



Lux Mundi

38:3 September 2019

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



In this Issue

Broadest Assemblies: RPCNA, OPC, RCUS
50th anniversary CRTS (CanRC)
Resident Aliens: church in society
Upcoming Regional Conferences

Magazine published by the
International Conference of
Reformed Churches



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Eyes That See

You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with abundance. (Psalm 65:11 ESV)

God wants us to remember and confess his sovereignty. Whether he crowns our work with success or withholds his blessing, he wants us to humbly acknowledge that we are utterly dependent on him.

But he doesn't just want us to admit that he is in control. God wants us to have eyes that see all the events in our lives as the working out of his personal commitment to us, his promise to work for our good in all things. This is the great benefit that we gain when we learn the lesson that David and Israel learned so long ago. God sent drought and famine to chastise his people but afterward he sent rain again and a harvest (see 2 Sam. 21:1–14; Ps. 65:9–12). The church learned that nothing came to them by chance, but all things came from God's fatherly hand.

When you believe this, it changes the way you think about your life. It may look like bountiful crops happen to believer and unbeliever alike, as if it makes no difference whether you believe. But you don't get the whole story from what you see with the naked eye. You need to look at your life in the light of the gospel. Then you can see that your success is God's personal gift to you. And he gives it to you because he loves you for the sake of Jesus Christ.

If you are blessed to sit down for a Thanksgiving meal, then you're seeing and tasting the righteousness and the grace of God. Sing praises to God with David, and say, "You crown the

year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with abundance."

When you can look out at the fields, and see that the Lord cares for the land and enriches it abundantly, that he waters its furrows, settles its ridges, and softens it with showers, then you have a gift. If you see God at work blessing the land's growth, if you can hear the meadows and valleys shouting for joy and singing to the Lord, then you have received the real blessing of an abundant spiritual harvest. If you have eyes that see the way the world really is—under God's guidance and control at all times for his honour and the good of his people—then you have the treasure of faith, and reason for great thanksgiving. ✱

Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms – Devotional is a collection of daily meditations on all 150 Psalms, enough to cover a whole year. Sixteen Reformed pastors from Canada and Australia worked together with the special focus of bringing out the legitimate connection to Christ in every psalm. The meditations are written for teenager and up and are suitable for personal, couple, or family devotions. All proceeds from the sale of the *Devotional* are going to support mission work in Brazil. These same pastors have also written a *Study Resource* on the book of Psalms, providing explanation and comment on every psalm with care taken to show the lines to Christ. The *Study Resource* is to be released in late 2019, the Lord willing. For more information, please consult the editor's website, peterholtvluwer.com



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).



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SUBSCRIPTION

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KURIAKE EKKLESIA

What is the church? There are two terms to consider here, both with their origins in the Greek language. We have the word *kuriake*, the origin of the English word *church*, and the word *ekklesia*, the origin of the French word *église*.

Ekklesia

The word commonly translated “church” or “congregation” in the New Testament is always the term *ekklesia*. Derived from the preposition *ek* (out of, from) and the verb *kaleo* (to call), the word *ekklesia* most basically means “assembly, meeting”. Thus it is used in Acts 19:39 to refer to the ruling body of the city of Ephesus.

The fact that the church is “called out” or “assembled” points out that the church consists of people who come together. Children of God do not have an isolated, fragmented existence, but form a family. Togetherness is an essential attribute of the church.

Some Bible translations, especially in the English language, translate *ekklesia* with the word *church*. That tradition goes back all the way to the King James Version. It would seem Anglicans and Roman Catholics had a preference for the more institutionalized *church* as opposed to the more organic *congregation*.

Interestingly, in The Netherlands the *Staten Vertaling* avoided the word *kerk*, choosing to go with *gemeente* (“congregation”). Thus in an English Bible translation the New Testaments letters are written to *churches* while in Dutch Bible translations they are written to *congregations*. By the way, this is also why some Reformed denominations with Dutch roots are not called “churches” but “congregations”, such as the Netherlands Reformed Congregations.

Kuriake

The word *church* has its etymological roots in the Greek word *kuriake*, strictly speaking the feminine form of the adjective *kuriakos*. That adjective is derived from the Greek word *kurios*, meaning “lord”. *Kuriakos* thus means “that which is the Lord's”. The term is found in Scripture, though not in reference to the church itself. We find it in an expression like “the Lord's Day” and “the Lord's supper”.

In time the term was also used with the Greek words for

house (*dooma*) and household (*oikia*). Going to worship was going to “church”. For the nations of north-western Europe somehow – scholars are still not sure why – the preferred word thus became “church” as opposed to “ecclesia”.

Referring to the Lord's people as the church, given the Greek background, means referring to the Lord's people as precisely that: *the Lord's* people. The idea of the *church* thus is found already in the accounts of God and Abraham. In Genesis 17 God covenants with Abraham, promised to be the God of Abraham and his descendants, and promising that his descendants would be his people (Genesis 17:7-8). That promise is repeated by Moses to Israel just prior to Israel entering the promised land: “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 7:6). Being the Lord's takes on more significance as God's people are purchased with the blood of the Christ, the Son of God in human flesh. Thus the church is “a people for God's own possession” (1Peter 2:9).

What is the church?

The church is, first and foremost, the Lord's assembly: *kuriake ekklesia*. She is desired and called forth by the Father, she is gathered, defended and preserved by the Son, she is formed and renewed by the Spirit.

As the church is the Lord's, in the church the Lord will rule. Not human opinions, but God's directives will govern and guide God's people.

These past months many of the ICRC member churches had their broadest assembly. As particular churches gathered as a whole church, they sought to understand God's will so as to walk in it. The previous edition of *Lux Mundi* reviewed one such broadest assembly. In the pages of this *Lux Mundi* more are reviewed, and we intend to cover more yet in the next edition of *Lux Mundi*.

Enjoy the read and let us never forget that the church is not just some association of people: she is the assembly of people that belongs to the Lord. ❄️

RPCNA SYNOD: HIGHLIGHTS OF A CONCURRENT SYNOD

When retiring moderator (and recently retired pastor) Bruce Martin dropped the gavel on the 188th Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, it was not exactly business as usual. This Synod was unique in that it was being held concurrently with the Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), both convening on the campus of the RPCNA's Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pa.

Conference

The International Conference Advisory Committee directed people to its website, rpc2020.org, for details about the next RP International Conference July 29–Aug. 3, 2020, at Indiana Wesleyan University. Keynote speaker Warren Peel, pastor of Trinity (Belfast, N. Ireland) RPC, will expound the book of Daniel on the theme, “Glorifying God in Babylon.” Rates are to be published by the end of this August.

Membership

Membership in the RPCNA grew by 3.4 percent in the past year, and worship attendance increased 3 percent, reported the stated clerk. This was called the largest gain in the denomination since the 19th Century and the largest total membership since the 1940s. The denomination had a net increase of 1 congregation to 91 total and a net increase of 4 mission churches to 13 total. Six congregations or mission churches were either organized or were received from other denominations: Coram Deo Mission (Squamish, B.C.), Great Basin RP Mission (Reno, Nev.), Grace Reformed Mission (Columbia, Mo.), Birmingham RP Mission Church (Birmingham, Ala.), San Antonio Mission Church (San Antonio, Tex.), and Christ Presbyterian Church (Grandview, Mo.). The Synod rose to give thanks to God in prayer.

Global activities

Rev. Charles and Susan Leach have returned to the U.S. after his pastorate in Kobe, Japan, since 2011. He thanked the RP

Global Mission Board for the opportunity to serve in Japan for 18 years total and encouraged others of retirement age to consider service in Japan.

In South Sudan, a time of transition has led to “Cush4Christ 2.0” with a heavy emphasis on raising up church leadership and indigenous trainers. Also, Zach and Beth Smith have accepted the missionary call to South Sudan. Cush Christian School continues to grow and has completed an addition,

and the radio station continues to minister in conjunction with Every Village ministry.

Missions, congregations, and presbyteries in several fields in South Asia continue to show very encouraging growth, although not without persecution. RP Missions continues to send out many teams each year, with 17 locations identified for 2020. RP

Missions is thankful for interest in longer-term service as well as short-term missions.

RP Global Missions will continue to collaborate with

2nd RPC (Indianapolis, Ind.) on its work in Liberia while not adopting it as an RP Global mission field.

An HMB/RPGM joint recommendation regarding Japan Presbytery that was taken up from last year failed; more work on this matter is in process.

The Central and South America Committee has reached the milestone of having the entire RPCNA Constitution translated into Spanish. The committee hopes to see a work established in Santiago, Chile, by the end of this year. The committee has also found fertile ground with contacts and churches in Bolivia, Brazil, and other countries. Bolivia is experiencing a resurgence of Christian persecution.

Church government

The Judicial Committee reported to Synod in response to an appeal from a minister regarding actions of Midwest Presbytery and Shawnee RPC in connection with statements

All photos with this article were taken by Bryan Schneider



Author: Drew Gordon

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At Monday's joint service, Rev. Bruce Martin delivered the retiring moderator's sermon on 2 Chronicles 22:10–23:21. This passage speaks of the difficulty of living a life that is not under the Davidic king, and yet the Davidic line was preserved.

he published on wine in the Lord's supper. Synod, at the recommendation of its judicial committee, decided not to take up the appeal. In accordance with the RPCNA *Constitution*, specific reasons for not taking further action on the appeal were provided by the Synod. The decisions of the lower courts therefore stand.

Divorce and desertion

A Study Committee on Divorce and Desertion was created in 2017 in response to a Synod paper from Atlantic Presbytery related to some Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary communications on divorce and desertion. The seminary responded to this paper, and last year the work was given back to the committee with some alteration. This year the committee asked Synod to affirm its interpretation that “the word 'departing' [in the *RP Testimony*] explains that desertion refers to an unbelieving spouse physically leaving the believing spouse and departing to live elsewhere.” There was lengthy debate about the recommendation, including whether to pass it as is, whether it was too simplistic, whether it met the assignment Synod had given the committee, or whether it might cause harm through misinterpretation. The committee and many others contended that it was important for the committee and Synod to respond to the assignment in this precise and basic way, knowing that sessions and presbyteries can, and do, apply this and related statements from the standards to individual situations. In the end, the committee recommendation lost, 47–90, and the committee was dismissed.

Christ's Mediatorial Kingship

A Special Committee on Christ's Mediatorial Kingship was begun in 2014. The committee this year recommended that a booklet called “Christ-Centered Voting: A Practical Guide for Bible-Believing Christians” be published by Crown & Covenant in sufficient time for the next U.S. presidential


election. The recommendation of adopting the booklet was vigorously debated. Several amended recommendations failed, such as that the booklet first be circulated to the churches for feedback to the committee. Much of the debate dealt with how to characterize Synod's affirmation of this booklet—whether to receive, approve, or adopt it, or whether to send it back to the committee for further work. Ultimately the committee's request that the booklet be adopted or approved lost when an amendment passed (67–59) to change the word to “receive.” The new motion then passed overwhelmingly. The committee's recommendation about working with Crown & Covenant to publish the booklet passed, 69–55. The committee was continued.

Home mission

On Wednesday afternoon, similar institutions, missions, and ministries in the ARPC and RPCNA shared about their work in various workshops

The Home Mission Board recounted that “in 2005, with 77 congregations/missions, HMB proposed the 20/20 Vision, which sought 100 RPCNA congregations/missions by the year 2020. Standing at 104 congregations/missions, we've seen an increase of 35% since 2005.” The board has “clearly seen that being a church-planting denomination is becoming...part of the DNA of the RP Church. All glory goes to God for that which He has accomplished.” The HMB also noted the existence of more church planters and more bivocational ministers. The board noted that presbyteries are typically waiting for plants to become more established before requesting denominational aid. Bryan, Tex., Casper, Wyo., and Harrisonburg, Va., are receiving aid through the HMB's reducing-aid program. A grant was made for exploratory work in San Antonio, Tex. Two church-planting residents in training are being supported. Twelve lessons/tips for church plants from Christ RPC were

documented in the board's report. Some longtime church-planting mentors were thanked.

For more news of the 2019 Synod, including detailed daily reports, go to RPWitness.org. 



Reformed Presbyterians and Associate Reformed Presbyterians gather in Metheny Fieldhouse for the first joint worship service.

Republished with permission from
Reformed Presbyterian Witness,
July-August 2019.



OPC GA: DIFFICULT DISCUSSIONS AND MEANINGFUL MOMENTS

Author: Glenda Matthes
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The General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church met from June 5-10, 2019, in Dallas, TX. While docket items generated little controversy, the GA's actions included some difficult matters as well as several meaningful and historic moments.

Difficult matters

One difficult matter was an appeal of a complaint a minister had brought against his presbytery, which is a matter of administrative discipline. OPC standing rules call for appeals to be provided to the Stated Clerk eight weeks prior to the GA; however, the presbytery action regarding the complaint had taken place only five weeks before the GA. The GA chose not to suspend the standing rule in order to take up the appeal. The appellant may bring the matter to the 2020 GA and was encouraged to be present or arrange for a representative if he chooses to do so. Because the matter did not come before the Assembly, the Clerk was instructed not to include supporting materials in the minutes.

Another challenging matter pertained to the Presbytery of the Dakotas, which has struggled for some years with

ongoing conflict. Last year's GA remanded a complaint to the Presbytery. This year, the Presbytery submitted an overture (which was not adopted unanimously), requesting assistance. The Assembly set up a committee of three to help the Presbytery and urged its members to meet as soon as possible with concerned parties in order to promote reconciliation.

Sadness and challenges

A sad issue with which the OPC continues to deal is the aftermath of the synagogue shooting in Poway, CA. The Assembly designated a special time for prayer and reflection regarding the incident. This was the most memorable part of the GA for Rev. Everett Henes (Hillsdale OPC, MI). He said, "Pastors Eric Watkins and Zachary Keele talked a bit about what had happened there, and we prayed for the families of those who were injured and killed, along with the members of the synagogue and the OPC church impacted. We prayed, especially, for the witness of Christ in the midst of this tragedy."

Other challenges have arisen on the mission field. The official report, written by Rev. Ken B. Montgomery (Geneva OPC, Marietta, GA), tells how Mr. Mark Bube, General Secretary of the Committee of Foreign Missions, acknowledged the current season of great trial and how it seems Satan seeks to thwart the gospel's spread "with his sledgehammer." Still, the OPC rejoices in evidences of growth on many foreign mission fronts.

Rev. Brian De Jong (Grace Presbyterian, Sheboygan, WI) noted, "The Assembly had several difficult matters that required much wisdom. The deliberation over those matters demonstrated restraint and prudence, as well as a desire to maintain our Presbyterian principles."



The OPC General Assembly 2019

Interchurch relations

Fraternal greetings from various denominations impressed Rev. De Jong as one of the Assembly's memorable aspects. He said, "We heard reports from Australia, England, and Brazil that were very encouraging, as well as from our sister denominations in North America."

The OPC is increasing fellowship with churches internationally. The Assembly voted to invite three groups into Corresponding Relations: the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe (RPCCEE), the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Peru (EPCP), and the Presbyterian Church in Uganda (PCU). For both the RPCCEE and the EPCP, commissioners voted in favor of approving their applications for membership in the ICRC and agreeing to serve as one of the two required church sponsors. The Committee on Foreign Missions reported in 2016 that the PCU had reconciled with the OPCU (Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Uganda) and, after 13 years of separation, had received the entire OPCU back into the PCU as its Mbale Presbytery.

In other ecumenical action, the Assembly adopted a letter to Synod Goes 2020 of the Reformed Churches of Netherlands, pleading with them to turn back from Synod Meppel 2017's decision to open offices of minister and ruling elder to "persons who are biblically disqualified."

Doctrinal standards

The matter of updating language in the church's doctrinal standards, which generated extensive discussion last year, took far less time this year. Dr. Alan Strange informed commissioners about the Committee's progress. The Committee requested and received an additional year to complete its work.

Rev. Henes admits he was skeptical about the process because he hadn't been present to hear the discussion at last year's Assembly and had read some arguments against it. Having read the Committee's mandate and safeguards and attended this year's GA, he is now "much more comfortable and excited" to see the Committee's results.

"I was encouraged by the seriousness that is being taken in this task," he says. "The men on the Committee are godly and gifted, so I am hopeful that they will produce something this is of great benefit to the church." While he senses some commissioner may still be opposed, he believes "more are cautiously interested" to see the work's result.

Matters of polity

An overture from the Presbytery of the Midwest requested amending the Form of Government to define the process of receiving elders and deacons from other denominations. Commissioners discussed if the possibility of a revision might delay the printing of the *Book of Church Order* scheduled for 2020, but that was determined as insufficient reason to delay printing. The overture was referred to the Committee on Christian Education, which will report next year.

The *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* is proving to be popular among OPC and URCNA congregations. It was reported that 50,000 copies have been sold and a third printing is planned.


The GA approved the request from the Presbytery of the Northwest to expand its borders into Canada. It also approved expanding the membership of the Committee on Arrangements due to the increasing workload associated with the General Assembly. The GA determined that the Committee on Sessional Reconciliation had accomplished its work, and it was dissolved with thanks.

The GA also approved a request from the Presbytery of New Jersey to receive a minister who does not have a traditional seminary degree, but is continuing his education. He pastors a former Baptist church that is becoming more Reformed.

Officers

Historical moments included tributes to Rev. Donald M. Poundstone, Mr. Gary Hoogerhyde, and the late Rev. Jack J. Peterson. Appreciation was expressed to Ross Graham, who plans to retire on December 31, 2019, after serving six years as Stated Clerk. His successor, Rev. Hank L. Belfield (Providence OPC in Chilhowie, VA), was elected without audible dissent and will begin a three-year term on January 1, 2020. Rev. John Mahaffey continues serving capably as Assistant Clerk.

This year's moderator was Mr. David Haney, a ruling elder from New Hope OPC in Bridgeton, NJ, who serves as Director of Finance and Planned Giving for the Committee on Coordination as well as Director of the Committee on Ministerial Care. On taking up his duties, he observed that his father, the late Rev. George Haney, had served as Moderator 40 years ago, in 1979.

The 2020 General Assembly is slated to meet from Wednesday, June 3, through Tuesday, June 9, on the campus of Eastern University in St. Davids, PA. 



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Jack Sawyer: Southern gentleman and global ambassador

Reformed and Presbyterian Christians around the world mourn the loss of Rev. Jack Sawyer, who went to be with the Lord on August 13, 2019. Memorial services were held at Pineville Presbyterian Church in Louisiana on August 17 with Rev. Chris Wisdom officiating.



Rev. Jack Sawyer at the ICRC 2017

As the administrator of the OPC's Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR), Rev. Sawyer's ministry extended beyond his beloved Pineville congregation to ecumenical fellowship in many other countries.

"When the previous administrator of the Committee, Jack Peterson, retired, Jack Sawyer was asked to assume those important, though part-time, responsibilities," explains OPC Assistant Clerk, John Mahaffy. "Both men took very seriously Christ's prayer in John 17 for the unity of the church, and appropriately, 'Cajun Jack' became known, like 'Texas Jack' before him, for his pursuit of closer relations between the OPC and other portions of the body of Christ." A longtime friend of Jack Sawyer, Rev. Mahaffy affirms, "He had a deep love for his Lord."

Jack Winthrop Sawyer, Jr. grew up in Fairhope and attended the University of Alabama, where he met Carolyn Snow through a campus ministry program. The two were



Jack and Carolyn Sawyer

married in 1974 and became members of a PCA. Jack taught at a Christian school, also coaching football and basketball, until his session encouraged him to enroll at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, MS. He later transferred to Westminster Theological Seminary, earning a Master of Arts in Religion degree in 1980 and returning later to receive his Master of Theology (Th.M.) degree in 1986. While in seminary, he and Carolyn lived in the home of Cornelius Van Til and helped care for the elderly minister.

While in Pennsylvania, the Sawyers affiliated with the OPC. Jack served as a deacon and then a ruling elder in Pennsylvania churches before accepting a call to New Zealand. He was ordained in



The Sawyers lived with Dr. Cornelius VanTil during seminary days. In this picture: Jack Sawyer and Dr. VanTil holding Jack's daughter Katherine.

1984 at the Reformed Church of Silverstream (RCNZ) in Upper Hut, following G. I. Williamson's ministry there. Rev. Sawyer pastored the Reformed Church of Hastings (RCNZ) from 1989-1994. He also served two years as an adjunct professor at Wellington Bible College.

The Sawyers returned to the US in 1994, and Jack was received into the OPC to serve the Westchester OPC in Mount Vernon, NY. He then pastored an independent congregation in Forest, MS, which subsequently affiliated with the OPC. He began serving Pineville OPC in 2000. Jack and Carolyn were blessed with four children and two grandchildren.

Rev. Sawyer wrote "The Glorious New Zealand Experiment" in the OPC's 75th anniversary book, *Confident of Better Things*, and was contributing editor of *Trust and Obey: A Forty Year History of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand*. *

Condensed and republished with permission from *Christian Renewal*, September 21, 2019, p. 13.



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RCUS SYNOD: CREMATION AND CHURCH POLICIES

The Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) met from May 20-23, 2019, at Northland Reformed Church in Kansas City. Due to threatening weather, the initial worship service was held earlier than scheduled. Midwest rains did not interfere with business during subsequent days. Delegates spent the greatest amount of time discussing the issue of cremation. They also dealt with routine matters and an overture about how congregational decisions relate to denominational policies.

In acknowledgement of the *Canons of Dort* anniversary, devotions and worship services focused on the *Canons'* different heads of doctrine.

Cremation

Although cremation has become increasingly popular in recent years, biblical direction about the practice has been lacking. Four years ago, the RCUS attempted to fill the void by appointing a Special Committee to study the Theological and Pastoral Implications of Cremation. That Committee presented a comprehensive report at last year's Synod, which generated discussion but not consensus. Synod 2018 adjusted the Committee's membership and recommitted the report. Discussion of this year's report was lengthy and intense.

Rev. Sam Powell explains that some delegates held views

The RCUS Synod adopted the following recommendations regarding cremation:

Recommendation 1. The RCUS affirms the following regarding the bodily burial of the dead:

- A. It is the historic practice of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church (Genesis 25:8-10; 35:29; 47:29-31; 1 Kings 2:10; Matthew 14:12; Acts 8:2).
- B. It is the biblical practice that imitates God (Deuteronomy 34:5-6; Ephesians 5:1).
- C. It is the biblical practice that follows the example of our Lord Jesus Christ (John 19:40-42; Romans 6:4).
- D. It is the biblical practice that witnesses to the hope for bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:42-55; *Heidelberg Catechism* Questions 1, 57; *Belgic Confession of Faith* Article 37).

Recommendation 2. The RCUS affirms that, as a general rule, bodily burial should be practiced by the Christian Church.

Recommendation 3. While cremation is not an acceptable alternative, except under extraordinary circumstances, RCUS pastors have both the duty and liberty to preach the gospel in season and out of season, and in cases involving cremation should exercise their best judgment as to how best to compassionately minister the gospel of Christ to the grieving.

Recommendation 4. Recognizing that cremation has become an increasingly accepted practice in American society, and that there has been relatively little teaching on the subject of Christian burial versus cremation, the RCUS encourages church officers to patiently instruct those who are struggling to accept Christian burial as the biblical and confessional teaching. (Ephesians 4:11-15; 2 Timothy 2:15, 24-25).

Recommendation 5. Since our bodies belong to Jesus in death, and we should magnify Christ with our bodies after death, the RCUS encourages its members to remember that burial services are not merely private events but gospel-centered worship services. Great care should be taken to plan burial services in such a way that the gospel hope of bodily resurrection is clear to all who attend. This includes the words read and sung, the message preached, and the burial of the body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 15:16-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Philippians 1:20).

Recommendation 6. The RCUS encourages its churches to be prepared, through the diaconate, to assist with funeral costs whenever a family struggles to afford a modest burial service (Galatians 6:10; 1 Timothy 6:17-18).

Recommendation 7. The RCUS commends the study and use of this study paper in its churches in order to teach its members the proper means of caring for the dead as demonstrated in the Word of God, the Reformed confessions, and the history of the Christian Church.

that were “poles apart” when debate began. “Some, like me, didn't think that a paper was even warranted and that it should be left to individual conscience,” he says. “There were others, like many of the members of the committee, who were strongly against cremation as a violation of the temple of God and a resurgence of Gnosticism.” He adds, “Even the old timers couldn't remember an issue debated as long as we debated this issue.”

In the end, differing factions came to consensus on several recommendations based on the report (see accompanying box). These recommendations reflect the binding position of the RCUS. The report itself is commended and available upon request, but not directly approved in every detail.

Rev. Kyle Sorenson, who served on the Committee, believes the broader Christian community should be aware that consensus can be reached on divisive issues, and that the Committee's work is ground-breaking. He says, “Christians can actually get along and come to a meaningful consensus, through an entire day of formal debate.” He also notes that “this is the first time any Reformed or Presbyterian church in the Western World has studied the issue and made any statements about it.”

He explains, “The study paper documents the history of cremation and burial, the biblical evidence for each, theological considerations from that evidence, and the pastoral application of the Biblical evidence. The title of the paper hints at one of the basic conclusions, 'Magnifying Christ in My Body: Is Cremation a Legitimate Alternative to Christian Burial?'" He adds that “as a general rule burial is the only way that Christians care for our bodies and present the gospel hope of the resurrection to the world.”

Women voting

The issue of women voting at congregational meetings has long plagued the RCUS. Last year's Synod reconstituted a study committee and changed its mandate. This year's Synod voted to postpone dealing with the special report on women voting until next year.

An overture coming before delegates this year, however, related indirectly to that matter. Covenant East Classis requested a synodical ruling on the question: May a church take an action or make a change to its constitution that is contrary to a position of the RCUS? Synod answered “Yes,” but with explanatory grounds that seemed more supportive of a negative response (see second accompanying box).

Regarding the overture from Covenant East Classis, requesting Synod to rule on the following question: May a church take an action or make a change to its constitution that is contrary to a position of the RCUS? Synod answered, “Yes,” but with this explanation:

- a) The constitution of a congregation must be in accordance with the Constitution of the RCUS (Article 10). The Constitution is “the fundamental law for government, doctrine, worship and work” within the RCUS and has “binding authority on all its members, congregations and judicatories.”
- b) To be strictly binding upon the whole church, a position of the RCUS must first be approved by a two-thirds vote of the Synod at a stated meeting and ratified by the Classes pursuant to Article 104. See the RCUS Position Paper “The Authority of Position Papers” adopted by the Synod (Abstract 2000:48-50), which states in part, “Should the RCUS desire to make a position strictly binding, it must use the process spelled out in Article 104.”
- c) Nevertheless, positions of the RCUS are not to be ignored. Adopted recommendations of position papers are “authoritative advice to the members” of the RCUS, serving as the RCUS' “understanding of Holy Scripture and our subordinate ordinances.” Furthermore, the decisions made at Synod, including decisions to adopt position paper recommendations, “set precedents by way we determine what we believe and how we will act together as a mutually submissive confessing body.” (from the “Authority of Position Papers”) As recommendation 2 of that report states, “the expectation should be that when a matter relating to a position taken comes to the judicatory, the adjudication will be consistent with the position taken.”
- d) Since the Bible requires that our submission be in the Lord, and since the covenant of membership in the RCUS binds a congregation to the rest of the RCUS, and the covenant of ordination vows binds the church officers to the decisions and authority of the church, when a congregation or its officers believe a position of the RCUS is in error they have the privilege and responsibility to call the RCUS to revisit a position by providing Biblical, confessional, and constitutional arguments through the normal overture process. (See Article 22, Article 49, The 5th vow at the installation of elders and deacons)

Synod's Vice-President Travis Grassmid says, "Essentially, Synod said nothing new in our decision. The judicial committee compiled pertinent information from past decisions and our constitution to recommend that 'yes' a congregation may adopt a position contrary to positions of the RCUS, so long as the action does not conflict with our confessions or constitution. However, great care should be taken, and the adopted positions of the RCUS should not be taken lightly."

Outreach and discipline

Synod's Executive Committee will appoint a special committee to examine outreach and growth and determine if ways exist for the RCUS to improve in areas such as promotion, evangelism, stewardship, and financial health. While this work will overlap that of permanent committees, the purpose is for its members to look at current practices with fresh eyes.

Rev. Doug Schlegel's "The Process of Church Discipline According to the Constitution of the Reformed Church in the United States" was commended as a helpful guide. Synod amended a standing rule to clarify that an overture regarding "matters of original jurisdiction of Synod may be submitted to Synod at any time by a delegate to Synod or a lower judicatory."

Delegates approved a new home mission work in Montana and designated September 8, 2019, as the Home Missions day of prayer with Grace Reformed Church (Dickison, ND) to


receive that day's offerings.

Mission and ecumenics

A Foreign Missions day of prayer was scheduled for November 10, 2019, with the offering for Reformed Faith and Life. The RCUS continues working with the URCC in the Congo, the RFCK in Kenya, and the POCRC in the Philippines. The Interchurch Relations Committee will send fraternal delegates to OPC, URCNA, and RPCNA major assemblies. The Committee also plans to send a delegation to the 2019 NAPARC meeting and to the 2021 ICRC meeting in India.

Growth and officers

Synod welcomed two new ministers (Revs. Michael Lassley and Winthrop Groseclose) and one new church, Christ Reformed Church of Casper, WY, which has organized. The RCUS supports two seminary students: Matthew Dawn (Heidelberg) and Ryan Anderson (Mid-America). Synod also welcomed student Paul Liberati (City Seminary, Sacramento), who is attending seminary while interning at Covenant Reformed Church in Sacramento.

Officers were all reelected to their positions this year: Rev. Frank Walker as President, Rev. Travis Grassmid as Vice-President, Rev. David Fagery as Stated Clerk, Elder Randy Schroeder as Treasurer, and Rev. George Horner as editor of the *Reformed Herald*. 

Republished with permission from *Christian Renewal*, June 28, 2019, pp. 8-10.



RCUS Synod 2019



Author: Rev. Matthew Van Luik
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THANKSGIVING FOR 50 YEARS CRTS

For the past 50 years, many pages of *Clarion* have been dedicated to the work of the Canadian Reformed Seminary in Hamilton (CRTS). Many pages of the magazine have been graced with numerous articles from her professors. For 50 years the seminary has been a blessing for the Canadian Reformed Churches as men were trained for the ministry of the gospel. Its influence has been felt not only in Canada, but a special bond is felt with the Australian churches and in recent years stronger bonds are being forged with the churches in South Africa. Its influence has also extended to other parts of the world as students from Asia, Africa and Europe have been trained at this biblical institution of learning.

Beginnings

The seminary arose from humble circumstances. It became a reality because of an early vision within a new federation of churches in Canada. Many reformed believers from the Liberated Reformed Churches of the Netherlands immigrated to Canada in the 1950's. When they could not find a church to call home, a new federation of churches named the Canadian Reformed Churches was established across Canada, with a few in the US. The name itself indicated a desire on the part of its members to become part of the country they had adopted as their homeland. While there was still a close bond with the churches in the Netherlands, there was also a desire to become Canadian and for the churches to develop a better understanding of the theological climate in North America. Quite quickly the churches made a deliberate decision to transition from the Dutch language to English in the worship services. The first ministers came from the Netherlands and these men faced the challenge of transitioning quickly to the English language. The very first Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches held at Homewood (Carman) Manitoba (1954) already dealt with the training of men for the ministry. The realization

arose from the very beginning that the churches would need to train men to become future ministers and therefore it was decided that the churches should begin to collect money for a seminary. At first a number of ministers were appointed to train men for the ministry. Those who wanted to study were mentored by these ministers, but it required them to travel from place to place. The alternative was to study either at the Seminary in Kampen (the Netherlands), or at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.

In 1962, Synod Hamilton made the decision to establish a Theological College but it was not until Synod Orangeville 1968 that professors were appointed. The opening of the new seminary took place on September 10, 1969. The vision expressed by the churches at its first Synod finally came into reality under the Lord's blessing 15 years later in 1969. This was an occasion of much thankfulness for a small but growing federation of churches.

A new milestone was reached in 1981, when the legislature of the Ontario Government passed the "Canadian Reformed Theological College Act." This Act allowed the seminary to grant the graduates the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree. While the degree itself

did not make the graduates more competent ministers, yet it gave the institution greater recognition as a legitimate place of learning for the ministry.

Professors

The most critical requirement for a seminary is qualified professors. A number of ministers in those first fifteen years continued their studies and received Master of Theology degrees, some at Knox College in Toronto, so there were then a number of qualified men who could teach at the seminary. The seminary began with a few serious



Dr. C. VanDam, retired professor of Old Testament, presents the 50th anniversary book from behind the lectern gifted by alumni to the CRTS.

challenges. Rev. J. Van Popta was appointed as professor by Synod but he passed away before Synod ended and Rev. F. Kouwenhoven passed on to the Lord within a month of beginning his teaching at the seminary. Rev. H. Scholtens also suffered serious health concerns. The task was left to the three remaining professors, Dr. J. Faber, Rev. L. Selles and Rev. G. VanDooren to carry on the work with extra teaching responsibilities. The seminary finally had a full complement of professors in the 1972-73 school year with the appointment of Drs. H.M. Ohmann. During the 50 years the seminary also faced serious challenges when the health of Dr. DeJong and Dr. Gootjes made it impossible for them to continue teaching, but by God's grace, the training of men for the ministry continued unhindered. For many years the seminary operated with four full-time professors and in 2013 Synod Carman added a fifth professor. This was a real blessing for two reasons; first it helped make the teaching load of the professors more reasonable and secondly it gave the professors time to do important research to better fulfill their calling to train men for the ministry. Professors need to understand the developments in the world of theology so that when the graduates go into the ministry, they are equipped to face new ideas and challenges with good biblical insights.

Students

What is a seminary without students? There was no certainty that this small federation of churches, made up of recent immigrants who, from my perspective, largely did not see the value of higher education, could count on enough students for the seminary. The Lord provided so that in that first year four students were enrolled. One, Dr. C. VanDam, would continue his studies and later become Professor of Old Testament. The first number of years the class sizes remained small but steadily the student population began to grow so that now the seminary has an enrollment of 24 students. Today the seminary is reaching out into the church community to encourage gifted men to consider the ministry. In the past 50 years over 142 people have graduated from CRTS's programs, most of whom are men who have gone on to serve as ministers within the Reformed churches.

We are thankful that the student body has become diverse. They have come from the Canadian and Australian churches and in the near future, the South African churches also hope to send students to the seminary. The student body has become more international, coming from countries like New Zealand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Korea, China, Sudan, Russia, Poland, and Italy. We are thankful that



CRTS Faculty with the 2019 graduates

the seminary is able to fill the needs not only in the Canadian Churches that it serves, but the Lord has also used it to promote the gospel in other parts of the world. The Lord's saying that, "the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few," is still true today. There is increasing need for faithful preachers of the gospel to serve both existing churches and the work of mission.

Building Facilities

A seminary needs a place for instruction. In 1969 a large house or mansion was purchased on Queen St. South, in Hamilton. Two large rooms on the main floor were used for a classroom and chapel, while the upstairs rooms housed the professors' offices and a small classroom for the freshman year. The library was spread throughout the rooms of the house and in the old musty basement. The old servant's quarters on the third floor served as housing for up to 4 seminary students. After 16 years, a new property was purchased (in 1985) on Hamilton's West mountain. This was a larger building in a quiet neighbourhood that could accommodate a growing student body. The building was renovated so that first a wing with offices was added for the faculty and later another wing was added to house the library. We may be thankful that the Lord has provided these facilities to serve the needs of the seminary. With 24 students, the classrooms are becoming more crowded but the building should be able to fulfill the seminary needs for the foreseeable future.

The reality for many seminaries in North America is that bricks and mortar buildings are being replaced by distance education with the use of video conferencing. A committee with input from the faculty is exploring the option of distance education. While technology makes it possible for people living far apart to be connected in learning environments, the reality is that it creates more work for the professor and the best learning environment is always face to face instruction in the learner community. Students need to be able to interact not only with the professor but also with one another in order to have a dynamic learning environment. It is unlikely that the seminary will go in this direction, but there may be aspects of distance education that can be implemented.

Fifty Years of Development

Over 50 years, important changes have taken place to the program of study. In the first years the professors discussed which courses would be taught (within the framework given by Synod) and they developed the content of the courses

themselves. While that is still largely true today, the seminary has developed tools to help evaluate the courses that are taught. The entire MDiv program now has Program Learning Outcomes (PLO) that speak about the students learning to understand, communicate, and radiate the Word of God, while each course has particular Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) that show how that course is designed to contribute to the program outcomes. Selected student artifacts are examined afterward by other professors to see if the goal for the course has been achieved. Students also hand in course evaluations at the end of the year and the Alumni are given a survey a few years after graduation to evaluate the effectiveness of their studies for their work. We may be thankful that the professors are able to use all this information to make important adjustments to their course of studies.

The seminary has also implemented a Spiritual Formation Program. The seminary is an academic institution of learning but wishes to assist the students in spiritual growth and leadership formation, so that all the learning takes place in a healthy spiritual atmosphere. In this program, students write self-evaluation papers and meet regularly with a professor who has been assigned as their mentor. The student is able to speak about his own spiritual journey, receive encouragement and together they pray for his needs. In the past, professors cared about the well-being of their students, but they were not as intentional about inquiring after their spiritual life. We may be thankful that the professors are now more in tune with the needs of their students. As the student population grows, this program will help the professors to identify problems and give encouragement when needed.

Another important change has been the Pastoral Training Program (PTP). It is now a requirement that a student does a summer internship in one of the churches under the direction of an experienced minister. In my own experience, I entered the ministry having made fewer than 10 sermons and these were all delivered in the seminary setting. Today, in addition to sermons presented at the seminary, students spend about 12 weeks in a local congregation, preparing a sermon each week that they are able to deliver to a congregation for their spiritual edification. This program helps the student to develop his preaching skills and it gives him an important insight into the work of the ministry of the gospel. For many, it confirms their desire for this ministry, and some may realize that it is not where they see their calling.

The purpose for the program is to better prepare men for the ministry but we also need to be realistic about the outcome of the course of study at CRTS. The men who come out of the seminary and begin their ministry receive the tools they need to expound the word of God and minister to the flock of Christ. It is not until they enter into the ministry that such men really begin to develop their skills in preaching and pastoral work. In a very real sense, every man who enters the ministry is never finished learning nor developing their skills. A faithful preacher of the gospel is someone who continues to grow, both in knowledge and wisdom, throughout his entire ministry.

Accreditation

In 2013 CRTS became a fully accredited member of "The Association of Theological Schools" (ATS) in the United States and Canada. The College Act of 1981 gave the seminary the legal right to grant the Master of Divinity degree. The accreditation with ATS means that the degree granted by CRTS will also be recognized by other Theological schools in North America and by extension in other parts of the world. For example, one of the graduates this year had his application accepted in four prestigious theological schools in Europe.

There are two benefits that come to mind for the accreditation. The first is that every seven years the seminary needs to do a self-study to identify strengths and weaknesses. It will build on its strengths and improve on its weaknesses. This self-study begins with a look at the "Statement of Institutional Purpose." This statement lays out the basis (which is the Word of God as summarized in the confessions of the church) and the purpose for the seminary (the training of men for the ministry of the Word). Everything that the seminary does, including the courses being taught, must align with those principles. That is a real blessing as the seminary needs to consciously think through whether it remains faithful to its basis. The seminary needs to remain true to the calling the Lord has given it through the churches.

Another important benefit of this accreditation is that it makes it possible to accept foreign students from Australia, South Africa and other nations in the world. It was providential that at about the same time the seminary received its accreditation, the Canadian government



The CRTS building

changed its rules for foreign students. Because CRTS had ATS accreditation, it was much easier to be accepted as a Designated Learning Institute with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and thereby to receive foreign students. Thankfully the Lord granted the accreditation in a timely manner.

Thanksgiving

As we reflect back on 50 years at CRTS, we thank the Lord that he has so richly blessed this institution of theological learning that began from very humble beginnings. He has blessed the seminary with faithful professors who have taught future generations of ministers. Without ministers of the gospel, the churches would have floundered. The church needs faithful shepherds of the flock to direct God's people in the way of life and salvation. We may be thankful for the many positive developments over all these years, so that the program of study has grown and improved. We praise the Lord for the positive impact the seminary has had on the Churches in Canada and other parts of the world. We pray that the Lord may continue to bless the work at CRTS and that it may continue to be faithful to the work of the Lord for the next 50 years. ✨

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REFLECTION ON INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE THEME: RESIDENT ALIENS - WHAT CAN CHURCHES DO TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE WELLBEING OF THEIR SOCIETY?

Author: Lilian Kanya and Grace Ann Kabaale

Lilian Kanya and Grace Ann Kabaale are leaders in the Women's Ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Uganda (PCU) and represented the PCU at the International Conference held at Viaa Christian University of Applied Sciences, Zwolle, The Netherlands, from 8th– 22nd May 2019.

During the period 8th– 22nd May 2019, a group of 28 men and women drawn from 15 different countries of Africa, Asia, South America, and the host, The Netherlands, gathered for an international conference at Viaa Christian University of Applied Sciences, located in Zwolle, The Netherlands.

The conference was organized by Viaa University, together with Theological University in Kampen and De Verre Naasten (DVN), under the theme: **Resident Aliens: What can Churches do to Contribute to the Wellbeing of Society?**

Most ordinary dictionaries and immigration regulations define a 'resident alien' as a foreign national living (on an official basis/legally) in a country of which they are not a citizen.

Bible scholars designate Christians, and therefore the body of believers, the church, as resident aliens, which essentially describes the nature of the relationship between the missional church and the surrounding culture that does not readily welcome the gospel of Jesus Christ. As citizens of Christ's Kingdom, we presently live in an alien land, because the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour is not of this world. Hence, as Christians, we are in the world, but not of the world (John 17:16), making the Church a community of resident aliens (1 Peter 2:11). And yet we have been called to serve and bless this land, to be involved in society and in helping to make it a better place in which to live.

The conference aimed at deepening our knowledge and awareness about this theme, which has become more critical for our times. The sub topics further helped us appreciate the urgency to embrace our unique identity and mission and the responsibilities that come along. We appreciate the conference format which provided equal opportunities to all participants to share their experience and participate in all areas of the conference. We will reflect on at least three sub topics.

First, the Conference challenged us as participants to reflect on our mission and testimony as aliens in a globalised world. As the countries and people of the world continue to interact and coming together through political and economic integration, the Church today faces the challenge

of how to be involved in this changing environment, in a manner that advances the wellbeing of communities and remains loyal to the mandate of making disciples of all nations.

Second, the Church (aliens) everywhere needs to be constantly reminded of her role in praying for peace and prosperity in the geographical locations (residences) where God has placed us (Jeremiah 29:7). This will show our love for the world, as we express our concern for our respective communities and seek to transform them socially, morally, economically and politically. The discussions under this topic helped us appreciate how our individual wellbeing and the wellbeing of our churches are closely bound up with wellbeing of our immediate communities.

Third, in many parts of the world, and particularly in Uganda, Islam is on the rise. The question of how to deal with the increasing Islamic influence demands urgent biblical and practical answers. The Conference challenged us to avoid building boundaries on reaching out to the Muslim community, but rather seek to build bridges to reach out to them as our neighbors who need Jesus Christ, by creating friendships and relationships with them in the love of God.

For further practical purposes, we visited three educational institutions established by the Reformed Church of Netherlands (Liberated); a primary school, a senior secondary school and a university. These schools helped to demonstrate how the Church can be relevant to its community, providing for one of the most essential needs - education. The schools also show how we can particularly use education to help build a community with character, and influence the world of business, sports, politics, etc., for Jesus Christ.


We were humbled by the visits to various local churches, where we used the opportunity to share testimony concerning the different ministries in our denomination, the Presbyterian Church in Uganda (PCU).

As the PCU, we are also grateful to God for the partnership that exists between our denomination and the Reformed

Church of Netherlands Liberated (RCN/L). Our participation in the conference was a result of the common passion we share for advancing the Kingdom of Christ in our respective countries. We continue to pray with the churches in The Netherlands about the challenge of secularism and other forces that oppose the true gospel of Christ.

Finally, we were so honoured to meet with brothers and sisters from different parts of the world, and share experiences, and pray together, and design action plans

customised to our unique context, on how to advance the Gospel of the Kingdom and also contribute to the wellbeing of our (respective) societies.

To the urgent question '*what can Churches do to contribute to the wellbeing of their society*' the answer is given in the Holy Scriptures: *do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8)*. 

A SEPARATE AND UNIQUE OFFICE GIVEN BY CHRIST

Press Release of the ICRC diaconal committee of the face-to-face meeting held July 8-12, 2019 in Voorthuizen, The Netherlands.

Introduction

From all corners of the earth we arrived, one after the other, in the picturesque Dutch village of Voorthuizen. Here between meadows and forests the *Diaconal Committee* of the ICRC had its first face-to-face meeting. Instituted in 2013 by the ICRC Wales, it is the youngest of the committees, and as it is normal to childhood, it first had to learn to find its feet. From the day of its inception, there were big expectations among member churches as for the Diaconal Committee and its role. Almost from day 1 we started receiving requests for help. The ICRC gave us an elaborate mandate which, if to be fulfilled, would require one or more full-timers at least.

Speaking of our mandate, this was therefore the main agenda point for our first face-to-face meeting. We brainstormed on what could be an attainable mandate for a committee consisting of volunteers, and how we are to proceed to coordinate, stimulate and invigorate the diaconal ministry of all the ICRC member churches. In order to arrive at a shared vision, purpose and mandate, it was mandatory of course to develop a common understanding of what the diaconal ministry, which Christ gave to his church, actually entails. Drawing from a lecture of Gé Drayer

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presented to the European Conference of Reformed Churches held in 2018 in England, we compiled the following:

The diaconal ministry of the church

Many believe that the task of the deacon is limited to the collection and distribution of funds, but Scripture indicates that diaconal ministry includes much more. There are at least seven or eight areas of diaconal ministry according to Scripture. Christ's church is called amongst others to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and those in prison or held captive, and comfort those who mourn. The deacons are called to spearhead and enable the church to strive to restore this world in accordance with God's purpose and plan. In its diaconal ministry Christ's church works out Christ's plan to demonstrate and restore God's justice and righteousness in this world.

Diaconal ministry is about addressing spiritual, social, material and physical needs of the marginalized, the poor, the sick and the needy – inside and outside the church, at home and abroad. This includes, amongst others, a focus on debt and financial needs, loneliness, aging, imprisonment, physical and mental illness, people with disabilities and

refugees. We are called as churches to identify these diaconal needs and develop a strategy to become involved. Through the ages there has often been a lack of clarity about the role and office of the deacons in our churches. Hence diaconal ministry has often been seen as limited to receiving offerings, helping the needy in the church only, maintaining the church property and a stepping stone towards eldership.

God's Word reveals that their task involves much more. The office of deacon is a separate and unique calling instituted by Christ for his church. It is multi-faceted and virtually impossible to reduce to a fixed list or job description. A deeper and more comprehensive description of the deacon's role being:

- A man of prayer: he prays with and for those to whom he ministers.
- Vigilant: he is vigilant in identifying needs, God-given gifts and resources.
- Coordinator: he promotes and/or facilitates cooperation where necessary, especially in times

of need and disaster both in a personal and communal way.

- Bridge-builder: he knows how to establish, maintain and build contacts and connect people.
- Helper: he offers help where no one else does, a listening ear; looks for solutions for those in need, protects the vulnerable, and bears burdens.
- Initiator: he strives to take initiatives, creates awareness of diaconal needs.
- Trainer/Motivator: he trains, encourages and motivates others to contribute.
- Watchman: he identifies those who are suffering spiritually and physically and seeks out ways to comfort and restore.

New Proposed Mandate

Our week together resulted in an adapted mandate, which we hope to propose for adoption to the next ICRC. In addition we also outlined a work plan based on the proposed new mandate. In this Press Release we also serve you with these drafts: *purpose, vision, mandate, and work*



The ICRC Diaconal Committee

plan. We value very much any feedback and you are most welcome to send it to our secretary.

Purpose of Diaconal Committee: To encourage and facilitate access to Biblical resources and networking among ICRC member churches so that they can each develop their own fully-orbed diaconal ministry as well as to seek opportunities to cooperate in carrying it out.

Vision of Diaconal Committee: ICRC Member Churches each fulfilling their fully-orbed diaconal ministry as prescribed in God's Word and cooperating together where possible.

Mandate of Diaconal Committee:

1. Work towards a common understanding of what a fully-orbed Reformed diaconal ministry ought to look like, confer with ICRC member churches on such an understanding, and challenge them to pursue establishing such ministry in their churches.

2. Encourage and facilitate networking among representatives of the diaconal agencies/ministries of the ICRC member churches for the purposes of exchanging information on the work of deacons locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally, discussing issues of mutual concern, and exploring ways for possible cooperation in ministries of mercy among the member churches.

3. Bring focus to the diaconal ministry at ICRC conferences by employing various formats (presentation of papers, round-table discussions, information table, video presentation, etc.) to encourage networking and present material that has been collected and/or developed.

4. In response to the request of a member church in case of a major disaster, identify entities connected with member churches, working in the area and/or responding to the disaster and provide contact information. This committee serves to facilitate networking and does not serve as a source or channel of funding for member churches.

Based on this, we also mapped out a **work plan** until the next ICRC in 2021. To mention a few:

Ad Mandate 1:

- Elicit feedback on the Diaconal Ministry description from the member churches, as well as theological professors.
- Speaking on regional conferences on what Diaconal Ministry is.
- Carrying out a limited survey of all member churches as for their diaconal ministries.
- Identifying educational resources in various formats and recommend them to the churches.

Ad Mandate 2:

- Create and maintain contact info for diaconal representatives of member churches.
- Produce and maintain a booklet with information on diaconal ministries of member churches.
- Visit diaconal representatives and offices of member churches.
- Enable access for deacons of all member churches to identified resources.

Ad Mandate 3:

- Encourage diaconal representatives to attend regional conferences.
- Speak about the work of



The Committee hard at work

the Diaconal Committee at regional and general conferences.

- Facilitate an information table or other medium for interaction at ICRC conferences.

Concluding Remarks

During our stay, we also used the opportunity to visit the diaconal offices of the two current ICRC member churches in the Netherlands. In short, these are well organized and efficient offices, with impressive experience in stimulating their churches to execute their fully-orbed diaconal ministry. Although they may not be in need of help from an ICRC diaconal committee, these visits brought to our attention the need of many other ICRC member churches, especially the smaller denominations. We also realized afresh the strength of a body such as the ICRC Diaconal Committee, representing churches from both the global north and south, and functioning on an equal footing. When it comes to the diaconal ministry which Christ had given his church, there is still a huge and terrific task awaiting us, and how lovely would it be when a day may come that all ICRC member churches, from the north and the south, east and west, will cooperate together in this Christ given calling. Meeting in the Netherlands also confronted us with the accelerating rate of secularization in this part of the world, which had been a stronghold for the Reformed faith during past centuries, and how this also affects the churches.

For a committee with members from all continents of the world (except Antarctica), used only to meet with Skype at a time when everyone is awake, it was an eye opener to have this face-to-face meeting. It was wonderful to spend a whole midweek together face-to-face. It was a privilege indeed to discover things about each other, that Skype could never reveal, to mention but a few:

- That the roots of our chairman Dirk van Garderen, who came from the other side of the globe all the way from the southern island of New Zealand, are in fact a few kilometers from Voorthuizen, in the village of Garderen, and that they have some very

good ice cream there.

- The excellent cooking of Brazilian Chris Boersema.
- The humor of OPC'er David Nakhla.
- That the straightforward uncompromising Canadian Rick Postma is actually a very nice guy.
- That it is a fact indeed that the Dutch are the organizers and planners of the world, and that Ko Serier and Gé Drayer are no exception to this.
- That the ever smiling Korean Aaron Bae's friendliness is most sincere indeed.
- That although Pieter Boon is from South Africa, he was well informed about what the Dutch are best in, using the opportunity to buy an e-bike for his wife, which everyone had to test drive of course.

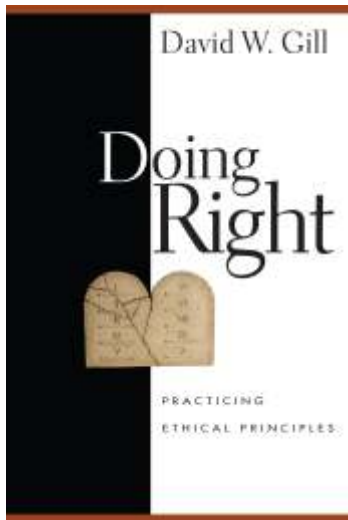


David Nakhla tries on some Dutch shoes for size

The week was concluded, expressing much appreciation to our chairman, Dirk van Garderen, and his successful efforts to steer us towards reaching the goal we had set ourselves for the week. We parted ways, each to his corner of the world, after giving thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ for the week, and prayerfully entrusting each other to the protection of our providential Father in heaven. ✨

Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles

Author: Rev. Dr. Theo Lodder
 Theo Lodder serves as a minister with the
 Canadian Reformed Churches.



While preaching my way through the Ten Commandments again I came across this book by David Gill. Preachers are always thankful to discover quality material like this. Gill combines scriptural investigation with contemporary application of God's commands, encouraging the reader to reflect critically on his own ethical principles and choices.

I will use his chapter on the eighth commandment (*You shall not steal*) entitled "Stuff Stewarding" to give you a sample of his treatment. He introduces the commandment by citing a few classic interpretations, including Luther, Calvin, and Rabbi André Chouraqui. Then he systematically works through the biblical teaching on stealing. This brings him to a discussion of why theft is wrong and why we are tempted to steal. Next, he lays out a "biblical theology of things" which acknowledges as primary the awareness that God is the

owner of everything. "If the first concern of economic thinking is to serve God," writes Gill, "the second is to serve and care for our neighbours." *Koinos* (sharing in common) needs to replace *idios* (thinking in terms of "my own," the root of our term *idiot*). He also helps us think through our perceptions towards wealth and poverty in a truly biblical manner.

Gill's short list of "How many ways can we steal?" includes:

- keeping the change we receive from a cashier when we have been given too much
- taking office supplies for personal use
- failing to work during time for which we are being paid
- underpaying employees
- presenting someone else's ideas or creations as our own or failing to give credit where it is due

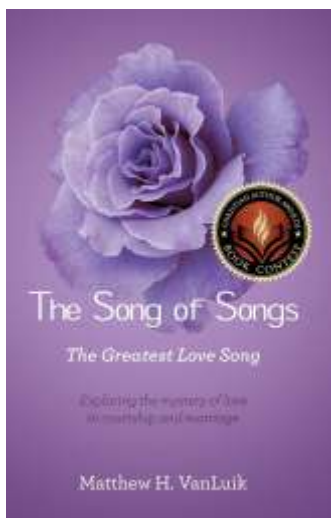
The more complex issues surrounding economic theory, wages and prices, taxes, charitable contributions, gambling, reparations and lifestyle choices also receive his attention.

This book any Christian reader who is eager to learn and grow – a biblical, contemporary, thought-provoking, and action-inducing look at doing right. ✳

Previously published in *Clarion* Volume 56, No. 20, pg. 502,
 September 28, 2007

The Song of Songs: The Greatest Love Song – Exploring the Mystery of Love in Courtship and Marriage

Author: Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer
 Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer serves as a minister
 with the Canadian Reformed Churches.



How often do you read the Song of Songs? A little uncomfortable, is it not? Maybe even embarrassing. Have you heard many sermons on it? I doubt it. It's hard to preach on such sexually provocative passages! What to make of this most unusual Bible book? Rev. Matthew Van Luik helps us a great deal in his new meditative volume covering this entire Bible book.

Allegory?

In a valuable introductory chapter, VanLuik reviews some unhelpful ways of interpreting the Song of Songs. He goes on to make a clear case for understanding it as a collection of love poems (dealing with a woman and a man) that has been gathered and edited (under the Spirit's influence) into one whole song. It has been popular in the past to take this Song as an extended allegory, where the two lovers are a picture of God and his people, ultimately of Christ and his bride, the church. Yet, such an approach does not do justice to the details and nuances of the lovers' interchanges and simply does not ring true. This book plainly (though poetically) speaks of human love, sexual desire, and the dynamics of a growing bond between a man and a woman from



engagement into marriage. VanLuik brings out these dynamics very well.

Courtship through marriage

As VanLuik's subtitle indicates, he takes the view that the poems are arranged sequentially, touching on the stages of a relationship from courtship to the wedding night to the challenges of living together as husband and wife. The unnamed couple in the poems is not any one historical couple but rather an imaginary pair used by the inspired compiler of the Song to teach believers how God meant such love to be reflected in their lives. It's not a straightforward narrative but rather snap-shots of the progression of their relationship. Having read and reflected on VanLuik's explanation, I think his approach makes good sense of the text and works out quite well.

Learning about love

In the fifteen chapters following the introduction, Pastor VanLuik works through each poem of the book in turn, bringing out the lessons for believing lovers, whether courting or married. Careful attention is given to application for both men and women, triggered by the specifics of the text. A key to his interpretation lies in how God created this relationship in the beginning, how it was distorted by our sin (cf. Genesis 1-3), and how God in Christ is restoring this bond of true love (cf. Ephesians 5:21-33). He skillfully and helpfully keeps in view how Christ by his blood and Spirit works to help us overcome our selfish, sinful instincts in order to bring our relationships back in line with God's original design.

The entire book has very pertinent advice for courting and married couples. VanLuik does not shy away from dealing with the overtly sexual imagery but, while explaining it candidly, he does so with care, maintaining honour for God's gift of sexuality. If a mature young couple were to work their way through this book and discuss it together, I would think their relationship could only improve and specifically be more Christ-based in how they relate to one another. Rev. VanLuik's advice is prompted by the text but also shows much pastoral experience and keen insight into both human nature and the struggle of man/woman relationships.

Additionally, he speaks often and just as wisely about each member of the couple's relationship with Christ. The picture of marriage in the Song points to and is perfected in the marriage of Christ and his bride. VanLuik uses that analogy quite effectively to point us as men and women to love and serve our spiritual "husband" more fully and faithfully. One of the pleasant surprises for me was how often (every

chapter, more than once usually) VanLuik draws a connection from the passage to our Saviour – not in a rote way but in a genuine manner which gets you thinking about your own personal Christ-likeness. As much as studying this book may bless your marriage, it will just as much bless your individual bond with the Lord.

Format

If I have a critique about the book, it concerns the format and layout, which is a minor matter by comparison. Each chapter helpfully begins by quoting in full the relevant portion of the Song but the quote does not include a reference to which "voices" are speaking, as in the man, woman, or "others" as is common in current Bible translations. That makes it difficult for the reader to discern who is speaking and harder to follow the explanation in the chapter, forcing one to open the Bible anyway.

In addition, paragraphs are overly-lengthy (sometimes a whole page!), subheadings are not bolded and there are too few of them. That all makes for a dense look to each chapter, something which is less than inviting to a casual reader. Also, the lack of capitalization for the proper nouns "Scripture" and "Bible" is both strange and annoying to a Christian reader. Certainly, this book is worth over-looking such irritants, but hopefully a future edition can correct these and similar issues.

Read and reflect

The language and style of writing is easy to understand but because of the subject matter, this book is not a fast read. VanLuik's work and its wisdom needs to be thoughtfully digested and discussed. I recommend it especially for mature young couples as well as married folk who desire to strengthen their love for each other and for the Lord. Each chapter has a list of helpful questions at the end which would lend itself to discussion as individual couples or for use in some sort of marriage counselling class.

Rev. VanLuik's volume may also be used as a study guide for a general adult Bible study group but then some of the questions may need to be passed over as too personal for that setting. This book would make an excellent gift to an engaged couple or even to newly-weds. Recommended! ✨

Republished with permission from *Clarion*, Volume 64, No. 11, pg. 316, June 15, 2015.

NORTH AMERICA REGIONAL CONFERENCE, ANAHEIM 2019

Esteemed Brothers,
I want to provide you all with some details about the upcoming meeting.

- The host church of the 2019 NAPARC meeting has graciously agreed to provide a room for our meeting following adjournment of the regular business of NAPARC on Thursday November 14. We may use the room for as long as we have need of it. So, the location of our proposed organizational meeting will be Rohthem Presbyterian Church 1759 W Broadway Anaheim, CA 92804.
- Depending on when the NAPARC meetings adjourn, we can first take time for lunch, or simply

ICRC Member Churches in North America:

Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (ARPC)
Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC)
Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA)
Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)
Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)
United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA)

begin our meeting immediately. We will have to make that call on Thursday morning when we have a better idea of adjournment time.

- I think it is reasonable to figure our meeting will last from 2-3 hours. This is an organizational meeting.
- I ask that each delegation review the mandate for Regional Conferences adopted by the Conference in Wales, 2013.
<https://www.icrconline.com/conferences1>
(access from [icrconline.com/committees/operating/conferences](http://www.icrconline.com/committees/operating/conferences))
- I ask each delegation to review the regulations of the EU Regional Conference as a sample guide for our own use as the Conference may deem it fit.
<http://eucrc.org/pdf/regulations.pdf>
- I ask each delegation to consider what role your own delegation might be willing to take on in the NA Regional Conference Organization Committee (see the agenda below for officers needed, and the EU Regulations pdf for anticipated job descriptions).

With this information in hand it is my hope that we will be able to have a profitable, orderly and concise meeting together. I look forward to seeing you all in November, the Lord willing.

In Christ's service, Rev. James Sawtelle



AFRICA REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES 2020

Dear ICRC Africa Region Members, Greetings in our Lord's Name!!! This letter serves to inform you that our next regional conference is scheduled to take place next year beginning Tuesday August 04th - Thursday August 06th, 2020. The meeting place shall be in Kenya at Kenyatta University. Arrival time for the meeting shall be Monday 03rd, 2020, while Friday Aug 07th, 2020 shall be for taking a tour to the zoo or museum, and may depart on Saturday 08th, 2020.

The proposed topics to be covered together with the anticipated keynote speakers are as follows:

1. **Theological training in Africa:** The Rev. Dr. L. Anthony and The Rev. Dr. Brian de Vries
2. **The Reformed mission in Africa:** Mr. Mark T. Bube
3. **The ministry of the diaconate in Africa:** The Rev. Dr. Pieter Boon and Mr. David Nakhla.

The host church AEPC is working on the required budget for this arrangement which shall be disseminated to all member churches of ICRC Africa Region and other well wishers for the necessary financial support. We eagerly look forward to hearing from you shortly. In Christ Alone, Elder Fred Kabenge (ICRC Secretary for the Africa Region) 