



Lux Mundi

39:1 March 2020

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



In this Issue

Biblical Principles of Church Unity
ICRC Coordinating Committee Press Release
Newbigin's Ecclesiology
CanRC Missions & Theology Conference

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International Conference of
Reformed Churches**



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In This Affliction

"I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things." Thus we read in Isaiah 45:7. Our world groans in affliction at this time, weighed down by the hand of God. Humanity figured it was making a name for itself. The Lord is making clear how vulnerable humanity continues to be. May our world repent and look to God for mercy. May the church be courageous in declaring God's good news. For it is almost Good Friday and Easter: a day of calamity followed by a day of well-being.

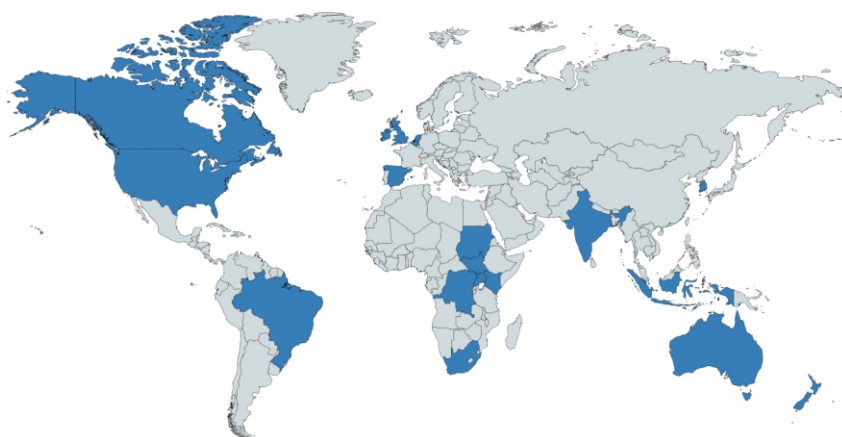
For this edition, the Rev. Dr. Dick Moes, current chairman of the ICRC, has written a meditation with a view to the current affliction. Heed the encouragement to have faith in our God who frees us from all our fears and has us find strength in Him.

In the Press Release of the ICRC Coordinating Committee you can read that with regret, the decision was taken to

have the ICRC in 2021 take place, not in India, but in Namibia. There were too many uncertainties surrounding an ICRC in India at this time. Hopefully we can be there in 2025.

This edition has a focus on ecclesiology and mission. The OPC document on church unity reminds us of how the Lord would have us be church in this world, and the importance and relevance of the ICRC in that. Further you'll find an article on Newbigin's view of the church and a Reformed response to that, as well as a report on the missions conference held in Hamilton, Canada, in January.

Blessings in these trying times. Keep safe, be loyal to God, celebrate salvation in the death and resurrection of the Christ, and do not cling to earthly things but raise eyes and heart to heaven. Humanity may seek refuge in the shadow of God's wings (Psalm 36:7).



Nations where ICRC member churches are located



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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In the Midst of an Unstable World, God is the Source of our Strength and Vitality

*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation
of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when the morning dawns (Ps. 46:4-5)*

We live in a broken and unstable world that is in a constant state of flux. Things that are here today are sometimes not there tomorrow. Things that give us great joy and contentment are sometimes taken away from us. The global pandemic declared by the World Health Organization because of the continued international spread of the corona virus clearly underscores that we are living in this kind of world. The health we have today, can be gone tomorrow. The social activities we used to enjoy are suddenly suspended till further notice. The financial stability we took for granted is unexpectedly taken away. In this kind of world, a person needs to have a place where to find strength and vitality that remains stable and accessible at all times and all places even when our whole world may be turned upside

down and many are in a state of fear and panic.

Psalm 46 describes such an unstable world by speaking about the earth quaking and mountains shaking in the heart, the oceans roaring and raging and the hills being violently shaken. Moreover, it speaks about nations roaring in fear or dismay and people melting in fear and terror as God frightens the nations and shakes their kingdoms.

Yet, in this kind of an unstable world, the people of God have a source of strength and vitality that is unmovable: God! After having first compared their God to an always accessible refuge that keeps them safe, strong and confident, the psalmist compares their God to a constantly flowing river whose streams makes the inhabitants of Jerusalem glad. At first, Jerusalem did not have a constantly



Niagara River (near location of ICRC 2017). Credit: Laurens den Butter

flowing river. Instead, its source of water supply (the spring of Gihon) was located in the deep Kidron Valley outside the walls of Jerusalem. Because this water supply could be cut off by enemies attacking Jerusalem and thus defeat Jerusalem simply by having the people die of dehydration, Hezekiah diverted the spring through a solid rock conduit some 1777 feet long into a reservoir inside the city walls. He then completely covered the spring outside the walls in the Kidron Valley so that the enemy would not know it was there. It does not take much imagination to figure out that the constant sight of this source of water inside the walls of the city was a continual source of delight for the people of Jerusalem.

When we trace the theme of a river whose streams make glad the city of God, we are reminded of the one river branching out into four rivers flowing through the Garden of Eden. It does not take much imagination that this river was also a source of constant delight for Adam and Eve before the fall into sin. Moreover, we are reminded of the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the New Jerusalem. On each side of this river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:1-2). It also does not take much imagination that this imagery would also be a constant source of delight for the people of the new earth.

Now we understand that the river the psalmist speaks about not only refers to the physical source of water supply inside the walls of the city of Jerusalem. It also symbolizes the presence of God who is in the midst of this city giving

the people strength and stability. That is why he also immediately adds that God is in the midst of Jerusalem, namely, the God of Jacob! Now we also understand why this God later complains about his people of Israel through the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah that they have forsaken Him, the spring of living waters and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water (Jer. 2:13). In this light, we also understand how Jesus can later say to the Samaritan woman that if she drinks from the water that He gives her, she will never thirst again. In fact, the water He gives her will become in her a spring of water welling up to eternal life (Jn. 4:13-14). Likewise, we can understand how Jesus on the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles can say to the people, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scriptures has said, streams of living water will flow from within him (Jn. 7:37-38). And John adds that this water referred to the Holy Spirit. Thus, when the psalmist compares God to a river whose streams make glad the city of God, he is ultimately referring to the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This God lives in his church in Christ through the bond of the Holy Spirit. This God also lives in the members of the church in Christ through the bond of the Holy Spirit through faith. And when He does, He is like a constantly flowing stream in their lives that refreshes them, revitalizes them and gives them strength and stability in the midst of a broken and unstable world. May faith in this God during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic free us from our fears by guarding our hearts and minds and granting us a peace that surpasses understanding.

The Lord willing
the next
General Meeting
of
the International Conference of Reformed Churches
will take place in
Windhoek, Namibia
in
October 2021
hosted by
the Reformed Churches in Namibia and South Africa

Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church

The following position paper was adopted by the OPC and presented to ICRC 1997 where it was "received with deep appreciation" (Proceedings ICRC 1997 article 24).

I. The Nature of the Church

- A. The church is the covenant people of God—the body of people to whom God has made the promise to be their God and they to be his people and he to dwell with them. The church is the covenant people of God in all ages and among all nations.
- B. All those who believe the promise of God and their children and have had the promise sealed to them in baptism are to be recognized and treated as God's people, as members of the organized church.
- C. The church belongs to her covenant head Jesus Christ and "there is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ" (Confession of Faith XXV.6).
- D. The work of the church, in fellowship with and in obedience to Christ, is divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness (Form of Government II.4.), under the teaching and rule of elders.
- E. The Lord governs his church also through the application of his Word to the people by the Spirit as the Word is expounded and applied by the officers of the church (Eph. 4:11-16).

II. The Unity of the Church

- A. The church finds its unifying principle in the covenant promise "my dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Ezek. 37:27, Lev. 26:12). This finds fulfillment in Jesus as Emmanuel ("God with us," Matt. 1:23, Jn. 1:14), who came as the mediator of the covenant of grace to redeem and purchase this people for his dwelling by his blood. The ultimate consummation of the promise is the new Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ (Rev. 21:3).
- B. The church must recognize, appreciate, and confess this fundamental unity of the covenant people of God, the body of Christ; which is a God-given creation and not a human achievement.
- C. The church, the visible organization, is described in the Bible as one church. God has given only one covenant of love (Deut. 7:6-12) and has only one people of the covenant.

D. In the New Testament this teaching of the unity of the people of God is sustained (see Eph. 2:11-22 and 4:1-16). Yet the situation is different. No longer are the people of God circumscribed by ethnic, political, or geographical boundaries. All nations are to be discipled.

E. This unity includes those people of God in past ages and also looks to the future and includes the people of God who will believe on his name (Jn. 17:20-21).

F. The gospel proclaimed by the apostles as the foundation of the church resulted in establishing churches as covenant communities in various locations, churches which were ruled by elders. These churches and these elders were not independent, but were one body united by Christ their head, by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, and by the covenant promise of God. The elders at Antioch and Jerusalem resolve a problem, under God, and their decision is binding on the churches (Acts 15, 16:4).

G. The unity of the church is attained unto by growing in spiritual maturity (Eph. 4:13). Unity and maturity are the result of mutual, loving admonition and joint submission to Scripture. Such maturity is manifested by speaking and acting the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

H. Each member is essential to the body, and the growth of the body depends on the active participation of each part (Eph. 4:13, 16). The work of the officers of the church is to prepare the members for, and assist them in this work (Eph. 4:11-12).

Ephesians 4:1-6

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

III. Ecclesiastical Union

In ecclesiastical union two denominations join in submitting to one common form of government. Since ecclesiastical jurisdiction includes the maintenance of spiritual discipline, unity in polity requires agreement in the standards of faith and worship which such discipline maintains. Hence unification in polity, when properly sought and achieved, involves also unity in faith, discipline, and worship.

As we take account of the diversity that exists between denominations arising from differences of ethnic identity, cultural background, and historical circumstance the most conclusive evidence derived from Scripture is required to support the position that the obliteration of denominational separateness is an obligation resting upon these Churches of Christ. The differences that exist often manifest the diversity which the church of Christ ought to exemplify and make for the enrichment of the church's total witness. If ecclesiastical union impairs this diversity, then it may be achieved at too great an expense and tends to an impoverishment inconsistent with the witness to Christ which the church must bear.

Though the diversity which manifests itself in differentiating historical development might appear to make ecclesiastical union inadvisable or even perilous in certain cases, yet the biblical evidence in support of union is so plain that any argument to the contrary, however plausible, must be false.

A. The Ethnic Universalism of the Gospel

In Christ there is now no longer Jew or Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free (cf. Gal 3:28; Col. 3:11). The New Testament does not suppose that the differences natural to individuals nor those arising from ethnic identity, cultural background, and historical circumstance are to be obliterated by the gospel. But it does mean that the unity of Christ transcends all diversity arising from language, race, culture, history. What is more, this unity embraces and utilizes all the diversity that is proper and this is created by God's providence. If we should maintain that the diversity is in any way incompatible with the unity of which the church is the expression, then we should be denying THAT unity which the ethnic universalism of the gospel implies. Implicit in the universalism of the gospel is the same kind of universalism in that which the gospel designs, the building up of Christ's church.

B. The Universalism of the Apostolic Church

The church of the apostolic days embraces all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues. There is no evidence in the New Testament for the diversification of distinct denominations and anything tending to such diversification was condemned (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10-13). The emphasis falls upon the oneness of faith (cf. Eph. 4:5) and the oneness of the fellowship of the saints (cf. Eph. 4:2-4; 11-16; Phil. 2:2, 3; 4:2).

C. Jesus' Prayer for Unity (Jn. 17:20, 21)

It is a travesty of this text, as of all others bearing upon the unity of the church, to think of the unity for which Christ prayed apart from the unity in the bond of truth. Verse 21 must not be dissociated from verse 20. To divorce the unity for which Christ prayed from all that is involved in believing upon him through the apostolic witness is to sunder what Christ placed together. Furthermore, the pattern Jesus provides in this prayer—"as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee"—makes mockery of the application of the text when unity is divorced from the characterization which finds its analogy in trinitarian unity and harmony.

But while these and other distortions of this text are to be shunned, the prayer of Jesus does bear upon our question in two respects.

1. The fragmentation and consequent lack of fellowship, harmony, and cooperation which appear on the ecclesiastical scene are a patent contradiction of unity exemplified in that to which Jesus referred when he said, "as thou, father, art in me and I in thee."
2. The purpose stated in Jesus' prayer—"that the world may believe that thou hast sent me"—implies a manifestation observable by the world. Jesus prays for a visible unity that will bear witness to the world. The mysterious unity of believers with one another must come to visible expression so as to be instrumental in bringing conviction to the world.

D. The Unity of the Body of Christ

The church is the body of Christ and there is no schism in the body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:25). As in the human body, there is diversity in unity and unity in diversity (cf. 1 Cor. 12). The point to be stressed, however, is the unity. If there is unity it follows that this unity must express itself in all the functions which belong to the church. Since government in the church

is an institution of Christ (cf. Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 1 Pet 5:1, 2), this unity must be expressed in government. The necessary inference to be drawn is that the government should manifest the unity and be as embrative in respect of its functioning as the unity of which it is an expression. A concrete illustration of this principle is the decree of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:28, 29; 16:4).

E. The Kingdom of Christ, etc.

1. Christ is the head of the church. So ultimately there is the most concentrated unity of government in the church of Christ. He alone is King. Any infringement upon this sovereignty belonging to Christ is a violation of what is basic and central in the government of the church. It follows that all government in the church must adhere to the pattern of a cone which has its apex in Christ.

2. Christ also instituted the apostolate with authority delegated from him (Matt. 16:18, 19; cf. Jn 20:21, 23; Eph. 2:19-22). This apostolic authority is exercised now only through the inscripturated Word. But in the sphere of delegated authority the apostolate is supreme and will continue to be so to the end of time. This is the way the Holy Spirit, as the vicar of Christ, abiding in and with the church, exercises his function in accordance with Christ's promise. He seals the apostolic witness by his own

testimony and illumines the people of God in the interpretation and application of the same.

3. Subordinately, however, in terms of Matt. 16:19, the hegemony of the apostolate is undeniable and it exemplifies the descending hierarchy which Christ has established.

4. There is also in the New Testament institution the delegated authority of the presbyterate, always subject to the apostolic institution, to the Holy Spirit who inspired the apostles (Jn. 16:13; 20:22), and ultimately to Christ as King and Head of the church, but nevertheless supreme in this sphere of government.

5. Since all office in the church of Christ can be filled only by the gifts of the Spirit, this structural subordination of the government of the church to the rule of Christ functions in living reality as a fellowship of the one Spirit. Everyone who has the Spirit of Christ is thereby called as a good steward of the manifold grace of God to minister his spiritual gifts to all the saints, so far as he is given opportunity. In particular, those whose gifts are for rule in the church must exercise such gifts in the communion of Christ and his church.

When these principles of gradation and communion are appreciated, and when coordinated with other considerations already established, especially that of the



ICRC 2017

unity of the body of Christ, we appear to be provided with a pattern that points to the necessity of making the presbyterate as inclusive as is consistent with loyalty to Christ and the faith of the gospel. In a word, we are pointed to the necessity of unity in government, a unity that is violated when churches of Christ adhering to the faith in its purity and integrity are not thus united.

IV. Toward Perfecting Biblical Unity

A. The unity of the church is in Christ and it is both a given reality and also a requirement. The unity of the faith is both gift and mandate.

B. The church is compelled to give expression to this reality and requirement, this gift and mandate, by actively seeking the promised goal, namely, that of being one body which serves the Lord in perfect peace, purity, and unity.

C. The ultimate goal of the unity of the church is nothing less than one world-wide presbyterian/reformed church.

D. The unity of the church is unity in Christ, unity in the gospel of Christ, "unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:13). This Christ, this gospel, this faith and knowledge, the church must confess. It is summarized for us in our Confession of Faith.

E. The present division into separate denominations is because of unfaithfulness to God as expressed in beliefs, teaching, and living, on the part of both individuals in the church and the churches that are contrary to the Word of God.

F. We find ourselves in this sinful situation as we undertake to pursue the mandate to unity. There exists between us and all other churches a sinful disunity that demands reconciliation in a biblical way. This sin must be faced and removed so that true and full unity and fellowship of the church may be reached.

G. In seeking actively the unity of the church, we must recognize several levels of separateness (i.e., degrees of purity) among the churches. There are presbyterian and Reformed churches that are more or less faithful. There are non-Reformed churches that are more or less faithful. There are also churches that have apostatized, and no longer have the right to be called church.

H. In seeking unity with faithful presbyterian and Reformed churches:

1. There should be mutual agreement on what the gospel is. The churches must confess in their official documents of faith and life the same gospel.

2. There should be a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship established in which official interchange may take place including the exchange of delegates at the meetings of the ruling bodies of the church.

3. There will be fellowship and cooperation in organizations, both domestic and international, which give expression to oneness of faith and life.

4. There then may take place the actual steps toward uniting.

These include:

- a. The recognition of each other as true churches of Christ, more or less pure (Confession of Faith XXV.4), in which the marks of the church are found.

- b. Reconciliation between the bodies (the sin that is involved in the separate existence must be faced and resolved: this may be only the sin of separate existence; or a sin which has historical roots; or doctrinal error; or error in the life of the church).

- c. Self-examination on the part of each church. Agreement that the confession of the united church must be apparent in the life of the church.

- d. The offering of each church to the other for examination; willingness to give, receive and respond to reproof (2 Tim 3:16-17); speaking and acting the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

- e. Agreement on the same ecclesiology and government of the church.

- f. Maintaining the peace, purity, and unity of the churches.

5. There would then be the actual uniting into one organization.

- I. There is also responsibility to call all churches, including our own, to faithfulness in order to seek the unity of the whole church.

John 17:20-23

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

ICRC Coordinating Committee Press Release

On January 29, 2020 the ICRC Coordinating Committee met for the second time since ICRC 2017. Normally Coordinating Committee meetings are held in October or November of years in which there is no ICRC. This time the meeting was postponed as per a decision of the Executive Committee to give the churches in India until January 15 to come with a permit to allow for ICRC 2021 to take place in India.

Corresponding Secretary's Report

The Rev. Dr. James Visscher presented the annual Corresponding Secretary's report. He noted the many requests the ICRC receive for membership, for partnership, and for assistance and explained how he responds to these. He reported that the Rev. Bruce Hoyt has expressed the wish to retire from his position as co-ordinator of the ICRC and that the Rev. Dr. Peter Naylor has resigned as Recording Secretary. It was suggested that Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen fill the role, as needed, for now. ICRC 2021 will have to make the new appointments. It was noted that as current officers of the ICRC are getting older, some thought needs to be given to the appointment of younger men. Finally, it was reported that a formal letter was sent to the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (RCN) pleading with them to re-consider their decision to open all of the special offices in the church to women. No response has been received. Upon request, Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen and Mr. Mark Bube reported briefly on their experience as delegates at the current General Synod of the RCN earlier in January. The situation in the RCN will continue to be brought to the Lord in prayer.

Treasurer's Report

Mr. Kyle Lodder presented the annual Treasurer's report. In general things are fine. Some discussion took place on how to expect smaller and less capable churches to pay their assessment. It was noted that for such churches, given the small amount and the cost of international transfers, it probably makes most sense to note that churches may pay dues at an ICRC once every four years. It is also possible for churches to indicate they are not capable of paying their assessment. It was also reported that there have been some changes in the way the banking is done. In view of these changes a more regular review of the books was agreed to. Some discussion took place on how to fund activities of the various ICRC committees.

Regional Conference Committee Report

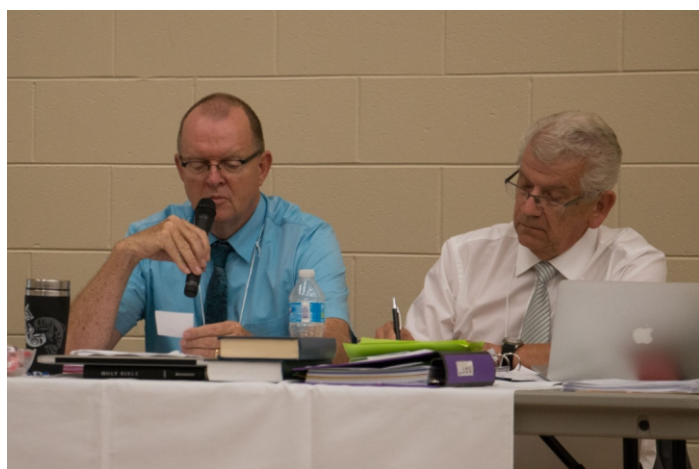
Though the coordinator, the Rev. James Sawtelle, was absent the report on Regional Conferences was brought into discussion. Some of those present could report that the Asia-Pacific Conference recently held in Melbourne, Australia, had gone well. Some discussion took place on the funding of the Africa Regional conference. It was noted that, in light of the existence of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), the need for a North American Regional Conference has never been felt strongly. However, in 2019, in the wake of the annual NAPARC meeting, a committee was created for the formation of a North American Regional Conference.

Publications Committee Report

The Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen reported on the work of the Publications Committee. He noted the continuing health concerns of our webmaster, Mr. Martin Vanwoudenberg. The Web Subcommittee was requested to look into email addresses connected to our domain. The Magazine Subcommittee reported that Lux Mundi continues to be published every quarter. A concern is that there is still no editor or coordinator for Europe.

Missions Committee Report

Mr. Mark Bube reported on activities of the Missions Committee. Upon request, the Mission Committee was allowed an extra day to conduct its consultations. Some discussion took place on how the ICRC and the WRF might communicate and cooperate.



Chairman D. Moes and Corresponding Secretary J. Visscher

Theological Education Committee Report

The Rev. Dr. Douw Breed presented the report of the Theological Education Committee (TEC). The Rev. Pieter VanderMeyden has resigned as secretary, the Rev. Dr. Gerhard Visscher has been appointed in his place. A consultation has been planned for August 2020 in Grand Rapids: various seminary presidents have been invited to this meeting. Some discussion took place on how seminaries might be involved in ICRC 2021. It was further reported that the TEC is working on coordinating the sharing of resources and educators among ICRC member churches.

Diaconal Committee Report

The Rev. Dirk van Gardenen presented the report of the Diaconal Committee (DC). There had been an excellent consultation in The Netherlands in 2019. The DC has especially focused on developing a vision for diaconal work and the role of the ICRC in this.

Next ICRC

The Rev. Dr. Mohan Chacko presented a letter from the ICRC member churches in India indicating that no assurances could be given regarding an ICRC happening in India in 2021. The letter noted that the government only approves a request at the most 6 months before a conference takes place. Further, there is no guarantee that all delegates to the ICRC would be granted visas. The meeting noted that 6 months is often not enough time for delegates to an ICRC to secure a visa. Reluctantly and with regret it was decided to move the location of ICRC 2021 from India to Windhoek, Namibia, with the Reformed Churches in South Africa as host church. Gratitude was expressed for the work done by the brotherhood in India and the hope was expressed that in 2025 an ICRC in India would be possible.

Various arrangements were then made with respect to the next ICRC being in Namibia. The conference would still be in October of 2021. The Rev. Dr. Douw Breed gave some background on the country and the situation of the churches there. It was decided that the Rev. Dr. James Visscher should visit the location as soon as possible.

Regarding the conference itself, the Rev. Dr. James Visscher reported that the Rev. Dr. Mohan Chacko and the Rev. Dr. Douw Breed had been confirmed as speakers. He was still awaiting a response from a European speaker.

Potential New Members

A church serving Hungarian speaking people, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe is seeking membership in the ICRC. This church is being sponsored by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales. Interest has been expressed by a church in Peru, a church in Switzerland & Austria, and a church in Germany. It was further noted that interest might be expressed by more churches in The Netherlands, in Australia, and in Singapore.

Officers and Prayer

With a view to the filling of arising vacancies in the ICRC, it was noted that a large proportion are currently filled by men from the Canadian Reformed Churches and Reformed Churches in New Zealand. Some discussion took place on whether a single church should be allowed to become a member of the ICRC. The consensus was that this should be possible, provided the sponsoring churches can testify to the willingness of such a church to be accountable as church to other churches, thus showing a desire to practise presbyterial-synodal polity.

In his closing prayer the Rev. Dr. Mahon Chacko expressed gratitude for the work of the ICRC in all its committees, and brought the needs of the member churches before the Lord.



Rev. Imre Szoke of the RPCCEE addressing ICRC 2017

Evangelising and Discipling Young Generations for Christ A Report on the PCU Children's Camp

Background

The Annual Children's Camp is an initiative of the Women and Children's Department of the Secretariat of the Presbyterian Church in Uganda (PCU). It is aimed at reaching the children directly with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It provides a platform for children from the different PCU and partner churches to know each other and learn together. It is also an avenue for Sunday School Teachers from the different PCU churches to learn and work together in the Children's Ministry.

The first Children's Camp was held in January 2017 at the campus of Westminster Christian Institute, Uganda (WCIU) in Bweya-Kajjansi, Wakiso District, and has since been held annually, every first week of January. This happens to be school holiday in Uganda. The Camp is a three-day retreat for children from ages four (4) to fourteen (14) and their Sunday School Teachers.

A theme is chosen each year and the lessons drawn from the theme. Three main lessons are taught by three selected teachers on each of the three days. All the other activities are centered on the main theme and these include; interactive lessons, quiet time, singing, creativity sessions, Group Bible Studies, role play, conversations and storytelling, Scripture memorization, Bible quizzes, games and crafts.

There is also a life skills session addressing the different age groups, including social skills and manners, cooking, appropriate dressing, cleanliness, personal grooming and hygiene, work, money, basic safety and organizational skills. The life skills sessions are intended to relate the Biblical lessons to everyday life. It is aimed at helping the children apply the foundational truths of Scripture in their daily lives and move from Bible information to life transformation. It is also an opportunity to interact with the children closely to address the questions they have.

The camp also holds a Camp Fire, an evening when the children gather to learn through storytelling, drama and fun.

Authors: Mrs. Anenon Sarah Ochola and Ms. Nattabi Cate



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Ms. Nattabi Cate (41yrs) is the immediate past Head of the Children's Department at the Secretariat of the Presbyterian Church in Uganda (PCU). She holds a Diploma in Secondary Education, a B.A. in Theological Studies and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Higher Education and Pedagogy from Westminster Christian Institute Uganda (WCIU). Cate is a single mother of 3 children and goes to Zana Community Church (PCU).

Objectives:

The objectives of the Children's Camp are:

- To help children value God's Word and choose to live by it;
- To preach to children the Gospel of Grace and teach them the basics of their Christian faith;
- To impart basic life skills in the children to prepare and eventually enable them become valuable members of their families, local churches and communities; and,
- To teach children to live with and value others in today's highly individualized society.

The Topics Taught

The topics taught are selected basing on the theme for the year.

- The 2017 Camp theme was "Walking in the Light" based on Matthew 5:16. The topics included: *Jesus the Light of the World* and *How to Walk in the Light*.
- The 2018 Camp theme was "Children of the King" based on Galatians 4:6 and the topics included: 'Our Father,' 'Becoming a Child of God' and 'Living like a Child of the King.'
- The 2019 Camp theme was "I will make you fishers of men" based on Matthew 4:19 and the topics were:

'Becoming a Christian,' 'Becoming a Disciple of Jesus' and 'Making Disciples for Jesus.'

- The 2020 Camp theme was "Running the Race" based on Hebrews 12:1-2 and the topics were: *'The Race,' 'Preparing for the Race' and 'Hindrances in the Race.'*

The topics for the life skills sessions are chosen to address the current needs, for example, Self-care, relating with others, becoming heroes of the faith, being focused and having self-control.

Preparing Children for their Future Responsibilities

The Camp is designed to help prepare the children for their future responsibilities by grounding them in the Word of God, which alone gives us a firm foundation. It also helps them to know who they are, different from the world and challenges them to live differently.

The children are taught their responsibilities as Christians in their homes, schools, local churches and communities. The Camp urges the children to become responsible members of their churches and exemplary citizens of the world.

During the camp, children are assigned tasks to do together under the supervision of the Sunday School Teachers. This hands-on learning helps them understand they have (future) responsibilities in the family, community, church and the world.

The children are encouraged to pass on the things they have learnt in the Camp to their family members, neighbors and friends at school and in so doing they are already active agents of change.

We have received positive feedback from parents and guardians and this has led to increase in the numbers enrolling for the camp each year.

Some of the children who attended the first Camp meetings (2017-2019) have joined Teen and Youth ministries in the local churches. These active teenagers are good ambassadors of the Camp in their local churches.

The Task of Passing on Reformed Teaching to Young Children

The Camp passes on reformed teachings through the lessons and reinforces it in all the activities. The Camp organisers and teachers are members of the PCU churches and uphold the reformed faith. Westminster Christian Institute Uganda has been very supportive and has provided teachers for the Camp. All lessons taught in the Camp are based on Scripture with the goal of developing and deepening faith.

The Camp is also used as an avenue for spreading reformed

teachings as participants come from Presbyterian churches as well as other Evangelical and Pentecostal churches.

The Impact: Helping pre-teens understand and grow in the knowledge of God's Word

We have received reports that parents and children have become increasingly interested in the Children's Sunday School Classes, which are held on Sunday mornings in the local PCU churches. This is achieving the objective of its design as an extension of what is taught in Sunday Schools in the churches.

The Camp has also encouraged spiritual growth, as the children get to love God more and appreciate the place of His divine Word in their daily lives. As John MacArthur once observed, *'if we don't teach our children to fear God, the devil will teach them to reject and hate God'*, (Brave Dad, 2016).

The Camp has also helped to connect Sunday School Teachers from the PCU churches, which is an important network for the unity of the church and achieving consistency in delivering the curriculum.



The PCU received as member of the ICRC in 2017

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Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology

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Lesslie Newbigin is well known among a broad spectrum of Christians as an ecumenical church man who was the inspiration behind the contemporary missional movement. Newbigin worked as a missionary and bishop in India almost forty years. During that time he played a role in the unification of various denominations that resulted in the formation of the Church of South India. At the international level, he was active in the World Council of Churches. After retiring and returning to the United Kingdom in the 1970s, Newbigin started a second career as a lecturer and writer. He became known as a critic of modern Western culture and a prophetic voice that encouraged the church to stand firm and live up to its missionary calling.

Already before Newbigin's death in 1998 people were writing books and dissertations about him, and during the last few decades many more have been published. Michael Goheen's doctoral dissertation on Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology was published in 2000. Goheen has since written and spoken on Newbigin on many occasions. Recently he returned to his subject again with his new book: *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology* (Baker Academic, 2018).

For the purpose of this article I'm using Goheen's new book as a window into the theological views of Newbigin, especially his missionary ecclesiology. Apart from Goheen's book, I have also used two books by Newbigin himself: *Foolishness to the Greeks* (1986) and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989).

Uniqueness of Christ

An aspect of Newbigin's writing that we can appreciate, is his defense of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of mankind, as he did for example in his book *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Newbigin described his own position as "exclusivist in the sense that it affirms the unique truth of the revelation in Jesus Christ" (*Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 182). He rejected the kind of inclusivism which regards non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation. It was courageous on Newbigin's part to take this position. It must not have been easy to defend the uniqueness of Jesus Christ within

the circles of the World Council of Churches circles at a time when pluralism was gaining the upper hand. Although Newbigin's struggle in the WCC did not have the desired effect, we appreciate that he spoke up against the views of pluralists like John Hick and Paul Knitter.

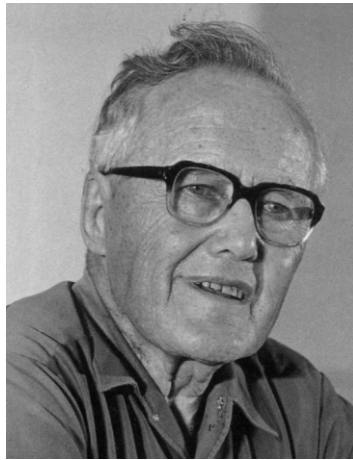
Western culture

Another aspect of Newbigin's writing that we can appreciate is his ability to analyze modern Western culture, as he did for example in *Foolishness to the Greeks* (1986). Goheen summarizes this in chapter 6 of his book (chapter entitled "A Missionary Encounter with Western Culture.") Having lived and worked in India for close to forty years, Newbigin was able to see Western culture with the eyes of a foreign missionary. He considered Western culture to be the most dangerous foe the church has ever faced (Goheen, 164). He also judged Western culture to be more resistant to the gospel than any other culture in the world (165). In Newbigin's judgment the church in the West has become syncretistic: "Instead of confronting our culture with the gospel, we are perpetually trying to fit the gospel into our culture" (167). Newbigin offered a penetrating analysis of modern Western culture: how it has been influenced by the Enlightenment, how it has relegated religion to the category of values (not facts), and how Western culture is based on hidden faith assumptions even though it claims to be neutral and objective. In sum, Newbigin did a good job at unmasking Western culture as idolatry.

Salvation

This brings us to a key aspect of Newbigin's theology: his view of the identity and mandate of the church (ecclesiology). In order to get a handle on this, a good place to start is where Goheen starts as well: Newbigin's view of salvation. Goheen observes that Newbigin wanted to stay away from an individualistic understanding of salvation, as if salvation were limited to the personal salvation of individual people (41). Newbigin would not deny that there is "some truth in this" (according to Goheen, p. 41) but he would insist that "this is an entirely too reductionistic view of the gospel" (41).

Newbigin describes the gospel message in much broader terms. In his view it is a message “about the fullest revelation and the final accomplishment of the end of universal history – the comprehensive restoration of all creation and the whole of human life in the kingdom of God – present and coming in history in Jesus Christ and by the Spirit's power”



Lesslie Newbigin

(Goheen, p. 42). The Biblical support for this view is taken from the announcement by Jesus, made at the outset of his public ministry: “The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:14-15). But what is the kingdom of God? In Newbigin's view, the kingdom of God consists in corporate and cosmic renewal. In Newbigin's own words, the very essence of salvation is “that it is corporate and cosmic, the restoration of the broken harmony between all men and between man and God and man and nature” (59).

Newbigin's view of salvation contains important Biblical aspects but in my estimation the emphasis is problematic. It appears that Newbigin's aversion against an individualistic understanding of salvation has caused him to be one-sided. He focuses on Christ's announcement of the kingdom but he says little about the atonement, the need for personal faith in Christ, the promise of forgiveness of sin and guilt, the promise of indwelling by the Spirit, and the coming wrath of God for those individuals who do not repent. I am aware that one should be careful with criticizing a theologian for what he is not saying. At the same time, when certain aspects are always highlighted and other aspects largely ignored, things get out of sync. In this regard, I found Goheen's observation to be revealing: “Newbigin does not (emphasis mine, AJdV) move from Christ to the application of Christ's work and the distribution of various salvific benefits to individuals” (54).

This is illustrated by Newbigin's discussion of the work of the Spirit. Goheen observes that Newbigin describes the work of the Spirit in eschatological, missional and communal terms. While Newbigin acknowledges that Christ's work brings benefits to individual people, Goheen nevertheless feels that Newbigin's references to the Spirit's work in individuals are “infrequent” at best (p. 54).

Election

Another important aspect of Newbigin's theology is his understanding of election. In his book *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* he devoted a chapter to this theme entitled “The Logic of Election.” In this chapter Newbigin is at pains to point out that the doctrine of election should not be understood as some people having a privileged status before God while others don't have that status. Quote: “To be chosen, to be elect, does not mean that the elect are the saved and the rest are the lost” (*Gospel in Pluralist Society*, p. 86). One wonders how Newbigin felt about the confessional statements in the Westminster Confession of Faith (ch. 3) and the Canons of Dort (ch. 1) that God has predestinated and foreordained to everlasting life a definite number of specific persons. Once again, Newbigin seems to be fighting against what he considers to be an individualistic view of salvation.

What, then, is Newbigin's own understanding of election? In his view, “to be elect in Christ Jesus means to be incorporated into his mission to the world...” (*Gospel in Pluralist Society*, 86-87). It seems to me that this is a reductionist view of election. To be God's elect means more than being sent on a mission. It means to be adopted as sons of God through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5) and this sets the elect apart from the lost. Our Lord himself, in the prayer that is recorded by the apostle John, said that the Father had given him authority “to give eternal life to all whom you have given him” (John 17:2).

Church

Newbigin's views of salvation and election influence his understanding of the nature of the church and its calling in the world. Goheen quotes a statement by Newbigin to the effect that the church “does not exist for itself or for what it can offer its members” (122). Rather, the church exists to carry out God's mission in the particular place in which it is set (123). When the apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth or Ephesus, Newbigin takes this to imply that the church exists for Corinth, for Ephesus, etc. The church must be church “for its particular place” (123). This does not mean that the church simply goes along with the world. Rather, the church will live in a painful tension (145): the church is for the world and identifies with the world; at the same time the church is against the world and confronts its idolatry. Newbigin has a high view of the calling of the church: The church has to claim the high ground of public truth. It is called to represent the kingdom of God in the life of society (*Gospel*

in a Pluralist Society, 222, 226). In order to do this, the church will be “a community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighborhood” (229).

We can appreciate Newbigin's call to the church to be relevant and active and to confront the world. At the same time, he is overstating the case when he says that the church exists “for” the place where it is planted. The church exists for God and for its Saviour, and therefore it is called to build itself up to the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13). The church should not feel guilty when it invests lots of time and energy in the edification of its members, worship, pastoral work and diaconal work. After all, the church is the bride of Christ. He gave himself up for her, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:27). In other words, the church is not merely an instrument in the hands of the Lord to reach the world! God gave Christ as head over all things to

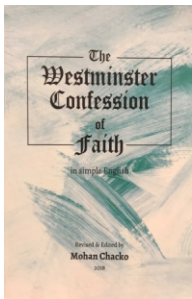
the church, which is “his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22,23).

In sum, I appreciate the fact that Newbigin defended the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Saviour of mankind. I also appreciate his efforts to unmask the idolatrous nature of Western culture and the task of the church to take a firm stand on this. There is a lot that is good about his call to the church to reclaim its missionary calling. At the same time, Newbigin's views of salvation and election are lacking in Biblical balance. His aversion against a so-called “individualistic” view of salvation goes hand in hand with a view of the church that sees its *raison d'être* mainly in what it does for the world. The church fathers and the Reformers (see Calvin's Institutes, part 4) were more balanced and emphasized that the church is called to be the “mother of believers.” She is called to nurture her children! As a result, we cannot but draw the conclusion that there are significant weaknesses in Newbigin's ecclesiology.



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The Westminster Confession of Faith in Simple English



For many readers of *Lux Mundi*, English is often a second if not third language. This brings with it the challenge of reading theology.

One of the classic documents of the Presbyterian tradition, the Westminster Confession of Faith, was drafted in formal English. Often, this confession is used in its original text, which means the language is

also that of an older form of English. Even if the document is revised in a more modern form of English – an activity the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is currently undertaking – the language will be elevated.

To make the Westminster Confession of Faith more accessible, the Rev. Dr. Mohan Chacko of India has revised and edited it into simple English. Long sentences have been broken into smaller segments. Good use has been made of paragraphing and list formats to make the structure of the statements clear.

Fear not, “revised and edited” does not mean the contents have been changed, just the English. If you are not sure of this, each left page has the original text, each right page has the simplified version.

The author has also had the Confession published in a book format that is simple to work with. There is a lot of white space on each page for notes. The proof texts are clearly listed at the bottom of each right hand page.

Dr. Chacko expresses his sincere hope in the preface that this amazing, nearly 400-year old articulation of biblical truth will continue to engage the coming generations. I am sure this publication will serve well for education in the Reformed faith around the world, wherever English functions as the common language but not the native tongue.

For copies of this book and other enquiries please email mc@ptsindia.com or write to Dr. Mohan Chacko at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 51-C Rajpur Road, Dehra Dun, UK 248 001, INDIA.

Discipling the Nations

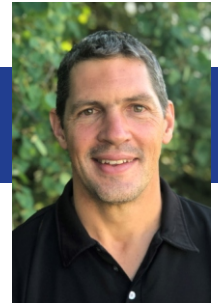
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The presentations of the CRTS/CRMA conference of 2020 made it abundantly clear that the church of Jesus Christ is in a spiritual war (cf. Ephesians 6:10-12). Discussing strategies to bring the gospel in the face of idolatry, witchcraft, persecution, confusion and complacency, the presenters helped us to see how the battle is raging on many different fronts. One after the other, the presenters emphasized the urgent need for reformed missions that focus on the sovereignty of God, the preaching of His Word and the faithful pastoral care of Christians from every tribe, nation, and language in the world.

Reports of the Lord's work in Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin and South America, Africa and North America, which is being carried out by faithful churches all over the world, caused me to go home thanking my Lord Jesus for His gracious and powerful work! The Lord has heard our prayers to open doors (Colossians 4:3-4), and Reformed churches all over the world continue to be a part of our Lord's exciting work. When you listen to the conference speeches (which are available on the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary website: crts.ca) you will get a taste of the burning missionary zeal that is found among faithful reformed churches engaged in discipling the nations. Praise the Lord for excellent foundations of mission-loving churches and for the many opportunities that stand before you even today! When Dr. Arjan de Visser explained the Great Commission

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of Matthew 28:18-20, and Rev. Ryan deJonge highlighted the enormous number of people who have never heard the gospel (see also the Joshua Project), it was clear that the church's responsibility to foreign missions is far from over. Increased opportunities on the home front don't diminish the need for ongoing spiritual warfare in other countries. In fact, the opportunities in our own neighbourhoods that were highlighted by the Revs. Matthew VanLuik and Eric Onderwater (Brampton) and Rev. Tony Zekveld (Toronto) help us to appreciate even more how the Lord Jesus is **simultaneously** calling people to himself from all over the globe though several different means (cf. also Rev. Paulin Bédard's presentation). Canadian churches are finding themselves in a post-Christian country, other nations are coming to our doors, churches in other countries are asking for help, and there are millions of people in the world who have never even heard the gospel proclaimed one time! The LORD has also given the churches human resources, financial resources and many useful instruments such as the internet which can be compared to the "Roman roads" of our modern age. It is certainly an excellent time to be prayerfully engaged in the work of mission both "at home" and "in lands beyond you".

The speeches we listened to on Friday gave many helpful insights concerning how missionaries can best fulfil their task. Rev. Ryan deJonge's speech on exposing worldviews



A joint conference hosted by the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary and the Canadian Reformed Missions Association

made it very clear that true conversion includes a change in the way that people see the world, because their worldview is the lens that is used to shape their beliefs and values which are closely related to their customs and behaviours. A clear example of this was given by Jeremiah Mhlanga, who spoke to us through a video feed from his home in South Africa about the challenges of bringing the gospel to a culture that is dominated by a belief in witchcraft. Breakout sessions during the conference gave us an opportunity to grapple with different challenges that are faced by missionaries in Latin and South America, Africa and the Pacific. The lessons learned from Rev. Ian Wildeboer's speech concerning humility when training Christ-exulting leaders in foreign mission, reminded us that the radical transformation of the heart of those who are given the Holy Spirit, takes some time to manifest itself as it comes in conflict with other beliefs and values and perhaps even cultural customs that contradict or undermine God's gracious work. The speeches on Friday helped us to see the importance of being patient when we preach the gospel and when we train new spiritual leaders, ensuring that true Spiritual transformation is evident and praised in Christ's church.

The reverberating consequences of a transformed heart are not always easy to identify and interact with. People immersed in their own national culture do not always perceive how they have been influenced by their own culture, and foreign visitors have difficulty understanding the full connotations of the values and cultural customs they are observing. The best way forward is to cooperate and to combine both an outside look and an inside look. Rev. Jim



Missionary Jim Witteveen addressing the conference

Witteveen's speech exemplified this cooperation as he investigated questions concerning the contextualization of worship. After allowing us to hear a short audio clip of the famous Brazilian singer Luiz Gonzaga (which brought back memories of the blasting music that played late into the night during the Brazilian carnival celebration), Rev. Jim Witteveen shared that Brazilian church leaders did not think it would be appropriate to adopt this musical style for corporate worship in reformed church services. The goal of contextualization is not to fit in like a hunter in camo gear, but rather it is to communicate to the world in its own language that you are different from them and stand out like





light in the darkness (John 1:4-5; 3:19-21). Furthermore, if your goal is to adapt to the culture you live in, you will find that it is very difficult to do, since most countries have a combination of diverse cultures (cf. Brazil, Canada). When the church chooses one cultural expression over another (whether it be “Euro-centric”, “Brazilian” or whatever), it becomes irrelevant to those groups who identify with other cultural expressions. The only way forward is to be governed in form and content by the content and principles of worship as these are found in Scripture. Then we will see that the cross-cultural message of God's grace and forgiveness is counter-cultural (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16), because the Lord Jesus is a sign that is opposed (Luke 2:34). As Rev. Ryan deJonge's speech on exposing worldviews emphasized, in 2 Timothy 3:16 the Holy Spirit teaches us the value of a reproof or rebuke encounter (elenctics) as we bring the gospel into the world. The

conclusion of all this is that although we must think carefully about how to communicate the truth to others in a winsome manner, the gospel will always stand out like light in the darkness and call people to repentance and a transformed life.

The final day of the conference consisted of a CRMA (Canadian Reformed Mission Association) meeting at which updates were given about the work that Canadian Reformed churches are involved in. The list was impressive. There is a lot going on, and there is more to do. Both Rev. Richard Bout (Domestic and Foreign Missions Coordinator of URCNA) and Dr. Arjan de Visser (Professor of Ministry and Mission, CRTS) presented arguments that show the value of working toward more cooperation among the local churches in their mission efforts. The URCNA missions committee is recommending that their federation move from a “narrow congregational approach

to a broader classical effort where the local church continues to have an important role". Dr. de Visser suggested that Kuyper's principles of foreign mission (1896) should be reconsidered, since they highlight the importance of the local church while also giving room for synod-appointed "mission deputies" who would help the sending churches with advice and facilitate consultation and cooperation. Seeing that both of the suggestions placed a strong emphasis on the ongoing active involvement of the local churches supporting their missionaries, as well as a heavy emphasis on mission work that is "field-driven" (rather than board controlled), I was convinced that these suggestions would be helpful for our missionary efforts. I wonder if it is possible for both the URCNA and the CanRC to simply join forces with the OPC and cooperate with them as one praying, coordinating, training, supporting and cooperating group.

The presenters at the "Discipling the Nations" conference encouraged church members to spend some time evaluating the level of our personal engagement with the work of mission. There are many different questions we can ask ourselves to help us correct our perspective concerning mission work and stimulate further engagement. Maybe you can sit down and try and answer these questions as a family around the dinner table one evening: Do you feel any compassion toward the millions of people who do not know the gospel? In light of the coming Day of the Lord, do you have a sense of urgency? Have you ever spoken to your neighbours about Christ

and/or invited them to your home and/or church? Can you name some places where mission work is being done, and can you describe what that work looks like? How about your children? Do you read books about mission to them? Are you encouraging one another to serve the kingdom of God in places where a church planter could really use their help? Why wouldn't you consider finding a job and raising a family in a place where the Lord is planting new churches? What percentage of your household income is directed to reaching the lost and how does that compare with the money you spend on "little get-aways" or vacations?

I really appreciated the suggestions that Rev. Ryan deJonge and Rev. Ian Wildeboer gave to people of all ages to help us change the culture of our homes, schools and churches. It is my prayer that all God's people may have the opportunity to see regeneration, which the Scriptures affirm is not inferior in power to creation or the raising of the dead (John 5:25; Romans 4:17; cf. Canons of Dort, III/IV, Article 12). May our children and young people experience the catholic church in all its beauty! May we learn to love mission and give it a real and important place in our lives. Maybe you can begin this renewed focus by watching the speeches that were presented at the CRTS conference (crtsc.ca) They are short and to the point. They will increase your zeal and love for mission work. They will encourage you to pray often for the furtherance of God's kingdom in Canada and in all parts of the world.

