

Clarion

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



Sunday Soup

Dr. Jason VanVliet

Rahab: When God Opens the Door

George van Popta

ECHS Grad 2026

Trevor Gansekoele

What's Inside

This time I'm going to write about something *not* inside the coming pages. A good number of our readers are likely aware that Rev. Wes Bredenhof, our Book Review Editor, has been dealing with some severe health troubles since the early months of 2026. This past July, our brother was formally diagnosed with Lewy-body dementia, a progressive neuro-degenerative disease for which there is no cure. Since the spring, Wes has been on leave from active ministry in the Free Reformed Church of Launceston (Australia) and plans are underway to seek formal retirement from the ministry of the Word and sacraments this fall—a calling our brother has dearly loved and served in faithfully since 2000.

At the same time, Wes has also decided to give up his duties as our Book Review Editor, a task he has ably fulfilled for the last several years. Wes still plans to do some writing as his health allows but, as of now, he is officially retired from his position at the helm of book reviews for *Clarion*.

Wes, thank you very much for all the articles written and especially the steady stream of book reviews over the years. Your discerning eye, easy writing style, and courageous determination to write at times on controversial topics with careful reasoning and a brotherly tone have been a blessing to many and will be sorely missed. May our gracious heavenly Father grant you and Rose and family the rich comfort of his love in our Lord Jesus Christ and may you always know that you are in the Father's loving hands. May God also generously provide for the flock you leave behind in Launceston.

Inside Issue 13 you will find many upbuilding pieces (please discover them for yourselves) and one is a longer-form book review by Tim Challies, hand-picked by Wes.

Strength and grace to us all.

Peter Holtvliwer

CLARION (ISSN 0383-0438) is published 16 times per year (tri-weekly) by Premier Printing Ltd., 1 Beghin Ave, Winnipeg MB R2J 3X5.

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	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada	\$ 59	\$ 104
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Digital	\$ 40	

Digital can be added to print subscription at no cost.

Taxes extra for Canadian subscribers.

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Sunday Soup

Do you ever serve Sunday Soup? Sunday Soup is not quite the same as “soup on Sundays.” In its most traditional form, Sunday Soup is prepared on Saturday and reheated for lunch on Sunday between worship services. You could make a pot of clam chowder on Sunday, but that doesn’t make it Sunday Soup—somehow it just isn’t.

But is Sunday Soup just a Dutch Reformed tradition? Well, as happens more often in life, there is more to the story.

MORE THAN JUST TRADITION

True enough, Sunday Soup has a Dutch connection, but it is not exclusively Reformed. Interestingly, it all started with Dutch *Roman Catholic* practices, especially in the southern part of the Netherlands. It was customary there to take it up a culinary notch or two for the main meal on Sunday. After all, the Lord’s Day is a feast day (Lev 23:3; Isa 58:13–14). So, Roman Catholic families were in the habit of slowly simmering a rich-tasting beef broth on Saturday, adding more tasty ingredients on Sunday, and then serving it as part of a more festive meal after the church service.

Dutch *Reformed* families, many of whom lived more to the north, also made Sunday Soup but perhaps with a slightly different motivation. Sunday is the Christian day of rest, so regular work, including cooking, should be set aside as much as reasonably possible (Ex 20:8–11; 35:3). Indeed, during the wilderness wanderings the LORD gave his people twice as much manna to prepare on the sixth day, so that families, including the mothers in Israel, could have a good solid rest on the seventh day (Ex 16:23, 29). Similarly, preparing Sunday Soup on Saturday lines up well with the divine command to rest on the Lord’s Day.

Since the Holy Spirit instructs us “to show hospitality” (Rom 12:13), it also helps to have a meal that is mostly prepared in advance—so you have more time to speak with your guests—and can be scaled to size with relative ease. Sunday Soup fits that bill nicely. If you have extra guests around your table on Sunday, you can always add some more water to the pot, throw in some extra noodles, and pull another bag of buns out of the freezer.

Of course, Sunday Soup is not the only meal that ticks all these boxes. You could also consider *cholent*, a hearty stew that some Jewish families prepare on the day before Sabbath. Or what about

Mexican Stuffed Peppers? You can prepare them in advance, and apparently they taste even better when you reheat them the next day.

Ultimately, it’s not about the soup. But it’s also more than just a Dutch Reformed tradition. It’s about finding a way that the fourth commandment lands, very practically, in the realm of food preparation for Sundays. If that principle is maintained—ideally with a dash of festivity and some room for spontaneous hospitality—undoubtedly many different menu options can be dished up on Sunday.

MORE THAN JUST FOOD

“It’s just a tradition.” In church lingo, we sometimes say this to indicate that something, whether Sunday Soup or anything else, is not that important. You could easily get rid of it and nothing would be lost.

Our Lord, though, speaks in a more nuanced way. If a tradition, such as Corban, gets in the way of obeying God’s commandments, such as honouring your parents, then that tradition can make the Word of God void (Mk 7:9–13). Clearly that is wrong. But the apostle Paul also urges the Thessalonians to “stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter” (2 Thess 2:15). He even *commended* the Corinthians for maintaining the traditions that he delivered to them (1 Cor 11:2). Whatever the apostle may all be including in these instructions, evidently, tradition has a good and godly side to it as well.

The root word for “tradition” simply means “to pass along,” often from generation to generation. The critical question, though, is *what* is being handed down and *how*. If a certain tradition undermines Scripture, we need to divest ourselves of it. Conversely, if the traditions help us understand and apply God’s Holy Word, then we do well to hold on to them.

In church life, tradition is serious business. Let’s embrace our Lord’s nuanced instruction and apply it wisely and practically. 



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People of the Book

The Great Reformation of the sixteenth century ensured that the Bible was translated into the spoken language so that it could be put into the hands of ordinary people. The invention of the printing press shortly before the Reformation made it possible for the Bible to be spread far and wide. These developments went hand-in-hand with the Reformed principle of *sola scriptura*, only Scripture as a source of authority for the Church. People went to great lengths to get a copy of the Bible. Their longing for the “pure spiritual milk” Peter spoke of could be satisfied. Christians were known as “people of the Book,” especially Christians of Reformed persuasion. As heirs of the Reformation, do we still have that longing for the Word of God?

The apostle Peter writes in his first letter, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Pt 2:2–3). Peter doesn’t present this longing for God’s Word as an option, but as a command. He uses the imperative form—long for the Word!

The initial recipients of Peter’s letter were scattered throughout what is now Turkey. They were mainly Gentile believers who had come to faith in Jesus Christ after being called out of darkness into the marvelous light of the gospel (2:9–10). They had been ransomed from the futile ways inherited from their forefathers (1:18), and they loved Christ and were filled with an inexpressible joy (1:8). Now they were exiles in the world (1:1), people living in the world but having a heavenly homeland: in the world, but not of the world.

Like those early Christians, we too experience that it isn’t easy to live as Christians in the world. We must contend with our old sinful nature which still tugs at us and wants us to live by our sinful desires (1:13–14). We must contend with the opposition and pull of the world, which wants us to join in with its practices (4:4, 12). In light of our sworn enemies—the devil, the world, and our own flesh (LD 52)—we need to drink in the Word of God to stay strong! In order to live a life of commitment and service to God, we must be immersed in the Word. It’s within this context that Peter issues his command.

LIKE NEWBORN INFANTS

Peter uses imagery to get his point across. He says, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk” (2:2). Infants long for their mother’s milk with an intense craving. The imagery of infants is not used because the initial recipients were new to the faith; some of them may not have been so new by the time Peter wrote his letter. Peter doesn’t say that they *were* infants in the faith. Peter says that *like* infants they must long for the Word of God. The imagery of infants is simply used to convey the intense desire which believers must have for the Word of God, whether as new or seasoned Christians.

The “pure spiritual milk” is the Word of God. Peter says a little earlier that the believers “. . . have been born again . . . through the

living and abiding word of God . . .” (1:23). The Word of God is the means which the Holy Spirit uses to regenerate us as well as to nourish us in the faith.

The fact that Peter refers to milk should not make us think that we can be satisfied with the simple truths of God’s Word. In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul does make a contrast between milk and solid food when he says, “I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it” (1 Cor 3:2). However, there is no evidence that Peter intends such a contrast. Peter speaks about milk because he wants to convey that a Christian’s longing for the Word should be as intense as a baby’s longing for milk. It’s the intensity of longing which Peter wants to get across, not the contrast between milk and solid food. We may never say that we are finished taking in the Word of God. We may not neglect worship services and personal Bible reading and study. We constantly need to be nourished with the Word.

Note also that Peter speaks about “*pure* spiritual milk.” The Greek word translated “pure” literally means “without deceit.” The Word of God is without deceit and must be presented without deceit. It is without deceit because it does not mislead us as it speaks to us about Jesus Christ who said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). It does not mislead us when it presents the living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the imperishable inheritance awaiting those who are in Christ through faith (1:3–5). It does not mislead us when it tells us not to be conformed to the passions of our former ignorance and calls us to be holy in all our conduct (1:14–15). And the Word of God must be presented without deceit so that it is not a watered-down version of the Word. Our sinful nature as well as the world would like us to accept a watered-down version of the Word because such Christianity is easy to accommodate. The apostle Paul writes to Timothy, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17).

GROWING UP

What’s the purpose of Peter’s command to long for the Word? Peter tells us when he says, “. . . that by it you may grow up into salvation” (2:2). It’s not that we bring about the growth ourselves. The Greek verb used is a passive form, which indicates that God gives the growth. Like Paul writes to the Corinthians, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Cor 3:6). Peter commands us to use the means which God uses, but God gives the growth. The fact that God gives the growth does not diminish the command which Peter issues because we use the means in order that

God may give the growth via the means. If we aren’t in the Word, God can’t use the Word to grow us up into salvation.

What does it look like to grow up into salvation? It means that as a baby is nourished by milk and becomes physically stronger, you will be nourished by the Word and become spiritually stronger. It means that as you attend the preaching of the Word regularly, and read and study the Word regularly, you will be more and more impressed with the height and depth of the gospel of salvation. It means that because you drink in the Word, you will know better how to live out of the Word in all aspects of life and thus live a life of thankfulness to God expressed in commitment and service to God.

As far as this last point is concerned, consider that grammatically 1 Peter 2:1 tightly leads into the next two verses. Peter literally says, “*Having put away* all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation. . .” (2:1–2, emphasis added). It’s about putting away the old and putting on the new. Putting on the new—growing up into salvation—requires that we drink in the Word of God. The more we grow up into salvation, the more we will be able to resist the pull of our sinful nature and the pressures of the world.

TASTING THE LORD’S GOODNESS

Peter then adds, “. . . if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” (2:3). “If indeed” implies, “Of course you have!” Peter addresses his readers as believers who love Jesus Christ and are filled with Christian joy (1:7–8). The NIV translates, “. . . now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” As Christians, we know that the Lord Jesus Christ has been so good to us by paying the price for our sins on the cross and rising from the grave as the victor over sin, Satan, and death, thereby giving us a living hope and an imperishable inheritance (1:3–5, 18–19). As a baby tastes that mother’s milk is good and craves more, so Christians taste that the gospel is good and ought to long for more of this spiritual milk.

As we live as exiles in this world, we need the pure spiritual milk of God’s Word. We need to drink in the Word. Let’s be people who could be known as “people of the Book.” Long for the pure spiritual milk—it’s a command! 



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Rahab: When God Opens the Door

“... Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab” (Matt 1:5a).

Editor's note: This is the second in a five-part series looking at the women in the genealogy of Jesus.

The second woman Matthew names in the genealogy of Jesus Christ is Rahab. Rahab was the harlot of Jericho. Her title alone startles us. A prostitute in the family line of the Messiah? Yet the Holy Spirit deliberately includes her, not to glorify her past but to magnify the grace of God. Rahab stands as a living testimony to sovereign mercy: God opened her heart, worked faith in her, and used her to open the door into the land of promise and toward the coming Messiah himself.

AT THE THRESHOLD OF PROMISE

Israel had reached the doorway of the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They had stood here once before. Forty years earlier, under Moses, twelve spies had gone into the land. Ten returned trembling with fear. Two, Joshua and Caleb, returned burning with faith, ready to go. The people listened to the ten. They cried for Egypt, begging to die in the desert rather than trust the God who had redeemed them.

And so, they wandered for forty years, one year for every day the spies had spent in the land. Now the forty years are over, and a new generation stands at Shittim, near the Dead Sea. Across the Jordan rises Jericho, a small but powerful fortress city, the key to entering Canaan. Jericho must fall if Israel is to enter the land.

Joshua sends two spies across the Jordan with a simple command: “Go view the land, especially Jericho” (Josh 2:1). They slip into the city and enter the house of a prostitute named Rahab. Her home likely served as an inn, a place where travellers came and went without attracting attention. But word spreads quickly in a fearful city. Someone recognizes them. Someone tells the king and soldiers are sent to Rahab’s house.

When the soldiers arrive, Rahab has already hidden the spies beneath stalks of drying flax on her roof. She meets the soldiers at her door with a calm face and a bold lie: “Yes, the men were here, but they left before the gate closed. If you hurry, you might catch them” (see 2:4–5). The soldiers rush out toward the Jordan. The gates slam shut behind them while Rahab climbs the stairs to the roof.

THE DOOR OF A HEART SWUNG OPEN

Why did Rahab do it? Why risk her life for two foreign spies? Why betray her king, her city, her people? There is only one answer: God had opened her heart.

Before the spies ever set foot in Rahab’s house, the LORD had already been at work within her. She had heard the stories of a God who dried up the Red Sea, drowned Pharaoh’s armies, and crushed Sihon and Og. Everyone in Jericho had heard these stories. Everyone trembled with fear—but one woman believed.

On the roof, Rahab speaks words that echo across Scripture: “I know that the LORD has given this land to you. . . . We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea. . . . When we heard of it, our hearts melted . . . for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below” (2:9–10).

While Jericho bolts its gates, Rahab opens her heart. While the city clings to its idols, Rahab abandons hers. While her people prepare to resist the living God, Rahab chooses to join him. She makes the choice every human being must make: Will I serve the LORD, or will I serve the world? Will I say, “Thy will be done,” or “My will be done?”

Rahab chooses the LORD.



A FAITH THAT OPENS DOORS

Rahab's faith does not remain hidden. Hebrews 11, the great hall of faith, includes her name alongside Abraham and Moses (verse 31). James praises her as one whose works proved her faith genuine (James 2:25). Rahab's faith moved her hands as well as her heart. She hid the spies and misled the soldiers. She lowered the spies from her window by a scarlet cord and sent them into the hills for three days until the search parties returned. She gave them counsel and gave them courage.

Through Rahab's active faith, the spies survived. Through her testimony, they returned to Joshua with a message that electrified the camp: "The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us" (2:24). Forty years earlier, ten spies had returned with fear and unbelief. Now two spies returned with confidence and faith, and the difference was Rahab.

The words "the land" appear seven times in Joshua 2—the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The land flowing with milk and honey. The land where Israel would be free from oppression, free to worship, free to rest. And God used Rahab to open the door.

Joshua led the people across the Jordan. Rahab opened the way into Jericho. Together, the great leader of Israel and the former prostitute of Canaan served the unfolding plan of God.

Scripture tells us there is a greater rest still to come. A better Joshua, Jesus, the son of David, the son of Rahab, leads his people into a better land, a land where sorrow and death are no more. A land where the people of God will serve him with joy forever. Through the faithful obedience of Jesus Christ, the son of Rahab, God opens the door to that eternal land. He opens it wide and no one can shut it.

SCARLET CORD, OPEN DOOR

Before the spies left her house, Rahab asked that she and her family might be saved. The spies swore an oath that they would be, but there was something Rahab must do: she must hang a scarlet cord

from her window. Rahab's house was built into the city wall. The same window through which she lowered the spies would become the sign of her salvation. "Tie this cord in the window," they said. "Gather your family inside. When the city falls, you will all be safe."

The scarlet cord carried layers of meaning. Scarlet was the colour of her past, the colour of sin, shame, and harlotry. Yet in Hebrew, the word for rope is the same as the word for hope. Rahab's rope became her hope. Her scarlet cord, once a symbol of shame, became the sign of salvation. It pointed forward to the scarlet blood of Christ, by which sinners are redeemed.

When the walls of Jericho fell, God remembered Rahab. The entire city lay under his curse, but the house marked by the scarlet cord stood firm. Rahab and her family were brought out alive. After a period of purification outside the camp, she was welcomed into the community of faith.

And God continued to use Rahab. She married Salmon, a man of the tribe of Judah. She became a mother in Israel. She became a mother of the Messiah. From Rahab came Boaz. From Boaz came Jesse. From Jesse came David. From David came the Christ.

Jesus was born, a son of Rahab the harlot. He was born to bear the scarlet sins of his people. Like his mother Rahab, he too went outside the camp to suffer, to redeem, and to gather a people for himself.

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus created a new community, a community of faith, a people who believe in him, gather with him, and obey him. He has gathered us into that community—the church of Jesus Christ.

God is the God who opens doors. He opens the door of the heart. He opens the door of faith. He opens the door to the eternal land of rest. And even now, he opens the door of his church to all who come to him in faith. 



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Esau Got Everything He Ever Wanted

I am sure many readers are familiar with the story of Esau from the book of Genesis. It's worthwhile digging into what Scripture teaches us about his life, as Esau's life provides many important lessons about faith and true blessing.

ESAU'S EARLY CHOICES

Consider first what Esau had. He was the firstborn son of Isaac and Rebekah, born just ahead of his twin brother Jacob. As the eldest son, the birthright blessing belonged to him. However, with an attitude of complete carelessness, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a pot of stew (Gen 25). This godless attitude would cost Esau dearly. Years later, Jacob received the blessing of his father Isaac in place of his brother Esau (Gen 27). Jacob did this through trickery, of course. Even so, he received the blessing, and Esau did not.

When Esau realizes Isaac blessed Jacob instead of him, notice how Esau reacts. His first reaction is anguish and sorrow. "As soon as Esau heard [that Jacob received the blessing] he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said to his father, 'Bless me, even me also, O my father!'" (Gen 27:34). Esau understands that he just missed out on something extremely important and hopes there is something left for him to receive. Isaac does also bless Esau, but it sounds more like a curse. Esau's dwelling will be away from the fatness of the earth and away from the dew of heaven (27:39). Contrast that with Jacob, who is told he shall receive the dew of heaven, earth's fatness, and plenty of grain and wine (27:28).

After losing out to Jacob's trick and then receiving this "blessing," Esau is so angry that he is ready to kill Jacob. Jacob flees to his mother's family in Haran where he stays for many years.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

When you read the blessing Esau receives from Isaac, how might you expect his life to go? You might expect that Esau would live as a homeless man in abject poverty. You might also expect him to permanently hold on to his anger, bitterness, and his hatred of his brother Jacob. However, when we fast-forward many years later, we see a completely different picture.

In Genesis 33, Jacob returns to his homeland and meets his brother Esau. To put it mildly, things don't go as we might expect.

First of all, Esau is delighted to see his brother Jacob. Esau even hugs and kisses him! Not only that, but Esau is far from living in poverty! To the contrary, he is overflowing with possessions (36:6–8). It could even be that the 400 men who accompany Esau to meet Jacob are Esau's personal army, supported by Esau himself. Such a group would require huge personal wealth to support.

ANALYZING ESAU'S SITUATION

What should we make of all this? Is Esau a changed man who has learned how to forgive? Does time heal all wounds so that he's no longer angry? And what about Isaac's words to him in Genesis 27:39–40, where he says that Esau will live away from the fatness of the earth? Did those words fail to come true? We might wonder, "Did Esau actually get the blessing in the end?" After all, part of the blessing Jacob received was that his mother's sons would bow down to him (Gen 27:29). In Genesis 33, Jacob is the one who bows low to Esau, and seven times no less!

The answer to those questions is this: Esau got everything he ever wanted, perhaps even more than he ever wanted considering all his wealth. But therein lies the problem! Notice, however, what Esau did *not* get: he did not get the true blessing of God. He did not get God himself! In the end, Esau had a lot of stuff, but God was not with him. God was not looking on him in favour and love. Esau was not walking by faith and was not walking with the Lord. He is entirely godless and he does not care.

Esau's focus has only been on gaining wealth, possessions, and living life in the here and now. That's why he was so sorrowful and angry when Isaac blessed Jacob instead of him. Esau thought he was going to miss out on wealth. *This* is what Esau really wanted, which is why he's no longer angry when Jacob returns.

In the end, however, earthly wealth is the only thing Esau got. Scary! You see, part of the curse Esau received was that, despite his wealth, he could not see that he was still living outside the blessing of God. Perhaps his wealth blinded his eyes to this reality. But consider Esau right now. What does he have? He has none of the earthly money and possessions that he once had. He does not have peace and fellowship with God in heavenly bliss like Jacob does. Instead, he is now only receiving the wrath of God.

LESSONS FOR US

A lot of people are living a lot like Esau. They take the same view of possessions, money, and even life itself. They are content to live life apart from God, thinking they are living a blessed life because they have a lot. Does that perhaps describe you and your heart? Have you failed to see that it's a curse to live apart from God, no matter how much you have?

One thing this teaches us is that we must not confuse the *gifts* of God with the *blessings* of God.¹ It is true that things like money, possessions, property, and good health are all gifts from God. Scripture makes this clear in various places (Matt 5:45; Acts 14:17; Jas 1:17). We can enjoy material things to God's glory (1 Tim 6:17). But even though material things are gifts from above, they are not necessarily blessings if we use them with the attitude of Esau. If our outlook is the same as Esau's, then those gifts will be a curse in the end.

You've probably heard the saying, "Money can't buy happiness." In a sense that's true; there are many rich people who are unhappy. But in some respects, perhaps money can buy temporary happiness, and there again lies the danger. People fail to see that despite the temporary feeling of happiness or comfort that money might give them, money can't provide true blessing or joy. You might think you have it all until it's suddenly taken away.

WHAT ARE TRUE BLESSINGS?

In Revelation 3, the Lord Jesus warned the church in Laodicea, "You say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,' not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see."

Christ here calls us to seek true riches and true blessings. True blessings are to have God as your Father, to walk close to the Lord, to trust God's promises, to have Christ as your Saviour. When you have these things, you have true blessings. Your life is ultimately secure when your sins are forgiven through the sacrifice of Christ. When Christ is your Saviour, it doesn't matter so much if you have little or have a lot. In the end, you have God, and so you have it all. Let us pray for eyes to see what true blessings are, and may we seek them in faith every day. ☪



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We must not confuse the *gifts* of God with the *blessings* of God



¹ This distinction was given to me in a sermon I heard from Rev. Jan deGelder.

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Street scene in Jijiga, Ogaden, Ethiopia
(photo by Charles Fred)

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The Somali language is spoken by about 23 million people. The vast majority are Muslim and live on the Horn of Africa — a semi-arid land mass jutting out into the Indian Ocean just across from the Arabian Peninsula. This includes the Ogaden region of Ethiopia as well as Djibouti, Somalia and northeastern Kenya. Also, since the 1990's wars and instability have spread communities of Somali-speakers around the globe.



Although many Somali-speakers now live in urban areas, traditional Somali culture is built around nomadic herding of camels, goats and sheep in the arid and semiarid pasture lands following seasonal rains. Livestock are the center of rural life. Camels provide milk, transport, important social prestige and wealth. Somali society is a clan system of extensive kinship under the leadership of elders. This enables mutual aid and collective responsibility in a harsh environment. The rich oral tradition of poetry and storytelling provides opportunities to share the largely unknown message of the gospel. So does the culture of warm hospitality, sharing spiced tea or camel milk.

For around two decades, twice a week, MERF's Somali language radio programs have aired Christ's good news far and wide in the midst of an overwhelmingly harsh Islamic environment. By God's grace, many respond to the gospel. Inquirers are carefully followed up. MERF puts Somali Bibles in the hands of hungry souls, and translates, prints and distributes basic Christian literature to build young believers solidly in the faith. Printed Bibles and Christian literature are very much in demand. The team recently reprinted these translations:



Living the Christian Life by Albert Martin, *Healthy Christian Growth* by Sinclair Ferguson and *Coming to Faith in Christ* by John Benton.



From left to right: *Living the Christian Life* by Albert Martin, *Coming to Faith in Christ* by John Benton, and *Healthy Christian Growth* by Sinclair Ferguson

In the last few years, MERF's Somali gospel team provides globally 24/7 online links to hear the radio programs and to read the Somali Bible and free, downloadable Christian literature at: somalforchrist.com

Praise God that now, in places with good internet service, logistic security and high cost are no longer barriers for Bible and literature distribution.

Social media is also proving to be very useful for following up inquirers and ministering to new believers, who are often located far away. This online ministry has effectively speeded up and multiplied the reach of the gospel among Somali-speakers. Gradually, small Somali-speaking fellowships form here and there and are growing in number and in God's Word and His ways.

MERF's Somali team regularly (but discretely) travels long distances to different Somali communities in the Horn of Africa. They follow-up radio and online contacts and encourage the small Somali Christian churches and fellowship groups by providing Somali language Bibles, Christian literature and biblical training seminars and conferences. It is uplifting to see steady spiritual growth despite the many challenges. There is, however, a great need for more Somali-speaking spiritual leaders who are solidly grounded in God's Word and equipped to steer young Christians away from false teaching, such as the prosperity gospel.

The Somali team asks prayer –

First, for the Lord to raise up Somali-speaking ministers who are well-versed in the Scriptures and committed to sharing the gospel of Christ with their neighbors;

Second, for the Lord to strengthen the faith of Somali-speaking Christians to persevere through the trials and suffering that are not uncommon.

Thank you for your faithful prayer partnership!



Street scene in Jijiga, Ogaden, Ethiopia (photo by Charles Fred)

See MERF's 3-minute video & 12 issues of MERF News:
powerofchristatwork.net

Meet Nathan VanGrootheest, Thrift Store Owner

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” It’s a standard childhood question, one for which some kids have a definite and consistent answer. Looking back thirty or forty years later, they can easily see the hand of God as they pursued a clear path and achieved their goal. For others, even when their early dream was just as definite, the path of life is much more circuitous and less smooth, and the destination may be nowhere near what they expected. But in their lives too, God’s hand is present and obvious, and his love and light shine into—and through—these believers as well.

Today I’d like you to meet Nathan VanGrootheest, jack of all trades and master of none, currently the proprietor of the Value Vault, a thrift store that he and his wife Sarah own and operate in Carman, Manitoba. They are members in Carman West Canadian Reformed Church, where he currently serves as an elder.

The life you’re living today bears little resemblance to your childhood dream. Can you give me a quick summary of those dreams, and how you got to where you are today?

Sure, but it won’t be quick! From the age of twelve, I always had one goal: to be an MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship) pilot. I did a bunch of training and things were on track. But then I went through a rough period in college where I threw everything aside, hurt a lot of people in the process, and wasn’t living for God. I was actually the opposite of being a witness for God and have many regrets from that period. My goals were sidelined. I did a variety of jobs, finally doing property management for my dad. I struggled with addictions and eventually went to rehab where I connected intimately with God.

By then I was married and we had four kids. We thought God was calling us back to the original goal of being an MAF pilot. So, we moved from Ontario to Manitoba, for cheaper housing, while I did flight training in Steinbach. While waiting almost three years on Transport Canada for my Class 1 medical, I worked odd jobs and dealt with the difficulty of delays. Then I got an opportunity to work on a project for my dad in Mexico, so I moved there with my whole family for nine months.

Just before leaving for Mexico, we got the answer from Transport Canada: my licence would have many restrictions on it due to previous life choices, to the point where we had to see this as God saying no and shutting that door. It was the end of a long dream, but it was God’s way of getting us to Carman, not a place I would have chosen on my own! But it’s a great place for a family, and it’s obviously where God wants us to be now.

That’s a long introduction . . . and I still don’t know what it is you’re doing in Carman in 2026!

After coming back from Mexico, I did a number of different jobs that weren’t really supporting my family, or things I wanted to do long term. At some point I came across an auction of storage units and figured I could purchase one and sell the stuff from my garage for fun and some extra money. I was selling from the garage, on Marketplace and garage sales, but soon my garage filled up. We joked that if a proper spot came up for rent, we could turn it into a full-time gig as a storefront.

And that’s what we ended up doing [opening a thrift store]! Most of my inventory comes from storage unit auctions, but some from private sales too. For the private sales, it’s a great opportunity to be a witness. I don’t undervalue their stuff during negotiations and then walk away saying, “What a score!” I have actually sometimes doubled their first price, to be fair and transparent with them.

What are some other ethical or moral decisions that you face in this business?

A big one is people offering to pay me cash, so I won’t have to claim it, won’t have to pay taxes. This happens all the time, and they are quite surprised when I say it doesn’t matter because I claim it all anyways! It’s not about whether I agree with how much tax we should pay, it’s just the right thing to do. This happens multiple times a day, not only in my business, but in so many other businesses too, and it’s one way that, as a Christian, we can choose to live out our faith by being ethical in these transactions and not putting money over morals.

What are some of the biggest challenges and rewards of what you do in a day?

Because the store itself has only been open for a few months, the biggest challenge right now is growing the business while supporting my family and finding the right deals to buy. If you're looking for just financial returns, retail may not be your best option. I still do another job one day a week, including driving a septic truck, which is more fun than it sounds! I'm also an elder in my church, so life is pretty busy lately.

But one of the joys, and one of the reasons I got into it, is that I can include my family in the business. My wife works in the store a couple days a week, and the kids help out as well. If I'm doing a pickup in Winnipeg, which is an hour away, the family can hop in the vehicle and we drive there together and make an evening of it, or I take the kids while my wife works the store. My wife and I have very different personalities: she's methodical and organized and doesn't mind repetitive tasks. I'm the opposite—I am unorganized, I like physical work, variety, and quick changes in my day, so we work together very well. Where one of us is lacking the other fills in; it's amazing how God uses these different traits to bless our marriage and our jobs as well.

Another thing about having a store downtown is that you get to interact with your community, you get to know and be part of the community you live in. I offer an affordable shopping option in our small town, which is nice when the nearest larger town is 30 minutes away.

And we have opportunities to talk to people. We have a Bible text on our wall inside, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt 6:19–21). I know it's funny when we're selling all these things, collectibles too, and it sounds like we're encouraging people not to shop. But impulsive shopping can be an attempt to fill an emotional or spiritual void, so this verse reminds them—and ourselves—not to get too connected to stuff. I've had a couple really good conversations with people from them reading that verse that we otherwise wouldn't have had. And I have the time to talk to them; I can empty that box or price those items later.

Any final thoughts?

I think sometimes we put too much emphasis on having the right job, the right career, but at the end of the day it's not about the money we make, it's about how we are Christians in our task and how we glorify God through it all and point others to him. Once you embrace that, then you know your job is important, but most important is how I can help the person in front of me. God offers so much grace to us and the least we can do is offer it to those around us. And this thrift store, the Value Vault right in small-town Manitoba, is how he wants me to do that right now. 

Lyn Metzlar-Leyenhorst

Cloverdale, BC

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Emmanuel Christian High School **Graduation**

On Friday, June 26, the Emmanuel Christian High School community was blessed with wonderful weather and the opportunity to celebrate the graduation of 39 Grade 12 students. For the second time, the ceremony was held in June, just one week after many students wrote their final exams. Amid the busyness of studying, marking, report cards, and event preparation, many hands made light work. The décor and dinner committees, composed of parents from the upcoming Grade 11 class, worked diligently to ensure the evening ran smoothly.

At 5:15 p.m., graduands and their families began arriving at ECHS and approximately 160 guests were seated. Graduates led the way to the buffet dinner, followed by dessert and fellowship. Students participated in a Jeopardy-style game prepared by staff, allowing them to reflect on their four years at Emmanuel. By 7:00 p.m., closing devotions were complete, and attendees travelled to Lakeside Community Church in Guelph for the formal graduation ceremony.

GRADUANDS ADDRESSED

At 8:00 p.m., principal Stephen DeBoer led the processional, escorting the newly-gowned graduands to their seats. The Board Chair, Mr. Greg Wildeboer, opened the ceremony with reading from John 8:31–47 and prayer. Following a time of singing, Mr. John Penninga presented the parent address, encouraging the graduands to build their lives on the solid foundation of God’s truth as they enter a new stage of life. Mr. Penninga challenged students to remain

firmly rooted in Scripture amid the competing voices and influences of today’s culture. They were reminded that while parents, teachers, and loved ones have guided them throughout their schooling, they must now take greater responsibility for their faith, decisions, and future direction.

The address emphasized understanding identity through a deep knowledge of God and trusting him through both joys and challenges ahead. Students were encouraged to unplug from worldly distractions, spend time in God’s Word, and allow Scripture to shape their priorities, relationships, and character. The address concluded by urging graduands to read truth, love truth, walk in truth, and live lives that reflect Christ.

After a brief musical interlude, Mr. DeBoer delivered the principal’s address. He encouraged the graduating class to consider the communities they are part of, and those that they will become a part of in the future. Drawing from the school theme text in Hebrews 10:23–25, he highlighted the importance of “fostering community,” one of ECHS’s four core values. He reminded graduates that, regardless of where the Lord leads, believers are part of his covenant community and are called to be lights in the world. As the graduands move into workplaces, colleges and universities, they can and will surround themselves with new friends, but Mr. DeBoer encouraged every student to surround themselves with good Christian families and friends.



GRADUATES FAREWELLED

Following the addresses, students were called forward to receive their diplomas, along with a number of academic and special awards. The valedictorian, Douglas Brouwer, then addressed his classmates, reflecting on fond memories from their time at ECHS while also looking ahead to God's plans for the future. He shared stories contributed by classmates and emphasized the blessing of being part of a Reformed Christian school community. While academics and extra-curriculars were meaningful, he highlighted that the greatest blessing was the relationships formed over the past four years. He encouraged graduates to cherish these relationships as they continue into new seasons of life.

The ceremony concluded with Mr. John Penninga closing in prayer, giving thanks for the gift of Reformed education and God's continued work in the lives of the graduates and the ECHS community. With the singing of the national anthem, a recessional, and a long receiving line of congratulations, the ceremony came to a close. Congratulations once again to the ECHS graduating class of 2026. May our faithful Father in heaven continue to guide them in all that they undertake. 📷

Trevor Gansekoele

*Vice-Principal, ECHS
Fergus*

2026 Awards

Royal LePage Business Award: Levi Kottelenberg

Post Structures Award: Sullivan Leistra

L. Martin Toet Athletic Scholarship: Zachary Sikkema and Julie DeBoer

Alec Calder Award: Teagan Kottelenberg

Wellington County Historical Society Award: Mikayla Kottelenberg

Wightman Family Bursary: Zachary Sikkema

Ashley's Music Studio Music Award: Madison Knol

Jordan Hutchinson Memorial Academic Proficiency Award: Zachary Sikkema

Governor General's Award: Zachary Sikkema

Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award: Sullivan Leistra

ECHS Golden Eagle Award: Jenny Deboer, Brooklyn Feenstra, Kara Jonker, Reuben Sikkema, Zachary Sikkema, Courtney Vis, Loraya Westrik

ECHS Citizenship Award: Jenny Deboer and Loraya Westrik

ECHS Stewardship Award: Zachary Sikkema

ECHS Faithful Growth Award: Teagan Kottelenberg



A Shepherd for the Flock

The church pews filled with grateful congregants as they anticipated the ordination of their new minister. On March 29, 2026, Rev. Quentin Vandermeulen was ordained to preach the word in Coaldale Canadian Reformed Church, ending their two-year vacancy.

Dr. Andrew Pol officiated the service with a sermon on 1 Corinthians 2:1–5. In these verses, Paul reminds believers that it is not about the eloquence of the pastor's words; it's about the working of the Spirit through divine revelation. The sermon focused on letting faith rest on God's power, revealed through the proclamation of the Word. He reminded the congregation that problems will arise when elevating personal preferences above the message. The importance is in preaching Christ crucified and keeping the message centered on that. The congregation was reminded to look beyond the preacher to the God of wisdom and to see the preacher as the vessel through which the treasure is carried.

Dr. Pol, Rev. Cornelius Vanspronsen, and serving elder Rob Van Middelkoop participated in the laying on of hands. What an incredible ceremony to witness and what reason for thankfulness! Kneeling in front of the congregation, Candidate Quentin Vandermeulen was ordained before the Lord and his people.

INAUGURAL SERMON

The morning came and went, and the Reverend Quentin Vandermeulen took his place on the pulpit for the afternoon service, working through 1 Chronicles 29, with the message that our everlasting King provides us with all things. The sermon focused on having a willing heart, a prayerful heart, and a satisfied heart. We are called to serve God's kingdom no matter what stage of life we are in, and Rev. Vandermeulen encouraged the congregation to continue to grow in the desire to serve, for seeing others serving the Lord wholeheartedly is encouraging and comforting to other believers.



In verse 14 of the chapter, David asks the question, “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to thus offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.” Rev. Vandermeulen pointed out the importance of understanding that it is only by God’s grace that we are here. Who are we to share a personal relationship with God? Who am I that Jesus died for me? David’s prayer brings forth the weakness of man, encouraging his kingdom to focus on God. Rev. Vandermeulen encouraged the congregation to remember the purposes of God, looking confidently to building up the church, and through praying that their new pastor would remain faithful in bringing the message of salvation to the people. God is worthy of our devotion, and the church will always belong to him, and we should be satisfied in knowing that he will preserve his church.

WELCOME EVENING

A few weeks later, the congregation came together to welcome our new minister. The evening was packed with food, fun, and so much

added flavour. There were letters from various churches in Classis Alberta, in-person greetings from local churches, games, gifts, and music. The council gifted Rev. Vandermeulen a brand-new barbeque. Various Bible study groups played both unique and familiar games that brought loads of smiles and laughs. Winston Hoogerdyk sang *You Raise me Up*, with Sylvia Hofsink on the piano. The church choir and school music class sang two songs. The evening was a fruitful time of fun and fellowship. Council Chairman Mark Slomp closed the evening by reading from Ephesians 4 where we find these words, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure and stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11–13).

We thank our Lord for providing a minister of the Word for the church in Coaldale. 🍷

Meaghan Diek

Coaldale



READ AND SEARCH OLD VOLUMES

of Clarion

clarionmagazine.ca/archive

The Beauty of Mentorship

At River's Edge Haven of Hope, the start of summer marks the end of our regular mentoring season. One-on-one mentorship naturally slows as families enjoy vacations and participate in extracurricular activities. Wednesdays, however, remain a special time for some mentees to continue their mentoring relationships and for those curious about the program to come and "test the waters."

Although the pace of mentorship slows during the summer, it is by far the busiest season on the farm. Our buildings, property, and the natural beauty of the river, forest, and animals create a welcoming environment for other organizations to gather in. Throughout the

weeks of summer activity, there are many opportunities for God's Word to be shared, relationships to be formed, and seeds to be planted. The joyful sounds of laughter and fun become the daily music of the farm.

Now in its sixth full year of operation, River's Edge Haven of Hope continues to experience God's blessing through seasons of change and growth. There remains some mystery and curiosity surrounding Haven of Hope and what the ministry seeks to accomplish. At its heart, Haven of Hope is a farm-based Christian ministry that welcomes people of all ages and walks of life to experience



the love and grace of Jesus Christ through genuine relationships and intentional mentorship. Our desire is to provide a nurturing environment where people can grow spiritually, mentally, socially, and physically.

CHRIST-CENTRED MENTORSHIP

While our program shares the value of intentional mentoring found in organizations such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the heart and purpose of Haven of Hope are distinctly Christ-centered. With a deep love for the Lord and a heart for children and youth, our dedicated staff and adult volunteers mentor more than 80 children each year through meaningful one-on-one relationships.

Our mentorship program primarily serves children and youth between the ages of 6 and 18. We believe that a consistent, caring relationship can have a lasting influence on a young person's life. Mentors strive to listen, encourage, and walk alongside their mentees with compassion and consistency while pointing them toward the hope found in Jesus Christ. Our desire is not simply to help young people navigate life, but to encourage them to see themselves and the world around them through the light of God's truth and grace.

At the heart of every mentoring relationship is a desire to reflect the love of Christ. As Scripture reminds us, "We love because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). We recognize that we are ultimately dependent upon God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit to bring about growth and transformation in his perfect timing. It is both a blessing and a humbling privilege to witness God at work in the lives of others.

Our program is intentionally focused on mentoring rather than counselling. We do not provide counselling or therapy, and our mentors do not take the place of parents, guardians, or professional counsellors. Instead, mentors offer a safe, consistent, and caring presence where young people can be seen, heard, encouraged, and supported. In the peaceful setting of the farm, ordinary activities and shared experiences create natural opportunities for conversation,

connection, and encouragement. Through these relationships, the love and hope of Christ can be demonstrated in simple and meaningful ways. While our primary focus is children and youth, no one is turned away simply because they are beyond our primary age range.

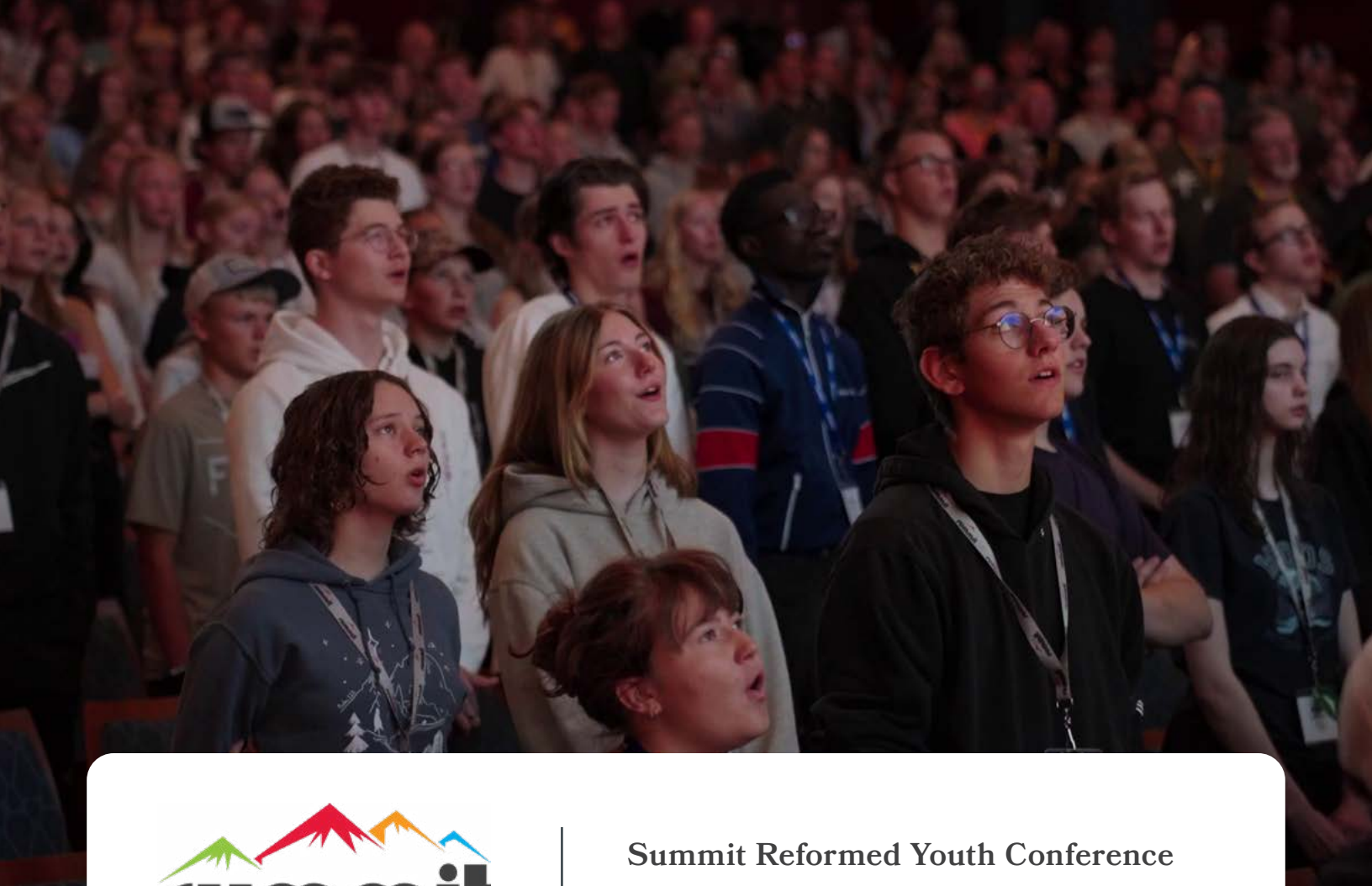
COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Mentorship remains the heart of Haven of Hope, but God has also provided many opportunities for the farm to serve the broader community. Throughout the year, we are grateful to welcome visitors, churches, schools, and other groups to experience the farm and learn more about the ministry. Each week, we are especially blessed to welcome residents and caregivers from the Beacon, Harbour, and Anchor Christian Homes. Cadet and Kingdom Seeker groups enjoy time in our program barn, and Christian schools and homeschool groups are invited to spend time at the farm in ways that complement and enrich their curriculum. These gatherings provide opportunities to enjoy God's creation, build meaningful relationships, share his Word, and simply experience the joy and peace of the farm.

As the ministry continues to grow, we recognize the importance of helping our supporting community understand who we are, why we exist, and how God is using Haven of Hope. Throughout the year, we seek to remain connected with churches, schools, individuals, families, and businesses through on-site and remote presentations, social media updates, and our quarterly newsletter. Through these connections, we hope to share the heart of Haven of Hope, invite others into the story of what God is doing here, and encourage our community to pray, participate, and partner with us. Above all, we are grateful for the opportunity to share this ministry and point people to the One who makes it all possible. **C**

Jackie Nordeman

Executive Director
www.riversedge.ca



Summit Reformed Youth Conference 2026 RECAP

What do Candy Parachutes, a game called “Name that Psalm,” and a man named Dr. Strange have in common? They were all featured at the 2026 Summit Reformed Youth Conference at Mt. Royal University in Calgary, Alberta. During August 3–7, 478 youth, chaperones, and speakers came together to enjoy an incredible week of worship, fellowship, and fun.

SUMMIT’S 10TH ANNIVERSARY

The 2026 Summit Youth Conference was our tenth conference in eleven years. To celebrate this milestone, the Summit organizing committee reached out to all the speakers who spoke at the 2016 conference to see if they were available to speak in 2026. Reverends Rich Anjema, Bill Pols, Ralph Pontier, Gary Zekveld, and Dr. Alan Strange were all able to come back and speak! Rev. Richard and Angela Bout and Rev. Brian Cochran were unable to return.

The 2026 Conference theme was “Counselor, Comforter, Keeper” exploring the person & work of the Holy Spirit. The five main session presentations were led by two very capable and gifted speakers: Dr. Alan Strange (President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary) and

pastor John Bouwers (Hope Reformed URC, from Brampton, ON). Summit also offered various breakout sessions. Nine of the breakout sessions featured a fruit of the Spirit, while the others focused on purity, union with Christ, sins against the Holy Spirit, and praying for the Holy Spirit.

Rounding out the list of speakers this year were Rev. Hendrik and Kristen Alkema, Dr. William Den Hollander, and the Reverends Joel Dykstra, Bradd Nymeyer, Tim Schouten, James Sinke, Kelvin Tiemstra, Julius Van Spronsen, and Ken Wieske.

CANDY PARACHUTES

One of the mainstays of every Summit Conference is the daily candy prizes, and pastor Keith Davis is committed to finding new and exciting ways to distribute the candy to the young people. For 2026, candy parachutes were deployed. Tootsie Rolls, Rockets, Tootsie Pops and other sweet treats were strapped to plastic soldiers and the ushers in the Bella Concert Hall went into the upper deck and, all on cue, launched the candy laden paratroopers into the crowd. To make it extra special, the parachutes were signed by various 2026 speakers.

NAME THAT PSALM

Speakers from both the United Reformed and Canadian Reformed churches also got into the action with a special “Name that Tune” game devised from the *Book of Praise* and the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*. Tunes from various psalms were chosen and, with the pianist providing only the first four notes, the speakers had to guess the name and number of the psalm. Both sets of speakers did very well, but Gary Zekveld won the URC version of the contest and Ken Wiekse won the CanRC version.

OUT-DAY EVENTS & TALENT SHOW

Thursday is always a special day at Summit. After the morning Main Session, everyone heads to their selected Out-Day event. For 2026, we introduced downhill karting (at Canada Olympic Park) and a lazy river float (down the Bow River). Other Out-Day events included the Calgary Zoo, whitewater rafting and hiking in the nearby Rocky Mountains.

The Thursday Evening Talent Show is always a big hit! The 2026 participants played and sang and presented hilarious skits. One of the reasons the Talent Show is so fun is that we never actually select a winner, and everyone gets a standing ovation. It’s an opportunity for the young people (and speakers) to use their musical or theatrical talents to the glory of God and to provide some fun and entertainment.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

The next Summit Reformed Youth Conference will be held August 2–6, 2027. Dr. Ian Hamilton (professor of historical and pastoral theology at Westminster Presbyterian Theological Seminary UK) and Rev. John van Eyk (pastor of the Trinity URC in Lethbridge) will be exploring the doctrines of grace under the topic “From Ruin to Redemption.” Mark your calendars now to make sure you’re there! 📅

Keith Davis

Minister

Bethel United Reformed Church, Calgary

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Summit Reformed Young Adults Conference 2026

GOD'S GREAT LOVE

On Thursday, February 12, 160 Young Adults met at Bethel URC in Calgary for the 5th annual 2026 Reformed Young Adults Conference. Pastor Chad Vegas (Senior Pastor of Sovereign Grace Church in Bakersfield, California) led three main sessions on God's Great Love based on John 3:16. Session titles were, "The Love of the Father in Sending," "The Love of the Son in Giving," and "The Love of the Spirit in Fellowship."

For the fourth session, Pastor Vegas presented a powerful testimony of his transition from the Baptist "world" to the Reformed. (All sessions and group photos can be found at summitrefcon.ca.)

CONFERENCE FEEDBACK

Attendees were asked to provide their overall impressions of the 2026 Conference. Responses ranged from "Fabulous" to "Phenomenal." Sarah shared these comments: "I really loved it. It was such a joy and blessing to be around people who were like-minded. I made some friends, had really good conversations with people about faith matters and the singing was amazing. It was such an encouragement to be in this kind of environment."

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Along with singing and worship, attendees loved the Christian fellowship, the Friday Out-Day options (laser tag, bowling, Activate, Banff tour, or tubing on Mt. Norquay). The Saturday evening square dance is always a conference favourite as are the fresh baked chocolate chip cookies from Costco!

LOOKING AHEAD

For 2027, the conference will be held on February 11–14. Pastor Chad Vegas will return, the Lord willing, and speak on God's Great Faithfulness. Look for registration to open around Mid-October, 2026. 📅



Pastor Davis and wife Laura having some fun!



Main Speaker Pastor Chad Vegas



Morning Prayer

1. The dawn with ros - y blush - es a - dorns the sky
 2. O Son of God, now ris - ing as Morn - ing Star,
 3. *Shoot them as gleam - ing ar - rows or glow - ing darts*
 4. *In - crease our faith, re - kin - dling its flick - 'ring light,*
 5. A - rouse us from our slack - ness, our sin - ful sloth.
 6. Un - til we shall here - af - ter with per - fect sight

As on the east ho - ri - zon the day draws nigh.
 With Your bright rays il - lu - mine us from a - far.
 To let Your light burst in - to our dark - ened hearts.
 And so let doubts and dark - ness be put to flight.
 May we, a - lert and watch - ful, seek out Your paths,
 Be - hold in its full ra - diance Your glo - rious light.

Music: Pierre Guédron, 1602; harm. Henk Lemckert

Text: Jacobus Revius, 1630; tr. William Helder, 2026 © 2026, William Helder wllmhldr@gmail.com

CRUELLE DÉPARTIE

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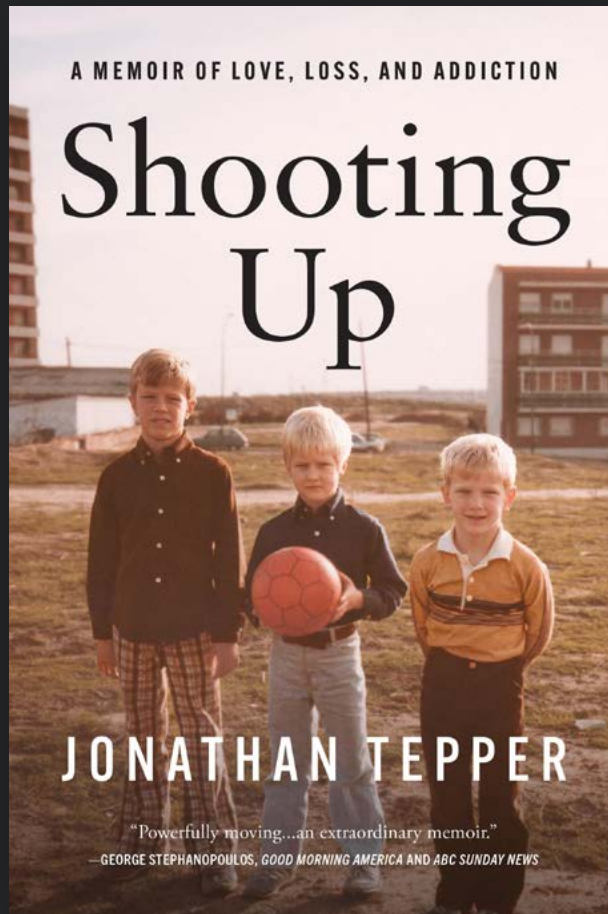


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Shooting Up

Shooting Up: A Memoir of Love, Loss, and Addiction, Jonathan Teppper.
London: Constable, 2026. Softcover, 292 pages.

What makes a Christian book Christian? Is it the author? The publisher? The subject matter? The vibe? I suppose that to even ask the question is to admit that no book can actually be Christian any more than a car, a house, or a bag of groceries can be Christian. Sometimes we use adjectives in ways that don't really make sense, but I suppose we tend to know what we mean by our terms.

Shooting Up is not a Christian book. At least, it is not published by a company that focuses on publishing books by Christians or for Christians. It is not written by an author who professes faith in Jesus Christ, though he used to. Yet in its own way, it is as Christian a book as I've read this year. It is as enjoyable a book, too.

MINISTRY TO ADDICTS

Jonathan Pepper grew up the son of missionaries to Madrid, Spain. Elliott and Mary Pepper had been sent by their Presbyterian Church in the States to found a ministry to young intellectuals that may have been somewhat in the vein of the Schaeffers' L'Abri. When that ministry failed to thrive, they changed their focus to reaching heroin addicts. At that time, and in their impoverished neighbourhood of San Blas, heroin was running amok and claiming many victims. AIDS soon appeared and made the situation even worse as sharing needles also meant sharing the virus.

It was in this context that the Teppers's ministry, Betel, began to see success. It offered rehab programs for addicts, but of course also offered the hope of the gospel. The ministry quickly expanded as more and more people got clean and came to Christ, or came to Christ and got clean. Businesses sprang up, staffed by those who had come off drugs and were in need of honest work. Churches were founded too, of course. People who had gotten clean through the program began to lead portions of that program and even to pastor the churches. In the decades that followed, Betel helped first thousands, then tens of thousands, and then hundreds of thousands of people. It's quite the story.

FRONT-ROW SEAT

Jonathan grew up as a witness to all of this, one of four sons born to Elliott and Mary. Of course, none of these happy results came without struggle and sacrifice, and much of that was borne by the Teppers's children. Added to the struggles that are common to most missionary kids were the struggles of often being impoverished, and the grief of seeing so many of their friends and church members succumb to a horrific virus. On top of all that, the family suffered

an especially grievous blow when one of the sons was killed in a car accident. Though there are ways that the boys enjoyed an idyllic childhood, there are other ways in which it was traumatic.

Tepper writes about all of this as a witness to it. He also writes about the slow erosion of his faith. Born into a Christian home and educated at a Christian school (and, at times, a home school), he was raised in "the discipline and instruction of the Lord" by parents who loved him, cared for him, and in so many ways displayed Christ in their lives. Yet the suffering and sorrow Tepper witnessed made him wonder if God could really be good, just, and kind.

By the time the book ends, Betel has grown to be a prominent ministry, and Tepper is leaving it behind to study first at the University of North Carolina and then at Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. He never describes a process of deconstruction and never outright disavows or criticizes the Christian faith. Rather, it seems like he simply chose to take a different path in which reading, learning, and a free mind took precedence.

UNEXPECTED ADMIRATION

Yet all the while he seems haunted by the faith of his parents and, perhaps even more so, the transformations he witnessed in so many of the people he knew and loved at Betel. He saw them arrive as broken addicts but then progress to faithful men and women who had found freedom from addiction and purpose through their relationship with God. They were and still are some of the finest people he could ever have hoped to meet. Though he may not share the faith of his parents or the people they helped, he admires and respects it.

"The story of Betel is extraordinary," he says, "but my parents almost never gave interviews or sought attention. They thought it was unseemly and not Christ-like. My mother and father had reason to be proud of all they accomplished over the decades, but not because of the size of the building or the numbers of addicts in the centers. My parents did not set out to create a large organization, seek political influence, or fight any culture wars. They set out to show compassion to one addict at a time." And they did.

Shooting Up is, according to the subtitle, "A Memoir of Love, Loss, and Addiction." It is all that and more, and though the story is not told by a Christian, it's told by someone who saw Christians behaving Christianly, who admired them for it, and who celebrates what they accomplished. It is a story I'm thankful to have read and one I think you'll enjoy reading as well. 

Tim Challies

Originally published at challies.com; reprinted with permission



Church History For Young & Old

Why did the emperor Nero blame the Christians for setting Rome on fire? And did you know that during the Roman siege and starvation of Jerusalem, the Jews themselves set their granaries on fire?

Over the next few issues of *Clarion*, you can read more on this and other topics in a series of short church history stories. While written primarily for children, they can be just as interesting for adults who want to brush up on church history. Although they are told in story form, the authors made every effort to keep them historically accurate.

The stories come from a series written by Pieter and Jenny Boon, commissioned by the Institute for Christian Education in South Africa. The goal of the project is to convey church history to school children in a captivating and relevant way.

Pieter Boon serves as pastor of the Free Reformed Church Maranata in Pretoria (South Africa) and holds a PhD in church history. Jenny is an artist and mother of four who loves to write and illustrate children's stories. Together, they hope to turn church history into something

kids don't just study because they have to, but something they genuinely enjoy and grow from spiritually.

Why does church history matter? It reminds us that we are part of something far greater than ourselves. We aren't the first believers to face hardship or navigate shifting cultural tides. Generations of Christians have come before us, some paying a steep price for their faith. Through every age, Christ continues to preserve his church.

Two of the four planned books are already available in Afrikaans: one on the early church and another on the Middle Ages (see photo). In the books, church history stories are combined with facts, background information, photos, maps, illustrations, and craft projects. It is published in full colour, and the magazine-style layout also makes it suitable as a coffee table book. We hope that translating some stories for *Clarion* will be the first step to publishing these works in English. Enjoy this taste of the stories, translated for us by Pieter and Jenny themselves. 📖

STORIES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

Who Burned Rome?

PIETER & JENNY BOON

It was the year AD 64. Night had fallen over Rome. The people of Rome were fast asleep. Or were they?

Leo opened his eyes. Something must have woken him up. Was it the wind howling around the house? Or was it the sound of people screaming? What were they doing? Then he caught the smell of smoke. Something was terribly wrong!

He threw off his blanket and ran to the door. The moment he opened the latch, the wind pushed it wide open. The street was dark but in the distance he saw the glow of flames in the air. He heard someone shouting, “Rome is burning!”

FLEEING THE FLAMES

By then, Leo’s parents were awake too. “We have no time to lose!” his father yelled. “The wind is blowing right toward us. Leo, go get some food! I’ll get the money!”

Leo scrambled for anything edible. He wrapped a few loaves of bread in a blanket. In the dark, he accidentally bumped into the birdcage, which fell on the floor. *Poor little bird*, he thought, quickly flipping the door open.

The streets of Rome were packed with people fleeing the oncoming flames. As the fire approached, the flames roared, and houses started collapsing with a deafening crash. Thick black smoke blew over the crowd. Everyone pushed forward through the narrow alleys. Children called in vain for their parents who had disappeared into the dark.

Leo felt relieved when they finally reached one of the hills outside the city. The fire would not easily reach them up here. People kept arriving and it was chaos as people tried to find their loved ones. Fortunately, Leo’s family had managed to stay together. They climbed higher up the hill where it was quieter. There they had a clear view of the city. A huge part of Rome was ablaze, with flames leaping high above the rooftops.

“This fire won’t die down as long as the wind keeps up,” his father said.

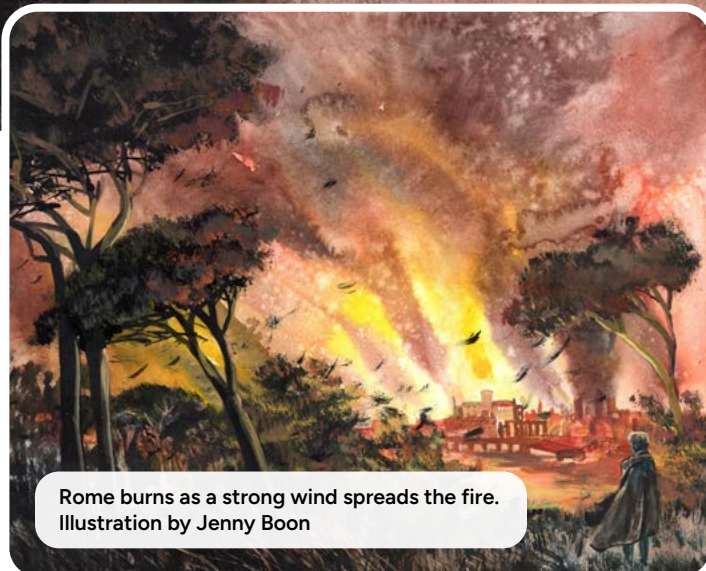
WHO’S TO BLAME?

Nearby, a group of men sat together. They looked furious, shaking their fists in the air. “Emperor Nero must have set the city on fire!” Leo heard one of them say above the noise of the wind. “He wanted to get rid of all the ugly old houses.”

“So he can build a prettier city,” another man shouted. “He even wants to name it after himself: *Neropolis*!”

“The Senate would never give him permission. I bet he burned the place down just to get his way.”

Leo wondered if that could really be true. How could the emperor, of all people, do such a thing?



Rome burns as a strong wind spreads the fire.
Illustration by Jenny Boon

“Well, you can expect anything from Emperor Nero,” the first man continued. “He even murdered his own family—his stepbrother, his wife, and his own mother!”

The men became increasingly furious, their voices growing louder and louder. One man clenched his fist. “How can we let such a monster rule our Roman Empire? We must do something about this!”



Emperor Nero
Source: Abraham Janssens (1575–1632)



Remains of the Colosseum, a large amphitheatre in Rome. Emperor Vespasian ordered the Colosseum to be built on the site of a lake Nero had created in his gardens. By doing so, he wanted to show his subjects that he was a better emperor than Nero, whose building projects had served only his selfish interests.

Source: Dalbéra, Wikimedia Commons

Meanwhile, the sun began to rise, staining the clouds of smoke above Rome a dark orange. Escapees from Rome kept pouring in—the stream of people just did not stop. The rumour of Emperor Nero being responsible for the fire spread even faster than the flames. Everywhere people started shouting, “Away with Nero! Death to Nero! We want a new emperor!”

“Do you really think he set the city on fire, Father?” Leo asked.

“Maybe,” his father replied. “Most people think so, although it could also have started easily by accident with this wind . . .”

For a total of nine days, the fire raged. When the flames finally died down, a huge part of Rome was left in ashes and ruins. Leo’s family lost everything in the blaze, but fortunately, they were not on their own. The Christian community in Rome took care of one another in tough times. There was a family who invited them to stay on their farm outside the city.

One day, a visitor arrived at the farm with the news: Emperor Nero was blaming the Christians for the fire! At first, Nero had tried to calm the people down by promising to build a much grander city. But to no effect—the people remained furious. So, he changed his strategy. He started accusing the Christians of setting Rome ablaze! Because of this, Nero ordered his soldiers to arrest Christians. It is said that they even threw the apostles Peter and Paul into prison.

After a while, Leo and his father headed back into Rome. They remained on guard, avoiding the main roads. When they finally reached the city, they could not believe their eyes. The entire neighbourhood had turned into a dark, scorched wasteland of rubble. After searching for hours, they found the spot where their house used to stand. Only a few blackened walls remained. Off to the side, buried in ash, lay the birdcage, completely charred. *At least I opened the little door . . .* Leo thought to himself.

Not far away, a group of men was digging a massive pit. Leo and his father walked over to ask what they were doing. “Haven’t you heard?” one of them answered, leaning on his shovel. “Emperor Nero decided to build a gigantic palace for himself, right here. We’re digging the lake that’s going to be in the middle of his garden.”

Leo and his father stared at him in disbelief. “And where does he expect us to rebuild our homes?” Leo’s father’s face flushed with anger.

The worker shrugged. “I don’t know. As usual, Emperor Nero only cares about himself.”

PERSECUTION

Before heading back to the farm, they visited a few members of their church who were still staying in Rome. Their worst fears were confirmed. The believers described how terrible the persecution had become. Christians were being fed to wild animals in the amphitheatres. Nero was even smearing Christians with tar, tying them to poles in his garden, and setting them on fire to serve as human torches during his drunken parties.

Walking back to the farm, Leo and his father stared ahead in silence. “What if we get caught and thrown to the wild animals?” Leo asked. “I’m scared I won’t be brave enough to stand firm in my faith.”

“Don’t worry, my boy. You shouldn’t burden yourself with that right now.” His father wrapped an arm around Leo’s shoulders. “If the Lord ever asks something like that of us, he will give us the strength to bear it. None of us can do it on our own.”

Back on the farm, they told the others everything they had seen and heard in Rome. “One day,” his father said, “even Nero will have to answer to God.”

Little did they know just how quickly that day would come! Not long thereafter, a rebellion broke out against the emperor. Nero fled Rome and took his own life. He never lived in the grand palace he had dreamed of. And so came the end of a man who did not fear God.

A few years later, Leo’s family bought a small piece of land outside Rome to live on. The persecutions eased, though whenever a new disaster struck, the Romans quickly blamed the Christians, and the violence flared up again. Yet the church did not vanish. In fact, more people came to put their faith in Christ!

Even when Leo was grown up, he would still sometimes dream of the dark ruins of their home and the scorched birdcage with its open door. He felt deeply thankful that the Lord had carried his family through those dark days. Even the mighty Roman emperor could not destroy the Lord’s church. 📺

Pieter & Jenny Boon

Ministerial couple

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CRTS Board of Governors

Press Release September 10, 2026

OPENING AND ROLL CALL

The chairman, Rev. Jeff Temple, led in opening devotions. It was noted that several governors were unable to be present for the meeting due to personal circumstances.

MEMORABILIA

Information was shared about the well-being of emeriti professors Drs. de Visser, Van Dam, and Visscher and their families, as well as the widows srs. Gootjes (Hamilton-Providence CanRC) and DeJong (Hamilton-Cornerstone CanRC). The chairman will continue to try to reach out to sr. Deddens (living in the Netherlands).

MINUTES AND AGENDA

The agenda for the meeting was established. The minutes of the regular meeting held on January 7, 2026 were approved. Correspondence and matters on the action log were reviewed.

STRATEGIC PLANNING UPDATES

1. The strategic planning sub-committee that is focused on upholding faithful integrity in the age of advancing Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology reported that the Senate invited an AI specialist who gave instruction that will help safeguard students from the dangers of AI, especially when they are preparing sermons during and after their studies at CRTS.
2. The strategic planning sub-committee focusing on cultivating aptitude for gospel ministry reported on their investigations into the roles of the seminary, students, and churches during the steps of cultivating a student's aptitude to serve in a local church or mission setting.

3. The strategic planning sub-committee focused on evaluating the place and sufficiency of the missions program at the CRTS is scheduled to present an initial report of their work to the Board in January 2027.

ACADEMIC COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. The Academic committee received reports given by the governors who visited lectures and had conversations with the students and professors. We give thanks to the LORD for the ongoing faithfulness, diligence, humility, and Christ-like service of the administrative staff, the librarian, the principal, the professors, and the students.
2. Considering that the principal is nearing the 12th year of service (9 years plus a 3-year extension), the board directed the Executive Committee to begin the process of preparing a recommendation to General Synod 2028 for a new principal as this is outlined in the college handbook policy.
3. Giving thanks to the LORD for his gracious provision and the commitment of the churches to the future well-being of the seminary, the Academic Committee reported that two applicants were granted the Advanced Theological Studies Assistance (ATSA) bursary for the 2026-2027 academic year.

FINANCE AND PROPERTY COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. The Finance and Property (F&P) Committee submitted the annual report of their activities and the minutes of recent meetings. The committee developed a long-term plan to complete capital projects that were not completed during the renovations, and could report that the parking lot was

redone this summer and that a repair to the front roof will be done this fall.

2. The Board approved the 2025 financial statements and CRTS annual budget for 2027, and expresses deep gratitude for the work of the Women's Saving Action and the ongoing substantial support from within our sister churches in Australia. The assessment for 2027 will remain at \$103/cm.

INTERACTION WITH ASSOCIATION OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS, ASSESSMENT, GOVERNANCE

1. The board received the 2025 ATS Institutional Peer Profile and Strategic Information reports.
2. The assessment coordinator, Mrs. Margaret Alkema, submitted the annual Assessment report, minutes from the Assessment Day 2026, and the Annual Metrics Report 2026. The board is very thankful to note that the faculty has surpassed the publication goals (more than 85 publications in the last 3 years) and that some of these publications have been translated and distributed all over the world. We also are thankful to the churches for their overwhelming support of the 2026 Prospective Student Event and for the 50 interested individuals who came to participate (38 men and 12 wives or girlfriends), which is almost a twofold increase of total attendees as compared to 2023.
3. As part of our commitments to ATS the Board must regularly review all the policies and procedures of CRTS. At this meeting the Board approved policies concerning the tenure of professors, conference attendance and funding, sexual or gender harassment, and health and safety. The board also decided to ensure that new professors are granted a sufficient time of transition before they begin teaching by explicitly addressing transition time in the handbook policy.

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

1. In his principal's report, Dr. VanVliet noted that the faculty and staff are doing well and that the CRTS has the privilege of welcoming thirty students into our classrooms, including eleven new freshmen students and one new visiting student. The principal's report also highlighted Dr. Bredenhof's *Ministry of Small Things* and Dr. den Hollander's *1 Peter: Living Hope for Suffering Sojourners* and its accompanying Bible study guide (see <https://canadianreformedseminary.ca/1-peter-bible-study/> for more info).

2. The principal also expressed thankfulness for the faithful support of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) who sent seven new freshmen students to the CRTS this year. The FRCA has also recently made it possible for Dr. Rev. Dean Anderson to start up the Schola Linguarum Biblicarum (School of Biblical Languages) which the CRTS recognizes as a very helpful tool to train young men in the biblical languages to prepare them for theological studies.

SABBATICAL, CONFERENCE, AND TRIP REPORTS

1. The Board received a report from Dr. William den Hollander concerning his activities during his sabbatical in 2026, and approved Dr. Jason VanVliet's sabbatical proposal for Winter 2027.
2. The following annual reports were received with thankfulness: course work report, registrar's report, library report, website report, convocation committee report, Faber-Holwerda bursary report, publication foundation report, foreign student bursary report, conference report and the lecture schedule for 2026-2027. The board noted the value of the CRTS website (<https://canadianreformedseminary.ca/>) as well as the Heidelberg Catechism website (<https://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/en/>) for the churches.
3. Dr. Bredenhof and Dr. den Hollander reported on their attendance at the Timothy Trust conference and Sr. Margaret Alkema reported on her attendance at the Association of Christian Librarians. Dr. VanVliet reported on his visit to churches in Germany and the Netherlands and Dr. Bredenhof reported on his visit to churches in South Africa. These reports were received with thankfulness.

PRESS RELEASE AND CLOSING

The next Academic Committee meeting is scheduled for January 5, 2027, and the next Board meeting is scheduled for January 7, 2027. The completion of the Press Release was delegated to the vice-chairman in consultation with the other members of the executive and the principal. Rev. Jeff Temple closed the meeting with prayer. 

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary,

Rev. Julius VanSpronsen

Vice-chairman

O Sing a New Song to the LORD!

Based on Psalm 98

Capo 3: A C G D Bm E A D A

1. ¹O sing a new song to the LORD! He won-drous things has done.
 2. ²To all the na - tions He has shown His pow'r and right - eous - ness.
 3. ⁴*Make to the LORD a joy - ful noise, O lands of all the earth!*
 4. ⁵*With harps make mu - sic to the LORD; Burst in - to song and sing.*
 5. ⁷Let seas and all that fills them roar; Let earth in shouts break forth.
 6. Re - joice! ⁹The LORD will come to judge The world with right - eous - ness

His right hand and His ho - ly arm For Him the vic - t'ry won.
³He in His love for Is - ra - el Has kept His prom - is - es.
Let psalms of ju - bi - la - tion ring And shout your prais - es forth.
⁶*Let trum - pets and the horn re - sound Be - fore the LORD, our King.*
⁸Let riv - ers clap their hands for joy, And moun - tains sing with mirth.
 And gov - ern it with eq - ui - ty; All wrongs He will re - dress.

Music: African-American spiritual; harm. Harry T. Burleigh, 1939

Text: William Helder, 2023 © 2023, William Helder

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George van Popta

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