



Lux Mundi

41:2 July 2022

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



In this Issue

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Synods of the RCNZ and CanRC
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A Spanish Reformed Seminary
Helping Fleeing Ukrainians

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International Conference of
Reformed Churches

Keeping the Heart

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*Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.
(Proverbs 4:23)*

Scripture reading: Proverbs 4:20-27

Heart in the Bible refers to the inner you; where you think, feel with emotion and make decisions about what you will do. It defines who you are because as a man “thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

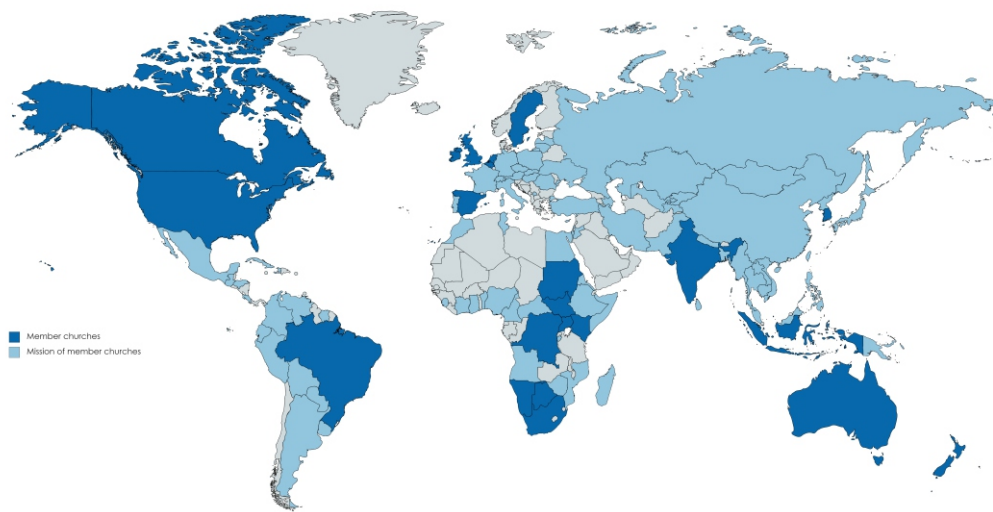
We like to think that we are good-hearted people, but the Bible disagrees. It tells us that, “The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked.” We all need to cry out with David, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.” God does this renewing creative work in us as we turn from sin and look in faith to Jesus (Ezekiel 36:26). Now we can love God and make good decisions.

But be careful. Our Proverb urges us to keep our hearts “with all diligence.” Guard them with care and let them direct your

life as God intends. We need to know how to do this.

The Psalmist leads us in the way when he says that he hides God's word in his heart “That I might not sin against You” (Psalm 119:11). Then think in harmony with God's word like the righteous man in Psalm 1 whose “delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.” Set your affections on God's ways and act accordingly. That will keep your heart focused on God and you can say with the Psalmist, “I delight to do Your will, O my God” (Psalm 40:8).

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Nations where ICRC member churches and their mission projects 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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Let the Word Speak!

One of the things that I have been doing in my retirement years is leading preaching workshops for overseas students. This arose because I have been regularly visiting a certain very large country where I now have many friends and connections. In the process of teaching and mentoring them in the Reformed faith, it became obvious from their remarks that they needed help when it came to preaching the Word and they asked me to assist them.

Now, let me issue a word of disclaimer here. I was asked not because I am such a great preacher or have all the answers, but because in more than fifty years of preaching I have learned a few lessons and gained some modest insights. So, keeping in mind those reservations, I have tried to help my foreign friends.

What have I observed? What has been the major difficulty for these students and budding preachers? It has to do with a rather simple but perhaps not so obvious thing, which is sticking to the text. How hard it is for any number of preachers or would-be preachers to focus, concentrate and explain the Bible in front of them on Sunday morning. Instead of leading the congregation in expositing that part of God's Word, they are soon distracted and heading off in all sorts of different directions.

An Illustration

Let me give you a concrete illustration. Some years ago I was in that large country mentioned above and my companion and I went to church on Sunday (It was in those days when a foreigner could still go to church there). Since my knowledge of the language used there is rather limited, I relied on his translation. That means that I had to sit there and listen respectfully while not really understanding much. Still, I sat there in the hope and expectation that my partner would soon convey to me the message that was preached. So on this particular occasion I sat there and waited, and waited, and waited. The preacher went on and on for almost two hours. Not knowing exactly what he was saying I noted his facial expressions, his gestures and posture. On the whole, it was a rather impressive outward display. If I was evaluating his presentation and style, I would have given him an "A" for delivery.

When the service was finally over, I commented to my

companion that the man was a rather lively preacher and then asked about the sermon. My companion replied in one word, "Nonsense!" Apparently, the man had preached for two hours and had not once turned his attention to the text. Of course, he read it at the beginning of the service but then he promptly forgot about it and spent hours giving the congregation a boatload full of his own homespun wisdom and insights. My friend said, "What a waste of time! Stones for bread!"

Now this is only one illustration, but it could easily be multiplied a hundred or thousandfold. In so many places, preachers are using the text as a pretext to say whatever they want. This world is infested with preachers who do not really preach the Word. They may read it and refer to a Bible text, but solid exposition is sadly lacking. In the end their preaching is not really about God and what he reveals to his people in his Word, but about themselves and how they can talk for an hour or more and impress people with their oratory.

As a result of this disturbing trend the first thing that I try to drum into my students is the fundamental need to open, explain, and apply the Bible text before them. It is about the text, the text and once more, the text! In other words, it is not about you, the preacher. It's not about your wife or your family or your experiences. It's about God! The people before you need to be fed spiritually by the living Word of God and you should not pretend as if your life or experiences are able to nourish them. Only God's Word, filled with God's Spirit, can do that.

How then?

But, of course, that raises the question, "How? How does a preacher stick to the Word?" This involves a process and that process calls for six things: reading the actual text frequently, carefully, contextually, believably, pastorally and prayerfully.

Read it Frequently

The first thing then is always the text and nothing but the text. Read it frequently! I always urge my students to read it over, over, and over again. Read it slowly, read it fast. Read it and ask questions. Read it and reflect. The natural tendency is to read a passage several times and then proceed to breaking it down. After that one heads off to consult countless commentaries, many of which say the same thing. But not so fast! First, spend a lot of time with and in the text. Do not be in such a big hurry to move on.

Over the years I am at times left to wonder whether a



particular preacher that I am listening to has really done this and familiarized himself with the text and identified its central message. He emphasizes this but overlooks that. He goes on and on about this aspect but totally ignores another. Or he is preaching but the results are muddled and the hearers are left to wonder, “Where is he going? What is he saying? Just how much time did he spend with the text?” If the text is not clear to the preacher, it will not be clear to the hearers either. At bottom it usually means that he has neglected to read the text often and failed to come to grips with what it is really saying.

Read it Carefully

In addition to frequent reading, there is careful reading. What I mean by that is examining the words, sentences, and expressions found in the text. It has to do with determining whether one is dealing with a narrative, poetic, prophetic or apocalyptic passage. It has to do with flow and structure, tense and syntax. At times I will also encourage my students to breakdown the text into a schematic diagram.

Since most of my foreign students are not familiar with the original biblical languages of Hebrew (OT) and Greek (NT), much less Aramaic (parts of Daniel), they are at a disadvantage here. Fortunately, we are in the computer age and that can help them a lot. In that regard I envy modern students. During my student days in the late 1960's and 70's, we had to do things the hard and often time-consuming way of consulting numerous dictionaries and grammars. Many a late night was spent with Brown, Driver and Briggs (Hebrew Dictionary), as well as with Arndt and Gingrich (Greek Dictionary), not to mention Gesenius (Hebrew grammar) and Burton (Greek grammar). Whereas today a student finds the right computerized Bible program, runs his cursor over the word, and up pops the pertinent linguistic information relating to mood, tense and all the rest. So armed with a computer and a good Bible software program like Logos or Accordance, a student can go a long way. It may not make him a linguistic expert, but it will give him the tools needed to do some diligent and profitable digging in the text.

Read it Contextually

Another thing that should be mentioned has to do with reading in context. Every text in the Bible exists in a certain context, and the preacher needs to be aware of that. The first order of business when it comes to context is to determine who wrote this, when did he write this, where did he write this and why did he write this. Of course, it will not always be possible to answer all those questions. Take the Psalms as an example. At times we are told the name of the human author

of a particular book and we can even identify the situation that led to what he wrote. At other times this is difficult, if not impossible. Still, as much as we can, we need to identify the setting of a text or passage. Only in that way will you do it justice and will you, in due time, be able to make a proper application for your audience.

Read it Believingly

All of that brings us to another thing. How does one approach the Bible? Some people regard as little more than a famous literary work. It's like Shakespeare, only more religious. Others regard it as a textbook that contains information that people need to know and master. And then there are those who treat it as a strawman, meaning that they think it their duty to attack it and expose what they deem, with their puny minds, to be its faults and shortcomings.

Yet none of that will do, and all of it will lead to nothing more than dead and lifeless preaching. Indeed, there is only one correct way to approach and treat the Bible, and that is as the living, infallible, error-free Word of God. In short, this is a book unlike any other. The Belgic Confession, Articles 2 – 7, is foundational here. At bottom this is not an anthology of human writings, but a unique revelation of the Triune God. It comes to us from the Father through the Spirit and brings us to the Son.

Hence where does the preacher begin and end? With a holy reverence for the Bible as the Word of God. With the realization that the Bible represents, as it were, God's living letters to his people. This is the awareness that must undergird his study of it. It is this conviction that must fill him. He can only “thus says the Lord” if he is certain that the Lord speaks to us even today through his Word.

Read it Pastorally

Still, for a sermon to really land the preacher needs to keep another thing in mind. It has to do with what my old teacher, the Rev. Gilbert VanDooren, taught me. He was fond of saying that a minister has to have three ears. One for the text, one for the world and one for the congregation. In other words, the preacher needs to take into account what the text is saying, what the world is thinking and what the congregation is feeling.

So preaching does not happen in a vacuum. It has to be directed to the congregation as the people of God and to what they are experiencing as they live their lives in this world. Preacher, do not forget their struggles, their burdens, their diseases, and their temptations. Make sure that your sermon lands in their lives and hearts.



Read it Prayerfully

We come finally to the last thing, and in some ways the best thing and the most necessary thing. One must call on the name of the Lord and ask him to open up its holy treasures to you. Prayer is a vital part of preaching preparation. Indeed, it is all prayer. Pray as you read. Pray as you exegete. Pray as you prepare. Pray as you type. This whole process of sermon preparation needs to be coated in prayer! Without it, there is no light, no insight, no understanding, no conviction. So, I urge my students, “Pray your way through the entire sermonizing process. Pray and you will be given light. Pray and you will be blessed! Pray and your people will be blessed!”

Alas, being sinful people, we often neglect to do that. At times we approach the Bible and sermon preparation in much the same way as we would approach any other job that needs doing. We allow it to become routine. We work our way through an established set of procedures. It becomes all head work, and we neglect the heart. Yes, and then when the sermon falls flat we are left to wonder and ask, “What happened? How come it was such a dud? Here I thought that I had an exegetical masterpiece on my hands and it went nowhere – no comments, no feedback, nothing?” Well, any number of factors may be at play here, but most often it comes down to a lack of prayer and petition. We assume that we can do this in our own strength and based on our own insights and expertise.

At other times the reverse may happen. You are working on a difficult text and it requires a lot of effort. It's like a nut that is hard to crack. You pray about it, work on it, wrestle with it, and the results still do not impress you. You have a sense that you failed to get a handle on the text. But Sunday is coming and there is no time to start over. Hence with a heavy heart you go on the pulpit and as you do so you pray, “Lord, I have done my best but I feel in my heart of hearts that I have failed.” You proceed to deliver it with hesitation. But then something happens. You come off the pulpit and countless people come to you to thank you for speaking so well to their hearts through this particular passage. So, what happened? The Holy Spirit happened! He heard your prayer and he turned a dud into a diamond. It happens! Yes, it still happens, BUT not without prayer.

In closing, this is a plea to preachers and congregations alike. Make sure that it is the Word of the living God that feeds your souls.

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The Lord willing
the next
General Meeting
of
the International Conference of Reformed Churches
hosted by
the Reformed Churches in Namibia and South Africa
will take place in
Windhoek, Namibia
on
October 12 - 18, 2022



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Report of the 31st Synod of the RCNZ

After having held over certain matters from last year's Synod meeting, in the anticipation that we would be able to deal with certain appeals and other business face-to-face, we were again placed in the situation of having to deal with it online. This is far from ideal, but with the omicron variant of the coronavirus beginning to sweep through the country, practically there was no real alternative.

The Rev. David Waldron helped to demonstrate how difficult what we were doing was as he invited us to stand with him and sing at the conclusion of his opening devotion for Synod. It wasn't quite the same. And it wasn't something taken up in the subsequent devotions! The other aspect noted was that normally while discussing serious issues we are able to get together over a tea or lunch break and listen and interact together. While I know there were many phone calls between delegates in the breaks and in the evenings, where we had no sessions, it wasn't the same. When the Bible speaks about being together it really is about being physically together.

Yet we cannot say that the Lord wasn't with us in this very provisional manner of business. Every day we began seeking his face and reading his Word and every day we ended the same way with the morning and afternoon sessions ending and beginning the same. There were many times when a certain delegate would be asked to pray for a fellow member or church or committee or denomination.

We were led in this Synod by the moderamen of the Rev Reinier Noppers as Chairman, Elder Andy van Ameyde as vice-chairman, Elder John van Dyk as first clerk, and the Rev Albert Couperus as second clerk. The change in chairman and vice-chairman from last September was as a result of the Rev Peter Kloosterman suffering a heart attack (for which we are thankful he is recovering from and was still able to be part of our Synod).

Looking Inward

Dealing with appeals from individuals or congregations is always a particularly taxing part of a synod. The Synod acts in these matters as court and so any vested interest had to be noted. Thus the two presbyteries apart from the Auckland Presbytery were those deciding on the appeals. This was also why the two appeals took up much of the time of Synod.

The first appeal came from the Reformed Church of Avondale as it appealed to synod against a decision of Auckland

Presbytery. The presbytery had previously upheld an appeal of a church member against the suspension of their membership.

Because this matter involved the second appeal it was decided that that appeal be dealt with first. The second appeal came from the Rev. John Rogers (emeritus) as he appealed to synod following his successful appeal to Auckland Presbytery against the Reformed Church of Avondale. His appeal to the Auckland Presbytery was that while the Avondale church had withdrawn the sanctions imposed upon him in his former capacity as a church visitor it had not withdrawn the charges that gave rise to the sanctions. His appeal to Synod was sustained while Avondale's appeal was dismissed. The Avondale brothers said that they now understand that what they did in writing to the Church Visitors was inappropriate and contrary to Article 95 of the Church Order.

This is only the matter in brief. There is a lot more behind these things, and particularly as it relates to the brokenness which has come about between brethren. Please pray for healing for them and for us all.

Looking Outward

As a Synod we also dealt with our ecumenical relationships. Sadly with several of our sister denominations there has been a serious departure either from God's Word or in the unity of God's people. In regards to the former – departure from God's Word – we had to make the decision to terminate our sister church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKNv) because of their practice, adopted in 2017, of ordaining women to all the offices in the church. Also in relation to the former, the relationship with the Reformed Churches in South Africa, although still close, could be subject to downgrading at the next synod from a sister church to one in ecumenical fellowship due to their ordination of women as deacons.

In regards to the latter – the unity of God's people – the Elder Graeme Mitchell (Presbyterian Reformed Churches of Australia) spoke to us of a serious challenge to the unity of the denomination and how that has affected ongoing denominational work, such as the mission support for the churches in Vanuatu. He told us of four ministers demitting their charges within their federation, one congregation

dissolving, and another being reduced to a preaching post. The Rev. Logan Hagoort, minister of the Covenant Grace Presbyterian Church in Manurewa, spoke to us in his capacity as their delegate to our Synod. He mentioned his own upbringing in the RCNZ and his thankfulness for this. Then he spoke of the new church plant in Tauranga, and potential plants in Nelson and Taupo. He spoke of the COVID-19 challenge but even more of the 'death culture' so prevalent in our society, which means we must work together to witness to the gospel. He concluded with the words of the apostle Paul in 2nd Timothy 3:12-16 about having everything we need in the word of God. He then commended us all to the Lord in prayer.

We were encouraged in the Overseas Mission Board's report on the work in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu and radio ministry in Southeast Asia. There is a genuine heart for overseas mission, not only indicated by our synodical budget but also by others supported privately and congregationally in Asia and Africa and eastern Europe. There were proposed changes to the Missions Policy Handbook. For example, good guidelines have been developed for missionary support groups in the sending congregation of the missionary.

The OMB accounts for 2018, 2019 and 2020 were approved. The budget and quota for 2021 – 2024 was approved, allowing for a 10% increase each year. The current board remains the same with the hope that an extra member from the Auckland Presbytery skilled in promotion be appointed. There was also discussion about a further missionary in the future, though no further action will be taken on this presently.

The National Diaconate Committee report described word-and-deed ministries carried out with sister churches in India, Lithuania and Vanuatu, the Compassionate Catalogue's help in these, and also disaster relief in various parts of our world. The Rev. Dirk van Garderen spoke on behalf of the committee. We have been very encouraged by the work they have done. The presbyteries were encouraged to arrange annual deacons' conference for information sharing and valuable training. There was also the decision to support one inter-synodical national deacons' conference and encouragement to local sessions to attend these conferences. We also committed to encouraging our deacons in their ministry of mercy locally and globally.



Synod 2022 RCNZ

Looking Forward

The Vicariate Examinations Study Committee proposed a number of changes to the way in which the two presbytery examinations for intending ministers are conducted. The one that was acknowledged to be quite radical is where the candidate is no longer eligible to receive and accept calls after sustaining the first examination. Now a pass in both exams is required before a local congregation can call a candidate.

An overture from the South Island Presbytery to help fund a chair in systematic theology at the Reformed Theological College was accepted with \$50,000 being committed.

Another overture, from Bishopdale, to require students for the ministry to study on-campus for at least two years of their degree was also passed.

The Deputies for Students to the Ministry noted that since 2019 there had been four deputies for Students for the Ministry, but before that there had been three, thus their recommendation to appoint three deputies. Annual visits to students would be where this is geographically possible, otherwise by the use of Skype or similar means.

Summer internships were encouraged for our students for the ministry. It helps puts their learning into practice and enthuses them for further study. (As an aside, I have found it an added blessing being a minister supervising these students). To support this funding was approved, up to \$10,000 per summer internship.

The Deputies also proposed changing the language of “vicar” and “vicariate” with “intern” and “internship”. This motion was not sustained. While this was a surprise to some it does clearly delineate the difference between any short-term internship and the final part of preparation for the ministry.

The principal of the Reformed Theological College, the Rev. Dr. Phillip Scheepers, spoke of where things are at with the College. Presently there are 72 students, 49 part-time, and 23 full-time. Over the past five years student numbers have doubled, which is bucking the trend of theological colleges in the ACT framework. Of their students 8 are from the RCNZ.

Looking Upward

Getting to this particular part of our synod in the form that we did conduct it, was quite an involved process. It meant a number of votes about the way to deal with the business, two postponements, and six days of meetings spread over six months. What was meant to have taken place way back in September 2020 took an added year and a half.

There has been a bit of debate about conducting our business in this way, and we are thankful the Lord provided for us in this

time with this way, also as the involvement online is every bit as intense and draining as being there in person. But the Lord is a great and gracious God.

We were thankful for the way the moderamen conducted the business of our synod. They were commended for the work they did.

The Rev. Noppers concluded the meeting by reading Philippians 2:5-11 and encouraging us in the mind of Christ. This is a passage for every day, not only Synod. We prayed for God's leading and guiding and he has answered that. We can only move forward with the attitude of Christ. What led Jesus to come to earth to suffer and die? He who was in very nature God, equal with him, who is the very being of God, the ruler over all. This is the amazing nature of grace. This is not about me – it's about others. He did it freely, no arm-twisting, no carrot dangling in front of him. It was his free decision to put aside what he was and had to truly sacrifice. In that humbling of ourselves we bring Christ's reconciliation into the lives of others. It was a difficult, unusual, and challenging Synod, also with everything else going on around us. The Hukanui Session with its tech team, primarily Willem van Noordt, have been a real blessing. Rev Noppers then declared Synod concluded and led in prayer.

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The RCNZ building in Oamaru



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General Synod 2022 of the CanRC

On May 10, 2022, the twenty-third General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches was convened by the Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church in Guelph. It was a Synod that began by listening to God's voice as revealed in his Word, and it was concluded by hearing God's voice in creation.

God's voice as revealed in his Word

As is customary, on the evening preceding the convening of Synod, a Prayer Service was held. This was led by Rev. Douwe Agema, who was chairman of the previous Synod, held in Edmonton in 2019. He preached on Psalm 119:57-64 under the theme, "The Spirit teaches us to handle rightly the Word of Truth." He impressed on the delegates that they had been tasked by the churches to serve the churches in total submission to the Word of God. He added that it was the prayer that the Spirit would give the strength and wisdom to handle the Word rightly so that all glory would go to our Lord and King, Jesus Christ.

On May 10, Rev. Peter Feenstra, emeritus minister of the Emmanuel Church, guided the process to come to the constitution of Synod. The delegates elected Rev. John Ludwig as chairman, Rev. Eric Kampen as vice-chairman, Rev. Karlo Janssen as clerk, and Rev. Carl VanDam as second clerk. The agenda items were divided over five committees. As each Synod is free to decide on the format of the Acts, it was decided to work with a different format than used by previous Synods, in the hope that the Acts would be more reader friendly.

The first week of Synod saw the delegates immersing themselves in the agenda items assigned to them, seeking to work in humble submission to God's Word. To serve the members of the churches, this review will touch on the matters dealt with in a topical manner.

Interchurch Relationships

A major item on the agenda of every Synod is interchurch relationships. For many years, the relationships were dealt with by two committees, one maintaining contact with various churches in North America and another maintaining contact with churches throughout the world. Synod decided to make this one committee, as there is overlap in meeting with churches in ecclesiastical fellowship at various international gatherings. A proposal about developing various categories for exercising ecumenical relations,

rather than our current way of only having one category was referred back to the committee for refinement, with the instruction to reflect on the feedback provided by the churches.

Synods also are occasions where visits are made by representatives of churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship. Guests were present in person from all over the globe, including South Africa, Australia, and Korea. These guests were given the opportunity to address Synod, passing on greetings. Some of those who had been invited, but were not able to attend, delivered greetings via video links. Others sent letters of greetings. These interactions with delegates from various churches throughout the world gave visible expression of the catholicity of the church. It was striking that a number of presentations concluded with Paul's words from 1 Cor. 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain."

In reviewing the reports of the committees looking after interchurch relationships, and hearing the presentations of the guests, Synod was made aware of the struggles and joys of these various churches throughout the world. A general theme was that, while COVID had been hard on the churches, God had graciously preserved his churches through this time.

Standing Committee for the Book of Praise (SCBP)

The previous Synod had mandated the SCBP to suggest some more hymns, as well as Psalm versions with different melodies, for testing in the churches. The Committee put in a herculean effort over the past three years to fulfill this mandate, soliciting song suggestions, coming up with a suggested list of hymns and Psalms, receiving and considering feedback, and then preparing a report for this Synod. The whole process of testing these songs was greatly hindered by the inability to gather for worship because of the COVID outbreak. When all the factors were considered, Synod considered it best to provisionally approve the Psalms and Hymns, deleting a few as suggested by the SCBP, for use in the worship services. The Committee was mandated to serve Synod 2025 with final recommendations based on further review of feedback received.

Synod also had to deal with overtures to eliminate the Hymn cap of one hundred hymns, set by Synod Chatham 2004. The overtures argued that removing this cap need not jeopardize the priority of the use of the Psalms in worship. Synod was not persuaded and decided to retain the hymn cap. Retaining this cap, however, will not affect the testing of hymns during the worship service for the next three years.

Under the heading of the SCBP, mention can be made of suggestions regarding forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It was decided to remove the qualifier "For the second service" from the abbreviated form. That qualifier was put in place in a time when churches would have a celebration of the Lord's Supper in both services on a Sunday. It now enables the churches to use this as an alternate form. There was also an overture to adopt some shorter forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Synod decided to mandate the SCBP to present the next General Synod with more possible forms, perhaps using some of the forms of our sister churches.

Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

A highlight of this Synod was the appointment of Dr. Reuben Bredenhof, Minister of the Free Reformed Church of Mt. Nasura, Western Australia, as Professor of Ministry and Mission. His appointment was necessitated by the upcoming



Dr. R. Bredenhof addressing Synod from Australia

retirement of Dr. A. DeVisser at the end of the Academic Year 2022/23, at which time he will have served the churches at CRTS for 19 years. On Monday evening, May 16, Dr. Bredenhof addressed the members of Synod and guests via video link. He indicated that it was most humbling to receive this expression of trust, and to be granted the beautiful opportunity and privilege to train young men who are getting ready for a life of ministry and mission at CRTS. He thankfully accepted the appointment and was eagerly looking forward to beginning his task. Dr. DeVisser also spoke to the Synod and guests, expressing gratitude to the Lord for the opportunity to serve the churches for 18 years in his task at the seminary.



General Synod 2022 of the Canadian Reformed Churches

Synod dealt with many other matters related to the Seminary and preparation for the ministry. It received the general report on the operations of the Seminary over the past number of years, as well as reports about funding for the pastoral training program and the fund for needy students. With much Thankfulness it could be noted that the Seminary is able to continue to do its work of teaching men for the ministry of the gospel.

Related to the work of the training for the ministry of the gospel, Synod dealt with an overture which recommended that preparatory examination of students, when they are declared eligible for call, should be conducted in the classis of their home church before they went to the Seminary. For many years, the bulk of that responsibility fell on Classis Ontario West, as the students were members of churches in that classis. Synod adopted this overture, effective January 2023. This will greatly alleviate the workload of Classis Ontario West.

Other matters

Synod dealt with many other matters, such as reports from Committees looking after the Federation Website (canrc.org), Bible Translation, Archives, and Days of Prayer. It also had to deal with a number of appeals. Synod appointed the Church at Aldergrove to convene the next General Synod in 2025.

God's voice as heard in creation

It may not be apparent from this brief review, but the delegates spent an intense ten days discussing, reflecting,

considering, and debating. Each day was opened and closed with reading God's Word and asking for his blessing. There was the desire to deal in a just and righteous manner with all the matters on the agenda, so that the Christ, the king of the church, would be glorified and his people served.

In his concluding remarks, the chairman, Rev. John Ludwig, expressed his thankfulness that Synod could be conducted in a brotherly manner, even when there were differences of opinion. He also acknowledged how so many members of the Guelph-Emmanuel Church willingly gave of their time and talents to help Synod function well. The delegates enjoyed many excellent meals and benefitted from the skilled IT and secretarial help. As a token of appreciation, the church was presented with a picture of a Guelph landmark, with a plaque expressing gratitude for hosting Synod. The chairman was given a ceremonial aluminum gavel with the date of the Synod inscribed. Thanksgiving prayer was then offered to our gracious God for his blessing over the Synod, but just before the "Amen" could be said, we heard the voice of God as described in Psalm 29. The powerful voice of the LORD thundered, the waters poured from the heavens, and the power went out and remained out for more than 24 hours! We enjoyed a final meal in dimmed lighting, said our farewells, and the homeward journeys began.



Synod singing to God's glory



Author: Mr. Wayne Johnson

Wayne Johnson is a retired elder with the Reformed Church in the United States.

New Reformed Seminary Opens in Quito, Ecuador

Most Reformed denominations have struggled to plant churches in Latin America, due largely to the lack of Spanish-speaking Reformed pastors. A number have brought Latin American students to U.S. seminaries, but we all realize the answer is to train indigenous pastors to plant churches where they live.

Now, thanks to the pioneering work of a United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) church-planter in Quito, that's changing. Pablo Landázuri graduated from Mid-America Reformed Seminary and has been working to build a congregation in his nation's capital. Part of that ministry was to try and prepare other men for ministry. What began as a labor of love soon overwhelmed the resources of the local church, as more and more pastoral students began to seek training.

Pablo enlisted the support of Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) home mission pastor Valentín Alpuche to help shoulder the teaching load from his church plant in Shafter, California. Seeing the need, Valentín reached out to City Seminary of Sacramento for advice. City Seminary had a unique model, focusing on training pastors where they live. They ran an extremely efficient program, and had a “no tuition debt” policy buttressed by a board that focused on raising scholarship funding. What began as advice soon became much more.

Excited by the prospects of a genuinely Reformed seminary in Latin America, City Seminary agreed to take over the administrative burden, leaving the faculty to concentrate on teaching. City Seminary also agreed to open its scholarship fund to Latin American students, and to assume the fundraising role for the new seminary. They also invited RCUS pastor Ruben Zartman to join the faculty of the new Seminario Reformado de las Américas.

Like Pablo and Valentín, Ruben was a MARS graduate. He had also grown up on the mission field and spoke Spanish fluently. With this initial faculty, operating with classes in Quito, and Zoom classes from the U.S., el Seminario Reformado de las Américas began operations in January with eleven students from four countries.

To date, the seminary has received financial support from City Seminary, as well as from a growing list of URCNA and RCUS churches. City Seminary Board of Governor's

member Jose Fabila has been visiting churches, classes and presbyteries in the U.S. enlisting support. The numbers make a compelling case.

The Southern Baptists manage the world's largest missionary enterprise, and are extremely efficient. They estimate the cost to field a single missionary at \$60,000 per year. The problem, of course, is that these missionaries are seldom natives of the countries where they serve, and most eventually return home. For that same \$60,000, by the fourth year the Quito seminary can graduate 10 confessionally Reformed pastors annually – church-planting pastors who will remain on the field indefinitely.

Since January, the City Seminary board has reached out to the seminary and missions teams at the URCNA, the RPCNA, Heritage Reformed churches, RCUS, Canadian Reformed, etc. to discuss making el Seminario Reformado de las Américas the flagship training ground for U.S.-based Reformed denominations. Those discussions have involved asking the various denominations to agree to provide oversight to students that will eventually serve as church planters in their own missions programs. The reception has been warm, and we are gratified at the godly ecumenicity evidenced in those discussions. Eventually, denominations may have a large enough “footprint” in Latin America to begin their own seminary efforts, but for now, we have a program in place willing and able to assume that vital role. It is through such cooperation that we will continue the effort to make ICRC and NAPARC more than just fraternal associations, but also a nexus for fraternal action.

While the MINTS program has done immeasurable good in offering training worldwide, what el Seminario Reformado de las Américas offers is a full classical Reformed curriculum designed for full-time students. In Latin America, that is the need of the hour.

In May, 2022, the seminary transitioned to the enhanced Google Classroom platform, and is diligently trying to establish a route to provide classes in Cuba, thus far the only nation not able to access the seminary classes.

Visit the website: <https://seminariodelasamericas.org>

We have also been concentrating on translation of Reformed books that are not only for evangelism, but

specifically for church-planters and seminarians. That effort has received funding from the RCUS and has produced nearly a dozen titles thus far. Still, the list of needed translations is greater than our four translators and proofreaders can handle. There is no shortage of work, but in many ways, we are plowing new ground.

Lord willing, ten years from now, we will have students from every Latin American country, as well as the huge Spanish-speaking U.S. mission field. There is literally no place in the U.S. today without a growing Spanish-speaking population, and a need for church-planters.

We cannot know how the Lord will bless this new ministry, but we do know that we should not shy away from so great an opportunity. While City Seminary and a number of individual churches are shouldering the financial burden now, the base of support will need to broaden if we are to expand the faculty. With new students enrolling every semester, it will not be long before the faculty must grow.

The “ASK”

1. We covet your prayers. This new opportunity brings new challenges.

2. We need student referrals. If you know Spanish-speaking brothers exploring a call to ministry, have them reach out to us.

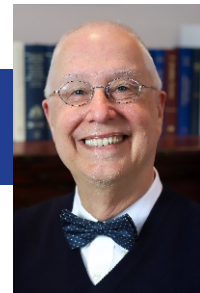
3. Yes, we need funding partners. Approach your church or denomination and ask that they consider adding el Seminario Reformado de las Américas to their annual giving. Churches and individuals can give through the Seminario's website here:

<https://secure.anedot.com/city-seminary-of-sacramento/2d7491f7-4058-4ea5-ac07-092ef5310cfc>

4. Put us in touch with solid Reformed prospective faculty members. We'd like to talk.

Most of us will never serve on a foreign mission field, but we can all support missions. If you have any questions, reach out to us at wayne@theagency.us.





Author: Mr. Mark Bube

Mark Bube is an elder with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and chairman of the ICRC Missions Committee. He has served as general secretary of the Committee on Foreign Missions for the OPC since 1991.

Reflections On the Goodness of Our Lord

In what has come to be known as the Great Commission, our Savior, shortly before he returned to the Father in heaven, commanded his apostles—and through them, his church—to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. And to this very day, churches that would be faithful to observe all that he had commanded us, send missionaries to the nations to establish his worship (planting churches in which his people are discipled, baptized, and taught) and to cast the net—to go—to bring the lost into that worship.

Following the pattern of Scripture, these young church plants on the mission field, by his grace, grow in their whole-hearted embrace of the system of doctrine that is taught in the Scripture and reflected in our Reformed confessions. And over time, we see them also grow in their ability to provide for their own needs and for those of the poor around them; to govern themselves according to the biblical pattern, as the Lord provides sound and godly ministers, elders, and deacons; and, in turn, to continue the process of carrying out that Great Commission to the next village and then to another halfway around the world. This

is a process that usually takes some time—often it's multi-generational—and that requires much patience, self-restraint, and waiting upon the Lord, and always with our eyes fixed upon Christ. And yet how truly delightful it is to serve a glorious Lord who continues to work powerfully and supernaturally every day of our lives.

An Adventure in Grace

For the past thirty-one years, as general secretary of the Committee on Foreign Missions, it has been a joy and a privilege—an “adventure in grace,” if you will—to see with my own eyes the wonders of his hand at work through the labors of your missionaries as they, by the power of the Holy Spirit, press on faithfully to gather and build his church in faraway corners of the globe. And as his Word has been earnestly and lovingly proclaimed in distant lands to thousands who are otherwise perishing in their sins, time and again we've witnessed his Spirit apply that Word to the hearts of his precious ones to cause them to repent of their sins and to flee in faith to our Savior—each case of which is a supernatural work!



Mark Bube in Haiti

Have you ever seen the look in someone's face when it first begins to dawn on him or her that there might be forgiveness for sins? We are all sinners, and (apart from Christ) we all carry the terrible burden of our sins around with us every day. Christ tells us in his Word that all people who have ever lived know that there is a God to whom they will one day have to give an answer, but that they suppress that knowledge, exchanging truth for a lie, to pursue their own sinful desires. But we all also know that (unless Christ comes first!) we're going to die. And then one day someone, perhaps even a strange foreigner from a different culture, comes and opens up the gospel, and the Spirit gives ears to hear, and they comprehend for the first time that there is repentance and

forgiveness for sin in Jesus Christ—and that they safely can flee in faith to Christ and know that he will never turn them away. And warming in their faces is a wonderful peace, some tears of joy, and a keen anticipation of delighting in their newly found Savior.

Ministry to Image-Bearers

In his Word, Christ teaches me to view each person that he brings across my path as his image-bearer, no matter how different all our externalities—language, ethnicity, economic or cultural situations—might be. And not only as a fellow image-bearer, but since Christ has with his blood purchased for God men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, I need to consider that this one who he is bringing into my life just now might also be one of those precious ones for whom he died—and I need to love this one, just as my Savior has loved me.

As part of our ministry of mercy in the name of Christ, our missionaries have been involved in the operation of three different medical facilities in three different nations over the past thirty years, all in a region of the world where, if one went to a typical government (or secular) medical facility, the doctors (if they were present at all) would probably be drunk and the necessary medicines or drugs would long ago all have been pilfered and sold on the black market; and worst of all, you would be treated like an animal.

One of the first things that would stand out to an incoming patient arriving at any of the three medical works through which the Lord gave us the privilege to minister mercy was that, when someone entered the gate, they were treated with the respect and dignity that befits an image-bearer, as someone who had intrinsic value because they are made in God's image. This is part of our testimony and might be one of the reasons that patients and their families will walk for hours, often bypassing other clinics, to come to us for treatment.

In the ordinary course of events, maybe it will please the Lord to use the ministrations of our missionaries and the local medical staffs they have trained to treat the malady that brought the patient to the clinic with success. Or maybe not, for maybe they waited too long to come, or the necessary medications just weren't available to us—but we still have time to pray with them and carry their needs to the throne of grace, and to show them the compassion of Jesus.

Learning in Humility

Meeting brothers and sisters in Christ among those to

whom we minister on our mission fields has been such a blessing. In Christ our hearts are already knit closer together than they will ever be with our own blood relatives who do not know Christ. The shared joy that is ours in the use of the ordinary means of grace together, especially in the context of gathering for worship, is a foretaste of the sweet fellowship that will be ours with them around the throne forever. And we have so much to learn from one another.

I remember years ago sharing a meal with a brother who had been imprisoned multiple times for Christ. He had memorized sizable portions of Scripture to be prepared for the next time he would be put in prison, where no Bibles were allowed (note to self: am I anywhere near as ready?). Near the end of our time together, the brother, who is now home with Jesus, looked me straight in the eye and pointing with his finger, exclaimed, “And you know, prison is a wonderful place to share the gospel with unbelievers!” I still remember like it was just yesterday: that sense of a wave sweeping over and then melting me with the feeling that I was not worthy to be even in the same room with this valiant brother, who is a real soldier for Christ.

Another brother from the same place related to me how, for several brothers and sisters in Christ, it seemed that, on their way into prison, the Lord, in his merciful providence, would sometimes blind the fingers of the guards as they searched incoming prisoners, missing the Bibles in the prisoners' pockets. Accounts of some of the sweetest fellowship among those united to Christ that I've ever encountered have occurred among those imprisoned together for the name of Christ.

It is difficult to overestimate how truly miserable mankind's bondage to sin is, and how terrifying the thought of God's



Mark Bube in India

lifting his restraining hand upon the actions of the evil one ought to be. As we look around the world, it seems that, generally speaking, the further the life of a people is removed from Christ and what his Word teaches, the crummier their daily lives are.

It's fairly easy to see the bondage to sin in the wicked and awful pagan practices of the heathen—child sacrifice, bodily mutilation, greedy impoverishment of widows and orphans, and the like—not to mention the terror of a life dominated by the fanatic and evil wiles of a witch doctor or shaman. But we also see that bondage to sin in the graceless and sometimes bloody practices of other more organized religions that know not Christ—in the superstitions of Roman Catholicism, in the false teachings of the so-called prosperity gospel, and in the overwhelming meaninglessness of our modern secular culture that denies there can be anything called “truth.”

Yet in every place, Christ is at work, redeeming men and women and boys and girls for himself. As we seek to be useful to our Savior in our engagement with the unbelieving world, we are reminded that we need to be always ready to give an answer for the hope that is in us, and to do so with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience.

I remember one of our missionaries being put under a blood curse by a much-feared witch doctor while preaching one night to an assembled crowd numbering in the hundreds. The following night hundreds more turned out to watch him drop dead. He didn't, and the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ shone brightly into the community that night.

Another one of our missionaries, who labored among a people that loved riddles, engaged some of the older men gathered under a tree while he was walking between villages. The question that he put to them that day was: “How is it that, if you are born once, you die twice, but if you are born twice, you die only once?” Can you solve the riddle?

Seasons of Ministry

As many who have been involved in Christian ministry for any length of time have probably experienced firsthand, it sometimes pleases the Lord—the One who opens doors that no one can shut, and closes doors that no one can open—to grant to his servants in his gracious providence, certain sweet spots or seasons in their labors during which the Spirit especially seems to be moving across the land and there is much fruit being gathered in. Those are the times, when at the end of the day, although we are tired and dirty and maybe hungry, our hearts are overflowing

with joy and gratitude at the goodness of our God. We rejoice in seeing his power made manifest in our weakness, and we delight in Christ.

We also know that, when the work seems to be going well, and it looks like we're making real inroads to his domain, Satan will push back. Hard. Trusted workers will betray us or fall into serious sin. The sin of pride is always lurking at our door. We have to remind ourselves over and over again that our work, even a fruitful missionary enterprise that he is richly blessing in the moment, is ultimately never about us: it's always about Jesus Christ and him alone. For it is Christ who leads us in that triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

The psalmist reminds us that our days are like grass; we flourish briefly like a flower in the field and then we are gone. The famous missionary apostle opened his heart to a much-troubled church plant in Corinth, whom he nevertheless dearly loved, declaring, “I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls” (2 Cor. 12:15). Brothers and sisters, this is what we are doing today, and my desire all these years has been that it would please our Lord to grant our missionaries much joy in their labors unto Christ, even as we ourselves are being spent. For together we confess our sure hope that we shall indeed look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. To God be the glory!



Mark and Kathy Bube

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Author: Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen

Karlo Janssen serves as a minister with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

ICRC Coordinating Committee Press Release

On March 22, 2022 the ICRC Coordinating Committee met for the fourth 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 to be closer to the planned convening of ICRC 2022, allowing the committee to weigh whether to again postpone the upcoming conference.

The convener, the Rev. Bruce Hoyt, spoke some opening words and then invited the Rev. Dr. Douw Breed to open the meeting with devotions. The latter read Acts 12:12-17, spoke some words of encouragement regarding praying in faith and waiting in faith, and led in opening prayer.

The Rev. Dr. James Visscher presented the annual Corresponding Secretary's report. He noted there had not been much activity in 2021 because of the pandemic. He pointed out specifically a letter from one member church regarding postponing the ICRC again and a letter from the OPC regarding RCN membership in the ICRC. During discussion it was noted that some churches applying for ICRC membership had not yet submitted all the necessary documentation. Arrangements were made to look into this.

Mr. Kyle Lodder presented the annual Treasurer's report. In general things are fine. Some discussion again 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. Some discussion took place on how to fund activities of the various ICRC committees. The Missions Committee indicated it would need funds for an in-person meeting in September. The Theological Education Committee indicated it might need funds as well for an in-person meeting.

No individual has yet been found to be the Regional Conferences coordinator. There have been no regional ICRC conferences this past year. It was noted that an ICRC-like conference, NAPARC in North America, did take place.

The Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen reported on the work of the Publications Committee. The website continues to function and Lux Mundi continues to be published, albeit not as frequently as intended. A mandate for the Publications Committee has been drafted and is ready for submission to the ICRC.

Mr. Mark Bube reported on activities of the Missions Committee. He indicated that the work continues to progress well. For the Missions Committee to function well, an in-person consultation needs to happen prior to this year's ICRC. The Rev. Dr. Douw Breed presented the report of the Theological Education Committee (TEC). A network of seminary librarians continues to be formed. Work on publishing a directory is progressing, with advice having been received regarding possibly security concerns. Some sort of consultation (and conference) may take place yet this year. The Rev. Dirk van Garderen presented the report of the Diaconal Committee (DC). The report for the ICRC is ready. Recently the DC has been facilitating the sharing of information regarding help for the crisis that is developing in Ukraine. Some discussion took place on encouraging assistance to the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe, a church that is in the process of applying for ICRC membership.

Regarding ICRC 2022, the Rev. Dr. James Visscher reported that all speakers have been confirmed. It was decided unanimously to go ahead with the conference in October of 2022 in Windhoek, Namibia. This decision would be communicated by the Corresponding Secretary to the member churches. Time will be allocated during the conference for meetings and consultations. The Executive Committee will meet closer to the conference to finalize the schedule. Some discussion took place on who might chair the conference; this matter will be finalized by the Executive Committee. It was further decided that the next ICRC would be, the Lord willing, in 2026. Some arrangements were made for Coordinating Committee members to connect with churches in various parts of the world regarding hosting. Requests from 4 churches for ICRC membership were reviewed. It was noted that an ICRC member church may soon divide along a national boundary and the question was asked what this would imply for ICRC membership. This was referred to the Executive Committee for action if required.

A list of churches to be invited to the ICRC 2022 as observers was reviewed.

As there are no single churches currently requesting membership in the ICRC, it was decided to table the drafting of a proposed amendment to the ICRC Constitution and

Regulations on this matter. The Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen was appointed to fill the vacancy of Recording Secretary in the Executive Committee. Some discussion took place on nominees for the various facilitating and operational committees of the ICRC.

The Rev. Bruce Hoyt spoke some closing words. In his closing prayer the Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen expressed gratitude for the work of the ICRC in all its committees and brought the needs of the member churches before the Lord.

Newsletter of the ICRC Theological Education Committee

June 24, 2022

Greetings, all. Here is yet a third edition of the newsletter of the ICRC's Theological Education Committee. Our goal is to keep seminaries that serve the church federations affiliated with ICRC connected to each other, so that they can help and encourage each other in the service of our glorious King, the Head of the Church.

We had hoped that the newsletter and the correspondence with our respective seminary representatives would lead to a plethora of information about what's happening at seminaries around the world. However, it seems that the troubles of our time, from Covid to the Ukraine, are keeping us all focused on our local situations.

There are however a few things to share. First of all, some news out of that area of the world that has all of us troubled and found much in prayer – Ukraine. Secondly, a plea for some co-ordination in the Philippines. And thirdly, a bit of news re ICRC Namibia.

Please consider keeping the brotherhood around the world up to date re the weal and woe of seminary education in your corner of the world. You can do this by sending material to us (at icrctecnews@gmail.com). It's good for us to keep in touch with each other. GHV

Being a Reformed Seminary in Today's Ukraine

Last March, Valery Zadorozhnyy, a Ukrainian pastor and NT lecturer at Evangelical Reformed Seminary in Kyiv, Ukraine, wrote the following (as it appeared in Tabletalk and Facebook):

Author: Rev. Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher
Jerry Visscher is a minister with the Canadian Reformed Churches and emeritus professor of New Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary.



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am currently in Odessa, where all is still relatively well. Air raid alarms rarely sound. A couple of minutes ago, I heard shots from the sea. A rocket hit a house not far from the house where my mother is, but thankfully it did not explode. You may know what is happening in other cities from the news. My wife and children have gone to Poland, so I'm not worried.

What of other Ukrainian Christians? What is the state of the church in Ukraine currently? There are some pastors and churches that are under fire in Kyiv every day and need the prayers of God's people. There is the pastor of the Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church in Kyiv, Pastor Ivan Bepalov, with his family. Another Reformed pastor in Kyiv, Pastor Sergey Nakul, reported that his young son recently asked, "Dad, if Putin kills us, will we go to heaven?" "Yes, son, of course we will go to heaven."

Due to the chaos, I think that the state of the church here can be described as follows: a state of prayer, full trust in the Lord, and readiness to fight to the end. There's a sense of pride on the part of the Ukrainian people, but also humility before the Lord, for we Christians know that our people are not sinless and need repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yesterday, for the first time, I heard our president clearly declare faith in God and the inevitability of God's retribution. He even expressed hope in Him. This is a very good sign. But we understand that this is still only a general belief in the existence of God, and we pray that our president, like the entire nation, will know God in the true Messiah, Jesus Christ.

We pray because we need a miracle. The Ukrainian army and ordinary people are putting up a heroic resistance, and we are filled with pride for our people as never before. We are grateful for the support that Western countries have provided in the form of weapons, sanctions, and care for refugees. But

we understand very well that we need a miracle because of the prevailing enemy.

Russia still has a lot of resources and Putin still has a lot of soldiers to throw to their deaths. And he has nuclear weapons. Our hope is only in God, and we need a miracle to withstand the threat we face and to prevent our destruction.

Our hope is only in God, and we need a miracle to withstand the threat we face and to prevent our destruction.

We pray, and we are also ready to fight. There are fewer and fewer pacifists even in the traditionally pacifist denominations. Many brothers, young and old, volunteer for the army and territorial defense and fight till the end. Not because they hate Russians but because there is no other way to protect what we hold dear—our country, our children, and our freedom, including the freedom to believe in and worship the one true God.

For every Christian, the following question is especially urgent now: How do we hate evil and also love our enemies who commit egregious crimes? And we are no longer conceptualizing this question theoretically. When hatred boils up in us, we understand that we will need to forgive and to love. And two truths are especially valuable for us now: God's just retribution and the cross of our Lord. Our hearts are comforted in the truth of God's retribution. He will repay His unrepentant enemies in a way that we could never have done ourselves. Our hearts are humble before the cross of Calvary—we, as well as our enemies, deserve the wrath of God, but God has reconciled us to Himself with the blood of His Son. We were under the power of the devil, just like everyone else, but God redeemed us with the blood of Christ.

We, as Christians, now vividly witness the bloody fruits of Putin's war, and we're shocked that many, though not all, Russians have followed him. We Christians are aware that the tendency to suppress the truth with untruth and to believe what we want to believe is a property of fallen human nature, and we are also not immune from this.

Therefore, we pray for the repentance of our enemies, so that God will free them from the power of the devil's deception.

We believe we'll come out as victors. We know that evil is defeated by the cross and the resurrection of our Lord. We know that whatever our enemies do to us, we will be resurrected, because God has united us with Christ. Therefore, we celebrate the victory of our Lord. The main battle took place, and the main enemy was defeated by the cross.

Pray for us, my dear brothers and sisters. Pray for our people

to withstand, to survive, and to forgive afterward. Our hope is only in the Lord. Isaiah once said that horses and chariots are flesh and not spirit (Isa. 31:3). And we haven't forgotten that. Tanks and planes are just iron, but true victory comes from the Spirit of God. "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue" (Ps. 120:1–2).

Interview

As the above was written in March, I wrote to Alister Torrens, the President of the Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Kyiv, Ukraine to affirm that most of it is still current. Below you can read my questions (in italics) and his responses. His email is dated June 13, 2022.

Jerry: I have no idea how many Reformed seminaries there are in Ukraine. Are you the only one?

Alister: There are at least a couple of other smaller institutions, including our friends at RITE seminary, previously based in Donetsk, but more recently (since the 2014 invasion of Russia) in Kyiv. However, I believe we are the only Reformed seminary in Ukraine with a faculty and administration normally resident in country, in Ukraine, and therefore with the ability to offer a Masters-level theological education (the main degree we offer is the M.Div.

Jerry: If there are other Reformed seminaries, can you comment on how they are doing according to your knowledge?

Alister: There used to be an informal seminary called Ukraine Biblical Seminary that brought in reformed lecturers to teach, but did not have any resident faculty or administration. We have not heard anything about them in many years and are unaware of any online presence. We have friends at RITE seminary, who before the war were renting our facility for classes. I know that they recently (for the first time since Feb 24) resumed classes via Zoom.

Jerry: I have been through your Facebook page, seen the post from Valery Zadorozhnyy from March 2022 (quoted above) and am wondering whether that is still an accurate description of the present situation?

Alister: Yes, the main difference is that by God's mercy the North of Ukraine has now been liberated from Russia's invading troops, and that now we have seen the war crimes perpetrated in the areas they occupied.

Jerry: Are your buildings still in tact?

Alister: Yes, by God's grace they are.

Jerry: Are you still able to offer classes?

Alister: we initially paused classes to concentrate 1) on fighting

the informational war being so cruelly waged by Russia against Ukraine and 2) to practically help the people in our churches fleeing to safety as we as pass on financial help from our friends around the world to those most in need. However we resumed classes online at the end of April. Our classes are offered in intensive two-week modules held 5 times a year. Because we have students from all over Ukraine as well as from other countries, the realities of war make travel a risky prospect thus far.

Jerry: Do you care to comment on the present condition of the reformed churches in Ukraine?

Alister: There are two confessionally- reformed denominations in Ukraine the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Evangelical Reformed Church. ERSU is the denominational seminary for both. While each denomination is not huge, they are faithful and keen to grow and reach out to the lost. Our seminary also welcomes (Ukrainian or Russian-speaking) evangelicals of any denomination, who desire to learn Reformed theology with a view to serve the church in some capacity.

Jerry: Which Reformed seminaries presently support and endorse your work...?

Alister: Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary (Riga); Reformed Theological Seminary Heidelberg; Theological University Kampen. Also aware of, and supportive of our seminary: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary, Westminster Seminary, California

Jerry: Is there anything else you would really love to share with us?

Alister: Please continue to pray for God's mercy on Ukraine and her churches, for the defeat and removal of the invading Russian army (with the death and outrageous atrocities it has brought upon Ukraine), and for the quick downfall of the evil regime which ordered the same invasion. Pray for the global moral and political will to oppose Russia's fascist war and genocide in Ukraine as decisively as the world eventually united against Nazi Germany in the early 40s. We firmly believe this to be a Satanic war being waged by Russia against Ukraine, since it is entirely based on a web of outright lies - such as the accusations that Ukrainians are Nazis or that Russian-language speakers in Ukraine are being suppressed, or even that Ukraine committed genocide in Eastern Ukraine.

Jerry: Our hearts go out to our brothers and sisters in the Ukraine and to the cause of world peace. Let us be prayerful about this and all the issues of the day as we long for the Day of the return of our beloved Lord Jesus.

Attempt to Unite Reformed Efforts in the Philippines

Yesterday I sat down with Rev. Kim Lapiz, a recent graduate of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, and we were discussing the fact that many Reformed denominations are working in the Philippines but there seems to be little cohesion among the churches. As far as we know, to this day there is no Reformed federation in the country. The thought then occurred to me to use this vehicle to bring about some gatherings that might be directed towards some fellowship and possible union. So, here's the question: *would all those who know about Reformed mission or church work in the Philippines, please take up contact with Rev. Kim Lapiz?*

His contact information is below:

Jireh Reformed Church Mandumol, Macasandig, Cagayan de Oro City Tel.: 09058496021 | Email: kimoy11@yahoo.com

ICRC Namibia 2022

The next ICRC meeting will be held in Windhoek, Namibia from October 14 – 20, 2022. The theme topic is *Training for Ministry*. At this ICRC meeting, the federations will be discussing the matter of how theological education is best carried out and shaped. Among the speakers are Dr. Mohan Chacko on "Seminaries: A Centre for Theological Education, Ministry Training, or Spiritual Formation," Dr. Douw Breed on "Models or Alternate Strategies for Ministry Training," and Dr. Henk van den Belt on "The Authority of the Scriptures in Diverse Situations and Ethical Contexts."

Please note: As TEC, we may have given the impression by earlier means that there would also be a meeting of seminaries in Namibia; upon further reflection, please be aware that this will not take place. We expect that during the proceedings, the TEC mandates will be reviewed and, if we still have a mandate to do so, we will attempt to organize a gathering of seminary representatives at a later date and a different location. Stay tuned.

ICRC-TEC Newsletter

- Any interesting news updates?
- Interested in a visiting professor to teach a short course on-site?
- New online courses you have developed that may be of interest to others?
- Other questions or items of interest?
- Please email them to us for our next newsletter

How often the newsletter will appear and how much material it contains depends entirely on the interest you show in it and the amount of material you send to us. You can do this by sending material to us (at icrctecnews@gmail.com).

For ICRC TEC, James (Jim) Beeke, Gerhard (Jerry) H. Visscher



Author: Rev. Dr. Pieter Boon

Pieter Boon is a minister with the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa and secretary of the ICRC Diaconal Committee

Ukraine Crisis

March 10th, 2022

To all the Churches in the ICRC,

We are all appalled by the brutal aggression the dictator Putin is displaying in Ukraine, causing the senseless deaths of civilians, Ukrainian and Russian and more soldiers, as well as causing millions of refugees leaving Ukraine.

As Christians it is our Biblical calling to reach out to those in need, first to our fellow believers and also to others (Galatians 6:10).

We are convinced that in all member churches the distress in Ukraine and surroundings is brought before God's throne at this moment with earnest supplications. As Diaconal Committee of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) we also call on all member churches to give to this dire cause in a generous way. Let our fellow believers of Ukraine tangibly experience the care of Christ through their worldwide brotherhood, as well as enabling them to reach out in mercy to those around them.

As Diaconal Committee it is not our task to collect funds. We have a networking task, especially amongst the ICRC churches and their organisations. We can confidently recommend using the following channels (listed in alphabetical order):

Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund Website: www.crwrf.ca

Address: PO Box 85225, Burlington, ON, L7R 4K4

CGK Diaconaat (Netherlands).

Email: diaconaat@cgk.nl. Website: www.cgk.nl. Tel: +31 318 582367.

Come Over and Help (Canada & USA).

Email: greg@coah.org. Tel: +1-888-844-COAH (2624).

Orthodox Presbyterian Church Diaconal Ministries (USA).

Email: OPCDisasterResponse@opc.org.

Website: <https://opcdisasterresponse.org/opportunity/ukraine-crisis-fund/>. Tel: +1 (215) 935-1007.

Verre Naasten (Netherlands).

Email: info@verrenaasten.nl. Website: www.verrenaasten.nl. Tel: + 31 38 427 0410.

Word and Deed (Canada & USA).

Email: office@wordanddeed.org & usoffice@wordanddeed.org. Website: www.wordanddeed.org.

Tel: + 1 877-375-9673 (Canada) & +1 519-633-2333 & +1 866-391-5728 (USA).

World Witness (USA).

Website: <https://www.worldwitness.org>.

Address: 918 South Pleasantburg Dr. Ste 218, Greenville, SC 29607.

We fear that the situation in Ukraine as well as the ensuing refugee crisis will take a long time. Support will be needed not only in the coming weeks, but probably in the years to come. As churches we therefore will have to plan and prepare for that. A one-time donation on the short term will perhaps be less helpful than support in the longer run. The above-mentioned organisations can give the churches proper advice about when and where help will be needed, and of what nature the help should be.

Our prayers are with our fellow believers as well as all others who have become and perhaps will still become victims of this senseless war.

On behalf of the Diaconal Committee of the ICRC

Rev. Dr PG Boon (Email: fampgboon@gmail.com)



Helping Ukrainians

Author: Rev. Imre Szöke

Imre Szöke is a minister with the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Central and Eastern Europe.

Editor: The city of Miskolc, Hungary, is located close to the Ukrainian border. It is also the city where the Seminary of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Central and Eastern Europe is located. The RPCCEE is looking to become a member of the ICRC later this year. It has also been one of the channels through which aid from organizations connected with ICRC member churches has flowed. Since the invasion of Ukraine, Rev. Imre Szöke has been sending out update letters. Below are the first, second, third, seventh, and eighth letters sent out.

For information on the RPCCEE, see www.reformatus.net/en/

Letter 1

Dear Brothers,

Greetings in the name of our Lord!

This is a brief letter, please pardon my direct approach, but the urgency of the situation demands it.

As you all know, the war in Ukraine erupted yesterday and the situation escalated quickly. Our churches there are affected by this. The primary danger at this moment is not the bombing or any direct military actions (though this cannot be excluded at all), but the mandatory enrollment of the men. No man from age 18 to 60 can legally leave the

country anymore. The other vulnerability is the chaotic situation where electricity, internet, fuel and the food supplies are not guaranteed.

As a result, some of our members decided to leave the country and fled to Hungary. We are also approached by other refugees who are asking for a place to stay. Our local church in Miskolc is able to house up to 40-45 people and we already have 12 people here with others on the way.

One of our pastors came to Hungary because his church/parish was located nearby a military facility which is a potential target. The other pastor decided to stay in Ukraine, but I had to pick up his children at the border last night. So, some are staying, others are leaving.

What we covet first are your prayers. Pray for safety, pray that the war might end as soon as possible and pray for the testimony of our Christian brothers whether they are staying or leaving. Pray for the divided families. Secondly, if you are led by the Lord to help financially or in any other way, please contact me directly. Also let me know if you have any further questions.

We do not know how long will this last until the situation is stabilized, but these people have a variety of needs which we are trying to fulfill. They need food, clothes, medicine, some travel/fuel expenses and other subsidies. We also opened for them a new building, which will increase our utility costs in the coming weeks. Our local church people are giving generously, but any other help is welcome.



Miskolc is located in eastern Hungary



An RPCCEE building

May the Lord be with you as you intercede for us at the throne of grace!

Rev. Imre Szoke

Letter 2

March 4, 2022

Dear Brothers in the Lord,

This is my second communication on this terrible conflict. A week has passed since my initial letter was sent out and – humanly speaking – seeing the big picture, things don't look too encouraging. So here is a brief update of what happened and what can we expect (although I don't claim to be a prophet).

First, we are thankful for your prayers and for the help we received from you through various channels. The Lord provided enough to cover the immediate needs (food, shelter medicine, cleaning supplies, fuel, etc.) of the refugees who came or were directed to us. In my estimation we have now the means to handle the situation for three weeks, even with full housing capacity. Until now we have had 28 refugees here in Miskolc and 30 in our Budapest congregation. Some of them are still here, others left. Yesterday we were also able to carry across the border some funds for those who remained or are stuck in Ukraine. This included help for brothers from our sister-denomination there. The other good news is that until now, no man was taken into the army by force.

Secondly, the military actions have intensified by now and are covering a much larger area. The number of victims have been increasing – sadly many are civilians; this is first hand information (not fake news) from those who are staying with us. Initially I thought that this would be a 'blitzkrieg', a quick

war, but this seems less and less probable. The more the war is prolonged; the situation is getting worse and worse. More people will leave their homes and some will never return to their mother-land. Others will probably try to stay even risking their lives and facing hardship. But both groups will need help: those who want to settle in Hungary and those who have to rebuild the ruins at home in Ukraine.

Therefore, thirdly, my request to you would be to persevere in prayer both for the refugees and for us (we have never been in a situation like this before). Please pray for those in the war zone: for peace or at least a cease-fire. Pray for those who are under tremendous spiritual pressure facing the decision to leave or to stay. Pray for strength; we are just at the end of our first week, but due to lack of sleep, fatigue is palpable. And if the Lord moves you as you pray – please be ready to give. My suggestion is to set apart your gifts and do not send them over at this time. We will wait two or three other weeks to see how the situation evolves and what kind of support will mostly be needed. Then we will notify you. We will also name a few Christian aid organizations which are partnering with us in this.

Again, let me know if you have any questions or even if we can help you. Some of you may have friends, brothers who have to flee Ukraine. If so – and they choose the Hungarian route – we will try to help them and offer shelter.

As a personal remark, seeing these refugees reminded me again – among other things – that we are pilgrims on this earth. Many people lost their homes. But our Lord went ahead to prepare a home for us. (John 14:1-3) So we should not fear. We are heading to a home which is secured, which will not be bombarded, confiscated or robbed. The price of this housing is already covered in full. And our reservation there is not for a week, or a month, but for an entire eternity. What a wonderful Lord and Savior we have!

I hope to write you another update next week – Deo Volente.

In His service,

Rev. Imre Szoke

Letter 3

March 11, 2022

Dear Brothers, Partners and Helpers,

Here is a new update on the situation in Ukraine. This is our third week and we can hardly see the light at the end of the tunnel. The diplomatic efforts have had little impact on the ground, bringing no relief in the ongoing humanitarian crisis. Peace seems to be so far away. By now more than half of the country is directly affected by various military actions,

and violent air strikes can occur anywhere.

One can easily follow the spreading of the armed conflict by tracking back the origins of the refugees. Last week for example, we had people coming from the Kiev and Zaporizhzhia region, this week we had refugees mostly from Winnitsa/Winnytsia and the Odessa area (check your maps for these cities). They were Baptist and Presbyterian brothers – we are welcoming all these Christian refugees. One interesting fact: some of these brothers are ethnic Russians – not ethnic Ukrainians – yet they are still leaving their motherland.

As we tried to extend hospitality to these people, we had several difficult moments as well. In the haste we had some miscommunication; we were less patient with each other; the tiredness and the constant “stand by” mode had a toll on us. To make a long story short: we felt Satan's attacks or – as one of my friends likes to put it – “Sauron's eye” was on us. This is his *modus operandi*: whenever there is an opportunity for some kind of ministry, an attack from our enemies is expected. As Paul has stated: „for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.” (1Cor 16:9)

But we have experienced God's grace and work with and

through us as well. I was delighted to see how the “help chain” works. Let me explain: you helped us, we helped our brothers from Ukraine who had to move temporarily to Miskolc, now they went back to the Hungarian side of the border to help authorities (border guards, Red Cross) as translators, thus to help refugees themselves. Also by God providence, these two elders from Ukraine are interpreting for me too – since refugees arriving in Miskolc speak little or no English. By the way, this week we offered shelter to 23 new refugees here in Miskolc and over 30 or so in our congregation in Budapest.

One other touching highlight from this week: we housed 11 orphans here with their foster parents; that is 13 persons in total. They were all squeezed in a minivan with 9 seats and barely escaped a bombardment. They stopped in Miskolc, then left for Italy. The husband – who is a pastor – has incurable lung cancer with metastasis in bones. But he was very cheerful and thankful, no signs of worry, self-pity or depression. He was the kind of person who gladly acknowledged that his “life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). Double and absolute safety! Do we need more?

Finally, some prayer items. Please pray for those who are traveling and looking for a safe haven. Keep praying also for



Building of the Karolyi Gaspar Institute of Theology and Missions – the RPCCEE seminary.

peace or at least a longer cease-fire. Pray for the divided families. Allow me to add one major prayer request. Over 80% of our church members are still in Ukraine. They hope to resist and survive there unless the situation becomes unbearable. However, everything can change dramatically in a day or two. This could lead to a sudden mass-evacuation – meaning that we have to pick up our people in a short time-span from the border. If panic infiltrates, things could become very chaotic. So please pray so that we could avoid a 'Presbyterian Dunkirk' situation at the border.

Hope to stay in touch with you. I will give you some directions on donations next week.

In His service,
Rev. Imre Szoke

Letter 7

April 30, 2022

Dear Brothers and praying Friends,

This is my seventh letter and I hope it will give you more insight into what we are doing:

We have behind us two quiet weeks here in Miskolc. This does not mean that it was quiet in Eastern Ukraine, where the war is still raging. But the influx of refugees decreased radically on this end. It turned out that the government agency I presented in my last correspondence did not channel any people toward us. However, we know of Reformed Christian families from Kherson who would like to escape the war via Hungary and are preparing to leave, but they cannot depart from the city for the moment.

Having said these, let me share with you a new facet of our ministry. As I mentioned in my sixth update, in a nearby facility over a hundred young Ukrainian mothers and children are housed. In the last weeks, their number have increased to nearly four hundred. We are helping them with what they need; for example recently we have provided them with dishes and cutlery, since they are doing their own cooking. Furthermore, some of them are planning to stay in Hungary. So, they approached us and asked for assistance in learning the language. We have decided to organize for them Hungarian classes in order to help. We have 22 mothers and 9 children 'enrolled' as early birds into this program. Thus our worship hall is going to be transformed into a language school twice a week.

Alongside this, we are continuing our aid-distribution programs in Ukraine. We are just preparing the fourth phase. After a careful selection we are going to help again over a hundred needy people with cash and/or food

packages.

On a personal note, after more than two months of war I can reflect a bit on these events based on my experience. Here are a few thoughts I would like to share with you: a) Watching the news was one thing, meeting with and listening to the personal stories of these refugees was something else. Suffering seems to be so distant, but suddenly becomes real and painful. And you realize how easy is your yoke and how ridiculous is to complain about our little daily inconveniences. b) It is always an amazing experience to meet with brothers who are on the same spiritual platform with you. People whom you never knew before – yet are members in the family of our Father. c) As we have been ministering to these refugees, the news went out and people from the town heard about us. So we might even have some new people showing up at the services. Mercy ministries could produce results even in outreach. d) During these weeks many things which are taken for granted in our welfare societies became highly valued for me: my bed or simply having a place to lay down; heating and hot water in the house; food and electricity; the liberty of taking a walk without the danger of being bombarded; the freedom of gathering for a worship service, etc.

In closing, here are a few prayer points:

- 1) Please keep praying for the ending of this destructive war. Last time there was some hope for a ceasefire – but it vanished quickly. Now it is more probable that we will be witnessing a long conflict. Pray that the war might not propagate into other countries.
- 2) Pray for those who want to leave the war zones and cannot, that the Lord may open an escape door for them. Pray also for safe travel to Hungary, Romania or Poland.
- 3) Pray for this new ministry among these mothers, including the 'language school'. And for a good testimony as we get to know them closer.
- 4) Keep praying for wisdom and for the Lord's guidance on what to do. Many people are still fluctuating between the possibility of leaving Ukraine or returning to their homeland. This is a constant pressure for them. And there is one other struggle for those within Ukraine. Here is an excerpt from a letter written by our pastor in Beregovo: "... it is a big test of faith for men, because they are afraid of being stopped, verified and given call-ups, when coming to church. Their dilemma is: Is it irresponsible to attend the worship service or any other meetings when they can listen to these online, from home? Some people think it is

irresponsible, but others think that for the Lord, at least that much should be done.”

I hope to write you again at the end of May – unless something unexpected happens.

In His service,
Rev. Imre Szoke

Letter 8

May 31, 2022

Dear Brothers and Partners,

Greetings in the name of our Lord, who declares to be the „Father of the fatherless and protector of widows...” He „settles the solitary in a home....” (Psalm 68:5-6) These claims do not lack substance. God is very much involved – even in these perilous times – in what has been going on in Ukraine. He is continuously providing for the oppressed and the persecuted through various means. We are just a very small part of His remarkable work in this respect. And it is a privilege to be His coworkers and emissaries. Meanwhile, we are also learning as we are helping, so this ministry has didactic purposes as well. The Lord can use certain situations toward the benefit of many, both helpers and those who are being helped.

The focus of our ministry toward the needy changed a bit during the last month. We had just one refugee to whom we had to offer shelter in Miskolc. So it seems – at least for the moment – that this facet of our ministry will wither. But the Lord opened other doors and used us in different ways. Here are **two main areas**:

First, our ministry in **Miskolc**. As I mentioned in my earlier letters, there are several hundred mothers and children in a nearby government shelter. At their request we started language classes for them. This program is working out extremely well. Originally, we had begun two Hungarian language classes per week. But then they said they would like to have an English course as well. So we started English classes too twice a week. By now I have got accustomed to hearing 'foreign languages' coming out from our church sanctuary – and we did not become Charismatic. During these language classes we provide everything these ladies and children need: exercise books, pencils, etc., including refreshments. Needless to say, how thankful they are for everything.

One highlight. One afternoon after the classes, we invited some of the Ukrainian ladies to have coffee with us. To our amazement, they stayed for nearly three hours to chat. This was a wonderful opportunity to share the gospel with them.

As you probably know, they are mostly nominal and superstitious Eastern Orthodox; until now we have not met even one evangelical Christian among them.

Secondly, our ministry **outside** the borders of Hungary. We have nearly completed the fourth phase of our aid-distribution effort in Ukraine. The Aid Committee of our church approved subsidies for another 170 persons. The value of this aid program was \$15,000. We managed to take these funds over the border. One interesting new development is that we included in this program several Ukrainian families who are refugees in Western Romania (Oradea). We got to know them through our church in Cluj-Napoca. So we directed a \$2,000 help to them – which was delivered just last week.

As I close – on behalf of our Ukraine Aid Committee – I would like to thank you again for your ongoing support in prayer and finances. Here are some prayer requests:

Since I wrote my last letter, Sub-Carpathia (the region where we have several small churches) has also been reached by two missiles. So the war came closer to them. Pray for the safety of the civilians. It seems that you can easily become a target not only if you live close to a military base, but also if you live nearby a railroad, main road junction or a depository.

Our pastors from Ukraine informed me that the shortage of fuel is getting more imminent. In fact, in some cities fuel is rationed. This could hinder our ability to distribute aids, visit people, etc. Pray that the Lord may provide at least as much fuel as is needed to keep things going on.

Pray for our people who would like to see some light at the end of the tunnel. It is exhausting to be under the continuous threat of a war, without seeing its end and without the possibility of doing any future planning.

Some of the young men in several families are reaching the age of 18 this summer, thus they could be taken into the army any time. You can imagine how this affects their parents. So keep them in your prayers.

The tension between the European countries and Russia is more and more palpable. Especially after Sweden and Finland expressed their desire to join NATO. And after Russia had stopped transporting natural gas to several Western countries. Only the Lord knows where this will lead.

I hope to write you a new update during the summer. May the Lord be with you all.

In His service,
Rev. Imre Szoke

Fraternal Moments at General Synod 2022 of the Canadian Reformed Churches

