



# Lux Mundi

44:1 April 2025

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



## In this Issue

Reports: NAPARC, Africa, and Europe Regional Conferences

Announcement: Theological Education Conference

Articles: Accountability, Multigenerational Church  
and more

Magazine published by the  
International Conference of  
Reformed Churches



**Author: Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen**

*Karlo Janssen is a minister with the Canadian Reformed Churches. He serves as editor of Lux Mundi and as corresponding secretary of the ICRC.*

## Harmony

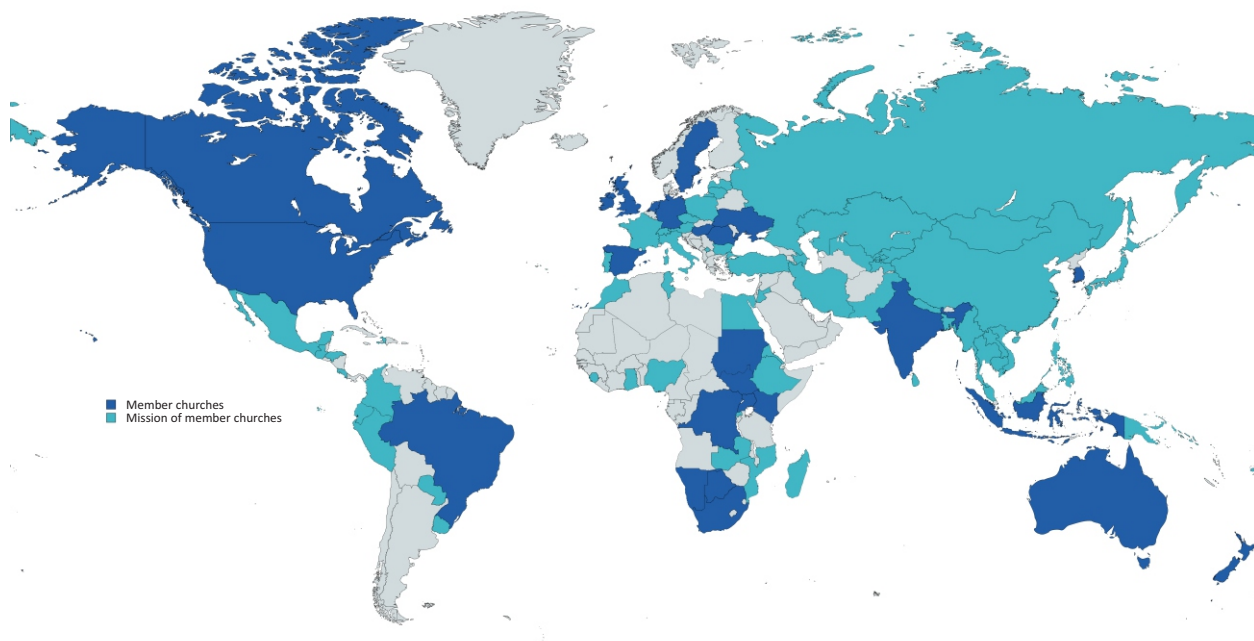
The world is unsettled. I live in Canada and recently went to Korea for some ICRC business. One question I was repeatedly asked concerned the relationship between Canada and the United States. They are certainly taking a hit. I live close by the US border. Land crossings are currently down by 25%. The US-Canada relationships dominates the current federal election. It is not only Canada that is impacted. There is disharmony as world trade is impacted and as nations jockey for influence.

Does this lack of harmony also translate to interchurch relations? Thankfully, ecumenical relations do not involve economics or power. Still, the current uncertainty quickly creates distrust. And church is all about trust, about faith in our Triune God, and faith in one another.

We do well to remember the apostle Paul's words: "May the

God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 15:5-6) This was the experience in The Netherlands in the past 6 months as two church federations merged into one. The lead article is the sermon held for that occasion.

This issue of Lux Mundi has a diversity of content. Reports of Regional Conferences in North America, Africa, and Europe. News items from the USA, South Africa, and India. A "Fraternal Greetings" address by a Korean church at a synod of Dutch churches. Lessons from Haggai regarding holiness and happiness. Lessons from Acts regarding accountability. Enjoy the read and rejoice in the activities within the Kingdom of God!



*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).



## CONTENTS

02 What's Inside

### Devotional

04 A Peace Palace

### Ecumenics

09 Africa Conference

12 North America Conference

14 European Conference

15 IRCK – Address to CRCN

### News

17 FRCSA – Synod Press Release

19 PCA – The status of the PCA

### Theology

23 RPCI - Haggai

25 CanRC – Accountability (Acts 10 – 11)

### Missions

28 PFC-CI – Report

### Announcement

30 Theological Education Conference

### Devotional

32 Now I'm a Believer

## CONTRIBUTORS

### Editors

Karlo Janssen

Sjirk Bajema

Lawr Khawbung

Ben Glaser

Chris Boersema

### Design & Print

Minuteman Press - Chilliwack, BC, Canada

### Regional contacts

North America

Ben Glaser

South America

Chris Boersema

Europe

William Middelkoop

Sub Sahara Africa

Paul Bukenya

Southern Africa

Albert Coetsee

South Asia

Lawr Khawbung

East Asia

Heon Soo Kim

Pacific

Sjirk Bajema

### ICRC liaisons

Missions Committee

Arjan de Visser

Diaconal Committee

Pieter Boon

Theological Ed Committee

Gerhard Visscher

Regional Conferences

Reinier Noppers

## SUBSCRIPTION

The digital version is published free of charge to readers. To receive notice of a new edition posted to the ICRC website, please register with [luxmundi@icrconline.com](mailto:luxmundi@icrconline.com), subject line "Lux Mundi digital registration". One is free to print and/or distribute the digital version. To receive a printed copy via mail, printing and postal fees will be charged. To receive a printed edition, please register with [luxmundi@icrconline.com](mailto:luxmundi@icrconline.com), subject line "Lux Mundi postal registration".

## CONTACT ADDRESS

### Lux Mundi

7949 202a Street,  
Langley BC, V2Y 1W8, Canada

Email: [luxmundi@icrconline.com](mailto:luxmundi@icrconline.com)

Phone: +1-604-854-4011

[www.icrconline.com](http://www.icrconline.com)

## Not a Warring Church but a Peace Palace

*Psalm 122:6-9*

*6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!*

*"May they be at rest who love you!*

*7 Peace be within your walls*

*and rest within your towers!"*

*8 For my brothers and companions' sake*

*I will say, "Peace be within you!"*

*9 For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,*

*I will seek your good.*

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters, boys and girls, it is a feast to see that the Lord Jesus brings churches together. That we may have this worship service together. That at the synod which starts tomorrow we may also work together as churches that are joined to each other.

If you do that, you are also faced with a choice. Among other things, this one: what kind of churches do we want to be together? How do we want to live together as churches? What will we radiate within, to each other, and what will we radiate to those outside?

Do we want to be a warring church or a peace palace? Are we already in the starting blocks to begin the battle in the new church federation? Are we already decided that it will happen, for we see things that we would like to change? Are we already prepared to do that with pompous words and make almost everything a principle? Or do we want to let the peace of Christ work in us and so radiate to each other and to the outside world, shine to the maximum? Are we willing to leave pompous words behind and to speak to each other in love and to do everything to let God's love and peace flourish in our midst?

As churches, we have a history, a genetics, in which struggle has often come to the fore. In which statements have been made such as: He who does not wage war is not converted. Or to put it more literally: He who does not polemicize, is not converted.

I am going to say two things about this now, from God's own

Word.

The first is that there is a constant call for peace in Christ's church! That the Lord Jesus shows us that life in His church requires love and peace, to always be prepared to be the least, to be prepared to suffer injustice. When the Lord Jesus has shown at the washing of the feet that proper service is indispensable in His church, He says this: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this all will see that you are My disciples, if you have love among yourselves." John 13:34,35

But what about the struggle? Isn't it already said in Genesis 3 that the LORD puts enmity between the seed of the woman and that of the serpent? That is God's grace. He does not leave us to our own sinful hearts. That means that the real fight starts with ourselves! The battle against our own sinful hearts. How do you and I live for the LORD? Is there a heartfelt love for Him and a denial of ourselves?

Then, there is the battle out of love for Christ and neighbor against what truly goes against God's Word. True heresy is that which brings people on the broad road to eternal judgment. But even that is still a battle in which the love and peace of Christ is heard. In this too we have to reflect God, as Christ teaches us: "You have heard that it was said, 'You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies; bless those who curse you; do good to those who hate you; and pray for those who insult you and persecute you; that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven, for He makes His sun rise on the wicked and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust." Matthew 5:43-45

I proclaim the gospel to you from our text under the following theme: THE SPIRIT TEACHES US TO PRAY NOT TO BE A WARRING CHURCH BUT A PEACE PALACE. We will consider: 1. A prayer for rest; 2. A prayer for the good.

### 1. A prayer for rest

Led by the Spirit, David boasts of the temple. The temple as the house of God. The temple as the place where, as a community, God's people meet the LORD. We can and must translate that today to the church, to the congregation. It is Christ who wants to see His people together every Sunday.

**Author: Rev. Rob Visser**

*Rob Visser is a minister with the  
Reformed Churches [The Netherlands]*



Then it's not about the building.

Then it's not about whether that building looks beautiful or not. No, then it is about coming together as a people of God, being the church of Christ. That, in a word, is wonderful. That should be something that makes us say to each other with joy: Come, let's go to church as the starting point and highlight of each week.

Yet the LORD knows that we are not always so well-intended. Yet the LORD knows that even in Christ's church things are not always so that all of us are always happy. The LORD knows very well that we as people in the church take our defects and our sins and our proud behavior with us from time to time. We as humans can make the congregation so unattractive to others and ourselves through our behavior. He who seeks the perfect church on earth will not find it. It may seem that way for a while, but after a longer period of time you also start to see the dark sides of that congregation. It is precisely because the Spirit knows us so well that He teaches us to pray in this psalm! In Christ's church too, rest and peace are not automatic.

Yet that should never lead us to throw our hands in the air and say: "Well, that's just the way it is."

No, it should lead us to fold our hands and place our expectation on the Lord. That is also what I hope and pray for the united church federation. For us as we live together as churches. That we always start again with prayer, with the reverence of focusing on the LORD in prayer. That we are churches where the ministers of the Word are prayed for again and again, that they bring us the Word that is good and that we need. That we pray together for the whole congregation and for the ministers. So that we expect the true rest in the churches from Christ and not from ourselves and that we do not start with an "I know it all" attitude, but let ourselves be taught by Christ, by His voice that comes to us in the Bible and in preaching.

Let us truly be praying churches together. Then we pray for rest. True rest. This is not doing nothing. That's not just allowing things to take their course. That means that together as churches we take the time and rest to be close to the LORD.

That was also the secret of the temple. To be together as God's people where the LORD dwells on earth among His people. That rest was and is to concentrate on who the LORD is, what the Triune God has to say to you. That is to detach yourself from all the hustle and bustle in and around you and

to become silent, so as to listen to the LORD.

You don't have that of yourself. We often think that we have to do it ourselves, that we can do without a day of rest, without the peace and rest that exists only in Christ, because otherwise things will not go well in our lives. Then the LORD says, "Now just put everything aside, come and sit very quietly at the feet of the Lord Jesus as the Good Shepherd and let yourself be taught in rest." It's possible! For the LORD says that He wants to take care of you as the Father Almighty. You can easily hand it over. Take a rest on Sunday. Come and listen to Him together with the other believers and come and worship Him. Live as churches of Christ and His Word and not of our own ideas and points of view. Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, we should pray for that! Because we are often so restless. Before you know it, we are already working on the contact we want to have with each other, we are already looking forward to that email, that message on social media etc.

LORD, we ask You to calm us down, to have us really be, proceeding from the Sunday, listening churches and listening people. To be churches that do not live proceeding from their own theology and their own identity, but that want to live proceeding from Your Word alone. Have us not bind each other to less or to more than what You Yourself tell us. Bind us together because we really listen to You with our hearts and want to live that way. Lord also teach us to become personally silent before You every day and to take the time to grab our Bible or to look up the Bible on our device and to listen to You with reverence and prayerfully to bring our lives to You in deep dependence on You.

Praying for rest has its source in respectfully listening to the LORD as your God and to Christ as the Reconciler of your own sins. Also praying for rest for the whole church. Rest for Jerusalem. Rest for the churches and congregation to which we belong. This means that we do not want to be a congregation and churches and a church federation where our ideas are implemented. We don't want to be a congregation and church federation that we belong to because we all agree on everything. We don't want churches where we turn small things and small differences into big things and use pompous words in the process. No, we seek real rest by looking together for the LORD and His infallible Word to listen to. In which the confession of the church is of great value to us, because it echoes the Word of God. Then we also do not want to bind each other to things



that go beyond God's Word and where we then bind each other to our own ideas and theology instead of to God's own and clear Word. That is also something, and I am thinking especially of the older people among us, which was emphasized during the Liberation of 1944.<sup>1</sup>

Real peace in the churches comes when we pray for it and when we want to listen to the LORD together in deep dependence on Him and with confession of our own guilt and sins, and following Christ at His Word in all things.

The young people and the children are also very important. They too, belong to God's people, to the church. For them too there is the message that Christ wants to be your Savior and your God and your Lord. That the Spirit also wants to make you a new, different person. Someone who seeks his or her rest with Christ out of love. That is why we have to be open to the young people and to seriously address their questions and feelings.

Brothers and sisters, acknowledge how important it is that we seek real rest in the churches and pray for it. To live together full of wonder for God's grace, so that we do not remain under God's judgment. How important it is that we seek real rest in Christ's church so that when we come home with our children we talk with a heart full of wonder about the gospel we have heard, rather than focus all attention on that one thing we feel needs to be criticized. If we do the latter, we make it so difficult for each other and especially for our young people to see how great it is to be the church of Christ together. Then we make it so difficult for each other and especially for our children to long to be the church of the Triune God together as something so beautiful, what you really learn to long for, where you can already know the real joy in your life. Then we pray for rest in Christ's church, in our own church. Also to live in that rest together with other congregations and to grow in it. Then we look for each other. Then we seek each other's good and show how beautiful the good is that comes from God is. We discover that when we learn to see what that real peace for Jerusalem, for Christ's church, is.

We also pray for that and we see that in the second place.

## 2. A prayer for the good

We do not only read about rest in our text. The peace and quiet we are talking about here is not a false assurance. It is about real rest that comes from peace. From the real shalom. Just look at how many times David speaks of peace here: "Pray for peace for Jerusalem.... Let peace be within

your ramparts..... For the sake of my brothers and my friends, I now say: Peace be in you."

David's prayer is not primarily focused on himself. He prays for Jerusalem, he prays for the church. His heart is focused on all those others who love the LORD with him. That's his brothers and sisters, that's his family, that's his friends.

The Lord Jesus preceded us in showing that the closest family relationship should be those with whom we are spiritually one, with whom we have peace with the LORD and therefore want to live for Christ. I am now thinking of the moment that Mary and the brothers of Jesus stand at the door of a house where the Lord Jesus is. The house is full of His followers and someone tells the Lord Jesus that His mother and brothers are at the door. Then we hear the Savior say, "Who is My mother, and who are My brothers? And He stretched out His hand over His disciples and said, Behold, My mother and My brethren. For he who does the will of My Father that is in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." Matt 12:48-50

It is so important that we know the peace that teaches us to live in peace with God's children, with whom Christ loves. To really be a church together. Then Christ's work is greater than we are aware of. Then we also want to appreciate that work of Christ wherever we see it. If we then see that elsewhere in places we were not thinking of Christ is also spoken of according to God's own Word, then it is not the case that they have to come to us.

Then we would like to be church to help each other without elevating ourselves above such others. We see this in Mark 9: "John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he wasn't following us." "Don't stop him," said Jesus, "because there is no one who will perform a miracle in my name who can soon afterward speak evil of me. For whoever is not against us is for us." vs 38-40. It is never about us and our church. Christ is more than we are. God can even raise up children of Abraham from stones.

Let us always pray for that peace, in order to learn not to be a warring church but a peace palace. Pastor, do you want us to become some soft church where the truth of God's Word is not so important? Is that the purpose of your service in our congregation? No, not at all. This is about the real peace that comes from a life based on the truth and the truth alone. Living out of Christ.

What is that? What is that prayer for peace for the church,



for the churches? This is the prayer that we find our peace personally and together with Christ. That through the work of the Spirit you learn to recognize that you need Christ to be saved from the misery of sin. That you recognize that you have to put your hand on God's promise that you have received and of which baptism is the sign and the guarantee in your life. Recognize that you can't do it yourself, that no matter how hard you try, you can't make peace. A very clear example of this was Martin Luther. He tried to live his life in such a way that he became good enough for God. He became desperate, because no matter what he did, he noticed again and again that sinful thoughts and deeds entered his life. He could not become perfect on his own. What a misery because again and again that peace with God was gone. It drove him crazy. Then he discovered the real gospel through God's Spirit, that whoever sincerely confesses his guilt and inability to the LORD will receive forgiveness, peace with God because Christ took God's punishment for our sins upon Himself on the cross. He exults in the 62nd proposition that was struck at the castle chapel of Wittenberg on October 31, 1517: "The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God."

The point in our lives is that we see the gospel as the treasure of our lives and do not criticize it, but live by it as the voice of God. Then we hear that we can only have peace with God through one person. He who is the truth itself, He who is the way to God himself, He who is true life in person. He who by His bearing of God's wrath against sins has earned peace with God for everyone who takes refuge with Him. Eternal peace. Living together from the forgiveness and undeserved love of God. Therefore, living together in peace with God and therefore also with each other! That is only possible if Christ is our peace. No matter how different our backgrounds are. Then we can find each other in real peace, at the feet of Christ. Not holding each other to our opinions but to the truth.

Then we want to grow more and closer to Christ in our lives. Then what we read in Ephesians 2 and 4 speaks more to your heart: "But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, .. So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household, built on the

foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are also being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2: 13,14, 19-22). And (Ephesians) 4: "Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ." (Ephesians 4:14,15).

When we know Christ as our peace while praying and with our heart focused on the LORD, then peace also comes among ourselves. You can't have one without the other. If we do not really love our neighbor and certainly not our brother and sister in faith, then we do not really love the Lord. Who knows himself and realizes how you yourself need forgiveness. How you need the Spirit of Christ to love the LORD and your neighbor, who seeks the good of those brothers and sisters in the church. Precisely because the LORD has brought you home to the house of His eternal peace, you therefore seek the good for all those others with whom you form Christ's church. Then you don't want to condemn anyone unheard, then I don't talk badly about others, but I want to spread that good rumor about someone else. Then I want to suffer injustice, but I am afraid of doing injustice to someone else. Then from God's peace comes the tender fellowship in love with each other. This is how we want to live from the sacrifice of Christ. In order to attract people to listen and live together from the gospel that is proclaimed among us.

Here again what the Lord Jesus says in John 13(:34,35) is so incredibly important: "I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." How important it is that we are also known to the people outside the church and to the churches as a church that is a real peace palace that people can long for. This is how the LORD wants us to be in order to draw people to Christ and the real proclamation of the gospel.

Brothers and sisters, young people, that peace of Christ is so beautiful, so good. Something to long for again and again and to live more from it. Without that peace you will be lost forever. Without that peace, we have no future as churches and church federations. Without that peace, the



congregation will become a cold and dead place, a place from which the warmth of God's love has disappeared and then real peace disappears. That peace is so wonderful, so heartwarming, so indispensable.

That is why I now direct you and myself to seek and find our peace in Christ. Cling to Him to be at peace with God. Let us cling to Him together in order to be and remain a true church of Christ.

Let the synods that, the Lord willing, begin tomorrow be characterized by this.

AMEN

*'In 1944 a segment of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands left to form what would become known as the Reformed Churches (liberated). The main reason for leaving was the imposition by general synod of certain doctrines as binding, doctrines not stated in the confessions and which the liberated Reformed tended to disagree with.*

This sermon was preached during the prayer service prior to the synods which decided to the merger of The Reformed Churches (restored) (DGK) and the Reformed Churches The Netherlands (GKN) to form the Reformed Churches [The Netherlands] (GK).



The signing of the document sealing the merger of the DGK and GKN into the GK





**Author: Mr. Frits Raimond**

*Frits Raimond is a member of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa and serves on their interchurch relations committee.*

## Africa Regional Conference 2024

The Free Reformed Churches in South Africa have been members of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) for many years, together with 38 churches around the world.

The objectives of the ICRC include:

- To express and promote the unity of faith that the churches have in Christ.
- To encourage cooperation between the member churches in fulfilling the mission mandate.
- To present a Reformed testimony to the world.

The member churches are divided into different global regions. Each region aims to hold a regional conference every four years. The Free Reformed Church of Cape Town has been asked to host the African Regional Conference in 2024.

The organization of the conference, which was held from 23 to 27 October, included funding the costs, transportation to and from the airport, meals during the conference, finding host families for 38 guests, a sightseeing tour on Saturday, and the congregational dinner after the evening service on Sunday.

The organization took unexpected turns. Problems with the approval of the visas of participants from several African countries left the organizers scrambling to provide all required documents to the South African embassies in other African countries. Apparently some 'church' denominations are involved in human trafficking from other African countries to South Africa, by inviting them to conferences in South Africa. This causes embassies and

consulates to be reluctant in approving visa for church conferences. Some participants received their visas just in time, but the visas of four delegates were ultimately rejected. This was also the reason that churches from Congo and Ethiopia were not represented at the conference.

### Participants and programme

Of the 44 participants who attended the conference, there were delegates from Kenya, from three churches in Uganda, and from South Sudan. There were a large number of delegates from churches in South Africa itself, including the Free Reformed Churches, the Reformed Churches, and we were grateful to welcome 4 delegates from the Free Church in Southern Africa.

The programme included presentations during the day on the ICRC's Mission Committee, the Diaconal Committee and the Theological Training Committee. In the evenings there were lectures on the spread of the gospel, and on diaconal opportunities and challenges in Africa.

Something that was not planned in advance was the spontaneous contribution of the Bellville Reformed Primary School. They prepared a beautiful greeting message which was read out on the first day, and each delegate received a colourful, handwritten message from one of the children. At the opening of the last day of the conference, the learners came to sing to us, and we sang with them to the glory of the Lord. It was a moving moment for the participants.

### Introduction of the churches in Africa

An important part of the program throughout the day was the introduction of the churches from Africa by their delegates. After each introduction there was ample opportunity for questions and discussion. After the discussions, one of the participants prayed specifically for that church.

It is during these presentations that we got to know church communities that are very close to us in faith and confession, but which were not known to everyone. One example of this is the Free Church in Southern Africa. During these introductions we learned about the enormous need in Africa. Need as a result of disasters, war and poverty, but especially also hunger for the gospel. We heard about the challenges that churches in Africa have to face, such as the prosperity gospel that is preached by many churches around them. Young people in particular are easily lured away to other churches and sects. And at



*Attendees from Sudan*

the same time, we heard deep Reformed convictions from their presentations. But, as one of the speakers said: as Reformed Christians in Africa, we often feel alone. The introduction of the Sudanese Reformed Church was very striking for more than one reason: firstly because they have been plagued by long civil wars, but especially because of their enthusiasm to spread the gospel. Their strategic plan for 2018-2028 literally left some participants speechless, because it involves, among other things, the planting of 36 new churches, 11 of which are specifically in North Sudan, which is dominated by Muslims. Furthermore, they plan to establish 16 schools, train 50 theological students, and become involved in peace initiatives and reconciliation between the communities.

### **The OPC in Africa**

The organizers were initially surprised to see that so many participants from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC USA) had registered for the conference. However, it seems that most of them are either missionaries or involved in missionary work in Africa. It is truly remarkable to see how active the OPC is in Africa, with missions, assistance to churches and training of theological students at the Knox School of Theology in Uganda. They also had a large share in the success of the conference by sharing their experience and participating in almost every discussion.

### **Theological training in Africa**

During the presentation on the ICRC's committee for Theological Training, it was explained that the committee facilitates and promotes the cooperation of the member churches in the field of theological training. Afterwards, representatives of various Theological Trainings in Africa were given a turn to speak. Rev. Jopie van der Linden was



*Attendees from Kenya*

the first to introduce the work of the Reformed Study Centre. Then there were presentations by the 'Knox School of Theology' in Uganda, Mukhanyo Theological College as well as the Dumisani Theological Bible Institute of the Free Church in Southern Africa.

### **The benefit of the Regional Conference**

Many people worked hard and sacrificed a lot to make the conference a success. But it was all worth it!

The conference was a blessing for the congregation. It was good to organize it together, to help with transport and in the kitchen, and to host guests. Most of the people from the host families said afterwards that it was a very enriching experience.

It was also a blessing for the churches, to get to know each other and to pray for each other.

When you listen to the depth of the Reformed convictions with which the churches proclaim the gospel in Africa, and see the many places where mission work is done, then you can see the tremendous church-gathering work that the Lord Jesus is currently doing in Africa.

The conference provided many opportunities to learn from each other, especially when it came to theological training, and to conduct missions in a sustainable way.

### **Previous and next African Regional Conferences**

Since there is no information provided on the ICRC website about previous conferences of the African region, I did some research. The first conference was held in 2008 in Nairobi, Kenya. The theme was *"Christianity and Islamic challenges"*. In August 2016 the Presbyterian Church in Uganda hosted a conference. The theme of this conference is still as relevant 8 years later as it was then: *"How the church can meet the challenges of Islam in Africa."* Even



*Attendees from Uganda*



during the Covid pandemic, a virtual African Regional Conference was held from St Paul's University in Nairobi, Kenya.

It became very clear during the Cape Town conference that the ICRC can mean a lot to small church communities across the African continent, by playing a facilitating role. On the last day of the conference, plans were made for the next Regional Conference DV in four years time. Proposals from the floor were Uganda or Kenya. God willing during the international conference in South Korea 2026, the African delegates will finally decide on the venue for the 2028 conference. It would be nice if more non-Western theologians were invited to provide training, because the broader Reformed world can learn a lot from African theologians about how to proclaim the gospel in the African context. Africa needs the gospel, and the ICRC can play a big role in that.



*Attendees from South Africa*



*ICRC Africa Regional Conference 2024*



**Author: Rev. Ralph Pontier**

*Ralph Pontier is a minister with the United Reformed Churches in North America; he currently serves as secretary of NAPARC.*

## NAPARC 2024

The 49th annual meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) convened on Tuesday afternoon, November 12, 2024. It was hosted by the Reformed Church in the United States at the Northland Reformed Church in Kansas City, Missouri. The outgoing Chairman, Rev. J. P. Mosley, led the opening devotions.

### Basis

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

### Membership

All 13 Member Churches of NAPARC were represented. The Member Churches include the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC), the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), the Reformed Church of Quebec (Église réformée du Québec) (ERQ), the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA), the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC), the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) (KPCA), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Presbyterian Reformed Church (PresRC), the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). Representatives of the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC), the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA), and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada (RPCC) attended as invited observers.

### Officers

One of the first orders of business was the election of new officers. Elected as Chairman was Rev. Bruce Parnell of the RPCNA. Elected as Vice-chairman was Rev. Joel Dykstra of the URCNA. Rev. Ralph Pontier was elected to a seventh term as Secretary, and Mr. Danny McDaniel of the PCA was elected to a second term as Treasurer. The chairmanship and vice-chairmanship rotate annually among the Member Churches following an alphabetical listing of them.

### Reports

The bulk of the time at NAPARC is spent in Member Churches giving oral reports about what the Lord is doing in their midst, and in praying for one another after each

report. Reports were heard of both spiritual blessings and the struggles of ministry. The ARP reported the completion of study papers on membership in secret societies and another paper on the diaconate. The FRCNA reported on the near completion of a new Psalter developed jointly with the HRC and the PRCA. The RCUS reported on a new study completed on Sexual Misconduct Prevention. The URCNA reported on two studies papers completed, one on Digital Media and Worship, and one on Human Sexuality.

### Discussions

After the reports and prayer, three topics of discussion were taken up. The topics were chosen from suggestions by Member Churches in their written reports included in the Council docket. They included:

- How can we better foster, and coordinate, interchurch relations at the presbyterial and classical levels?
- What can we do to encourage men to pursue theological education in preparation for the pastorate and for missions?
- How do the member churches handle requests from international churches for fraternal relations? What are unique opportunities and risks presented by such requests? Do you have different categories for internationals as compared to national (e.g. "corresponding" or "observer" churches)? Do you encourage them to establish a relationship with a lower court (presbytery) first in order to build relationships?

### Devotions and Inspiration

A devotional service was held on Tuesday evening led by Rev. Chris Campbell, pastor of the host congregation. He spoke on the joys of Christian ministry from 3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." On Wednesday evening, after feasting on Kansas City's famous barbeque, Rev. Dr. Breno Macedo, senior pastor of Messiah's Independent Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, spoke on "The Preservation of Plain Preaching." He underscored the need for good pastoral training in homiletics and the need for sermons where the order of the text is followed and where the text is explained in its context. The sermon must be in plain, simple language with proclamation, confirmation, and application. Rhetorical embellishments and extensive citations should be avoided which he likened to food made unpalatable by too much spice.

### Bilateral Opportunities

The NAPARC schedule runs from Tuesday afternoon to Thursday noon and provides many time slots for bi-

lateral meetings between the inter-church or ecumenical committees of the Member Churches. These smaller meetings have proven fruitful for Member Churches to grow closer together and manifest more fully their oneness in Christ.

## Consultations

In addition to the annual meeting of the Council, NAPARC sponsors consultations where representatives of Member Churches gather to discuss cooperation in specific areas of ministry. For more than thirty years, there have been annual world mission consultations in September of each year. This year the meeting was held in October. Representatives from seven NAPARC Member Church world mission agencies (WMA) were present. They were from the ARPC, CanRC, HRC, FRCNA, OPC, RPCNA, and URCNA. They met together for the annual consultation at the OPC's administration offices in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. Joining with them were representatives from five NAPARC Member Church diaconal ministries/agencies (DMA). They were from the CanRC, FRCNA, HRC, OPC, and URCNA.

The next NAPARC Joint WMA/DMA Consultation is scheduled for September 16-19, 2025, with Mr. Mark T. Bube as the chairman and Rev. Timothy J. Worrell as secretary. It will be held concurrently with the ICRC WMA Consultation.

The Council also appointed Rev. Bruce Parnell as convenor of a consultation on Theological Training to be hosted by the RPCNA with assistance from the HRC and ARPC. It will be held concurrently with the next meeting of the Council.

## Hosting

The Council enjoyed the gracious and generous hospitality of the Northland Reformed Church and experienced warm and joyous fellowship with fellow delegates, observers, and other guests.

## Proceedings and Next Meeting

The minutes of the Council, along with NAPARC's Constitution, Bylaws, and other resources, can be found at NAPARC's website: [naparc.org](http://naparc.org). The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for November 11-13, 2025, to be hosted by the RPCNA at the Hope Community Reformed Presbyterian Church in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.







**Author: Rev. Dr. David McKay**

*David McKay is a minister with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.*

## EuCRC 2024

The Convening Committee of the European Conference of Reformed Churches was delighted to be able to organise a conference 10 to 13 September 2024 at Yarnfield Park, Staffordshire. The conference planned for 2020 had to be cancelled due to the onset of Covid-19, leaving the committee with some financial problems on account of the cancellation fees that had to be paid to the conference centre. We deeply appreciate the generous support of the Regional Conferences Committee of the ICRC which enabled the 2024 conference to go ahead.

Representatives of eight of the nine member churches were able to attend along with a number of others, making up a gathering from the UK, the Netherlands, Hungary, Germany, Switzerland and Turkey. We had hoped that brothers from Ukraine would be able to attend, but this did not prove to be possible. They were remembered in prayer during the conference. An organising committee made up of members of one of the CGK congregations had done a tremendous job of making practical preparations for the conference, including the handling of financial matters, and their work continued during the conference meetings. The Convening Committee wishes to express its warmest thanks to these brothers and sisters.

The Chairman of the Convening Committee, Prof. David McKay (Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland), welcomed the delegates at the beginning of the conference and preached from Ephesians 1:1-11, stressing that in the

troubled times in which we live we must remember that our God is sovereign, that God's plan is perfect, and that God is glorified in everything.

The theme of the conference was 'Preaching' and four papers were presented and discussed:

1. Rev. Simon Arscott (International Presbyterian Church) – 'Expounding the Word of God'
2. Rev. Timothy McGlynn (Free Church of Scotland Continuing) – 'Preaching the whole Christ from all the Scriptures'
3. Prof. Maarten Kater (Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken) – 'Doctrinal, ethical and catechetical preaching'
4. Rev. Stephen Roger (Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland) – 'Preaching to the heart'

All of the speakers did an excellent job in fulfilling their brief, presenting us with biblical truth pastorally applied. There were many positive comments about the papers from those present.

The conference programme was planned to allow time for prayer and for developing the contacts that are essential elements in these conferences, and we believe that these opportunities were well used.

The Convening Committee is most thankful to the Lord for his grace in every aspect of the conference and we pray that the impact of the meetings will continue in the lives and ministries of those who were able to attend.





**Author: Rev. Heon Soo Kim**

Heon Soo Kim is a minister with the Independent Reformed Church of Korea, and a professor at the Independent Reformed Theological Academy.

## Fraternal Greetings from the IRCK to the CRCN

*The following address was delivered on behalf of the Independent Reformed Church in Korea to the synod of the Christian Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. It is a fine example of how interchurch relations are an expression of accountability as the address addresses a matter of concern. The CRCN synod reaffirmed a previous decision not to allow women to serve in office.*

Esteemed moderator and delegates in Christ, Christian greetings from your sister church in South Korea, the Independent Reformed Church in Korea [IRCK]. In 2007, your esteemed General Synod proposed entering into a limited sister church relationship with the IRCK, a small federation of 600 people in four congregations. Though you, CGKN, and we, IRCK, are located at the opposite ends of the Eurasian continent, we found each other in the Lord, who calls us to unity of faith through his Word and Spirit. Just as your forefathers who convened in Emden in 1571 drafted important documents saying, "We have found each other," so we have recognized each other in the Lord and entered into a sister relationship to encourage each other and to be joint witnesses of the gospel in this world.

With your kind support, we, the IRCK, became a member of the ICRC in 2009, and hosted the AP-CRC in 2015. The Heidelberg Catechism, translated by the educational committee of the IRCK in 2004, has sold 41,773 copies to date, becoming the standard translation in Korea. The Holy Covenant Press, the publisher of the IRCK, has published more than 185 books over the past 40 years, with around 600,000 copies sold. We launched our seminary in 2010, and five Chinese-Korean students, recommended by the China Mission of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, have since graduated and planted three churches in China. We are small in number but are serving as a canal for spreading the Reformed faith in my country and beyond. However, as I mentioned in your previous General Synods, we have been facing ongoing challenges since 2016. One church has withdrawn from the federation, and another has not been attending ecclesiastical gatherings. Although four churches are still federated under the IRCK, the church membership has decreased. The seminary also had to relocate in 2019 due to related difficulties.

Together with the IRCK, nine congregations of the Independent Reformed Presbyterian Church in Korea [IRPCK], a sister federation of the IRCK, have actively

supported the seminary, and 12 students have graduated since 2019. Apart from those who have returned to China or other federations, seven men have begun to serve in the IRCK and IRPCK, and the churches are gradually stabilizing. The two federations, IRCK and IRPCK, have also been working together through pulpit exchanges and various committee activities.

Since 2020, two books by Jan van Bruggen, *Aantekeningen bij de Heidelbergse Catechismus*, *Het Amen der Kerk: de Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis Toegelicht*, and Evert Kuijt, *Kleuterbijbel*, have been published, as well as *Confessing the Faith* by Chad van Dixhoorn, a fine commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith. Books by Willem van't Spijker, Hans Maris, and Erik Peels, emeritus professors at TUA, are also being read steadily. Professor Herman Selderhuis and Arnold Huijgen visited us to give some lectures.

Now, let me turn to the current issue of women in office. In South Korea, many churches allow women to serve in church offices. However, IRCK, Koshin Presbyterian Church, and Reformed Presbyterian denomination affiliated with Hapdong Seminary are against women in church offices. We believe that, just as the three persons of the Trinity are equal and yet have an order of love, male and female are equal as co-bearers of God's image, but with an order of love between them. Thus, women can actively participate in various ways within the congregation without being ordained as office-bearers.

In preparing for this address, I have reviewed two reports from CGKN (1998 and 2020)<sup>1</sup> and two from GKv (2017 and 2020)<sup>2</sup>, written before GKv merged with the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken in 2023. Thank you for your labor on the reports and the additional effort you put into translating them into English. I don't want to, nor can I, deal with the whole issue here, but I'd like to make three points.

First, the issue of women holding office is closely tied to hermeneutics. Your 1998 report legitimately addressed the tension between traditional biblical exegesis and modern hermeneutical methods. Your report did not overlook the subtle differences but sought to do justice to each by presenting reports of both the majority and the minority viewpoints. In reading your report, I underlined the following sentence: "Excessive hermeneutics can hinder direct and unprejudiced interaction with the Scriptures and overshadow the clarity of the Word of God".<sup>3</sup>



In addition to the caution against the danger of excessive hermeneutics, I want to highlight another aspect: the role of the congregation and the Holy Spirit. Starting the discussion with hermeneutics can make the issue appear esoteric. While this may not be the intention, this approach might diminish the congregation's role. Simply put, this may mirror the claims of the Roman Catholic clergy and the historical-critical scholars regarding the interpretation of the Bible.

Let me give you an example. On the resurrection day, the risen Jesus chose to first show himself not to Peter and John, who had run to the empty tomb, but to a weeping woman, Mary Magdalene. Jesus commissioned her to go to “my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (Jn. 20:17). Being able to call Jesus’ God “my God” and his Father “my Father” is the gospel message that speaks to those who were separated from God because of their sins. This gospel message was first proclaimed by Jesus himself to a weeping woman, not to the leading disciples. This would be a powerful lesson to them: The risen Lord preaches the gospel to the brokenhearted. Later that day, the risen Lord would appear to the disciples, commissioning them to go with the words, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn. 20:21-22). Some evangelical scholars see this story of Mary Magdalene as the seed of a reversal.<sup>4</sup> They correctly point out that expecting a female witness to be accepted in a male-dominated culture would be unusual. And they go on to argue that this reversal represents a door opened for women in ministry. However, this hermeneutical approach has serious shortcomings since their discussion overlooks the central role of the witness of the Lord to his people by the power of the Holy Spirit. Their hermeneutical discussions develop in a confrontational direction, focusing on things like “the equality and differences between men and women,” “rule and service,” and “the culture at the time of the writing and the current culture.” It seems as though there is now little room left for the Holy Spirit to work among the congregation through the office bearers (cf. Heb. 2:11-12; Ps. 22:22).

In your history of Afscheiding [Secession] in 1834, the Lord transformed the so-called “enlightened spirit” of Rev. Hendrik de Cock through the earnest soul of Klaas Pieters Kuypenga. The Lord spoke directly to his people who were poor in spirit and accomplished the work of “separate or return” by renewing the office bearers. Your church vividly shows that God builds his church through “little people.” Second, I appreciate your patient and humble approach when your General Synod’s decisions were not accepted as final in some local churches. Your report chooses not to assert directly that the decisions of the broader assemblies

are binding provided they do not contradict the Word or the church order (CO 31). Instead of imposing ecclesiastical decisions, your report, “Seek first the kingdom of God – A way of turning out of an impasse,” humbly confesses “our sins” for the difficulties arising within the congregations. When you, as a federation, have faced various problems in the past, you were able to overcome those difficulties and move toward unity because you all had a contrite heart under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Your attitude is an excellent example for us, as your brothers in South Korea remain divided. We pray that the Lord, who has gathered us into His one church, would grant us the same grace—the spirit of repentance.

Finally, let me address the ecumenical perspective. The Church of the Lord is one, so your decision will directly impact the churches in Korea and member churches of the ICRC. This impact will be more significant than you might think. As you know, the ICRC member churches had to make painful decisions in 2017 and 2022 about the membership of the Reformed Churches Liberated, once the charter member of the ICRC played a key role for decades. If there are any changes in the CGKN, the ICRC will also be significantly affected. I entreat you to consider the broader church context when you discuss important matters such as women in ministry. Moreover, since all member churches of the ICRC confess the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church,” we could discuss important issues together, as your and our forefathers did in the years 1618-19 at Dordrecht.

Thank you for allowing me to speak so frankly in the Lord. On behalf of the Independent Reformed Church in Korea, Rev. Heon Soo Kim

<sup>1</sup> CGKN: “Final Report by the Committee on Women and Office” in 1998 and “Seek First the Kingdom of God— A Way of Return out of an Impasse” by the study committee, “Being Church Together” in 2020.

<sup>2</sup> GKv: “Serving together” by the Deputies Male/Female and the Office for Meppel General Synod in 2017 and “Serve each other sincerely from the heart” for Goes General Synod in 2020.

<sup>3</sup> “een overmaat van ballast de directe en onbevangen omgang met de Schritt belemmert en de helderheid van het door God gegeven Woord verduistert.” Eindrapport deputaten voor de vragen rond vrouw en ambt, GS 1998, 36.

<sup>4</sup> R. T. France, “Women in the New Testament Church – and in the Church Today: Continuity and Development,” in *Women in the Church's Ministry* (Eerdmans, 1995), 73-96; “N. T. Wright on Women in Ministry”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaVVXleoAdU&t=164s>



## FRCSA Synod 2024

Here are a few extracts from the **Short Report of Synod Mamelodi of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA)**, held from September 22 – 27, 2024. Synod started with a prayer service on Sunday afternoon in the Church of Mamelodi. The proceedings were held from Monday to Friday in the building of the Maranata Church in Pretoria.

### Sister Church Relations

The FRCSA do not have official ecclesiastical fellowship with many other church federations. As a small federation this demands too much time and resources. Yet with much gratitude we make use of the ICRC with all the contacts provided through this worldwide ecumenical body.

Historically the FRCSA had many decades of ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands. During synod the chairman expressed with sadness that this was the first synod in the history of the FRCSA that this Dutch federation was not represented, since ecclesiastical fellowship was terminated in 2023 because of unbiblical developments in these churches. Yet out of these churches was formed at first two federations, the De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) and the Gerefomeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) who have decided to be one church federation under the name Gereformeerde Kerken (GK). After deliberation, Synod decided to extend sister church relationships at the first official synod of these churches in 2026, Lord willing.

### Relationship with Churches in South Africa

Regarding our relationship with the churches in South Africa we are grateful for every church that shares the reformed faith with us and therefore continue to desire to seek fellowship. This is particularly true of the GKSA churches. Synod decided that that we would cautiously continue to build toward unity with the GKSA churches. The caution was expressed due to the internal struggle that the GKSA are having regarding women in the office of elder and pastor. Nevertheless, synod is thankful that we were able to adopt a memorandum as a basis on which to have further discussions. There was also a framework adopted in which to grow the local contacts.

### Bible Translations

As bond of churches, we hold strongly to the cry of the Reformation: “Sola Scriptura”. Synod decided to test more intensely the use of the 2020 Afrikaans Bible Translation by using it in the preaching. The reason for



this is to receive feedback from the pastors who are familiar with the underlying Greek and Hebrew texts. Synod would also like to alert the churches that the introductions to the respective Bible books in the 2020 Bible Translation are written from a liberal perspective and are not to be accepted at face value. Nevertheless, we are grateful that the text itself gives no indication of such a bias.

Synod also acknowledged that there are a variety of translations being used in the churches such as the NIV 1984, ESV, Sotho translations among others. Synod encouraged the English medium churches to remain with the English Standard Version (ESV) or the New International Version (1984) for use as a pulpit Bible.

### Mission Work

In obedience to the command of Christ to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:17), synod wants to encourage the local churches to continue to spread the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every church in our federation is called to be a missionary church, and we must not let money dictate when and how we do missions.

### Needy Churches

Synod wants to emphasize that, simply because a church is needy, does not make this church less of a church. In fact, every church is needy and wholly dependent on her Lord for life. Because of the growing need in our bond of churches, synod asked the deputies article 11 to organize a meeting with other deputys to discuss how we as a church federation can continue to grow while at the same time being sustainable.

### Theological Training

We praise the Lord for what He continues to do to raise up students for the ministry of the Word. Synod expressed gratitude for the fruitful cooperation with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, serving our bond of churches with in-person as well as online training. Synod also discussed future possibilities of local training.

## Finances

Paul writes to the church of Philippians: “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” We hear these words echo through to our day as we are so richly supported in our churches, both locally and internationally. Synod wants to encourage all the churches to continue to prioritize the giving for the sake of the preaching and spreading of the gospel. In this regard synod approved the increased budget without putting an undue burden on the churches. The treasurer was thanked for his conscientious work with the funds of the federation.

## Closing

In closing the foreign delegates spoke words of thanks and appreciation for the work of synod and for all the work that the FRCSA is involved with. The chairman expressed words of appreciation for the church of Mamelodi and for all the work the church of Maranata put into hosting the synod. The sisters were also recognized for all the work that they put in behind the scenes preparing meals, and making sure that the delegates were amply supplied for. Appreciation was expressed for how the brothers worked together.



*Dr. P.G. Boon addressing ICRC 2022 on behalf of the Diaconal Committee*



**Author: Rev. Dr. Bryan Chapell**

*Bryan Chapell is a minister with the Presbyterian Church of America, presently serving as stated clerk.*

## The Status of the PCA

*From the editor: The following address was spoken at NAPARC, 2024. It is published here with Dr. Chapell's permission. The various matters Dr. Chapell touches on in this speech are further dealt with in his soon-to-be-published book, *The Multigenerational Church Crisis: Why We Don't Understand Each Other and How to Unite in Mission*.*

I want to begin my reflections on the status of the PCA by citing comments of church demographer Ryan Burge: the PCA remains the only significant-in-size denomination still growing in the U.S. This past year's growth included an encouraging "Triple-5" dynamic: 5000 infant baptisms, 5000 child professions of faith, 5000 adult professions of faith. I know that those numbers are not huge, but even with a meager annual growth of 1-2%, the Lord has made us twice as large as we were 35 years ago.

Other signs of health: despite our battles over particulars, we remain united in the core doctrines of our faith. Further, despite all the contention over the last four years, we came to virtual unanimity at GA on Book of Church Order amendments clarifying the chastity and purity standards for ordained officers – no small blessing.

By the Lord's provision, we have key leadership positions in national organizations such as NAE, Cru, The Gospel Coalition, Campus Outreach, Navigators, Lausanne, the World Reformed Fellowship, Ligonier, Bible Study Fellowship, the Evangelical Theological Society, scores of colleges and seminaries in this country and internationally, key state and national government offices, multiple Christian publishing houses, all this in addition the work of MTW (with 600 full-time missionaries), MNA (with plans for 1000 new churches in the next decade), and RUF (ministering to 20-thousand college students weekly).

Lest we get proud, it is important to remember that we now total .08 of 1% of the U.S. population. We need each other to do the Lord's work against such odds. Others who working by faith, despite the odds, include our people who are involved with mission and church planting efforts in a hundred nations, including some of the most challenging areas of the world such as Iran, China, Afghanistan and India.

I could continue to list our blessings but need to face the reality that I probably spent more time trying talk more pastors off the ledge of leaving the PCA, or the ministry,

or their faith after this last GA than after any other. What is going on that we could experience such blessings and still experience such anxiety?

As a national denomination we reflect polarities of the wider culture: generationally and attitudinally as much as theologically.

Our tensions are often a consequence of differing views of current losses to Christ's church whose borders are much larger than the PCA.

### I. Our Current Losses

In the American, evangelical church at large, we are experiencing great losses of cultural influence and church participation. These losses include the loss of **truth**, the loss of our **youth**, the loss of our **mature**, and the loss of a **majority**.

#### - Loss of Truth

The radical relativism of our day argues that the only way we know anything is by what we personally experience. The consequence of living in a culture where almost everyone believes personal truth should determine our choices is disdain for any church that claims the Bible should govern all conduct, especially in matters regarding marriage, sex, gender, and the right to life.

#### - Loss of Youth

The group most affected by this societal disdain for biblical truth is our young people. Only 15 percent of America's highschoolers are regularly active in any religious organization or church – only 8 percent of college students. As a result, two-thirds of the young people who attend Bible-believing churches will stop attending when they go to college. One third will come back when they begin to have children of their own, but we are losing the majority of our youth.

#### - Loss of Mature

We can readily cite many of the Western church's compromises that have made a generation of young people disregard the church: 1) entertainment models of attraction, 2) prosperity appeals to human greed, 3) sex and abuse scandals, 4) financial corruption scandals, and 5) the use of religion to advance political power.

Still, none of these negatives has been as devastating as the breakdown of marriages. Society's divorce rate is usually cited as being about 50 percent. The divorce rate among Evangelicals is not quite as high but is still over 35 percent.

These factors combined with the disruption of church



attendance due to COVID restrictions have accelerated the exodus of mature members.

### - **Loss of Majority**

The impact upon the church is staggering. As reported in the much-cited book *The Great Dechurching*, "In the last twenty-five years . . . about 40 million people have stopped attending church [in the United States]. More people have left the church in the last twenty-five years than all the new people who became Christians from the First Great Awakening, Second Great Awakening, and Billy Graham crusades combined."

Prior to the year 2000, almost 90 percent of Americans claimed to be Christian. Today the number who identify as Christian is only about 60 percent. But what people claim is not a true picture of our culture.

Despite the fact that 24 percent of Americans say that they are Evangelical/Bible believing Christians, only half of them are regularly active in any church. And only about half of that half can or will affirm basic Evangelical truths: 1) that the Bible is true; 2) that we are saved by faith alone in Christ alone; and, 3) that we have a mission to tell others about Jesus. So, active and knowledgeable Evangelicals total no more than 6 percent of the U.S. population.

How significant is this loss? Cell phone data reveals that only 3 percent of Americans now attend any form of religious worship weekly.

### **Our Current Divisions**

These rapid changes have created very different perceptions about the mission of the church among the generations now in our churches – especially in a denomination already divided between Confessionals, Pietists, and Transformationists (to use an older classification originally from CRC sources) that Tim Keller shortened to "white corpuscles," those intent on removing diseases from the church, and "red corpuscles," those intent on church health and multiplication.

### - **Majority Generation Mission Perceptions**

The generational divides can initially be marked by those who were raised prior to the 1990's, who are now in their 50s and older, and were taught that the mission of our churches was to motivate America's Christian majority to worship and vote in ways that would halt the growing evils of the late 20th Century – caused by the loss of truth. For this older segment of Builders and Boomers, the church's mission was *to take control* of the culture through joining effort to motivate the Christian/Moral majority to vote for politicians that

supported traditional morality.

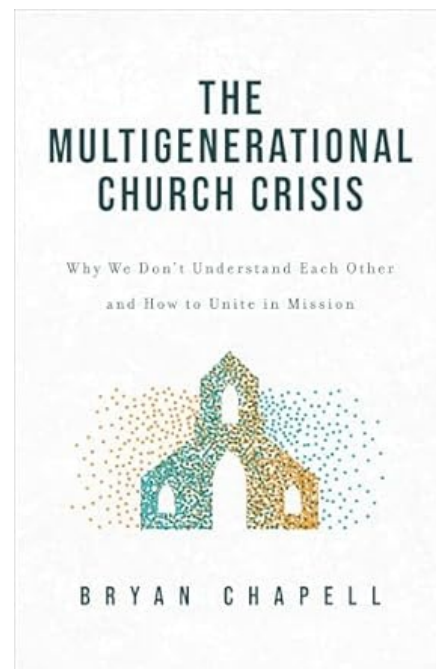
### - **Minority Generation Mission Perceptions**

But what is the perception of those raised during and after the 1990's, when there has been no Christian majority to rally for the control of culture? Younger generations have seen themselves as a Christian minority in a pluralistic culture whose primary mission is *to make credible* their faith to family, friends, and co-workers.

These different mission agendas can create significant tensions among church leaders. Members of the older generation look at the agenda of younger leaders and conclude that the rising generation is composed of cowards, compromisers, and liberals who will not put on the moral majority *uniform* in the present culture wars. It is also common for younger leaders to examine the mission priorities of an older generation and conclude that senior leaders are insensitive, out of touch, and hypocritical about today's gospel mission.

### **II. Our Future Hope**

Hope lies in respecting our Lord's providential calling for each generation for its time in his mission. Post-war leaders built churches, established training institutions, defended the faith against liberal drift, and provided unprecedented support for world missions through gospel zeal and sacrifice. These contributions of the older generations should be celebrated by all.



*Soon to be published*

It is clear, however, that the period of institutional *building* is largely behind us, and we have entered a period where cultural outreach is vital. Very few of our older church leaders have faced the challenges of a younger generation who are surrounded daily by the godlessness and faith opposition cheered by their peers, employers, and educators. Young people who remain faithful amidst such challenges are the present heroes of the church.

#### - *Shared Principles of Faith*

We will not celebrate or respect one another if we believe that one generation is faithful and the other unfaithful. What can help us unite in ministry and mission is insight into the principles that we share? First, we should be able to see that both generations in our churches are basing their agendas on **Scripture**. Yes, sometimes our cultural perceptions cause our agendas and applications to differ, but praise God that in our church we are still asking, "What does the Bible say?" We remain a people of the Book.

Second, we should be able to see that both generations are basing their agendas on the **sanctity of life**. At the root of the issues of abortion and adoption, border protection and refugee care, homosexual opposition and LGBTQ witness, racial reconciliation and social justice, and even the tensions of capitalism and creation care is the conviction that we are to regard all that God has made as precious to him and deserving of our care. Each generation also wants family, neighbor, and nations to know the salvation that is made available through the shed blood of Jesus Christ and the peace that is available to our souls and society through the rule of his kingdom over the hearts of humanity. We all continue to believe **Christ's mission** is our responsibility.

#### - *Shared Concerns for Family*

We will make little progress in biblical unity if we fail to recognize the cultural and political polarities that threaten to keep us divided. But there are new dynamics to recognize:

Into these generational equations we now must introduce the variable of universal loss. Senior generations are experiencing the loss of a way of life marked by the passing of traditions of family, worship, and national influence. However, younger generations of Christians are also experiencing the loss of cultural acceptance, loss of family continuity, and loss of opportunity if they make their family or faith a priority. Each of these losses, especially those that are made more intense when affecting our families (in terms of marriage, sexuality, and employment), creates deep

heartache and often the sense that someone needs to be blamed or held accountable for our hurt. This *zeal of loss* drives frustration and anger toward governmental, educational, or church leaders whose decisions or supposed compromises are sensed to have contributed to the losses we grieve.

Losing our families, intergenerational faith, and traditional influence creates an almost universal sense of resentment and outrage that fuels zeal to make the changes stop and to return to former ways of life. We are not alone. The zeal of loss is creating populist movements in countries around the world (Brazil, Argentina, Australia, Hungary, Kenya, Myanmar, Germany, Italy, India, Pakistan, England, France, Spain, Italy, Korea, Japan, Russia, numerous Middle eastern countries, the United States, and many other nations) where reflex, reactionary movements are seeking to take nations, families, and faith institutions back to days of traditional values and moral conservatism.

In the church, *healthy* expressions of the *zeal of loss* motivate older and younger generations to stand for biblical values and proclaim the power of the cross to heal the human heart and to transform cultures. In unhealthy expressions, the zeal of loss leads people to resort to various forms of reactive fundamentalism (that are more properly identified as populist traditionalism) that is not so much about faith promotion as about lifestyle preservation.

Sadly, but inevitably, when the preservation of a lifestyle becomes a religious priority, then the polarities and politics of the culture inevitably enter the church and fuel our debates. Our people's fear of greater losses can motivate scorn or rejection of those perceived to have made compromises to cultural pressures.

The anger that Bible-believing church people have over past losses and the fear they have of further losses makes them particularly vulnerable to victimization and demonization messaging. Such messaging capitalizes on the zeal of loss to blame persons and scandalize organizations thought to be contributing to liberal drift or way-of-life damage – allegations made easier than ever through social media.

Since we are a church that has taught our people to oppose and be suspicious of governing authorities since Roe, or even since Machen, we should not be surprised that such dynamics create recurring waves of anger and anxiety among both older and younger leaders toward our church's governance and institutions.

For reasons that we may choose to debate, but came to a head during Covid and the Revoice controversies, we



moved from multiplication priorities to purification priorities in recent years. The missional wings of the church that had won virtually every critical GA vote about our priorities for most of the last 30 years have lost most of the contested votes in the last 3 years to those more concerned to halt liberal drift.

Those from our right and left wings, who now talk about leaving the PCA to avoid these dynamics, are usually thinking about avoiding perceived drift [to the left or the right] in our church's culture rather than facing the polarities in the larger culture that are affecting all Bible-believing denominations, not just ours.

The path that will take us from such unhealthy expressions of the zeal of loss is the path of zeal for Christ. This path is not about self-preservation but about Christ's proclamation; not about preserving a past way of life but about leading the lost to eternal life *and* shepherding Christ's flock in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. That means that we neither abandon our church to the fearful, nor abandon leadership responsibilities to secure our own "personal peace."

This is the time to stay the course of our founders' original vision to be a Confessional and Reformed church with the Great Commission as "top priority."

We need leadership that is not overwhelmed by the challenges of the moment. Such leadership will recognize that these challenges are not simply about PCA debates, but about the larger cultural forces that we and our children will need a healthy PCA to withstand. Our goal should not be to "win GA debates or leave", but to **stand in witness** to the wisdom of our founders' vision of being a Confessional church with a missional

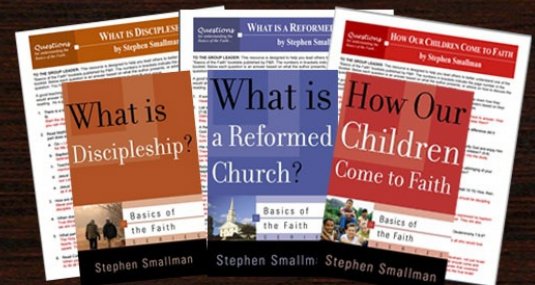
priority. This requires our prayers and yours.

We still need white corpuscles and red corpuscles. This means the calling of every generation and every Christian is to believe that the most powerful instrument of godly transformation in this world is a body of believers who commit to the mission and message of their Lord by communing together in selfless love and mutual respect.

Our times are not more threatening than those of the Apostle Paul, when he instructed us to outdo one another in showing honor, and not to return evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but, above all, to love one another deeply. Why did the Bible's greatest missionary to those *outside* the church put such an emphasis on relationships *inside* the church? He realized that Christ will only be known through us when he is displayed in us.

In a time when the world is addicted to cultural outrage and reputational assault such mutual love and respect in the church will be incredibly difficult and powerfully distinctive. Mutual love and respect will be the evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the heart of Christ Jesus. Our present calling – with informed insight – is to commit ourselves by a repentant demeanor and renewed dedication to *always be reforming* the church for which God's providence has made us responsible. For the sake of future generations and the glory of Christ, our present challenge is to commit again to mutual love and respect that enables us to be a Biblical and Confessional church that makes the Great Commission her top priority.

These booklets are ideal for small groups ~ teaching basic Reformed doctrine and practice with **Free** Leader's Guides developed by **cdm**



## Haggai: Holiness and Happiness

Time is passing. It is now about four months since Haggai first issued a stinging rebuke to the people; three months since he brought encouragements to a people with a new appetite for the Lord; two months since they actually started getting their hands dirty in the work of serving God. It is now 18 December 520 BC, and some commentators suggest a formal ceremony is taking place to mark a significant shift in the work.

Still, it has not all been plain sailing. The autumn rains have come and the winter crops are sown. There may now be a suggestion of apathy, even lethargy—a lack of wholeheartedness, a sense of grudging obedience, among the people. Perhaps some are fearful, asking, as we are still so prone to do, "What will happen to me? What are my prospects if I put the temple first and central? What of my family, my work, if I put the Kingdom of God before everything else?" There seems to be a sense of entitlement, as if the people are demanding a blessing. It raises an old question: How does one find and encourage willing workers? To a people struggling to sustain a willing spirit, Haggai offers particular counsels.

### Purity

First of all, Haggai asks a question about purity (Haggai 2:10-14). The priests were more than ceremonial automatons. They were to teach, to interpret, to apply the law (Lev. 10:11; Dt. 17:9-12). Haggai goes to them, on the basis of their calling, to get public judgment on a key principle from which he will derive a particular application. The question arises from such passages as Leviticus 6, Leviticus 11:28, and Leviticus 22:4-7. "If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?...If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?" In other words, does a holy item communicate its holiness to everything it touches, or does an unholy and defiled item communicate its uncleanness to everything it touches?

The answer is that holiness does not turn the neutral or unclean item holy, but that unholiness does make the clean or neutral item unholy. *Unholiness pollutes.*

This would have been fairly obvious, as we can tell if we try some near-equivalents. Think of a viral epidemic; do we send healthy people among the sick in the hopes that victims of the disease will catch wellness? Of course not! Haggai's point is that you can no more catch holiness than you can catch health. Defilement is contagious, tainting all that is touched. Things need to be made holy, because they become unclean.

### Haggai 2:10-19

<sup>10</sup>On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, <sup>11</sup>"Thus says the Lord of hosts: Ask the priests about the law: <sup>12</sup>'If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?'" The priests answered and said, "No." <sup>13</sup>Then Haggai said, "If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?" The priests answered and said, "It does become unclean." <sup>14</sup>Then Haggai answered and said, "So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the Lord, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean. <sup>15</sup>Now then, consider from this day onward. Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, <sup>16</sup>how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. <sup>17</sup>I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the Lord. <sup>18</sup>Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider: <sup>19</sup>Is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing. But from this day on I will bless you."

It seems that the people may have assumed that their efforts in and around the holy place somehow entitled them to a blessing: "We are God's people doing God's work in God's place—what is the problem?" But now we hear the verdict of the Holy One. Observe again the language of "this people...this nation" (cf. 1:2). This is divine indignation! Good works, as we understand them, do not make us good. This unholy people are not being sanctified by what they touch; rather, they are contaminating those things. They have the wrong notions about themselves, their God and their work. Acts of devotion without a devoted heart are a mere charade, and God sees through it. Haggai deals with a selfish reluctance and a proud spirit of entitlement by underlining the purity of God. It makes us ask, "How is my heart in God's work?" Perhaps you have felt the sting of rebuke and the prod of encouragement, and have said, "Well, I suppose we had better do something." But the problem is that the Lord desires your *heart*! What, then, are your attitudes and motives in God's work?



To calibrate our answers to such questions, we need to properly consider the holiness of God. Holiness is not caught. It does not rub off on those who are around holy things. It must be granted by a holy God. God's dealings with sinners are a matter of grace, not merit. If you would be holy, you need a new heart. You need to be washed in Christ's blood. Then, and only then, will you be accepted in his sight. True obedience flows from a holy heart.

## Chastisement

There follows a description of chastisement (Haggai 2:15-17). There are two mentions of a day: "... from this day forward: from before stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the Lord" (Haggai 2:15) and "... from this day forward, from the twenty fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid" (Haggai. 2:18). The second day certainly seems to be the day of this prophecy. The Lord is underlining that justice and mercy are in his hands. Verse 15 is a call again to consider, to take to heart the relationship between their attitudes and actions and their experiences. Through Haggai God emphasises that he is not obliged to bless, but delights to do so.

We begin with a survey of the experience of this disobedient people. We have seen this language before in Haggai 1:5-11. It echoes the language of Amos (Amos 4:9) and stretches all the way back to Moses: "The Lord will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever, with the sword, with scorching, and with mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish" (Dt. 28:22). The blight, mildew and hail of previous days were not an unfortunate sequence of events; they were acts of judgment, divine chastisements, the rumblings of covenant curses. They were God's wake-up call. The people had failed to give God his due and neglected his house, concentrating on their own dreams and establishing their own defences.

The Lord therefore roused them from their apathy. The failures of the harvest, the dashing of their dreams and the destroying of their defences were a painful corrective to their mistaken priorities. The people were stubborn; they did not grasp that they were engaged with the rebuilding of the dwelling of the Lord of hosts, and that it was worthy of their best endeavours.

We too need to remember that the Lord is neither a carelessly indulgent nor a mawkishly sentimental father-figure. Too many of us think that love never says, "No!"; I hat is not love! Love does what is right and what is best to secure long term blessings (Heb. 12:7-11). Short-term indulgence in response to stubborn sin is the real cruelty. Blessing is not automatic, and we are not automatically entitled to it.

We must also consider that the Lord is not some remote

'first cause.' He is intimately and immediately involved in his world and he is among his people: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Prov 15:3). We should at least consider that our afflictions may be God's wake-up calls, designed to stir us from our slumbers and correct our false thinking and flawed living (Heb. 12:5-6).

## Blessing

At last comes a declaration of blessing (Haggai 2:18-19). The Lord is a God who intervenes personally in time and space. Twice he promises that he will act "from this day". This may be a day of formal ceremony, or it may simply refer to a day of the Lord's own choosing. Either way, the Lord of hosts reserves the blessing to himself: "I will bless you" (v19). Life in Israel hangs in the balance; the seed is sown, but previous years have provided a tragic return. The vines and the branches hang empty. Nevertheless, the Lord himself has been at work. He has warned and stirred his people, and-as they repent and obey-he now will bless them. The language is again covenantal (drawn from Genesis 12:2), the material blessings a symbol of divine favour. In the face of human stubbornness, carelessness, weariness and dullness, the Lord will do good to his undeserving people.

We would love to be able to say that Israel is in a right spirit by this point, but it is not clear. What of you? Have you repented of your sins and obeyed God as he calls you? Are you doing hard work with a humble will?

When God warns us and wakes us, he always gives us work to do. He reminds us that "... we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). He urges us to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt. 6:33). Do you see how our God smiles on the repentant and obedient heart?

When we know this mercy, we must trace all good back to God himself. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will he keep his anger forever" (Ps. 103:8-9). Our God delights to do good. Were it not so, we would be utterly and eternally lost. Our blessings all, and always, have God as the fountainhead.

In Haggai, all goodness and glory are of grace, from above. It is always so with us. We are chosen and accepted in Christ. We are blessed in him, for he is the source and the channel of every good gift.



**Author: Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen**

Karlo Janssen is a minister with the Canadian Reformed Churches. He is currently serving as corresponding secretary of the ICRC and as general editor of *Lux Mundi*.

## Accountability in Church Life

*Prefacing note: This is the first portion of a lecture presented at the Independent Reformed Theological Academy of the Independent Reformed Church of Korea.*

With Belgic Confession article 32, many Reformed churches confess: “We believe that, although it is useful and good for those who govern the church to establish a certain order to maintain the body of the church, they must at all times watch that they do not deviate from what Christ, our only Master, has commanded. ... We accept only what is proper to preserve and promote harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God.”

With this, Reformed churches confess that the purpose of church governance is to promote harmony and unity, and to keep all in obedience to God. If you want to catch all of that in one word, I would suggest the word “accountability”. Accountability is so fundamental to the organization of Christ’s church that the way the church functions and is structured—what she does and how she is—will always take into account the need to be accountable.

In an essay published in *Paradigms in Polity*, Dr. David Hall writes: “Reformed Christians have been leaders in the development of governmental systems, perhaps because of our intimate and undeniable acquaintance with our own lack of trustworthiness. We have constructed governments, therefore, with checks-and-balances. Furthermore, we stress regular and thoughtful means of **accountability**. To facilitate this best, we have acknowledged the necessity of constitutions as following the covenantal patterns of God.”<sup>1</sup> In this lecture on Reformed Church Polity, especially in the tradition of Dort and the Doleantie, I will first show that the need for accountability is rooted in Scripture. (Next, I’ll give some illustrations of how Reformed churches go about being accountable.)

First, then, the proof that accountability between churches is a practice rooted in Scripture.

### Using Scripture

To begin, I observe that where the use of Scripture is concerned in church governance, the principles are those found in ethics in general. This implies that one must be careful in the application of Scripture passages. Some Scripture passages are prescriptive, others are descriptive. One cannot always deduce a prescriptive principle from a descriptive passage. The Dutch Reformed ethicist, Dr. Jochem Douma, has suggested that Scripture serves as guide, as guard, as compass, and provides examples.

Where accountability is concerned, the Scriptural guidelines are clear. Accountability is an assumed reality in Genesis 2 and 3. God gave the first humans a command, and God calls the first humans to account when they disobeyed the command. Accountability is a foundational aspect to the laws of Moses, and the interaction between prophets and kings. The work of God the Son as Jesus the Christ assumed accountability to God the Father. Humans are accountable to God for all they do. The Lord Jesus said: “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.” (Matthew 12:36) The apostle Paul wrote: “So each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). Accountability towards God is part of the fabric of human existence. That includes the relationship which leaders in the church have with members of the church. We read in Hebrews 13(:17): “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.” This last quote indicates that accountability is not just between individual humans God. The charge to “obey your leaders” implies accountability between humans. More could be said but, for the sake of time, I’ll leave it with this. I consider it sufficiently proven that Scripture as guide requires the practice of accountability towards God and among humans. I’d like to turn to an account in Scripture which serves as an example of how such accountability was practised by the early church between local churches. It’s an account that, I believe, can serve to underpin the practice of mutual accountability between churches as it takes place in a presbytery or a classis, assemblies of individual churches. Because Scripture teaches that accountability is required in life, this account is not just descriptive but provides us with prescriptive principles for the practice of church governance.

### Acts 10

The account I’m referring to is found in Acts 10 and 11. It’s the story of the Apostle Peter being called from Joppa to Caesarea, to preach the good news of Jesus Christ in the house of Cornelius, the Italian, and subsequently being called to account for this in Jerusalem. For the sake of time, I’m going to assume the story is known. I invite you to take a Bible, and scan along with me as I point out the significance of some minor details.

By the way, as we do this you’ll also experience how important it is to read the Bible closely and accurately.

The account begins by introducing Cornelius in Caesarea,



how God moved him to send for Peter, who happened to be in Joppa. The scene shifts to Joppa, where Peter, in a vision, is firmly informed by God not to call unclean what God has called clean. The implications are clear: Peter should not ignore the request from a non-Jew like Cornelius.

The two servants and the soldier whom Cornelius had sent arrive at Peter's place of lodging. Peter hears the request. Now note what we read in Acts 10:22: "So he [that's Peter] invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him."

"Some of the brothers from Joppa", these are the people we want to keep track of. If you happen to have a Greek Bible open, note that the word "brothers" has a definite article before it. It doesn't say "some brothers from Joppa" but "some *of the* brothers". I suggest to you, these "brothers" are not arbitrary members of the church in Joppa. Rather, they are office bearers. As we continue reading in this account I'll point out why I believe that. Peter, the soldier, the two servants, and some of the brothers from Joppa travel to Caesarea. Peter brings the good news of Jesus Christ to the gathered household of Cornelius. The Holy Spirit is poured out on these Gentiles, just as He was on the church at Pentecost. And then we read, Acts 10:45: "And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles." "The believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter", given the flow of the account, they would have to be "some of the brothers from Joppa." The thing to note here is that these brothers were witnesses to the preaching of Peter and to the event that followed.

Then Peter declared, verse 47: "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" When you read this, have you ever wondered, who is this question for? Who has the authority to stand up and say "yes, baptize them" or "no, they are not to be baptized"? The clue lies in the word "we", "who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." The "we" can only be Peter and some of the brothers from Joppa. Here we see accountability in practice. Peter doesn't just go ahead and baptize Cornelius and his family on his authority. Even though he is clearly convinced they should be. And even though he is an apostle, and may claim special inspiration by the Holy Spirit. None of that. The apostle Peter gives the brothers from Joppa the opportunity to voice an objection. Some may consider it a bit of a stretch but I think one can justifiably say: the decision to baptize the household of Cornelius was taken

by the elders of the church of Joppa.

No objection is recorded. And so, verse 48: "And he [that's Peter] commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." Again, read carefully. The phrasing suggests that Peter did not do the baptizing himself. If Peter had done the baptizing, he would not have given a command. He would have simply done it. We may assume that the baptisms were administered by "some of the brothers from Joppa".

At this point, here's a first principle for the practice of church governance. The church is governed by a group of people. Even an apostle is subject to the judgment of elders. It should not surprise us that Peter, in the letter we know as First Peter, refers to himself simply as "a fellow elder" (1 Peter 5:1).

## Acts 11

We are not done yet. My interest lies in accountability, not just between office bearers, but between churches. And so we have to continue the story as it is told us in Acts 11.

The church members throughout Judea heard what had happened. It caused quite the stir. When the apostle Peter went to Jerusalem, he is criticized by the circumcision party. Not for the sermon he preached. Not for the baptisms that were administered. No, the accusation was, Acts 11:3: "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." The issue was the application of a Jewish law. In this situation the Apostle Peter is willing to give account. He explained what had happened. Take a look, please at Acts 11:11-12. There we read these words of Peter: "And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house." Take careful note of "these six brothers". We learn here that "some of the brothers of Joppa" were actually six in number. That's quite the delegation! And note also that Peter says "*these* six brothers". The original Greek makes clear that the six brothers were with Peter. Reading between the lines this suggests that Peter did just happen to be in Jerusalem and didn't just happen to get challenged and so didn't just happen to defend himself. No, this is official. There was concern among the churches, and the Peter and the 6 brothers who had gone with him to Caesarea, the seven of them went to Jerusalem in order to give account. The concern being expressed by a party in the church of Jerusalem is not just with respect to Peter, but as much with respect to the eldership of Joppa approving what had happened. Here we have an example of accountability among the churches.

## More examples

There are more examples in Scripture. I think of what's often referred to as the Council in Jerusalem, the story told us in Acts 15. Antioch sends a delegation to Jerusalem. Jerusalem sends a delegation to Antioch. And, by the way, as the first delegation travels to Jerusalem, they also visit the churches along the way (Acts 15:3). There is openness and transparency, hallmarks of accountability. Think of how Paul wrote to the Colossians that the letter he sent them be read in the church of Laodicea as well, and that the letter of the Laodiceans be read in Colosse (Colossians 4:16). Think of the letters written by Christ to the seven churches in Asia (Revelation 2-3).

## Integral to church life

I trust the point has been clearly made. The early church considered accountability an integral part of church life. It does not matter who you are. Even the spokesman of the apostles, Peter, has some brothers come with him, who function as witnesses and, at the critical moment, even as a kind of consistory: should these people be baptized or

not? Paul and Barnabas, with much learning and missionary experience, have no issue with other people coming along as witnesses as they travel to Jerusalem. My guess is, it's probably not something you think about when you think "church". But accountability is a very important side to being a communion of saints. Again, the line from Article 32 of the Belgic Confession: "We accept only what is proper to preserve and promote harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God." In order to preserve and promote harmony, church members must be willing to be held accountable and must be prepared to call each other to account. For only thus can we keep all in obedience to God.

*'David W. Hall, "The Pastoral and Theological Significance of Church Government", pp. 13-14, published in David W. Hall and Joseph H. Hall, eds., Paradigms in Polity: Classis Readings in Reformed and Presbyterian Church Government (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 12-34.*



Dr. K. Janssen at the Independent Reformed Theological Academy in Korea, March 2025





**Author: Rev. Samit Mishra  
and Rev. Pradeep Kumar**

*Samit Mishra and Pradeep Kumar serve as ministers  
with the Presbyterian Free Church of Central India.*

## Report on the PFC-CI

*The following report on the PFCCI will be included in the Missions Committee report for PCEA Synod 2025. John Greensill is the Missions committee contact with the PFCCI and contributed this report.*

The words of William Carey, "Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God," continue to inspire and challenge us in our gospel mission. His unwavering commitment to ministry in India serves as a beacon of encouragement for those laboring in the Lord's harvest. Carey's dedication reminds us that no opposition or hardship can hinder the power of the gospel, and his legacy continues to shape the work of missions today. As we reflect on the past year, we lift our hearts in praise and thanksgiving to God for His provision and protection. In the midst of challenges, He has remained faithful, sustaining both the church and the mission schools. His hand has been evident in every step, opening doors, raising leaders, and strengthening the faith of believers. We are especially grateful for the perseverance of our mission workers, who tirelessly labour despite many hardships.

The reality of Christian ministry in India continues to be marked by an increasing rise in persecution and hostility. Opposition to the gospel is growing, and believers are facing difficulties in various forms, from social discrimination to direct threats.

However, in the midst of these challenges, God is at work. The gospel continues to advance, new believers are being discipled, and the church is being built up. Though the trials are real, they serve as a reminder that suffering for Christ is part of our calling, and we take heart in the promises of Scripture that assure us of His presence and victory.

Despite these challenges, the church and mission schools are flourishing. The past year has been marked by significant growth in ministry, new opportunities, and remarkable achievements.

The following report provides an update on both church ministry (PFC-CI) and mission schools in Chhapara and Lakhnadon.

### Church Ministry (PFC-CI)

#### 1. Inward Mission: Strengthening the Faith

The primary focus of the church remains the spiritual nourishment and strengthening of believers.

This year, we have emphasized discipleship and deepening faith through systematic Bible studies, prayer meetings, and personal mentorship programs.

Regular fellowship gatherings have created a strong sense of community among believers, encouraging them to stand firm in their faith despite external challenges.

#### 2. Community Work and Outreach

Recognizing the need for holistic ministry, the church has expanded its efforts to serve the community in practical ways. A dedicated women's wing has been established to focus on outreach among the disabled and elderly. Through inclusive friendship programs, health camps, and house visitations, these women have become a source of comfort and care for many. Regular medical assistance has also been provided, ensuring that those with chronic illnesses receive the medication they need. This initiative has not only met physical needs but has also opened doors for gospel conversations, as many recipients have expressed their gratitude and curiosity about the Christian faith.

#### 3. Women Empowerment Initiatives

Economic independence is crucial for the well-being of women in our community, particularly for widows and those from underprivileged backgrounds. The church has launched income-generating training programs, equipping women with skills in tailoring, handicrafts, and small-scale entrepreneurship. Additionally, investment opportunities have been introduced, allowing women to start their own businesses. This initiative has empowered many women to provide for their families and has also served as a platform to share the gospel through mentorship and fellowship.

#### 4. New Candidate for Ministry

One of the greatest joys of this year has been witnessing the calling of Vipin John from Chhapara into full-time ministry. Vipin has shown great zeal and commitment to the gospel, and he is currently pursuing theological studies. His journey is a testimony to God's calling on young men to serve His church. We pray for his continued spiritual and academic growth, and we look forward to the impact he will have in the ministry in the years to come. His training will further strengthen the mission work in the region.

#### 5. Church Construction

By God's grace, the church construction projects in Lakhnadon and Nagpur have been successfully completed. These new buildings are not just structures; they are places of worship, discipleship, and community transformation. The Nagpur church has now become a strategic base for expanding the

gospel work in Maharashtra. With this new facility, we anticipate increased evangelistic outreach, discipleship programs, and ministry expansion into surrounding areas. We are thankful for the provision that made this possible and pray that these spaces will be used effectively for the glory of God.

## Mission Schools

### 1. Chhapara School

The mission school in Chhapara has seen significant growth, with student enrollment increasing at 15% per annum. This steady rise indicates the growing reputation of the school and the increasing demand for quality education.

One of the highlights of this year was Sana Anjum, a student who passed the state board examination with the highest state rank. Her outstanding performance brought great recognition to the school, earning her multiple awards from the government. This achievement has enhanced the credibility of the institution, attracting more students and families to our school.

Infrastructure development is also progressing well, with seven additional classrooms nearing completion. The school remains committed to providing a Christ-centered environment, and although direct evangelistic activities are limited, the gospel is being shared through indirect means such as value-based education and personal interactions.

### 2. Lakhnadon School

The mission school in Lakhnadon has experienced modest growth in student enrollment. While the numbers have not increased dramatically, the school is recognized for its dedicated staff and strong Christian testimony within the local community. Teachers are not only committed to academic excellence but also to reflecting Christ through their lives and work. However, financial struggles persist, particularly in meeting salary commitments for staff.

Despite these challenges, the faculty continues to serve sacrificially, trusting in God's provision. There is an urgent need for investment in infrastructure and facilities to enhance the overall learning experience and attract more students. We pray that the Lord will provide the necessary resources to strengthen this vital mission.

## Conclusion and Prayer Points

As we reflect on this past year, we recognize both the challenges and the victories. We are humbled by God's faithfulness and encouraged by the fruit of our labors. However, there are pressing needs and areas where we seek the prayers and support of our partners in ministry.

- Pray for the continued spiritual growth and perseverance of believers, especially in areas where persecution is increasing. May they remain strong in faith and bold in their witness.
- Pray for the success of community outreach initiatives, particularly the women's wing and empowerment programs. May these efforts open more doors for sharing the gospel.
- Pray for Vipin John as he continues his theological studies. May God equip him for effective ministry.
- Pray for mission schools, particularly regarding financial stability, infrastructure development, and staff salaries. May God provide the resources needed to sustain and expand this vital work.
- Pray for the continued impact of the Nagpur church base, that it may be a hub for gospel advancement in Maharashtra.

We trust in God's promises and look forward to seeing His work unfold in the coming year. To Him be all the glory!

---

Republished with permission from  
The Presbyterian Banner, March 2025, magazine  
of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.



*Some of the members and visitors of the PFCCI synod, November 2024*





## Theological Education Conference, June 2025

As ICRC Theological Education Committee (TEC), we are excited to inform you that we are planning a three-day conference for ICRC Church Federation Representatives and Representatives from Seminaries identified by ICRC member church federations as seminaries from which they call pastors (termed “ICRC Seminaries”).

The theme of the conference will be *“Meeting the Challenges of Theological Education in the 21st Century: Education, Accreditation, Formation”*. The conference is being planned for June 11-13, 2025, at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS), in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. Please mark these dates in your calendar!

To reduce travel expenses, the HRC and FRC churches in Grand Rapids are willing to billet representatives attending the conference from a distance.

For more information, contact Mr. Jim Beeke [jimbeeke@shaw.ca](mailto:jimbeeke@shaw.ca)

### TEC – Conference Program

#### DAY 1: Wednesday, June 11

- 9:00 a.m. Opening – Douw Breed, ICRC TEC Chair
- 9:15 a.m. Explanation of ICRC-TEC Mandate and purpose of the Conference – Douw Breed
- 9:30 a.m. Keynote Speaker – Davi Gomes
- 10:30 a.m. Refreshment Break

#### PART I: EDUCATIONAL ADAPTATION

##### (contextualization and delivery)

- 10:45 a.m. Contextualization of Theological Education (*Two 15-minute topics*)
- Speaker: Key Elements of Theological Education – Jerry Visscher
- Speaker: Positive and Negative Contextualization – Phil Scheepers
- 11:15 a.m. Examples of Contextualization (*Two 15-minute presentations*)
  - Tony Curto
  - Brian De Vries
- 12:00 p.m. Lunch
- 1:30 p.m. Q&A Panel Discussion with Presenters (Moderator: Phil Scheepers - SlideOut program)
- 2:30 p.m. Refreshment Break
- 3:00 p.m. Breakout groups to enable church and seminary reps to choose to individually meet with one of the speakers who presented one of the four topics/examples above
- 3:45-4:00 p.m. Closing
- Networking and dinner with host families

#### DAY 2: Thursday, June 12

- 9:00 a.m. Opening
- 9:15 a.m. Part I (continued): CONTEXTUALIZATION, ADAPTATION and DELIVERY
- Examples of Delivery Adaptation – (Three 20-minute Presentations)
  - Blended ThM or MDiv Degree (accredited by ATS) via shared courses, professors, and resources delivered in-person and online synchronously and asynchronously using speech-synchronized speech (PRTS Model – Adriaan Neele)
  - Church leader training and theological education courses delivered via modules to village pastors and evangelists (Mukhanyo Model – Brian DeVries)
  - Sharing library resources to enhance research capacities (1 or 2 Librarians)
- 10:15 a.m. Refreshment Break
- 10:45 a.m. Q&A Panel Discussion with Presenters (Moderator: Jim Beeke)
- 11:15 a.m. Three breakout groups to enable church and seminary reps to choose to individually meet with one of the speakers who presented one of the three examples
- 12:00 p.m. Lunch – Opening & Closing

# Announcement

## **PART II: ACCREDITATION**

- 1:30 p.m. Examples of Accreditation Models (*Three 20-minute Presentations*)
- ATS Model – Jonathon Beeke
  - ATS Blended Model – Adriaan Neele
  - Regional Accreditation Models – Phil Scheepers
- 2:30 p.m. Refreshment Break
- 2:45 p.m. Panel Discussion Q&A (Moderator: Albert Coetsee) Jerry Visscher introduces Q:  
Is there interest or need for an ICRC model of accreditation?
- 3:15 p.m. Three breakout groups to enable church and seminary reps to choose to individually meet with one of the speakers/teams who presented the three examples
- 4:00 p.m. Closing
- 6:30 p.m. Conference Dinner (Opening & Closing)  
After Dinner Speaker: Joel Beeke

## **DAY 3: Friday, June 13**

- 9:00 a.m. Opening

## **PART III: SPIRITUAL FORMATION**

- 9:15 a.m. Importance, Essentials, and Challenges of Spiritual and Leadership Formation – Speaker – Albert Coetsee
- 9:45 a.m. Full Group Discussion – Successes and challenges with student spiritual leadership formation in the following four models (Moderator – Philip Scheepers)
- On-site model
  - Online and blended model
  - Local church partnerships model
  - Student exchanges, visits, and internships
- 10:30 a.m. Refreshment Break
- 11:00 a.m. Full Group Discussion: Administrative Practices (Moderator: Tony Curto)
- AI issues
  - Sexual abuse allegations – Policies and procedures
  - Other helpful policies
  - Other issues?
- 12:00 p.m. Lunch and Closing – Douw Breed



*Puritan Theological Reformed Seminary*



## Now I'm a Believer!

Some years ago, we heard a pop song called, "I'm a Believer". It was recorded by a British group called the Monkees back in 1967. The song was a big hit and then enjoyed a big reboot when the film "Shrek" came out. Soon all the next generation knew the song as well. But what is the main message? The song has a main character who thought love was a fairy tale because nothing special had ever happened to him. One day he saw the face of a very beautiful stranger. He fell in love with her immediately! He sings: *"Then I saw her face, now I'm a believer Not a trace of doubt in my mind. I'm a believer, I couldn't leave her if I tried."*

Behind this snappy tune and benign lyrics is a deceptive popular belief of Chinese origin. The idea is that somewhere out in the world is that one individual person who is your perfect match. This person is the yin to your yang, so to speak. Once you meet that perfect someone, you are obliged to spring into action, throw caution to the winds, and pursue that perfect person. This one chance may be the only one you ever get! Your combined energies will make you a strong couple. You will have to seize the day, throw off any and all hindrances, and go for it. Pursue personal happiness!

This romantic notion is very appealing. Hackneyed versions of this theme often hit the bookstores and the movie theaters. But is there any truth in it at all? The answer of course, is NO. It is pure fiction! It does not matter how many people fall for it. This will never become truth. Yes, people do meet each other and fall in love. Scripture describes that process as a mystery. *"There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a young woman."* (Proverbs 30:15-19) And who is the author of the mystery? Only God makes the love possible. Nothing happens without His sovereign will. Fate or chance is not involved at all. What about the origin of faith and love for Jesus Christ? There were times when faith in Christ and love for God happened very quickly, as was the case at Pentecost. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit became evident when ordinary Galileans spoke in a dozen languages! But, since those early days, things have changed. Learning about the Bible, about the Lord God the Creator, learning about Jesus the Saviour and Redeemer is fundamental and necessary. In a secular society, it is essential. Then finally, after receiving some teaching, by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, we may joyfully say: "I'm a

**Author: Mr. Siebe DeJong**

*Siebe DeJong is a member in the Canadian Reformed Churches, currently serving on the board of Manoah Manor, a CanRC associated senior care home.*

believer!" What a great confession to make. Even better, we may join in singing praise to God and Jesus Christ. We can offer praise to Christ alone instead of singing about ourselves. We can worship the Creator instead of the creature! We can joyfully join in a well-known chorus: *"I will sing of my Redeemer, and his wondrous love to me. On the cruel cross he suffered, from the curse to set me free. Sing, O sing of my Redeemer! With his blood he purchased me. On the cross he sealed my pardon, paid the debt, and set me free"*. (Arthur P. Bliss, 1876)

In conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus says: *"You must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."* (John 3: 7,8) May the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you as you rejoice for grace received. May your hearts be filled with thankfulness for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and for the opportunity to join with the children of Abraham by faith in cheerfully telling others: Now I'm a believer! There is no doubt in my mind!

---

Republished with permission from Manoah Moments, magazine of a senior home associated with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

