



Lux Mundi

37:2 June 2018

Jesus said: "I am the light of the world." John 8:12

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The meaning of "holy"

Mission in Italy and Costa Rica

Conferences: Africa, Europe, and North America

News: the RCSA (GKSA) synod

Magazine published by the
International Conference of
Reformed Churches



FAITH IN PRACTICE

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As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1Peter 1:14-16 ESV)

How are you to fill in your life of hope each day again? Since you have become a child of God you cannot give free rein to your natural character and do as you may like.

Your life needs to testify that you are a child of God. Hence you live as Your heavenly Father wants you to live. We are to model being children of God's holiness. God is your standard, not just your conscience or your natural character. Before their conversion many of the people addressed in our text believed in gods that are as bad as humans. Their gods were slyness, deceiving each other, exchanging spouses, a lust for war.

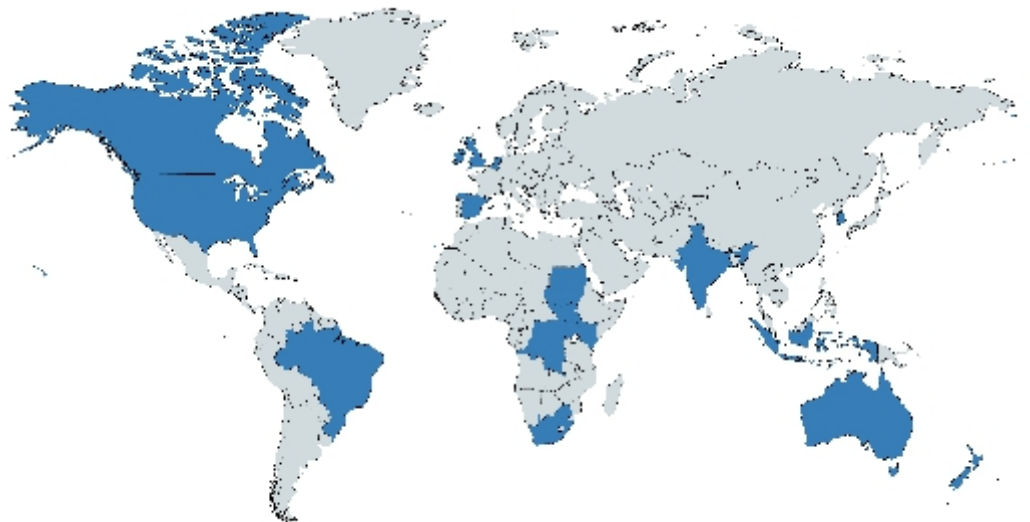
The true God is totally different! He is holy. The letter of Peter will spell out in further detail what this life means in practice for the believer. In short it means that you as believer, with all you are and have, are in service of God. In all you say or do you will first want to discern whether it receives God's approval. A human will want to push this mandate aside and piously asks: "How would I be able to live a holy life?"

We need to realize, though, that God does not ask us to do something you are to do in your own strength. Indeed, the call to live a holy life is well founded. You are to live a holy life because you are God's child (see 1Peter 1:3). ✱

From *Dagstukkies*, a devotional published by the Reformed Church in South Africa on its website.
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The logo combines the ICRC logo with the Lux Mundi monogram, an early Christian symbol combining the initials of Jesus Christ (in Greek I and X), referring to Him as the Light of the World (Lux Mundi).



Front cover picture: Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada. Photo: L. den Butter

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A HOLY CHURCH

"The church is holy, because she belongs to the Lord."

"We believe one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church." Thus the church, gathered at the Ecumenical Council of Nicea (325AD) summarized and professed this teaching of Scripture. The church is "holy". What does this mean? As on the next few pages you'll find an article on the term "holy", some reflection in our editorial as well.

For most people the word "holy" evokes the image of "sinless". Holy people – in the English language called "saints" – are generally considered to be people who have reached a certain level of goodness. And thus "a holy church" is quickly conceived of as a church which has attained a certain level of goodness.

The idea is not entirely wrong. "Be holy for I am holy" is a theme that runs through the Mosaic Law, especially the book Leviticus. This divine command is repeated by the Apostle Peter (see the devotional earlier). In this context the concept "holiness" certainly has moral implications.

However, it is also clear from a simple reading of Scripture that holy cannot just mean "without sin". It cannot just have moral implications. For in the sinless world of the creation week God set aside the seventh day as a Sabbath day "and made it holy". When I discuss the fourth commandment with catechism students it is a neat question to ask to make the point: "Does the hallowing of the Sabbath mean it's a day on which sin is less okay than on other days?"

There are more realities in Scripture that are holy, without having a moral side to them. The tabernacle and temple were holy. The utensils used in the worship of God were holy. The sacrifices were holy. This "holiness" is not in relation to morality, but in relation to position or status. What is "holy" is devoted to the service of God. This holiness category would also apply to the priests. They were holy by virtue of being in God's service, not because they were without sin.

What of the church being holy? Is it a positional holiness or a moral holiness?

The answer – in light of the article that follows – is that it is the first, with the implication of a morality to strive for. It is a positional holiness that brings with the calling to moral goodness. The members of the church in Corinth are addressed as saints by the Apostle Paul (1Cor. 1:2). Yet one would hesitate to hold up the Corinthian congregation as a fitting illustration of a "good church". For, given the letter that follows, there's a lot amiss in the Corinthian church.

The church is holy, because she belongs to the Lord. The Apostle Peter wrote, the church is "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God's] own possession" (1Peter 2:9).

There are two reasons for being such. The first is: to proclaim the excellencies of God (1Peter 2:9). The second is: to abstain from the passions of the sinful nature (1Peter 2:11). That the church is holy will be evident from her talk and walk, from the gospel she proclaims and the love she practices.

Our prayer to our Holy Father is that He will equip the church to be holy, proclaiming the true Gospel far and wide and living up to the calling of love and loyalty. ✱



Niagara Falls. Photo: L. den Butter



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DOES 'HOLY' MEAN 'SET APART'?

"The church is holy, because she belongs to the Lord."

"The word 'holy' basically means 'set apart'." You've probably heard that statement from the pulpit or perhaps in catechism class.¹ It's the sort of thing that ministers say when they're talking about saints or sanctification. It's the kind of statement that you take for granted and don't really question. But is it true? I recently read a paper by David Clines which argues that it's not true, at least not in Hebrew. As the general editor of the eight-volume *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, Clines is one of the foremost Hebrew lexicographers alive today, so he's worth listening to.² He presented this paper at the Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, held recently in Stellenbosch, South Africa. Its title is "Alleged Basic Meanings of the Hebrew verb *qdš* 'be holy'."³

In this paper Clines engages in what he calls "comparative Hebrew lexicography" (1), which means that he compares a variety of Hebrew dictionaries or lexicons published over the past 500 years or so, in order to determine where this idea comes from, that the word for 'holy' basically means 'set apart,' and whether this idea should be maintained. I'd like to summarize what he has to say for the Hebrew, and then take it a bit further and discuss the Greek and the English words as well, and so conclude whether it's true at all that 'holy' means 'set apart.'

Hebrew

Let's start with the Hebrew. Here we're talking about the noun *qodesh* (holiness), the adjective *qadosh* (holy) and the verb *qadash* (be holy). Clines notes that in the dictionary of Brown, Driver, and Briggs (or BDB for short), it says that the Hebrew root *qdš* has "the possible original idea of separation or withdrawal" (2).⁴ BDB got this idea from a book entitled "The Concept of Holiness in the Old Testament,"



written in 1878 by a German scholar named Wolf Graf von Baudissin, who in turn got it from Heinrich Fleischer, a teacher of Franz Delitzsch (6). Fleischer and Baudissin speculated that the word comes from an earlier root *qd*, which supposedly meant 'to cut or to separate.' There is no evidence that any ancient Semitic language ever had such a root, however. There is an Arabic word, *qadda*, which means "to cut", but there's no evidence that this word is related to the Hebrew root *qdš*. Nonetheless, BDB cited 'separation' as a possible meaning for the root and then went on to suggest that the verb *qadash* primarily means 'to be set apart,' and that the noun *qodesh* means 'apartness.' In short, this meaning was suggested on the basis of the etymology or origin of the word.

There are two problems with this. First of all, the etymology is very shaky, and more recent dictionaries have rejected it: Koehler-Baumgartner's lexicon mentions it but disapproves of it, and so does Clines himself (7).⁵ Secondly, and more fundamentally, etymology does not tell us what a word means but only where it came from and how it developed. James Barr made this point abundantly clear in his 1961 book, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*. What a word actually means is determined by its use in context, and when you look up all the occurrences of this root in Biblical Hebrew, it refers to a quality of God (holy, divine), or what is in the realm of God or belongs to God (sacred). It is the opposite of the word *ḥol*, which means 'common' or 'non-sacred.' Thus holiness is not a moral quality (it doesn't say whether a

¹ This article was first presented as a chapel message at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary on November 29, 2016. Footnotes have been kept to a minimum.

² David J. A. Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993-2011). A ninth, index volume has also been published. DCH is available for major Bible software programs such as Accordance.

³ The paper is available online at academia.edu. Page numbers in parentheses refer to the online version.

⁴ F. Brown, S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Hendrickson, [1906] 1979), 871.

⁵ L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (trans. M. E. J. Richardson; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 3:1072. Interestingly, Clines' own Dictionary does include the gloss 'set apart' for both the Piel and the Hiphil forms of the verb. (DCH 7:192-93). I imagine that this will be changed in the next edition.

person is good or bad), but a ritual status (15).⁶ To be sure, in the Old Testament there are sacred spaces that are distinct from non-sacred spaces and there are both sacred and common people and things, but that does not yet imply that the word means “to set apart.”

Here is Clines' conclusion: “When God is said to be [qadosh], no other characteristic or quality is in view than his deity, i.e. his being God. When a person or thing is [qadosh], it means that it belongs to the deity, no more than that. The natural English equivalent for qdš is 'holy', but 'divine' and 'sacred' are usually also appropriate translations” (15). I'm not entirely convinced of the first conclusion, that it refers simply to God's deity: holy and divine are related concepts, but they're not entirely synonymous. Yet I do believe that Clines is correct that we should relinquish the meaning “set apart” for the root qdš. There are other Hebrew words that do mean 'to set apart,' notably the verb *badal*, which means 'to separate.' But there is little evidence that *badal* and *qadash* are synonyms. In fact, it is the verb *badal* that is used for making a separation between the holy and the common (Lev 10:10, Ezek 22:26, 42:20).

Now if all of this stayed in the rather esoteric corner of Hebrew lexicography, then it might not matter so much: we could simply adjust our vocabulary and carry on with life. But, as you know, the meanings of words affect theology, and that's certainly true of holiness. Let me take Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* as a case in point. Berkhof discusses the meaning of holiness in his section about the attributes of God. His very first sentence there reads as follows: “The Hebrew word for 'to be holy,' *qudash* [sic], is derived from the root *qad*, which means to cut or to separate.”⁷ Three guesses where he got that from—and no, he doesn't have a footnote. Berkhof continues, “In its original sense [the holiness of God] denotes that he is absolutely distinct from all his creatures, and is exalted above them in infinite majesty.”⁸ There you see how the notion of separation has impacted his doctrine of God's holiness. That's not to say that Berkhof is entirely off-base, for he continues, “holiness in this sense of the word is not really a *moral* attribute, which can be coordinated with the others, such as love, grace, and mercy, but is rather something that is co-extensive with, and applicable to, everything that can be predicated of God.”⁹ There he is very close to Clines. Nevertheless, though he says it's not a moral attribute, Berkhof does discuss holiness under the category of God's “moral attributes,” and that, perhaps, needs to be

reconsidered. In short, the meanings of words have an impact on the shaping of theological concepts, and thus, if the meanings of words are corrected, then the theological concepts too should be re-evaluated. That's the main reason why I'm drawing Clines' paper to your attention.

Greek

Now, to be sure, our theological vocabulary is drawn not only from the Hebrew words of the Old Testament but also from the Greek words of the New. So what about *hagios* and *hagiazō*, the Greek words for holiness? Do they mean 'set apart'? According to Berkhof, they do. Right after saying that *qadash* comes from the root *qad*, which means to cut or separate, Berkhof adds, “The same idea is conveyed by the New Testament words *hagiazō* and *hagios*.”¹⁰ I have not done a full study of these Greek words, but let me mention a few points. First, in Classical Greek *hagios* and *hagiazō* (or *hagizo*, as it was spelled back then) do not seem to mean “set apart.” At least the classic lexicon of Liddell-Scott-Jones and the new dictionary of Franco Montanari do not give this meaning. Both say that *hagios* means 'devoted to the gods, sacred, holy, pure,' and that it can also have the negative connotation of 'execrable' or 'accursed.’¹¹ So its meaning in classical Greek overlaps with two Hebrew words, namely *qadosh* (holy) and *herem* (devoted to destruction).

In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and in the New Testament *hagios* never has the negative meaning but only the positive one. The Septuagint generally uses *hagios* or *hagiazō* to translate the root *qđš*, but for the word *herem* it uses 'anathema' or 'anathematize. Does the Septuagint ever use *hagios* or *hagiazō* in the sense of 'set apart'? Well, the *New English Translation of the Septuagint* has the phrase 'set apart' fifty-five times—but never for *hagios* or *hagiazō*.¹² I could not find any evidence that the Greek words gained the meaning 'set apart' via the Septuagint.¹³

What about the New Testament itself? Louis Berkhof begins his treatment of the doctrine of sanctification by saying that, “The verb *hagiazō* is a derivative of *hagios*,

⁶ I should mention that Clines also discusses (and ultimately rejects) several other meanings for qđš that have been proposed in older dictionaries, such as 'be clean,' 'prepare,' and 'be unclean' (7-14). These will not be dealt with here.

⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 73.

⁸ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 73.

⁹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 73.

¹⁰ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 73.

¹¹ Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Revised Ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 9; Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (ed. M. Goh and C. Schroeder; Leiden: Brill, 2015), 12-13.

which like the Hebrew *qadosh* expresses primarily the idea of separation”¹⁴ Standard dictionaries of New Testament Greek do not agree with him, however. Louw and Nida's lexicon does not give the meaning 'set apart' for either *hagios* or *hagiozo*.¹⁵ Danker's lexicon does give the meaning 'to set something aside' for *hagiozo*, but then it qualifies that by adding, 'or make it suitable for ritual purposes, consecrate, dedicate.' If something is *hagios* in the cultic sense, that means it is 'reserved' for God and his service, says Danker, so the word does have the nuance of restricted use.¹⁶ Further it should be noted that the meaning of the Greek word for 'holy' is not entirely the same as its Hebrew counterpart. Unlike *qadosh*, *hagios* can have a moral sense: Louw and Nida say that in some contexts *hagios* means “holy in the sense of superior moral qualities and possessing certain essentially divine qualities in contrast with what is human.”¹⁷

At the very least, then, it should be acknowledged that 'set apart' is not a predominant meaning for the Greek words in the New Testament either. Hence ministers who use the notion of separateness to explain what holiness is run the risk of reading foreign ideas into the text. All the more reason, then, to make sure that this idea does not intrude unduly into the doctrines of God and of sanctification. If these doctrines must include a notion of 'apartness,' then this notion needs to be established from somewhere else than the Greek and Hebrew words.

English


How well do our English Bibles fare in translating these words? Over the whole, I would say, “Not bad.” The ESV has the phrase 'set apart' thirty-two times, but only four of these translate the root *qdš* in the Old Testament (Josh 20:7, Neh 12:47 [twice], Jer 12:3), and only one of these translates *hagiozo* in the New Testament (2 Tim 2:21). All the other occurrences translate other Hebrew and Greek words that really do mean 'set apart.' The statistics for the 1984 NIV are very similar.¹⁸ A few of these passages in the ESV and NIV may need to be reviewed for accuracy, but I'm not really concerned that our English translations are leading us astray.

That brings me at last to the meaning of the English word 'holy.' Does the English word have the notion of being 'set apart'? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'holy' means “dedicated or consecrated to God or a religious purpose; sacred.” A holy person, then, is someone who is “devoted to the service of God.”¹⁹ Now, does “devoted to the service of God” mean the same thing as “set apart”? Not quite. For one thing, 'set apart' does not specify what

something is set apart *for*, whereas 'holy' specifies that something is consecrated or devoted *to God*; it is more explicitly religious. For another, 'set apart' focuses on the action of separating or the result of that action, while the word 'holy' does not. Furthermore, the English word 'holy' can be used in the moral sense of being spiritually excellent or pure, just like the Greek word *hagios*, but unlike the Hebrew word *qadosh*.

I have three closing reflections. First of all, it's not surprising to hear ministers say that 'holy' means 'set apart.' After all, BDB and Berkhof both say so. Unfortunately this idea is inaccurate and misleading. I've presented this material because it has implications for theology, and it's not always easy for ministers and theologians to stay up-to-date with Biblical lexicography. Older books such as that of Louis Berkhof are not always reliable when it comes to explanations of Greek and Hebrew terms. That doesn't mean, of course, that his doctrines of the holiness of God and of sanctification are completely wrong. Berkhof was too good a theologian to let his doctrines rest on the meanings of words. There are places, however, where correction is needed, particularly where word meanings do shape his theology.

Secondly, I would argue that a theology of holiness should not only reflect the way words are used *in the Bible*, but also the way words are used *in English*. To say to a native speaker of English that 'holy' means 'set apart' can come across as a card trick or sleight of hand: you've deftly exchanged one English expression for another one but you act as though they are one and the same, even though in ordinary English usage they are not. We run the risk of confusing our people, if not misleading them. So the next time somebody tells you that the word 'holy' basically means 'set apart,' you tell them, “Nope, the word 'holy' basically means 'holy'.”

A third and final reflection: I wonder to what extent the notion of being 'set apart' has formed the ethos of Reformed Churches. Is it possible that we have portrayed holiness too much as a matter of being separate and not enough as a matter of being *devoted to God*? 

¹⁸ It has 'set apart' thirty-four times, but only eight of these are for *qdš* and only two for *hagiozo*.

¹⁹ Consulted online: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/holy>.

This article was used with the author's permission. It was submitted for publication in *Diakonia*, a quarterly for office bearers published in North America.



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COSTA RICA MINISTRY CENTER OPENS

Jubilant Celebration

Seventeen years after construction began, Costa Rica Ministry Center is finally being fully utilized. The facility houses three ministries: the CECRE (Centro Educativo Cristiano Reformado) Christian High School, the CLIR (Confraternidad Latinoamericana de Iglesias Reformadas) printing operation, and the Pacto de Gracia congregation. The church has held worship services in a finished room on the second level of the building for several years, but

pupils.

It took a full day to move the printing operation from the garage of missionaries Bill and Aletha Green three miles and up a hill to the new building. Workers used a forklift to load presses and other equipment onto two trucks that made the trip three times. The CLIR print shop occupies the Ministry Center's ground floor and shares an office with the high school. Air-conditioning keeps the shop and

storage area free from humidity. More convenient installations will increase printing volume.

Getting it done

Many Christian Renewal readers have participated in work groups at the site since 2001. As many as four or five crews arrived annually from about 2005-2012. Construction then stalled for nearly five years, due to financial recessions and sharp increases in the cost of building materials. But almost two years ago, a contractor offered a quote of \$330,000 to finish the project.

"The contractor was great,"

Rev. Green says. "We got an extra 25 percent built for the quoted amount. Four sheds, cafeteria, poured parking, and a lot of other nice things. God is good!"

The ministry

Bill and Aletha Green have been working with missions in Costa Rica for over three decades. Aletha continues to be active with the Christian school, after having served many years as principal and on the board. She helped organize senior class trips to Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 2016 and



the high school and print shop moved in during February of 2018. An open house to celebrate this significant milestone was scheduled for April 6.

In use

The 115 high school students and instructors enjoyed their first day of classes in the new building on February 12. The larger space in a clean and quiet location includes a cafeteria area. While the students in six grades nearly fill the available space, there is room for about 40 more



Chino, California, in 2017. Her current service includes baking sweet treats for a worldview class the couple conducts in their home.

"Our 33 years of experience in Costa Rica has enabled us to identify cultural impediments, and the worldview class is addressing this," Rev. Green says. "Some things are universal: individualism, selfishness. Some things are specific to Costa Rica—people have a difficult time working together as a team. Our primary goal is to ensure that following generations will sustain and push the Costa Rican Reformed ministries forward."

The three ministries seem to be moving forward. The school's student body is steadily growing. The Pacto de Gracia Reformed Church has enjoyed growth during the past year and a steady stream of visitors. Many parents from within the school community are becoming interested in the church due to its biblical distinctiveness. God is providing men to assume more leadership in CLIR as well. Lester Martinez serves as administrator and

Daniel Lobo is a translator and editor. The two men are elders licensed to exhort.

"They both combine their love for God's kingdom and the church with their passion for CLIR's ministry—in publications, conferences, and church support," Rev. Green says. "Both are willing to serve the CLIR ministry for the long haul. Praise the Lord for these two men, their tremendous gifts, and their commitment to the Lord and His church."

Prayer

Ministries and individuals making advances in Kingdom work often feel the presence of spiritual warfare, and those involved with the Costa Rican ministry are no exception. They request prayer for that and other matters. "We feel the attacks of the evil one, even as so many good things are happening," Rev. Green says. "Please pray that God will protect and use us." ❄



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MISSION TO ITALY

"I went into the bathroom, closed the door, got down on my knees to pray, and cried."

A decision

The decision to serve as missionaries for Reformation Italy, beginning in June of 2018, was extremely difficult for Pastor Mike Brown and his wife, Janie. God's will became increasingly clear through many circumstances and people over the last two years, but what finalized their conviction were unanticipated questions posed this past summer by their 11-year-old son, Iain.

In Pastor Brown's letter to the Christ United Reformed congregation he currently serves in Santee, California, he related his conversation with Iain while they visited Italy's far south. "'Dad, who will be the pastor for the people here in Cannole?' I carefully replied, 'Well, we hope that God will send Vincenzo [a student at Westminster Seminary California] after he graduates seminary. But we need to pray about that.' 'Who will be the pastor in Perugia?' 'Well...We don't know yet. We need to pray.' 'Don't the people want Pastor Ferrari there?'

'Well, yes, the people are very happy with Pastor Ferrari, but...we need to pray.' 'If Pastor Ferrari goes to Perugia, who will be the pastor for the people in Milan?' 'Son, we just need to pray that God will supply a pastor, so that all the churches here can grow, OK?' 'Dad, I think we should pray and ask God to send you here. You could help them.' I smiled and said something like, 'Well, we'll see.' I went into the bathroom, closed the door, got down on my knees to pray, and cried."

That may have been a turning point for Pastor Brown, but Rev. Andrea Ferrari had hoped his friend would join him in the work of Reformation Italy ever since Rev. Brown had assisted him during the summer of 2015. When the Browns returned for the summer months of 2017, Rev.

Brown filled the pulpit in Milan, while Rev. Ferrari pastored a small group in Perugia. This period of ministry convinced both men that Rev. Ferrari was a good fit for the work in Perugia and Rev. Brown could serve well in Milan.



Reverend Brown and Reverend Ferrari

Executing the decision

Having both arrived at the same conviction, they worked up a proposal suggesting this division of labor as Reformation Italy goes forward toward its goal of establishing a Reformed federation in Italy. The Christ URC consistory discussed the proposal and then sought counsel at the September meeting of Classis Southwest US.

"The delegates were very supportive of the proposal," Rev. Brown said. "They have been familiar with CURC's mission to Italy since 2009."



The elders at Christ URC also sought the advice of the URCNA Missions Committee. Missions Coordinator Rev. Richard Bout and Rev. Paul Murphy traveled to Italy and recommended the plan to Christ URC's consistory. The Milan and Perugia groups each voted unanimously in favor of the proposed pastors serving them.

Christ URC's elders additionally conversed at length with the elders in Milan, a new elder in Perugia, and Pastor Ivan Forte in Turin. Revs. Ferrari and Brown had worked with Pastor Forte during the summer, helping prepare him for a ministerial examination. Because Rev. Brown has traveled to Italy several times since 2009 and has studied Italian intensely in recent years, he is proficient enough to preach without a translator. Christ URC's council voted unanimously for the proposal at its October meeting. Churches within Classis Southwest US have expressed support, and the plan is scheduled for implementation in June of 2018.

Sharing the labour

Rev. Ferrari explained that Rev. Brown can immediately and effectively serve people who already know him within the established and organized church in Milan, a multicultural city similar to San Diego. "When Rev. Brown arrives, he will be able to concentrate at once and without any distraction on his pastoral responsibilities and refining his knowledge of the language/culture." He added, "On the other hand, I have been visiting Perugia regularly in the last three years, knowing the people and the place so that it is much easier for me to labor there as a church planting pastor."

Perugia is a university city and has a population of about 175,000 people, with a culture is very different from Milan, according to Ferrari.

"Because of the load of work and need for wisdom from more people," Rev. Ferrari said, "we think that more than one consistory in the US should be involved in the work in Italy and also that the Missions Committee itself should determine a plan to be more present on the field to assist and encourage Rev. Brown and myself, helping us to form a class of mature elders and deacons in the churches." Ordaining office-bearers in Turin and Perugia will permit the churches to begin holding Classis meetings, the first step toward organizing Chiesa Riformate in Italia (CRI, Reformed Churches in Italy).

The Browns plan to sell their house and apply for a religious visa through the Italian consulate. Iain is

preparing for the move by going to a private tutor and doing daily homework in Italian. The family hopes to commit to the mission for at least five years. Rev. Brown anticipates raising financial support from URCNA churches and private donors.

"Janie and I are confident that just as the Lord supplied our family's needs while I was in seminary, he will provide for our family again," he said.

Backgrounds

Pastor Brown graduated from Westminster Seminary California in 2004, but began teaching a Bible study in Santee a year earlier under the oversight of the Escondido URC consistory. The congregation became an organized church in September of 2006 and Rev. Brown was installed in January of 2007. He and Janie love their church and have rejoiced to see God's amazing work in it.

"He has established CURC as a congregation that has remained hungry for the gospel and willing to love one another," Pastor Brown said. "He has marked this church with peace rather than controversy, and service rather than selfishness. On top of that, God has used CURC to produce several pastors and missionaries that are now serving the church in different parts of the world. He has done far more abundantly than we ever thought or imagined."

The church has been involved with mission work in Italy since early in its organization, when they began supporting a ministry that published Reformed literature. Christ URC member, Simonetta Carr, translated projects for the editor, Rev. Andrea Ferrari, who pastored a Reformed Baptist church.

The field

As Rev. Ferrari became more familiar with the Reformed faith, he and his congregation sought affiliation with more confessionally Reformed churches. Rev. Ferrari sustained a colloquium doctum in Classis Southwest US, and Christ URC ordained him as a missionary pastor to establish a Reformed federation of churches in Italy. He subsequently has preached primarily in Milan's Chiesa Evangelica Filadelfia, but Reformed believers from other areas have been in contact with him after discovering the Milan church's website.

The group in Perugia, about four hours south of Milan, has prayed for a pastor for years. For the last two years, they have gathered in front of a computer to worship with the church in Milan via Skype. About every eight weeks, Rev.

Ferrari administers the Lord's Supper and provides pastoral care. The congregation loves Rev. Ferrari and his wife, Christina, and looks forward to their arrival in June.

Another group in Turin, about 80 miles west of Milan, is led by Rev. Forte. Pastor Ferrari travels to Turin monthly to instruct church members in the Three Forms of Unity and the URCNA Church Order.

Expanding work

Rev. Ferrari explained that there is contact with a handful of Reformed believers in a part of the Italian “heel” with few Protestant and evangelical churches. The hope is for God to raise up Reformed pastors to minister to these groups and eventually form a federation.

Two Italian brothers are attending seminaries in the US. Vincenzo Coluccia, a member of the Turin church, left a position as an engineer and is in his second year at Westminster Seminary California. Ottavio Palombaro, from Perugia, is a student at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids and attends Cornerstone URC in Hudsonville, Michigan.

As the URCNA Missions Committee sought counsel on establishing a Reformed federation in Italy, they were

consistently advised to seek an experienced minister to come alongside Rev. Ferrari. Rev. Brown has 14 years of pastoral experience. He chaired the URCNA study committee on missions, helped write mission policies for the URCNA, and served as Chairman of the URCNA Missions Committee, on which he still serves.

Rev. Brown originally resisted the idea of becoming a full-time missionary and was reluctant to leave his home and church. “Janie and I were willing to go wherever God called us, but we quietly hoped that he would send someone else.”

He thought his 2017 trip to Italy might be his last. “This arrangement did not seem sustainable for CURC or for me personally. We agreed to go to Milan for three months because we believed it was necessary for the starving group in Perugia.” But then God used Iain's words to convince him otherwise.

For more information on the work in Italy, see Reformation Italy's updated website at www.reformationitaly.org.



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Reverend Brown and Reverend Ferrari

ICRC DIACONAL COMMITTEE PRESS RELEASE

The Diaconal Committee has been appointed by the ICRC mainly to provide a network for member churches on diaconal matters. We are guided by the principle found in Galatians 6:10: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

In the past a perception existed that churches with diaconal needs could come to the DC, who would then reach out to them on behalf of the ICRC. This was not correct, and it has been explained on the ICRC Jordan 2017. The DC doesn't have a budget of its own for diaconal needs in the ICRC family. Neither does it have the manpower to investigate and approve incoming requests for assistance. All members of the DC are volunteers, each with his own full-time ministry. The purpose of the DC is rather to be a networking body, assisting churches to come into contact with other member churches, or parachurch organisations working on behalf of member churches.

In order to fulfill this networking function properly, DC needs to be in contact with the member churches. In this regard the ICRC Jordan 2017 has stressed that diaconal matters should become a standard agenda item on the meetings of the regional conferences, as it is also on the international conference's agenda.

With this press release we want to call on all regional conference representatives and those involved in organizing the regional conferences, to communicate in time with us, and to make sure that the DC can explain its role during the regional conference, so that we as DC can start assisting churches to network amongst each other with regards to diaconal matters.

The Diaconal Committee consists of members from each continent:

The Rev. Dr. Aaron Bae (South Korea)
aaroneebae@yahoo.com

Mr. Chris Boersema (Brazil)
chrisboersema@gmail.com

The Rev. Dr. Pieter Boon (South Africa)
fampgboon@gmail.com
Secretary of DC

Mr. David Nakhla (United States of America)
david.nakhla@opc.org

Mr. Rick Postma (Canada)
publicrelations@wordanddeed.org

Drs. Ko Serier (Netherlands)
k.serier@zonnet.nl

The Rev. Dirk van Garderen (New Zealand)
dirkjvg@gmail.com
Convenor of DC



Reverend D. van Garderen

We neglected to acknowledge that the painting reproduced on page 14 of the March 2018 edition of *Lux Mundi* is by Henk Helmantel. Our apologies.

- The editors.



Rev. Paul Bukenya is elder and serves as minister with Nkumba Presbyterian Church (PCU, Uganda).

ICRC AFRICA REGION CONFERENCE

An interview on the ICRC vision in Africa

The ICRC Africa Region Conference was held from 1st to 5th August 2016, at Westminster Christian Institute, Uganda, with the constitution of the ICRC Africa Region Committee as one of the key objectives. The extensively consultative process was finally concluded on the sidelines of the 9th Meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, held in Jordan, Ontario, Canada, from July 12 – 19, 2017.

Lux Mundi's Africa Region Editor, Bukenya Paul, talked to Rev. Daniel Kithongo, Chairperson of ICRC Africa Region and Rev. Fred Kabenge, Secretary, ICRC Africa Region about their plans to advance reformed missions and promote the vision of ICRC in the Africa Region.

1. How would you describe the condition (health and growth) of reformed churches in Africa today?

Reformed missions to the African continent date back to the 17th Century, in the case of Southern Africa, and through the 18th and 19th centuries in the case of Western and Eastern Africa. Reformed missions have since been established across most parts of the continent, growing through complex eras of colonial rule and apartheid, nationalism and liberation struggle, independence and stability, growth, democracy and civil

war, tribalism and religious conflicts, hunger, poverty and disease, intellectualism, technological advancement and terrorism, biblical evangelism, false teachers and cults. This is the mission field that reformed churches, and other Christian missions, have had to contend with; we praise the Lord God because these contextual (historical and contemporary) realities have not stopped the Church from continuing to advance the gospel mandate.

Today, we see continuing attacks by false teachers, cults, divisions, disease and corruption, God remains faithful and gives victory in all these areas. His Word remains our anchor and gives health and growth to the churches. Yes, we need to address critical areas, especially training and facilitating clergy to effectively serve and maintain healthy churches and meet spiritual and physical needs of our communities.

As reformed churches, we aim to be churches that play a critical role in society; hence we emphasise a theology of development that focuses on holistic people-centered development from a practical theological perspective. There is deliberate effort to empower the local church for an effective role in community development, by establishing a school, health center, water and sanitation



African Regional Conference of Reformed Churches 2016

project, and agricultural initiatives aimed at improving household incomes. We are largely progressive churches which are serving as agents of socio-economic change through people-centered development.

In view of complex social, political and economic situations, we aim as churches to establish cordial relations between people in the community, with a message that people should live in peace with God and one another. We believe and teach that when people are reconciled with God and each other, new relationships are established. The converted sinners obtain freedom to engage in cross-cultural, cross-political and cross-economic relations without discrimination. This also helps

Region was constituted in July 2017 during the ICRC Conference in Jordan, Ontario, Canada. As a Region, we have plans to meet and discuss several issues including specific statements on mission and vision of ICRC Africa Region. But it is important to note that as members of ICRC, we share the common objectives of the Conference, which are:

- a. to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ;
- b. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches;
- c. to encourage cooperation among the member churches in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates;

- d. to study the common problems and issues that confront the member churches and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters;

- e. to present a Reformed testimony to the world

Therefore, any formulation of vision and mission statements will fall within the above aspirations. In the meantime, our immediate task is to introduce and promote ICRC to the Africa region, in cooperation with the ICRC Theological Education Committee, and other Committees.

3. How can membership in ICRC help the mission of reformed churches in Africa?

We believe that membership to a conference like the ICRC will help reformed churches in Africa access a common platform to advance the Gospel mission across the continent and beyond.

Churches in Africa serve in an environment that has much in common, cultural-social, political, economical and technological. Given the several (theological and ecclesiastical) challenges that we still have as (comparatively) young churches, the Conference gives us a forum to discuss and find common answers, and to encourage each other in our Gospel mission.

Equally important, the Conference connects us to other believers around the world in fellowship, and with these believers, we can work together to achieve the common missionary mandate.

We wish to emphasise that fellowship is a very important



Africa RCRC – 2016

us to heal the hurting of the past and promote health and growth of the body.

We are also mindful and watchful of the fast changing political, cultural-social, economic and technological landscape, which often put sound biblical teaching and doctrinal standards to a test. This is why fellowship with bodies like ICRC is important, because in this fellowship, we are able to study the common problems and find solutions to these matters and remain healthy and growing.

2. What is the mission and vision of ICRC Africa Region?

The formal administrative Committee of ICRC Africa

aspect of our journey as disciples of Christ; it is important that we come together, to share together with other believers the common union we have with Christ and each other.

4. What are the immediate challenges of ICRC Africa?

Our immediate challenge is to increase and sustain awareness among our membership about the ICRC Africa Region, and ensure that our respective General Assemblies and local churches own and support the Regional Conference, its objectives and activities.

We aim at encouraging fellowship among the existing member churches and then building on this unity to reach and bring other reformed churches into our fellowship.

Administratively, we have the task of building and coordinating our capacity to effectively utilize available opportunities for bilateral and/or multilateral cooperation in the areas of missions, education and mercy/diaconal ministry.

5. What are the challenges facing reformed churches and institutions in Africa region?

Reformed churches face the common challenge of negative legacy of missionary association with colonialism. Reformed faith continues to be seen as an extension of a foreign culture that was brought by the western powers to be imposed upon Africans.

Reformed faith as a lived ecclesial reality has been, and still is, fundamentally determined by the conviction that God is sovereign and central; the Bible as mediation of his Word is the authoritative source and norm for all of life; and Christian vocation embraces worship, study and service. This perspective on ecclesiology is not equally shared by the majority of people especially those who think that man still has something to offer for his salvation. Reformed people will always find it challenging to reorient such people and bring them to a place where they begin to appreciate the beauty of God's sovereignty in working out his predetermined plan and purposes for mankind.

Despite the appreciation for the "richness" of the Reformed Theology, there appears to be "somehow a problem" in Africa. There is a general feeling that the reformed faith cannot provide a remedy for those under

torment by witchcraft and other spiritual forces instead it encourages people to endure suffering rather helping to change their oppressive circumstances. This kind of sentiment among people has always led them to view charismatic influences as more appealing to them because of their strong emphasis on physical deliverance for those under oppression by evil forces.

The political, cultural, religious and theological pluralism in a number of African states also pose serious moral challenges to the Reformed faith as they threaten the oneness of the Gospel and the unity of the faith. In the midst of religious plurality, the church is being forced to redefine its identity and mission vocation. There is a tendency to try to revisit the Biblical theology and the Logos Christology of the early church, and to examine the basics of our faith in a broader perspective. Such a move obviously leads to some level of compromise as churches try to conform to prevailing social and cultural landscape.

We need to add that Reformed churches face the



Welcoming the PCU as members at the ICRC 2017

challenge of spreading influence of Islam, and the effects of its radicalism and extremism. The ICRC Africa Region Conference (August 2016) observed that both Christian clergy and laity have not been adequately prepared to witness to Moslems. But as Dr. Mutei Joseph wisely counseled the Conference, in the face of rising extremism, we have to remain the Church, cherish and act the Kingdom value of Love, because you cannot preach to the one you hate.

6. Where do you see ICRC Africa in the next five years?

ICRC Africa should over the years cultivate a sense of servant leadership in its service in the kingdom of God on the African continent. This is an essential part of Christian attitude and can thus be described as the core value of being a church in a modern-day African liberal democracy. As a servant of Christ, the church is thus a unique community in the midst of many other human communities in modern society. It has its own character, calling and way of doing things. It is responsible for its actions not to humankind, but to Christ, Sekhalelo (2016:4).

With the combined effort of the reformed churches on the continent of Africa under the common banner of ICRC, the platform for spreading the gospel of grace, which is well represented in the five solas will have been broadened. The prospects of expanding the horizons of reformed faith on the continent are certainly very high. Under the only one Head of the Church Jesus Christ, the church shall have made great strides in her task of living and carrying out the Word of the Lord to all people (Mt 28:19–20; Mk 16:15–16).

This Good News should offer lost people in Africa what they are frantically searching for: forgiveness, freedom, security, purpose, love, acceptance and strength. It settles the people's past, assures their future and gives meaning for today (Ande 2010:56; Bauckham 2003:11; Berkhof 1996:577; De Bruyn 1998a:154; Parker 1995:131).

With the current rise and popularity of cults, false teachings and non-biblical philosophies in Africa and around the world, the mission of the Reformed Churches should be to return to the roots and foundation of our faith and present a balanced Biblical Christianity that will not only be conducive to the spiritual unity of the church but will bring out the essence of the full Gospel message that alone shows the way to salvation and eternal redemption (Cairns 1996:274; Dever, 2004:39).

Moreover, churches must proclaim the Gospel with courage and boldness. Their preaching must preserve the truth which we have received as our Christian heritage, based on historical origins and the revelation of God (2 Tm3:14–17).

7. How do you plan to handle theological controversies within ICRC, for example on sexuality and church offices?

The church is under pressure today to conform to the present popular cultural norms and forms of relativistic practices, while downplaying the centrality of all moral

absolutes. Many church denominations that formerly stood faithfully for orthodoxy in regard to ethical standards and the position God's word play in the believer's life are now being swept away by the blowing wind of our time that calls for redefinition of biblical standards to conform to the order and popular cultural demands of the day. In an environment like this, we will prayerfully stand firm and promote teaching that is true and faithful to scripture and respond to these challenges by continuing to uphold the old time scriptural truths without compromise.

On matters of sexuality, the best way for the church to reorient the disoriented world is to root our understanding of gender in Scripture. The biblical text, while clear and authoritative about sexuality, is ultimately about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Questionable hermeneutics not only cloud the roles of men and women but ultimately the gospel of Jesus Christ. Scripture uses the analogy of a husband and wife to illustrate Christ's relationship with his church. Christ as husband (groom) is the head of his church (bride) Ephesians 5: 22-33. To redefine gender roles within the family and home would automatically lead to redefining the relationship that exist between Christ and his Church. The relationship between man and women is God's creation which cannot be altered without breeding unnecessary gender confusion in the creation order. Moreover, scripture intends for both men and women to be equally involved and engaged in ministry and society. Being equally involved in ministry does not entail being interchangeably involved.

The ICRC as the current bearer of the reformers' torch, can and should never shy away from proclaiming these old time Biblical truths but must always be vigilant, standing firmly in its defense of the faith that was once and for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 1:3).



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EUROPEAN CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES CLOSING STATEMENT

The seventh meeting of the European Conference of Reformed Churches took place 15-18 May, 2018, at Yarnfield Park, Stone, Staffordshire, in England.

Around 45 ministers and missionaries, representing churches in the British Isles, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Germany, Turkey, Albania, Croatia, Romania, Hungary, Lithuania, Switzerland, and France met together. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the USA also sent delegates, as they have an interest in the work of the Lord in Europe.

The theme for this conference was 'Caring for the Church of God'. In a world characterized by much suffering and indifference, the Church of Jesus Christ is to show to the world the caring heart of a gracious and loving Saviour as its members live together under the loving authority of their Lord.

Four papers were delivered on this theme. 1. Rev. Andrew Lucas (of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland) gave a paper on caring for the pastors of the church, since ministers need to be cared for as they face the struggles of their vocation. 2. Rev. José de Segovia (Reformed Churches of Spain) addressed the subject of caring for the flock. 3. Rev. William Macleod (Free Church of Scotland Continuing) tackled the demanding subject of church discipline, which is the third mark of the true church of our Lord Jesus. 4. Rev. Gé Drayer (Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) presented a study of the

office of deacon. Each paper was discussed in small groups and in full session. Three workshops were also held: 1. On the continuing development of elders and deacons. 2. On the wise exercise of church discipline. 3. On pastoring covenant youth, the young people of the churches.

The Psalmist sang, 'See, how good and how sweet it is for brothers to dwell together' (Psalm 133:1). This



was certainly true of the conference. Representatives of the churches were able to meet together to strengthen the ties between their churches. There was a significant time of corporate prayer: for the churches, for the gospel, for particular situations in some European countries, and in particular for a Presbyterian minister who has been wrongfully imprisoned in Turkey since 2016.

A record of the proceedings and papers is published on the website www.eurc.org.



NORTH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED COUNCIL PRESS RELEASE

November 27, AD 2017

The 43rd annual meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) convened on Tuesday afternoon, November 14, 2017 on the campus of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Chairman Rev. Bartel Elshout led the opening devotions during which the delegates and guests sang heartily from Psalm 67, O God to Us Show Mercy.

NAPARC is composed of 13 member churches (denominations or federations of churches) which together represent about 3,600 organized and mission congregations and about 584,000 members including baptized covenant children. Each member church may send up to four delegates and they meet annually “to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another, and to hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.”



Member churches of NAPARC are the:

- Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC)
- Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)
- Église réformée du Québec (ERQ)
- Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA)
- Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)
- Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC)
- Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) (KPCA)
- Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

- Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
- Presbyterian Reformed Church (PresRC)
- Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)
- United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA).

Representatives of the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) and the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) attended as invited observers.

The basis of NAPARC's fellowship is “Confessing Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Sovereign Lord over all of life, we affirm the basis of the fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to be full commitment to the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God written, without error in all its parts, and to its teaching as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms.”

One of the first orders of business was the election of officers. Elected as Chairman was Rev. Dr. S. Steve Park of the Korean American Presbyterian Church, and as Vice-Chairman, Rev. David Kim of the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin). Elected as Secretary was Rev. Ralph Pontier, and as treasurer, Rev. Dr. Maynard Koerner. The chairmanship and vice-chairmanship rotate annually between the 13 member churches following an alphabetical listing. The vice-chairman this year is slated to serve as chairman next year, and his denomination is asked to host the following year.

A large portion of time was spent on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning with each member church giving an oral report on the state of its church. Following each report delegates could ask questions and a designated delegate led the group in prayer for the church that had reported. One theme was repeated in several reports, that the work of missions is thriving among the churches.

On Tuesday evening, Rev. Mark Kelderman of the Heritage Reformed Congregations (the host church this year) led a devotional service. He encouraged the assembled with a

message based on Revelation 1.

On Wednesday afternoon and Thursday morning, a discussion took place on four topics suggested by member churches.

The topics were:


1. How important is organic union among dissimilar NAPARC denominations? For example, do the denominations which focus on a specific ethnic/linguistic group in North America really need to merge with other NAPARC denominations?
2. What denominational distinctives presently exist as obstacles to organic union? (Examples: exclusive psalmody, delegated or non-delegated assemblies of synods, strict subscription or good faith subscription, unique denominational histories, etc.)
3. What denominational distinctives should be considered as valid obstacles to organic union under biblical scrutiny?
4. Discuss the possibility of a structure that allows for both distinctives and organic union.

The discussion revealed different ideas about the importance and feasibility of organic (organizational) union, but also a common commitment to giving visible expression to that unity which is already ours in Christ. The discussion was helpful in reminding delegates of the two-fold purpose of NAPARC, but also of its limitations. NAPARC continues to provide a venue for its member churches to talk with one another corporately and bilaterally, and to hold out before each other the ecumenical imperative of Scripture. It has strengthened fraternal bonds and spurred greater cooperation in

missions, diaconal services, theological education, and youth ministry.

On Wednesday evening, Rev. Dr. Joel Beeke gave an inspirational address, "An Earnest Call to Help Restore Family Worship among Our Church Families." In addition to the annual meeting of the Council, NAPARC sponsors consultations where representatives of member churches gather to discuss cooperation in a specific area of ministry. For more than thirty years, there have been annual world mission consultations in September of each year. This year's Council appointed hosts and convenors for three other consultations. The OPC was asked to host, and Mr. David Nakhla to convene, a consultation on relief and diaconal ministry. Mr. Nakhla is the part time administrator of OPC's Committee on Diaconal Ministries. The ARP was asked to host, and Rev. Dr. Kyle E. Sims to convene, a consultation on theological training. The ERQ was asked to host, and Rev. Ben Westerveld to convene, a consultation on youth ministries.

The NAPARC schedule runs from Tuesday afternoon to Thursday Noon and provides time slots for bilateral meetings between the inter-church or ecumenical committees of the member churches. These smaller meetings have proven fruitful for member churches to grow closer together and manifest more fully their oneness in Christ.

The next meeting of the Council is scheduled to be hosted by the Korean American Presbyterian Church in the Philadelphia area on November 13-15, 2018. For more information see www.naparc.org. 



GKSA GENERAL SYNOD 2018 IN A NUTSHELL

Without presuming to be complete, I would like to touch briefly on the most important decisions made by the General Synod. This rendition is based on my own notes and not the official minutes.

Synod Executive

Elected to the Synod Executive: Dr Douw Breed (chairman; seated front right), Rev. Hendrik de Beer (vice chair, seated front left), Dr Deon Lartz (secretary, rear left), and Rev. Abel Modise and Rev. Carel Jansen (assistant secretaries, middle and rear left). The meeting was conducted very smoothly and impartially by the executive.



Language and communication

About 30 delegates from our black churches were present at the Synod, they do not all have a command of the Afrikaans language. In order to facilitate better communication, a committee of deputies recommended that the language used at the Synod should be English. We are grateful, however, that Synod decided on a policy of multilingualism, in which each speaks his own language and a simultaneous interpretation into English takes place. We believe that the language problem has now been permanently solved and justice done to the diversity found in our churches.

Ecumenical local

Our connections with other churches both in South Africa and abroad were confirmed and strengthened. We will be given observer status at the SA Council of Churches, the agreement with the NG Church [Dutch reformed Church in SA] has been maintained, in spite of a letter of objection, and we have been charged with maintaining a connection with the APK [Afrikaans Protestant Church] while entering into discussion with them concerning their exclusively white membership. A special mention was made of the fruitful collaboration with especially the NG en NH [our

fellow-Dutch Reformed churches in SA] with regard to the local and central Reformation 500 celebrations, as well as our communal witness in the Tussenkerklike Raad [an ecumenical forum in which the NG churches, NH churches and GKSA are represented] towards the government.

Ecumenical abroad

Various reports mentioned valuable connections with the Reformed Churches across the world. An exciting new development is that a bond with a Reformed Church in Hungary has come into view after our deputies made contact with their deputies during the session of the ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches). It is also insightful that the ICRC suspended the membership of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) from the Netherlands following the church's decision to allow women to office.

Songs

About 130 new songs, faithful to Scripture, mostly from the NG church songbook, have been approved by deputies and approved by Synod for use in the worship service, subject to approval by the local church council.

These songs will not be included in a songbook, they are simply part of a list of approved songs faithful to Scripture. Churches can then project the songs on a screen.

Women in office

A number of appeals were not able to succeed in moving Synod to allow women to serve in the offices of elder and minister. The objection against the 2015 decision that it is an essential matter was not validated and a motion about this was not adopted, neither was a motion that sought to shift the decision to the local churches. Thus the status quo was maintained (that women can serve as deacon but not as elder and minister).

Relations with North-West University

In spite of tension surrounding developments at the University, especially regarding the Pentecostal Chair and appointment at the Theology Faculty, the relations with the NWU will be maintained in thankfulness and our ministers will continue to be educated exclusively on the foundation of Reformed Theology at the Theological



Rev. Cassie Aucamp is minister of the GKSA in Bergsig/Andeon.

College. The trustees will enter into discussion with the NWU regarding the problem areas.

Our environment

Synod issued an appeal to churches, individuals, societies, businesses and the government to radically change the mind-set on the environment and fight the enormous



Reverend Ligege and visitors from Uganda

pollution and abuse of God's creation. New Deputies of Environment have been appointed with a broad mandate.

Format of the Synod

Synod decided that a large part of the agenda of the next General Synod can be worked through by means of delegates from different parts of the country communicating simultaneously by means of direct video communication. A much smaller agenda will then remain which can be dealt with in a shorter session of the full synod in a week, at the most. Deputies are to investigate the practical options connected with this and implement them as best they can.

Church growth (including Expando)

During General Synod of 2015, the deputies for church growth received the charge of setting up an office to support ministers and equip them to be spiritually strong and to propagate the Word to the outside world. This has led to the institution of Expando on April 1st, 2017, with a temporary director (Dr Malan van Rhyn) serving part-time. That Expando fulfils a great need is apparent from the

number of charges Synod 2018 referred to Expando, among others, the equipping of elders, the spiritual equipping of families, the continued equipping of ministers and the encouragement of church growth in our congregations. Our prayers are sorely needed for this, as this work of service is fully dependent on the Lord's blessing!

Publications

In the discussion of the reports on our church magazines, an appeal was made to the churches to collaborate in a positive way towards the growth of our number of readers. The decision was also made that an English version of the youth magazine Kruispad will be published following the drafting of a sustainable business plan to this end. The magazine will be known as Cross Courier. The report on the Calvin Jubilee Book Fund revealed that many reformed publications are available on their website at no cost (www.cjbf.co.za). Ministers and church members are encouraged to make good use of this.

Other matters

Synod furthermore discussed sound reports and made decisions on diaconal matters, Bible translations, Bible distribution, youth work, theological training, education, historical cases and financial and administrative matters.

With great thanks to the Lord we can look back on a meeting that has completed its agenda in an orderly and timely manner. We also received extensive and objective media coverage through Jana Marx's (photo below, left) attendance of almost the complete Synod. We believe that the decisions made by the communal churches will serve and build up our congregations and we thank the Lord for Synod 2018.





Rev. Fanie Coetzee is a minister serving in the Reformed Churches in South Africa

GKSA SYNOD 2018 ECUMENICAL MATTERS (FOREIGN)

As in the past, the discussion of the report by Deputies of Ecumenical matters (Foreign) was once again a highlight during this Synod. One is in silent awe of the Lord's omnipresence when people from all over the world, with whom we enjoy church connections and unity, send their greetings to Synod. Each time they had spoken, the brothers were brought before the Lord in prayer by Synod.

The GKSA currently has ecumenical connections with 21 churches worldwide. During this Synod, the following 30 delegates visited us:


- William Middelkoop of the Christeljk Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (CGK)
- Jan Matthijs van Leeuwen and Joop Schreuder of the Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt (Gkv)
- David Fraser of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCS(C))
- Kruger de Kock of the Canada Water Church in London
- Patrick Jok of the Sudanese Reformed Churches (SRC)
- Reinier Noppers of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA)



Dr. Davi Gomes

from the Igreja Presbiteriana de Angola (IPB Angola).

- Paul Archbald of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ)
- Kalala Kobongo of the United Reformed Church of Congo (URCC)
- Davi Gomes of the Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil (IPB)
- Dick Moes of the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)
- Antonnio Mussaqui and two colleagues

Among all the wonderful testimonies of growth in the church of the Lord and the unique and common problems of churches worldwide, the unique story of the churches in Sudan was especially moving. In the middle of a civil war where people are murdered solely because of their tribal context, the church of the Lord continues to grow. We thank the Lord that we as believers are not alone in the world. 



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Rev. Carl VanDam serves as minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Houston, British Columbia.

Mark Jones, *A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God*



Mark Jones begins this book about God's attributes with these words, "The true and living God is too much for us to bear, to handle, to conceive, to adore, to know, to trust, to understand, and to worship. The Incomprehensible One is simply too much for us in every conceivable way." This tone of awe, reverence and worship sets the tone of the book well. He goes on

to say that it is in Christ, God made flesh, that we may begin to truly get to know God better and better. As we read in John 1:18, "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." As might be gleaned from the title, *God Is* is an explanation of the many attributes of God, which he possesses to the fullest and most perfect degree. It deals with each of the attributes of God mentioned in the Belgic Confession, Article 1 and many others besides. There are 26 chapters, each focusing on one attribute of God. These chapters are even shorter than the ones in *Knowing*

Christ, about 5 pages each. Each chapter is structured in the same way: a section explaining the attribute, how this attribute is revealed in Christ and how this attribute applies to us in the Christian life. Jones has a gift for explaining difficult concepts clearly and precisely. Ironically one of the most difficult attributes of God for us to understand is that God is "simple". He does an excellent job with this, explaining how all God's attributes harmonize and work together flawlessly in perfect consistency. God is not composed of separate parts but he is "simple undivided essence." The life of the Spirit-filled Christian is to show an analogous simplicity in showing the fruit of the Spirit in harmonious unity. *God Is* is a very edifying read, suited to personal devotional reading, as well as group study. Although this book doesn't have discussion questions, the application part in each chapter gives much to consider for further reflection and discussion. Highly recommended! *

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Mark Jones, *Knowing Christ*



Back in 1973, J.I. Packer wrote *Knowing God*, a book which was very helpful for many Christians to get to know God in a more personal way. It focused on the core of the Christian faith, that of knowing and worshipping God, and did so in an accessible and stimulating way.

A few years ago, Mark Jones, a PCA minister in Vancouver and noted Puritan scholar, wrote *Knowing Christ*, a title clearly meant to recall Packer's book. While Packer could be said to have focused primarily on God the Father, Jones focuses on God the Son, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. Jones states in his introduction, "I write that people may know Christ better than they already do, and so love him more." For my part, he has certainly succeeded in his objective. It is, of course, a tall order to write such a book. For Christians, Jesus Christ can seem overly familiar to us. After hearing years and decades of Reformed preaching and regular instruction in the Heidelberg Catechism, there can be the danger that we think we know all there is to

know about Christ. For those of us who may feel somewhat jaded in our life of faith with the Lord, this book about knowing Christ is highly recommended. How does Jones succeed in his objective? He does so by taking Christ's divine nature and human nature utterly seriously. He shows aspects of these two natures in Christ in fresh and interesting ways. The mystery of Christ's incarnation is explored and shown by illuminating Scripture passages which we may have overlooked or read over. He also does this by making good use of the Puritans, such as John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, and Samuel Rutherford. These brothers of seventeenth century were exceptionally gifted at drawing out precious pearls from the depths of God's Word. The book consists of 27 short chapters, each about 6 or 7 pages, making it easy to read in short sittings. At the back of the book, there is a study guide with several questions on each chapter, making it suitable for family worship and study societies. It is certainly also highly recommended as a personal devotional book. *

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