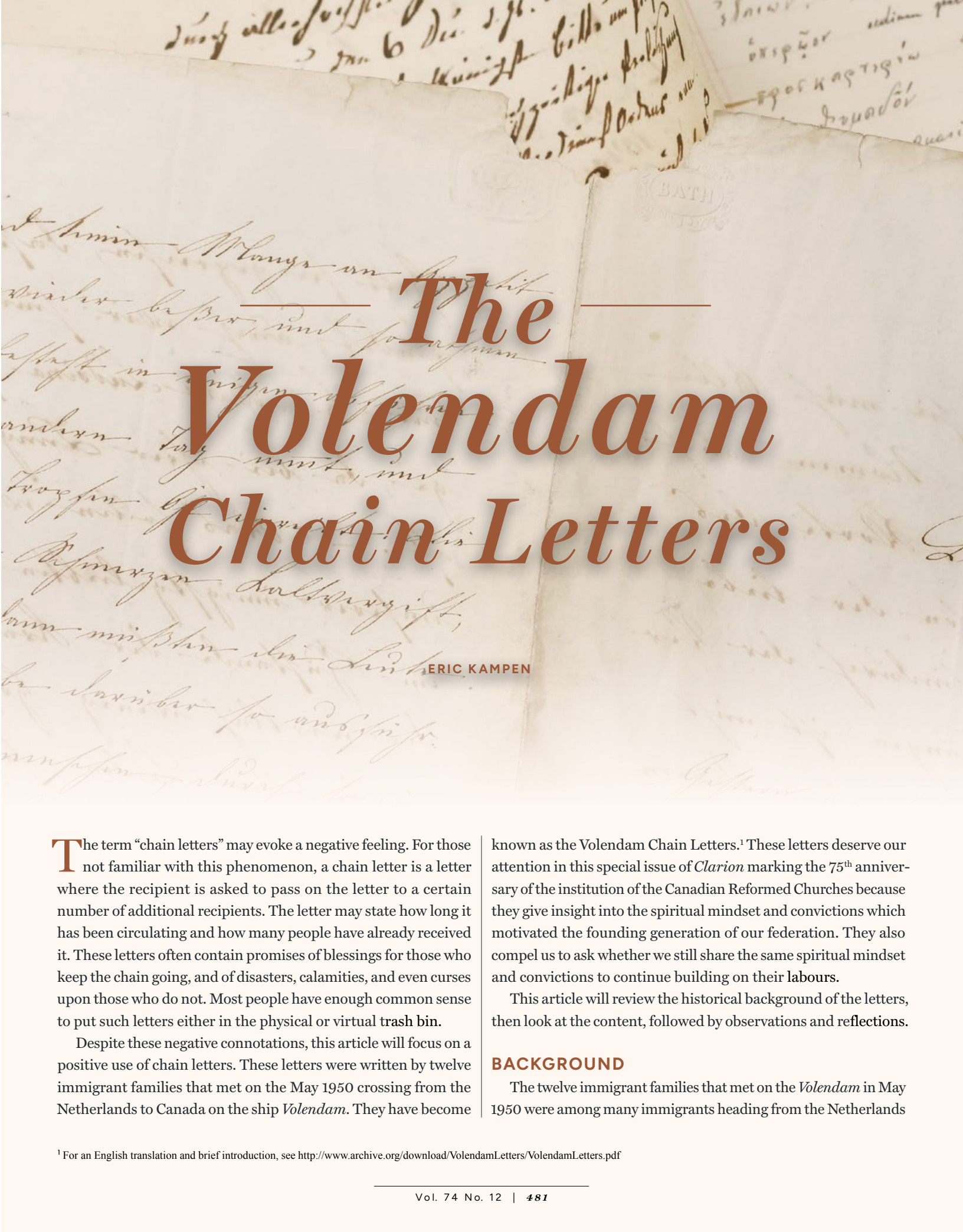


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The Volendam Chain Letters

ERIC KAMPEN

The term “chain letters” may evoke a negative feeling. For those not familiar with this phenomenon, a chain letter is a letter where the recipient is asked to pass on the letter to a certain number of additional recipients. The letter may state how long it has been circulating and how many people have already received it. These letters often contain promises of blessings for those who keep the chain going, and of disasters, calamities, and even curses upon those who do not. Most people have enough common sense to put such letters either in the physical or virtual trash bin.

Despite these negative connotations, this article will focus on a positive use of chain letters. These letters were written by twelve immigrant families that met on the May 1950 crossing from the Netherlands to Canada on the ship *Volendam*. They have become

known as the Volendam Chain Letters.¹ These letters deserve our attention in this special issue of *Clarion* marking the 75th anniversary of the institution of the Canadian Reformed Churches because they give insight into the spiritual mindset and convictions which motivated the founding generation of our federation. They also compel us to ask whether we still share the same spiritual mindset and convictions to continue building on their labours.

This article will review the historical background of the letters, then look at the content, followed by observations and reflections.

BACKGROUND

The twelve immigrant families that met on the *Volendam* in May 1950 were among many immigrants heading from the Netherlands

¹ For an English translation and brief introduction, see <http://www.archive.org/download/VolendamLetters/VolendamLetters.pdf>



to Canada in the period after the Second World War. This movement started in 1947 and peaked in the early 1950s. With the Netherlands still suffering the devastation of war, many sought a new start in Canada, a favoured destination because Canadian troops had been at the forefront of liberating the Netherlands from Nazi occupation.

While the main motivations for immigration may have been social and economic, there were also many Christians who had belonged to the Reformed Churches which in 1944 had undergone an ecclesiastical liberation from unscriptural general synod decisions about the doctrine of baptism. One of their concerns was to find a faithful church home when they came to Canada. At that time, there were a small number of Christian Reformed Churches (CRC) as well as some Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) in Canada. The immigrants, however, did not know what they would find in the places to which they were heading. In most cases, their destination was determined by where they had an offer of employment for the first year.

On the May 1950 crossing of the *Volendam*, twelve families who had belonged to the Liberated Reformed Churches in the Netherlands met one another. There is no indication that they knew one another before the trip, or how they got to know one another. The fact is that they met, formed a bond on the ship, and “agreed to keep in touch by means of a chain letter” (Letter 1).

The first letter gives a list of the twelve families. The plan was that the first person on the list would write a letter to the second person, and so on, and the last person was to write back to the first person.

The ship arrived in Canada at the end of May 1950. The first letter was written on July 2, 1950, from Fort Frances in Northern Ontario. The next six addresses in the chain were in different parts of southwestern Ontario, followed by two addresses in Lethbridge, AB, and one in Trail, BC, before heading back to the final two addresses in Ontario, where the last letter was written on Feb. 11, 1951.

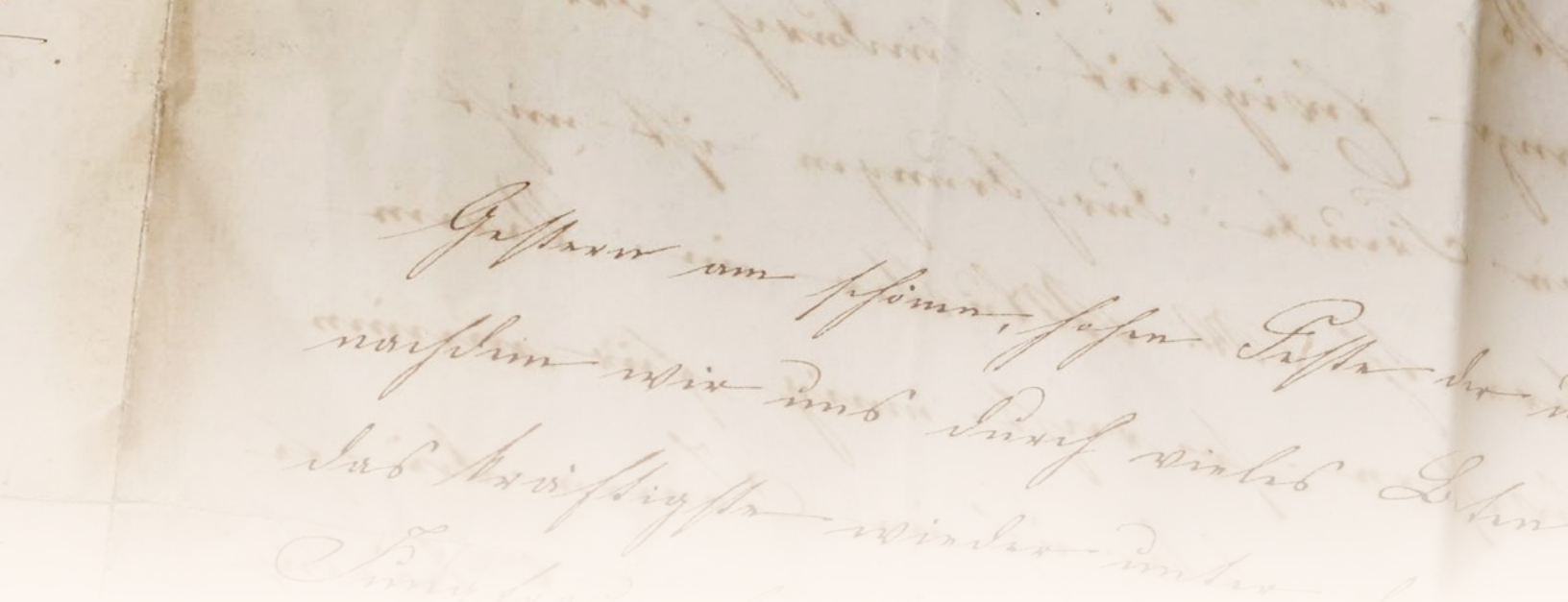
CONNECTIONS AND CONTENT

The letters tend to start with some information on how the family was settling in. Generally, the families were doing well and, with some exceptions, their work arrangements had turned out fine. Many spoke of having good bosses or farmers to work for and being able to provide for their families. The first letter, dated July 2, 1950, was written by G. Schutten from Fort Frances and reveals the key concern in the hearts of the writers: “Concerning life here, there is not much to tell. As far as we can judge, we will be able to keep it up here for now. There is one big *but* here, *the church*. We have no church life here and as far as we know there are no other Reformed people living here. . . . We hope that we do not have to stay here longer than necessary, but, the Lord willing, are able to move on to a place with a church.”

The recipient of his letter was D. VanLeeuwen in Waldemar, a hamlet near Orangeville, ON. In his letter (no date), VanLeeuwen mentions contact with the Christian Reformed Church being established in Orangeville. He had requested that they also allow ministers from Liberated Reformed Churches to lead worship, or that their sermons be read. This was not accepted. After mentioning that there was a lot of space, a lot of mixed farming, good homes, and that he had a good boss, he continues, “however, this is not our first priority. Our first priority is to look for the communion of saints, be it here or in Alberta.”

The third recipient was J. Feenstra, in Fenwick, ON. He and others in the area were attending the Protestant Reformed Church in Hamilton. While he recognized there were some differences and difficulties, he wanted to study the matter more before drawing conclusions.

The next recipient was the Walinga family, living in Newmarket, ON. Their letter was dated July 30, 1950, showing that the chain system was working well. They had sought out the local Christian Reformed Church but concluded that “here too, the synodical stand is taken, namely, ‘we do not want to discuss it.’” He suggested that perhaps the Reformed believers should aim to move closer



together. In his opinion, the CRC as well as the PRC differed too much from the Liberated Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

The next link in the chain was the Wildeboer family in Orangeville, ON. They got around to writing their letter some three months later. Much had happened in the intervening months. There had been contact with the VanLeeuwen family nearby in Waldemar. The letter related interaction with the local CRC. Upon request, they had read one sermon from a Liberated minister, but there was trouble the following week. This letter also related contact with Rev. Veldman of the PRC in Hamilton. There was some promising interaction. However, it soon became clear that there was concern about the PRC teaching on baptism. The letter mentions how Rev. Veldman came back, but then "... we could not come to an agreement. Especially my wife spoke up. Rev. Veldman put us at ease by assuring us that it was indeed a little strange to see baptism in light of election." Further visits and conversations, however, indicated that they could not agree with the PRC teaching. The letter goes on to explain the events that led to the institution of a church in Georgetown, ON on August 13, 1950. Within a few weeks, the meeting location shifted to Orangeville.

The Wildeboer letter was sent on to the Poortinga family. In their letter, dated Dec. 26, 1950, the Poortingas relate their experiences. They had ended up in Hamilton, but the PRC would not accept them because of their views of the covenant. They describe how they then came into contact with the church now meeting in Orangeville and, with the help of D. VanLeeuwen, found work in the Orangeville area and moved there.

The next recipient was P. VanderGaag, who had ended up in Mooretown, ON, on the St. Clair River. He and his family were attending the PRC in Chatham when possible, recognizing it was quite different from the Liberated churches in the Netherlands.

The next two addressees, the K. Flokstra and H. Veldkamp families, lived in the Lethbridge area of Alberta. Their letters were dated Jan. 3 and Jan. 8, 1951, respectively. They related how they had been welcomed into a church which had been instituted in Lethbridge on April 16, 1950. This, of course, would prove to be

the first of a group of new churches which soon became known as the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches.

From there, the letters ended up with the H. Schutten family in Trail, BC. In their letter, dated Jan. 22, 1951, they stated that, "As far as material goods are concerned, we have everything we could desire; however, spiritually we have very little. We miss the church fellowship here, a situation we cannot stay in. We are busy changing this and we hope that in the spring we can meet with brothers and sisters." They mentioned too that there were no Christian Reformed or Protestant Reformed Churches, and they could not see themselves joining the mainstream churches. They expressed the fear that "unless the Lord prevents it, we would go along with the flow and fall away. It is of great importance that we do our best to meet with one another."

From Trail, BC, the letters went to the J.M. VanSydenborgh family in Goderich, ON. The postal service showed its excellence judging by the date of their letter—Jan. 26, 1951. They mentioned not feeling at home in the Christian Reformed Church they had attended in Clinton. When they learned of the new church in the Orangeville area, they joined it even though they were not able to attend as they did not have transportation.

The last link in the chain was the VanSieders family. In their letter, dated February 11, 1951, they indicated that, while they had started in the Lethbridge area, they had ended up in Tottenham, ON, living temporarily with the Walinga family, which made it possible to attend church in Orangeville.

OBSERVATIONS

The information provided in these chain letters brings to mind several observations. First, we should note the ability to stay in touch without the current methods of communication. Letters traversed the country. Judging by the dates the letters were written, the letter from Trail, BC made it Goderich ON in four days. Each family on the list managed to contact the next, keeping one another up to date.



Second, it is notable how many letters were signed by husband and wife, or even on behalf of the family. The involvement of sisters is also evident in the letter from the Wildeboers, which specifically mentions how his wife spoke up in the discussion about baptism, covenant, and election. Matters were well discussed within families.

Third, it is evident how the obvious destination for immigrants of Liberated Reformed background seemed to be the Christian and Protestant Reformed Churches. Unfortunately, the contact with the Christian Reformed Church ran aground because they sided with the synodical group in the Netherlands and did not want to discuss the issues leading to the Liberation. The contact with the Protestant Reformed Churches also ran aground because of their views on baptism, covenant, and election. In essence, the Protestant Reformed Church held the same views as found in the Dutch Synodical churches, views which had led to the break in the Netherlands.

Fourth, though these letters are only a small sampling of the mindset of immigrants from Liberated Reformed background, they serve as a window into the hearts and minds of the immigrants coming from Liberated Reformed churches. They bring out how important faith and church life was for them. As is evident from the institution of churches in Lethbridge, Edmonton, and Neerlandia in 1950, and that some immigrants initially sought out the Protestant Reformed Churches in Hamilton and Chatham, these twelve families were not the founding families of the Canadian Reformed Churches. A number of them, though, did play a key role in the institution of the first Canadian Reformed Church in Georgetown, which soon moved to Orangeville.

Finally, while the root motivation for immigration may have been social and economic, these immigrants sought to live out their faith also in their immigration. They were concerned about finding a faithful church home to worship the Lord. They eagerly sought the community of saints. They could have made do with what was

available but instead were ready to relocate and make sacrifices to be with believers standing on the same confessional basis.

REFLECTION

The Canadian Reformed Churches today stand on the shoulders of the Reformed immigrants who instituted churches in the 1950s, committed to the Reformed understanding of Scripture they took with them from the Netherlands as their spiritual luggage. When the two existing Reformed options in Canada, namely, the Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed churches, seemed to have no room for them, they only saw one option: instituting Reformed Churches true to their name, refusing to be bound to teaching beyond those confessions. There was only a passing glance at the mainline churches found in Canada, which were not seen as a suitable home. When they ended up in a place where there was no Reformed community, they were not content to make do. They sought to move to places where they could be with fellow Reformed believers.

The question all this puts before us is whether we today, their spiritual heirs, have the same conviction of and commitment to the Reformed understanding of Scripture. Further, do we have the same commitment to live where we will be near to fellow Reformed believers to worship the Lord our God and support one another? In short, is being Reformed just an incidental label, or is it something we personally cherish and thankfully embrace? 



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GREAT IS HIS FAITHFULNESS!

The Beginnings of 75 Years!

DR. TED VAN RAALTE

God is good, all the time, including during the last seventy-five years. We praise him who made and kept the Canadian Reformed Churches. He stayed true to his promises, gave us his infinite love in Jesus Christ, and renewed us by his Spirit. We are here by grace alone, for we faltered, failed, and resisted in all kinds of ways. To God be the glory!

The beginning of these seventy-five years has been told in books by John DeHaas, Wicher Bredenhof, William Van Oene, and George van Popta. Church Yearbooks, starting in 1952, also contain summaries of what was happening in the federation. In addition, many families possess private autobiographical accounts of the immigration and settling of their first generation (I have read at least seven).

EXPERIENCES & REALITIES

In this account, I highlight the lived realities of the early Dutch immigrants. They left a land and people that had suffered enormously through World War II. The Nazis had drowned Europe

in terror, racism, and genocide. Afterward, some Dutchmen needed distance. They left their wider families, truly doubting whether they would ever again on this earth see their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends. Many families left the city; office-working men took jobs outdoors on farms and fields in Canada. They left behind their communities, churches, schools, businesses, bank accounts, and well-ordered societies. They restarted without money and useful possessions. They learned a new language, new work, new laws, new relationships, and built new church communities.

FAITH COMMITMENTS

The realities of immigrant life in Canada were made both easier and harder by the second main thing I want to highlight, namely, the faith commitments of these early Dutch immigrants. These men and women were firmly Reformed and not afraid to face the consequences of following Christ as Lord. They trusted in their faithful God to carry them forward, lived for his glory, and

INTRODUCING THE *Canadian Reformed History Collection*

On this 75th anniversary of the formation of the Canadian Reformed Churches, we need to acknowledge the grace of God in gathering and forming our federation of churches. He who led us deserves all praise. For his praise, we also need to preserve knowledge of the past and so help each other to pass it on.

To these ends, the Canadian Reformed History Collection (CRHC) has formed.



**CANADIAN
REFORMED
HISTORY
COLLECTION**

We are a board that includes historians, a librarian, and an archivist, among others. Following

the exhortation of Psalm 78:4 to “tell the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD,” we aim to collect, archive, and make available the historical documents and artifacts of the Canadian Reformed communities. We are interested in the history of immigration, of families, churches, schools, mission work, special homes, publication efforts, Bible studies, etc. Similar history associations exist within other churches, such as the Free Reformed

Churches of Australia and the Christian Reformed Church. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has its own historian.

The CRHC has established its mission and core policies. With professional help, we are seeking charitable status with the Canada Revenue Agency. In time, we will need a location for the collection and an archivist. We intend to provide help for our Christian schools to teach some of our history. If the Lord grants us good progress, we also hope to liaise with interested Canadian Reformed churches, ecclesiastical assemblies, and organizations to assist them in archiving, digitizing, etc.

If you are interested in this, stay tuned. We will be reaching out with more information and with requests for help. If you wish to know more, please email CRHChistorycollection@gmail.com.

For the CRHC: Margaret Alkema, CRTS librarian (BA, MLIS); Keith Sikkema, retired church history lecturer at CCRTC (BA, MEd); Albert van der Heide, curator of the Windmill Archives and former publisher of the *Windmill* (1969-2012); Dave Van Es (BA), Reformed history enthusiast; Dr. Ted Van Raalte, church history professor at CRTS (BA, MDiv, MA, PhD).

enjoyed communities of Christian love. Even if it meant hardship, they were determined to live honestly, keep promises, keep the Lord's Day, and not join labour unions. They had seen evil from the Nazis, from Dutch betrayers, and even from some in the church. They knew the cost of compromise and were determined to follow through consistently on their commitments. God was with them.

HARDSHIP AND DETERMINATION

Let's illustrate the immigrant's life with the following story. In April 1951, Mr. W. Bredenhof was a young man—28 years old, married, with two children. His family had arrived in southern

Alberta in late March. Two years earlier, in the Netherlands, he had earned a commander's position in the Dutch national police force. As a hobby, he farmed. This hobby helped open the door for immigrating to Canada because the Canadian government wanted farmers—any experience in farming helped. Canadian and Dutch connections were strong: during the war, part of the Dutch royal family had lived in Canada where a princess was born; Canadian soldiers had liberated much of the Netherlands from the German occupation; and after the war Canada published pamphlets in Dutch to invite farmers over.

Mr. Bredenhof and his family sold their furniture to pay the fare for the ship that brought them to Canada (the *Volendam*). They received no government assistance and were permitted to take along only 200 guilders (dollars). In late March 1951, they arrived in a small town in Alberta where Bredenhof was given work on a farm. A few weeks later, the farm needed to get last year's crop off the fields because last year's snow had buried the crop early. Work began at 4:00 AM, getting the horses ready. Then a huge breakfast was served for all the workers, but Bredenhof wasn't used to eating much for breakfast. He ate lightly. By 10:00 he wanted a coffee. But there was no coffee, no water, nothing until another meal at 3:30 p.m. He writes,

By that time my hands were raw. During the day I got blisters on my hands that were as big as eggs; all from loading and unloading wagons with a pitchfork. The blisters had broken and there was blood and water streaming down the pitchfork. My hands were a bloody mess. Somebody in the crowd noticed and suddenly all the attention was focussed on me. Everyone was in awe. You can imagine what it was like; here were hands that hadn't done heavy work in years; they'd become nice and soft, and then a gruelling hard day's work of loading and unloading. My farmer advised me to go home, but I refused. I'd stick to it to the bitter end no matter what the cost. Besides, I had to get used to this kind of work. So I thought the sooner I got through this, the better. I refused to be considered a failure (Bredenhof, 88).

He was up the next day at 4:00 AM and again at work. After three or four days his hands started to heal and he could work as hard as everyone else. He also learned to eat voraciously at breakfast. This story is emblematic of the realities of starting over in Canada at that time.

"The crummy cabin we were living in, my Dad [in the NL] wouldn't even have put pigs in."

HOUSING AND CLIMATE

Stories like this could be multiplied. Immigration was hard. Finding work and money was hard. Many immigrants anticipated a big, roomy house in the big, roomy land of Canada. But one family's experience is echoed in almost every account I've read: "The crummy cabin we were living in, my Dad [in the NL] wouldn't even have put pigs in. But many immigrants didn't fare much better. Many farm workers lived in old hen houses. Everything was good enough for the DPs [displaced persons]" (Bredenhof, 93–94).

The same author writes about how he nearly lost his life in the first winter, while walking to work at 2:00 AM. He was literally freezing to death and was reduced to crawling. He knew that if he stopped, he would die. One of his fellow workers wondered why he was late and decided to drive the car out to find him. This saved his life. I can recall another hard-working man (my grandfather) who, a couple of winters earlier, had frozen his nose so badly that its skin remained red, porous, and numb for the next 45 years.

"One of his fellow workers wondered why he was late and decided to drive the car out to find him. This saved his life."

SHIPS, PLANES, AND FIELDMEN

The earliest immigrants arrived by boat. The Kottelenberg family immigrated to Ontario in the summer of 1947 on the first ship, the *Waterman*. The DeHaas family immigrated to Alberta in the fall of 1947 on another ship, the *Tabinta*. Two months later, the Dutch and Canadian governments agreed that in 1948 Canada could receive 10,000 Dutchmen—farmers and their families. These immigrants were joined by many more in 1949 and in the 1950s. In the 1950s, immigrants began to fly rather than sail to Canada.

The "fieldmen" deserve particular mention. These were key Dutchmen in Canada who coordinated between the Canadian government and the Dutch emigres. Their contact information was published in Dutch newspapers and they found sponsors, jobs, and housing for interested emigres (the hen houses, mentioned above, were not due to them). Their help was key to completing government paperwork and obtaining entry into Canada. They also could travel by rail for free, to find new places to farm (this was how so many Dutch immigrants settled in Telkwa, Houston, and Smithers—the area was discovered by fieldman Jacob Prins). The Christian Reformed, Canadian Reformed, and Free Reformed churches had particular fieldmen. The Canadian Reformed Churches had John DeHaas in Alberta, Gerry Kuik in Manitoba, and Peter Wildeboer in Ontario. Their work for families and for the benefit of the church was a rich blessing from the Lord.

CHURCHES, COVENANT, AND CATHOLICITY

The pain of WWII was greater for many in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands because a break in the church occurred in 1944. A new theological position was made mandatory, namely that the proper biblical ground for the baptism of



infant children of believers was that they were to be presumed to be regenerated. Therefore, they were to be baptized on that basis. Since 1905, this position of Abraham Kuiper had been *permitted* by the churches but now it was made *mandatory*.

The common view had been that the children were to be baptized because the promises of God belonged to them, per God's covenant of grace. In 1944, those ministers and elders who maintained that common view were deposed and not granted a proper appeal. They continued as the Reformed Churches but "freed" themselves from the binding mandate that presumed regeneration was to be regarded as the basis for infant baptism. They were called *Vrijgemaakt*, which meant *Liberated* or *Freed*. They said that they were still truly the Reformed Churches, but they were freeing themselves from this false decision about baptism and covenant and from the synodical decision that denied them the right to appeal. This right to appeal is key to the Reformed Church Order, particularly Article 31. This led to them also being called "Article 31ers."

These brothers and sisters also loved to speak of the whole church of Christ, the catholic church. They didn't want to start at new church. They said, "We are the true church. We are continuing what we always were. Those who kicked us out have changed; not we."

THE FIRST CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES (1950)

When these believers came from the Netherlands to North America, many sought to join the Christian Reformed Church. They asked those churches to acknowledge that the break that

had occurred in the Netherlands was unjust and that they, the "Liberated" Reformed believers, were from the churches with which the Christian Reformed ought to maintain fellowship. In Alberta, brother & sister John & Helen DeHaas were warmly welcomed and richly blessed in Burdett and Nobelford Christian Reformed Churches. Clearly, they enjoyed the communion of the saints (DeHaas, 42-43, 49-50, 61).

The decision to separate was not made by them. Rather, their opponents had excluded good Reformed sermons, office bearers, and members

Because the DeHaas family couldn't travel to church every Sunday, they asked permission to read sermons from Liberated Dutch ministers. When the Christian Reformed consistory denied this, brother DeHaas appealed to the Christian Reformed classis and synod, but his appeals were denied (67-70). In sadness, they withdrew from their church. In July of 1949 they, with three other families, began a house congregation and held Sunday worship services (73). Seventy-five years ago, on April 16, 1950, this group of 48 members, with 10 men to choose from, elected two elders (Barendregt and VanderGutten) and one deacon (DeHaas). This was the first Canadian Reformed Church. These Christians were adamant that, as had happened six years earlier in the Netherlands, the decision to separate was not made by them. Rather, their

*Great is his faithfulness.
Wide is his love.
Deep is his wisdom.
High is his calling.*

opponents had excluded good Reformed sermons, office bearers, and members.

On July 9, the church in Edmonton began when it too elected office bearers. On August 6, members of an existing Christian Reformed church in Neerlandia formed a new Canadian Reformed church because their synod refused the request of brother L. Wierenga to investigate what had happened in the Netherlands in 1944. On August 13, the church in Georgetown, Ontario formed. These four churches met on November 15, 1950 for the first “Classis Canada.” On December 17, New Westminster formed. On April 18, 1951, six churches had formed and met together, still being without any ministers. Thus, five major steps were taken prior to having any of our own ministers: (1) the formation of the first Canadian Reformed churches; (2) their mutual assistance in major assemblies, thus forming a federation; (3) the adoption of the name “Canadian Reformed”; (4) the adherence to the creeds and confessions; and (5) the use of the Church Order.

On December 13, 1951, the number of churches reached ten. The churches met again in this month, this time in two separate classes (East and West), and for the first time including ministers—the Reverends J. Van Popta, H. A. Stel, and W. Loopstra. By this time, two churches that had initially become Protestant Reformed (Chatham and Hamilton) had also joined.

GREAT IS GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

As we mark seventy-five years as Canadian Reformed churches here in Canada, we give God the glory for his faithfulness in keeping people faithful to himself. By his grace he has used the generations to entrust to us the gospel. He ensured that we personally heard the gospel and believed. In light of God’s saving work through all time, seventy-five years is short. Yet his grace is amazing and his faithfulness is great. God converts not just a believer here and there, but he gathers the whole assembly of his people, the bride of Christ. Great is his faithfulness. Wide is his love. Deep is his wisdom. High is his calling.

Thank God that we have a purpose, a task, and a calling. Let us live by grace, with thankfulness and faithfulness in each generation. 



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Sadly They Wrote the Letter

Editor's note: What follows is a first-hand account of an ecclesiastical dispute within the Christian Reformed Church in 1948/49 which resulted in a series of official decisions from consistory to classis to synod. These decisions so vexed the consciences of some members that they were compelled to leave that denomination and continue worshipping as “free churches,” eventually federating together as the Canadian Reformed Churches. The writer is John DeHaas, who describes the difficulties he and his family experienced in the Nobleford CRC (Alberta) and their eventual, sadness-filled withdrawal. Similar difficulties were experienced by other Dutch immigrants with a background in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) in other CRC churches which in turn led them to make the same decision as the J. DeHaas family. John DeHaas wrote a book-length account of his experiences immigrating to Canada,¹ a large part of which was finding, joining, and participating in a Reformed church. The story excerpted below begins in the latter part of 1948, at the point where three families belonging to the CRC in Nobleford (20 miles from their homes in Lethbridge) had decided to worship locally (while still under the consistory of Nobleford) because they could not afford to travel each Sunday. It was in this setting that the dispute began.

Meanwhile, the three families in Lethbridge congregated together every Sunday: John [DeHaas] and Vanderveen took turns reading sermons. They had given notice of what they were doing to the consistory of Nobleford, who did not fully approve of it, but did not disapprove of it either because they realized that only lack of transportation had brought about the situation.

Then a difficulty developed. Vanderveen insisted that the consistory should provide them with the printed sermons for their services, assuming thereby that the consistory would send only sermons written by ministers of the Synodical churches.² His assumption was correct—the house congregation at Lethbridge

was given a number of sermons from the series “Menigerlei Genade” [“Manifold Grace”] published by Kok at Kampen in which a sermon of a Synodical minister was published weekly—and the group could do naught else but use them since they had to obey their consistory.

John found himself in a difficult, and even impossible, situation. Because the consistory had forced the people in Lethbridge to read these particular sermons, the people were also bound to the teachings in these sermons; and because the ministers who had written and preached these sermons were bound by the statements of the Synod of 1942, the people to whom these sermons were read were also bound to these statements. It was exactly

¹ John DeHaas, *And Replenish the Earth* (New Westminster: Covenant Publishing, 1987). The excerpted piece is most of chapter 13.

² In an earlier chapter DeHaas explains that Vanderveen, a recent Dutch immigrant from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Synodical), was of the opinion that the teachings of the “Liberated Church” were unscriptural” and that he wished to prevent such from being taught in the Christian Reformed Church (p. 63).

this “binding” which had compelled John and all the others in the Reformed Churches in Holland to liberate themselves from these statements. He was now under the same yoke from which he and many others had liberated themselves in 1944! With this he had no peace.

NO ROOM FOR LIBERATED VIEWS

John immediately wrote a letter to the consistory explaining at length why he could not comply with the decision of the consistory. He offered an alternate solution. He had brought a large number of sermons with him to Canada written by ministers of the “Liberated” churches, a series called “Waarheid en Recht” [“Truth and Justice”]. He suggested that the brethren in Lethbridge be allowed to read from both the “Menigerlei Genade” series and the “Waarheid en Recht” series. In this way, he explained, freedom of interpretation would be restored and he could have peace with the reading of Synodical sermons. He was not opposed to listening to Synodical sermons as long as there was also the possibility of hearing Liberated sermons.

The consistory replied that since a decision had been made years earlier allowing only sermons of the series “Menigerlei Genade” to be used in reading services, his suggestion could not be approved.

In the early years of the Christian Reformed Church at Nobleford the congregation had consisted of people who, in the Netherlands, had belonged to different denominations. Most of them had belonged to the Reformed Churches, several to the “Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk,” and others to various Old Reformed congregations. The latter group was not always satisfied with the preaching of the Christian Reformed ministers, and when a reading service was held they wanted sermons of the “old fathers” read, men like Smytegelt, Comrie and A. Brakel, sermons that were at least two hundred years old. This caused strife in the midst of the Nobleford Church and the consistory had decided at that point only to allow sermons of the “Menigerlei Genade” series to be read. The maintenance of this rule, however, which in the past had worked as glue to bind the congregation together, now worked towards a split, and John pointed out this fact to the consistory.

JUDGING OTHERS UNHEARD

Another subject which John brought up in his letter pertained to the correspondence situation between the Christian Reformed Church and the churches in the Netherlands. Before World War II began, correspondence had existed for many, many years between the church denominations. During the war years correspondence

had floundered due to the German occupation. After Holland was liberated from the Germans in 1945, contact could be and was restored, but now two denominations existed instead of one due to the split in 1944, and both claimed to be the Reformed Church of old with which the Christian Reformed Church had had correspondence before the war. Since approximately ninety percent of the members were in the Synodical Churches and ten percent in the Liberated Churches, the Christian Reformed Church had accepted, without hesitation, the first group as the one with whom she had a sister-relationship, and did not recognize the other group at all.

John protested against this attitude. He wrote: “The least you could have done was to find out which of the two claiming to be the rightful heirs to the name ‘Reformed Church’ was the right one. Since you did not take the trouble of finding out, you should have taken up correspondence with both or with neither, but to take up with one and leave the other out is rash and judging by hearsay and a sin against the ninth commandment.” He concluded his letter by urging the consistory to send an overture to Classis Pacific to have the decision of the correspondence rescinded.

The consistory refused to do so. In fact, they judged the correspondence issue of such little importance that in the beginning they did not even bother to answer John. Eventually Rev. Hoekstra wrote him a short letter stating that when an annual family visit occurred this matter would be discussed. “Because,” he wrote, “We are not intending to write or speak extensively about this.”

But the family visit did not occur. Rev. Hoekstra’s letter had been written in September 1948 and by the end of December no action had been taken. Again John wrote to the consistory. He pointed out the importance of the consistory’s decisions, namely that on their decision hinged on the question whether he, and others like him who in Holland had belonged to the Liberated churches, could remain in the Christian Reformed Church with a free conscience. He ended his letter by stating that if he had not received a favourable reply from the consistory before the next celebration of the Lord’s Holy Supper, he would abstain from participation in it.

A few weeks later Rev. Hoekstra and elder Konijnenbelt arrived for a family visit, a visit which lasted more than four hours. It was immediately clear to John that the consistory members were not going to change their minds. In their opinion the Synodical churches were the true Reformed Churches, with whom the Christian Reformed Church had always had correspondence. The Liberated churches which the two brethren called the “Schilder Group” (named after Prof. K. Schilder) were free to send a request to the next Christian Reformed synod in order to establish

correspondence, a request which the synod would undoubtedly deal graciously with, but at present the consistory could not and would not do anything to change the situation.

“Well,” said John, “the consequences are then yours, but will you be so kind as to ask the consistory to send me, in writing, the decision about the matters which I have brought up?” The brethren committed themselves to a reply, and fourteen days later, on Saturday, January 29, 1949, he received the promised letter, in which the consistory advised him that all his suggestions had been rejected. At the bottom of the letter a note was printed—“Holy Supper will be administered D.V. Sunday, January 30th.” It was a good thing that the consistory had written “D.V.” (Deo Volente) on it, meaning “the Lord willing,” because the Lord had not willed that Holy Supper should be administered at Nobleford that Sunday. An outbreak of a flu epidemic occurred that weekend causing the consistory to cancel all church services!

DECISIONS OF CLASSIS AND SYNOD

John was not content to let the issue rest and decided to appeal the consistory’s decision to the Classis Pacific and the Synod if necessary. In March, 1949 his appeal was tabled at the classis with, as he expected, an unfavourable result. The classis had the same opinion as that of the Nobleford consistory, namely that the Liberated churches were a new organization with which the Christian Reformed Church had never had correspondence and probably would not have correspondence with in the near future.

John appealed the decision to the Synod which assembled in July 1949. There, too, the same reasoning occurred as he had earlier encountered. In a letter John received from them he read: “There has been no change in the confession and in the ecclesiastical conduct of the Reformed churches which would warrant a change in correspondence.” In other words, the Synodical decisions made in Holland from 1942 to 1944 had been correct, the discipline exercised over all the office bearers (elders, deacons, ministers, and professors) at that time had been correct and in no way had the Dutch Synod deviated from the old, Reformed road. If such a deviation had occurred, it was of such little importance that the Christian Reformed Church saw no reason to change the present correspondence situation.

LAST MONTHS OF STRUGGLE

Between the decisions of the March classis and the July Synod, the consistory of Nobleford had officially started holding church

services in Lethbridge. John and [his wife] Helen faithfully went to the services in Lethbridge. As long as the ecclesiastical process had not been concluded at the Synod, they were obedient to their consistory. Yet John talked where he could about the things which had happened in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. He discovered that many immigrants had no idea of what had been at stake, and as he himself was well informed, a number of churchgoers often clustered around him after the service for information. The consistory viewed this as dissension, and sent John a letter urging him to refrain from speaking to others about the schism in the Netherlands.

John immediately informed the consistory that he would not heed their request. He wrote: “The consistory’s job is to oversee my doctrine and conduct. If in one of these there is something which is not according to Scripture and Confession I want to hear proof of it. But in the meantime, I shall speak with whom and about what I choose. The subject of my discussions shall be determined by me and by the person with whom I speak. After all, the schism in Holland was written about frequently in “De Wachter” [“The Watchman”] (e.g. by Dr. P. Prins and the Rev. Van Halsema). Has the consistory requested them to refrain from publishing articles? No! You did not, because you apparently read those articles with approval. I conclude that you are in agreement with someone who writes about it, provided it is done in a way in which you approve, but when someone has another view on these matters, then his mouth has to be stopped.”

Shortly after John sent this letter the Synod advised him that his appeal had been rejected. John and Helen had received a lot of friendship in the Christian Reformed Church, especially in Burdett, and they had hoped that they could remain with this church. They had already experienced the church struggle of the Liberation in the Netherlands and were certainly not anxious to do so again in Canada. Yet they had to. They could not remain now that the Synod had rejected their appeal and left the true Reformed Church in the cold.

Sadly they sat down and wrote the consistory that they, with their children, withdrew themselves from the communion of the Christian Reformed Church. It was not yet clear to them what they would do next. At this point they only wished to be faithful to their belief—to the Reformed confession which they loved and wanted to retain—and remain Reformed in church policy [i.e. polity]. 



IT ALL BEGAN IN *LETHBRIDGE*

DR. JAMES VISSCHER

It all began in the spring of 1950, in a place called Lethbridge, a town not far from the foothills of southern Alberta, Canada. What began? A new Reformed church federation.

Truth be told, it was not much—just a bunch of newcomers, fresh off the boat from Europe, getting together in a simple house to read the Bible, offer a few prayers, and sign several papers. What were they doing? They were instituting a church, a church made up of Dutch immigrants, singing Dutch songs, reading out of a Dutch Bible, listening to Dutch sermons, pledging to do church the Dutch way.

This does not sound like much, right? True enough, but soon things began to stir in other places: Edmonton, Georgetown, Hamilton, New Westminster and more. In a few months, a small federation had formed. It was somewhat ironic, for this very much Dutch federation ended up calling itself “Canadian Reformed.” How is that for being audacious? Or should we say visionary?

Moving forward, today we are in the year 2025 and that little Dutch federation is still around. In the intervening years it has had its struggles and setbacks. Today it has largely shed its Dutch ways. English is now the dominant language and being Canadian (and, in some places, American) is now the prevailing culture. It has also grown from one church to over 70 churches.

Some would say “you are lucky.” Most of us, however, would say, “We have been blessed! We have been richly, abundantly, and graciously blessed! To survive this long in our kind of world, what a gift! Seventy-five years—what a miracle!”

It is indeed a blessing and a miracle. Only it is, and never has been, a miracle of our own making. This is very much a sign of God at work! Left to our own devices, we would have long ago collapsed and dispersed. Yet God has been faithful. In the face of our weaknesses and mistakes, these seventy-five years of existing,

even thriving, as a church federation are all his doing. All the credit and tribute belong to him alone.

While a milestone such as this should lead us to praise God, it also merits some further reflection.

JUST OFF THE BOAT

Something needs to be said about those people back in Lethbridge seventy-five years ago. Who were they? Where did they come from? When did they come? Why did they come?

A closer look reveals a number of things. All the people gathered in that house were Dutch or, to say it officially, they came from The Netherlands (henceforth NL). The country is popularly known as Holland, but that is a bit of a misnomer as Holland is really a province, not a country. It is known as being an under-the-water kind of place, right beside the often-stormy North Sea. It is known to be cold in winter and wet much of the year. It is famous for its cheese, Holstein cows, bikes, and “snert” (pea soup).

The people assembled in 1950 were Dutch, but it should be added that they came from all over NL—north, east, west, and south. Now you might think “so what?” but you should also know that NL, while being a little country, has a long, long history. As a result, over time people developed different local and provincial characteristics. Some were, and still are, known to be blunt, direct, down to earth, slick, urban (sophisticated), rural (backward), evasive, or demanding. Back in the old country, each group had their own area to live. On coming to Canada, they were all mixed together in a church setting. It made for a very interesting cross-section of people, and for not a few conflicts.

Thus far we have answered the “who” and the “where,” which brings us to the “when.” Most of the people who came from NL came in the decade of the 1950s. Some came earlier, as in the case of those living in Neerlandia who had come already in the 1930s. Others came in the 1960s and later. Still, the prime immigration years were between 1950 and 1960.

One more question is why these people had come to Canada. This question has a host of answers. Many of these early immigrants came for the sake of their children. They saw no future for themselves and their offspring in NL and Europe after the Second World War (1939–45). They were willing to uproot, travel to an unknown land, learn a new language, adjust to a different culture, find a new job, even live in poverty in hope of a better future. Some gave up much and came to little.

Then too there were those who came for other or additional reasons. Some wanted to farm but could never see themselves owning a farm in NL. Others had been through trauma in the Nazi years (death had taken away their fathers, mothers, brothers,

sisters, friends) and they wanted to get away from the aftermath of war. Others had been sent to Indonesia to fight the rebels, came back to NL disillusioned, and longed for a better life elsewhere. Added to this there were those who had been involved in church conflict during the 1940s or who had been expelled by the church. In short, there were any number of reasons for leaving the old country and starting fresh in Canada.

What all this shows you is that those who joined this new church shared a common confession and ancestry, a common language and culture, as well as a common longing to make of this new land a new home. And yet, in all this commonality, there were differences of character and temperament that often made those early years challenging. Being an elder, deacon, or minister and trying to lead such a diverse flock caused more than a few sleepless nights.

GROWING ROOTS

Upon arriving in a new land as an almost destitute immigrant family, the first order of business had to be finding shelter, buying food, and getting a job. That was often hard in those early years. I can still remember my dad and uncle leaving the house early Monday morning (we lived together as two families), waving good-bye to us kids, hitchhiking to work, and not coming back until Friday night. I can also remember sharing a bed with my older brother, counting the stars at night because the roof was not finished, praying that it would not rain. Indeed, the stories of adapting, adjusting, and surviving are many, and they are often colourful.

Despite the hardships, however, many church members made it. They learned the language, they found jobs that put food on the table, they started businesses, they adapted to the culture, and they began to identify themselves as Canadians (or Americans).

In addition to all this adapting to life in a new country, places were found for worship. In time, some purchased property and built basements to worship in. Others rented, saved, and eventually erected buildings. At first, the buildings were very basic: slats of two-by-twos for pews, fans for air conditioning, shaky podiums for pulpits, cramped quarters for meetings. But that all changed. Today, if you drive across the country and visit the churches in our federation, you will encounter some impressive structures.

The decades following the 1960s were not without struggle for the new churches. Early on, there were problems around the Form of Subscription, which calls on office-bearers to adhere to the Reformed doctrine and polity of the church. There was controversy over the doctrine of the church: was the church visible or invisible (or both)? How should we understand the communion of the saints? How should we properly fence the Lord's Supper? There

were also problems with relating to other churches of Reformed persuasion. It took decades for the federation to work through the challenge of Presbyterianism and Presbyterian churches. The debates in those years within churches and among believers could get heated.

Despite the heat, however, things got done, not just in the church but also in the realm of Christian education. No sooner did a church institute that soon a Christian school would follow, and then in time perhaps a high school, even a teacher's college. The children of believers in many places began to enjoy, and still enjoy, covenantal education. What a source of blessing our schools have been and continue to be!

The years of immigrants were followed by the years of settlement. But there is more to the story, for now you can say that as churches we were into the years of adopting Canada (or the US) as our home.

MAKING IT HOME

Has that been a good thing? In many ways it has. As we look around at church life today, we see that, in both Canada and the United States, freedom of religion remains. Of course, the COVID years tested this, and there are other dangers that threaten, but by and large we are not living in countries where it is a crime to say what you believe, to worship the Lord, or to wear your Christian faith on your sleeve.

In addition, there is opportunity for our children to get an education, to develop their talents and acquire skills. Again, this is not without challenge, but the possibilities are there. Our children are taking advantage of these opportunities.

Our churches are taking opportunities too. Canada, for example, continues to welcome immigrants and this has changed the character of our nation when it comes to languages being spoken, styles of dress, festivals being held, and buildings being constructed. Some may see this as dangerous, but many of our churches see this as an opportunity to reach out with the gospel. Worship services are being held in different languages or multiple simultaneous language translation is being used. The church used to send people out into the world (and it still does) but more and more the world is coming to us, living next door, and moving into our neighbourhoods. Thankfully many of our churches are making the most of these opportunities.

STAYING FAITHFUL

Yet all of this is not to imply that there are no dangers. As our churches celebrate seventy-five years of existence, they need to be on guard as well. The dangers of secularism, materialism, sexism, as well as biblical relativism abound. Churches all around us are crumbling and giving in to the idea that the Bible is not the authoritative Word of God, that the biblical offices should be open to all regardless of gender, and that sexual orientation and lifestyle do not matter. And if the danger is not from the world, it is from the devil and the self. Pride, conceit, selfishness, and lust are all too alive on planet Earth.

In my ministry I have at times compared the church to a hockey team in that it needs a good offense and a good defense. If you have only one or the other, disaster and defeat are close at

In my ministry I have at times compared the church to a hockey team in that it needs a good offense and a good defense. If you have only one or the other, disaster and defeat are close at hand.

hand. A church with no offense has forgotten the command of its Commander-in-Chief to make disciples of all nations. A church that has no defence is deaf to the warning not to be enslaved to the world and the devil. As churches we need both a good gospel offense and a stout gospel defense.

I pray that our churches will continue to live in truth, faith, love and holiness. If they do, they will surely prove that they really and truly belong to that Church which has spanned the ages—the one, holy, catholic Church of Jesus Christ. 



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THE FIRST CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES — IN — ONTARIO

EERSTE JAARGANG
ILSE VANDERMEULEN

Born in 1941 in Berkel en Rodenrijs the Netherlands, Jane (Sjaanie) Knol-Roodzant was ten years old when she and her family immigrated to Ontario. The family became early members in one of the newly instituted Canadian Reformed churches in Ontario. Though she was young at the time, Jane clearly remembers those early days in her new country. “It is surprising how many of the details I still know,” she says. “And above all, I see the Lord’s faithfulness to his church over all those years.”

EGGS & BANANAS

The post-war years in the Netherlands were difficult, as many Dutch families tried to return to normal life. “It was very tough,” recalls Jane. “There was no food, no milk, and my younger sister was sent away to another town to be taken care of, because she was malnourished. There was no housing or work and my parents struggled to make ends meet.” In search of a better life, the family of nine decided to immigrate to Canada.

They arrived in Thamesville on May 14, 1952, sponsored by the Koster family. Jane, her sister, and their father soon found work on farms. “I was not quite eleven and my oldest sister was twelve,” says Jane. “We worked with my father in corn fields, beans, sugar beets and tobacco. We were so poor in Holland, but here in Canada I had a lunchbox filled with sandwiches with meat, eggs, and bananas.” For her parents, the ability to provide for their family lifted a big burden.

Jane has many fond memories of those early days in her new country. “I remember the Canadian people being kind. During the first winter we received Canadian skates to replace our Dutch ‘tie-on-skates’ and we had a real Christmas tree with gifts. When we moved to Brampton and said goodbye at school, I received from my class a blue blouse and ribbons for my hair, and potato chips and pop for a farewell party. I never forgot that!”

FINDING A CHURCH

For Dutch immigrants, the language barrier made it difficult to join local Canadian churches. Most initially joined the Christian Reformed Churches. However, discussions about the Liberation—the 1944 split in the Dutch Reformed Churches that led to the formation of the Liberated Reformed Churches in the Netherlands—were discouraged.

Jane’s parents had supported the Liberation. “I remember we stopped worshipping in a nice church and instead met at the building of the flower auction,” she says. It caused divisions in many families, including Jane’s: “My grandfather even stopped entering our house. If he had a message, he would not step inside.”



Jane as a little girl

For the immigrants coming from the Liberated churches, remaining silent about the concerns that led to the Liberation was not an option. In the Chatham area where Jane’s family arrived, believers reached out to Professor B. Holwerda for guidance, which led to the institution of the Protestant Reformed Church in Chatham in March, 1950. However, differing views on the covenant brought unease to many members of this new church and, in the following year, a group of members requested to be admitted to the federation of the Canadian Reformed Churches, which had begun with a small number of churches in Alberta and Ontario but which was spreading out across other provinces.

ORANGEVILLE & HAMILTON

Dutch immigrants who settled in Orangeville connected with Reformed believers living in Hamilton. In August 1950, about fifty

Sundays were a highlight for the new Dutch Canadians. The first Canadian Reformed churches grew rapidly, drawing people from all over the Netherlands, each with their own dialects and customs.

people came together in Georgetown to hear Rev. Hettinga from Harlingen, the Netherlands. That same day, they decided to institute a church in Georgetown (which would become Orangeville). Elders and deacons were chosen and installed. It must have been a memorable day, as they also celebrated the Lord's supper and a child was baptized.

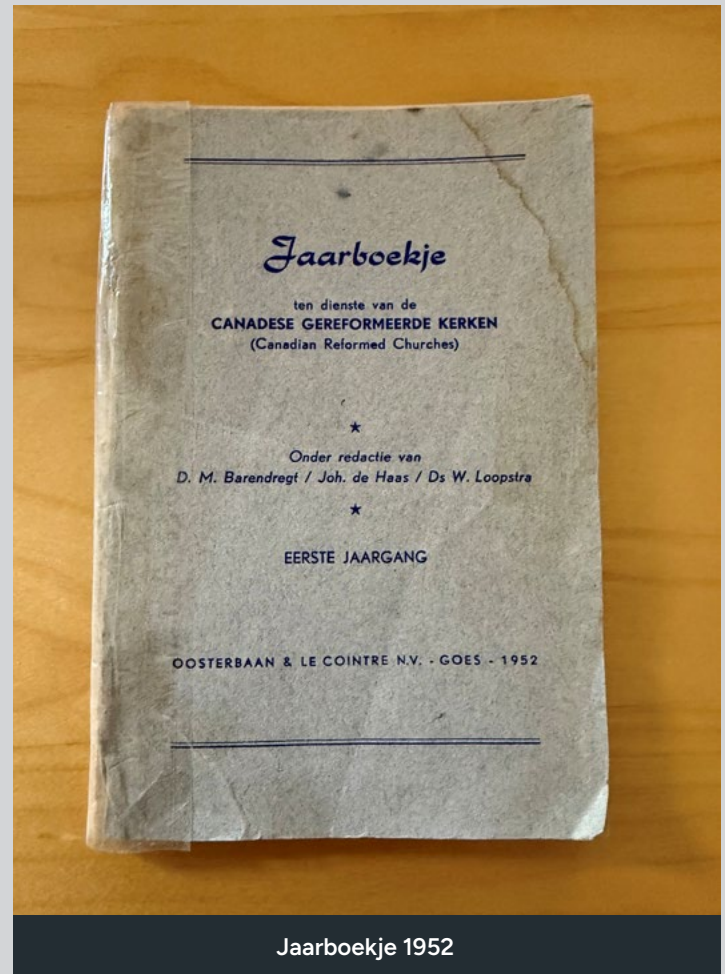
A year after arriving in Canada, Jane's family moved to Brampton and traveled 40 kilometers each Sunday to attend the Orangeville church. Some of the young people hitchhiked, including her future husband, Klaas (Klare) Knol. "Many immigrants lived far away from church," recalls Jane. "It was challenging to visit the Sunday services. But we never missed a Sunday!"

Jane and Klare married in 1961 and were members in Orangeville for the next 47 years. They raised a family of seven daughters and a son on a dairy farm in the Shelburne area. After worshipping for a time in the local Legion building, the Canadian Reformed Church in Orangeville constructed its own building with a commemorative stone inscribed with the words of Nehemiah 2:20: "We shall arise and build." That same text was used again at their recent 75th anniversary celebration.

FIRST YEARBOOK

The newly formed Canadian Reformed federation quickly began developing a full church structure. The federation's first yearbook, *Het Jaarboekje* (*The Yearbook*), was published in 1952 by a publisher in the Netherlands and was written in Dutch. The publication reported on Classis East and West. Classis East existed of the three young churches in Ontario: Chatham (350 members), Hamilton (422) and Orangeville (170). Classis West included Edmonton (293), Lethbridge (167) and Neerlandia (92) in Alberta, Carman/Homewood (70) in Manitoba, and Houston (55) and New Westminster (214) in British Columbia.

The first yearbook also contained practical information for new immigrants, including a warning against joining unions, an article on whether immigration was biblical, and contact information for the *'Gereformeerde Stichting tot Bijstand van Emigranten en Geemigreerden* (Reformed Association for Assistance of Immigrants). Fearing not all immigrants would end up with a



faithful church, the Dutch Liberated churches had initiated this organization to guide immigrants to the federation of Canadian Reformed churches.

GROWTH AND CONNECTION

Sundays were a highlight for the new Dutch Canadians. The first Canadian Reformed churches grew rapidly, drawing people from all over the Netherlands, each with their own dialects and customs. "I speak what is considered "high Dutch," says Jane, "which is very different from Gronings or Fries. I once had guests

from eastern Holland and I didn't know whether to say *ja* or *nee* in the conversation, because I could not understand most of it! Consistories had the challenging task to bring the different groups together around a shared Reformed identity. We all had to realize we were not first Friesians or Groningers, or people from Berkel—we were, above all, brothers and sisters in the Lord.”

For many years, congregations continued to hold services in Dutch. “Most men were adults when they came and they never went to school here to learn English,” Jane points out. “In the beginning, consistory meetings were held in Dutch, and we only called ministers from the Netherlands. When my youngest brother started Kindergarten, my mother forced herself to learn English with him, but many other women never really did.”

Constructing church buildings and establishing schools gave the Canadian Reformed people common goals. “The first schools were so exciting. And now we have even high schools!” Jane says. “The Lord blessed us tremendously. We now have the Teachers’ College and the seminary where our ministers are trained. We have solid preaching and we have the freedom to gather together as believers. God has been so good to us.”

LOOKING FORWARD

While the Knol family was active in the agricultural community and the children met many people through part-time jobs in town, Jane admits that not all church people were engaged in the broader community. “As Canadian Reformed people, we often kept to ourselves and did not bring the gospel to others.” She is encouraged to see that younger generations are often more open and engaged with their communities. “Maybe it needed time. We were very busy establishing church life and new schools and finding our place in Canadian society,” she says. Now, the next generation of Reformed believers has other opportunities to build on what has been established.

Jane’s dear husband passed on in 2012. Today, she lives in Holland Christian Homes in Brampton and regularly visits other Dutch widows in her community. She also sees many immigrants in her community facing the same challenges as the Dutch immigrants once did. Her current church, Grace Canadian Reformed Church, welcomes many of them. “As a church, we still have our Dutch-isms. But we are learning. It’s hard for me to get used to people walking in late with backpacks and coffee. But these new Canadians are often eager for God’s Word and it such a blessing that they can come to our churches and hear the true preaching of the Word.”



Jane Knol Currently!

Jane is grateful for the past seventy-five years in the Canadian Reformed Churches, for the blessing and growth she has been able to witness. “The Lord has not let go of the work of his hands, and the Lord continues his work.” ☪



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GREETINGS FROM A FELLOW PILGRIM

MARK T. BUBE

Editor's note: I invited Mr. Mark Bube of the OPC—who has many long years of experience with our churches—to share with us, as a member of a close sister church here in North America, his perspective on our federation. What follows then is a view from an informed brother in the Lord which may help us to better understand ourselves.

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! (Ps 34:8)

What a delight it has been over the past thirty years to see and experience our two churches, the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) growing closer together, as our lives and ministries have become more intertwined. I've been a member of the OPC's Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) since 1994, and I'm always both happy and thankful when I attend an interchurch meeting anywhere in the world and spot solid brothers from the CanRC also there.

SIMILAR BEGINNINGS

The stories of the founding of our two churches are quite similar. Very briefly, our grandfathers in the OPC came out of the northern branch of the "mainline" Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA). By the early 20th century, the marginalization of supernatural religion was creeping into that church. Missionaries were being sent out by the General Assembly's Board of Foreign Missions who were compromising on core doctrines of the gospel. When the 1933 General Assembly failed to take the necessary corrective measures, Dr. J. Gresham Machen and others formed an Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions to continue sending out missionaries who would be fully committed to the Word of God and the doctrines of the historic Christian faith.

In response, the 1934 PCUSA General Assembly adopted a deliverance that called upon all church members to sever their connections with the Independent Board and directed the presbyteries to see that disciplinary action was instituted against all members who refused to comply. Denied an opportunity to challenge the legality of the Assembly's deliverance, Dr.

Machen was convicted by his presbytery and suspended from the ministry. His appeal of that conviction (and those of others in similar circumstances) was rejected by the 1936 General Assembly.

Accordingly, on June 11, 1936, the General Assembly of the new Orthodox Presbyterian Church (originally named the Presbyterian Church of America) was constituted by thirty-four ministers and seventeen ruling elders, who were also joined by seventy-nine laymen in signing the act of association and doctrinal statement. The new church saw herself as continuing the true spiritual succession of the PCUSA. She would soon thereafter be sued by the mainline church over her choice of name. All but three of the congregations that withdrew from the mainline church to join the new church would be sued and lose their properties.

These experiences and providences continue to reverberate in the OPC's polity and culture today. She would be whole-heartedly committed to biblical Presbyterianism and, unlike the church she had left and many others still today, she would be very wary of centralizing power in the hands of a few at the top of an ecclesiastical pyramid, especially at the general assembly level. She would remember that God alone is the Lord of the conscience and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men. She would respect the liberties guaranteed to individual congregations in biblical Presbyterianism. She would strive to promote biblical due process in judicial proceedings. She would devote herself to the use of the ordinary means of grace in confident anticipation of the ongoing supernatural work of the Holy Spirit through her labours. And the pursuit of biblical foreign missions would continue to play a significant role in her church life.

She also learned that she needed to shift the focus of her attention from the events and controversies of the past that led to her founding and focus squarely on moving forward in Christ. We needed to press on as pilgrims in a foreign land with the work that he has given

One of the best examples of iron sharpening iron in interchurch relations that I've ever seen in all my years was an exchange of correspondence in the mid-1970s between the relevant committees of our two major assemblies.

us to do. Recognizing that no system or polity implemented by sinners (like us!) will ever be better than those actually appointed to do the work, we needed to beseech our Lord to raise up men after his own heart. And we needed to learn to trust our brothers in Christ.

Some twenty years ago, a friend passed along to me a copy of G. van Dooren's . . . *And We Escaped*, which I recently re-read, with a growing sense of *déjà vu*, as background for this article. I also dipped into W.W.J. VanOene's *Inheritance Preserved* and my heart was warmed to see several ministers, whose photos were included in the volume, that I recognized—primarily through their work with the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). The Liberation of 1944 was only eight years after the founding of the OPC, when your grandfathers in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) came out of what would become known as the RCN (Synodical) over some serious doctrinal and polity issues. In the midst of the Second World War, they, too, experienced the abuse of an overreaching broad assembly, a denial of basic due process in judicial matters, and the imposition of extra-confessional doctrinal requirements—and they would consider themselves to be the true spiritual successor of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

In the years following the war, many in the RCN (Liberated) immigrated to Canada and, following the same course we would have, sought to unite with an already existing Reformed church. When efforts to do so with either the Protestant Reformed Church or the Christian Reformed Church of North America failed, the first congregation of the CanRC was organized on April 16, 1950.

DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP

It would take another fifty years for the OPC and CanRC to establish an official relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. While there were some bumps in the road along the way, I have always appreciated the diligence, precision, and perseverance of our CanRC brothers as together we tried to navigate a path to that relationship. There were many issues that needed to be patiently and methodically worked through.

The first formal contact that I could find was a letter from Synod Edmonton (1965) addressed to our 33rd (1966) General Assembly seeking to initiate contact. One of the best examples of

iron sharpening iron in interchurch relations that I've ever seen in all my years was an exchange of correspondence in the mid-1970s between the relevant committees of our two major assemblies. Soon thereafter, Synod Coaldale in 1977 recognized the OPC "as a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ as confessed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession."

By the end of the 1980s, most of the "divergencies" had been worked out and Synod Lincoln 1992 determined that all but three matters—confessional membership, supervision of the Lord's Table, and the OPC's relationship with the CRCNA—had been sufficiently discussed to conclude that they were not impediments for ecclesiastical fellowship. In 1997, the OPC terminated its relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the CRCNA following the decision of its Synod to allow women to serve in the offices of elder, minister, and evangelist. There would be one last bump (not directly related to the two remaining issues under discussion) in the late 1990s before both Synod Neerlandia 2001 and the 68th (2001) General Assembly would approve an agreement formulated jointly by our interchurch relations committees on those two remaining issues—I remember it was hard work, but it was good work—and we entered into full ecclesiastical fellowship.

Years later, I would have the privilege of serving as the OPC's fraternal delegate to Synod Dunnville 2016 and Synod Guelph 2022, where I was warmly welcomed and made to feel right at home. There I first met and became friends with Jeff Temple, and we continue to correspond from time to time. He brought some very kind remarks as part of his fraternal greetings to our 88th (2022) General Assembly upon my retirement.

RUBBING SHOULDERS IN THE BROADER REFORMED COMMUNITY

While the development of a formal interchurch relationship was slowly moving forward, our two churches also began to cross paths in the quadrennial meetings of the ICRC, of which the CanRC was one of the founding Member Churches in 1982. The OPC sent three observers to the 1985 meeting and four to the 1989 meeting. In 1988, the OPC resigned its membership of thirty-nine years in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod—which was one of those matters of concern to our CanRC brethren—when the RES refused "to request the resignation of a member denomination [i.e., the RCN

Synodical] that accepts homosexuals as in good standing and eligible for office in the church.” In 1993, the OPC was received as a Member Church of the ICRC.

My first time attending a meeting of the ICRC was in 1997 in Seoul, where I presented a paper on “The Principles of Reformed Missions” and met several CanRC brothers, including Karlo Janssen, who would become a dear friend in the decades that followed. At that meeting I was also appointed to the ICRC Missions Committee, in which I have served in one capacity or another ever since, and had the privilege of working with Kees Van Spronsen. Jumping forward twenty-five years, in 2022, Karlo was appointed Corresponding Secretary and I was appointed Coordinator of the ICRC, which keeps us in regular communication.

In 2009, the CanRC brought a recommendation to the ICRC to establish a Committee of Review “to engage in a complete review of the history and functioning of the ICRC.” Jack (James) Visscher—another CanRC brother whom I grew to love and respect—served as the chairman and I as the secretary, and together with five other brothers from ICRC Member Churches, we worked together over the next four years to carry out our mandate. We presented our final report in 2013 and, with a few amendments, our recommendations were adopted. Jack began serving as the Corresponding Secretary and I as the convenor of the Missions Committee, which initiated a wonderful season of collegial working together with Arjan de Visser (our secretary).

A difficult season for both of our churches developed when Synod Meppel 2017 of the RCN (Liberated) decided to open the special offices of minister and ruling elder to persons who are biblically disqualified from such offices. Members of the CanRC and OPC interchurch relations committees consulted on how to respond, including how to initiate the process of suspending the RCN (Liberated)’s membership in the ICRC. Since the timing of that decision made it impossible for the Synod of the CanRC to do so, the OPC, through a special commission



of its General Assembly, brought the necessary motion to suspend the RCN (Liberated) to the 9th (2017) Meeting of the ICRC. When Synod Goes 2020 of the RCN (Liberated) reaffirmed the 2017 decision, members of the CanRC and OPC interchurch relations committees again consulted, and both came to the 10th (2022) Meeting of the ICRC with proposals to terminate the RCN (Liberated)'s membership. Since the CanRC had the closer relationship with the RCN (Liberated)—her “mother” church—when the matter came to the floor, the OPC delegation deferred to the CanRC's proposal, which was adopted.

In 1975, the OPC was one of five constituent churches to form the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), of which the CanRC would become a Member Church in 2008. In 2009, NAPARC also appointed a Committee of Review, and I enjoyed working on it with Riemer Faber. Our recommendations were approved with a few amendments in 2013, and since then our two delegations to the annual meetings of NAPARC have met together bilaterally almost every year. There is also an annual consultation of representatives of the World Missions Agencies of the NAPARC Member Churches, and the fellowship in those meetings between our CanRC brothers, the OPC's Committee on Foreign Missions, and the brothers from other NAPARC Member Churches has been especially sweet. Over the years, our missionary labours have overlapped with yours in Haiti, Quebec, and Uganda.

At a NAPARC meeting in 2022, a CanRC brother approached our delegation with a suggestion to establish a three-year rotation

(CanRC, FRC Australia, and OPC) for sending fraternal delegates to the annual General Assembly of the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea, which includes the sharing of our reports. The rotation began in 2023, and we are very pleased with this new arrangement.

Over the years, several OPC brothers have been invited to speak at your seminary and at various conferences. This past April, I was invited to speak at the Canadian Reformed Mission Consultation. While I was unable to attend in person, I was able to join by Zoom for almost all the presentations and came away much encouraged.

Brothers and sisters in the CanRC, it has been wonderful to labour alongside you in our Master's fields. I am so thankful for our Lord's marvelous grace upon you these past seventy-five years. Inscribed on the tombstone of OPC missionary nurse Anna Strikwerda—who was martyred while serving the sick and dying in the town of Ghinda, Eritrea, in 1974—are words from Revelation 2:10: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (KJV). 

Mark T. Bube

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Mr. Bube served as the general secretary of the OPC's Committee on Foreign Missions from 1991–2022, and as a member of the OPC's Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations since 1994 (administrator since 2019).

READ AND SEARCH OLD VOLUMES

of **Clarion**

clarionmagazine.ca/archive

Mighty God, We Give You Praise

Ignaz Franz, 1771
Tr. George van Popta, 2025

Johann Peter Ritter (1763-1846)

1. Might-y God, we give you praise, King of kings, in glo-ry seat-ed!
Heaven and earth their voic-es raise, with your won-drous deeds re-peat-ed.
Who you are, you yet shall be all through-out e-ter-ni-ty.

The musical score is written on three staves in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major. The melody is simple and hymn-like, with lyrics written below each staff. The first staff ends with a double bar line, and the second and third staves continue the melody and lyrics.

2. All who lift their voice to praise
your eternal unseen glory
celebrate your gracious ways.
All the angels, never weary,
cry aloud, their praise renew:
"Three times holy God are you!"

3. Lord, have mercy, hear our plea;
open wide your arms of kindness!
Pour your blessings endlessly;
keep us in your constant goodness.
Ever faithful is your way;
guide us, lest we go astray!



EXPERIENCES IN JOINING THE CANRC

ILSE VANDERMEULEN

When our Lord Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations,” he encouraged his followers to share the gospel with others and, through preaching and godly living, to draw people to him by his Spirit.

Clarion spoke to men and women from across the country who became members of the Canadian Reformed Churches as adults. They navigated catechism classes, creeds, and confessions. They adjusted to the liturgy, singing Psalms, the Genevan tunes, and many Dutch immigrant customs along the way.

How did they find a Canadian Reformed church? What drew them to the Reformed faith, and what is it like to join our church culture? They shared what surprised them, what they’ve come to love, things which they wonder about, and things the rest of us might not even notice anymore. “It can sometimes be difficult and intimidating for those curious about Christianity or new to an area to come into our churches because we are so used to being a community that operates within our own spheres that we don’t even realize that others feel on the outside or like they don’t belong,” one of them wrote. “Loving our neighbour is so much more than just being friendly.”



CORLISA PIETERSMA

Corlisa (35) teaches at Covenant Canadian Reformed School in Neerlandia, AB and attends the Canadian Reformed Church in Barrhead. She became increasingly concerned with the direction of her home church, the Gereformeerde Kerk (vrijgemaakt) in the Netherlands, and moved to Canada in 2014 to join the Canadian Reformed Church.

“Joining the Canadian Reformed Churches, I noticed that knowledge about God was important, not just the feeling of how good faith can make you feel. I am convinced that we need knowledge to understand God, or try as best as we can, and to live according to God’s Word. Now, when I visit my family in the Netherlands, I go to the Gereformeerde Kerk Nederland (GKN). They are like the Canadian Reformed Churches in their teaching, which I am very happy about.

“I appreciate how the Reformed faith focuses on God and his Word and not so much on our own feelings. Hearing God’s words each Sunday and hearing his Ten Commandments puts me in a place of humility and dependence on God and on him alone. Teaching this knowledge to covenant children at school is something that brings me joy that nothing can beat. Having faith like a child is something to be in awe of and seeing this in my work is such a blessing that humbles me every day.

“Before I left for Canada, an old minister who was a family friend advised me to ‘watch and learn’ in my new church. And those words had much truth to them. To adjust, I watched and saw how my new church was working. One thing I had to get used to was the fact that women in my church can’t vote during elections for elders and deacons. In the Netherlands, as a full member and

single woman, I was allowed to vote. I now had to find other ways to be heard, which was hard to get used to. My elders are now my representatives in those situations, and I can be active in the background.

“I believe we have to continue to examine the things we do in church. Why are we keeping certain traditions over others? Find out why things work, and if they don’t work, think about what can be done to change it in a way that focuses on God and not on people.” •



DAVID MINCHIN

David (69) is a retired wood-protection technologist who attends Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church in Surrey, BC.

“I grew up in Summerland, BC. I always attended Sunday school and later a group for guys aged 5–16 at our minister’s house before our morning service at Summerland United Church. When I was 36, I started dating a woman who temporarily attended Maranatha Church. Our relationship did not last but after she moved away, I continued to attend Maranatha. I took catechism classes (a forty-year-old with teenagers!) and I was brought back to the faith. I appreciate the adherence to Scripture in the Canadian Reformed Church and I like the lack of hierarchy in the church structure.

“What was new for me was to attend two services on a Sunday. I am an anxious person, and years ago, a minister once stopped the sermon to admonish a person who got up to go to the bathroom, saying they should come prepared to sit for an hour. It still terrifies me! I’m also not used to singing. I can’t sing. And Canadian Reformed people love to sing! I did not grow up with singing but in the church, you are expected to sing, even in a small group without music. When I don’t sing, I hope people don’t perceive this as a lack of faith.” •

“God used them to witness to us over the next two years. The love they showed to each other rubbed off on us ... We’d never been around any Christians before, so it was beautiful to observe.”

ADAM AND DANICA WRENCH

Adam (40) is an environmental consultant, and his wife Danica (45) takes care of their home and educates their two children. They attend the Canadian Reformed Church in Houston, BC. Adam grew up in a nurturing, stable home with his parents and three siblings in Sicamous. Faith was non-existent in the home. Danica was adopted and raised in the area of Philadelphia (US). She went to a Catholic church with her dad and grandfather for the first twelve years of her life.

“After we married,” Danica shared, “Adam and I moved to Yukon Territory. We were living life in our own strength, struggling but looking okay on the outside. Marriage was difficult, and we had two young children. We were running a farm and living off grid. Only a handful of people in our town of 400 attended a church. There was, however, one older couple who lived there that were Christians. And one day, they ‘randomly’ came up our driveway. They were looking for wild cranberries, and our property was full of them.”

“God used them to witness to us over the next two years. The love they showed to each other rubbed off on us. It wasn’t overly affectionate, but loving and respectful. We were lacking that in our marriage. We’d never been around any Christians before, so it was beautiful to observe. They came to help us harvest, watched our kids, helped build a greenhouse and dig a root cellar, and just visited and shared meals. As we got to know them more, we learned that they loved Jesus. They never pushed their faith on us, but they sure lived it out. When we started asking more questions, they answered happily. They got each of us a Bible and we started reading it.”

“At this same time, though, we were looking to move. This happened very quickly; our farm sold immediately, and we found a place in central BC. As soon as we arrived in the Bulkley Valley, we attended a Reformed church. The pastor at the time was incredibly generous with his time. He answered our many, many questions, made a special Catechism class for us, and we professed our faith there.”

“Later, we were invited by two couples who are members of the Houston Canadian Reformed Church to join them for worship. When we did, we were extremely impressed by the depth of preaching, the liturgy, and the hospitality of many in the congregation. The church we attended took a marked departure from biblical truth and we found the worship in the Canadian Reformed Church to be a refreshing return to the centrality of deep biblical preaching and teaching. After attending several services and getting to know many of the members, we felt this congregation was part of the true church and where God had called us.”

“Ever since then, Jesus Christ and his Church have been the cornerstone of our life. We have observed many traditions in the Canadian Reformed church that were new to us, and we have come to really appreciate them as we learn the history and roots of many of them. We both really appreciate the Genevan tunes as we find them excellent for following each word of praise. They are easy to learn, and our children memorize them quickly. We appreciate the emphasis on the finished saving work of Christ and the assurance of salvation that flows from knowing and faithfully trusting in him for that.”

“Our faith, praise God, has continued to grow. God chose to save Adam and I together, which was quite amazing. God led us to the Canadian Reformed Church at the perfect time. Now here we are, blessed as can be.” •





DAN MACKAY

Dan (51) is an electrician and pipefitter. He attends the Coaldale Canadian Reformed Church with his wife Trish and their five children. Dan was raised in Richmond, BC, in a family with no faith background. He has served as elder and his wife's grandfather John DeHaas was one of the founding fathers of the Coaldale (then Lethbridge) congregation.

"I was writing my final pipefitting exam at BCIT, a technical school in the BC, on 9/11 when the planes flew into the Twin Towers in New York. Afterwards I ran into a friend—now my wife—and asked her if her church was having a special service because of what happened. She said they weren't, but they would pray for it on Sunday. I asked her if I could come. She at first was hesitant because of the stigma of having a male non-believer coming to church with her, but

thankfully the Spirit had a plan. This shows that it's all the Holy Spirit and not human choice; when he calls, he calls!

"Shortly after this, I headed back to Northern BC, to my job in the oil fields. I bought a Bible and took it with me. Reading it made me realize that something was missing in my life. I grabbed my stuff, handed in my keys and company vehicle, dropped everything I knew from my old life and headed back to the Fraser Valley, never looking back. I took up a new trade, working electrical at my now wife's cousin's company, a member of the Langley Canadian Reformed Church. He was a huge help navigating some of my questions about the faith. I found great friends and good role models within the church. I was blessed to be able to absorb the preaching twice every Sunday.

"When I look back, I can see that Lord pulled me out of the world and into the kingdom of believers. I started doing catechism with Rev. James Visscher, which led to me being baptized and doing profession of faith. It was awesome! It's hard to explain, but when you're a new believer, pulled out of the dark like I was, you get to see a different side of the grace of God than maybe most people who are born in the church family.

"I'm thankful the Lord opened the hearts of my wife's family to accept me. On my part, I had to get used to how awesome it is to be part of such a large family of believers. Still blows my mind! And the Dutch community is interesting, including the Dutch bingo! I have seen the church flourish into something that isn't quite Dutch anymore. I see more people from different backgrounds. The people can change but as long as the Word and the doctrine keeps true, we will flourish." •

JEREMY SEGSTRO

Jeremy (32) was raised in a Christian Reformed family but was critical of the traditionalism he saw. After attending a non-denominational church, he met some people from the Canadian Reformed Church and got to know their pastor, who kept pointing him back to the Scriptures for all his questions. Eventually, Jeremy went from pew to pulpit—he is now the minister of Yarrow Canadian Reformed Church in Yarrow, BC.

"I grew up in Winnipeg and faith did play an important part in my youth. I grew up in a Christian family and went to Christian schools, but something was missing. The richness, the faithfulness of Reformed theology; the confidence and the ability to show that what we did, what we believed, was directly from Scripture.

"I had left the Christian Reformed Church, fed up with the traditionalism I saw there. At the time, I considered 'tradition' and



‘traditionalism’ to be synonymous, so I started attending a non-denominational church. This was clearly the wrong move, but God directed events in my life so that I met some Canadian Reformed people through work. They invited me to attend church with them, and the timing was perfectly chosen by God, as the cracks and weaknesses in the non-denominational church had started to show.

“I started attending the Canadian Reformed Church and felt that I was hearing the richness of the gospel for the very first time. However, I was quite stubborn and skeptical, and so it took a few meetings with the pastor, with him patiently answering my often rude and pointed questions with grace and love. I would be skeptical of something and say, ‘Well, that’s just your opinion,’ but I would be pointed back to Scripture time after time. Then I realized that God was calling me to him, through this faithful pastor, this faithful church, and this faithful federation.

“Faithfulness to what God has revealed in his Word is so foundational! We have to be so mindful of the rich heritage we have! The way to be ‘seeker friendly’ as churches is to faithfully present God’s Word. Don’t water it down, don’t seek to be a poor imitation of mega-churches.

“The songs during the worship service were challenging in the beginning. I had come from a church with a full band, light machine, smoke machine, and loud, emotionally manipulative music. To go from that to psalms and hymns with the organ was a challenge. But it is so much richer. The songs we sing are not meant to be an emotionally manipulative spectacle.

“While I sometimes feel that growing up outside of the Canadian Reformed Church is a real weakness, not being educated in the doctrines of grace from birth, I know that God has taught me things on this journey that I would not have otherwise learned. I have been through so many learning curves and periods of immense growth—from non-denominational to Canadian Reformed, from pew to pupil at our seminary, and then from pupil to pastor. And God is so good and gracious—a little under a decade after I joined the Canadian Reformed Church, my parents joined me as members of the Canadian Reformed Church.” •



DOLF FEDDES

Dolf (53) is a grain and beef farmer and realtor in Manitoba. He is married to Marijke, and they have a son, four daughters, and three grandsons. They attend the Canadian Reformed Church of Carman East.

“I grew up in Veendam, the Netherlands, and we attended the GKV, the Reformed Church (Liberated). I am thankful my parents raised me in the faith and taught me that being an involved member of the church is important. I attended a Reformed elementary and high school. When my wife Marijke and I moved to Carman in 1999, hoping to start our own farm, we knew we wanted to be in the vicinity of a Reformed church and a Reformed school for our kids.

“When we moved in 1999, the GKV was still very similar to the Canadian Reformed Church in all aspects of church life, like liturgy, singing of the psalms, and church structure. Except for the language, we did not experience many differences when we moved to Manitoba. Our church federations have now grown apart and the bond of sister churches is, unfortunately, not there anymore.

“One of the things I love about the Canadian Reformed Church is the rich preaching that emphasizes how God works through the generations and the importance of the covenant that he established with his people. We hope that the Canadian Reformed churches stay connected to their rich heritage. When we left Holland the ‘changes’ were just beginning and now, twenty-five years later, that federation is unrecognizable to us. I hope we don’t have to experience the same changes in Canada. The Canadian Reformed churches have given a lot of constructive criticism to the GKV over the years. I hope that we, as a federation, also learned from this and don’t fall into the same trap.

“The Canadian Reformed churches have a lot to offer to a world in need. I pray that we may be open to the world and show that there is forgiveness of sins for all believers in Christ. The pure preaching of the Word needs to be heard by all!” •



TINA LITTLE

Tina (53) attends Streetlight Christian Church in Hamilton, ON. Tina lives with her adult daughter and has been on disability for the last ten years.

“I grew up in Scarborough, Ontario, and always believed in God, although I would not call myself a Christian. I discovered Streetlight while searching online for a church because I was new in Hamilton and wanted to grow and obtain more knowledge of God. I still remember the first day I went to Streetlight and the incredibly warm welcome I received from the greeter and from a kind lady who sat with me after seeing me sitting alone. I am a baptized member of this wonderful church now and love my new family in Christ.

“The teachings at Streetlight are Bible-based, which is very important to me. The people at Streetlight also have a great love for the community and those in the congregation. I am fairly shy, but the gatherings after the church service helped me socially and brought me out of my shell.

“I would still like to see more adult programs at Streetlight. There are a lot of lonely older adults in the community and the church can minister to them. I know there are not always many volunteers to help, but I hope that will change in the future.” •



LACEY GRANT

Lacey (39) is wife to Ryan and mother to three children, with a fourth due in the fall. She is a part-time Ward Clerk at St. Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg. She attends the Carman West Canadian Reformed Church with her family.

“I grew up in Carman. Being of Mennonite heritage, Christian faith was a large part of my upbringing. My husband Ryan and I were married in 2014 but it wasn’t until 2019 that I chose to be baptized and make profession of faith. I have never been a person to make quick decisions (don’t ask how long it took for me to decide to buy a simple beige Ikea couch) so when it came to my faith it took time as I observed and learned, which led to pre-confession lessons with our ward elder before making a commitment. Though Ryan could have had our children baptised on his own, I also wanted to be asked and to be able to answer ‘I do.’

“One thing I found difficult to adjust to, but now appreciate, is elder supervision. I don’t recall growing up with elders and no one came to our home, so I initially felt spied on, as if I were not a true Christian and could not be trusted, a misconception that our greater community has concerning those from the local Reformed churches. It took me a while to let my guard down, but we had very patient elders who were genuinely happy to have me in the congregation and spoke in a manner that invited questions. Now I look forward to home visits, talking about the year’s theme and gaining more understanding of God’s Word and how it applies to us through Reformed faith.

“I would like to encourage local evangelism. I am thankful for the outreach that we do have, whether it is open door events or participating on various town boards or in other small personal ways—our activity within our towns helps to break the stereotype of a closed church community. We as a communion of saints also need to look out for our fellow members. A kind, listening ear with gentle Christian encouragement can be enough to soften broken or hardening hearts. God gives us the words we need, the Holy Spirit works within, and nothing occurs outside of his will.” •



GLEN LEMON

Glen (70) learned about the Reformed faith from a young co-op student at the plumbing business where he worked. After the death of his wife and a tragedy in his family, Glen wanted answers to the hard questions about God and suffering. He now is a member of the Canadian Reformed Church of Owen Sound, where he also serves as deacon.

“I know God has a plan for me, as it says in Jeremiah 29:11. As a child, I grew up attending the United Church until it closed down. My wife Marilyn was Presbyterian, but I never went with her to church. She passed away in 2004; it turned out she had cancer. In 2006, my daughter, who was pregnant at the time, was in a car accident and she died while being airlifted to the hospital. I also lost a nephew who picked up a disease in Mexico. It was a very difficult time, and my life started to close in on me.

“At the same time, at work we had this young co-op student, Lambert Reinink. He always talked about his faith. In 2010 he asked me if I wanted to come to his church, because he was doing profession of faith. I did not know what that was at the time, but I was interested to see the ‘Dutch church’ on Mennonite Corners, so I went. Man, was that church full! I started to ask Lambert questions about God during lunch time at work. If he didn’t know the answers, he would ask his parents. After his final year in trade school, he announced that he was not returning to our business.

“After he left, I kept having this feeling that I was missing something. On Christmas morning that year, I put on a suit and went back to Lambert’s church. It was just something I had to do. I was too early and found an empty parking lot. I thought: “I am stupid! I don’t know anyone here!” But I waited until the first cars started to fill the parking lot and I attended every Sunday for a year. In

one of the services, Rev. Moesker started on a four-part series of the book of Ruth; it touched on a lot of things that Lambert and I had talked about. It was as if God answered a lot of my questions through the preaching. I missed the fourth part on the series of Ruth. However, when I visited Lambert down at his fiancé’s church, the minister there happened to preach that Sunday on the fourth part of Ruth! That blew my mind. I felt that God was following me around, and I had to smarten up! That’s when I wanted to work towards professing my faith and that is how I renewed my relationship with God.

“I worked through the Canons of Dort and the Belgic Confessions. I had to learn about many things, including how to view the Freemasons. I was a member of the Masons at the time, but understood the concerns with the organization and resigned. It is true that when your old nature dies and your new nature comes to life, things change. Many of your friends became acquaintances. I go to church on Sunday; they go to hockey. But it’s between me and God, and I condemn no one.

“The Reformed church is very family-oriented and everybody seems to be related to somebody. I don’t have the same upbringing and catechism education, and I am by myself, so at times it can be a bit lonely. But like I said, God has a plan, and it’s unreal! Lambert was the tool God used to bring me to him. I felt comfortable talking to him about Christianity and we are still close. I am a grandpa to his kids and visit him and his family regularly. Last year, I was elected as a deacon and am thankful I can serve our church that way.

I think that Canadian Reformed people should think outside the box, once in a while, instead of saying ‘that is not how it’s done.’ On the other hand, people have said to me, ‘If you think we can make things better, please tell us!’ ” •

I started to see the beauty and purpose behind the structure. The order of worship, the depth of the teaching, and even the rhythm of the liturgy—all of it started to point me more clearly to God, not away from Him.



UMAA LANGENDOEN

Umaa (30) is a Chartered Professional Accountant, married to Ben and expecting her first child in November. Umaa grew up in a Guyanese family in Mississauga, actively participating in many Hindu traditions and religious practices. She now attends Grace Canadian Reformed Church in Brampton.

“I’ve truly loved being part of the Canadian Reformed faith. I’ve found the community to be one of the kindest and most welcoming groups of people. There’s a deep sense of connection, unity, and genuine friendship—a real expression of what it means to be brothers and sisters in Christ.

“My journey toward Christianity began when I met my now husband, Ben. Early in our relationship, he gently and honestly shared his faith with me. He said, ‘I’m a Christian—this is what I believe. Maybe you’d be interested in learning more.’ That simple invitation sparked something in me. It led me to start reading the Bible and began my own journey of questioning, seeking, and exploring what I truly believed.

“Over time, the Lord opened my heart and mind to the truth of the gospel. By God’s grace, I was baptized in 2021, and my life has never been the same. I am deeply thankful for the way the Lord has worked through Ben, through Scripture, and through many moments of quiet reflection to bring me to faith in Christ. While my upbringing in Hinduism gave me a sense of reverence, life as a Christian has brought an entirely different kind of transformation. Now, my faith is rooted in the truth of God’s Word and in a personal relationship with Jesus. It’s not about rituals or

tradition—it’s about grace, freedom, and living in the light of His love and salvation.

“One of the initial challenges I faced when coming into the Reformed faith was adjusting to its structure. At first, the routine and order of the services felt a bit rigid to me—almost too methodical. I questioned whether this structure might take away from the sense of childlike freedom and joy in worship and limit our personal engagement with the Lord. But over time, as I began to settle in and learn more, those concerns faded. I started to see the beauty and purpose behind the structure. The order of worship, the depth of the teaching, and even the rhythm of the liturgy—all of it started to point me more clearly to God, not away from Him. Another aspect I cherish is the second service—what many refer to as the teaching or doctrinal service. It’s not just a tradition, but a meaningful opportunity to dig deeper into the foundations of our faith.

“Coming from an accounting and audit background, I’ve always appreciated clarity, structure, and integrity. In many ways, the Reformed faith mirrors those same values, providing a framework where things are thoughtfully examined, clearly articulated, and faithfully lived out. When I was going through the transition from Hinduism to Christianity, I found that the Reformed tradition provided strong, well-written resources—articles, sermons, and theological writings—that addressed my questions directly and with care. In a world full of uncertainty and confusion, it’s a gift to be part of a tradition that points so clearly and consistently to Christ.

“It’s been such a blessing to be part of this faith community. The love of Christ shines through in the people, the worship, and the shared life of the church. I often pray that one day my family, too, might come to know and experience the joy and peace that only the Lord can give.” •



MAGGIE LODDER

Maggie (37) and her husband Jordan have five children and live in Ancaster, Ontario. Maggie is a stay-at-home mom and homeschools their kids. The family attends the Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church.

“I grew up in Regina, Saskatchewan and Burlington, Ontario. As a child, I attended Catholic school, and our family went to the Roman Catholic Church. However, as we got older, our church attendance dwindled to just Christmas and Easter services.

“In my early 20s, while living in Florida, I found myself searching for meaning, purpose, and a relationship with God. During that time, the Lord led me to a local church, where I began attending regularly. It was there that I gave my life to the Lord.

“When I returned to Ontario, I began searching for a new church home. I decided to visit the Canadian Reformed Church, as I knew a few people from my past who were members. I eventually started catechism classes with Rev. DeGelder and joined a Bible study led by Henriette Vanhof. These two individuals were such a blessing to me, playing a pivotal role in helping me grow in my faith and my understanding of God’s Word. Soon after, I professed my faith and became a member.

“Some of the things I deeply appreciate about the Reformed faith are its strong biblical foundation, faithful preaching, and the intentional shepherding and teaching of the congregation. The Canadian Reformed church is truly a gift from the Lord. Since becoming a member, I have

experienced a strong sense of community, care, and kindness. I want to encourage those who have grown up in the Canadian Reformed church not to take this amazing blessing for granted. While it’s easy to become complacent, we must remember what a gift it is to be part of a church community that loves the Lord, serves him, and supports one another in love. We truly are the hands and feet of Christ to each other, and that is something to thank God for every single day. I am more grateful than words can express to be raising my children within the love and guidance of the Canadian Reformed church. It is a blessing and an honour to be part of this community.” •

Some of the things I deeply appreciate about the Reformed faith are its strong biblical foundation, faithful preaching, and the intentional shepherding and teaching of the congregation

KRESHA FABER

Kresha (47) is married to Richard and divides her time between their four children and many other activities, such as musician, organic farmer, teacher, and author. The Fabers live in Salmon Arm, BC, and attend the Canadian Reformed Church in Vernon, BC.

“My entire sense of identity as a young adult was wrapped around faith: I knew I was a beloved child of God who therefore had the joy and responsibility to live life in service to others. I grew up in Spokane, Washington, in a very large, vibrant Presbyterian church. My family was heavily involved in music ministry, mission outreach, and congregational life. Our lives centered around faith, and my parents had a deep desire to instill in my sister and me a deep love of God and a life-long desire to be faithful servants of the living God. We often spent Saturdays serving meals to homeless and low-income families, meeting new refugee families at the airport, or welcoming lonely individuals to our dinner table.

“I became a member in a Canadian Reformed church because I married my husband, who grew up at Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church in Surrey, BC. I deeply appreciate the doctrines of the Reformed faith! Obviously, these are straight out of Scripture, but the way they have been summarized in the catechisms and creeds we cherish synthesizes those doctrines so succinctly, so clearly, and so warmly.

“One of the things I cherish most about Reformed practice is the value we place on catechizing our children. There are so few churches remaining who hold regular catechism instruction. Even though my former church didn’t shy away from discussing Scripture in-depth and faith was at the center of our lives, there wasn’t a systematic way of studying or discussing our beliefs as part of church life. Even though my faith was strong, I struggled to put words to my beliefs as a young adult. Now, as a parent and a teacher who has the privilege of walking alongside our children as they learn these doctrines, I’m often floored with how much knowledge our youth have.

“I must say that it took me a very long time to feel at home in the Canadian Reformed church. In particular, the isolationist nature of the federation took me very much by surprise. When I came into the Canadian Reformed church, events and gatherings seemed to exist solely within Canadian Reformed circles and other people, even other Christians, were seen as ‘others.’ What grieved me most at that time was the church culture that seemed to imply that interacting with other Christians threatened the pure doctrinal beliefs of the Canadian Reformed tradition and should be avoided. Likewise, even though I was very warmly welcomed and made friends quickly, across the federation I still sensed the message that ‘You are only truly part of the church when you become like us.’ I belly laughed when I got my first mailbox at church, which had changed my German maiden name to a Dutch spelling!

“It also took some serious work to learn the Genevan tunes, even as I was a professional musician. I truly treasure many of the Genevan tunes now and the singing of the psalms in general, but they were definitely a hurdle at the beginning, especially when they served as the majority of the service music. The hymnody of the Church is so vast and rich, of which the Genevan settings of psalms are just one (very beautiful and essential) part!

“I deeply love the Reformed faith and am grateful to have been a part of the Canadian Reformed church for more than 20 years now, even though it took several years to feel at home. God is indeed good and faithful to His promises!” •



Ilse VanderMeulen

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Lamentations 1:

THE LONELINESS OF GRIEF

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of advent reflections on the book of Lamentations. The Lord willing, one reflection will appear in each issue of Clarion leading up to Christmas.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

During November and December of 2023, I preached a five-part advent sermon series through the book of Lamentations. It was a challenging process, but one that proved beneficial to both myself and the congregation as we learned how to lament the darkness of this world while simultaneously yearning for the advent of the Light of the world, the coming of Jesus Christ.

In the original Hebrew, the book of Lamentations is comprised of four acrostic poems. The fifth and final chapter does not have this structure. Each of the first four chapters progresses through the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, from Aleph to Taw. Lamentations 3 is slightly different; the acrostic pattern is intensified into triplet sequences. The chapters of Lamentations are like an A to Z description of lament, showing us how to lament

as believers. The entire Hebrew language is figuratively (or potentially) marshalled in service of lament.

AN AGELESS LAMENT

As Christians, we often overlook Lamentations, save for a few familiar verses in chapter 3. Yet this powerful book speaks directly to our hearts, offering a profound expression of collective sorrow and a pathway to hope. Much like Simon & Garfunkel's haunting lyrics in "The Sound of Silence," which begin, "Hello darkness, my old friend/I've come to talk with you again," Lamentations invites us to confront our despair, reflecting the deep grief felt after Jerusalem's destruction. Written by Jeremiah, the "weeping prophet," this book emerges from a time of profound loss,

reminding us that God's people have always experienced sorrow, yet have also found glimmers of hope amid their trials.

Lamentations 1–4 are crafted as acrostic poems, with each line beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This intentional structure serves two vital purposes. First, it aids memorization, helping us internalize our lament. God desires us to acknowledge our pain and the suffering around us. Second, it teaches us how to articulate our grief. Many of us struggle to express sorrow within our faith, but this Spirit-inspired lament equips us with language to navigate our pain in a broken world. In contrast, Lamentations 5 abandons this structure, offering a raw and desperate plea for help.

GASPING AT GRIEF (1:1-11)

The devastation of Jerusalem prompts profound questions: How could a loving God allow such suffering? Lamentations answers by emphasizing that this destruction is a result of divine judgment. Verses 5 and 8 illustrate the consequences of unrepentant sin: “the LORD has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions.” However, it’s crucial to recognize that this portrayal does not establish a direct correlation in every instance between individual sin and personal suffering. Jesus addressed this concern in John 9:1–3, when he clarified that suffering can serve a higher purpose. Today, those of us who endure hardship are not necessarily being punished more than others. While God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12), such understanding can still be challenging.

This perspective on suffering sets the stage for Jerusalem’s pitiable isolation. The city is likened to a widow who has lost her glory, and the phrase “Her uncleanness was in her skirts” (1:9) illustrates the consequences of turning away from God. The lament reaches its peak with a desperate cry: “Look, O LORD, and see, for I am despised” (1:11). This line encapsulates the profound grief of a people stripped of their identity and hope.

REELING IN GRIEF (1:12-22)

As the chapter unfolds, the lament shifts from a communal voice to the deeply personal experience of Jerusalem. It asks, “Is there any sorrow like my sorrow?” (1:12), allowing us to grasp the weight of anguish more intimately. The city laments, “He sent fire into my bones . . . I have been very rebellious” (1:13, 20). The imagery captures the overwhelming sense of emptiness and fear following loss.

Jerusalem’s lament reveals not just physical devastation but also the emotional toll of feeling abandoned—alone, lonely. Acknowledging guilt is vital; verses 18–20 articulate the city’s recognition of its rebellion against God. This acknowledgment serves as both a warning and an invitation for repentance: “The LORD is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word” (1:18).

Lamentations 1 concludes without resolution, leaving the reader in unresolved grief. Yet for us as Christians today, this lament can be viewed through the lens of the New Testament. Our ultimate hope lies in Jesus, who fulfills every lament and promises restoration. He came to share in our suffering and offers comfort amid our grief.

CONCLUSION: A LAMENT OF HOPE

Lamentations invites us to engage with our sorrow, reminding us that grief is an essential part of our faith journey. While it can be uncomfortable to dwell in the darkness of lament, it is in these moments that we are called to cling to hope. The book testifies to the consequences of sin while pointing us toward the future restoration promised in Christ.

Mark Vroegop, in his book *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*, writes, “Lament is a song we sing while living in a world that is under the curse of sin. Lament longs for the day when cities like Jerusalem will no longer be levelled.” Just imagine—a day when there will be no lament in the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21 beautifully promises, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4).

In the meantime, this minor-key song of lament shines a light on the brokenness of our human experience. May we embrace this lament as we anticipate the coming of our Saviour, who promises to wipe away every tear and bring healing to our hearts. 

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. In what areas of your life do you feel a sense of loss or sorrow?
2. How can you express your laments to God during this season?
3. What steps can you take to cling to hope amid your struggles?



Jake Torenvliet

Minister

Redemption Canadian Reformed Church, Flamborough

CLARION KIDS ASK!

How was God able to make creation with His words?

- Bre, Grade 1

Hello Bre,

Creation is amazing, isn't it? When we see creation, we can wonder: "How could such an amazing world be made?"

There are lots of things that people build. Some of those buildings are incredible! Think about a skyscraper being built. First, a plan called a blueprint is made. Then, construction workers come and dig up dirt. They build with metal and concrete and wood and put in pipes and wires and glass. Over many months, a giant building that people will live or work in is built. Wow! It takes a lot of planning and hard work by many people to make that happen.

Now compare *one* skyscraper to *all* of God's creation: every mountain and land, the lakes and rivers and oceans, millions of kinds of plants and animals, human beings, and past earth a universe that is bigger than we can even imagine. Nobody made a blueprint for that, did they? And God didn't have construction workers building creation for many months. God thought of every idea and then created every single thing *with his words*. He designed everything perfectly and because his power is so great, his words could make those things be created. It's a miracle that makes us marvel!

So, when we look at God's creation we see and know that our God is almighty and even his words are incredibly powerful.

Till next time,

Mrs. Veenendaal

Email your question to editor@clarionmagazine.ca
and watch for the answer here in the *Clarion*!

JERRY BONTEKOE

This month, I got to call Jerry on the phone and ask him some questions for this write-up. I can just hear the smile on Jerry's face as I am talking to him on the phone. Every time I ask a question, he gives me a few chuckles before he answers. Sometimes those chuckles are just happy, and sometimes they sound a little mischievous. It's hard to tell which is which. I do know Jerry brings much joy to many around him, and maybe just a little "trouble." ☺

So, let me introduce to you Jerry. He currently lives at Anchor Christian Home in Beamsville, Ontario. He is very happy there, living with fellow residents he calls friends, with many caring staff looking out for him, and with family and friends a quick phone call or drive away. When I asked him what he was doing that night, he very enthusiastically answered, "It's phone call night!" Monday nights are very exciting for Jerry because he gets to call many of his family and friends and catch up with them.

Jerry keeps busy doing different things around the house. One of his chores at home is to do the recycling and to put out the garbage on Thursday nights. On Monday and Wednesday mornings, he works from 9–12 PM at Mission Thrift Store. They keep him busy there organizing and putting the hangers on the rack and with whatever other jobs they have for him to do. Every day, Jerry also goes for a walk by himself down the road in his bright orange vest. He usually walks to Feenstra's house and back.

Every Tuesday night, Nathan Wanders and a friend come down to Anchor Home to do woodshop with some of the residents. Bernie, Henry, Brent, and Jerry all work together and make picnic tables, birdhouses, or even bat houses.

On Fridays, they do band with Reece Heemskerk. Jerry has lots of fun playing the drums. He also enjoys movies—right now he is watching the Waltons. He enjoys Anchor Camp every year. I asked him about his favourite part and he said "everything." I had to ask him a few times for a specific answer—I guess all of Anchor Camp is great! He told me he loved making a necklace for his sister for her birthday, and swimming.

Jerry attends Vineyard CanRC in Beamsville. He enjoys being part of the church there and he really likes the newly renovated building. He enjoys getting company from members of the church and others in the community. The Lord continues to guide and provide for Jerry all that he needs, and has blessed him richly. Thank you Jerry for sharing a small part of your life with all of us. We wish you the Lord's blessing in all you do at home and in the community.

SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS:

6 Katie Deboer will be 25
3558 Thurston Pl
Abbotsford BC
V2T 6Y2

8 Marsha Moesker will be 48
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line RR 3
Fergus, ON
N1M 2W4

14 Jerry Bontekoe will be 61
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road RR 2
Beamsville, ON
LOR 1B2

15 Cindy Blokker will be 34
c/o Harbour Home
Spadara Drive,
Hamilton, ON
L9B 2K3

22 Nick Prinzen will be 51
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street, West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8

29 Paul Dieleman will be 54
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street, West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8

Happy birthday to all of you celebrating a birthday in September! May God continue to bless you in the coming year. May you also be a blessing to everyone around you.

- Rachel Vis

