

Clarion

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



CRTS Principal's Report

Dr. Jason VanVliet

Ruth: Redemption in a Broken Family

George van Popta

Welcomed as Christ Welcomed Us

Kwangyoung Park

What's Inside

Things are changing at *Clarion* (well, behind the scenes anyway)! All the great content that you are accustomed to will remain, but as of January 2027, we hope to be under new management. And we also hope that in the new year *Clarion* will begin landing in every church mailbox in the federation so that all may freely read and discuss its articles. Please see my editorial and the current publisher's update for more details and rationale. And please join us in praying for and supporting this exciting endeavour!

We have a packed issue for you with meditations on Ruth (Jesus's ancestor) and on spiritual warfare. Kwangyoung Park writes a stimulating article encouraging us to put energy and time into welcoming and integrating new people into our congregations. Our seminary recently had its annual convocation, and so we present the principal's report, the main address (by William den Hollander), and an update on the work of the Women's Savings Action.

Jake Torenvliet contributes a thoughtful piece helping us to examine if and how we are responding to answered prayer, especially as it relates to men ready for the ministry. We love our Christian school teachers and Derek Hoogerdijk's piece encourages teachers in their calling (and us to pray for them). A retired teacher and long-time principal of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College Dr. Christine van Halen-Faber is interviewed in *Witness at Work*—thank you, dear sister, for all your labour for our schools!

We are also pleased to include Part 2 of a new column for children and other history lovers, *Stories of Church History*, complete with beautiful artwork. Rev. Pieter & Mrs. Jenny Boon have collaborated on this project, and we hope to present several stories over the coming months—your feedback on the benefit of this column is most welcome (just email me privately or write a letter to the editor)!

Elsewhere you can find Jan de Gelder's column on church government which examines the regulations for and the running of our ecclesiastical meetings. We have a *Reader's Forum* piece on the imprecatory psalms and by coincidence, a review of a book on that same subject. There's also another book review, *Classis Clippings*, a report on a 75th church anniversary, and a *Ray of Sunshine* to fill out this issue. Enjoy!

Peter Holtvliwer

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Why *Clarion*?

What good is *Clarion*? Of what use is this magazine to you, me, or our churches? And is it worth expanding our readership to include all Canadian/American Reformed households? As we at *Clarion* prepare to change our publishing model and increase our reach (see next page for details), I'd like to persuade you that *Clarion* has benefits for you, your family, and your local church, even as it serves to strengthen our federation's unity.

A MAGAZINE FOR US

First, *Clarion* is uniquely produced by and focussed on our CanRC community. There is no other magazine, podcast, or media platform like it. The editors and many authors are ministers from across the federation who write articles which seek to educate readers in the Reformed faith while encouraging all to live out the faith more fully and spread the gospel more widely. Other writers from our churches showcase how being Reformed makes a difference in the workplace, bring helpful book and podcast reviews, share tender descriptions of how our special needs brothers and sisters are faring, or keep us informed about the persecution of Christians. Still others offer meditations, mission updates, and informative articles on a variety of topics. All the writing comes from people who know and love our churches and who aim to wisely spur us on to greater maturity in Christ.

EQUIPPING

Second, *Clarion* can be a valuable resource for households and office bearers. Parents looking to understand the anxiety of their child, or to speak with their teen about shame, or to learn biblical patterns for parenting could benefit from recent articles by Kevin Hoogstaad, Jake Torenvliet, and Rob Schouten. An elder helping a member work through the issue of paedocommunion or maybe the violence of the Old Testament could refer to the contributions of Jason Van Vliet and Rick Vanderhorst. When council discussions turn to matters of church government, Jan DeGelder's column offers much enlightenment. *Clarion* seeks to equip and encourage readers to authentically live out the Reformed Christian faith—what could it do for the life and unity of your congregation if your whole church read *Clarion*?

SHARING AND CONNECTING

Third, *Clarion* enables us to share ideas and strengthen connections with each other. When the topics of a conference held in the West are reported on, folks in the East may be intrigued and perhaps host their own similar conference. When a new community ministry

in the East is highlighted, others may be encouraged to try something similar elsewhere. When sharing the gospel is promoted and new ideas for connecting with neighbours are shared, others may be inspired to follow suit. The result can be follow-up emails, phone calls, and helpful collaboration.

All sorts of mission works are regularly reported on, providing opportunity to pray for and learn from these endeavours. Pertinent clips of press releases from our classes and synods keep readers across the federation updated on important decisions and happenings. Our seminary (CRTS) and teachers' college (CCRTC) exist to provide our church community with the vital resources of future ministers and teachers, and *Clarion* strives to keep members from Smithers to Grand Rapids to Ottawa well-informed with timely updates. A magazine like this being read in every home will only strengthen connections, encourage cooperation, and help us spread good ideas which can build up the faith of God's people throughout our federation and beyond.

SHARPENING

Finally, *Clarion* is an effective vehicle to “let iron sharpen iron” (Prov 27:17). Let's face it: we don't always all agree. But where can we have constructive *public* debates to clarify such matters and seek consensus? Where can we carefully exchange opposing viewpoints and hear each other well? Does anyone think Facebook is the forum for this? At *Clarion*, we welcome the respectful interchange of ideas that are within the pale of Scripture and the Reformed confessions. We regularly feature letters to the editor which challenge or raise questions about a published article—and we let the reader work out where the best reasoning lies. We've published articles side-by-side presenting differing perspectives on COVID-19, participation in the Lord's supper, and psalm singing. Such honest, brotherly debate is necessary for a healthy federation. It's part of how we listen, learn, and grow together in the Lord.

Right now, *Clarion* does all of the above for about one-third of the members of our churches. Would it not be a great benefit for us locally and as a federation if *every* household could read and discuss *Clarion*? Please consider supporting our new initiative to place this magazine in every CanRC home. 📖



Peter Holtvliwer

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An Update from the Publisher:

Dear reader,

Some months ago, we reported that we were in the process of striking a Steering Committee to guide the transition of *Clarion* ownership from Premier Printing Ltd. to a new, not-for-profit entity in order to better serve the churches (Vol. 75 No. 7, p. 268). Since then, the Committee has been formed and has been hard at work setting up the infrastructure of the new organization. It has built a modest budget, sought and retained legal help to establish the not-for-profit, begun the work to obtain charitable status, and recruited persons to become the first board members once the legal entity exists. Our prayer is for the new independent board to be in place before the end of 2026 and to take over publishing responsibilities as of January 1, 2027, the Lord willing.

But there is a second part to our transition: the plan to give *Clarion* to every household in the federation so that all may freely read it.

In the preceding editorial, Rev. Holtvliwer demonstrates the benefits that our magazine holds for individuals, local churches, and our whole federation. Under God's blessing, the more widely *Clarion* can be read, the greater these benefits would be. Our vision has always been to use *Clarion* to build up our Canadian and American Reformed Church community, as well as others who are interested in our work.

We believe we are at a point where changing our model will allow us to better achieve that vision. We plan to start delivering *Clarion* in bulk to every Canadian and American Reformed church, for distribution to every mailbox, so that all will have access to it. And we want to do that free of charge!

To make this goal possible, we're moving away from our current subscription-only model to instead rely almost entirely on donations. Once the new entity is up and running, all current subscribers and others will receive direct communication inviting them to become donors. How to donate will also be explained in a subsequent issue of *Clarion*. The Steering Committee has already asked the churches in the federation to help defray some of the costs, since the aim is to benefit all church members alike.

As things develop, Premier Printing will recede into the background, and the new board will come to the fore to update our readers with more information. Thank you for praying along with us these last months—please continue to pray for the Lord to bless our labours. May the Lord make *Clarion* a blessing to our churches and beyond as it seeks to educate, encourage, equip, and unite all members and readers alike in the Reformed faith.

For Premier Printing,
Will Gortemaker



PEACE & WAR

We are at peace.

We are at war.

Those statements can't both be true, and yet for the Christian they are. That contradiction is the point. Hold that thought for a moment before we sort it out.

Before you knew Christ, you likely would have said you were at peace. Most people do. You had your life and your plans. Nothing felt like a battle. But here's the thing you likely never saw: you weren't at peace because there was no war.

FAKE PEACE

You were at peace because you were on the side that had no reason to fight you. A general doesn't discipline soldiers who are following orders, and before believing in Christ—whether you knew it or not—you were following orders. Paul says we were “by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Eph 2:3). God was on one side of the field. You were on the other. You couldn't feel the war because you didn't know that God stood against you.

Then grace moved, and by grace, I mean God. You didn't cross the battle line to the other side. You couldn't—you were “dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked” (Eph 2:1), and dead men don't cross lines. God moved you. He transferred you. Paul describes it plainly: “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col 1:13). Notice who is doing the work in that sentence? Not you. *He* delivered. *He* transferred. Even the faith you exercised was a gift, “lest anyone should boast” (Eph 2:8–9).

SWITCHING SIDES

The war you had been fighting against God ended the hour he laid hold of you, not the hour you laid hold of him. “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through

our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). This is the peace you had never actually had, even if you hadn't noticed it was missing, because it is a peace you could never make by yourself.

The peace God gave you didn't remove you from the battlefield; it put you on the other side of it. Satan lost a soldier the day God claimed you, and he hasn't forgotten. Peter writes, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Satan is a defeated foe, but he's not an idle one. His aim now is simple: to make you regret what God has done. Convince you that your old position was safer. Whisper in your ear that the cost of belonging to Christ is too high.

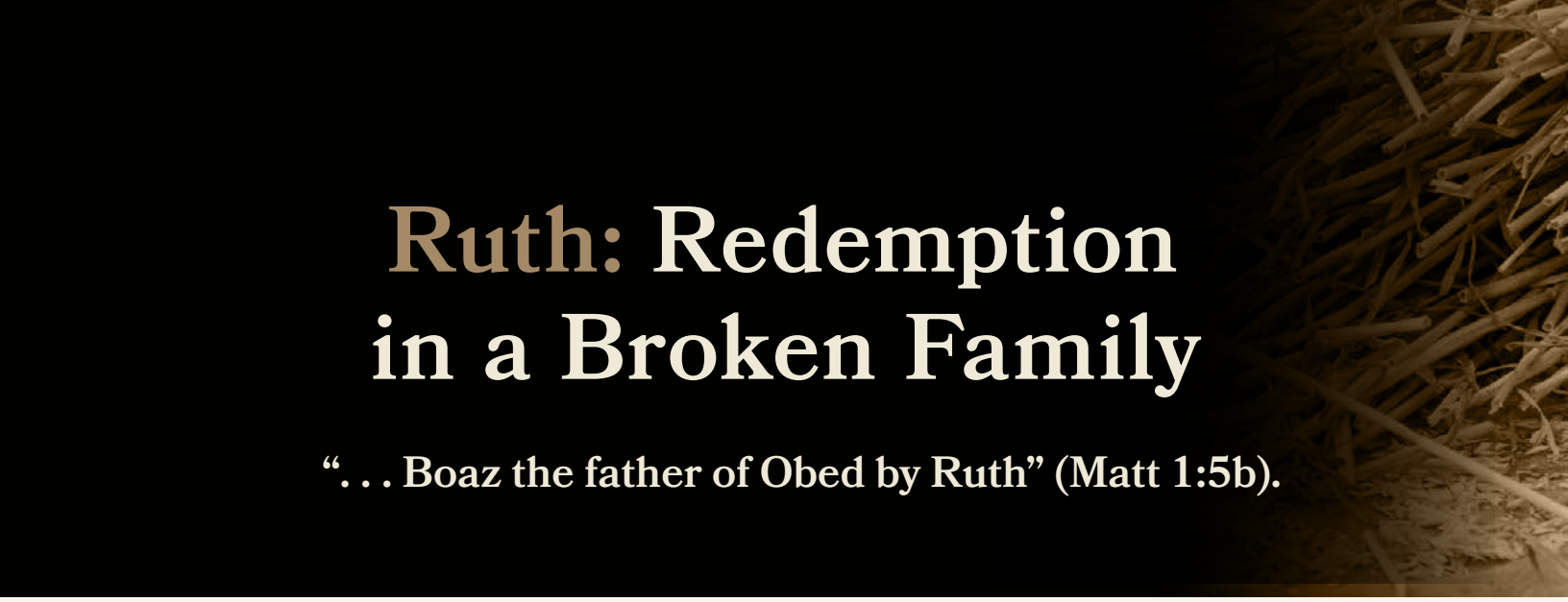
THE GOOD FIGHT

So here is where you live now. You've never been outside a war. Before Christ, you were in one and didn't know it because you were fighting on the side that left you comfortable. After Christ, you're in the same war and feel every inch of it, because now you're fighting against the one who used to leave you alone. But peace isn't the absence of conflict: it's the presence of God on your side in the midst of it.

That brings us back to where we started. We are at peace. We are at war. If your life feels harder since God saved you, that may not be a sign that something went wrong. It may be the first honest evidence that something went right. Your war with God is over, but the war with the devil has begun. The God who transferred you is the God who keeps you. Until then, stay awake. The peace is real. So is the fight. 

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Ruth: Redemption in a Broken Family

“... Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth” (Matt 1:5b).

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

The theme of *redemption* runs like a golden thread through the whole Bible. In the New Testament, we learn that Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, the one who bought us back from sin and death, who paid the redemption price with his own life. Redemption is the beating heart of the gospel. The Old Testament prepares us to understand this theme. It gives us the categories, the imagery, and the lived experiences that make the New Testament's proclamation shine with deeper meaning.

In Israel, redemption was woven into two great institutions: the preservation of the family *name* and the preservation of the family *inheritance*. To lose either one was a tragedy. A name forgotten in the gates of one's hometown was a name lost to history. A family that lost its lot lost its place in the promised land of God.

The book of Ruth is the story of a double redemption—the redemption of a family name and the redemption of a family inheritance. Ruth is the third of five women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. Through this story, God shows us the shape of the redemption he brings to all his people through Ruth's greatest Son and our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

A FAMILY IN DARKNESS

The story begins “in the days when the judges ruled,” a time of spiritual chaos and moral collapse (Ruth 1:1). Israel had received its inheritance and every family had its piece of land: a place to work, to raise children, and above all, to serve the LORD in gratitude for his deliverance from Egypt. But Israel forgot their God. They turned to idols and they did what was right in their own eyes.

In this darkness we meet a man named Elimelech, a man of the tribe of Judah, from Bethlehem, the “house of bread.” His name means “My God is King,” but when famine strikes the land, Elimelech does not turn to the LORD. He does not call the elders to

repentance. He does not seek the face of God. Instead, he does what is right in his own eyes.

Elimelech gathers his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, and leaves the land God had given them. He abandons his inheritance. He crosses the Jordan and settles in Moab, a land of foreign gods, a land whose chief deity demanded the sacrifice of firstborn children.

Elimelech leaves Bethlehem in search of bread but finds only death. He dies in Moab, leaving Naomi a widow in a foreign land. Her sons grow up and marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. For ten years they live there, but then tragedy strikes again. Mahlon and Chilion both die, childless, leaving behind three widows—Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth—with no men, no protection, no future, and no name to carry forward.

Naomi is left with nothing. No husband. No sons. No grandchildren. No inheritance. No hope. Her family line is on the brink of extinction. Her family land lies abandoned in Bethlehem. Her name is fading into the dust.

Then one day Naomi hears a whisper of mercy: “The LORD has visited his people and given them bread” (Ruth 1:6). Naomi rises to return home, and Ruth goes with her. Together they make the long journey back to Bethlehem as two widows, destitute and vulnerable, with nothing but each other. They return empty.

REDEMPTION BEGINS

When Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem, it is the beginning of the barley harvest, a season of growth, provision, and—for these women—a new beginning. Israel's law made provision for the poor: the gleanings, or leftovers, were to be left in the field for the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner. Ruth goes out to glean.

Ruth “happened” to end up in the field of a wealthy and respected man named Boaz (Ruth 2:3). Boaz notices her immediately. He sees her



humility, her hard work, and her devotion to Naomi, and he treats her with extraordinary kindness. He protects her and instructs his workers to leave extra grain for her. Ruth returns home with abundance and when Naomi hears the name Boaz, hope awakens. She knows Boaz is a relative, a kinsman of Elimelech, a man with the right to redeem.

Naomi sees the path ahead and she devises a plan—bold, risky, and rooted in faith. She tells Ruth to wash, to anoint herself, to put on her best clothes, and to go to the threshing floor. She knows Boaz will be sleeping at his threshing floor, guarding his grain during harvest season. When Boaz lies down to sleep, Ruth is to uncover his feet and lie down there—a symbolic request for protection, a quiet proposal, a plea for redemption.

At midnight, Boaz wakes with a start. A woman is lying at his feet. “Who are you?” he asks.

“I am your servant Ruth,” she replies. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, for you are a kinsman-redeemer.”

It is a request for marriage, for protection and redemption. Boaz receives her request with joy. He promises to act, and he does. He goes to the elders at the city gate and purchases Naomi’s land. He redeems it and takes Ruth as his wife. He restores the family name. Through it all, the LORD continues the unfolding work of redemption.

REDEMPTION BLOSSOMS

The Lord grants Ruth a son, and when he is born something remarkable happens: the women of Bethlehem gather not around Ruth, but around Naomi. “Praise be to the Lord . . . Naomi has a son! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age.” Naomi, who had returned empty, now cradles fullness in her arms. She gathers the child onto her lap and tends to his needs. Her bitterness melts into joy. This child means everything. Through him, Elimelech’s name will be preserved. Through him, the family land will remain in the family. Through him, Naomi will be cared for in her old age.

The neighbours give the child his name, “Obed,” which means servant, a fitting name for a child born to serve Naomi and her family, and above all, to serve the Lord.

But we see even more clearly than they did how Obed served God’s purposes. Obed fathered Jesse, who fathered David, the shepherd-king of Bethlehem who would lead Israel out of the dark age of the judges into a time of renewed faithfulness. The last word of the book of Ruth is David—a ray of sunlight breaking through the bleakness of a time when everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

David was a son of Ruth. But Ruth is also the mother of an even greater Son.

REDEMPTION COMPLETED

Boaz brought a real redemption, but it was yet incomplete. Obed and David continued that redemption, but it was still not perfect. Only Jesus, Ruth’s greatest Son, brings the final, complete, and perfect redemption.

First, he redeems our *names*. Through his perfect obedience and sacrificial death, Jesus writes our names in the book of life. They will not be cut off or fade. They will not be erased by sin or swallowed by judgment. The greatest kinsman-redeemer—the one who is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters—has rescued our names from extinction in the registry of hell.

He also redeems our *inheritance*. Like Elimelech, we walked away from our inheritance. Like the prodigal son, we squandered it. But Jesus bought it back. He rescued it from being lost forever, and he keeps it safe, “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet 1:4).

Let these truths be precious to you. Do not take lightly the fact that Christ has redeemed your name. Do not take lightly the inheritance he has secured for you. On the last day, you will hear your name called, read from the book of life, and you will enter into the joy of your inheritance—the joy won by Jesus, the great kinsman-redeemer, the great Son of a faithful woman named Ruth. 



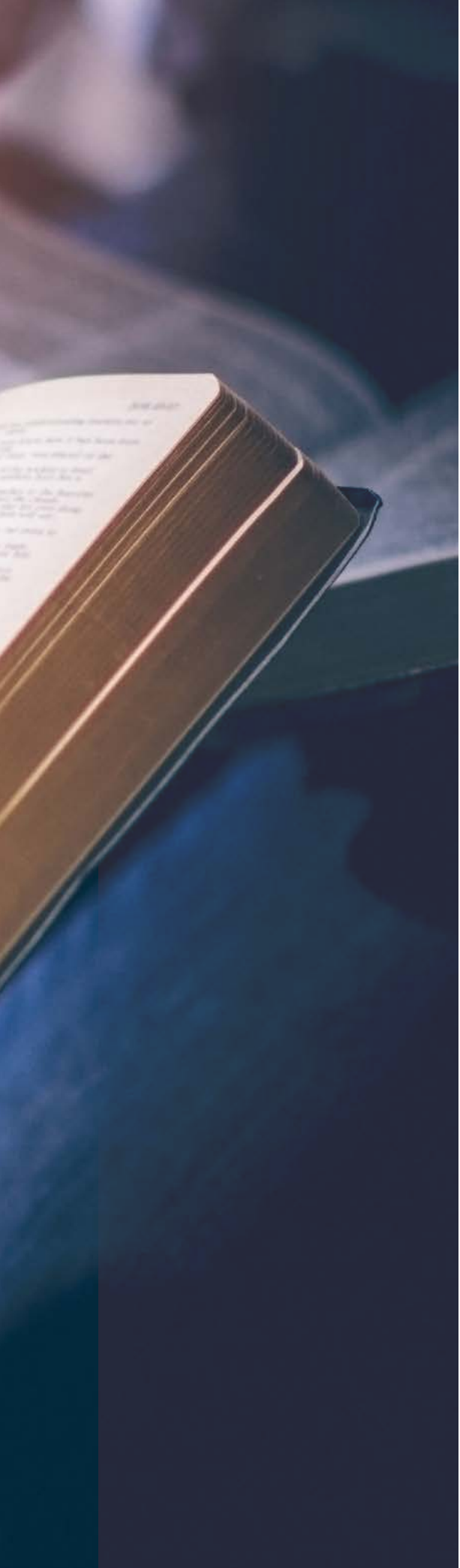
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Welcomed as Christ Welcomed Us

Mentorship Ministry at Bethel

KWANGYOUNG PARK

How does the Lord turn strangers into brothers and sisters within his church? Over the past several years, the Lord has brought many newcomers to Bethel Canadian Reformed Church in Toronto. Some came from other Christian traditions and encountered the Reformed faith for the first time. Others arrived with little or no Christian background. By God's grace, many of them have since been baptized or made public profession of faith.

Their arrival has given us much reason for thanksgiving. It has also led us to ask how a congregation should care for those whom the Lord brings into its midst. How can we help visitors become rooted in the worship, fellowship, doctrine, and discipline of Christ's church?

The answer begins, of course, with Christ himself. He gathers, defends, and preserves his church out of the whole human race by his Spirit and Word (LD 21), and his church is not confined to any one place, nation, or people (BC Art. 27). He works faith in our hearts through the preaching of the gospel and strengthens it through the sacraments (LD 25).

Yet Christ also calls the members of his body to use their gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit of one another and the building up of the church (LD 21; BC Art. 28). At Bethel, one practical response to this pastoral calling has been mentorship. Through ordinary Christian friendship, hospitality, prayer, and encouragement, mentors seek to help newcomers find their place in the congregation and grow in Christ. Mentorship is one way in which the communion of saints takes concrete form.

AN INTENTIONAL CONNECTION

Newcomers at Bethel normally receive approximately one year of biblical and confessional instruction in the covenant, redemptive history, the Apostles' Creed, the Belgic Confession, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer.

Alongside this instruction, we seek to connect each person or family with mature members of the congregation.

A mentor is a brother or sister who walks beside someone learning to live as a member of Christ's body. Mentors welcome newcomers into their homes, listen to their stories, pray with and for them, answer questions, and introduce them to the life of the church. They also discuss worship, church government, membership, fellowship, and service.

When a newcomer requests baptism or public profession of faith, the mentor may provide the consistory with helpful observations concerning the person's spiritual growth and apparent evidence of faith and repentance. These observations assist the elders in exercising careful pastoral discernment.

GOD GIVES THE GROWTH

Paul's description of his ministry and that of Apollos provides an essential starting point for understanding mentorship: Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth (1 Cor 3:5–9). Their labour was real and appointed by God, but the growth came from God alone. All Christian service therefore depends upon him. This foundational perspective protects the church from pride. Conversion and spiritual maturity are not products of our methods, personalities, or efforts. A mentor should not view a mentee's baptism or profession of faith as a personal achievement. God alone gives spiritual life.

The passage also protects us from passivity. God's sovereignty does not excuse indifference. Paul truly planted, and Apollos truly watered. Dependence upon divine grace should make us humble, but not inactive.

In one mentorship relationship at Bethel, a couple walked alongside a Chinese family with no previous Christian background. The family had never attended church and was encountering the gospel for the first time. In the Lord's mercy, they gradually came to repentance and faith and were later baptized as a family. Language differences made communication slow. Conversations required repetition, written messages, translation tools, and patient efforts to explain biblical teaching from different angles. Yet the Lord used even these limitations. Because communication could not be rushed, biblical truths were discussed carefully and revisited often. They read and discussed Scripture, prayed together, and gradually developed a genuine friendship.

The mentors knew that they had not created faith. The Lord had been at work long before they met the family, and the Spirit alone could open their hearts. Yet God was pleased to use Scripture-centred conversations, persistent prayer, and patient friendship.

SHARING CHRIST AND OURSELVES

Paul's ministry among the Thessalonians reveals the deeply personal character of Christian care. He writes, "We were ready to

share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves" (1 Thess 2:8). The passage shows that faithful ministry does not separate truth from sacrificial love. The gospel moved Paul to give them not only instruction but also his time, prayers, presence, and very self.

This corrects two opposite tendencies. Some emphasize relationships while neglecting doctrine. Others defend doctrine while giving too little attention to love and fellowship. Relationships must be governed by truth, but truth must also bear fruit in self-giving love.

Another mentor and his wife invited their mentee for supper every week. Around the table they discussed doctrine, sermons, church practices, and personal difficulties. The mentor did not claim to have all the answers. He listened, searched Scripture with the mentee, and sought help when necessary. The mentee was already a Christian but came from a different church tradition. At Bethel, he received instruction in the Reformed faith, came to embrace it, and eventually made public profession of faith.

Hospitality created space for this work. The mentee entered a Christian home, observed its rhythms, shared in prayer and conversation, and gradually became connected to the congregation. The mentors shared not only instruction but also their table, family life, evenings, and themselves.

In an increasingly post-Christian culture, many people are skeptical of doctrinal claims or institutional religion. Hospitality does not replace the preaching of the gospel, but it provides a setting in which newcomers can see the fruit of that gospel in the ordinary lives of Christians.

AS CHRIST WELCOMED US

Romans 14 and 15 address the church's responsibility to welcome believers despite differences in maturity, background, and conscience. The church in Rome included believers who differed over food, special days, and other matters of conscience. Paul did not deny these differences or treat doctrine as unimportant. He did, however, forbid believers from despising or condemning one another. Paul directs the church to "welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom 15:7). This gospel logic must shape the way our congregations receive newcomers. Many newcomers at Bethel came to faith later in life or encountered the Reformed confessions only as adults. Their backgrounds differ from those of members born and raised in Reformed homes, schools, and congregations. We do not receive believers because they already understand everything, nor should we require them to adopt every inherited cultural custom before treating them as brothers and sisters. We welcome those who belong to Christ because Christ himself has welcomed them by grace.

Hospitality does not replace the preaching of the gospel, but it provides a setting in which newcomers can see the fruit of that gospel in the ordinary lives of Christians.

Welcoming does not mean overlooking truth, repentance, or holiness. The elders must carefully discern requests for baptism and public profession of faith, while those making such requests must be faithfully instructed and called to turn from sin. Yet faithfulness to the truth must never become an excuse for coldness, and patience with weakness should not be mistaken for compromise.

Newcomers often carry unspoken questions: Am I welcome here? Could I belong among these people? Will I still be welcomed when I make mistakes? They may also wonder how should a Christian live. Genuine welcome takes visible form when a member remembers a visitor's name, invites someone for lunch, explains an unfamiliar practice, sends a message during the week, or takes time to listen. Such ordinary acts show that the truth proclaimed from the pulpit is bearing fruit in the life of the congregation.

FOLLOWING CHRIST TOGETHER

Christian discipleship includes imitation. Paul writes, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). Scripture likewise instructs mature Christians to model godliness for others (Phil 3:17; Titus 2:1–8; Heb 13:7). This imitation must remain Christ-centred. Mentors do not call others to become copies of themselves. No Christian example is perfect. Even the holiest believers have only a small beginning of the obedience God requires in this life (LD 44). They, too, must continually live by repentance and faith, looking to Christ rather than to their own maturity or good works.

Much of the Christian life is learned not only through formal instruction but through careful observation. New believers watch how mature Christians pray in suffering, observe the Lord's Day, respond to conflict, submit to pastoral oversight, serve the congregation, and bear the burdens of others. In this way, doctrines that may first seem abstract take visible and practical form.

One mentee and his wife had learned much about Reformed theology through books before coming to Bethel. What they had not experienced to the same extent was a close relationship with a Reformed family whose daily life gave visible expression to those doctrines. Through their mentors, they saw family devotions, hospitality, care for elderly members, service in the congregation, and sacrifices made for the spiritual nurture of covenant children. They also saw weakness and hardship. Their mentors did not present themselves or the church as perfect. They showed what it looks like to follow Christ through repentance, humility, patience, and trust. The mentees came to see that the covenant is not merely a doctrine to define; it shapes the life of God's people. It becomes visible when

parents instruct their children, families gather around Scripture and prayer, members open their homes, and believers remain committed to one another when church life is difficult.

Those raised in Reformed covenant communities may take this heritage for granted. Family devotions, catechism instruction, Christian schooling, Lord's Day observance, and established patterns of service may seem ordinary. But these riches were not entrusted to us so that we might congratulate ourselves. We received them by grace, and we are called to share them by grace.

ORDINARY FAITHFULNESS

Mentorship is only one way of practising the communion of saints, and not every congregation needs the same structure. Whatever form it takes, such care should not create dependence upon the mentor but direct newcomers toward Christ, his Word, public worship, and the pastoral care of the office-bearers.

Nor should these relationships necessarily end at baptism or public profession of faith. These are joyful milestones, but they do not mark the completion of Christian discipleship. Continued friendship and encouragement may help new believers become firmly established in the life of the church and, in time, begin using their own gifts in the service of others.

Bethel's mentorship ministry is still developing. Some relationships grow naturally, while others require patience amid cultural differences, disappointments, and feelings of inadequacy. Yet one lesson has become clear: by his Spirit and Word, the Lord gathers his people through the faithful preaching of the gospel and strengthens them in faith through the sacraments. He also uses the love produced by that gospel in the lives of his people.

What we have witnessed at Bethel is not the result of extraordinary human ability. Rather, it reflects the ordinary faithfulness of pastors who preach and teach, elders who shepherd and discern, and members who open their homes, share meals, ask and answer questions, pray faithfully, and walk patiently beside newcomers. Through such ordinary faithfulness, strangers are welcomed, newcomers become rooted in the life of the church, and those who once stood at the edge of the congregation become beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. 



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CRTS Principal's Report

JASON VAN VLIET



If you would like to watch the full CRTS 2026 convocation ceremony, scan the QR code to go directly to the recording.

Once more the Lord has allowed us to begin a new academic year at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. In this update I would like to focus on three things: a small window into a big world; resources on and under the radar; and artificial intelligence and entirely real pulpits.

A SMALL WINDOW

After the large graduating class at last year's convocation, the number of students in the CRTS building dipped down a bit. Under the Lord's blessing, though, that number is increasing again. We look forward to welcoming a total of twenty-eight students into our classrooms, including eleven new freshmen students and one new visiting student.

But what do these numbers have to do with a window? Well, take almost thirty students, add five professors, three admin staff, and the occasional guest or two, and suddenly at 10:30 each day, when we pause for a coffee break, our student lounge becomes a blessedly lively place. Factor in that these people come from seven different countries. Can you hear it? The hubbub of breaktime chatter includes, of course, different opinions, but also different accents. In this way our daily coffee time becomes that small window. The students who laugh and debate in the lounge are in the building to prepare for gospel ministry in various places around the globe. In them, we receive a little glimpse, yes, a small window into the grand scope of Christ's catholic, worldwide work with his church. Feel free to stop in for coffee some time. I think you'll see—and hear—what I mean.

RESOURCES ON AND UNDER THE RADAR

CRTS has a statement of purpose that reads: "The *primary* purpose of CRTS is to train students to serve as faithful, effective ministers of the Gospel. A *secondary* purpose is to produce scholarly and popular resources which will serve God's people throughout the world."



With thankfulness, I can report the Lord has blessed us with capable and eager full-time faculty and adjunct lecturers who sink many hours into ensuring that our seminary educates and prepares future ministers of the holy gospel. Our primary purpose is our primary focus each week again.

But we also sink time and energy into our secondary purpose: publishing solid, biblical, Reformed resources, both for a scholarly and a popular audience. These resources include books, articles in church magazines or academic journals, and even resources available on the web. Over the last three years, the Lord has enabled CRTS faculty to produce more than 85 resources. Some of these resources may well be on your radar. You’ve read professors’ articles in *Clarion*. Or maybe you’ve purchased books like Dr. Bredenhof’s *Ministry of Small Things* or Dr. den Hollander’s volumes on *I Peter*. (If not, ask your local Christian bookstore for a copy!) Or maybe you’ve heard professors being interviewed on podcasts. These are not just personal little side projects that professors happen to have. They all add up to fulfill our secondary purpose: serving God’s people by producing good resources.

Other resources, though, may well be *under* your radar. Our professors also publish articles in academic journals, contribute chapters to scholarly books, or even pour hours into writing their own academic books. You may not see these resources for sale at your local Christian bookstore, but the Lord is using them to bless other professors, scholars, and seminary students around the world. Some of them are also being translated into other languages.

Producing resources always involves a lot of different people. The preface of a book often provides a list of those who have helped in the project. Here at CRTS we are very blessed by administrative staff who continue so faithfully in their tasks: Catharine Mechelse, Margaret Alkema, and Leanne Kuizenga. Each of these sisters in the Lord has years of experience at our seminary and make such a big difference for its day-to-day operation. This past year we could celebrate Catharine’s forty years of service to the seminary!

May the Lord continue to bless CRTS with the time and energy to keep producing these resources, whether they end up on or under the radar. We hope that they are blessing to you as well.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND REAL PULPITS

Have you thrown a question into ChatGPT, or “Chat,” lately? Or have you paused at a picture in your social media feed and thought to yourself, “That *must* be fake. That’s AI!” More seriously, perhaps AI chat bots are rapidly transforming your business world. Yes, artificial intelligence is everywhere.

But does AI have any place in the pastor’s study as he prepares to take another sermon up into a very real pulpit and address a very real congregation? That is a critical question. It touches upon the spiritual heartbeat of the church, the weekly proclamation of the Word. At CRTS, we have been considering this question carefully and prayerfully. Here is a short excerpt of what we have said to our students about AI:



CRTS Professors and Grads

Sermon writing and delivery are both spiritual exercises. Preaching fundamentally rests on the work of the Spirit, who works through the Word and in answer to prayer (1 Cor 2:4–5; 1 Thess 1:5). Faithful preaching of God’s Word comes from preachers who have feasted on the Word themselves and been transformed by it. The intense work of sermon writing, which can be bypassed by the use of AI, is absolutely necessary for the preacher. (CRTS AI Policy)

So, this is where we start: AI does not, cannot, and must not replace or bypass the work of the Holy Spirit. Of course, that conviction does not answer every question about AI and the pulpit. But we want to assure you that as a seminary we do not have our heads in the sand. Working with scriptural principles and consulting with fellow Christians who know more about AI than we do, we are talking to our students about this. Case in point, the first sermon session of this new academic year has been dedicated to making students aware of how AI can easily compromise the integrity of preaching, God’s primary means of grace.

So, admittedly this is a little appetizer: a small window, a resource radar screen, and some brief thoughts about the pulpit and AI. Hopefully it will whet your appetite for more.

On behalf of everyone at CRTS, thank you so much for your faithful support. It is amazing! May the church be served and our Lord be glorified through everything that he enables us to do. 🙏



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Check out our website anytime for more information and the latest updates from the seminary.

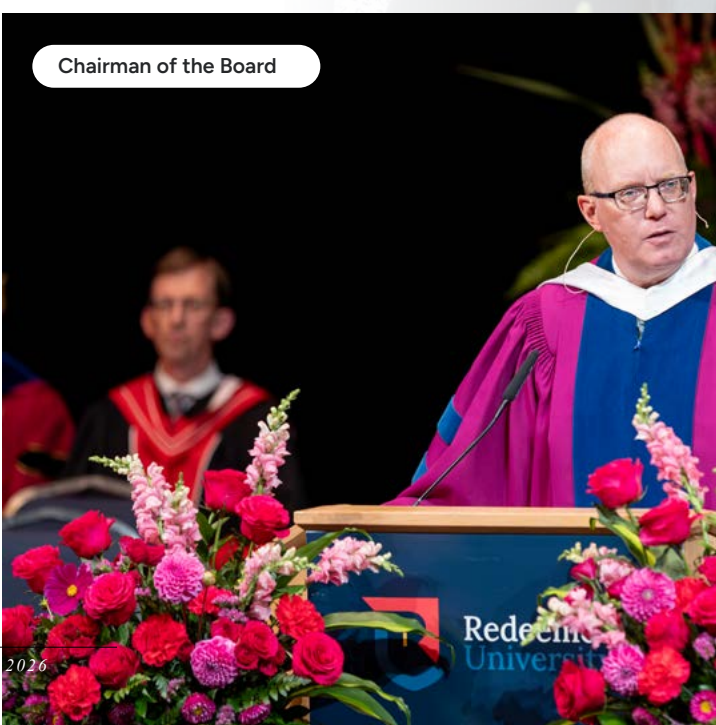
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Student Address by Noah Holtvluwer



Keynote Address by W den Hollander



Chairman of the Board



WOMENSSAVINGSACTION

FOR THE CANADIAN REFORMED
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The Women's Saving Action worked faithfully again this year to collect contributions from churches across the country for the benefit of the seminary library. This year, they were able to collect \$61,520 and the seminary was presented with the amount of \$55,000—a record! To God be the glory.

This money is used primarily for digital subscriptions—a reflection of our modern methods of sharing information. The Digital Theological Library and the interlibrary loan system are well used by students and professors alike.

Cards of appreciation for the seminary were also sent by many of the churches which support it through the Women's Savings Action. It was so heartwarming to open all these cards and to see the time and energy that went into the designs as well as all the signatures from churches across Canada and the United States.

The Women's Saving Action is honoured to be a part of the spreading of the gospel by supporting access to resources for our seminary professors and students. Thank you to all of you for your continued financial and prayerful support.



WSA card presentation

Good News for the Lukewarm Church

REVELATION 3:14–22

CRTS Convocation Address, September 11, 2026



Rev denHollander's tour group in Laodicea, at a Temple of Apollo from the 1st-century AD.

In Philippi, reading Acts 16 about the earthquake and conversion of the Philippian jailer



Reading as a group from Paul's letter to the Colossians, while in Colossae



In Philippi, reading together from Acts 16 about Lydia's conversion and baptism



Earlier this year I had the great joy of leading a group of around forty brothers and sisters in Christ through Turkey and Greece. We were following in the footsteps of the apostles. Among the many ancient sites we visited were the locations of the seven churches addressed by the Lord Jesus at the beginning of the book of Revelation. Some of the remains are quite impressive—testimony to the hard work of archaeologists in reconstructing what remains of the ruins—while others have little that bears witness to the first century.

My best memories of trips like these are the moments where we paused on site to read the Scriptures and meditate on them together. There's nothing quite like reading the Bible in the very place where the events described took place or where the first audience lived. And so also these letters to the churches in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey, came to life in a special way. That was especially true of our visit to Laodicea, which is a spectacular site that has been extensively reconstructed over the past twenty years or so. I want to share some of that with you.

LETTER TO LAODICEA

The letter to the Laodiceans is the last of the seven letters (or sermons, as they've been called). By the time we get to it, the pattern of these letters has become clear. Christ opens by declaring his identity, with a unique title that connects to the opening of the book of Revelation and draws on the rich background of the Old Testament. These titles underline his divine authority, his glorious victory through his death and resurrection, his almighty power, and his abiding faithfulness. Here he writes to the Laodiceans as "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation" (Rev 3:14).

After the opening Christ-title, the letters have each begun with a commendation. So, for example, to the church in Pergamum, Christ writes, "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast to my name" (2:13). This commendation has then been followed (in most cases) by a complaint, a correction, and the consequences for those who "have an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

But the letter to the Laodiceans doesn't follow the usual pattern. After declaring his identity, Christ proclaims "I know" as he does to the other churches—but he gives no commendation! As he walks among the lampstands, as he assesses their spiritual health, the

Hierapolis - Theatre from the 2nd century AD



Rev. W. denHollander at Hierapolis



Hierapolis - Pamukkale



glorious Son of Man and Son of God finds nothing to commend in the Laodicean church. What a shock that must have been to the believers in Laodicea who received these words from their Lord. There was nothing good to be said about them. Instead, Jesus said this: “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth” (3:15).

What was so wrong with the Laodicean church? Why does Jesus use this metaphorical language of hot and cold and lukewarm? And what is he communicating?

A VIVID METAPHOR

Well, a visit to the Lycus River Valley in Turkey brings the metaphor to life. Laodicea was not the only prominent community there. Within a few miles in either direction were the communities of Hierapolis and Colossae.

You may recall that when Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians, he directed them to share it with the Christians in Laodicea (Col 4:16), and he passed on greetings from Epaphras, who he says worked hard for the churches in all three of those cities, Laodicea, Colossae, and Hierapolis (Col 4:12–13). Virtually nothing is to be seen at the site of Colossae today except a road sign marking its location. But we do know where it was, nestled up against eight-thousand-foot-high Mount Cadmus, clearly visible from Laodicea. Being at the foot of the mountains meant that the community there had ready access to fresh, cold, mountain spring water.

Hierapolis, in contrast, is a spectacular site, even better preserved than Laodicea, with an amazing theatre overlooking the valley. But it's not just a destination for people with an interest in history. It's also an ecological site. The modern Turkish city is called Pamukkale (“Cotton Castle”) because there are hot water springs rich in calcium carbonate that cascade down the cliffs into the valley. The flow of calcium carbonate has created brilliantly white cliffs with startlingly blue pools that attract even more visitors than the archaeological remains. You can see the white cliffs, the cotton castle, from Laodicea miles away.

Hierapolis, then, was known for its hot springs, with their health benefits, while Colossae had an abundant source of fresh, cold water flowing down from the mountain above. But what about Laodicea? Their need for water was great, just like any ancient (or modern) city. But they had to bring in water by aqueduct, from a distance. By the time the hot water from Hierapolis arrived at Laodicea, it had cooled significantly. What's more, the minerals that made it so attractive for their healing properties became a problem when the

pipes calcified. And by the time the water came from the mountain streams near Colossae, it had become lukewarm, lacking the cold freshness it had at its source. Hot was good. Cold was good. But lukewarm? The ancients had a word for that kind of water: useless, not fit for consumption, more likely to be spewed out than serve any purpose.

A LUKEWARM CHURCH

That's how Jesus found the works of the Laodicean Christians: lukewarm. Not lukewarm in the sense of lacking passion or zeal, but useless, without value. After he has assessed their spiritual health in this way, his warning too is graphic and vivid and startling: “I will spit you out of my mouth” (3:16). Better put, “I will vomit you out of my mouth.”

Why such a visceral threat? The Laodiceans *were* doing works. That much is acknowledged: “I know your works.” It's probably true that the Laodicean Christians were even busy with *good* works. That is, they were likely doing things we would commend as good: looking after the poor, feeding the hungry, caring for the sick. The early Christians were known for that in the ancient world. I know your works, Jesus says, but they're ultimately useless!

Why?? What made the works of these Christians so repulsive? The Lord Jesus explains: “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing” (3:17). The church at Laodicea was proud. The Christians there prided themselves on their self-sufficiency. They had arrived. They wanted for nothing. They had no needs.

It wasn't just the church's problem, apparently. The Roman historian Tacitus tells us that there was a great earthquake in AD 60 that destroyed much of the city (*Annals* 14.27). That happened more commonly in various areas of the Roman empire, and generally the emperor would donate funds to assist with the rebuild. That had happened in the Lycus Valley already in AD 17. At that time the emperor Tiberius helped the Laodiceans rebuild their city (Tacitus *Annals* 2.47; Suetonius *Tiberius* 8). But this time, not too long before this letter was written, the Laodiceans said to Nero, “No, thank you! We can take care of ourselves, thank you very much.” They rejected the emperor's offer of assistance. They needed nothing.

It seems that this cultural attitude permeated the church. These believers could pull themselves up by their bootstraps. They could do it all by themselves. “I am rich. I have prospered, and I need nothing.” I can take care of myself, thank you very much! Such was the church in Laodicea. One commentator called it: “The Church of Vomit and Vanity.”¹ That about sums it up.

¹ Jeffrey Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation: A Commentary and Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021).

CLOSED HEARTS

Pride. Vanity. It lies ever close at hand for the sinner, even the redeemed sinner. Alongside unbelief and selfishness, it's one of the root sins that gives birth to all manner of other sins. Pride characterized many of the people Jesus encountered in his earthly ministry, like the Pharisees, covenant members by grace though they were. And pride continues to characterize believers and churches all too often.

When the church stops delighting in the good news, when the Christian stops being amazed by the grace of God, when the preacher stops drinking eagerly from the fountain of living water and sees himself as the dispenser of what is good for others, it's entirely possible, then, for a preacher of the gospel to preach useless sermons. Not useless in the sense that God will not work through them, of course. God can draw straight lines with a crooked stick, after all. But useless as far as the preacher's soul is concerned. When the preacher is proud, self-sufficient, relying on natural gifts, personal discipline, strength, and stamina, his efforts before God are useless!

Pride closes our hearts to the truth of who we really are *and* what God truly offers in Christ. Thankfully Jesus peels back the veil. He removes the mask: "you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (3:17). We can only imagine what the proud Laodiceans thought of that. You can almost hear their shocked silence! No commendation. No kind words. Instead, the threat of rejection, of being vomited up, and the application of one of the harshest characterizations in the Scriptures.

LOVING REBUKE

And yet, it's good news for the Laodiceans. Good news! This letter is God's grace extended to proud, self-sufficient wretches. It's good news to be reminded of your wretchedness apart from Jesus Christ. It's good news to be reminded of your natural poverty, just as the doctor's diagnosis is the first step on the road to healing. As the author of Hebrews puts it, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12).

The Word of God brings the healing grace of the surgeon's scalpel. Christ applies the double-edged sword to the Laodiceans not because he wants to cut them down to size or humiliate them, but because he *loves* them and so desires their spiritual healing from the poison of pride. That's the glorious reality that is revealed by the words: "Those whom I *love*, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent" (Rev 3:19)

What an unexpected and reassuring truth! Christ still loves this church at Laodicea. *That* should shock us, not his harsh

characterization of them! The Lord Jesus loves *these* Christians in Laodicea. He loves these proud, self-sufficient, useless Christians. That's why he comes with his rebuke. That's why he calls them to repentance. He is saying, as it were, "I know these are harsh words. But I'm saying them because I love you. This hurts me more than it hurts you."

So too the preacher of the gospel must love those to whom he preaches the good news. You have to *love* them, even when they are proud and their works are useless. You have to love them enough to prick their bubble, to call them to repentance, to rebuke, correct, admonish, and exhort. You have to love them enough to wield the double-edged sword of the Spirit.

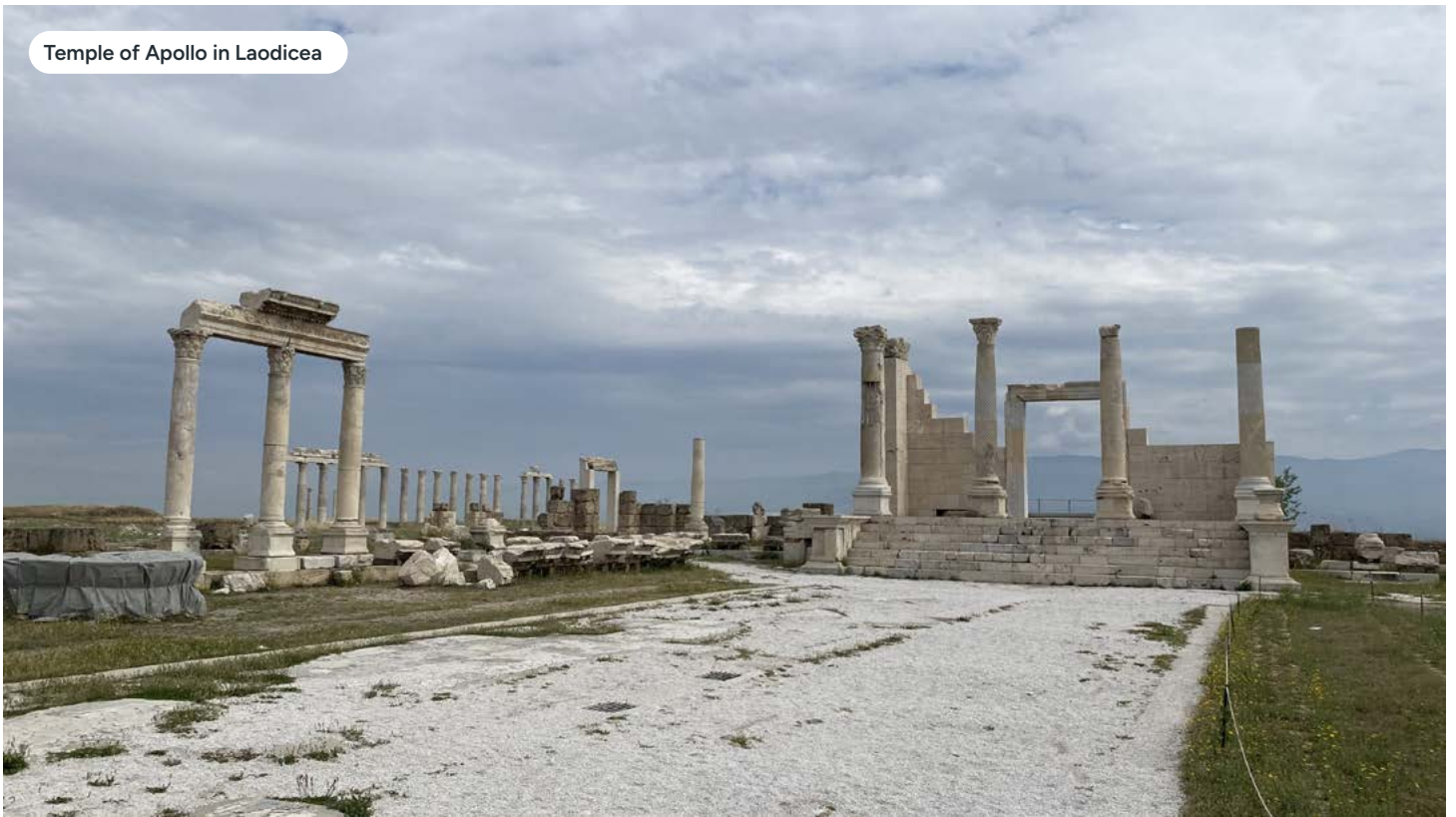
AN INCREDIBLE INVITATION

But the letter gets even better. The good news gets even better. Along with this harsh reproof, this loving discipline, comes the most incredible, almost unbelievable, shocking invitation: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (3:20). More grace is extended. More love is offered. Deeper fellowship awaits. Even to those whose works are useless, whose lukewarmness is abhorrent, whose pride is ugly, Christ issues his invitation to such as these: *open the door*.

It doesn't matter if you're the worst Christian or your church is the worst church. It doesn't matter what you've done or where you've been. Jesus Christ extends his grace to you. The good news comes to us again and again in the same way: "be zealous and repent" (3:19). Recognize who you truly are apart from Christ—wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, naked. And believe the good news, the sure promise of God, that this too is forgiven. Your pride, your self-sufficiency, your lukewarmness—forgiven, because Christ loves you. This is why we sing, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."

What an amazing picture Christ paints of his invitation! He is standing there outside the homes of these Laodicean Christians, or perhaps outside their place of worship, waiting patiently for them to open the door so that they might enjoy greater fellowship with him. He waits so that they might know more intimately the depth of his love, might experience more fully the tenderness of his heart. It's an astonishing image. What condescension from our glorious Saviour! He who is "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation" (3:14) stoops so low as to stand at the door and knock, waiting for entrance and invitation into deeper fellowship.

But not just with these Laodicean Christians; also, with you and me. Do you think that you have experienced the heights of your fellowship with Christ? Do you think that you have experienced the



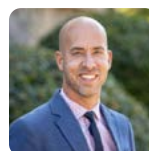
**There is more.
There is more intimacy.
There is more fellowship.
There is more joy.
There is more love.
There is more delight.**

depths of his love for you? There is more. There is more intimacy. There is more fellowship. There is more joy. There is more love. There is more delight.

Even now: open the door. Do not let pride or self-sufficiency keep you from knowing and experiencing the love of Christ. Do not neglect, as you preach the gospel to others, to enter the sweet fellowship offered to you in Christ, again and again and again, until this day: “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (3:21).

What a glorious promise! The one who is the Amen, the faithful and true witness, that is, the one whose word is firm and true, who is absolutely dependable, unchanging, and trustworthy, assures you that you will reign with him, eternally, sharing in his rule over all creation. Then your fellowship with Christ will be full and complete. Then you will know and experience ever more the greatness of his love towards you. He will dine with you and with all who have found in him “our heart’s desire, redemption’s only spring”!

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (3:22). 🗨️



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Be Careful What You Ask For

(And Steward
What You Get!)

JAKE TORENVLIET

In Christopher Nolan's 2008 *The Dark Knight*, the Joker, the film's infamous villain, says of himself, "I'm like a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do if I caught one." It's a disturbing philosophy, leading to a kind of chaotic recklessness in which the viewer never quite knows what will happen next.

Few of us have probably ever met such a person, and for good reason. The Joker is a caricature—a psychotic composite of insanity, engineered to entertain and disturb, a foil to Batman's sense of justice and order.

Still, while we may not build our lives on a philosophy of chaos, it can sometimes look like that. Our lives are often preoccupied with the pursuit of things, some good and some bad, but we pursue and desire these things with hardly a thought as to what we might do if we ever attained them.

At one extreme, this is simply idolatry. Sin makes promises to us, and we relentlessly spend, exert, and strain ourselves in pursuit of those promises, only to find that when we finally acquire the thing, it seems to slip through our fingers. Youth, beauty, success, family—all these are fool's gold when we ask them to provide the ultimate happiness and satisfaction that they were never designed to give.

But there's another way, less obvious and seemingly more pious, in which we can pursue something and then not know what to do with it when we receive it. I'm speaking about prayer.

ASKING IS EASY

As Christians, we value prayer and its necessity in the life of faith. We confess in the Heidelberg Catechism that prayer is necessary because "God will give his grace and the Holy Spirit only to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask him for these gifts." (Q&A 116).

Even for those of us whose faith is weak and fickle, we hardly need to be taught how to ask God for "gifts." The issue, as the Catechism continues, is whether the gifts we desire align with God's perfect purposes. And there's a final clause in Answer 116 that is easily overlooked: "... and thank him for them."

We're so adept at asking God for things. We're less inclined to recognize when he has answered our prayers. And then, even less inclined to thank him for his gifts. I say this from personal experience.

RECOGNIZING ANSWERS

Several years ago, a number of men in my local church formed an early-morning prayer group. Each Wednesday at 5:30 a.m. we assembled for prayer. First we'd read a Psalm, talk it through, then break into prayer groups. As we grew more comfortable with one another, real, raw, and beautiful prayer requests were shared. It was encouraging!

After a few months, however, we noticed something. We continued to bring our shopping lists of prayer requests, but we had forgotten to thank the Giver who had poured out his gifts. He had answered desperate prayers for deliverance from temptation and for provision in times of financial or health-related need, yet was receiving remarkably little thanksgiving from those of us who had asked him for these things.

So, we began to do that. We started including, in our breakout groups, an opportunity to follow up on previous prayer requests and to count our blessings one by one. We had learned to ask. We now needed to learn to recognize God's answers, give thanks, and move forward stewarding his gifts for his glory.

I suppose you could say we were in good company. In Acts 12, Luke records an amusing example of this. The apostle Peter had been imprisoned. The church was earnestly praying for Peter's release. God answers that prayer with an angelic prison break. What does Peter do? He goes to Mary's home, where the church is gathered, and rings the doorbell. Rhoda, a servant girl, answers the door, hears his voice, and runs to tell the others that Peter is at the door. Their response? Verse 15: "They said to her, 'You are out of your mind.'"

Those praying for his release could hardly believe that their prayer had actually been answered. We're surprised at the positive answer because in our heart of hearts we didn't think God would do it.

PRAYING FOR LABOURERS

All of this lands us on another doorstep with a pressing question—not primarily a question about individual Christians, but about us as a federation of churches. Before you tell me I'm out of my mind, sit with me a little longer as I dare to be like Rhoda. What if God has already answered some of the prayers we have been praying? What if, like the believers gathered in Mary's house, we have



prayed earnestly for something but been slow to recognize the answer?

Consider this: there is always a need for ministers of the Word. Even Jesus, in Matthew 9:38, directed his followers to an important prayer request when he said, “Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.” So we’ve done that as churches. As the Boomer generation of preachers neared retirement, and the prospect of widespread vacancies loomed, churches regularly prayed that the Lord of the harvest would send labourers to, at the very least, fill the gaps in the field. Throughout those years, it wasn’t uncommon to receive requests from the seminary in Hamilton: “Send us your young men!” There was a growing need, and a growing number of vacancies throughout the federation.

Then God did something. He graciously answered our prayers. No angels opened prison doors this time, but the Spirit moved men’s hearts. They arrived at CRTS, were equipped for ministry, and walked out with MDivs in hand, ready to receive calls from vacant congregations. And the Lord used them. Churches were filled, vacancies largely disappeared, and the need that had prompted our prayers began to diminish. Yet the men continued to come!

By my count, there are currently fewer than a dozen vacancies across our federation (this includes mission postings). If you’re a member in one of these vacant churches that may not seem like a small number. Still, when we consider how many men have graduated from CRTS in recent years, and how many are presently in the pipeline, we can only acknowledge that the Lord has generously provided for his church.

At present, four men are eligible for call without one having materialized, while more than thirty others are at various stages of preparation for ministry. The numbers are complicated somewhat by the fact that many of these men are international students, but the basic reality remains: the number of labourers being prepared is beginning to outpace the number of obvious places for them to serve.

HOW TO RESPOND?

God’s provision—like the widow’s oil in 2 Kings 4—has outpaced our requests. We prayed for men to enter seminary because we needed pastors to fill vacant churches. God

answered that prayer, and then some. Now some of those men are graduating without anywhere to go.

So what will we do? Will we tell Rhoda she’s out of her mind? Or will we go to the gate and see for ourselves? And if Peter really is standing there, what will we do with him? Kick him to the curb, or find a place for him to serve?

Are we, in some strange way, like the dog chasing the car? We prayed earnestly for labourers. God has provided them. Now that we’ve “caught” the thing we were chasing, do we know what to do with it?

I don’t presume to know exactly what stewarding these answered prayers should look like in every context. That is something each local church will need to consider prayerfully. Still, it seems to me that there are at least a few possibilities worth considering. Here are three:

CO-PASTORATES

There is no “Canadian Reformed formula” for church size, and I am not suggesting that the single pastorate is a problem. Still, compared with other Reformed denominations, the average Canadian Reformed congregation is significantly larger, while the typical arrangement remains one minister per congregation. Perhaps some of our larger congregations could prayerfully consider whether a second, or even third, pastor might increase their capacity for ministry.

The benefit of co-pastoring would not simply be dividing up the existing pastoral workload. A second pastor could provide more opportunity for pastoral care of the sick, dying, lonely, and struggling, while also expanding the church’s capacity for discipleship, instructional classes, visitation, and evangelism. It could create space for more intentional ministry among young people, families, or new members, as well as greater engagement with the local community, an area of pastoral ministry that can easily be neglected when a single pastor is primarily occupied with the needs of the congregation already gathered. The point is not that one pastor is inadequate. It is that two pastors can do more ministry than one.

There is another benefit, too. Newly ordained pastors would generally benefit from beginning their ministry in a co-pastorate. The early years of ministry can be demanding, and having a more experienced colleague would provide a natural context for mentorship, feedback, friendship, and accountability. A young pastor would have someone nearby

May we have the faith to recognize his provision, the wisdom to steward it well, and the courage to send these labourers wherever Christ's harvest is waiting.

with whom he could talk through difficult pastoral situations, learn from experience, and receive encouragement and correction. Perhaps if more young pastors had the opportunity to begin ministry this way, we might see fewer men approaching the early years of ministry already running at the edge of their capacity. A co-pastorate would not eliminate the pressures of ministry, but it could give a young pastor the space and support to grow into his calling without having to learn everything alone.

CHURCH PLANTING

A second possibility is church planting. Up to this point in our federational history, we have not really planted churches in the way many other Reformed denominations have done. We have tended to grow more like perennial clumps: when an established congregation becomes too large, it divides and another congregation emerges. There is certainly a place for that. Healthy church division can be a blessing to the churches involved. Yet it is worth asking whether, with additional labourers now being prepared for ministry, we should become more intentional about planting churches where there is presently no faithful church presence at all.

Canada is a vast mission field. Even within and around the cities where our churches are already established, there are neighbourhoods and communities with little or no access to a faithful Reformed witness. The need is particularly acute in our large urban centres, where thousands of people live within a few kilometres of our existing congregations without ever encountering the gospel through a faithful local church. Should we not prayerfully identify some of these places and begin asking what it would look like to plant a church there?

This doesn't necessarily mean sending a newly graduated pastor out alone to start a church from scratch. In fact, there may be considerable wisdom in having a new pastor spend his first years serving alongside a more experienced colleague in an established congregation, learning the work of pastoral ministry before being sent out to plant. In time, that younger pastor might become the planter, or an experienced pastor might lead the work. The particular model matters less than the intentionality behind it. We should be looking beyond the fields we already occupy and asking where the Lord might be calling us to send labourers.

Jesus told his disciples to pray for labourers because the harvest was plentiful. Perhaps part of recognizing God's answer to that prayer is becoming more willing to send those labourers into fields where we have not yet planted. We should not simply ask where our next

congregation needs a pastor. We should also ask where Canada needs its next church.

SEMINARY PROFESSORS

A third possibility is the seminary itself. At present, CRTS has five active faculty members, three of whom are well into their fifties. That is not an immediate crisis, but it does mean that the church should be thinking seriously about succession. The road to becoming a seminary professor is a long one. A man needs first to complete a bachelor's degree, then an MDiv, spend a number of years in pastoral ministry, and then undertake the further years of study normally required for a PhD. By the time a man is ready to teach at the seminary, many years have passed.

This means that we cannot wait until a professor is ready to retire before we begin looking for the man who will take his place. We should be identifying and encouraging suitable men now, giving them opportunities to develop academically and pastorally so that, in time, they might take up the work of teaching the next generation of ministers. The seminary has rightly recognized this need and has established a bursary for graduates who go directly into PhD studies. Perhaps some of the men we are currently praying about as future pastors should also be asking whether the Lord might be preparing them for the classroom.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

We have prayed for labourers, and some of those labourers will be called to the pulpit. Others may be called to plant churches. Still others may be called to equip the men who will go into those fields. If we are serious about stewarding God's provision, we should be thinking not only about where today's labourers will serve, but about who will prepare tomorrow's labourers for the harvest.

Let's not be like the Joker, chasing the car without knowing what to do when we catch it. Let's be faithful stewards of the grace God has given us. The Lord of the harvest has heard our prayers and, in his kindness, has given us labourers. What an opportunity lies before us! May we have the faith to recognize his provision, the wisdom to steward it well, and the courage to send these labourers wherever Christ's harvest is waiting. 📖



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The Weight & Wonder of Teaching

Teaching is not for the faint of heart. It is a noble, critical, and daunting task. Each of us starts off a year with a new group of students in our care. Each of these students is an eternal soul, given by God to their parents and to us as stewards. Our calling is to teach, mold, and guide their minds and hearts. If we sit back and truly consider the gravity of this, it might make many of us cringe or throw up our hands and run. Are we really capable of this huge demand?

THE WEIGHT

It is no wonder that James says in his epistle, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (3:1). We have a critical role in helping to guide and shape the students in our care. It is of utmost importance that we do not take this lightly. God has given us this task and will ask us for an accounting, much like the Master in the parable of the talents. Do we use those talents properly, do we bury them, or, worse yet, do we squander them when we are teaching?

James continues, “if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body” (3:2). It goes without saying that this is a rhetorical statement. Can any of us claim that we are never at fault in what we say? Can we say this about when we are in front of our students? I know I can’t. There have been many times of regret over the course of my career (entering my 26th year) that I can acknowledge that I spoke harshly or rashly and didn’t have the well-being of the students in mind at the time. I spoke out of frustration, anger, or selfishness, instead of the love, compassion, and kindness that God requires of me.

Even our Lord gives a stern warning: “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of

these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt 18:6).

The children in front of us look to us for truth and learning. They have (generally) utmost trust in us. The parents expect no less of us. We are called by God to lead these children in his way, never straying, never leading them astray, helping them grow in their knowledge of him. We are called to hold to the truth of God’s Word and never waver. That is a very tall order!

THE WONDER

Again, when we look at all this, we might start to have our doubts—are we truly up to this task? Is it more than we can bear? The short answer is “yes” and “no” (to both questions). In ourselves, we are not up to this task. It is well beyond what we can bear. Yet in Christ, with the Spirit and strength he provides, we are able to faithfully serve. If this were not the case, we would not see the call in so many Old and New Testament passages for the “whys” and “hows” of educating the youth.

The book of Proverbs is one of constant teaching, requiring a child to listen to his parents’ teachings (and, by extension, the teaching of those their parents place them under). If we were not capable of this task, why would we see so much in Proverbs to this end? At the beginning of Proverbs, the child is told, “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck” (1:8–9). As we teach in wisdom and for wisdom, these things are meant to grow the child, to adorn the child, to mold, shape and prepare the child.

Teaching in love, faithfulness, and wisdom is vital for the life of our children, and we are prepared, commissioned, and strengthened by God to fulfill this calling. Again, Proverbs tells us in chapter 3, “My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

This is our task as teachers: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov 22:6). We plant the seeds and water them. The Lord allows this work to take root and establish itself in the lives of the children in our care. So it is vital that we do this properly, not wandering off in different

directions, but holding firm to the truth of God’s Word while we educate his children.

How we teach and what we teach is critical. As Paul tells the Philippians, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (4:8–9). Those are the things we should be spending our time on in our classrooms, hallways, fields, and gyms, holding firmly to the truth and beauty of Scripture, seeking to serve God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength so that we can truly love our neighbours (in this case, our students) as ourselves. We recognize that we can only do this through Christ who gives us the strength.

ENCOURAGEMENT

So teach, teachers. Trust God in your task, be faithful in your calling. He has gifted you and strengthened you for this amazing calling. There is a severe warning for you, but there is also the wonderful opportunity of praise for the “good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:23). Use your gifts to his glory. “[P]resent your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. . . . we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:1–2, 6–8).

Stay true, teachers, to the Word of God and he will bless you richly in your task, continuing to strengthen you each day, each week, each year that you work in his service. He has promised that he “will be with [us] always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20) and he is faithful to do this. 



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Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church: Celebrating 75 Years

On May 20, 2026, the Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton celebrated 75 years as an instituted church. A consistent theme throughout the celebration connected to the name that was chosen for the church in 1973, *Cornerstone*.

In May, former pastor Dr. Bill Dejong preached on Ephesians 2:19–22 with the theme, “Christ Forms his Royal Family into a Holy Temple” and in September, Dr. Arjan Devisser preached on the same text with the theme “Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone”.

On Saturday, September 12 an open house was held at the church. The weather was balmy and the parking lot was buzzing with children enjoying ice cream, live music, and tables filled with current and returning members sharing fellowship and reminiscing. Inside the church, a timeline extended down the stairs and through the halls with bulletin clippings and pictures from the last 75 years.

The decision to start a bulletin for church members was made in 1955. Several members of the church had spent hours digging through the archives and many bulletins. The men who made that decision years ago likely had no idea that they were initiating a preservation of history! The Lord used many faithful servants over those years in many different capacities, from the pastors and teachers, the elders, deacons, and Bible study leaders, to administrators, committee members, musicians, and many more.

SPEAKERS AND MEMORIES

An official ceremony was held in the church auditorium. Council chairman James Lof opened with Scripture followed by a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his faithfulness and grace to the Cornerstone congregation. The church was full and the theme song for the anniversary, “Church of God Elect and Glorious” filled the auditorium.

Rev. Bram Degraaf, Cornerstone’s current missionary serving in Maceió, Brazil, spoke a few words. He referenced F. Scott Fitzgerald’s story about a man who aged in reverse. Over the 25 years he had been at Cornerstone he noted that the elders were becoming younger and that fathers who served were replaced by sons. He pointed out God’s faithfulness in this.

Jordan Stam, the oldest grandchild of Rev. Clarence Stam, was asked to speak on behalf of the family. In true Stam style, after he ascended the pulpit, he quipped, “As a kid, I always wondered what the church looked like from up here.” With fondness, we together remembered our beloved former pastor. Jordan told us that his grandfather would remind us on this occasion of what he consistently preached: “By grace alone, through our Saviour.”

After this, Dr. Bill Dejong spoke in his signature style, eliciting much laughter. He also reflected seriously on his time at Cornerstone, reminding us that Christian memory is not nostalgia, but a remembering of how God has always been with us and will be with us until Jesus returns. The last speaker was Rev. John Louwerse, who also spoke with fondness of his time at Cornerstone and ended with the words, “We have an awesome Redeemer and may we be ready for the return of our Lord and Saviour.”

After singing “Great is Thy Faithfulness,” everyone gathered back in the parking lot where the local City Councillor, Esther Pauls, cut the anniversary cake and remarked that she was so thankful for how the Cornerstone congregation was a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the city of Hamilton.

Seventy-five years is a long time, and many members have worshipped, served, expressed their testimonies, and breathed their last on earth only to be welcomed into the eternal presence of the risen Saviour. The saints below and the saints above continue to long for the day of Christ’s return. Dr. J. Faber, who has been with the Lord since 2004, was a longstanding member of Cornerstone and he remarked on Cornerstone’s 50th anniversary, “I don’t want to say that I wish for another 50 years for Cornerstone, because it is my prayer that the Lord will return before then.” With him and all the church we say, Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus! 

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Photos by Jasmine Kammeyer



Meet Christine van Halen-Faber

ILSE VANDERMEULEN



Christine van Halen-Faber (72) retired this year from her position as Principal of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College (CCRTC) after a long and distinguished career in the field of education.

Christine started her university studies in the seventies with the intention of working in medicine or psychiatry, but an urgent call to help a local Reformed school changed the course of her life and put her on the path of education. Born and raised in the Netherlands as the oldest child in a minister's family, Christine moved to Canada in 1969, at age 15. Her father, Dr. Jelle Faber, became Principal of the Canadian Reformed Theological College (now seminary) in Hamilton. From an early age, her parents instilled in her obedience to following God's calling.

Christine finished Grade 12 at Hamilton District Christian High School, Grade 13 at Hamilton Collegiate Institute, and her Bachelor of Arts in Music in 1978 at McMaster.

Christine taught at four Reformed schools: Timothy Christian School in Hamilton, Guido de Brès Christian High School, John Calvin School in Burlington, and Covenant Christian School in Millgrove, where she was Principal from 1987–1993. She served, and continues to serve, as an adjunct lecturer at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary.

In 1993, Christine took a break from her role as principal to study for her master's degree in education at Brock University. At the time, she was also appointed as lecturer at the Teachers' College, the first female faculty member and Dean of Students and, since 1999, Principal.

Her PhD in "Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)" was awarded the Canadian Association for Teacher Education 2004 Distinguished Dissertation Award at the University of Toronto. Her time and contacts at OISE were instrumental in assisting CCRTC's board of directors in the accreditation process for the college.

Christine and her husband Henk attend the Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church. She looks forward to spending more time with her husband and being involved in small things in congregational life. Christine also loves gardening, exploring Inuit art and classical music, and plans to spend more time playing the piano.

How does it feel to be retired after 33 years at CCRTC?

It's time to pass on the baton! Succession is a good thing. And it's good to go before people tell you to go . . . [laughs]. When Mr. John Wynia came forward to inquire about the job, I knew the Lord had provided. He knows the school communities across Canada and he is well respected. If there is one

characteristic that I want to put forward over all these years, it is that the Lord provides in amazing ways! It is such a joy seeing this new faculty so enthusiastic about Reformed education. I know that when I retire, the work will go on.

How did you become a teacher?

It was never my goal to be a teacher. I wanted to study medicine, and I was intrigued by psychiatry. I had done volunteer work with the young people in a psychiatric hospital in Hamilton and the medical faculty at McMaster had just opened. My first year in university I took all science courses in the pre-medical program with one elective in Music.

Timothy Christian School in Hamilton had just started, and the chairman of the board came to me and said: “Christine, we desperately need a teacher for grade 3, 4, and 5, and we think you can do it.” I had no training as a teacher, but the chair said, “my wife observed you in the church nursery, and she thinks you are a born teacher!” And that’s how I started teaching. I even taught my youngest brother in grade 5 at the time!

After a year, a qualified teacher was found and I went back to university. It would have been very hard to get into med school, so I continued in the music program.

How did you learn to teach without formal education in teaching?

How do you teach kids, when you don’t know anything? I was flying by the seat of my pants! But I have to say, I was blessed with amazing help, and I had access to teacher manuals. Also, watching the students closely was super helpful for me; I thought, what can I do to bring them further? At CCRTC I had to start from scratch as well, but my advantage there was that I came out of the actual school setting. Visiting students in the classrooms and connecting with principals have always been highlights in my career.

Was it difficult to study at secular institutions and bring the work of Reformed education into your research?

In my undergraduate years, I was known to others as a Christian because I would not rehearse or perform on Sundays. When completing my master’s degree at Brock University, I was a bit older and more mature. It helped me to stand up for my faith.

At the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, a very liberal environment, I made it a point to say right away, “I’m a Christian,” and then I would introduce myself. It often caused some surprise because there was an understanding that you did not talk about your faith in the academic world—that it was a private matter. Yet, in the hallways, several people would come to me to share their own faith backgrounds and thank me for mentioning my faith. 1 Peter

4:11 tells us that God will supply the strength we need and give us the words to speak.

The Lord works out his purposes. I had to select a supervisor for my doctoral studies. This professor, a lapsed Roman Catholic, appreciated that I wanted to approach my work from a faith perspective. He was very generous with his time and expertise. More than that, he taught me how the university system works. In hindsight, that helped position me well for the accreditation process.

Looking back on your long career, what are you grateful for?

One of the key things I will treasure is that, as a teacher, you are surrounded by people—parents, colleagues, board and committee members—who share the same sense of purpose. We all work together out of a deep commitment, first to the Lord and also to his people. I love the fact that the college is called “Covenant.” In education, God’s relationship with us, his people, and our response to him through the covenant are so beautifully reflected.

I am very appreciative of all the boards and committees I have worked with over the years. All these people have busy lives but still find time to give of their gifts to the Teachers’ College. Their support meant that I never felt alone as a principal.

Our Reformed view of education has given my work an extra dimension. Reformed education is student-focused, teacher-directed, and God-centred: teaching is like turning the pages of the book of creation for students. We can show students that they are redeemed by a Saviour, Jesus Christ. We also teach students how to live for God through the work of the Holy Spirit and our sanctification—think of classroom management and discipline.

And I’m so grateful for all the joy I have experienced! To come to work every day and see your students develop is such a privilege. A Grade 1 student who comes in at the beginning of the year not knowing how to read and, by the end of the year, is reading a chapter book! The same applies to the students at the Teachers’ College. I saw young people, whether coming directly from Grade 12 or from a degree program, grow as individuals and as professionals, and become part of the fabric of our schools. To have been allowed to play a small role in that process is a highlight for me.

What are some challenges you have experienced?

In all my years, the pandemic year was one of the most challenging. For all of us, our world was turned upside down. So many things we had worked toward suddenly changed. There were so many different opinions, and how do I, as a principal, navigate that? As people of God, we live in this world, and we need to steer a course that is faithful and obedient. It was difficult for me to experience resistance at different levels at a time when no one really knew what was going



on. I prayed for wisdom and insight, and was often reminded of my mom's words, who would say in her Frisian language: *Doch dyn plicht en lit de ljouwe rabje!* ("Do your duty and let the people talk.")

The whole process of seeking accreditation for the Teachers' College was a beautiful challenge because it allowed the College to grow from a somewhat insular organization to an organization that measured itself against external standards. It was an awful lot of work, yet it was a very positive experience. It taught me *ora et labora*: you pray, and then you work and await God's blessing. It taught me humility and dependence. I was very thankful that the Board of Directors did not agree to the requirements of the Ontario College of Teachers to change our enrolment and hiring policies in order to become accredited. The OCT wanted us to set aside our Christian principles because they felt these did not serve the public interest. However, God is in charge, and he guides institutions just as he guides our individual lives. As small people, we do our work faithfully, and God will decide the outcome in the end.

What are some changes and challenges you have witnessed in Reformed education?

We have changed as teachers over time, and our students have changed. When I cleaned out my office, I came across some old assignments that students completed during my early years at the College. When I see the depth of those assignments and the academic rigour, I am so impressed. Computers back then were nothing more than glorified typewriters, so students had to study their textbooks and read other literature. They processed knowledge; it became part of who they were.

Information is now available at your fingertips, and I'm afraid we may have lost the skill of reading deeply. That does concern me because there is a danger that we also start to read God's Word superficially—picking and choosing, skipping sections, and not really going deeper.

It is also fascinating to watch the developments around AI. As faculty, we have talked about AI over the last few years. It saves us time, and it can be incredibly helpful, including for teachers. If you want to adjust a lesson for a student who has difficulty reading, it doesn't take much to make it more accessible with AI. But I'm concerned about personal formation and discernment. We need to ask ourselves what role technology can play without losing our identity.

There are also some challenges in the schools that I see, including the low number of male teachers, especially in elementary schools. We need to look at how we grow leaders in our schools who can become principals, teachers, and College faculty.

And do we still see our schools as a wonderful gift from God, or are they simply one of the options for educating our children? Finding

volunteers to take on roles is becoming difficult. We live in a time of individualism and consumerism. If I don't feel like it, or if there is nothing in it for me, why would I do it? Who wants to go out to meetings at night? As the interests in our community become much broader, might that dilute the efforts towards Reformed education?

What are some opportunities for Reformed schools and the Teachers' College?

Our communities overall have been very blessed financially, and we have many resources now available to our schools. I don't want to assume that will always be the case, but there are many individuals whose giving demonstrates that Reformed education is important to them. The Harvest Foundation, as well, is doing very good work.

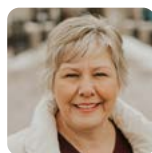
I also think that, in general, our teachers have a higher level of professionalism. As vocational professionals, we hold each other to a high standard. Lately, there have been more teachers, and that creates greater stability within the teaching community, allowing more opportunities for professional development. The Compass League of Reformed Schools, too, has been very active in support of our schools.

For the Teachers' College, my hope is that it will continue to steer the course while remaining true to our roots. I hope it will continue to *be a definitive source for Reformed teacher training*. I hope school boards will continue to look to the Teachers' College as a focal point for how we support and develop our teachers—not only through the full-time programs, but also through ongoing professional development opportunities.

I also hope that, over time, our college can play a role internationally. We have taken a small step in that direction with a group of students from South Korea. There is an opportunity to serve God's people beyond Ontario and Canada and play a larger role worldwide. I hope that, over the years, this will continue to develop.

What encouragement or advice do you have for anyone considering a career in teaching?

It's the best job in the world! Teaching is not for everyone—if the Lord has given you the gifts, pursue it! If you can play a role in the life of twenty or so students in a year, that is a wonderful opportunity! To assist parents in helping their children find their place in God's kingdom, that's a beautiful task. 



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Meetings, Meetings, and More Meetings

The previous article showed again the anti-hierarchical emphasis of our Church Order. Office-bearers do not all do identical work in the church, but equality must be maintained among ministers, elders, and deacons (Articles 17 & 25 CO). Under the headship of Jesus Christ, there are no higher and lower ranks of office-bearers in the church. This is sound Reformed church polity, which flows from this key article that “no church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no office-bearer over other office-bearers” (Article 74).

But churches are also human organizations. That’s true for the local church and it’s also true for churches that have federated, based on their unity of faith, and have agreed to be held accountable when it comes to that unity. When you run any human organization, including a church or church federation, you do need to make decisions. You also need a structure to make that work. In other words, from time to time those who are called to leadership in the church must get together for meetings.

We are familiar with consistory meetings and major assemblies. But does our Church Order have anything to say about how to make those meetings work properly? There is actually not much guidance here, and what we have is spread out over a variety of articles, mostly in the third section which deals with the ecclesiastical assemblies (see Art 29).

WHO LEADS?

In Articles 35 and 36 we learn that a chairman and clerk are required to serve the assemblies, and given a brief description of their responsibilities. There is nothing surprising in these articles, although it is good to note that here also the Church Order holds its anti-hierarchical bias. The last line of Article 35 reads: “In major assemblies, the office of the president shall cease when the assembly has ended.” The president (frequently called “chairman” or at times “moderator”) does not have any function after the synod is closed. We do not have a man who serves between synods as the face or voice of all the churches, to represent the federation at official events at

home or abroad. Our churches do not even have a stated clerk to serve between synods as the central address of the federation.

Although our synods usually elect ministers to be chairmen, the Church Order does not say anywhere that only ministers qualify for that position. One might say that this is kind of implied, since Article 44 stipulates that at a classis “ministers shall preside either in rotation or as chosen.” Here is again an anti-hierarchical hint, because it also says that the same minister shall not be chosen twice in succession. There is something similar in Article 38, where we find that if a church is served by more than one minister, they are to preside (over consistory meetings) in turn.

The stipulation in Article 38 that, as a rule, ministers are supposed to preside over consistory meetings has its roots in the time when, because of their training and experience, ministers would be better qualified to do this than elders. Today this is less convincing than it was in the past, and we see more and more often that capable elders chair our meetings.

WHAT’S ON THE AGENDA?

Article 30 of the Church Order stipulates what can be legitimately on the agenda of a meeting. All our assemblies can only deal with ecclesiastical matters, topics that have to do with the church. It is added that this must be done in an ecclesiastical manner, that is, a manner that is in accordance with what the churches have agreed upon in the Church Order.

This is correct, but it is also too little and too formal, especially for consistory meetings. Ministers and elders remain shepherds, also when they meet to discuss and decide on matters that are important for the congregation and will have an impact on the spiritual life of church members. Deacons are agents of mercy, also when they meet to discuss their work. And many decisions of major assemblies will have spiritual repercussions in the local churches. Handling issues in an ecclesiastical manner means that all is done prayerfully, in a manner that fits the character of God’s holy Church, gathered by Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

TALKING AND LISTENING

Article 31 of the Church Order states that a majority vote is needed to make binding decisions. This is mentioned here in the context of dealing with an appeal at a major assembly, but it makes sense to use this as a simple and fair rule to come to any decision. And yet it is good to think about this a bit more. Our assemblies have what is often called a “deliberative character.” This means that we usually spend a considerable amount of time deliberating and discussing a proposal, suggestion, or question that is on the agenda. We list pros and cons. We listen to each other’s arguments and weigh them. We challenge each other as we consider different viewpoints. As much as possible, we try to involve all the brothers around the table. This is particularly important at consistory meetings, where we should always strive for consensus. With that goal in mind, it can sometimes be wise to let a matter rest, without forcing a quick decision by vote, and come back to it at the next meeting.

It makes for good leadership in the church when a consistory can, as a rule, come to unanimous decisions. In the past, after a decision was made by majority vote, this was sometimes followed by a second vote to ensure that all those present at the meeting would accept the outcome of the first vote. This may sound a bit superfluous, since the majority is decisive already. But it can be important to stress the commitment to remain unified towards the congregation: voting against a certain decision does not give an office-bearer the freedom to publicly denounce what has been adopted.

Not only consistories but also our major assemblies are deliberative meetings. This is possible because, in the CanRC, the major assemblies are relatively small, which allows all members to participate in the discussion. Even our general synods have only 24 delegates. There might be good reasons to increase this number, but there is a limit if we want to maintain the deliberative character. Some other Reformed and Presbyterian churches have much larger numbers of delegates to their general assemblies or synods.¹ Of course, this does not mean that these assemblies cannot make good decisions. But it does make for a different kind of meeting, and a different way of coming to a decision.

FAIR AND TRANSPARENT

At the same time, unlike consistories, our major assemblies are temporary bodies. Once all the matters on the agenda have been dealt

with and decisions have been made, the assembly will be closed and no longer exist. While a consistory can “park” an issue to come back to at a subsequent meeting, this is not possible for a classis or synod. And thus, deliberations at those assemblies must lead to a decision at the same meeting. In order to make that happen in an orderly manner, it is necessary to operate with more formal rules for order and structure. Because of its general and basic character, our Church Order does not provide such detailed rules.

Some have suggested that, when our assemblies meet, they should simply adopt the famous manual of parliamentary procedure known as Robert’s Rules of Order.² This is called the “basic guide for fair and orderly procedure in meetings.” I trust that we all expect our meetings to act fairly and use orderly procedures. But I am not convinced that indiscriminate application of Robert’s Rules would be helpful for our ecclesiastical assemblies. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a democracy. It is ruled by God’s Word, and its government must acknowledge that Christ is the only head of the church. Its decisions must give spiritual guidance to God’s people. That’s why it was important enough to mention in a separate article (Art 34) that meetings of all assemblies must begin and end with prayer. And sometimes the best way forward is to stop the proceedings and pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. None of this is reflected in Robert’s Rules.

This does not mean that our ecclesiastical assemblies do not need regulations to facilitate orderly discussions and help run meetings in a fair and efficient manner. For that reason, consistories, classes, and synods have adopted internal regulations and when it comes to presenting proposals, motions, and amendments, or voting procedures to reach decisions, the regulations look very much like an adapted and simplified version of Robert’s Rules of Order. In this way our church meetings are able to run fairly, in good order, efficiently, and in a brotherly, Christian manner with the goal of making decisions which please our Lord and Saviour and serve the edification of his church. 📌



Jan DeGelder

Minister Emeritus

Redemption Canadian Reformed Church, Flamborough
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¹ The last URCNA synod had 225, the OPC 150, the CRCNA 196 and the PCA 2,500.

² First published in 1876 by Henry M. Robert. The latest edition is the 12th, published in 2020.



JOHN DASS

Our brother John Dass hopes to celebrate his birthday on November 21. Everybody in Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton knows and loves John! He welcomes the worshippers on Sunday mornings, hands out liturgy sheets, and gives everyone a happy smile. He is on the official list of greeters in the church, and he enjoys that very much. Most of the people remember the church service when he professed his faith, together with his parents. John loves the Lord.

John uses the talents that the Lord has given him. He loves music and when you visit him at home he loves to play "Amazing Grace" on his piano. One Sunday, he performed this song he loves so much after a church service. The church members are enthusiastic about the way he shares his joy in the Lord.

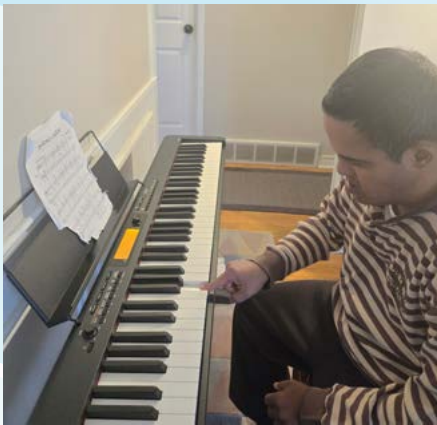
John is enrolled in different programs that are offered so that he keeps on learning. He loves to make artwork, and he surprises his parents on their birthday with a card or painting that he designs with the help of his personal support worker. On a regular basis he follows courses via his computer. The personal tutor writes encouraging reports about him! He is an enthusiastic student in many ways.

At Harbour Home he is a well-known and regular guest. They appreciate his kind character and love to celebrate his birthday in their midst.

Every year he attends Anchor Camp, where he enjoys all the activities. He loves to stay there, although he is far away from his parents and friends who live in Hamilton.

We are very thankful that the Lord brought him to our congregation. For all of us it is a joy to meet him, and we love to say something nice to him.

Written by Inge de Visser



NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

16

Jeremey Stulp will be 26
3991 Quarry Road
Beamsville, ON
L3J 1X4

21

John Dass will be 29
48 Montcalm Drive
Hamilton, ON
L9C 4B3

Happy birthday to Jeremy and John! May the Lord bless you both in the year to come. We hope you have a great day celebrating with family and friends. May God continue to guide and bless you in all you do.

We welcome you both to the *Ray of Sunshine* birthday list, and we hope you enjoy the birthday cards you receive!

A Caution About Imprecatory Psalms

In the July 3, 2026 issue of *Clarion*, Rev. Clarence Bouwman has an article titled “Asking God to Curse an Enemy—Should I?” In the article, Rev. Bouwman quotes different examples of imprecatory language throughout Scripture, and argues that we must not just hate the powers and plans of Satan that seek to destroy God’s kingdom, but also the persons making those plans. He sees this as the appropriate response to the LORD’s great love for his people. One example he gives is from Exodus 15, when the Israelites rejoice in song when the Egyptians are destroyed. Another is Psalm 139, when David expresses hatred for those who hate the LORD.

Are believers right to hate these persons? Rev. Bouwman argues that we are called “to curse or hate those who hurt the saints for whom Christ has died.” But we should carefully examine this. Today we live in the time after the victory accomplished on the cross. The saints who lived before the time of Christ were praying for and rejoicing in the destruction of their enemies. In the old covenant, God’s people were commanded to destroy their enemies and live separately from them. All of this had a clear purpose: so that our Saviour could be born out of Israel, and complete the task given to him. But today we live in a different dispensation and Christ has commanded us not to curse, but to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Rev. Bouwman also speaks about Jesus’s command at the end of his article, but how can we be asked to both bless and curse them?

John Calvin, in his commentary on Psalm 139, writes: “We are to observe however that the hatred of which the Psalmist speaks is directed toward the sin rather than the persons of the wicked. We are, so far as lies in us, to study peace with all men: we are to seek the good of all, and if possible, they are to be reclaimed by kindness and good offices.” (Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol 6, Baker Book House, 1981, p. 223). On page 469–470 of Volume 4, when commenting on Psalm 28, he writes that we must be careful not to have too much zeal. Jesus, in Luke 9:54, rebukes the disciples for wanting to bring fire down from heaven on the Samaritans. Calvin concludes with the general rule that we must pray for conversion of our enemies.

Rev. Bouwman also uses the example of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 23 where he speaks strong words of judgment to the Pharisees. But Jesus does this after demonstrating so much patience. For three years of ministry, Jesus speaks in parables. Those hearers who wanted to understand were free to ask for explanations. Jesus answers the Pharisees’ questions—which were meant to trap him—with other questions. But Jesus always left room for repentance. It is not until the final days before his death on the cross that the Lord Jesus speaks words of judgment. Because Jesus knew their hearts, he could do this, but it’s noteworthy that he also spoke with great sorrow, ending Matthew 23 with words of lament and weeping.

The songs sung in Revelation 11 and 19 are also used as examples of imprecatory petitions sung by the twenty-four elders before God’s throne. Again, the context is important. The words of Revelation 11 are sung as the seventh trumpet is blown and Revelation 19 is the judgment of the great harlot Babylon. Both are Judgment Day scenes. We are not there yet. We long for the destruction of Satan and all evil, and for the deliverance of unbelievers from Satan’s strongholds. All of this means that we should take great care where and how we use imprecatory songs. They need to be sung within the context of knowing a sovereign and merciful God, and our own sinful nature.

All of this has implications for our worship, especially our opening and final songs, which should always be songs of reverence and praise. As sinners who have been redeemed, we dare not approach the throne of grace without praise! Through God’s grace, we may also sing the songs of the elders and the angels as we read in Revelation 4 and 5. This is the time of the opening of the scroll, the age we live in today. Here they sing a new song of praise: “Holy, holy. Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come . . . To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever! Amen!”

Margaret DeJong
Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton

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 – SEPT. 23, 2026

A letter was received from the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER) requesting Classis to inform them of contacts with churches for which CER also has a mandate. Classis instructed Rev. Plug (deputy for coordinating ecclesiastical contacts) to send a response updating the CER on contacts with the OPC, RPC-C, URCNA, and the RCN.

Cloverdale requested Classis to have examiners submit assignments early enough to provide Candidate Hongdi Chen sufficient preparation time since English is his third language. After discussion, Classis instructed the exam coordinators to ensure assignments be given six weeks ahead of the examination to take into consideration the language barrier.

Church visitation reports were distributed and read, and opportunity was given for questions. The reports were received with thankfulness. Willoughby Heights requested advice from Classis regarding a pastoral matter. Classis went into closed session to discuss the matter and advice was given to delegates from Willoughby Heights.

Classis appointed delegates to Regional Synod West November 17, 2026 (Carman).

CLASSIS PACIFIC EAST – OCT. 08, 2026

After reviewing the necessary documents, the ordination examination of br. Noah Holtvlüwer commenced. The brother presented his sermon proposal on Acts 12:20–25. After discussion in closed session and concurring advice from the deputies of regional synod, his proposal was deemed sufficient to proceed with the rest of the exam. The candidate was examined in the areas of Old Testament, New Testament, doctrine and creeds, knowledge of Scripture, ethics, church history, church polity, and pastoral ministry. After discussion in closed session, and with the concurring advice from the deputies of regional synod, classis joyfully shared with br. Noah Holtvlüwer that he had sustained his examination. At this time the chairman gave thanks and led classis in song and prayer. Opportunity was then given to congratulate our brother.

A letter of fraternal greeting was received from Rev. J. Munive, on behalf of the Western Classis of the RCUS. The chairman noted the prayer requests shared by our brothers in this classis and prayed for them at the closing of the meeting.

Delegates were appointed to Regional Synod West 2026.

CLASSIS ALBERTA – SEPT. 17, 2026

Church visitation reports were received with thankfulness for the churches in Barrhead, Edmonton-Immanuel, Edmonton-Providence and Hope-Neerlandia. Reports were also received with thankfulness from the classis treasurer and an inspection on the treasurer's books. At the request of Neerlandia, Rev. C. Swaving was appointed as their counsellor (CO Article 45). Pulpit supply was granted every 6 weeks to the vacant churches with Rev. Veurink drawing up a schedule.

The questions from CO Article 44 were asked with 9 of the churches answering "Yes, yes and no." One church requested the judgment and help of classis in the government of the church. Rev. Matthew Van der woerd passed on greetings on behalf of Classis Western Canada of the URCNA and the vice-chairman responded with appreciation for our continued bond. A number of appeals were dealt with in closed session.

CLASSIS MANITOBA – AUG. 26, 2026

Rev. Pleiter welcomed the guests, regional synod deputies, and a special welcome to candidate Todd Linde, present for his peremptory examination. Having examined the credentials, classis was constituted. Rev. Joe Poppe was appointed as president, Rev. Carl Van Dam as clerk, and Rev. Dathan Pleiter as vice. The agenda was adopted. The deputies of regional synod and a fraternal delegate from the Providence Reformed Church of Winnipeg (URCNA) were seated.

Candidate Todd Linde presented himself for his peremptory examination, according to Art. 5. C.O. Once his documents were determined to be in good order, Classis proceeded with his examination. He presented a sermon proposal on Colossians 1:15–20. Classis entered into closed session. With the concurring advice of the deputies, classis judged that the sermon was sufficient and continued with the rest of the examination.

In the following proceedings, classis examined br. Linde in Old Testament exegesis, New Testament Exegesis, knowledge of Scripture, doctrine and creeds, church history, ethics, church polity, and diaconiology. Upon deliberating in closed session, and after concurring advice from the deputies, classis agreed that the

examination was sufficient and approbated the call. It was declared that br. Todd Linde could be ordained to the Ministry of the Word at Grace Canadian Reformed Church.

Classis Manitoba Committee for Ecumenical Relations (previously called “Committee for Contact with Neighbouring Classes and Presbyteries”): A mandate and report of activities was received with thankfulness. The committee members were able to send representatives on behalf of Classis Manitoba to the annual Northern Plains Classis of the RCUS, the meeting of the Presbytery of the Dakotas, and the Classis Central US of the URCNA. The chairman expressed his gratitude for the furthering of our ties with these faithful churches of Christ.

Ecclesiastical appointments were made. Brothers were delegated to Regional Synod West at Carman West, MB, scheduled, the Lord willing, November 17, 2026.

CLASSIS ONTARIO WEST – SEPT. 16–17, 2026

Brother Tony Zheng presented himself for a peremptory examination. His credentials were in order. The candidate sustained his exam; the deputies of regional synod gave concurring advice. The classis approbated London’s call of brother Zheng to serve as missionary for Lighthouse Ministries in London.

Fraternal delegates from the ARP (Canadian Presbytery), OPC (Presbytery Michigan-Ontario), and RCUS (Classis Covenant-East) gave greetings. The chairman asked the questions of CO Art. 44. All churches affirmed that the ministry of the offices was maintained, that the decisions of the major assemblies were honoured, and that no advice from Classis was needed.

Classis discussed a proposal from the Ancaster church specifying more detailed procedures for the Fund for Needy Churches. The delegates from Ancaster were asked to bring a revised proposal to the next classis.

The treasurer’s report and the audit of the books were received with thanksgiving. The classical assessment was determined to be \$9 per communicant member. A report of the Fund for Needy Churches was received; the classical assessment for the Fund for Needy Churches was set to be \$15 per communicant member. A report of the Inter-Church Relations Committee was received with thanksgiving. In closed session, classis dealt with an appeal.

Delegates for Regional Synod East were appointed.

CLASSIS NORTHERN ONTARIO – SEPT. 17, 2026

Classis received church visitation reports with thankfulness. Classis received reports from the church for classical archives, the church to inspect classical archives, the treasurer, the church for auditing the books of the treasurer, and from the church responsible

for auditing the books of the fund for needy churches. Question period as per Article 44 of the Church Order was held. Churches requested advice and advice was given. No correspondence was received.

Appointments were made to Regional Synod East, November 18, 2026 (Burlington).

CLASSIS CENTRAL ONTARIO – SEPT. 18, 2026

Each of the churches in turn reported on their foreign and local mission activities, giving opportunity for follow up discussion, and a time to celebrate how our triune God has blessed this work. Following each church’s report, their efforts were prayed over by a delegate from a neighbouring church. Burlington-Fellowship reported that the classis archives have been inspected and were found to be in good order. Thanks was extended to the facilitator of the archives for his faithful work. The Treasurer’s report was received and reviewed. The assessment proposal of \$3 per communicant member was approved. The treasurer was thanked for his work. Redemption will provide a report on the books of the treasurer at the next classis.

The Committee for Needy Churches reported on its activities for the past year. There has been no activity for the fund in the past year. No assessments are required. Mrs. Aafke Spithoff will be stepping down as treasurer of the committee. An individual has been found willing to take her place. Redemption Church will provide a report on the inspection of the financial records at the next classis meeting.

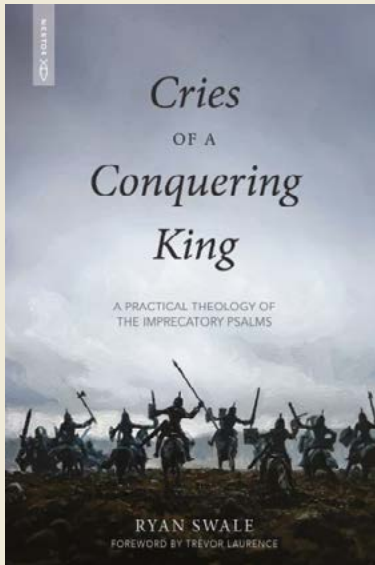
Delegates were appointed for Regional Synod East to be held on Nov. 18, 2026.

CLASSIS NIAGARA – SEPT. 16, 2026

A proposal from Attercliffe to amend the classis regulations to add Smithville (Hope) as well as to stipulate time limits for permission to speak an edifying word after licensure and candidacy exams was adopted.

The classis finances have been inspected and found to be in good order. It was noted that the financial review should not be called an “audit,” but an “inspection.” The classis archives have also been inspected and found to be in good order.

Following the report of Deputies for Contact with Neighbouring Classes, travel expenses to visit neighbouring classes were approved. It was noted that multiple classes across the federation receive the same invitations. The deputies were tasked with initiating discussions amongst the other classical Deputies for Contact with Neighbouring Classes/Presbyteries about how best to respond to these invitations. 



Cries of a Conquering King: A Practical Theology of the Imprecatory Psalms

Cries of a Conquering King: A Practical Theology of the Imprecatory Psalms by Ryan Swale (Mentor, 2026) 120 pages. Apprx. \$30.00 CDN.

Who does not flinch at the words of Psalm 137:9, “Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!”? In Reformed and Presbyterian churches, we love to sing the Psalms, but who finds it easy to sing lyrics like “Let [our enemies] be like the snail that dissolves into slime, like the stillborn child who never sees the sun” (Ps 58:8) or “May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow!” (Ps 109:9)? These are prayers for curses, or “imprecations,” and more than stomaching such sentiments we would like to know: *why* are they in the Bible? How do they accord with the teachings of the Lord Jesus and of what benefit are such words for Christians today? Pastor Dr. Ryan Swale has written a very accessible book which helps answer these questions and more.

It is indeed with a pastor’s heart that Dr. Swale, minister of Immanuel United Reformed Church in Jordan (Ontario), has set out to show how to rightly understand and make use of the imprecatory passages in the Psalms. Yes, he wants us *to make use* of them! That may well be Swale’s special contribution to this subject, for while there are articles and books which explain how to make *sense* of the imprecatory wishes of the Psalms, none that I am aware of explain at length how Christian believers and even church office bearers may actually *use* such passages beneficially for themselves and for others.

TWO-PART SETUP

Swale sets up his compact book logically into two parts. The first part (chapters 1–4) explains the theology of praying down imprecations. Working from Old to New Testament, Pastor Swale shows how such cursing is not only allowed by God but approved by him in the right context and with the right motives. Far from being contrary to the gospel, “the imprecatory psalms are rooted in the promises of God, especially that first gospel promise made to Adam and Eve in the garden” (p. 14). Think justice, not vengeance. Swale spends most of chapter 3 looking at what Jesus taught about such psalms, how he

employed cursing himself, and how Jesus’s great compassion and even his prayers for the forgiveness of his enemies do not contradict godly imprecations. The fourth chapter leads into application with its focus on how Christians may go about praying the imprecatory psalms (and also how not to). Swale’s explanations are clear and sound as practical advice.

It’s the second part (chapters 5–8) that is the main reason Swale set out to write this book. Here he focusses on making practical use of the imprecatory psalms in four areas: corporate worship, apologetics (defending the gospel), counseling, and preaching. According to Swale, believers should sing and pray imprecatory psalms publicly as soldiers engaging in spiritual battle (see Eph 6:10–20). Perhaps the most intriguing part of the book for me was Swale’s insistence that such imprecatory psalms can help make the gospel attractive to unbelievers who suffer things like racism, sexual abuse, and violence, for these psalms “show the world that God does care” (p. 82) and thus also teaches the church to care for those suffering such things. Connected with this is the thought of chapter 8 that imprecatory passages for believers can be a balm for their souls as they learn to cry out to God and wait for his justice to come, just as our Saviour Jesus Christ did. “When [these psalms] are prayed in union with the Christ who took these words upon His lips, they become a vivid reminder that He accompanies them in their loneliness” (p. 91).

Christians love the Psalms but sometimes are troubled by these prayers for curses. Be troubled no more! Pick up Pastor Swale’s nugget of a book and embrace the gospel comfort found also in the imprecatory psalms. 



Peter Holtvlüwer

Editor/Author of the *Christ’s Psalms*, *Our Psalms* project
pholtvluer@gmail.com



Gospel Healing for the Lonely

Why We're Feeling Lonely (and what we can do about it). Shelby Abbot. Epsom: The Good Book Company, 2026. Softcover, 143 pages. \$20.99 CDN.

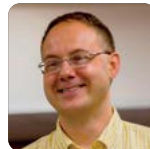
While people appear to be increasingly well-connected technologically, so many are still suffering from loneliness. Though it should not be so in the communion of saints, it often is there too. Loneliness is a real problem and it has real consequences. Shelby Abbot writes that “the Surgeon General of the United States sees loneliness as a public health concern, equating its mortality impact to smoking 15 cigarettes a day” (p. 17).

This book is addressed to Christian young people (20-somethings), but it could benefit anyone dealing with loneliness. The author takes a biblical, gospel-centered approach to sorting through loneliness, thinking about it properly and addressing it soundly. As a campus minister, he speaks from years of experience in hearing lonely young people struggle.

Why We're Feeling Lonely covers four areas connected to the loneliness epidemic: screen time (digital identities), relationship (porn and casual sex), community (polarization and anger), and

emotion (depression and anxiety). With each part, he has one chapter identifying the issues and then a chapter showing how the gospel brings authentic healing. In case you were wondering, in the chapter on depression and anxiety, he does not rule out seeing a doctor for depression or persistent, dark anxiety.

Shelby Abbot has written a great little book on a hugely relevant topic. It's simply written and features engaging stories and illustrations. The appendix mentions resources for readers to dig deeper into any of the four areas covered. If you or someone you know is lonely and can't see a way forward, this is one to check out. 



Wes Bredenhof

Minister
Free Reformed Church of Launceston, AU

Correction:

In Vol. 75, Issue 13, George van Popta's name was mistakenly included with one of William Helder's songs. Helder's name appeared below the song in the copyright as usual, but we apologize for any confusion the additional info may have caused. We thank both of these brothers for continuing to share their gifts for music and words through their songs!

STORIES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

The Fall of Jerusalem

PIETER & JENNY BOON





Editor's note: This story comes from a series written by Rev. Pieter and Mrs. Jenny Boon.¹ Each story is meant to be read a-loud to children—please try it! We'd love to receive your letter to the editor telling us how it went with your kids.

“Mmm... that smells good!” Asher peeked into the clay pot hanging over the fire. He had just arrived home, and his stomach was rumbling. He tried to scoop out a piece of meat. “Why are you making such nice food today? Are we expecting guests?”

His mother wiped the bread dough from her hands. “Your Uncle Lemuel is here.”

“Uncle Lemuel?” Asher raised his eyebrows. “So, he decided to come to Pella after all?”

“I’m sure we’ll hear all about it during dinner,” his mother answered. “Now move aside from the fire please. I need to finish.”

Uncle Lemuel, Asher thought. His father’s oldest brother. He used to live right next door in Jerusalem, but when they moved to Pella two years ago, Uncle Lemuel chose not to go. He owned a large jewellery shop in Jerusalem, and business in Pella would just not be the same.

Asher was sad to leave Jerusalem, but life had become hard for Christians there. The church was under persecution, and the Jewish Council had even killed their leader, James, the brother of the Lord Jesus.

Then, one night, an elder had a vision telling him that the whole church must leave Jerusalem. The congregation was shocked, but not entirely surprised. Had Christ himself not warned his disciples about hard times ahead, telling them it would be better to flee Jerusalem?

Almost the entire church had moved to Pella, a city on the other side of the Jordan River. Fortunately, Asher’s best friends had moved too, so he did not have to make new ones.

Asher walked toward the olive tree behind the house. Was that man sitting next to his father really Uncle Lemuel? He barely recognised him. His hair was snow

¹ These stories have been commissioned by the Institute for Christian Education in South Africa. Pieter Boon serves as pastor of the Free Reformed Church Maranata in Pretoria and holds a PhD in church history. Jenny is an artist and mother of four who loves to write and illustrate children’s stories. The Boons have kindly translated the original Afrikaans stories into English.



white, and he was nothing but skin and bones. His legs were almost as thin as Asher's arms. Something terrible must have happened.

JERUSALEM SURROUNDED

Once everyone was sitting around the fire with their food served, Uncle Lemuel cleared his throat. "I'm not sure if this is the best story to tell over dinner," he began, "but I suppose you want to know how I ended up in this state."

"Tell us, Lemuel," Father said. "We really want to hear."

"We Jews aren't the easiest people," Uncle Lemuel started.

"Yes," Father agreed. "We know that all too well—especially that rebel group calling themselves the Zealots. They can't stand Roman rule."

Uncle Lemuel took a bite of the tasty stew. "The Roman army is powerful, but on the other hand, we Jews had a chance. Jerusalem had high walls and towers, and what's more, the granaries were packed with wheat. The Romans would not starve us out easily, even if they surrounded the city for months.

"We fought bravely, but we couldn't hold off the Romans. They were just too strong for us. Then something unexpected happened, a miracle, really. One day, General Vespasian and his army packed up everything and marched back to Rome. We couldn't believe it! Only later did we hear the reason: Emperor Nero was dead, and General Vespasian had returned to Rome to become the new emperor."

THE ROMANS RETURN

"What a relief that must have been!" Mother said.

"Yes, looking back, I should have come to you in Pella right then. But I refused to listen. I was far too attached to my worldly possessions."

Lemuel went quiet for a moment, staring off into the distance. Asher saw the pain on his uncle's face. Meanwhile, the sun had begun to set, colouring the horizon a deep bloodred. Father tossed another log onto the fire.

"The Romans leaving gave us a moment to breathe. This was time we should have used to prepare for the day they returned. But we did not. Instead of making plans and coming together, we started fighting among ourselves. One group wanted to stay on good terms with the Romans, while the other wanted to fight till the bitter end."

"Did Jews actually kill each other?" Asher asked.

"Indeed. It was brother against brother. And before long, the Romans were back. It was April, and the city was packed with people who had come to celebrate Passover. We tried to defend ourselves, but the military technology of the Romans was far more advanced than ours. All day long, you could hear the thuds of their battering rams."



The Romans besieged Jerusalem for almost five months.
Illustration by Jenny Boon

"Indeed. Every time they revolt again. Emperor Nero sent his armies to punish them, and eventually, they surrounded Jerusalem. From the roof of my shop, I could see Roman camps appearing all around the city. We knew trouble was coming."



Relief on the Arch of Titus, Rome. The Arch of Titus commemorates the Roman victory over Jerusalem in AD 70. It depicts sacred treasures from the temple being carried through Rome after the destruction of Jerusalem.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

“What is a battering ram?” Asher asked.

“A large wooden beam with a sharp iron tip, hanging from a frame. They slam it against the city wall repeatedly. And on top of that, they had huge catapults to launch boulders against the walls. After a while, the Romans decided to try a new tactic. They wanted to starve us out, so they built an extra wall around the city so that no one could get in or out. That was the beginning of total misery, because no food could enter the city. Fortunately, we still had the granaries inside; however, then another disaster happened. The Jews were fighting each other so fiercely that during one of the battles the granaries caught fire and burned to the ground.”

“How could they do something like that?” Mother shook her head in disbelief.

“No one knows,” Uncle Lemuel answered. “It was a time of pure madness. Maybe they did it simply because the grain belonged to their rivals. It was right around Passover, so there were far more people in the city than usual. Suddenly, we had a massive crowd and no food. Some tried to escape the city, but that was dangerous. The Romans crucified everyone they caught.”

“How awful!” Asher felt sick to his stomach. It had become dark, and somewhere in the distance, a jackal howled.

“People were starving to death. Everything was eaten. First the animals, but later the leather from shoes and belts.”

Asher looked down at his sandals. “Can you actually eat shoes?”

“No, but when you are starving, you get desperate,” Uncle Lemuel replied. “And that wasn’t even the worst.”

In the light of the fire, Asher looked again at Uncle Lemuel’s thin arms and sunken cheeks. He must have been so hungry!

“In total, we held out for five months, but then we couldn’t go on. The Romans took the city and burned the temple down.”

“The five-hundred-year-old house of God?” Father sounded crushed.

“Yes, brother. Not much is left of proud Jerusalem. Everything was burned down and destroyed.”

“And the people?” Mother was almost too afraid to ask.

“All captured or killed.”

Asher pushed his plate aside. He had been listening so intently that he had forgotten to eat, but now he had completely lost his appetite. It did not feel real. Beautiful Jerusalem, where he used to know every street and alley. Nothing was left of it. And all those people . . . it was unthinkable.

“How thankful we must be that the Lord preserved us through all of this,” Mother said. “It could easily have happened to us too.”

“It truly is extraordinary grace,” Father added.

“But how did you survive it all, Uncle Lemuel? How did you get here?” Asher asked.

“It really was a miracle from God,” Uncle Lemuel answered. “I pretended to be dead, so the Romans left me alone. But look where the moon is already. Let us get some sleep. Tomorrow, I’ll tell you the rest.” 🌙

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