

Clarion

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



A Theology of the Bed

Ian Wildeboer

Dead to Sin: Part 1

Rob Schouten

CRWRF Celebrates 60 Years

Ilse VanderMeulen

What's Inside

For 60 years, volunteers with the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund have been working hard to coordinate care for the poor around the world—thank you, brothers and sisters! Many of our churches contribute to the work of CRWRF and so inside we celebrate the Lord's goodness in these six decades of service.

Frequently the fall months leading up to Christmas/New Year are busy ones in church life, and so it is especially good to be reminded to truly enjoy our weekly day of rest, as both Eric Kampen and Rick Ludwig highlight in separate pieces. Much of our resting takes place on our beds and, as Ian Wildeboer demonstrates, that presents a great opportunity to grow closer to our God as we reflect on him there. Spiritual rest begins when we are justified and, at the same time, definitively sanctified in Christ—something Rob Schouten clarifies for us in *Dead to Sin*. And because we belong to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, we are free to take joy and satisfaction in the good things he gives us in this life, a point Arjen Vreugdenhil brings home in his *Treasures* meditation.

Nearing the opposite end of the spectrum from rest is violence, not a particularly pleasant topic. Yet we meet it frequently in the Old Testament and Rick Vanderhorst helps us understand why God used such violence leading up to the coming of Christ. Educating ourselves and our children about our covenant God and his ways is vital for both preserving the faith and flourishing in faithfulness, something John Roukema (a retired Christian school principal) underlines in *Pass the Promise*. Many current Christian school principals were able to meet together this past fall to discuss healthy, effective leadership in our schools—lots of good teaching in Otto Bouwman's summary!

Men who were theological students a short time ago are becoming ordained ministers—praise the Lord! You'll find a joyful account of Dunnville West's newly minted pastor and, in *Classis Clippings*, several other reports of men passing their final exams en route toward ordination—what a blessing! It's so good to see a new generation take up this calling even as we say farewell to another of the Lord's servants in Rev. Garrelt (Charlie) Wieske (see *In Memoriam*).

There's plenty more inside so please go and discover it all and may it be edifying!

Peter Holtvliwer

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor in Chief: Peter Holtvliwer
E: pholtvliwer@clarionmagazine.ca
Managing Editor: Anna Nienhuis
Contributing Editors: Eric Kampen, Jason Van Vliet, Matthew VanLuik, Calvin Vanderlinde

CONTENT INQUIRIES

E: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADMINISTRATIVE INQUIRIES

W: clarionmagazine.ca
E: publisher@clarionmagazine.ca
T: 204-663-9000

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Sunday: Spiritual *ONroute*

Anyone who has driven on the 400 highways in Ontario will be familiar with the *ONroute* service areas, spaced at regular intervals along the highway. For those not familiar with these, *ONroutes* are large rest areas where motorists can easily get off the highway to take a break from driving, gas up, visit the restrooms, and get something to eat. If you decide to pass by one of these rest areas without stopping, you might soon discover that it was a mistake as the gas gauge signals it is time to fill up, and the next stop is now quite some distance away. Furthermore, some family members may indicate they really need to visit the restroom and others wouldn't mind stretching their legs or having a snack.

SPIRITUAL REST AREAS

Not unlike these regular highway rest stops, our gracious God has set up spiritual rest areas for us as we travel along the highway of life, on route to the heavenly Jerusalem. These regular opportunities to rest and refuel are called Sundays. The LORD commanded that we keep the day holy by resting from our daily work. While the word "command" might give the sense of being compelled to do something, it is a sign of God's goodness that he told us to rest. The command is a gift. The Lord Jesus spelled out that this day was made for man, not as a burden but as a blessing (Mark 2:27).

After racing through life at high speed for six days, we should be looking forward to the exit ramp on Saturday, as we slow down to enter the rest area called Sunday. By resting, we show we are (re)created in the image of God, who rested on the seventh day. If we decide to pass by this weekly rest area, we will soon discover it was a mistake. If our Creator rested on the seventh day, we are foolish to think we don't need to. Sunday is a day of rest needed by our whole being, body and soul.

REST FOR OUR BODY AND SOUL

First, the day of rest is needed by our body. Machines have regular intervals when they are down for maintenance. When people exercise, their bodies need a recovery time. This is a basic human reality. On a daily basis, we do our regular work, but on Sunday we interrupt that pattern. Our bodies are given rest. There is time to sit,

relax, unwind, and recover. There is time to talk to others, especially members of one's own family and church family, who may have passed each other like ships in the night in the busyness of life.

Second, there is a need for spiritual and emotional rest for our souls. In the Old Testament, the LORD said that the Sabbath day was "a day of solemn rest, a holy convocation" (Lev 23:3). Rest from work provides opportunity to gather for worship. While worship is important with a view to showing love to God and praising him, it is also important for the worshipper. In worship, the mind gets a chance to wind down from thinking about the busyness of life's journey. In hearing the gospel, there is a reminder of who we are, how we got to be who we are, and where we are going.

Rest is needed for reorienting, refocusing, and refreshing the weary soul. There is a need for encouragement to keep going, even when one experiences bumpy roads and potholes such as relational difficulties, financial anxiety, health concerns, and whatever other burdens weigh one down on route. Lifting up your heart in worship lifts up your spirit and gives renewed perspective (cf. Ps 73:17).

After living six days in a virtual world, where much communication takes place on screens, coming together in worship is an opportunity to interact with real people, fellow believers, to encourage and to be encouraged. The spiritual benefit is not limited to worship time. Our gracious Father has given us a whole day of rest for our total well-being.

CHERISH THE DAY

Let us cherish our weekly Sunday, taking the opportunity to rest from our daily tasks, to be physically and spiritually refreshed. Taking this rest honours our Creator who made the rest stops for our benefit, and will help us stay focused on route to the eternal rest of the heavenly Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth. 



Eric Kampen

Minister Emeritus
Canadian Reformed Church of Orangeville
rev.e.kampen@gmail.com

Go, Have a Good Time!

“Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.” — Ecclesiastes 9:7

“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity!” Expressed in contemporary language, this first verse of Ecclesiastes says: “Nothing matters! It’s all worthless!” If you take a frank look at the world around us, it is not hard to understand this message. People are always busy, but what do they really accomplish? Generations come and go, and the world remains pretty much the same. We live, we do things, we die. Ecclesiastes hammers this message home, chapter after chapter. It deconstructs any value we find in the life of this world. When it characterizes our lifespan as “the days of your vain (futile) life that God has given you under the sun,” it is hard to disagree.

Does that mean that Christians should be dour, looking down on our current life on earth? Should we simply ignore and avoid the world as much as possible, as we wait for the Lord Jesus to return and finally bring the life that is worth living?

It may come as a surprise that the same book of gloom, in the middle of chapter 9, advises us to go and have a good time. Enjoy food and drink, put on nice clothes, love your spouse. These are the good things in our human life.

Did you expect the Bible to give that kind of advice? Doesn’t it sound more like a motto from the world, “Make the best of life,” “You only live once”? Yet there is a big difference. The world has no basis for their merrymaking except to forget about the futility of life. But Christians have a good reason to enjoy themselves: “God has already approved what you do.”

God’s approval makes all the difference. When he smiles upon us, when he blesses us, this life is worth living. Believers will be sojourners on earth, just passing through, on our way to greater glory; yet that journey is not all darkness and gloom, because the Lord is with us. We do our work in a world where nothing lasts and everything eventually falls apart, yet our labour is not in vain in the Lord.

May you claim God’s approval? The message in Ecclesiastes 9:7 is for God’s faithful people, for believers who are united with Jesus Christ, the Son of God’s good pleasure. Without him, your earthly enjoyment will ring hollow and leave you unfulfilled. Without faith

in Jesus Christ, the curse of futility that lies on the earth will catch up with you.

But if you belong to Jesus Christ, and live your life as a citizen of his Kingdom, then that will give you joy and a purpose that overcomes the futility of this world. Then you can celebrate even this earthly life properly, knowing that the Spirit of God has given you greater life.

This message from Ecclesiastes is liberating. The Lord does not give us the Herculean task of making this world a better place, erecting institutions that overcome the futility of this current world. He will take care of all those things. Our calling is to humbly live our lives, small and simple as they may seem. Just enjoy the food and drink and beauty and friendships your Father in heaven gives you. Live your life to the fullest, so that it becomes a song of praise to him, who in Jesus Christ gives us his full approval and deepest love. 🕊

FURTHER READING: DEUTERONOMY 16:9–17

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. What are some practical differences between the way Christians enjoy their lives and the way unbelievers do so?
2. Acts 2:46 tells us about the first Christian church that “day by day . . . breaking bread in their home, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.” Is this a deliberate echo of Ecclesiastes 9:7? If so, what does it imply about the church?
3. How will you put the advice in Ecclesiastes 9:7 into practice in 2026 in your individual life? Your family life? Your church life?

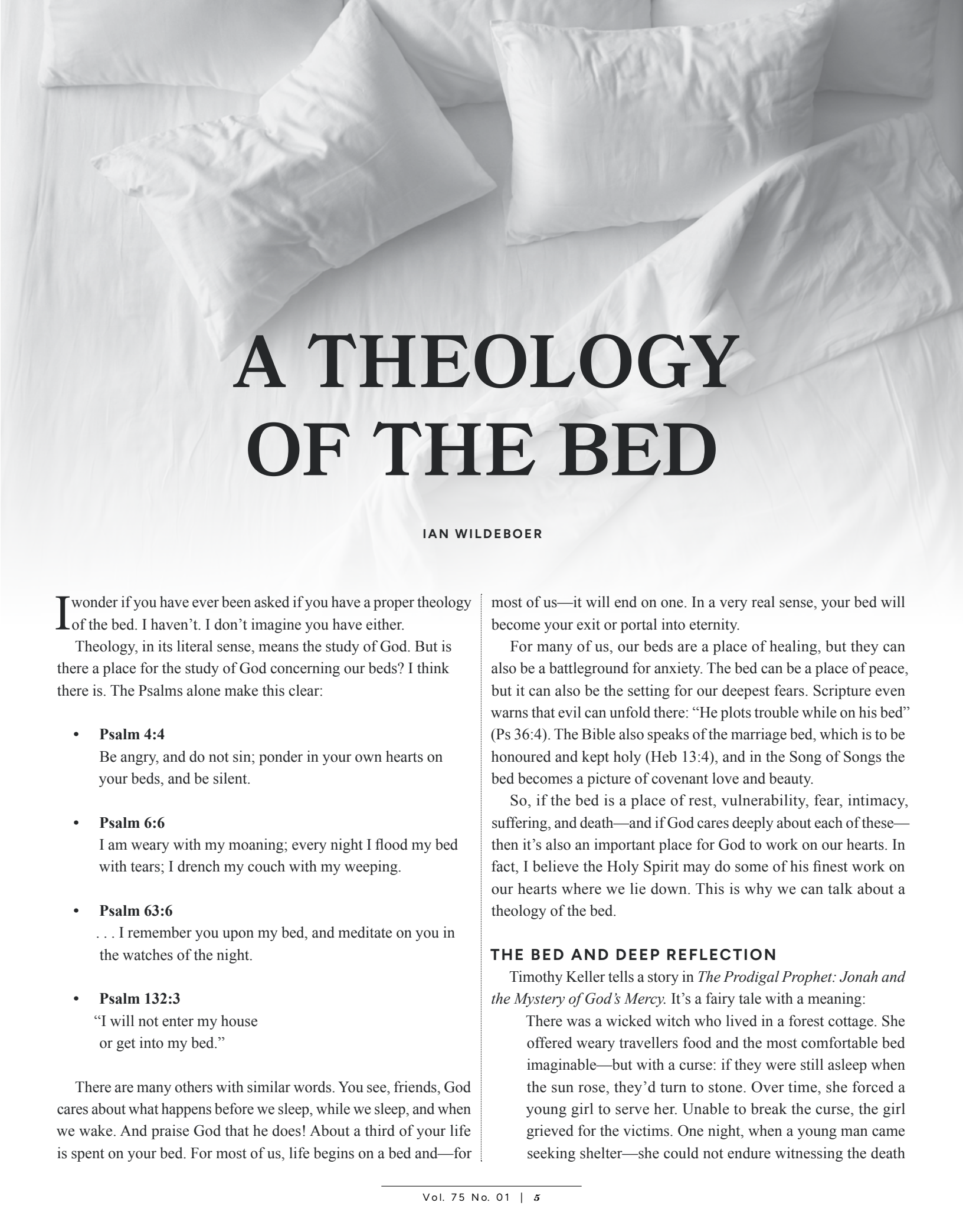


Rev. Arjen Vreugdenhil

Minister

Eben-Ezer Canadian Reformed Church (Chatham)

pastorarjen@gmail.com



A THEOLOGY OF THE BED

IAN WILDEBOER

I wonder if you have ever been asked if you have a proper theology of the bed. I haven't. I don't imagine you have either.

Theology, in its literal sense, means the study of God. But is there a place for the study of God concerning our beds? I think there is. The Psalms alone make this clear:

- **Psalm 4:4**
Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.
- **Psalm 6:6**
I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.
- **Psalm 63:6**
... I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night.
- **Psalm 132:3**
“I will not enter my house or get into my bed.”

There are many others with similar words. You see, friends, God cares about what happens before we sleep, while we sleep, and when we wake. And praise God that he does! About a third of your life is spent on your bed. For most of us, life begins on a bed and—for

most of us—it will end on one. In a very real sense, your bed will become your exit or portal into eternity.

For many of us, our beds are a place of healing, but they can also be a battleground for anxiety. The bed can be a place of peace, but it can also be the setting for our deepest fears. Scripture even warns that evil can unfold there: “He plots trouble while on his bed” (Ps 36:4). The Bible also speaks of the marriage bed, which is to be honoured and kept holy (Heb 13:4), and in the Song of Songs the bed becomes a picture of covenant love and beauty.

So, if the bed is a place of rest, vulnerability, fear, intimacy, suffering, and death—and if God cares deeply about each of these—then it's also an important place for God to work on our hearts. In fact, I believe the Holy Spirit may do some of his finest work on our hearts where we lie down. This is why we can talk about a theology of the bed.

THE BED AND DEEP REFLECTION

Timothy Keller tells a story in *The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God's Mercy*. It's a fairy tale with a meaning:

There was a wicked witch who lived in a forest cottage. She offered weary travellers food and the most comfortable bed imaginable—but with a curse: if they were still asleep when the sun rose, they'd turn to stone. Over time, she forced a young girl to serve her. Unable to break the curse, the girl grieved for the victims. One night, when a young man came seeking shelter—she could not endure witnessing the death

of another victim—she filled his bed with sticks, stones, and thistles. He tossed and turned all night, bruised and sleepless, and got up well before the sun rose. Angrily, he confronted her—why such cruelty to a weary traveller? She didn’t respond but whispered as he left, “The pain you felt last night is nothing compared to the fate you were spared. Those were my sticks and stones of love.”

Keller concludes that God sometimes puts sticks and stones of love in our beds to wake us, humble us, and draw us to himself—lest the end of life overtake us and we turn to stone, that is, life without him for all eternity.

Psalm 4:4 captures this reality: “Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on our beds, and be silent.” David is saying that searching and deep reflection are gifts from the Lord at night—even if they are uncomfortable. What if silence is the very invitation from God to set your heart right?

To understand what David is saying, we need to look at Psalm 4 as a whole. He begins not with rest but with distress: “Give me relief from my distress” (NIV). The Hebrew word for distress means to be forced into a tight, narrow place—hemmed in, hard pressed, just as we sometimes feel when we carry our troubles to bed. David’s distress came from those around him who opposed him cruelly. But what David does in his distress is instructive. He doesn’t look inward for strength or outward to people or substances (like drugs or alcohol) for relief. He looks upward to his righteous God.

Even before the cross of Christ—our righteousness—David clung to a righteousness not his own. As Paul would later write, “The righteous shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17). That’s the bedrock of a theology of the bed. David believed in God and was declared righteous. That faith changed his status with God from enemy to friend, from rebel to covenant child. He could say, “God is my righteous God,” without fear.

David continues lamenting that his God-given honor has been turned into shame. “How long,” he asks, will you people turn my glory into shame? (v. 2.) He’s been slandered and maligned. Many of us know that pain—being misunderstood, misrepresented, falsely accused, or betrayed by a friend. Such wounds can stir a desire for revenge. But David reminds us: “The LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him” (v. 3).

Because we belong to God—now sealed by the blood of Christ—David is saying that even in the night’s silence we rest knowing heaven is not deaf to our cries. The Lord hears when we call to him.

That brings us to verse 4: “Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.” David speaks of the anger or agitation that arises when we are maligned or face injustice. Scripture permits righteous anger—but warns us not to sin (Eph

4:26). When we are hurt or slandered, the temptation is to plan revenge. David says *don’t*. Rather, on your bed, search your own heart. Revenge belongs to the Lord.

As followers of Christ, we must turn agitation into self-examination—into deep reflection. When evening shadows fall and your pillow beckons, let your bed become a sanctuary for self-reflection. Examine your motives, your will, and your disposition toward others. Then, David adds, be silent. This silence isn’t the emptying of the mystic, but the filling of the believer—with God’s Word, God’s thoughts, and God’s ways. It’s surrender. It’s yielding our will to his.

If you’re like me, you may not do this well. The devil’s tactic is to distract us—to drown silence with media and noise. We so easily let our last thought be shaped by our last scroll. But David invites us to make our bed a sacred meeting place with God.

So try this: turn off your devices earlier. Be still. Ask, “Lord, where have I resisted you today? Where have anger, hurt, lust, jealousy, or pride ruled me? What do you want to reveal to me tonight?” Then pray with David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Ps 139:23–24.) It’s in this stillness and surrender that the Spirit often does his finest work.

THE BED AND TRUE REST

Reflection is essential, but so is rest. In Psalm 4, David moves from reflection through worship to rest: “Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD” (v. 5). The offering of right sacrifices is our worship. In the new covenant, this means presenting ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1). Then trust in the LORD—this is the basis for rest.

David notes that many ask, “Who will show us some good?” They are restless and faithless, seeking security in grain, wine, wealth, and success. They look not up but around. It’s no different today. It’s easy to pursue prosperity as the means for rest. If only I had more money, more toys, a bigger retirement package . . . but that leads only to restlessness. Augustine’s famous adage comes to mind: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

David prays, “Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!” True rest comes not from circumstances but from communion with God. This communion, sealed by the blood of Christ, produces deep joy—not tied to what we own, but to who owns us: “You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound” (v. 7).

That joy becomes the foundation for peace: “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety”

(v. 8). That peace—shalom—comes from knowing God is enough. He is your peace, your lighthouse in troubled seas.

I'm reminded of the apostle Peter just after James had just been killed by Herod. Peter, arrested next, was facing certain death. Yet, "when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers" (Acts 12:6). Certain death in the morning—and yet Peter slept. How? Only because he knew he was safe in God.

We know even more of that safety than David did—and maybe less than Peter knew—but for both, Christ secured it. Jesus, the true Son of David, knew both perfect rest and utter restlessness. He slept in a boat during a storm—but in Gethsemane, facing the storm of God's wrath, he did not sleep. He was betrayed, beaten, too weak to carry his cross, nailed to the wooden bed on which he would die, suspended between heaven and earth. There was no safety, no rest. He met the hell of a cursed restlessness and cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Why such suffering? Because of us. It was the only way to secure our eternal peace and safety before a holy God. Jesus became our forever peace, our eternal rest, our only safety from life's tempests. And so we have the promise etched on his blood-stained hands: "In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety."

THE BED AND READINESS

In Scripture, sleep is often a metaphor for death. The reality is that most of us will die on a bed. One day, you'll close your eyes and open them in eternity. That's why the old prayer still fits:

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Your bed matters because it's where you practice trust. It's where you search your heart. It's where you rehearse for your final rest. But, fellow believers, it's also a place where Christ turns fear and anxiety into victory, so that you can sleep in peace because of his finished work.

The question is: are you ready? Have you made peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ? Have you trusted the One who died and was laid to rest to defeat death for you? Do you believe he rose so you can rise with Him?

Psalms 4 begins with a cry and ends with calm peace—that's the Christian journey. In Christ, we move from panic to prayer, striving to surrender, anxiety to assurance. And when God makes your bed uncomfortable, perhaps it's his "sticks and stones of love" sparing you from a far worse fate. So, on your bed tonight, remember: you are a child of the Most High, his treasured possession, because Jesus purchased you. Christ is with you where you lie down to sleep, and he will be with you when you wake in eternity to see him as he is: your Saviour, your God, the fountain of all joy and peace forevermore. 



Ian Wildeboer

Minister

Mercy Christian Church (Hamilton)

wildeboer.ian@gmail.com

From the Publisher

Dear reader,

We regret that our Year End issue did not make into some of your hands before Christmas.

The magazine was designed and approved well on time with a good window for production and mailing. By that time the Canada Post strike was over (or we had confirmation it would be ended), and our expectation was that the magazine would arrive in mailboxes by Christmas Day. However, it turned out that because of the recent strike there was a significant backlog of mailing that needed to be processed, and that at an already busy time of year for Canada Post.

We have come through 14 months in which there were three separate instances of Canada Post strikes or job action. There is word of agreements between Canada Post and the union of postal workers, so we hope that we can put that all behind us for a long while.

Thank you for your patience and understanding.

William Gortemaker



Good Vibes

A number of years ago, my family enjoyed a Caribbean vacation to celebrate a milestone anniversary. One of the highlights of the trip was a day-long excursion hosted by a local family which included a boating adventure to see the shoreline highlights, a side trip into a small village, a dip in hot springs and a lava mud bath, as well as a lunch cooked and served by the mother and sisters, some snorkeling along a coral reef, and then a sun-soaked boat ride back to our home base while we enjoyed a homemade punch cocktail recipe. Our host for the day was a young man named Vaughn who, throughout the trip, offered us handshakes and high fives while repeatedly affirming, “Good vibes!” He wanted to make sure we were sharing in the rhythms of adventure and relaxation of their paradise island retreat. At the beginning of the day, my cynical side wondered if these people were truly related and how many extra American dollars would be shed in this “all-inclusive” outing, but by the day’s end I was bopping along with Vaughn and friends to the sway of the island beat. I had caught the vibe!

Last fall, I enjoyed a conference, along with my wife and some friends, hosted by the Christian Counselling and Education Foundation (CCEF) under the theme of *rest*. Here we were treated to a variety of gifted speakers approaching the topic of rest from various angles, including physical, spiritual, emotional, theological, practical, ministry-related, mental health focussed, and more. The teaching accumulated to form a well-rounded description of not only Sabbath rest but, more significantly, Sabbath living. As I enjoyed the conference and tried to scribble some notes and gather my thoughts, it was my erstwhile friend Vaughn who popped into my head. I saw the flash of his wide grin and heard the echo of his cheery voice declaring, “Good vibes!” It was then that I wondered if I may be wading in the shallow waters of understanding Sabbath rest, and now was as good a time as any to take a deeper plunge to discover if such a thing as a Sabbath vibe exists.

A GOOD DAY’S WORK

God reveals himself as one who abides with us in Sabbath rhythms. The Bible tells us that when God created everything, he did it in a measured way, one day’s work at a time. At the end of

each day, he looked back on his work to assess it. This was not to count and see what was not completed, but to take satisfaction in what was done. Starting and stopping allowed for an opportunity to create space for seeing that it was good. For man’s benefit, God meted out time into mornings and evenings to provide a natural way for us to mirror his example—to do some work each day and then take the time to reflect and see that is good.

At the same time, we discover that there is no rest apart from working. God worked first, then he rested. A work ethic was also established by God at the foundation of the world. We were created to be busy in God’s creation and to enjoy it. Work followed by rest in balanced rhythm existed before our fall into sin. It was the vibe of creation.

The fall into sin did not only bring death into the world, it also made a mess of working and resting. It was not that God’s Sabbath rhythm disappeared—rather, our new ill-gotten nature bucked against it, now doubting his good intentions towards us. In addition, the cropping up of thorns and thistles and the introduction of pain, all as punishment for sinfulness, launched a new reality for mankind that now included fatigue, frustration, competition, conflict, striving, and exhaustion. Our sinful nature prompted us to try recreating our own identity and purpose in the work itself, as we were bent on abandoning any real dependence on God.

The words of Ecclesiastes capture this newfound vanity that encourages limitless working, futile accumulating, and no real rest. And then the writer comes to this startling conclusion: “There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?” (Eccl 2:24–25.) In other words, there’s nothing better than a person rediscover his Sabbath living to get back in touch and in sync with his Sabbath-giving God.

SABBATH STRUGGLES

The law of God given to Moses encoded the principles of Sabbath back into the lives of God’s people in the Old Testament. While it would be good for them to follow the rule and it would bring blessing



to their lives, it was also difficult for sinful man to embrace the depth and cadence of it. God provided through Moses numerous embellishments of the Sabbath rule described in the ancillary laws to help his people fine tune its practice in serving the LORD, but as the apostle Paul later described, the law created opportunity for sin and it could not save the people. There are some terrifying stories in the Old Testament of harsh punishments for Sabbath breakers; people who feigned walking with God while secretly living according to their own wicked schemes. They received the due penalty for not trusting God as their Creator and provider. It turns out regular repentance and sacrifice were needed for everyone, also for Sabbath transgressions. Recovering Sabbath living and rest would take more than just trying to toe a line.

It is a wonderful reality that our Saviour Jesus, the Son of Man, called himself Lord of the Sabbath. He came to fulfill it, to master it on our behalf, to freely recapture our lost connection with our Creator and provider. In doing so, Jesus also exposed all wickedness in Sabbath living. The many attempts of the Pharisees to thread the needle of self-justification in respect to work and rest were outed and decried, “Woe to you!” Instead, Jesus reclaimed the Sabbath as an opportunity for loving, for doing good to others, for caring for self and ultimately for bringing glory to our Father in heaven.

Sabbath living has now been transformed as gospel living. Living in the freedom of working and resting both daily and weekly is the outward expression of our restored relationship with the Father through the work of Jesus Christ. He did not rest until it was finished, so that we could receive rest again! This Sabbath vibe carries through our work week and culminates on the day of rest, Sunday, where it reaches a crescendo of joy, gathering as God’s people together, declaring our trust in him and worshipping and praising his name. Our help is in the name of the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth! Sabbath living becomes a testimony to all of God’s goodness to us in Jesus Christ.

ALL INCLUSIVE

Sabbath living is not just meant for a group who are set apart, a mere dividing line on our streets that sorts out one household from

the next, one neighbour from the other. The Christian patterns of work and rest are our first testimony of the Spirit of Christ in our lives to all those around us. This Spirit is also willing and able to capture the hearts and souls of many who are struggling with the futility of their lives, the exhaustion of achieving self-worth, the vanity of clutching and grasping and having to let go, the brokenness of being stuck in the grind of daily work and restlessness.

In earlier years, my cynical side wondered if my neighbour really cared or would understand my choices around working and resting or even notice my best efforts to honour God. It seemed that I was setting it out as a mark of distinction rather than a point of connection. Now I realize that I had not really caught the Sabbath vibe! When I really believe and understand that Jesus Christ has liberated me from life’s greatest burden, my sin and my daily disconnect with my Creator God and his Sabbath love, how can I not want to share this? Like my Caribbean hosts, I can invite my neighbour, “Come, join me and my family on our journey and see a worldview that seems too good to be true. Have a meal like you’ve never tasted before, take a plunge in waters that wash and refresh you to the core, and share a drink that is so quenching that you will never thirst again. All-inclusive and without cost!” Imagine the feeling of arriving back home, shaking their hands or slapping high fives, and hearing them exclaim, “Good vibes!”

Sabbath love and life is for sharing. This is not a new idea. The Lord of the Sabbath himself says, “Go in my name and tell them!” And while we do, we enjoy our daily work and rest already, because he has earned our Sabbath back for us, for now and for eternity! 



Rick Ludwig

Streetlight Christian Church
rludwig@kitchingsteepeandludwig.com



Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ – Part 1: **A Fresh Start**

This is the first in a three-part series exploring what it means to be dead to sin and alive in Christ. Part 1 examines the decisive break with sin. Part 2 will address why Christians still struggle with sin, and Part 3 will explore how to grow in our new identity.

When most Christians hear the word sanctification, they think of a slow, lifelong process. Gradually, we hope, we become more like Christ. Gradually, sin loosens its grip. Over time, the rough edges are worn down. That's true... but it's not the whole story.

When the Bible talks about sanctification, it doesn't always describe it as a long, slow climb. It also describes it as a decisive break, something that happens once, definitively, at the beginning of the Christian life. It is a clean break, a new creation.

We don't often think of sanctification this way, but we should. Without it, we misunderstand what it really means to belong to Christ.

SANCTIFICATION NOT ONLY A PROCESS

We rightly think of justification, adoption, and regeneration as things God does once for all. They happen at the start of our Christian journey and don't repeat. We are justified—declared righteous—not gradually, but in a moment. We are adopted as God's children—not slowly, but definitively.

Surprisingly, the Bible puts sanctification into that same category of definitive works of God. For example, Paul addresses the Christians in Corinth as “those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Cor 1:2). Later, he reminds them: “You were washed,

you were sanctified, you were justified” (1 Cor 6:11). The language is in the past tense. It refers to something definitive.

In this context, sanctification is not a gradual improvement. It’s a change of category—a transfer of allegiance and a new identity.

WHAT IS “DEFINITIVE” SANCTIFICATION?

Paul’s clearest teaching on definitive sanctification is in Romans 6. After describing the power of grace in salvation, he anticipates a potential question: “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (6:1). His answer is blunt: “By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (6:2).

Notice Paul’s reasoning: we can’t live in sin because we have died to sin. Paul is not pointing to increased moral effort or gradual improvement. He is describing a definitive event: a break has occurred. We have died to sin’s dominion.

The apostle uses an analogy that everyone understands: death ends a relationship. When someone dies, they leave a world behind. They are no longer active participants in that world. They no longer live under its rules or influence. The same is true spiritually. When we are united to Christ, we die to the realm of sin. We no longer belong to it. We no longer live under its rule.

THE NEW LIFE

But Paul doesn’t stop at death. He continues with these words: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead . . . we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).

This statement is not theoretical. It describes a spiritual reality. When Christ died, we truly died. When Christ rose, we truly rose. The connection we have with Christ is not symbolic or imaginary. It is as real as death and life themselves.

To be clear, Christians still commit sin. However, they no longer live in sin. Sin no longer defines them and it no longer reigns over them. They are not partly alive and partly dead; they are entirely new in Christ.

WHY THIS MATTERS

For many Christians, sanctification feels like a long, discouraging slog. Progress seems slow. Old habits cling tightly. Temptation appears unrelenting. The common mistake is to believe that we are still in sin’s kingdom, still struggling to escape. It can feel as though we are fighting to become something we are not yet.

But Scripture teaches the opposite. We are already new. The old self—what Paul calls the “old man”—has been crucified (Rom

6:6). What remains are the lingering effects of the old way of life, not the old self itself. This truth changes everything. We fight not to win victory. We are fighting because Christ has already won the victory. Sin is no longer our master. We are not trying to become new creatures. We are already new creatures, learning to live in the reality Christ has already accomplished.

A CLEAN BREAK

This new reality is why Paul’s commands in Romans 6 are so sharp and direct: “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:11). “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body” (Rom 6:12). “Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life” (Rom 6:13).

Paul does not say, “Try to die to sin” or “Work toward becoming alive to God.” Instead, he says, “Consider yourselves dead to sin” and “Present yourselves to God.” You are what Christ has made you to be. Now live in a way that reflects that reality.

A NEW CITIZENSHIP

One of the clearest ways to understand this transformation is to think in terms of citizenship. As a believer in Christ, you have changed countries. You have left the kingdom of sin and death. You have entered the kingdom of life and righteousness. Your new passport has arrived and you are no longer a citizen of the old regime. This means that the laws of the old country no longer apply. Its customs no longer bind you. You may remember them. You may even fall back into old habits from time to time. But those old authorities have no claim over you anymore.

When you are in Christ, you are free.

THE TAKEAWAY

Sanctification is not just a slow, lifelong process of becoming better. It is a decisive, once-for-all break from the dominion of sin. It is a new beginning.

If you belong to Christ, you are not mostly old with a little bit of new. You are not two selves at war. You are not half-finished, hoping one day to be made whole. You are a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come! Believe it. Live it. 



Rob Schouten

Minister

Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church
robert.a.schouten@proton.me



The Violent Old Testament

Let's face it, the Old Testament is violent. Examples of gory killing and bloody battles appear repeatedly. Not only that, but at times these violent victories are celebrated as some of the greatest moments for God's people of old. Just think of David's victory over Goliath, where David slung a stone deep into Goliath's forehead and then cut off his head using Goliath's own sword. Other examples include Ehud's gruesome killing of King Eglon and Abimelech's bloody escapades and subsequent fall (Judges 3 and 10). Abimelech's reign of terror ended when a woman threw a millstone on his head from a tower, crushing his skull.

Part of us might be repulsed by these things. It's all so grisly and shocking. I still remember sitting around the dinner table when I was young while my dad read the story of Ehud during family devotions. I can still picture the look of nausea on my sisters' faces as the sword together with the hilt disappeared into King Eglon. Yuck!

Have you ever wondered about this before? Why all this violence in the Old Testament? Why would God have his people win victories through such gruesome means? What was his purpose in all of this?

GOD'S PLAN IN THE VIOLENCE

While there are several reasons for the violence of the Old Testament, such as God giving a picture of the kind of judgment sin and sinners deserve, in this article we are going to focus on one particular reason: through this violence, God was working to bring about Christ's own death on the cross so that he might bring about

the ultimate victory and give us salvation. Let me explain what I mean by this.

Right after the fall into sin, God declared that he would gain the victory over the devil. In Genesis 3:15, he promised that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. Although he made clear that victory would come, the LORD did not give any details beyond this basic promise. Instead of unveiling his plan all at once, he unfolded it slowly over time. He did this throughout the Old Testament.

Now, let's put our feet in the shoes of someone who lived in Old Testament times and did not have access to the New Testament Scriptures, including details about Jesus' death and resurrection. What might you think about God's promise in Genesis 3:15? You would probably think this battle would be won through violent means. You would think the winner would gain a victory by literally crushing the other person's head. This way of thinking would then be reinforced throughout the Old Testament in the violent victories won by God's people over their enemies.

God had a specific purpose in unfolding his plan in this way. He was using these things to gain the victory over the devil. You see, Scripture is not just something that humans read but it's clear that both angels and the devil know them too. This is something Scripture itself tells us. 1 Peter 1:10–12 says that even angels long to understand the predictions made by the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament prophets, things which are now declared through the preaching of the gospel. Furthermore, it's clear from Jesus'

temptation in the wilderness that Satan knows the Scriptures. In one sense, the Scriptures were not only written for us but also for the devil. I don't mean that they were written for his instruction, but that they were written for his downfall.

THE DEVIL'S DOWNFALL

What we need to understand is that while Satan knows the Scriptures, he doesn't really *know* them, as in, he doesn't understand them. In the same way, while Satan and the demons know God, they don't really *know* him, that is, in a saving way (James 2:19).

The devil heard God's declaration in Genesis 3:15. The LORD spoke those words to him, after all. Subsequent to that declaration, the devil kept seeing the defeat of his followers through violent means in the Old Testament time period. But Satan would not give up so easily. He worked hard to outsmart God, which is a very bad idea because no one can outsmart God.

In any case, the devil thought he would finally gain the victory if he could somehow put the promised Messiah to death and physically crush him. Perhaps he could turn the tables on God. Near the end of Jesus' ministry, the devil would finally get his chance. As children of the devil, the Jewish leaders wanted to do their father's will and murder Jesus (see John 8:44). They waited until their opportunity came. That opportunity came when the devil prompted Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus into their hands. Through their conspiring, they finally put Jesus to death on a cross.

In his crucifixion, Christ suffered one of the most violent deaths imaginable. From the perspective of the Old Testament alone, it looked like God's promised Messiah, and thus God himself, had suffered a complete and devastating defeat. Indeed, the devil and his followers were rejoicing when Jesus hung from the cross. However, this is where the LORD God himself turned the tables on the devil by raising his Son Jesus Christ from the dead.

While Satan thought he was taking away the life of Christ, the fact was that Jesus was actively giving it away.

The Scriptures tell us that Christ was crowned eternal king because of his humble obedience unto death (See Isa 53:12; Phil 2:6-11; Heb 2:9). This means that while Satan thought he was *taking* away the life of Christ, the fact was that Jesus was actively *giving* it away. It's by this obedience that Christ was enthroned above the devil, gained the victory over him, and now has the right to administer God's judgment on the wicked—including the devil.

Satan had thought he would win by violently putting Jesus to death on a cross. The truth was, however, that he effectively made Christ king by putting him to death and so sealed his own defeat. With all the violence of the Old Testament, God was drawing Satan into a trap at the crucifixion of Christ. The devil crushed his own head when he put Jesus to death.

All this is one reason Paul writes, "We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:7-8).

THE KINGDOM'S CURRENT ADVANCEMENT

The defeat of the devil on the cross marks a transition point in God's work in this world for the building of his kingdom. Christ Jesus won the victory by being physically defeated. This now forms the pattern of the advancement of God's kingdom in this world—it's often victory through apparent defeat.

God's people no longer use violent means to fight against God's enemies. Instead, the kingdom of God advances by the gospel of Christ. Through the pronouncement of Christ's victory in his death on the cross, people are brought to faith, rescued from slavery to sin and Satan, and transferred into Christ's kingdom. Not once in the book of Acts do you see the apostles or any of God's people using violent means to advance the kingdom of God. For example, think only of the apostle Paul, who suffered beatings, torture, and imprisonment at the hands of the enemies of the gospel. Instead of responding violently, Paul kept on preaching the good news of salvation for sinners. This is how the kingdom of God advances also today. Furthermore, when enemies of the gospel attack God's people, Scripture calls us to respond with acts of love and service (see Rom 12:20).

All this is *not* to say that the violent acts of judgment described in the Old Testament have disappeared forever. Far from it! When the Lord Jesus returns, he will dispense a terrible judgment upon sinners, including the devil. Scripture makes this clear in places like Psalm 2, 110, and in Revelation 19. Yet, Christ will dispense this judgment in perfect justice. He has been given this right by God as the perfectly righteous king who defeated the devil by his suffering unto death. 



Rick Vanderhorst

Minister

Smithers Canadian Reformed Church

rick_vanderhorst@hotmail.com



Youth Retreat in Singapore



Christ's Work in Southeast Asia

DR. JASON VAN VLIET

Sometimes brief chats lead to blessed outcomes. In this case, a quick discussion over coffee with Jeff Uriarte, a freshman student at CRTS, resulted in a trip to Southeast Asia, including both the Philippines and Singapore.

Especially during the last decade or so, the number of Reformed and reforming congregations in the Philippines has been increasing at a rapid rate. Consequently, in cooperation with the Philippine Mission Committee of the Baldivis Free Reformed Church of Australia, the first leg of this trip focussed on exploring whether and how these congregations could form a federation in the future. Rev. Carl Vermeulen helped plan the conferences. He has travelled to the Philippines several times and his insights were very valuable. It is not every day that a new Reformed *federation* is born. Therefore, it was well worth the tickets purchased and the kilometers travelled.

A FILIPINO REFORMED FEDERATION?

Our trip to the Philippines spanned two weeks and two islands. The first week was spent in the capital city, Manila, on the northern island of Luzon. Approximately 60 representatives of various Reformed and Presbyterian churches, mostly pastors and elders, participated in a two-day conference entitled “Bound Yet Free.” I was invited to give three keynote speeches: “Why federate? Isn’t it easier to just associate?” “Sometimes brothers do *not* dwell in unity: how to deal with conflict in Christ’s church,” and “Ministers, elders, and deacons: tasks and training.”

Filipino brothers discussing the possibility of a federation of Reformed Churches in the Philippines



In conjunction with these speeches, Rev. C. Vermeulen organized two panel discussions and three workshops. This generated an opportunity for the Filipino brothers to experience concretely, albeit in a very limited way, the blessings and responsibilities of federational life. Among other topics, the workshops focussed on what should (or should not) be in a church order, how a classis is convened, how “yes, yes, and no” (Art 44 CO) assists a local congregation, what church visitors do, and how overtures make their way to a general synod. More than enough to chew on over two days!

The second topic about conflict and reconciliation might sound rather sombre. Indeed, it is a serious topic, one that was requested in advance by the Filipino brothers. Sadly, weeds of tension, miscommunication, and even division have already set down roots among some of these young Reformed churches. Thankfully, this second speech prompted several attendees to seek ways to overcome their differences and reconcile in the name of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

MANILA CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Beyond the “Bound Yet Free” conference, though, what does Reformed congregational life in Manila look like? Here is one

example. The Cainta Reformed Heritage Church is a growing congregation of some 75 members, including a good number of young couples with children. Most members are quite proficient in English but understandably prefer to speak in their mother tongue, Tagalog. The order of worship is similar to CanRC and URC congregations. For singing they use the old “Blue” Psalter Hymnal of the Christian Reformed and United Reformed churches.

Fellowship time between services included many conversations with brothers and sisters who expressed their joy at having (finally) found a congregation that bases itself solidly on Scripture as summarized in the Reformed confessions. Most of them came from Pentecostal or Roman Catholic churches. They highlighted that, in contrast to their former churches, the Reformed churches have congregational life that centres on God’s Word rather than a leader’s opinion, preaching that leads to assurance of salvation rather than doubt, and pastors that serve rather than seeking their own gain. May that continue to be so, not only in the Philippines but throughout the world!

Yet, as excited as these church members are in their new Reformed congregations, they also face challenges. For instance, public schools in the Philippines promote unbiblical views and moral values. As a result, the church members long—and that is not an overstatement—for cohesion between what their children hear from the pulpit, at the supper table, and in their classrooms. They are familiar with Reformed schools established by parents and supporting communities in Canada and Australia. But currently they do not have the teachers nor the money to start their own Filipino version of the home-church-school triangle. May the Lord provide for them in his way and according to his timing.

MINDANAO CONFERENCE & WORSHIP

The next week, br. Vermeulen and I flew from Manila to Cagayan de Oro (CDO) on the southern island of Mindanao. This is the hometown of our current Filipino family at CRTS, Jeff and Michelle Uriarte, as well as another former student, Kim Lapiz, and his family. They are from the Grace Reformed and Jireh Reformed churches respectively. Here we repeated the “Bound Yet Free” conference and I gave an additional talk based on Psalm 128 entitled “Cultivating a Christian Family.” Both events were well attended and each time we ran out of time to answer all their questions.

The Reformed congregations of Mindanao have received faithful and generous support from the Australian churches. Not surprisingly, then, the worship services felt even more familiar. Singing was from the CanRC *Book of Praise*. In addition, the Grace Reformed Church has two church plants located several hours away in Maramag and Impalutao. On the Sunday that I was there, the mother congregation



Fellowship Meal between services at Singapore FERC ↑
And no, it wasn't all serious ↓



Part of the congregation in Cagayan de Oro, the Philippines (unfortunately, the camera should have been set to wide angle to get everyone) ↓



and both daughter groups worshipped and participated in the Lord's Supper together. Almost every seat was filled. The festive and thankful atmosphere was palpable, both in the worship services and in the energetic fellowship between services. During the fellowship time I gave a slideshow about our seminary. The Lord's Day ended with a Q&A session in which I was asked, among other things, whether a Christian could eat meat that came from a sacrifice to an idol and whether a Christian soldier could kill someone in a war.

Clearly, the head of the Church, Jesus Christ, is busy in the Philippines through his Spirit and Word. Reformed and reforming congregations are growing precisely because people are digging deeper into the Scriptures and finding a faithful expression of that truth in Reformed preaching, worship, and church life. It was humbling to hear how many members in these new congregations had been led previously by charismatic teachers who attracted large gatherings but fed their congregations blatantly unscriptural teachings and then also enriched themselves by pressuring their often-poor followers for money. The warning of the apostle Paul still rings true. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things" (1 Tim 6:10–11).

REFORMED FAITH IN SINGAPORE

As the planning for the trip progressed, social media served up an additional invitation. Another CRTS alumnus, br. Nam Tuck Chong, serves in the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (FERC). They were organizing their annual youth conference, and I was glad to accept their invitation to speak to their youth. About thirty-five participants, aged thirteen to twenty-five, came to the conference, including about eight guests from the Free Reformed Church of Australia. This indicates that the ties between the FRCA and FERC are strong.

WORSHIP THE LORD IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS



After a speech on Christian Family Life in Jireh Reformed Church (Pastor: Kim Lapiz)

I gave four speeches following a theme from Hebrews 11, “By Faith . . .,” focussing sequentially on Abraham, Amram and Jochebed, Moses, and David. Many of these youth have grown up in the church; their knowledge of God’s Word was sound. Not surprisingly, then, some of the follow-up discussions ran deep, diving into questions such as “When we must wait on the Lord, how do we know if his answer is ‘not yet’ or simply ‘no’?” and “What are the challenges and opportunities for Christians studying at a secular post-secondary institution?”

The FERC has existed for about 30 years, so it has a different feel than many of the congregations in the Philippines. Its membership has grown to over 400, and three pastors, Nam Tuck Chong, Mark Chen, and Jonathan Yap, serve the flock of God in this place. The congregation is divided into two linguistic groups: English-speaking and Mandarin-speaking. They worship in the same building, but in the morning the Mandarin-speaking group has its own worship service. In the evening service everyone is together, and live translation is offered via Bluetooth headsets to everyone who cannot understand English well enough to follow the sermon. Between services, some members have a fellowship meal together. Different languages can be heard around the tables, but food becomes their “common dialect,” helping church members to connect with each other despite Babel’s boundaries.

Much like Canada, Singapore enjoys a level of affluence that many countries in the world do not experience. Yet even if the worship of

mammon is widespread, the Lord ensures that his church continues to spread his gospel, the pearl beyond price (Matt 13:45-46).

Three weeks in Southeast Asia allowed but a small glimpse of what our risen Saviour is doing in that part of his world. But it was enough to confirm that although the love of money and the lure of false teachers are powerful, they are no match for the almighty grace of our God, who advances his kingdom no matter what the opposition may be. In addition, the deep appreciation for the Reformed heritage in Southeast Asia ought to prompt us to reflect. Are we still as enthusiastic about the Reformed confessions, liturgy, and church order as they are? If not, perhaps our brothers and sisters in Southeast Asia are prompting us to reignite our passion or at least add some more wood to the fire. 



Dr. Jason Van Vliet

Principal and Professor of Dogmatics
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary
jvanvliet@crtcs.ca

60 YEARS OF CRWRF

ILSE VANDERMEULEN



The Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund (CRWRF) celebrated God's blessings over its 60 years work of providing aid around the world. In Flamborough, ON, St. Albert, AB, and Aldergrove, BC supporters gathered for evenings of praise, thanksgiving, and updates on the organization's work. CRWRF also hosted workshops and a panel discussion on how Christians can help—rather than hurt—distant neighbours in need.

Founded on a mission of poverty relief and gospel witness, CRWRF is an avenue for members of the Canadian Reformed churches to respond effectively to global needs. The charitable organization began in 1965 when a member of the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church in Burlington encouraged each family to donate weekly the cost of a loaf of bread to assist people in need. These new immigrants, busy establishing themselves in a new country, were already looking outward to help others who had even less.

PARTNERS

Over the past sixty years, CRWRF has served the Canadian Reformed churches by finding trustworthy international partners worldwide who know and understand the culture where they work. They work with these partners to distribute financial gifts, ensuring that donated funds are used efficiently for poverty and disaster relief and the spread of the gospel. CRWRF has developed a rigorous vetting process to ensure that donated funds are used wisely, and the structure of the organization ensures that almost every dollar donated goes directly to projects rather than to organizational costs.

The first project the Fund supported was an orphanage in South Korea. In 2016, the organization became formally incorporated with the Canadian Reformed Churches as its members, represented by their deaconies. In the last five years alone, CRWRF has supported projects in 32 countries and remains active in 19 today.

Donations to continue the work of CRWRF come from schools, businesses, individuals, and local CRWRF committees that organize

fundraising events. On a global scale, these efforts might seem small, but they are consistent evidence of believers responding in faith to the call to help, trusting God with the results. As former board member Ruth Meerveld reflected in the commemorative anniversary booklet, "Though sometimes overwhelmed by needs that confronted us, I learned to be ok with the little we could do, realizing that though a mere drop in the bucket, it made a difference by God's grace in the lives of those reached."



Dressed in African attire, Rev. Winston Bosch, former missionary to Mali and CRWRF board member, spoke about how to give aid under the theme "Bread, not stones; fish, not snakes."

HELPING, NOT HURTING

During the anniversary celebrations, Rev. Winston Bosch, former missionary to West Africa and current pastor of Streetlight Christian Church, spoke about the history of giving in the Canadian Reformed church federation and about CRWRF's work to bring long-term improvements to the lives of those in need. He read from 1 Peter 4:10: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."



Learning to give, Bosch said, can take a lifetime. “They say babies are born with closed fists, and it takes our whole life to learn to open them to give generously!” He also noted the generosity of the Dutch Reformed community, even though they are known to be frugal. Even marriage, he pointed out, begins with a call for both husband and wife to work faithfully in their tasks so they can care for others.

Rev. Bosch also touched on giving *good* gifts. “Good intentions are not enough. Especially in international aid, our gifts can do more harm than good—even to the extent that they hurt our neighbour and dishonour God’s name.” Using examples from his work in Mali, he shared the importance of being a humble learner, to act slowly and carefully while remaining willing to play even a small part. “You can’t do everything, but you can do *something*. And even the little matters to God, who can bless and multiply it.”

VOLUNTEERS AND IMPACT

While many aid organizations employ full-time staff for fundraising and marketing, CRWRF operates with a volunteer board and committees, supported by only two part-time employees for administration and finances.

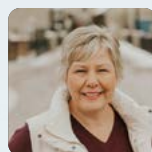
CRWRF board chair Karl Veldkamp has witnessed many encouraging results in his time on the board. “We are blessed with a well-rounded team,” Veldkamp said, “many with first-hand experience in mission and mission aid.”

Much has changed over the last sixty years, and mission aid has become more complex, with ever-increasing paperwork requirements, Veldkamp noted, “but we remain faithful to our original purpose.”

Like many charities, CRWRF faces increased competition for donors’ dollars. Nevertheless, donations have nearly doubled over recent years, reaching \$1.2 million in gifts last year. And Veldkamp stresses that what seems like little to us can do a lot of good when used wisely. “What seems like a small amount to us can have tremendous impact.”

Veldkamp acknowledges, too, that relying on volunteers has drawbacks. Limited volunteer time makes it challenging to raise CRWRF’s profile within the churches and to regularly report on how funds are used in person—essential tasks for continued support. “Every new generation again must live out its calling to share with those in need,” Veldkamp said. “We need to get them involved and carry the torch forward.”

In the commemorative booklet for the 60th anniversary, Veldkamp looks ahead with this perspective: “We stand confident that the Lord will provide, and we pray and intend that the organization will remain faithful to its original calling and purpose. We pray and hope that as the years roll on and the board members and field workers pass the baton, we would continue to receive the Lord’s blessings, and that in all of this, the good trust placed in us is recognized and honoured!” 



Ilse VanderMeulen

Elora

ilsevandermeulen@hotmail.com

CRWRF board members at the anniversary event in Flamborough. From left to right: From left to right: Hanna Olij, Holly van Weerden, Duane Swaving, Paul Deboer, Mike Deboersap, Rev. Winston Bosch, Sonya Kampen. Board members not pictured are Ruth Gelms, Karl Veldkamp, Jerome Lengkeek, Felicia VanderVelde, and Erica Feunekes.



CRWRF HAS A SIMPLE PURPOSE:

to give Christian charity to every area of the world that is in need of such. In order to ensure continued commitment to this purpose, the Fund holds to two foundational principles:

We believe that "all gifts which we possess are bestowed by God and entrusted to us on the condition that they be distributed for our neighbour's benefit"; and

In the Bible, we are instructed to meet the temporal needs of the poor and oppressed by showing generosity, charity, mercy and kindness in any area of the world, especially to those in the household of faith, in thankfulness for the salvation we have in Jesus Christ.

The Fund focusses on child and community development, relief and rehabilitation, aiding people living with HIV/Aids, and education. CRWRF has a bursary fund to encourage students in higher education. A subcommittee under the name Faithworks sends service and learning teams out across the globe, and has been doing so since 1996.

For more information about CRWRF, to make donation, or to find out how you can volunteer, see the website: crwrf.ca

National Principals' Conference 2025

The weather was spectacular, the fall colours brilliant, the camaraderie most enjoyable, the food and accommodations excellent, and our guest speaker did a fantastic job. From October 1–3, about 35 principals from across Canada (and the US) gathered at the Muskoka Bible Camp in Huntsville, ON, for a National Principals' Conference (NPC).

NPC 2025 was designed to encourage and equip principals to lead “with strength, humility, and vision.” The conference was an opportunity for principals from confessionally Reformed schools to come together for a few days of mutual encouragement and professional development.

DR. IRVING'S TALKS

The theme of this year's conference, “Healthy Leadership for Thriving Schools,” was unpacked by Dr. Justin Irving, Professor of Christian Leadership at the Southern Baptist Seminary. During his first lecture, Dr. Irving spoke of the character and commitment of healthy school leaders, explaining that a Christian leader needs to continually examine his or her own heart and motivation before all else. Character matters. Christian leaders need to be healthy—not just physically, but also spiritually, emotionally, relationally, and intellectually—in order to flourish and to enable the organization they serve to flourish. Effective leaders pay attention to their well-being, so that they in turn can be a blessing to those they lead.

During the next lecture, the speaker highlighted the critical importance of ensuring that the people on our teams are aligned. People are our organization's #1 asset. Effective leaders look for character and mission alignment when they hire, and motivate, empower, and hold accountable after they hire. He reminded us of the theology of work and spoke of various types of leaders, exhorting us to be servant leaders who intentionally model servant leadership to those around us.

The third lecture explored the leader's role in stewarding mission and vision in organizational culture. The leader needs to have a deep level of commitment to the organization's mission and needs to “tell the story” repeatedly and persuasively to all the organization's stakeholders. Strategies need to be implemented so that the organization's culture aligns with the organization's mission.

During his final session, Dr. Irving spoke about how we need to lead our schools through crisis and change. Though our faithful God doesn't change, there are many times in life that change is required; in the days of Nehemiah a destroyed city needed to be rebuilt, and in our days changing technologies, for example, require us to do things differently. Effective leaders are deliberate in identifying what things may not change and what things must change. When

change is required, intentional strategies need to be implemented. Effective leaders are also deliberate in the context of a crisis; we were encouraged to display a calm and non-anxious disposition when under pressure.

During the lectures, our speaker frequently referenced appropriate Scripture passages, historical figures, authors, and university presidents. Not surprisingly, his own president, Albert Mohler, was referenced affirmatively. Though at times listening to Dr. Irving might have felt like “drinking from a firehose,” his well-organized lectures were presented effectively. During his presentations, he referenced his extensive reading and broad research in the field of leadership. Additionally, as a result of the considerable effort he had expended to understand the unique context of our schools, he effectively wove conversations with us into his material.

STRENGTHENED LEADERS

The organizing committee made sure that there were a variety of constructive activities in addition to lectures, such as various case studies and working through the results of a leadership survey completed over half a year ago. Not surprisingly, school leaders find themselves most frequently preoccupied with navigating their way through “people challenges.” We noted, with profound gratitude to our school boards and our treasurers, that principals don't often feel the burden of responsibility when it comes to ensuring that our schools remain financially viable.

Developing and maintaining personal relationships between leader colleagues is a key ingredient of our principal conferences. Some principals are at the very beginning of their leadership journey; others are somewhat more experienced. Time was set aside to provide opportunities for conversations over meals, during walks, while driving to Ontario's only cranberry farm for an informative and humorous tour, around the campfire, or while engaging in sports activities.

As we returned to our respective homes, we felt not only encouraged, but also more equipped in our leadership roles. The organizing committee did an excellent job and God provided us with an opportunity to spend a few days in a breathtakingly beautiful part of his creation. May the consequences of this conference lead to continued growth for each of the participants and the flourishing of each of our schools. 



Otto Bouwman

Principal
Langley, BC



Pass the Promise:

A Passion for Reformed Education

JOHN A. ROUKEMA

Over the course of the 2025–2026 school year, Canadian Reformed school societies of the Lower Fraser Valley are celebrating seventy years of Reformed education. This is being done by means of brief articles, video clips, pictures of years gone by, and assemblies held at the schools. These various modes of celebration are collectively entitled “Pass the Promise,” referring to the promise made at the baptism of our children “to have them instructed in the doctrine” of our churches (*Book of Praise*, Form for the Baptism of Infants, 598).

We live in covenant with God who has signified in baptism that we are his children and heirs of the promise of salvation and eternal life. In this covenant, we are also “obliged to a new obedience”—that is, motivated by gratitude to God, we want to serve him in holy obedience to his Word. And so, our schools are primarily focused on the nurture of children who have been consecrated by God. The Reformed, Christian school complements and extends what is already taking place in the Christian home. And it’s not just the

Christian home; the entire covenanting community bears responsibility for the Christian nurture of God’s children, not just the parents.

COVENANT EDUCATION

We talk much about our children receiving *covenant* education. For us, that has very significant implications. As S.G. de Graaf (1889–1955), a well-known Dutch preacher and teacher, explained, “Without covenant there is no religion, no conscious fellowship between man and God, no exchange of love and faithfulness. Without covenant, man would be just an instrument in God’s hand. When God created man, He had more than just an instrument in mind: He made a creature that could respond to him. Only if man was capable of responding would he be able to assume his position as partner in a covenant. Without a covenant, God would have only claims and man only obligations. But as soon as God gave man a promise, man also had a claim on God, namely, to hold God to that promise. And

God then had an obligation toward man, namely, to fulfill that promise, for a covenant, after all, is an agreement between two parties in which the claims and obligations are spelled out.”¹

The translator of this book, H. Evan Runner, explains further:

“We live before the face of God (Coram Deo). We are called into being by the life-giving Word of God and are sustained in life from moment to moment by that Word. We are dependent creatures . . . (a)s servants of God, we are called to a task, namely, to work in creation. In Scripture, religion means covenant. By his Word, God called into being an order of creation culminating in man. By that Word he also gave man his favour and brought him into a life of conscious fellowship with himself . . . *God’s covenant is the underlying unity that embraces all human acts and all societal relationships*”² (emphasis added).

COVENANT OBEDIENCE

Since the covenant obliges us to a new obedience, teachers helping parents nurture their children in Christ must establish and maintain scriptural expectations. This should be reflected in the norms and standards for subject matter and for student learning and behaviour, keeping in mind the revelation of covenantal religion as the fundamental structure of life.

Covenantal education is affirmational; that is, it affirms the lordship of Jesus Christ over all education. To be affirmational is to recognize and acknowledge that God is in control, and that his written Word is our guide for discipleship in any human endeavour, including education. As we study God’s dealings with the world and his plan for restoration, we need to expose Satan’s empire for what it is (that is, we acknowledge the antithesis). But that is not our starting point: we need to first proclaim the Light. While proactively exposing Satan’s kingdom, we do not write off aspects of human culture as if Christ wants nothing to do with them. Nor should we accept any aspects of human culture at face value. Rather, proclaiming the Light means that we must bring every aspect of life under the lordship of Christ who has redeemed that which was at first laid down in the beginning (Gen 1 and John 1).

Living a covenantal life implies that we “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1) in education as well as in every other sphere of life. When we test the spirits, we do so on the basis of our affirmation, our confession, that Christ Jesus is Lord of all. Our educating work is an acknowledgement that all things are God’s.

The reason for having “our schools” should not be a negative one; that is, we do not have our own Reformed schools because of all the bad stuff happening out there in the public schools. Rather, the primary reason for our schools is our response to God’s call to obedience to his will, according to his plan. It is through our response that the world may know that our religion—our way of life in covenant with God—directs all our actions. God’s call on our lives directs our cultural mandate; it is our basis for Christian, covenantal living. Our Reformed Christian schools are not primarily establishments that oppose secularism (although they can and should do that), but they are first of all declarations that God exists and controls all things.

KINGDOM VISION

Today, too, we have a kingdom vision that extends over all of culture. Covenant and kingdom are like two sides of the same coin. They are two ways of viewing the all-embracing reality of God’s way with his world. What the Bible teaches us about covenant in the Old Testament the New Testament takes over as the “coming of the kingdom.” In our Reformed worldview, that implies that we need to educate the businessman, the carpenter, the doctor, etc., because all these have a calling in God’s kingdom. The kingdom vision is to take every thought captive for Christ, to renew our minds, so as to exert a positive influence on our culture, under the redeeming lordship of Jesus Christ.

The kingdom vision is to take every thought captive for Christ, to renew our minds, so as to exert a positive influence on our culture, under the redeeming lordship of Jesus Christ.

This kingdom perspective is (or should be) the driving impulse of our schools. Our students are to be taught to be willing and able to use their God-given talents to develop skills and knowledge in all areas of life, to be able to think critically, and to test the spirits of this age.

¹ S.G. de Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Vol. 1, Paideia Press, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, 1977, p. 36.

² *ibid*, p. 12, 13

Modern-day educators teach a relativism which closes the minds of students to moral truths and absolutes. Students are taught to have an open mind and be tolerant to such an extent that they will not accept anything as truthful or virtuous. In the typical pragmatic way of life, truth will be clarified so that it can be *socially useful*. Social consensus, not norms or absolutes, dictates the solution of value-related problems. Such is the outcome of a so-called “neutral” education. It is this type of thinking that has been one of the primary reasons for the establishment of parent-controlled Christian schools.

Our children, too, are liable to pick up and adopt the philosophy of relativism without knowing it. The Reformed, Christian school helps to harness against this. It is imperative that our children be instructed in such a way as to develop a desire for truth, an attitude of striving to obtain and live by moral values. Christian school supporters believe that children must be presented with life-giving perspectives which will give them a framework in which to grow, develop, and mature to the praise of God’s glory. They believe that the Bible gives the norm and guide for living in society. Lacking a vision, a direction, will result in a lack of commitment, and, therefore, a lack of meaning in life.

NEVER NEUTRAL

Secular philosophy does not only close minds but also hearts. Public education strips away important truths, leaving many students functionally and culturally illiterate. There is a sinister danger that secular and humanistic agendas are succeeding in cutting traditional moral and religious values from what our students learn while cleverly making it appear that the substitute (which is really a different religion) is a neutral alternative.

A car in neutral won’t go anywhere. Likewise with education. Christian parents know that there can be no such thing as a neutral education. An education that ignores moral standards and religious values cannot qualify as a good education. The kind of education we want to see in our students is that they begin to understand that what they learn is not “value-free,” and that they begin to apply Christian values in every area of life. Christian education is designed to be in gear, to move students forward to take their place in the kingdom.

So, are we still vigilant in maintaining our reason for being? Can the following be answered in the affirmative?

1. Do we still have conviction and passion for Reformed education?

2. Does the Bible still serve as the interpretive “bottom-line” for the curriculum?
3. Does a study of creation always point the student toward God?
4. Does the revelation of God call for an active response, that is, applying authentic assessment based on real-life application (rather than using only lower-level *factual* knowledge)?
5. Creation norms (God’s original intent or desire) exist for each area of creation and thus for each area of study. Do unit plans include creation norms for each topic being studied? In which way has sin affected this area of study? Can this area of study be reclaimed or redeemed for the advancement of God’s Kingdom and his glory?
6. Christians are “in the world but not of it.” Can this be shown in the curriculum as the struggle between the Kingdom of Darkness and the Kingdom of Light (the antithesis)?
7. Are the students developing a deeper understanding of, experience in, and commitment to a Christian way of life (rather than embracing, escaping from, or writing off the culture in which they live)?

God must be our starting point or our teaching will succumb to either syncretism or dualism.

It is not easy to always demonstrate this God-connectedness in every subject, unit, and lesson. Nonetheless, God must be our starting point or our teaching will succumb to either syncretism (adding religious frosting to a secular cake), or dualism (stating that some things are secular and some are sacred). Reformed schools acknowledge that God transforms learning; he is more than an add-on. He is sovereign Lord of all. But this is (viciously) denied in secular schools. Therefore, maintain the passion to pass on the promise to educate our children in the fear of the Lord. 

John A. Roukema

*Retired teacher and principal
Aldergrove, BC*



IRTC

INTERNATIONAL REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

Building for Growth: The IRTC Adopts Canvas

Over the past months, the IRTC has taken major steps toward upgrading its academic infrastructure by adopting **Canvas**, one of the world's leading learning management systems (LMS). This transition represents one of the most significant technological improvements in our history and aligns with our mission to offer high-quality, globally accessible theological education in Portuguese.

Why Canvas?

As the IRTC continues to grow, we need a platform capable of supporting students and instructors spread across multiple countries, time zones, and levels of technical experience. Canvas provides the reliability, clarity, and flexibility that our institution requires.

For a college that functions entirely online and serves Portuguese-speaking students globally, Canvas gives us a strong, future-ready foundation.

A Careful, Multi-Year Process

This was not an overnight decision. Over the last few years, the IRTC evaluated several learning management systems, weighing cost, technical requirements, long-term sustainability, and the overall learning experience. Canvas consistently emerged as the best option for our context. Yet its significant costs kept it out of reach until a special provision was made by our Canadian supporting organization, the IRTC Society, to fund Canvas' purchase and implementation.



Canvas
By Instructure

Implementation and Early Results

Thanks to this generous provision, Canvas was fully implemented in time for our third academic term of 2025 (July–October). The transition was smoother than we anticipated, thanks to the dedication of our staff, the flexibility of our professors, and the willingness of our students to adapt to the new environment.

With the fourth term now underway, we are already seeing several encouraging results:

- *Increased student engagement* – Students are interacting more consistently with course materials, due dates, and assignments.
- *Stronger communication* – Instructors now have streamlined tools for messaging, announcements, grading, and feedback.
- *Greater consistency across courses* – With Canvas' modular design, we have been able to standardize key elements of course delivery—improving the experience for both new and returning students.
- *Improved reliability and stability* – Canvas has provided the kind of dependability that a global online institution requires. Students have experienced minimal downtime and faster access to course content.

Why This Matters

Adopting Canvas is an investment in the long-term health of our mission. Better systems lead to better teaching, better learning, and ultimately better preparation for those whom the Lord is calling to serve His Church. Every improvement to our infrastructure produces ripple effects that extend far beyond the virtual classroom, reaching into churches, mission fields, and communities across the world.

A Word of Thanks

We are profoundly grateful to the IRTC Society in Canada for making this transition possible. Their generosity has positioned the College for healthy growth in the years ahead. As we continue to prepare hearts for ministry, Canvas has become a vital tool—one that strengthens the quality, reach, and sustainability of our work.

Praying for the Portuguese-Speaking World

Angola

Economic hardship and political pressure have led to protests throughout Angola, creating a challenging context for ministry. Pray for meaningful reforms, economic relief, and for churches to model love, courage, and integrity.

Brazil

Brazil remains deeply polarized, with ongoing concerns about censorship and judicial overreach. Pray for the protection of freedom of speech and conscience, and for believers to display wisdom and humility in a divided society.

Cape Verde & São Tomé and Príncipe

These island nations enjoy political stability but struggle with poverty, limited opportunities, and weak institutions. Pray for wise, transparent leadership, sustainable development, and for churches to care well for those facing hardship.

Guinea-Bissau

Chronic political instability and corruption continue to hinder development and daily life in Guinea-Bissau. Pray for peaceful governance, honest leadership, and for believers to be agents of reconciliation and hope in a fragile environment.

Mozambique

Mozambique faces the dual pressures of post-election unrest and continued violence from the recent insurgency. Pray for peace, justice, and protection for vulnerable communities, and for endurance for churches serving the suffering.

Portugal

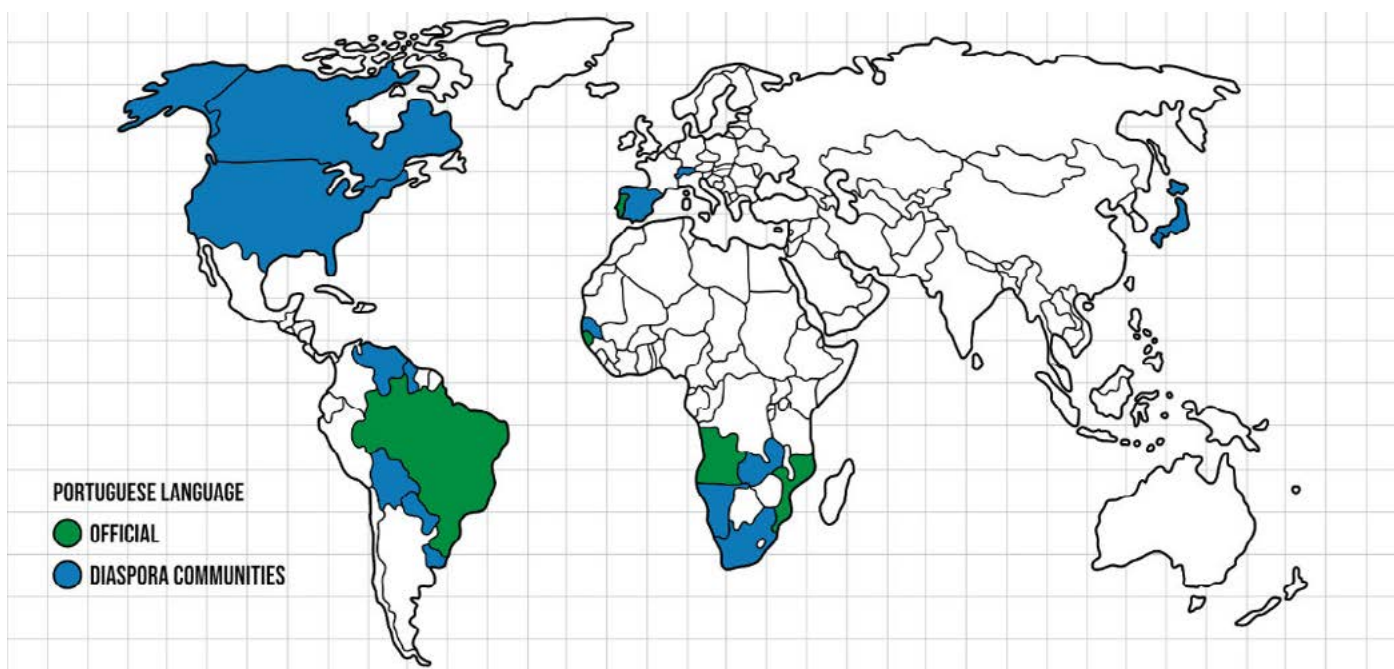
Portugal is stable but increasingly secular, and public debates around religious expression continue to sharpen. Pray that leaders will uphold religious liberty fairly, and that God would renew spiritual interest and strengthen faithful gospel witness.

East Timor

East Timor is a young democracy with a strong Catholic identity, facing poverty, corruption, and administrative challenges as it grows. Pray for leaders to govern with justice and for biblical teaching and discipleship to deepen.

Other Lusophone Communities

Portuguese-speaking communities and missionaries serving worldwide often face the pressures of cultural displacement and life far from home. Pray for churches to shepherd these diaspora communities well so that they may be fruitful.



\$227,245
2025 Budget

81%

\$183,378
Raised (Sep 30)



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Dunnville West Welcomes Rev. Josh Schouten

Following a three-year vacancy after the Canadian Reformed Church of Dunnville split into Dunnville East and Dunnville West, our congregation of about 335 members rejoiced when we received the news in July that Joshua Schouten, a recent graduate of CRTS, had accepted the call extended to him by Dunnville West. During our vacancy, our congregation was richly blessed with a steady line-up of faithful preaching on our pulpit—seminary students, professors, retired ministers and active ministers of some of our neighbouring churches, with only an occasional “reading service” conducted by our elders. Our catechism classes were taught by elders, and our pre-confession classes were taught by Rev. Ryan Kampen during our years of vacancy, for which we are very thankful. Yet there was a strong feeling of something missing—the need for our own shepherd was felt by every member of our flock.

ORDINATION

Candidate Josh Schouten sustained his peremptory examination at Classis Niagara on Sept. 17, 2025, making the path clear for him to be ordained as a minister of the Word and sacraments. On October 5, 2025, the long-awaited day of ordination took place.

Dr. Jannes Smith led the morning worship service with a sermon based on Leviticus 8, the consecration of Aaron and his sons—the first ordination in the Bible. The LORD himself was present for that ordination just as he was present for the ordination of br. Schouten. The laying on of hands was a beautiful ritual to witness and be a part of.

After many congratulatory words from neighbouring congregations, we were all given an opportunity to personally congratulate Rev. and Mrs. Schouten. We enjoyed fellowship with coffee and

cake as well as a luncheon for the congregation and guests. Our congregation is currently sharing the Dunnville East building, and they graciously permitted us to hold both of our services as well as the luncheon and two coffee socials with no time constraints, while Dunnville East worshipped in the nearby ACRES gym.

Rev. Schouten led the afternoon worship service with an inaugural sermon based on Titus 1:1–4, the introduction of Paul’s letter to Titus after leaving him on the island of Crete. The theme for the sermon was “Paul’s God-centred ministry sets the stage for his introduction to a younger minister.” This sermon was the beginning of a series that Rev. Schouten is working through with the congregation as he walks us through Paul’s letter to Titus.

WELCOME EVENING

On October 25, 2025, we welcomed Rev. Josh and Maaïke Schouten and their two sons, Elias and Jacob, to our congregation in a less formal but very heart-warming event at the Dunnville church. Our MC for the afternoon was br. Don Bos. The school-aged children sang a few songs under the direction of Miss Christina Feenstra and Mrs. Kait Nordeman. Then br. Bruce DeBoer got everyone involved in a skit where we all welcomed the Schoutens and were reminded that even though we do not yet have our own building to worship in, we are the church and it is up to every member to be actively involved in church life.

Next, the residents of our beloved Beacon Home challenged the Schoutens to a game of Guess Who. The first round was quite difficult, but after some assistance from one of the residents who had a very difficult time not helping, all nine clues were identified correctly. Then the Beacon Bunch sang “Seek Ye First” with John

and Jen VanderVliet, accompanied by John's guitar, after which the VanderVliets sang "Welcome to the Family" for everyone to enjoy.

The Ladies' Bible Study groups joined their voices together with a song called "Welcome to the Schoutens" (to the tune of My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean), where we settled the dispute of how to pronounce Schouten—is it Shoutin' or is it Shootin'? Now we are all in agreement after Rev. Schouten shouted "shootin'!"

The Young Peoples called up six couples, including Rev. Josh and Maaïke Schouten, for a game of Jeopardy where the husbands and wives were opponents and had to guess extreme close-up shots of different landmarks in the Dunnville area. Both Josh and Maaïke were able to recognize the house number of their new home!

One more game was played involving a few younger couples in our congregation, where the Schoutens had to match the occupation to each of five young men, and then match up wives to their husbands. There may have been a decoy set up to make it a little more challenging, but the Schoutens did surprisingly well as our congregation is blessed with a lot of couples in their 20s.

Finally, our congregation presented the Schoutens with a gift—a painting of a blue heron in the lovely setting of a sunset over the Grand River, hopefully a scene that they will be able to enjoy a lot over the next years as they'll be crossing over the river often. Rev. and Maaïke Schouten were given an opportunity to speak a few words of thanks, and then we closed with singing and a prayer of thankfulness.

After a time of fellowship and treats, the Schouten family made their way back to their home in Brantford for one of the last times before taking up residence locally. They moved into their new home a week later, just steps away from the Grandview School in Byng, the property that is the future home of our very own church building.

It is our prayer that Rev. Josh and Maaïke will soon feel at home in our midst and in the communities of Byng and Dunnville. Our congregation is very thankful to our heavenly Father for providing us with a pastor and teacher in his good and perfect timing, and we give all praise to him for his faithfulness to us. 🇨🇦

Charlene Tenhage

Dunnville





REFORMED EVANGELISTIC OUTREACH

International Plowing Match & Rural Expo 2025

The International Plowing Match & Rural Expo (IPM) is held annually in different counties throughout Ontario. It is North America's largest outdoor agricultural and rural expo, attracting 70,000–110,000 visitors. The IPM is organized and run by the Ontario Plowmen's Association (OPA). This year the IPM was held in Grassie, Township of West Lincoln, from September 16–20, 2025. This event marked the 40th IPM that the Reformed Evangelistic Outreach has attended.

The Reformed Evangelistic Outreach committee (REO) rents a 20'x40' tent for the event where tables are set up with gospel tracts, Bibles, books, etc. We are grateful for the volunteers that help in the booth each day handing out Christian calendars, tracts, and bookmarks to those who pass by. We encourage people to browse in our booth where we have Bibles and hundreds of Christian books available for sale at a very low cost. Approximately 800 books were sold! We are encouraged by the frequent discussions that are generated about the Christian faith.

The Reformed Evangelistic Outreach committee is thankful to the various supporting individuals and churches for their prayers and monetary support that make this possible. Each year, the costs to attend the IPM as well as purchasing the Bibles, books, tracts, calendars, and bookmarks is nearly \$20,000. The REO committee is aware that without the Lord this work will amount to nothing. We are to sow the seed, and it is God that gives the increase!

Please remember this outreach in your prayers. Pray for both adults and children who received a Bible, book, or tract, that they will read it, and that the Lord will be pleased by his Holy Spirit to make alive the spiritually dead, and edify those in the faith to grow in grace.

The Lord willing, the 2026 International Plowing Match and Rural Expo will be held in Walkerton, Bruce County, Ontario from September 22–26 and we will be there again to bring the light of the gospel to the many people in attendance. 📺

In Christian love,
Reformed Evangelistic Outreach
www.reoutreach.com





New Bible Study on the Psalms

Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms – Bible Study Workbook – Christ our Teacher (Ancaster: LittleANGELS Press, 2025)

\$34.99 — order from peterholtvliwer.com or your local Christian bookstore

Anyone reading this magazine would likely agree that spending time in God's Word is an important part of the Christian life. I think that most would also admit to experiencing hills and valleys in their devotional life—sometimes it feels rich and meaningful, and sometimes it just feels like words on a page. In our weak humanity, we don't always treasure God's Word and study it as we should. Rev. Peter Holtvliwer has developed a wonderful resource for devotional life, one that might be just the thing you need to get into a good habit of thoughtful study. Building on the previously published *Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms—Devotional* as well as the *CPOP—Study Resource*, Holtvliwer guides the reader through a sampling of wisdom psalms, effectively training us how to read the psalms and unlock their riches.

Over a period of thirteen weeks, the workbook covers thirteen psalms, highlighting different sections of the Psalter, various authors, and themes. Every lesson includes “homework” for five days, and each day has a variety of questions, encouraging the reader to slow down and chew on the riches of the psalms. Over the weeks, we learn how each psalm points us to our Saviour Jesus Christ, the perfect example and teacher of wisdom.

FIVE-DAY APPROACH

Day 1 of each week examines the context of the psalm, showing the importance of its placement within the psalter and how the author's experiences may have shaped its content. Holtvliwer has us flipping through our Bible, comparing Scripture with Scripture, an exercise which effectively shows how the Psalms reflect, allude to, and even quote passages of the Scriptures that were familiar to God's people at the time.

Day 2 guides us through making observations about the psalm, piquing our curiosity about the words and phrases the psalmist uses, and encouraging us to write down questions and comments about the passage.

Day 3 looks at the meaning of the psalm—what is the main message, both for the original audience and for us today? Questions help us to reflect on how the original audience might have received the Psalm and compare that to how we read it in our own context.

Day 4 focuses on what the entire *Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms* suite of books highlights: how the Psalms speak of our Messiah. Holtvliwer guides us to see how some Psalms point to Christ directly or subtly, how Christ quotes the Psalms in his teachings, and how Christ fulfills many of the themes found in the Psalms.

The week wraps up on day 5 with application of the teachings of the psalm to our lives. Penetrating questions force us to contemplate and consider how this psalm speaks directly into our hearts, thoughts, and actions.

Over the five days, with all the cross referencing, question answering, and repeated readings of the psalm, Holtvliwer leads us through a thorough excavation of each chosen Psalm. You will be amazed at what treasures can be unearthed in a psalm you thought you knew well!

HIGHLIGHTS

Another great feature of the *Bible Study Workbook* is its emphasis on prayer. I appreciated the daily reminder to begin my time of study with a prayer for the Holy Spirit to guide and to bless the reading of the Word, as well as the thoughtful suggestions to use elements from the Psalm to include in a closing prayer. These inclusions help develop a good habit of praying God's Word back to him!

The *Bible Study Workbook* is just what it claims to be—a *workbook*, one in which the reader is expected to put in a good amount of effort, but for great reward! It instilled in me a fresh appreciation for the depth and breadth of the Psalms and prompted me to keep my eyes more open to finding Christ in their words. The routine every week of Context—Observations—Meaning—Messiah—Application sets a practical and effective pattern for diving into any portion of the Bible. This workbook would also be great for use in a group setting—a few questions left me stumped and I would have loved to discuss them with others.

Rev. Holtvliwer has developed a wonderful resource for God's people, one that with the help of the Holy Spirit can serve to increase our knowledge and fear of the Lord, transform our hearts, and build up our faith to God's glory! 🙏

Rebecca Bredenhof

Hamilton



NAPARC 2025

Where is the college that opened its doors to freed slaves in 1865? Where was the first college basketball game ever played in 1893? Where was the first meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) held? Where was the 50th meeting of NAPARC held?

The answer to all of the above: in the quaint town of Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, about 50 km northwest of Pittsburgh.

From November 12–14, 2025, delegates from 13 member denominations and additional observers met in Pennsylvania for the 50th annual meeting of NAPARC to discuss, to pray, and to further church relations. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) hosted and ensured the gathering was filled with robust, acapella, Christ-centered psalm singing. The meeting was chaired by Rev. Joel Dykstra (URCNA) and vice-chaired by Rev. Benjamin Glasser (ARPC). Rev. Ralph Pontier (URCNA) and Mr. Danny McDaniel (PCA) were reappointed to be secretary and treasurer. The chairmanship and hosting are chosen alphabetically—so the Canadian Reformed church (CanRC) is due for these tasks in a couple of years.

BI-LATERAL DISCUSSIONS

The CanRC delegated six brothers who were rather busy over the course of the three-day conference. No less than eleven one-hour bi-lateral meetings had been scheduled with representatives from other federations. Of special note, on the Tuesday night we met at a local Applebees with representatives from the ARPC, where we gave thanks for the new relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) established by our last synod. NAPARC also has plenary meetings where the member churches give updates, are posed a few questions, and prayer is offered for each federation. We updated the council with the numerous decisions made by our recent general synod in

structure for ecclesiastical relations as well as our new regulations about songs to be used in public worship (Art 55 CO.)

We were asked three insightful questions to which we gave answers: How are the decisions of our general synod being received? (This has yet to be fully seen, but we believe fairly well.) How do we avoid being traditionalists, yet preserve our tradition? (Hold onto our confessions.) The new rules for EF distinguish between “more intense” and “less intense” relationships—what is the difference? (Frequency of attending one another’s broader assemblies is a key part.)

GS 2025 had also delegated us to develop contact with the Korean Kosin brothers in America. We already have EF with their mother church in South Korea. We learned that we have a fair number of similarities with these immigrant churches. Just as we in Canada had services in Dutch for some time, they have, and still prefer to have, their Sunday church services in Korean. But they recognize there is a need to transition to English or the next generation will be in peril. We talked with them at length about navigating the challenges of adjusting to the North American context.

We also had robust discussions with the PRCNA, who are considering joining NAPARC, and with the Bible Presbyterians, who are close with the OPC. In fact, the Bible Presbyterians hosted meetings between the CanRC and the OPC in Niagara decades ago, when we were talking intensely with the latter.

PROPOSALS & TALKS

In light of some concerning cases of fallen church leaders, NAPARC received a suggestion from the ARPC to set aside a day of fasting and prayer in order to ask the Lord that leaders would honour Christ in their work and be faithful to him. NAPARC agreed to this and suggested Wednesday, April 22, 2026.

Left: The 50th Meeting of the North American Presbyterian & Reformed Council—November 11, 2025.
Photo credit: Geneva College

The Heritage Reformed Congregations proposed to establish a separate meeting where delegates from the churches could discuss biblical counseling and share resources. This is illustrative of the ways in which the churches of NAPARC aid one another.

On Tuesday night, Dr. David Whitla from the RPCNA seminary in Pittsburgh led a devotional service. In a rousing Scottish accent, he preached on Romans 15:5–6. He addressed three pitfalls and problems the church faces in its call to be one: scandalosity (making major issues out of minor ones), ethnicity (making ethnic distinctives central) and hostility (the persecution of the world.)

On the Wednesday night, a special anniversary service was held in a gym at Geneva College. More than 100 guests joined the delegates to listen to Dr. Chad VanDixhoorn, professor of church history and theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, NC, briefly describe the history of the various churches of NAPARC. As he drew from John Arrowsmith, a 17th century Puritan pastor, he urged us to exalt Christ as the source and shape and aim of our unity.

The 50th meeting of NAPARC was closed on Thursday at noon. The next meeting is scheduled for November 10–12, 2026, to be hosted by the URCNA at First United Reformed Church in Oak Lawn, Illinois. May the Lord continue to make NAPARC a place where the church of Christ grows and serves and stands and worships the Lord together! 🇹🇼



Marc Jagt

Minister
Vineyard Canadian Reformed
Church, Beamsville
marc.jagt@canrc.org

For more on the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council, including the minutes from this 50th anniversary meeting, visit www.naparc.org.

Below photo credits: Rachel Kinney



CLARION KIDS ASK!

How does God remember everything He says? - Daniel, Grade 1

Hello Daniel,

That's a great question! Sometimes we forget things, don't we? Like you forget to pack your lunch bag in your backpack, or I forget where I put my car keys. But God never forgets a single thing, because God is perfect and powerful. We might be tired or distracted or busy, but that does not happen to God. The Bible tells us that God knows everything!

And God is not just powerful—he also remembers everything because he loves us. Nothing he says is an accident. He will keep every promise that he makes. When God said to Adam and Eve that he would send a Saviour to pay for their sins, he never forgot. And Jesus was born just as God promised!

Psalm 105 says that God “remembers his covenant forever.” When God says he loves his people, we can trust that. When he promises to be with us, we can believe that. God never forgets. And that means every time you read the Bible, you know that God's words are true and he will keep his promises.

Till next time,

Mrs. Veenendaal

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

CLASSIS CLIPPINGS

Editor's note: What follows are clippings from the press releases of recent classes across the federation, for the interest of our readers. Each press release can be found in full at canrc.org.

CLASSIS PACIFIC WEST – DECEMBER 11 & 12, 2025

Correspondence received was reviewed due to a significant amount of documentation being submitted in connection with numerous appeals. Rev. R. Gaillard affirmed and signed the Subscription Form as this was his first time attending classis after being ordained in Cloverdale Canadian Reformed church.

Classis deemed an overture from Maranatha to be inadmissible due to the timing of submission and would encourage Maranatha to submit their overture to the next classis. Classis resolved some conflicting dates, confirming that overtures to classis should be submitted nine weeks in advance. Instructions on the credentials from Cloverdale were noted by the chairman.

In response to a question from the floor, there was then a discussion regarding how oversight operates among various church plants and mission works within the classis.

Classis then went into closed session to deal with four separate appeals. The advisory committees worked into the evening, and classis resumed the next day, December 12, 2025, at which time an alternate delegate from Cloverdale was seated. Classis completed the work it was doing in closed session.

CLASSIS PACIFIC EAST – DECEMBER 18, 2025

Documentation was received concerning Candidate Marc Vermeulen and was found to be in order. Classis then proceeded to examine brother Vermeulen, who recently completed his studies at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary and who seeks candidacy in the Canadian Reformed Churches. After judging his

sermon to be sufficient to proceed with the exam, he was examined as to his personal life and desire to enter the pastoral ministry, Old and New Testament exegesis, doctrine and creeds, knowledge of Scripture, church history, ethics, church polity, and pastoral ministry. After a time of deliberation, it was determined that brother Vermeulen sustained his exam. Classis thanked and praised the Lord with singing and prayer.

The classis approved the call of the Vernon Canadian Reformed Church to brother Vermeulen to serve as a missionary in Mexico.

CLASSIS ALBERTA – DECEMBER 11, 2025

A report from the ad-hoc committee appointed by the Classis in September was discussed. Classis decided to pass on a revised report to the Neerlandia consistory. A report of the review for the archive of Classis Alberta was received. The church at Edmonton-Immanuel was thanked for their report, and the archivist was thanked for his work in preserving the archives.

Church visitation reports were received for Neerlandia, Calgary, Coaldale, and Taber. The church visitors were thanked for their work. Prayer was lifted for the churches visited.

The questions from CO Article 44 were asked with 8 of the churches answering “Yes, yes, and no.” Pulpit supply was granted every 6 weeks to the vacant churches with Rev. Veurink drawing up a schedule. Concurring advice was given to Edmonton-Immanuel and St. Albert in matters of discipline. An appeal was declared inadmissible as it had not been finished at the local level.

CLASSIS MANITOBA – OCTOBER 23, 2025

Brother Adrian Tams presented himself for his peremptory examination according to Art. 5 CO. After it was determined that all the documents were in order, classis proceeded to examine br. Tams. The first part of the examination was the presentation of a sermon proposal on Psalm 84. In closed session, classis judged the sermon

sufficient, thereby deciding that the examination could proceed. The deputies of Regional Synod West concurred.

During the next proceedings, the Grades 6, 7, and 8 students of Dufferin Christian School arrived to witness parts of the exam. Classis examined br. Tams in Old Testament exegesis, New Testament exegesis, knowledge of Scripture, doctrine and creeds, church history, ethics, church polity and diaconiology. Once again, classis deliberated in closed session and determined that the examination was sufficient, a judgment which received the concurring advice from the deputies of Regional Synod West. Classis approbated the call, declaring that the way was open for br. Tams to be ordained to the ministry in the congregation of Redeemer Winnipeg as missionary for the Ambassador Niverville congregation.

Brother Quentin Vandermeulen presented himself for his preparatory examination according to Article 4 CO. When it was determined that all the documents were in order, classis proceeded to examine br. Vandermeulen. The first part of the examination was the presentation of a sermon proposal on the assigned text of Romans 12:1–2. In closed session, classis judged the sermon sufficient, thereby deciding that the examination could proceed. Classis next examined br. Vandermeulen in Old Testament exegesis, New Testament exegesis, and doctrine and creeds. Once again, classis deliberated in closed session and judged that the examination was sufficient. Brother Vandermeulen was informed of this decision in open session. When br. Vandermeulen promised that he would only teach and preach anything in accordance with God's Word and the church order, he was declared eligible for call in the Canadian and American Reformed Churches for the period of three years. Prayer was offered, and opportunity for congratulations were given.

Following a delicious supper, classis reconvened. Rev. Chris Drew of the Faith Presbyterian Church (OPC) of Grand Forks, North Dakota, USA, addressed classis, bringing fraternal greetings of the Presbytery of the Dakotas. Rev. VanDam spoke some appropriate words of response and led the assembly in thanksgiving prayer and supplication for Rev. Drew and his church, presbytery, and denomination.

CLASSIS ONTARIO WEST – OCTOBER 29 (CONTINUED FROM SEPT 17, 2025)

Br. Fred Struik presented himself, with the required paperwork, for a peremptory examination. His sermon proposal was discussed and deemed sufficient. He was examined in Old Testament exegesis, New Testament exegesis, doctrine and creeds on the doctrine of man and sin, church history on the magisterial Reformation, general Scripture knowledge, diaconiology, ethics, and the Church Order.

After br. Fred Struik was informed that he had sustained the exam, Rev. John Vanwoudenberg concluded the examination with a prayer of thanksgiving, seeking the Lord's blessing for the ministry of the gospel in Living-Hope Canadian Reformed Church. Classis proceeded to review the letter of call and appendices. Everything was found to be in good order and the call from Caledonia Living-Hope to Br. Fred Struik was approbated.

CLASSIS NORTHERN ONTARIO (CONTRACTA) – OCTOBER 22, 2025

All correspondence related to the call of Rev. Mark ten Haaf [previously minister of Providence CanRC in Edmonton] to the Arthur Canadian Reformed Church are examined and found to be in good order. It is with thankfulness that classis can approbate the call to Rev. ten Haaf. Rev. Mark VanderLinde is appointed as the representative from classis at the installation service.

CLASSIS CENTRA ONTARIO – OCTOBER 24, 2025

After it was read aloud by the chairman, Rev. Kevin Wattel signed the Form of Subscription. Classis then proceeded to the examination of Rev. Bryn MacPhail [at that time a minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Kirk in Nassau, Bahamas, part of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church] with a view to him being declared eligible for call within the Canadian Reformed Churches. The documents required for the examination were reviewed, declared to be in good order, and the examination began.

Rev. Bryn MacPhail delivered his sermon proposal on Genesis 22:1–14. In closed session, the sermon proposal and the two additional sermons were discussed, and classis decided that Rev. MacPhail had sustained the sermon portion of the examination. The deputies of Regional Synod East gave concurring advice. In open session, Rev. MacPhail was informed of this decision, and the rest of the examination proceeded, with Rev. Ian Wildeboer examining in Old Testament exegesis, Rev. Tony Roukema examining in New Testament exegesis, Rev. Mark Stewart in Bible knowledge, Rev. Jake Torenvliet in doctrine and creeds, Rev. Hilmer Jagersma in ecclesiology (including both church history and polity), Rev. Darren Feenstra in ethics, Rev. Gerrit Brintjes in public/pastoral ministry, and Rev. Clarence VanderVelde in personal life (in closed session). In closed session, classis discussed the examination and decided that Rev. MacPhail had sustained the examination. The deputies of Regional Synod East gave concurring advice. In open session, Rev. Bryn MacPhail was informed of the decision, and that he is eligible to be called as a Minister of the Word in the Canadian Reformed Churches. The Chairman asked Rev. MacPhail whether he promised

to not preach anything contrary to the Word of God as summarized in the confessions, and Rev. MacPhail answered in the affirmative. Rev. Clarence VanderVelde led in a prayer of thanksgiving, classis sang, and opportunity was given to congratulate Rev. Bryn MacPhail.

Classis dealt with a proposal from the ad hoc committee appointed by Classis Central Ontario September 12, 2025 to amend the Regulations to handle approval of occasional pulpit supply from ministers in non-sister churches. The proposal was amended and approved.

CLASSIS CENTRAL ONTARIO – NOVEMBER 21 AND 25, 2025

The agenda was adopted; the only matter on the agenda was the approbation of the call from Blessings Christian Church to Rev. Bryn McPhail. It was confirmed that all the required documents had been submitted. The call could not be approbated based on the documents provided by Blessings. Classis was adjourned so that Blessings could amend the relevant document. Classis reconvened on Tuesday, November 25, 2025. The amended document as well

as the other relevant documents were found to be in good order and classis approbated the call extended to Rev. Bryn McPhail. Rev. Bryn MacPhail was then introduced to classis by Mr. Tom Zietsma. Rev. MacPhail responded on why he was attracted to our federation, which led to his interest in serving at Blessings.

CLASSIS NIAGARA – DECEMBER 17, 2025

After the adoption of the agenda, the chairman read the form of subscription, which was signed by Rev. J. Schouten who recently was ordained as pastor and teacher of the Church of Dunnville West.

The chairman asked each of the churches the questions from Article 44 of the Church Order, with each of the churches answering in turn.

A proposal from the church of Smithville was received and discussed. According to Article 40 of the Church Order, concurring advice was given for the constitution of the consistory Smithville South.

Br. John Jongsma was appointed as a deputy for the Committee of Appeals. 

Regional Synod Clippings

Editor's note: What follows are clippings from the press releases of recent regional synods held in our federation, for the interest of our readers. Each press release can be found in full at canrc.org.

REGIONAL SYNOD WEST – NOVEMBER 18, 2025

Regional Synod West was declared constituted, and it adopted the proposed agenda. Synod went into closed session to consider an appeal. Synod sustained the appeal. Synod received with thankfulness reports from its deputies in connection with the examinations of candidates J. Peters, R. Gaillard, and A. Tams. Synod also received a report from its deputies in connection with the dismissal (Art. 11 CO) of Rev. D. deBoer as minister of Abbotsford Canadian Reformed Church.

Synod further received reports from a) the treasurer; b) the church responsible for reviewing the books of the treasurer; and c) the church responsible for inspecting the archives. The church responsible for inspecting the archives recommended that materials for the

digitized since the church responsible for maintaining the archives has run out of room for them. Synod requested that the church responsible for maintaining the archives present a proposal around digitization.

REGIONAL SYNOD EAST – NOVEMBER 19, 2025

Synod dealt with a proposal from the church of Ancaster to update the regulations of Regional Synod East. This proposal sought to ensure adequate time is given to be able to deal with material submitted to RSE. After discussion and some minor changes, it was adopted. Synod also dealt with appeals from the churches of Grand Rapids, Kerwood, and London. These appeals were not sustained.

RSE received a report from the treasurer and the auditing church. RSE agreed to assess the churches at \$8 per communicant member for the year 2026.

Editor's note: RSE also decided to publish any proposals for future RSE as well the Acts of this and future RSEs on the federation website. Accordingly, the Acts of RSE 2025 may be read in their entirety at canrc.org.



Garrelt "Charlie" Wieske

February 18, 1938 — October 18, 2025

At 87 years old, the Lord our God called our brother Rev. Garrelt "Charlie" Wieske home to heavenly glory on October 18, 2025. Charlie was born on February 18, 1938, in Winschoten, Groningen, the Netherlands, the eldest of eight children. At 17, he immigrated with his family to Australia, where he later met the love of his life, Gertruida Bergsma. They were married on October 14, 1960, and were blessed with nine children, including their daughter Tricia who went to be with the Lord at two weeks old. On December 28, 2023, he was predeceased by his beloved wife, Trudi. Throughout his life, she was a faithful companion and a steadfast source of support. During the last seven years of her life, he lovingly cared for her as she dealt with dementia.

In Australia, Charlie worked hard to support his family, sometimes juggling three jobs at once. Eventually, he bought a hardware store that, with God's blessing, became very successful. He loved his work, but since his youth he had dreamed of becoming a preacher of the Word. At 43, this dream was about to become reality.

During his years of pre-seminary preparation, while raising a family of eight children, Charlie completed his high school diploma and subsequently studied Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and introductory philosophy. He was accepted as the last "mature" student without a university degree and was admitted to the B. Div program. He was also the first student from Australia.

Charlie had a sharp memory and excelled in his studies. After depleting all his financial resources, he began his ministry at 47, and over time was called to serve four congregations: Lincoln, Neerlandia, Chatham, and Rockway (now Spring Creek). He served these churches faithfully and during his ministry he published several books of sermons, including "God Uses Ordinary People," a collection of sermons on Ruth (2019), and "Glorious Gospel of Grace," a book of sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism (2010).

His greatest joy was preaching the gospel and by God's grace he continued to preach well into his 80s. Even in retirement, he kept preaching and ministering to others, serving churches in Canada, Australia, and Brazil.

Charlie was a man who deeply loved his Lord, guiding and overseeing his family of eight children, 50 grandchildren, and 99 great-grandchildren, and every congregation he served, with unwavering dedication. His life was not about fame or fortune but about serving the Lord wholeheartedly. His sharp mind, quick wit, warm humour, and lively spirit made him well-loved by many. He often spoke plainly, without a filter, yet those who knew him continued to cherish him. We thank God for the gift of Charlie's life and find comfort in knowing that the truths he faithfully proclaimed are now his complete and joyful reality.



Willem "Bill" B. Slomp

Minister Emeritus

Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church, Edmonton

willemb.slomp@gmail.com



TREVOR BUYS

Trevor is a happy guy who is always down for a good laugh or making others laugh. Trevor lives in Anchor Home, located in Grimsby. Everything he needs is close by. Trevor enjoys volunteering at Gleaners two days a week—he will often help with the stickers and if you ask him about it he will gladly give you a play-by-play on the process of applying the stickers.

Family is incredibly important to Trevor; he often visits with them. It is so nice that most of them are a short drive away, and he stays in close contact with some that are further away. He enjoys visiting the cottage with them or doing the word searches that are faxed over by his siblings.

Trevor is also an animal lover. Anchor Home recently got a cat and he will ask the cat everyday how her day is going so far. On walks, he is always willing to pet some of the dogs we pass.

Trevor loves music and will often direct along if we have some playing in the house or the car. When he is relaxing on the couch he will sometimes break into song. It always makes the people around him smile to hear him sing a song like "Jesus loves me." Trevor is a joy to have around at the Anchor Home!

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 3 Ron de Witt will be 53
3217 Twin Oaks
Burlington, Ontario
L7M 3A8 | 6 Trevor Buys will be 46
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road
Grimsby, Ontario
L3M 0L1 | 12 Connie VanAmerongen will be 61
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road
Grimsby, Ontario
L3M 0L1
e-mail: conniev1965@gmail.com |
|---|--|--|

Happy birthday to the three of you celebrating a birthday in February! May God bless you all richly in the year to come, and use you to serve his kingdom.

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer 29:11).

Clarion

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