



Lux Mundi

44:2 October 2025

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



In this Issue

The RCUS celebrates its 300th anniversary
Reports on broadest assemblies of various churches
Missions Consultation and Theological Conference
Articles: Diaconal Aid, Justification

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Reformed Churches



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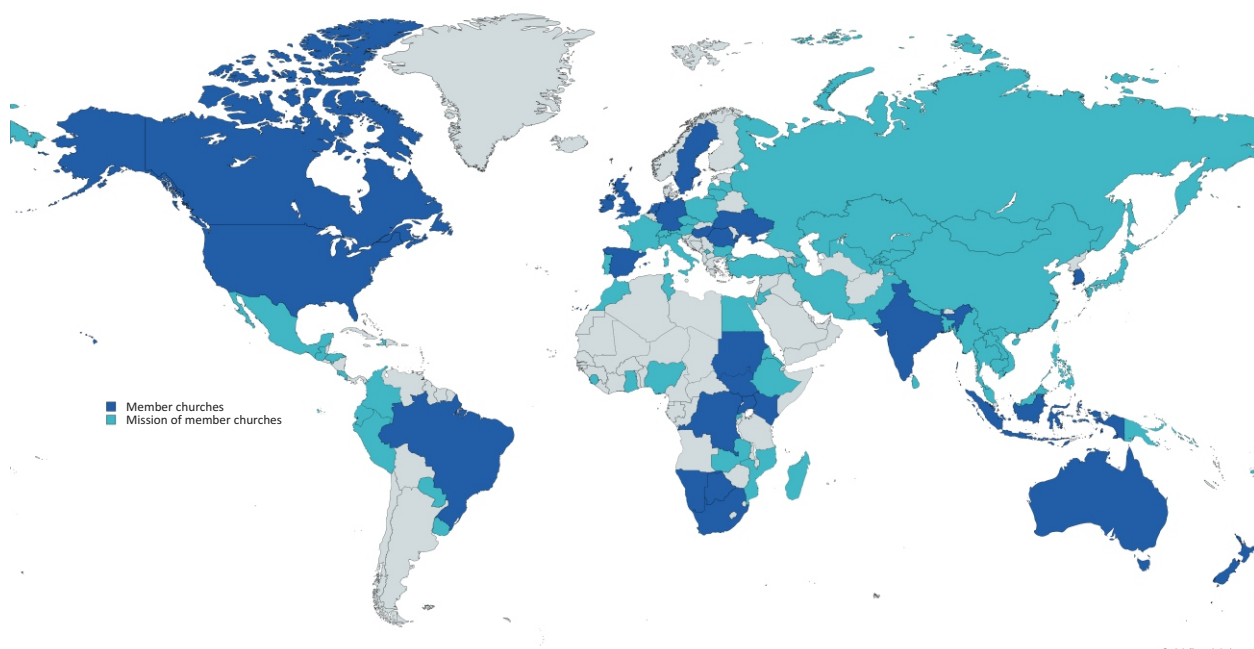
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Celebration and Labour

This past summer the Reformed Church in the United States could celebrate its 300th anniversary. There is much gratitude to the Lord for how He has preserved His own throughout the centuries. In the pages of this Lux Mundi you'll find a report on the celebrations, and on the RCUS Synod held around the same time. It is good and proper to celebrate the blessings the Lord grants.

On other pages of Lux Mundi you'll find reports on the labours of broadest assemblies of other ICRC member

churches held since the last edition of Lux Mundi. The various ICRC committees have been busy as well. There were a Missions Consultation and a Theological Conference in the past few months. Finally, an article on providing diaconal aid, on theological education in Uganda, and on the topic of justification. A little bit of everything, reflecting the many sides to activities by God's people in His Kingdom. Enjoy the read.



Nations where ICRC member churches and their mission projects are located



The logo combines the ICRC logo with the Lux Mundi monogram, an early Christian symbol combining the initials of Jesus Christ (in Greek I and X), referring to Him as the Light of the World (Lux Mundi).

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Eager for Church

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD" – Psalm 122:1

The psalmist was thrilled when he received the invitation to join group travelling to Jerusalem, to the house of God. Why? Was this his opportunity to admire some delightful architecture?

Psalm 120 had set the tone for the Songs of Ascents with its lament that life is so full of lies. The only place we can find true answers to life's perplexing questions is in the house of God— for that's where the good news is proclaimed, that God restores sinners through the sacrifice of the lamb! This is the heart of the solution to the miseries of this world. Now that the pilgrim has arrived in Jerusalem, where he's about to hear the answers explained once more, he recalls with gratitude the privilege of being invited to listen again. He was glad to be there!

How striking is the contrast, then, of Jesus Christ's final trip into the city before his crucifixion and death. Christ expressed no eagerness at all to go to the house of the LORD; he instead wept (Luke 19:41). He did so because he

knew that the answers God prepared to life's hard questions were not clearly communicated in the temple anymore. Instead of the faithful presentation of the gospel—how the sacrificed lamb foreshadowed the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God (and that's himself)—the temple was filled with the cries of merchants seeking to make a shekel from religious pilgrims.

But that didn't stop him from fulfilling the gospel message of the temple.

Obediently he went to the cross to die in the place of sinners. Because of his perfect sacrifice, those who believe in him are freed from the penalty sin deserves and are adopted into the family of God. In New Testament times, this divine answer is proclaimed in church. That's why the apostle encourages the Hebrew Christians not to neglect meeting together (Heb. 10:25), for the church service is the most important place to be!

Are you glad when it's Sunday again and you get to go to church? Do you find the thought of hearing again the good news of Christ's redeeming work exciting? Is in church that Jesus Christ provides answers to those struggling with life's brokenness. That is why we share the psalmist's gladness that its time again to gather together to hear the gospel solution!

Republished with permission from *Christ's Psalms Our Psalms*.



The RCUS Celebrates 300 Years

Author: Elder Roger Gallimore

Roger Gallimore is an elder with the RCUS and serves as president of the RCUS synod.

It was a warm, sunny day with occasional breaths of wind as we gathered under the immense visages on Mt. Rushmore to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the RCUS.

The park made it easy to find the pavilion where the event was held. It was a joy to visit with people we knew as people assembled for the celebration.

Mr. Wayne Johnson did a nice job as master of ceremonies. The presentation of historical background information with Dr. Maynard Koerner was especially fascinating. It was inspiring to hear the story of people risking so much to come to this country and to start the churches where many of us still worship today.

There were a substantial number of video greetings and congratulations from many different sources. The participation from the choir and the band was a great treat. Rev. Vern Pollema gave a warm charge for the future. Mr. Roger Gallimore had a stirring address (see below), and Rev. Dennis Roe concluded the event with a heartfelt benediction.

We were glad we went, and left thankful for the history of the Lord's faithfulness to the RCUS and were encouraged for what the future holds.

RCUS President's Report

This week has long been anticipated as we not only gather at the 279th Synod but also unite members from across the RCUS in a family convention, following both with the Tricentennial celebration of the RCUS. Having been party in some degree to the flurry of emails, texts, Slack posts, Zoom meetings, YouTube videos, and phone calls, all in preparation for this momentous occasion, I can say by virtue of all the effort by so many people that this is truly an extraordinary event in the life of the church. The celebratory atmosphere is hard to miss, even as Synod gathers in truncated fashion to do the ordinary business of the church.

And that's the point as we consider the state of the church today. While we look on with awe at the extraordinary work of the Lord in building, pruning, and carrying forward the work of the Reformed Church in the United States over these 300 years, it was the ordinary that God used to accomplish His extraordinary purposes.

It was the ordinary means of grace that make this Tricentennial extraordinary. Therein lies the hallmark of the RCUS upon which we stand firm. The ordinary preaching of God's holy word is clearly evident in RCUS pulpits every Sunday. The word is faithfully taught in confirmation and Bible studies and is found in publications and productions from the Reformed Herald to social media posts and everything in between. There is also much ordinary prayer in the church. In worship services, Bible studies, meetings, at home, and everywhere else, this ordinary means of grace permeates the RCUS. The proper use of the sacraments is faithfully observed and protected, as these visible signs and seals appointed by God confirm our faith.

I believe this provision and subsequent adherence to the ordinary means of grace are the strength of the church. Furthermore, it is the ordinary grit and grind of the means of grace that fuel our capacity to serve as officers of the church in local congregations, in the classes, in Synod, and in all the various committees thereof.

This last year, this ordinarieness manifested itself in a number of extraordinary ways. The planting of God's word found fertile soil as we experienced pockets of growth all over the RCUS, most notably in the Los Angeles area. Being present at Western Classis and hearing firsthand the work going on in reaching the unreached in Los Angeles brought great joy.

It is also with great gratitude and joy that we find in the statistical reports that the number of baptized members in the RCUS grew by just over 3%. This is the third time that the RCUS experienced growth in the last 20 years, with the other two years being 2015 and 2024. The increase in 2024 and 2025 is the first time we've had back-to-back years of growth since 2002 and 2003. Now I know we're quick to say it is the Lord that provides the increase, as well we should, but as a good farmer cultivates and plants, so our Lord uses the faithful planting and watering the word of God, the ordinary means of grace, and attention to the Great Commission to grow his church.

And indeed, much work is being done with attention to the Great Commission. Eleven Spanish translation projects were completed this year under the leadership of Rev. Valentín Alpuche in coordination with the Foreign

Ministries Committee, including up-to-date Reformed Herald articles, updated Three Forms of Unity, and Covenant Theology by Rev. Frank Walker. The Welcoming Committee tirelessly researched and contacted a number of independent or disenfranchised groups and churches possibly looking for a home. This year, three new correspondence relationships will have been established, and five recommended correspondence relationships have been given to Covenant East Classis. This committee has also begun the practice of a meeting each month devoted solely to prayer for these churches and groups. The Home Missions Committee implemented the new Synod Home Missions Manual through liaising with local congregations with emphasis on individual and congregational opportunities. The Communications Committee expanded its reach with support for the Tricentennial, endowment development, a communications calendar that ensures a regular media presence, enhanced website, and an RCUS style book.

Another highlight was in the area of endowment development. In spite of nearly a six-month gap during which we were in between development officers, there was over \$1.5 million raised in pledges through planned giving. Since beginning this effort, dubbed Mission 2025, over \$2.6 million was raised in gifts and pledges. Plus, dozens of more people have been given access to planned-giving tools through the Barnabas Foundation and Giftwise.

While we rejoice in the growth of baptized members, along with long-term growth of financial resources, we also understand that the work of making disciples and of teaching disciples is never done but remains the mission of the church. We now recognize that to accelerate reaching the lost requires laser-like focus from each member, congregation, classis, and the synodical committees to do their respective parts in reliance on God's word and Holy Spirit. As for synodical committees, the call is to use the reorganized scope of work and reporting tools accordingly. Less about efficiency and more about strategic purpose and accountability, the work of

each committee is driven by specific objectives directed by Synod and strategic objectives generated by each respective committee. Committees are thus encouraged to not wait to be told, but to proactively generate ideas and put proposals together that contribute to accelerating efforts toward the Great Commission.

I believe that the state of the RCUS today is at a juncture. Looking back, we see how our fathers and mothers were used by the Lord in extraordinary ways in keeping the church together. Looking ahead, we pray for us to be used by the Lord in extraordinary ways in growing the church.

That's not to say that we won't encounter great challenges. We undoubtedly will. But we meet these challenges the same way our forebears did, through steadfast grounding upon that which is ordinary; that is, the ordinary means of grace. May God our Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, grant His church the extraordinary in adding disciples to the body of believers we know as Reformed Church in the United States.

To God alone be the glory.

In the Service of Christ Our King,

Elder Roger Gallimore, President



RCUS Synod 2025 in session

300 YEARS, Hymn version

Joel 2

John Savage, 2024

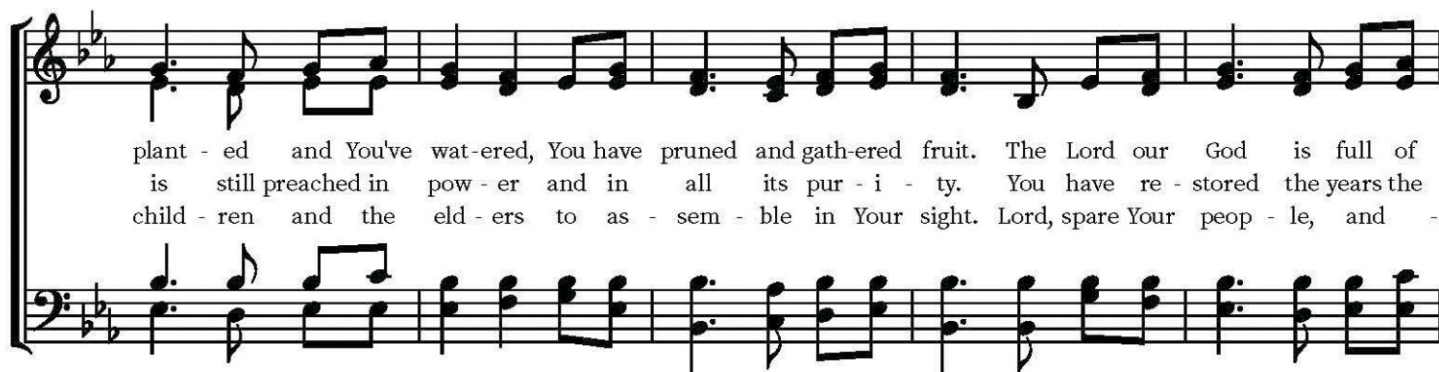
Celtic melody
Arr. Anne Savage

$\text{♩} = 80$



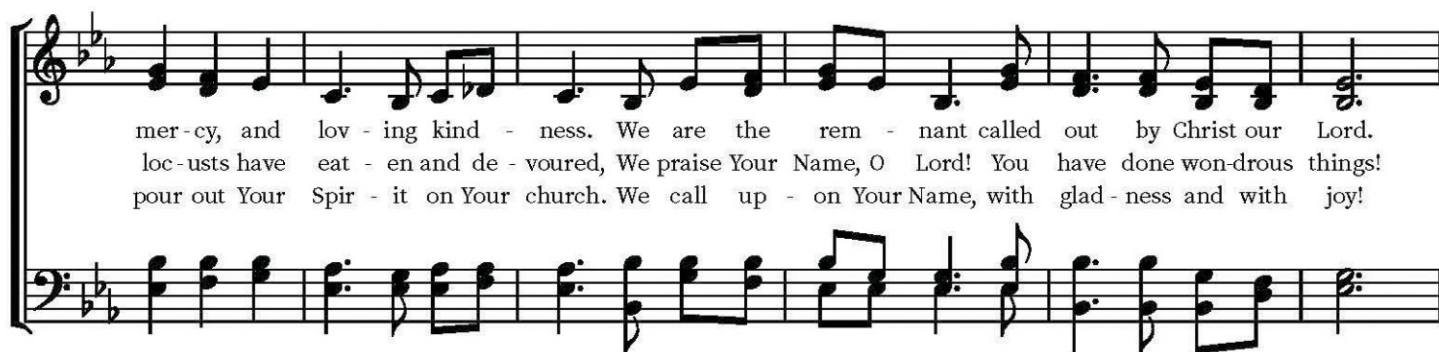
1. Three hun-dred years is noth-ing, Lord, but one mo - ment in Your plan. You ha - ve
2. Our fath-ers' church is now the church of our daugh - ters and our sons. The Gos - pel
3. The horn has blown in Zi - on and all the peop - le ga - ther here, we called the

6



plant - ed and You've wat-ered, You have pruned and gath-ered fruit. The Lord our God is full of
is still preached in pow - er and in all its pur - i - ty. You have re - stored the years the
child - ren and the eld - ers to as - sem - ble in Your sight. Lord, spare Your peop - le, and -

11



mer - cy, and lov - ing kind - ness. We are the rem - nant called out by Christ our Lord.
loc - ists have eat - en and de - voured, We praise Your Name, O Lord! You have done won-drous things!
pour out Your Spir - it on Your church. We call up - on Your Name, with glad - ness and with joy!

RCUS Synod 2025

The 279th Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, hosted by Grace Reformed Church, Rapid City, SD, opened with worship on Monday, June 9, 2025. Rev. Michael Voytek led worship and Rev. Maynard Koerner preached a sermon from Psalm 90, entitled “What God Has Done,” giving special recognition for God's faithfulness in preserving the Reformed Church in the United States for 300 years. Opening Roll Call after worship showed 43 ministers and 37 elders present, for a total of 80, a quorum.

This year marks the Tricentennial Anniversary of the Reformed Church in the United States (1725-2025). In honor of the occasion, the Synod held a Special Celebration on Thursday, June 12,, at Mt. Rushmore. The Synod also hosted a Family Convention at various locales in Rapid City, SD, for families and guests of the RCUS.

Officers of the Denomination were elected: Elder Roger Gallimore continues as President, Rev. Mike McGee as Vice-President, Rev. Carl Gobelman as Stated Clerk, Randy Shroeder as Treasurer, and Rev. Ruben Zartman as Editor of the Reformed Herald.

The body rose for prayer in thanksgiving for four new ministers who were extended the right hand of fellowship: Revs. Matthew Dawn, Larry Lynch, Orrie Oosthuizen, and Andrew Underhile.

The body brought a prayer of thanksgiving to the LORD for a new church received this year: Reformed Church of Los Angeles, Lynwood, CA. Synod also adopted a new home mission work, RCLA Wilmington, in Wilmington, CA, while continuing to support the following Hime Mission Churches: Covenant Reformed Chapel, Manhattan, MT; Valle de Gracia, Shafter, CA; Immanuel Reformed Fellowship, Pella, IA; and Omaha Reformed Chapel, Omaha,

NE.

As a follow-up from last year's meeting, Synod has provided a Sexual Misconduct Prevention Model Policy for local congregations to adopt or modify if so desired. The body also adopted a Sexual Misconduct Prevention Response Plan and a Background Check Procedure. In addition, Synod requests that RCUS congregations with existing sexual misconduct prevention policies share their policies with the Stated Clerk of Synod, to be made available upon request as a resource for congregations in developing their own.

In order to review the language of the RCUS Constitution, the body erected a Special Committee for Constitutional Review which will rectify issues of clarity and consistency and report to the 280th Synod next year.

On Wednesday evening, the Synod joined with the members and guests of Grace Reformed Church, Rapid, SD, for worship. Rev. Christopher Campbell conducted the service, and Rev. Ruben Zartman preached a sermon from Romans 3:4, entitled “The Truth of God.”

The Minutes of the 279th Synod have been dedicated to the memory of Rev. Paul Henry Treick, who went home to be with the Lord on March 7th, 2025. He engaged in a lifetime of ministry serving the Lord Jesus Christ and the Reformed Church in the United States, particularly as Stated Clerk for the Synod for a number of years.

Closing Roll Call showed 40 ministers and 36 elders present, for a total of 76, a quorum. The 279th Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States closed with a devotion presented by Mr. Don Oliver, an elder from Grace Reformed Church in Rapid City, SD, from Proverbs 3:3-6 and prayer, the recitation of the Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Benediction, and the Doxology.



RCUS Synod 2025

CanRC GS 2025

The night before Synod 2025 started, a prayer service took place at the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church. Rev. John Ludwig, chairman of the previous synod, preached on 1 Timothy 3:15. His theme was: *“The Church of the living God is the pillar and buttress of the truth.”* The message focused on the church's calling to confess and preserve the truth of the gospel in the world. Following the sermon, the worshipers prayed for God's blessing on the upcoming synod.

Opening

The next morning, the twenty-four delegates met in the church building at 9:00 a.m. On behalf of the convening church, Rev. Rob Schouten welcomed everyone on behalf of the convening church. He also led the opening devotions. He read Colossians 1:1–20 and gave a meditation on verse 18a: *“And he is the head of the body, the church.”* The delegates joined in prayer, asking for God's guidance over the deliberations and decisions of Synod.

The convening church examined the credentials from Regional Synods East and West and found them to be in good order. Rev. John Louwerse was elected as chairman, Rev. Rob Schouten as vice-chairman, Rev. Karlo Janssen as first clerk, and Rev. Peter Holtvliwer as second clerk. Rev. Schouten then declared General Synod 2025 duly constituted.

The chairman expressed gratitude for the extensive work carried out by the convening church. This included receiving correspondence and organizing a vast agenda, arranging hospitality for all delegates, coordinating three meals per day for delegates and fraternal representatives, and providing the necessary technical setup. As Synod progressed, the diligence and care of the host church became more and more evident.

Following a short adjournment, Synod formally adopted the agenda. The executive suggested a way to conduct the business of synod. Five advisory committees were appointed, each assigned a portion of the agenda. These committees were tasked with summarizing the issues, analyzing submissions, and preparing recommendations for discussion in plenary session. Much of the early part of Synod was occupied with committee work in preparation for those deliberations.

The main decisions of General Synod 2025 are summarized in the following paragraphs. For more details, readers should check the official Acts of Synod 2025. You can find the provisional Acts at www.canrc.org. In time, the official Acts will also appear there.

Ecumenical Relationships

In keeping with the mandate of the previous synod, the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER) proposed a revision to Article 50 of the Church Order. The previous wording referred to relations with “churches abroad,” a phrase that no longer reflects the global and regional realities of our ecclesiastical ties. The CER recommended the following revised wording:

“Ecumenical relationships with other churches of Reformed confession shall be entered into where feasible and be maintained according to the rules adopted for this purpose by general synod. On minor points of ecclesiastical governance and practice churches shall not be rejected.”

Synod adopted this proposal.

Synod also approved a new classification system for ecumenical relationships. Churches with whom we have formal ecclesiastical fellowship (commonly known as “sister-church” relationships) are now categorized as either Category A (“intense contact”) or Category B (“less intense contact”). This distinction does not affect mutual recognition but reflects the level of interaction and the allocation of limited resources. In God's providence, closer ties have developed with some churches, and these categories simply acknowledge that reality.

In addition to these two categories of ecclesiastical fellowship, a third category called “ecclesiastical contact” was affirmed. This category applies to churches of known Reformed character with whom full ecclesiastical fellowship is not yet feasible. In such cases, a relationship of mutual respect, dialogue, and cooperation is pursued with the goal of eventual closer fellowship.

Beyond these three levels—governed by what is now called “Rule 1”—Synod adopted a new provision referred to as “Rule 2.” This allows for more flexible local ecumenical engagement in cases where no formal ecclesiastical fellowship exists. Rule 2 permits the following, in accordance with adopted protocols:

1. Pulpit fellowship with the concurring advice of classis;
2. Reception of members at the Lord's Supper according to local regulations;
3. Reception of members into the local congregation according to local regulations;
4. An account of these ecumenical activities to be given to the appropriate classis.

A highlight of Synod was the decision to establish ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Churches (The

Netherlands) – GK, a new federation formed by the merger of two church groups that had previously separated from the Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt (GKv). In 2019, our churches were compelled to sever ties with the GKv, and it was therefore a joy to recognize and enter into fellowship with a faithful Reformed federation in the Netherlands (Category A). Rev. Rik Douma attended Synod as a credentialed delegate of the GK, addressed the assembly, and expressed gratitude for this newly established relationship.

Synod also decided to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC), designated as Category B. While based largely in the United States, the ARPC includes twelve congregations in Canada, located in Ontario and New Brunswick. These Canadian churches are working toward forming their own federation. Rev. Aaron De Boer represented the ARPC and was given the opportunity to address Synod. Delegates rejoiced in the evident unity of faith and shared commitment between the two church bodies.

Fraternal delegates were received from a number of sister

churches, including the Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church in the United States, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, the Reformed Churches of Quebec (ERQ), and the United Reformed Churches of North America.

In addition, letters of greeting were received from the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), the Reformed Churches in Indonesia, the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea, and the Reformed Churches of Brazil. Observers from the Free Reformed Churches of North America, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and the Heritage Reformed Congregations were also present and given the opportunity to address Synod.

Our confessions speak of the catholicity of the church, and this truth became tangible as Synod received greetings from churches across the world. It was a joy to hear about the worship and witness of Christ's church on every continent.



Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

Synod 2025 received the report of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) with thankfulness and approved its recommendations. Permission was granted to the Board to reappoint Dr. J. Van Vliet as Principal for another three-year term (2025–2028). Synod also acknowledged the importance of faculty succession planning, as three of five professors are expected to retire within a few years of one another, around the year 2035.

Several changes to the seminary's bylaws were adopted. These include: clarifying that all governors must be men eligible to serve as office-bearers in their local church; simplifying the process for appointing substitute governors; extending the time limit for completing a degree from five to seven years; and allowing adjunct professors to hold an appropriate master's degree rather than requiring a doctorate.

Synod approved the creation of a new bursary, the Advanced Theological Studies Assistance (ATSA), designed to help academically gifted CRTS graduates pursue further theological education with a view to potential future service as professors.

For many years, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) have strongly supported the work of CRTS. Synod took note that they continue to value CRTS highly but are exploring the possibility of establishing their own seminary—Australian Reformed Theological Seminary (ARTS)—though not before 2040. Of the four models under consideration, the FRCA is currently focusing on a partnership model in which ARTS would function as an affiliate of CRTS, overseen by an advisory committee rather than joint governance. This model avoids the need for legislative amendments in Ontario.

Synod also appointed new governors, approved financial reports, and expressed gratitude for the ongoing support of the churches, including contributions from the FRCA and the Women's Savings Action. A suggestion from the Toronto-Bethel church to add a sixth professor was noted but not adopted, as it had not followed the usual ecclesiastical route of church discussion.

Revision of Article 30 of the Church Order

For many years, the churches in our federation have discussed how new matters may be brought to a general synod. The previous protocol required churches to follow the “ecclesiastical route”: first submitting a matter to classis, then to regional synod, and only afterward to a general synod. This practice was based on Article 30 of the Church Order, which governs how matters are placed on the agenda of major assemblies.

In response to an overture from Regional Synod West 2024,

Synod Aldergrove 2025 decided to revise the final sentence of Article 30. It now reads:

“A new matter which has not previously been presented to that major assembly and is common to its churches may be put on the agenda by one of its churches.”

This change means that a local church may submit a new matter directly to a major assembly—such as a general synod—provided the matter pertains to the churches in common and has not already been considered at that level. The Guidelines for General Synod were updated to reflect this change.

Limits on hymns

Synod 2025 made a significant decision in determining that the cap of 100 hymns in the Book of Praise was for the duration of past revisions only, and affirmed that the cap is currently null and void.

Seven churches had appealed Synod 2022's decision to maintain the cap, arguing that it lacked a solid basis and unnecessarily limited the churches' ability to include edifying hymns and alternate Psalm settings. Synod agreed, concluding that Synod 2022 had improperly placed the burden of proof on those seeking change by requiring them to demonstrate that the 2004 decision was erroneous—a standard that does not apply to overtures proposing something new.

Synod further judged that supporting the singing of Psalms does not require restricting the number of hymns, and that expanding the hymn section can serve the churches while continuing to honour the place of the Psalms.

Article 55 of the Church Order

Synod 2025 received overtures from both Regional Synod East and Regional Synod West requesting a revision of Article 55 of the Church Order, which governs the use of psalms and hymns in worship. After careful consideration, Synod adopted a new version of the article, as recorded in Article 115 of the Acts. The revised wording reads:

“The 150 Psalms of the Bible are foundational to the church's worship, and are to be sung frequently in the worship services. General Synod shall adopt metrical versions of the psalms and shall approve hymns for inclusion in a song book which shall, as a rule, have the principal place in the worship of the church. The Consistory may also approve the singing of alternate settings of the psalms and additional hymns, provided they are in harmony with the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity.”

Additions to the Songbook

Synod approved the inclusion of nineteen alternate psalm settings. Thirty-one hymns previously tested by the churches were also approved for inclusion. These

selections will be published in an authorized *augment* to be used alongside the existing Book of Praise. These new songs may be incorporated into a future edition of the *Book of Praise* when it is reprinted.

Changes to the Form for Profession of Faith and Baptism

In Article 184, Synod 2025 considered an overture from Blessings Christian Church and Classis Central Ontario requesting changes to the wording used in the Forms for Public Profession of Faith, Infant Baptism, and Adult Baptism. The overture proposed a return to language used prior to 1983. At that time, the first question in the Profession of Faith Form read:

“Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?”

In 1983, this was changed to:

“First, do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian church?”

The 2025 overture argued that the change made in 1983 was not merely a shift in terminology but introduced a different emphasis. It recommended a return to a formulation more consistent with historic Reformed liturgies, which present the Apostles' Creed as the primary summary of the Christian faith. Synod agreed and adopted a revision of the phrase “summarized in the confessions” to “summarized in the Apostles' Creed” in the relevant liturgical forms.

While reaffirming the church's expectation that members adhere to and are bound to both the ecumenical creeds and the Reformed confessions, Synod concluded that the revised wording more faithfully reflects the original intent of the profession and baptismal questions and provides greater clarity in a pastoral setting.

Shorter Forms for the Lord's Supper

In response to a mandate from Synod 2022, Synod 2025 evaluated two proposed shorter forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, prepared by the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise (SCBP). These forms were designed to be Reformed in character, aligned in content with the existing forms, and significantly shorter than the current abbreviated form.

Synod decided to provisionally adopt both Short Form #1 and Short Form #2 for use in the churches. These forms are to be used on a trial basis and are not yet final. Churches are encouraged to make use of them and to submit feedback based on their experience. A newly established *Committee on Liturgical Forms* has been tasked with collecting and evaluating that feedback, refining the forms as needed, and

reporting to the next general synod with recommendations regarding their adoption, revision, or discontinuation.

Form for Infant Baptism

Synod 2025 considered an overture from Regional Synod West, proposing a revised Form for the Baptism of Infants. The overture expressed concerns about the current form's sentence complexity, formal tone, length, occasional lack of clarity, and outdated language.

Recognizing that many of the concerns raised were valid, Synod determined that a formal revision process should be entrusted to a synodically appointed committee, with input from the churches. Synod also observed that similar issues likely exist in the Form for the Baptism of Adults, given its parallel structure.

Accordingly, Synod appointed a three-person committee to review both baptism forms. The committee was mandated to evaluate clarity, language, structure, and doctrinal fidelity, to consider consistency with related forms, and to propose revisions. A draft version is to be distributed to the churches at least 15 months before the next general synod, with the final report submitted no later than six months before synod convenes.

Footnote to the Apostles' Creed

Synod 2025 considered an overture from Regional Synod East requesting that an explanatory footnote be added to the phrase “*he descended into hell*” in the Apostles' Creed. The overture proposed clarifying that these words do not mean that Christ descended to the place of eternal torment after his death, but rather express the depth of his suffering, as understood in Lord's Day 16 of the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 44).

After discussion, Synod decided not to adopt the proposed footnote. While acknowledging that the phrase has long been a subject of theological discussion, Synod judged that adding a footnote to the Creed itself was not the best way to address the concern. Instead, such matters are better handled through faithful preaching, catechesis, and instruction in the confessions.

Conclusion

The work of Synod was completed in ten days. We give thanks to the Lord for granting perseverance to the delegates. The meetings were conducted in a spirit of brotherly harmony and mutual respect. We express appreciation for the gracious leadership of Rev. John Louwerse as chairman. It is our prayer that the decisions made at Synod will serve the well-being of Christ's church and contribute to the unity and vitality of our federation in the years to come. Soli Deo Gloria.

R. Schouten

Vice-chairman of Synod 2025



Rest in God | 24 x 48 Acrylic on Deep Canvas | Sheila Rae Van Delft

Created from several photos submitted by members of the Aldergrove congregation, this image captures the beauty of the South Aldergrove landscape where we live and worship, and at the same time represents the rest we have in our God.

Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. Psalm 62:1

Whether strolling or power walking, our local parks are a beautiful way to enjoy the stunning creation that God has made for us. It is equally enjoyable to stop for a moment to quietly rest on a park bench that is perfectly situated for the best views, take a few deep breaths, and just be still in God's presence. What a great metaphor this is for the rest we are promised in God, rest from our daily toil, rest from our burdens, and rest from our sins. The waiting bench represents the people of God who live here and the rest that is offered to them.

We can also see our God in this image.

Mount Baker represents the majesty of God the Father, our rock and our fortress. It symbolizes his strength, protection, and reliability, and describes God's unchanging nature and his role as protector and refuge for his people.

The sunlight on the trees reminds us of the Spirit's illuminating presence which enables us to love Christ as we ought, resist sin, and grow in holiness, and it helps assure us that we are children of God.

Jesus is seen in the tree shading his people. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus invites, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest," extending God's promise of rest and protection to all who come to him in faith.

Rest in God was commissioned as a thank you gift from Synod 2025 to Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church for hosting.



Author: Rev. Nathan Eshelman
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 Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America*

RPCNA Synod 2025

The Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) met in Marion, Indiana June 16-20, 2025. The Synod began with the singing of Psalm 80 and a retiring moderator's address from Elder Tom Fisher. Elder Fisher spoke from I Peter 5 on the highs and lows of shepherding Christ's flock while calling us to greater service to Christ. Following the moderator's address, first time delegates were introduced, 12 ruling elders and 3 pastors. The floor was then opened for nominations for officers, with Rev. Dr. Ed Blackwood (Colorado Springs, CO) being elected moderator with Rev. Andrew Barnes (Grandview, MO) elected clerk and Rev. Drew Poplin (Durham, NC) as assistant clerk. The court thanked retiring clerk Rev. Dr. John McFarland (Lawrence, KS) for his many years of service as clerk. In a surprise to the court, Mr. Blackwood was not given "warning" of his nomination.

The court then rose to pray in thanks for the faithfulness of the pastors, elders, missionaries, and wives thereof who have gone to glory since our last meeting. The next order of business was to decide how a series of communications to the court were going to be handled. The Business of Synod Committee provides recommendations on how to handle each communication and the Synod votes on those recommendations. A complaint from Rev. Jeff Yelton who was disciplined at last year's meeting was determined to have "no standing" because Mr. Yelton was no longer a member of the RPCNA. A request to change the Directory for Public Worship on who may participate in communion was sent back to the St. Lawrence Presbytery with the charge to "further study" the matter. Several other communications were to be considered and will be discussed in their appropriate places.

The first major order of business was a decision to form a committee to rewrite the Book of Discipline. Several discipline cases in the past several years have proven the difficulty of handling our current book. That committee will be made up of: Tom Fisher, Kyle Borg, David Schaefer, Shawn Anderson and Gabe Wingfield. Alternates include Bill Chellis and Keith Wing. An overture on recusals was announced and declared to be the law and order of the church. Each presbytery met during a stated time at Synod and then reported to Synod. There are seven presbyteries and each clerk discussed the work of their regional courts—announcing students who have been examined, churches that are being planted, and asking for prayer for difficulties within their courts. The Lord is doing great things. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall

doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him (Psalm 126:5-6)."

Each missions organization gave report: Global Missions, Home Missions, Commissions in EA, _____ and _____, and the committee of Central and South America. The delegate from Chile spoke of persecution for the gospel. We heard of global churches planted and men raised up for ministry. A video was played showing the good work on one of our fields. A new Spanish Psalter is also in the works, which is exciting. Other Boards and committees also reported: Crown and Covenant Publications, Vital Churches, RPTS, RP Global Alliance, and Geneva College, Reformation Translation Fellowship, the RPWA, and Youth Ministries. A committee that studied over multiple years our vows and queries reported and it was re-affirmed that the queries of communicant membership is, in fact, vows before God.

In 2023, a study committee on female deacons was established. Synod spent a good amount of time on this committee's report—stretching over two different time slots for discussion. The committee's 18 page paper recommended that the line "men as well as women may serve as deacons" be struck from the RP Testimony. This would allow sessions some latitude in service as well as not bind consciences of those who have taken exception to female deacons. The committee put forward eight rationales for striking the line, one of which was an argument based on a survey of current pastors and elders in the RPCNA as to their beliefs. A paper argued against the survey results (which argued that only 46% of surveyed pastors/elders hold to the churches current pro-female deacon position). The submitted paper against the committee's work claimed that the survey results were flawed based on several factors. The court received this paper as information and it did come up in the debates. After several hours of debate (in the second day) it was noted that the Directory for Church Government requires "notice of major changes" one year before the change could be made. A break was called so that the moderator could discuss this with previous moderators, parliamentarians, and the chair of the female deacon committee. After deciding that one year notice was required, the moderator, due to the paper questioning the committee, called for a "non-binding vote" to determine where the court stood on the recommendation to remove female deacons from the Testimony. A vote resulted in a 54%-46% (76 to 64) divide in favor of removing the line from the Testimony. Notice was then given that next year the

change would be proposed. This change would not disallow a congregation from having female deacons, merely not requiring it as something that must be confessed by RPCNA officers. The proposed change will require a 2/3 vote and must then go down in overture.

The next major discussion had to do with the RP Testimony on abortion. Our Testimony says, "Deliberately induced abortion, except possibly to save the mother's life, is murder." The committee proposed the following: "Deliberately induced abortion is murder. When medical intervention to remove the child from the mother's body is necessary to preserve the life of the mother or the child, all medically reasonable measures should be taken to honorably care for both the mother and child's life and body." After several long debates, the proposed change failed and the committee was dismissed. A new committee was then established to continue working on the language of the Testimony. Rev. Dr. Andrew Kerr, a pastor and surgeon, will convene that new committee. Two professors, a medical doctor, and a pastor will be on the new committee.

Another major decision concerned the Reformed Presbyterian Home. The RP Home was chartered in 1897 by the RP Woman's [sic] Association (RPWA). The RP Home was under scrutiny last year due to a complaint that the Roman mass was being celebrated in an institution of the church that testifies against the mass. A committee was formed to bring recommendations to this year's Synod. The Synod decided that the RP Home transition the ownership and governance to another entity able to continue their ministry to care for seniors. A representative of the RPWA indicated that the RPWA Board has communicated closely with the special study committee through the course of the past year, and that they are in agreement with the recommendation of the Synod committee. The RPWA pledged to proceed towards accomplishing such a multifaceted transition. Mr. Bill Weir, a member of the court who has faithfully served the home for many years was given a long and grateful standing round of applause for his years of service.

A judicial commission related to Phoenix RPC reported on their findings and charges adopted by the Pacific Coast Presbytery against the former pastor of Phoenix RPC were referred to new Synod Judicial Commission. One complaint was heard from the former pastor and elder of Phoenix against the Pacific Coast Presbytery: a man was ordained as a ruling elder that had "allegations of sin." The court established an additional Synod Judicial Commission and ordered that the ruling elder "refrain from exercising the duties of his office" until the matter is settled.

The Synod "commended" our brothers in the ARP for this resolution: 'That the 221st General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church do on this solemn day condemn without distinction any theological or political teaching which posits a superiority of race or ethnic identity born of immutable human characteristics and does on this solemn evening call to repentance any who would promote or associate themselves with such teaching, either by commission or omission.'

Another complaint was heard related to the former pastor of Black Forest RPC in Colorado. The former pastor was suspended from office until a series of reconciliations occur. In the meantime he moved to PA for work. The complaint was that his membership was not transferred upon request (in accordance with the DCG). The court essentially sided with the presbytery, having his membership stay in Colorado until the reconciliation process is completed.

As heavy as these things are, there were several aspects of Synod that were encouraging. The Synod "commended" our brothers in the ARP for this resolution: 'That the 221st General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church do on this solemn day condemn without distinction any theological or political teaching which posits a superiority of race or ethnic identity born of immutable human characteristics and does on this solemn evening call to repentance any who would promote or associate themselves with such teaching, either by commission or omission.'" We also heard from brothers in other denominations: the RPs of Scotland, Ireland, Australia, and Canada. We also received greetings from the PCA, OPC, and ARP.

A committee report, which had a majority and minority report, related to departing congregations was tabled until next year.

Each morning began with preaching on the theme of shepherding. Besides the retiring moderator's address, we heard preaching from Rev. Gabe Wingfield, Rev. Kenneth Stewart of RP Scotland, and Rev. Dr. Rich Holdeman. Each of those sermons were excellent and encouraging and are available on our denomination's Sermon Audio page. The Psalm singing and times of prayer were special times of worship as well. A room of 130 or so men singing praise to God using the Psalms is a special treat. Hearing of the finances of the church was also encouraging as a tangible evidence of God's blessings on us.

It is a good reminder that it "belongeth to Synods... ministerially to determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience, to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and

government of His Church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same: which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in His Word.” (Westminster Confession of Faith, 31.3)
The Lord has been good to us—even as brothers do not

agree on every matter, we strive towards unity as we do our labor under Jesus Christ, the king and head of the church, who calls us sing, “Behold how very good it is, a pleasant thing to see; when brothers join to live as one in peace and unity (Psalm 133A, stanza 1, Book of Psalms for Worship)!” As the court closed in singing and prayer, we were charged to go forth and to do the work of ministry.

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OPC GA 2025

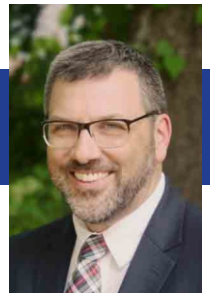
At the opening of every general assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), there is a worship service led by the previous moderator, which in the case of the Ninety-First General Assembly was the Rev. John V. Fesko. What is not always the case, however, is that the sermon theme matches the disposition of the assembly that follows as well as Mr. Fesko's sermon on Psalm 133 and the unity of the brethren in Jesus Christ matched last month's assembly. A spirit of love for others and humility marked the six days that 142 ministers and ruling elders from the OPC's seventeen presbyteries gathered to conduct the business of the whole church on the campus of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois.

In his sermon “Are You a Christian?” Mr. Fesko declared that the rich imagery of oil flowing down the head of the high priest upon his collar and robes in Psalm 133 foreshadowed Christ's anointing as our great high priest. Upon Aaron's collar were stones with the names of the tribes of Israel and upon his breastpiece there were twelve precious stones representing all twelve tribes. When Aaron and the high priests after him were anointed in the Old Testament, the oil would flow from the head to the rest of the body. This image in shadow points us to Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit and how we, his body, share in this anointing. The church's unity comes from union with Christ through the bond of the Holy Spirit. The sermon was often referenced in speeches and prayers throughout the rest of the week as the brethren rejoiced in Jesus Christ and the unity found in him that was being evidenced in love for others.

After the worship service ended, the assembly then enrolled

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OPC delegation at ICRC 2022

D. Nakhla, T. Curto, M. Bube, B. Tarullo

those present and elected Brian De Jong, pastor of Grace OPC in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, as moderator. Mr. De Jong, the son of OPC pastor Norman De Jong (1935–2022) and father of Elijah DeJong, a commissioner at the assembly and a pastor at Concho Valley OPC in Concho, Arizona, served the assembly well with a steady hand and a cheerful smile. In a moment that brought laughter to the body, Mr. De Jong with a wonderfully self-deprecating delivery announced the availability of a new book, “OPC Moderating for Dummies.” His clear direction helped the assembly to finish its work in a timely manner, but more so, his servant-like leadership set a tone for others to follow. This was invaluable given the fact that thirty-four commissioners were attending an assembly for the first time and that nearly half the assembly had been



Moderator Brian DeJong

ordained for fewer than ten years. Lending their wisdom to the proceedings in a quiet but steady manner were three commissioners ordained in the decade of the 1960s: Lawrence McHargue, John Jamison Jr., and Stephen Phillips.

Thursday, June 5

According to the statistician's report, the OPC's membership grew to 33,566 persons, including 601 ministers, 24,637 communicant members, and 8,328 baptized children (non-communicants). This was in spite of the withdrawal of two congregations with a combined membership of 442, and the dissolution of six congregations with a combined membership of 231. During the last decade, the OPC has had eleven congregations (2,102 members) withdraw, including some of its largest in size. It has also had twenty-four congregations (889 members) dissolved during the same time period.

As the work of the assembly began, God's covenant faithfulness was evident in the number of commissioners and standing committee members present who were fathers and sons. In addition to Brian and Elijah DeJong, also present (with the father listed first in each pairing) were Warren Bennett Jr. and Warren Bennett III, Alan and Jeremiah Montgomery, M. Joe and Andrew Moody, Jim and Peter Onnink, Bruce and Benjamin Stahl, and Timothy and Matthew Walker.

After the advisory committees completed their task of reviewing and preparing recommendations for the work that would be before the assembly, General Secretary

Douglas Clawson reported on behalf the Committee on Foreign Missions (CFM). Although two missionaries, Mark Richline (Uruguay) and L. Charles Jackson (Uganda), came off the field in 2024, Mr. Clawson expressed thankfulness to our Lord for two new missionary evangelists who were called, Frederick Lo (Uganda) and Michael Kearney (Uganda), and one missionary, Benjamin Hopp, who was called to the position of regional foreign missionary to Africa and Haiti. Four missionary associates, Joshua and Danielle Grimsley, Jedidiah Homan, and Beatrix Taverne, served in Uganda.

Mr. Clawson also described 2024 as a year in which the work done in multiple OPC mission fields was preparation for the changes that are anticipated in 2025. A Bible study in Maldonado, Uruguay, has turned into a new place of worship. Men who graduated from seminary in Korea have completed their internships and are planting churches in a closed country. Buildings were constructed in Mbale so that new students could be added to Knox School of Theology and so that the school could satisfy all the physical plant requirements for full charter status. Plans were begun in Karamoja and Mbale to lead to transitioning oversight of church plants from the mission to the indigenous church.

Mr. Clawson emphasized that the CFM continues to look for men who are willing to go wherever it pleases Christ, through his church, to serve. Needed particularly are experienced pastors and presbyters who are able to mentor those who have little exposure to functioning sessions and presbyteries. What a blessing it is to be able to send ordained servants who are humble and wise, and who love the sheep as Jesus loves them! He finished by urging the assembly to continue to pray, "Here I am Lord, send me."



Fathers and sons present at the GA

Friday, June 6

The Committee on Christian Education (CCE) presented before the assembly the Modern English Study Version (MESV) of the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of the OPC that the Eighty-Ninth (2023) General Assembly requested the CCE to prepare. The previous assembly had instructed the CCE to make morphological changes (for example, “hath” to “have”), archaic word and phrase changes, and necessary alterations of word order. The previous assembly also requested the CCE to replace the text of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:2–17) and the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13) with a modern English version.

The assembly directed the stated clerk to send a digital copy of the MESV text to the clerk of the major assembly of each of the churches/federations with whom the OPC has an ecclesiastical relationship of either Ecclesiastical Fellowship or Corresponding Relations, together with that of each of the churches/federations that are member churches of the International Conference of Reformed Churches or North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, for their information, comments, or advice. The assembly further requested the CCE to prepare a printed version to be made available to all OP ministers and sessions that request copies, and that all feedback regarding the MESV be submitted to the CCE by the end of 2027.

Great Commission Publications (GCP) Interim Executive Director John Dunahoo praised God for fifty years of joint ministry between the OPC and the Presbyterian Church in America in overseeing the Sunday school materials of the two churches. Mr. Dunahoo showed a video to the assembly that featured OPC minister and past GCP curriculum director Allen Curry.

Eric Hausler, the chairman for the Special Committee on Criminal History and Officer Qualifications, presented the report of the committee. The assembly determined to distribute the report to the presbyteries and to their candidates and credentials committees for study and to make the report available for interested parties who wish to study it.

Jeremiah Montgomery, general secretary of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (CHMCE), reported that the Lord is blessing CHMCE with more opportunities for ministry than ever before—more opportunities, in fact, than the current level of giving to OPC Worldwide Outreach can support. According to Mr. Montgomery, this wonderful problem before CHMCE of increased opportunities means that the committee may soon be facing a time when its funds are exhausted in supporting its existing commitments.

Mr. Montgomery declared that it is his prayer that the OPC would be as faithful in reaching the unconverted as it

is in reaching the under-disciplined. He asked the assembly to pray that the Lord would continue to save new souls, directly or indirectly, through the ministry of the OPC.

David Nakhla, administrator for the Committee on Diaconal Ministries (CDM), gave thanks to the Lord for the benevolent giving that the committee received in 2024. He also reported that the CDM is making plans for the Fifth National Diaconal Summit for the deacons of the OPC at Wheaton College, June 2026. He urged all congregations to consider sending their deacons to this event, held only once every four years.

Jon Eide, regional director of Mission to the World in Ukraine, shared an update on the diaconal ministry being carried out in Ukraine through giving to “Crates for Ukraine.” Those interested in participating can find further information at cratesforukraine.com.

The CDM also debuted an impactful video presentation of the disaster response effort (small homes are being built from the ground up for those who lost them) being carried out in North Carolina following the devastating effects of Hurricane Helene. The CDM is hopeful to have the full video available to the whole church during the month of July on opcddm.org. They also shared that The Reformed Deacon podcast completed its third year, having produced as many as twenty episodes each year.

Committee on Ministerial Care (CMC) Director John Fikkert reported on the service and projects of the committee in the past year. The CMC has continued its administration of the OPC 403(b) Retirement Plan, financial planning services, insurance offerings, and the Obadiah Fund for retired ministers and their widows. Fikkert made special mention of the Haney Memorial Fund and its provision of sabbatical grants and retreat grants for ministers. Since 2020, more than fifty churches have received a sabbatical grant from CMC for their minister, with over \$150,000 allocated. Anneke Fesko, CMC's care coordinator for ministers' wives, hosted a fellowship on Thursday for women in attendance at the assembly and area pastors' wives and an outing to downtown Chicago on Friday for the same group.

Saturday, June 7

On Saturday morning, the assembly continued consideration of a complaint on appeal that began the previous evening when the body had determined that it was in order and properly before the body. After hearing from the presentation of the appellant and the session and asking questions of both, the assembly reconsidered whether the appeal was properly in order before the body. After the morning break, the assembly allowed the appellant to withdraw his complaints.

Sunday, June 8

On the Lord's Day, the commissioners attended the local congregations in the Chicagoland area to worship in the morning and then regathered on the Trinity College campus for a joint evening worship service. The session of Covenant OPC in Oreland Park, Illinois, conducted the worship service with Iain Wright preaching on Luke 1:1–4, "Persistent Compassion."

Monday, June 9

The major business on Monday was consideration of an overture from the Presbytery of the Midwest that the assembly erect a special committee to review the Form of Government (FG) and the Book of Discipline (BD) that are contained in the 2025 edition of the Book of Church Order. The assembly granted the overture and elected David Winslow Jr., Archibald Allison, John Fesko, Alan Strange, Mark Bube, John Mallin, and Peter Van Doodewaard to serve on the Special Committee to Review Amendments to the FG and BD.

Tuesday, June 10

Jeffrey Dronenburg Sr. reported for the Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel. The assembly approved the committee's recommendation that the

United Reformed Churches of North America be received into full membership in the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains (PRCC). The assembly also approved a commitment of financial support of \$1,500 to the PRCC for each of the thirteen active and full-time OPC chaplains. Mr. Dronenburg stated that the thirteen chaplains are comprised of seven endorsed active military chaplains: Richard Brasher, David DeRienzo, Joshua Jackson, Cornelius Johnson, Kenneth Kruckow, Stephen Roberts, and Jeffrey Shames; four endorsed reserve military chaplains: Jeffrey Corbett, Daniel Halley, Kenny Honken, and Benjamin Johnson; and two civilian chaplains: C. Phillip Hollstein and Charles McIlhenny.

The assembly honored Luke Brown for his forty years of diligent, sacrificial, and valued work as statistician of the OPC. With Mr. Brown's retirement, the assembly passed a resolution that offered thanksgiving and praise to God for Mr. Brown's gifts and service as statistician.

The meeting closed with a standing ovation in appreciation for Mr. De Jong's service in moderating and the announcement that the Ninety-Second General Assembly will be held at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, from June 3 to June 9, 2026.



The General Assembly as it met

ICRC Missions Consultation 2025

Every three years, the ICRC's missions committee organizes a three-day consultation where representatives of world mission agencies meet to discuss various aspects of global mission. In September 2025, representatives of 12 Reformed and Presbyterian denominations met in Philadelphia (USA) to share reports about their mission projects and to listen to presentations on important topics.

The first topic focused on a problem several member churches are struggling with: how to find enough young men willing to be sent out as missionaries to foreign lands. Revs. Richard Bout (URCNA) and Douglas Clawson (OPC) reflected on the reasons why young men seem to be more hesitant than before to choose a career in global missions. They suggested that the churches can do more in terms of preparing the path to the mission field. For example, churches should invest more energy in mentoring young people (especially age 18-25) and provide opportunities to get involved in short-term and longer-term mission internships. Rev. Bout informed the meeting about the URCNA's annual mission training program in Mexico which aims to energize young people for global mission (www.ccmtmissions.com).

The second general topic for the conference was: 'Training, ordination, and support of indigenous pastors.' Two former missionaries shared their experiences and insights: Rev. Charles Jackson (until very recently: principal of the Knox School of Theology in Mbale, Uganda) and Rev. Julius VanSpronsen (former principal of the John Calvin Institute in Recife, Brazil). They discussed various aspects of theological training of national pastors, such as: the benefits of accreditation of theological training institutes, the need for involvement of the

national church, the pitfalls of contextualization (neglecting it versus overdoing it), fostering a good connection between the students and the churches that they hope to serve, setting holistic goals for theological training (not just academic aspects but also spirituality and character formation).

The third presentation was entitled 'Missions to largely unreached areas of the world.' The speaker was Dr. Richard Joe, associate professor of world missions at Covenant Theological Seminary (St. Louis, MO.) He addressed the perennial problem that only a small percentage of missionaries are actually going to unreached areas. He suggested four ways to alleviate the problem. First, using diaspora missions (outreach to people who live outside their country of origin but still have connections back home). Second, using vocational missions (bivocational people working and living in countries that are difficult to get access to). Third, engaging in contextual missions (be aware of different worldview of people from different background, especially majority Islamic countries). Fourth, trusting God's mission (the Lord is able to break through barriers where we can't – illustrated by the fact that thousands of Iranians are currently turning to Christ).

During the consultation updates were shared about various mission projects in different areas of the world. The meeting took time to pray for all these projects. The opening devotions by Rev. Doug Clawson set the tone for the conference: "Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted" (Isaiah 12:4). The consultation was chaired by Mr. Mark Bube. The venue was the administrative offices of the OPC in Willow Grove, PA.

Author: Rev. Dr. Arjan de Visser

Arjan de Visser is a minister with the Canadian Reformed Churches. He is Emeritus-professor of Ministry and Mission, Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, Hamilton, Ontario, and currently serving as secretary of the missions committee of the ICRC.



Participants in the 2025 ICRC Missions Consultation



Author: Rev. L. Charles Jackson

Charles Jackson is a former missionary with the OPC.

Knox School of Theology, Uganda

After many years of labor and prayers, the new Knox School of Theology in Mbale, Uganda, celebrated its first graduation of students in the spring of 2025. It was my last time to address the school as its principal, and I was overwhelmed. For my wife Connie and I, this event was one of the most emotional, joyful, and amazing moments in our life in the ministry. We didn't know what to make of the flood of emotions coming together all at once—joy; thankfulness that we were finished after years of labor, mixed with a serious sense of loss and homesickness for Africa; appreciation for deep friendships; and an overpowering feeling of hope for what this graduation represented for the church in Africa. It wasn't just the culmination of ten years of our lives; it was an encounter with the beauty of God's work. It was the end of our work in Uganda, but for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), it was a great new moment in our church's history.

On May 24, 2025, we granted four diplomas and ten bachelor's degrees in theology. This graduation celebrates more than simply a newly accredited program in Uganda; it represents the greatest opportunity for pastoral and theological education in a Reformed confessional school in East Africa. It also highlights that the OPC, a small and relatively unknown church in America, is now at the cutting edge of Reformed theological education in Africa.

A Desire for Better Education

When I taught my first class as a visitor in 2013 at what was then called Knox Theological College, I began with four or five students. One failed because he didn't know English well enough to pass the class. Another failed because he only came to half the classes. As I watched and listened to the students, I realized that most would not have qualified for an accredited program. From our arrival as missionaries in 2015, I dreamed that the OPC could expand Knox's horizons with a more formal program and greater outreach. However, I was told that accreditation was too long, too hard, and too expensive. It was true that the process was long, hard, and expensive, but it was worth it.

God's providence moved us all along the way. Soon after our arrival to Uganda, it became clear that pastoral training was going to need accreditation due to changing laws and growing pressure from governments across East Africa. We wanted to send qualified, better-trained students back to their churches as future leaders for gospel reformation in Africa. We couldn't find any serious, accredited undergraduate programs of pastoral study that were

confessionally Reformed in Uganda.

Our earliest attempt was to work with a local Christian university in Mbale, LivingStone International University (LIU). This worked well as a start. One of the first graduates, Pastor Muwoya David, is now working for Knox. (Incidentally, David grew up in a village church that OP missionary Tony Curto helped to start years ago in Kachonga.) Though LIU was a great partner, they were not Reformed, and we had a passion to train pastors biblically and confessionally.

When COVID hit in 2020, everything changed. The government closed churches and schools. Everyone was sent home to wait. Then it occurred to me that this may be the opportunity to do what we hadn't had the time to do—create an independently accredited program. Starting from scratch, I formalized the name as Knox School of Theology (KST), and off we went. I hired a young MDiv graduate named Okuch Andrew Ojullo to help me work through the mountain of paperwork that we needed. We created a new curriculum, a constitution, bylaws, and multiple other documents and guidelines. God blessed the efforts. In summer 2022, KST was given a provisional license of accreditation, and we began our new program with a fresh batch of students from all over East Africa. It was so exciting!

At the Forefront of Theological Education

The response to our new school has been overwhelming. Having never advertised, we have more students applying than we are able to accept. We are so humbled now to have students from Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Kenya, and of course, Uganda. Last year we had fifty applications from all over Africa—including Ethiopia, Tanzania, and even Cameroon (western Africa). Although KST can only accept a limited number of applicants from all these nations, it places OPC foreign missions on the frontline of theological education in Africa. God has providentially put us at the center of an amazing situation.

The new students at Knox represent a rapidly growing field of current and future pastors looking for an accredited institution dedicated to high-quality, undergraduate pastoral training. When you narrow down the field of Reformed theological schools that are accredited, KST is one of only a few on the whole continent of Africa. Can you imagine? The whole continent! Africa's Christian population is experiencing rapid growth, but there are very few formally trained pastors in comparison.



Charles Jackson speaking at graduation

Eager Applicants, Amazing Students

A few years ago, one of our potential students from South Sudan walked along dirt roads for two days, with nothing but a bag over his shoulder, only to find that the one road available for his bus to Uganda was flooded. He reluctantly turned around and walked home, still longing to come to KST sometime in the future. He represents so many passionate pastors and young men who yearn to come to KST, but due to poverty, civil unrest, and difficult social and cultural conditions, are simply unable to join us.

Each student at KST has a unique and beautiful story. Khamasi John graduated this past May as the valedictorian for KST in the diploma program in spite of serious health problems. John was born in Kenya, and as a young man, he sold drugs with his father near Lokichogio. After a dramatic conversion and many years in the ministry of a Pentecostal church, he made his way to KST at the urging of his friend, Santulinous “Santu” Ekada, a teacher at a Reformed graduate school in Kampala.

Santu told John that KST was the best and only choice for a Reformed undergraduate program in East Africa, and that, unlike so many other pastoral training centers, it is biblical as well as accredited. At our banquet, John testified to the grace of God he experienced through the loving and excellent academic training at KST, and he affirmed his strong commitment to Reformed theology.

Another beautiful story about God's work is connected to the OP Mission in Karamoja. One of our 2025 graduates is a young man named Lokiru Timothy—often called “Timo.” Timo is a native of Karamoja and a fruit of God's work through the Mission in that challenging place. He came to KST and personally testified about his wonder and awe at the education he was receiving. He said he had

never encountered anything like it.

As a graduate of Knox, Timo is now qualified to pursue pastoral ministry in Karamoja with our mission there. You may think that since he is a local from the area, things will be easy—but remember Jesus's words that a prophet has no honor in his hometown (Matt. 13:57). Timo's natural ability to know the culture and speak the language fluently is a benefit, but it also means that clan, family, and cultural ties will be challenging to his work and witness. Praise God, and pray for Timo, that he may by God's grace complete the circle of our work in Karamoja to have a local Karimojong pastor and a particularized church in that region.

KST is also situated brilliantly with full-time African instructors and staff. An OP mission's task is to work itself out of a job by turning its work over to the indigenous church—and we are well on our way. Please pray for our instructors—Okuch (yes, the same man who helped me with the paperwork for registration) from South Sudan, Desire from Burundi, and Kakule Joseph, Paul Magala, and Muwoya David, all from Uganda. These men are not only academically qualified by government standards but also honest, humble, hardworking, and godly young men who love the church. Please pray for their future in the ministry.

The Beauty of God's Work at KST

In addition to all the other beautiful stories over the past few years, we can recall how God allowed the school to purchase more land beyond the initial land that missionary Phil Proctor had helped to purchase years ago. This additional land was exactly what the National Council of Higher Education requires schools to have. God provided the means to renovate the old buildings and build a new pavilion, a new kitchen, and two new dorms. And just in time for graduation, we officially opened a new administration building, containing offices, classrooms, a computer lab, and an expanded library, as well as a two-bedroom apartment for visiting professors.

These additions to our provisional program now complete all the infrastructure requirements for Knox to apply to move from provisional to permanent accreditation. With our two new missionaries in Mbale, Fred Lo and Mike Kearney, we can move to the next level for Knox's place in African theological education.

As Connie and I close ten years of our lives spent serving God in Uganda, we are amazed at what God has done, especially in the work of Knox School of Theology. We are in awe at the beauty of God's work. When I look at the pictures that I am showing to churches, I can hardly

believe it myself. God has done a great work through the OPC these last three decades in Uganda, and he blessed us to be a part of it. We thank all the missionaries who work there now and those who went before us. Thousands in the church have prayed and supported this Mission over the years.

We thank you all and ask that you join us in praying that God will continue to bless and to grow the work of the Lord in Africa.

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Knox School of Theology building at graduation



Author: Rev. Dr. Pieter Boon

Pieter Boon is a minister with the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa. He currently serves as secretary of the ICRC diaconal committee.

Again that beggar who makes me feel guilty... How do I help the many poor in Africa?

You are just loading your shopping into the car when suddenly someone stands behind you. "Mam, do you have a few coins for me? I can't get home, I'm looking for taxi money."

Or you drive your usual route to work and also that morning the woman is standing at the traffic light with a baby on her back and a toddler sitting right there next to the road. Most motorists make an effort not to look at her. To your relief, the light turns green, but when you drive away you still feel guilty... I drive in a comfortable car, I have a job... On the other hand, at every traffic light there are beggars like this again. And didn't the municipality recommend not to support such beggars? On the other hand, doesn't the Bible say that *He who has mercy on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his good deeds* (Proverbs 19:17)?

This is how we live here in Africa from day to day with a sense of helplessness, which often becomes a sense of guilt. Sometimes you just want to run away to a country where there are no beggars on the streets...

In the work we do as Diaconal Commission of the ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches), these questions often come up. With this article I would like to share some thoughts that might help. But in advance I just want to mention that the Diaconal Commission is not an institution that provides money. Our aim is to 'network' between all the churches in the ICRC, as well as to equip them in their diaconal task. The ICRC has member churches on all continents, rich but also poor churches, and together there is a great challenge to put the LORD's command into practice, namely that there will be no poor among you (Deut 15:4). Although the poor will always be with us in the world (Mark 14:7), it should be different among God's people, in Christ's church.

When it comes to helping the poor, three phases are often distinguished.

1. First aid

Earlier this year a major earthquake hit Myanmar. In addition to the thousands of dead, the survivors were also in great danger. There was no food. Epidemics broke out because there was no more clean water and all the deceased could not be buried fast enough...

First aid is direct emergency aid. Very short-term help is provided from the outside - things like food, fresh water, medicine, clothes, blankets and the like. This emergency aid will be more

necessary in poor countries. When a big earthquake hit Christchurch a few years ago, emergency aid was also needed, yet New Zealand generally had enough funds.

When natural disasters occur or a war breaks out, we as Christians are obliged to help as far as this first phase is concerned. The Scriptures call us to do good to all people, but most of all to the household of the faith (Galatians 6:10). An extra collection can be held in the short term. The proceeds can be paid to an aid organisation that has experience in reaching out to disaster areas in this first phase. When Covid hit my country South Africa in 2020, many church members gave donations for emergency aid to the mission congregations. That help was distributed by an experienced organization and also by the missionaries.

2. Reconstruction

A few years ago devastating floods hit the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Many houses were physically washed away, especially in the low-lying areas where the poor live...

After the first phase of immediate relief, the second phase of reconstruction follows. The definition of reconstruction is to restore or bring people back to the position they were in. Those whose houses were washed away are financially supported to rebuild them. Important in this phase is that as far as possible the reconstruction work is done by the people themselves and not for them. They must and can decide for themselves how they want to restore their daily life. It is not good for people who have experienced a setback in their life to just watch passively how things are being done for them. This takes the initiative away from them and can cause them to not take ownership of what is being built for them. Financial aid is therefore provided to the extent of bringing them back to their state of life before the disaster. The intention is not to build a villa for those who lived in a small house. This will have negative consequences in the long run. There will be no ownership, they will not be able to maintain such a large house, and some will even wish for a disaster to hit them again. With financial help, people can decide for themselves what they are going to do. Are they going to build a bigger house and do the work themselves? Or are they going to use a building contractor to build the same type of house as they had? The financial aid must be of such a scope that the people can handle it responsibly. Anyone who suddenly gets heaps of (well-intentioned) money is saddled up with new problems. In Africa there are numerous examples of poor people who suddenly got a lot of money (think of the lottery), and whose lives were ruined as a result.

In this phase of reconstruction, we as churches may focus primarily on our fellow believers, even though we are also called to do good to all people. When the war broke out in Ukraine, the Diaconal Committee called on the ICRC churches to provide financial help. Many donations were received, which were in the first place intended for the household of faith in Ukraine, and for churches in surrounding countries that had to receive the refugees.

3. Development

The third phase is a long-term thing. The intention is to lift people up to, for example, the middle class, so that they can live a life without the immense pressure that poverty causes. Very important in this phase is to realize that money is not the answer to all problems. Money is not even the primary tool towards development. Mostly in this phase it is more important to pay attention to people's worldview, and even more deeply, to their faith or lack of it. The reason why many Western development projects in Africa end in failure, is because there is too much focus on the financial side. Whoever builds houses or hospitals or churches for people who are not good stewards, does not help them. From a Christian point of view, development primarily means that people are taught a Biblical worldview, that they begin to learn from Christ's grace and through the work of the Holy Spirit to become good stewards. This is the greatest gift we can give to the poor. It even

precedes the proverbial fishing rod we give to the poor. Think of the well-known proverb that it is better to give to a poor person a fishing rod than a fish. Yet this is not enough. Someone also needs to learn to maintain his fishing rod, how to be a good steward, also in regards to his fishing rod. This will enable him to provide for his livelihood in the long term, for he has come to realise the importance to set income aside to maintain his fishing rod. In line with this, the experience in South Africa teaches that it is much better to give someone a job than a donation.

Just to clarify, the above mentioned three-step-approach does not mean that the Gospel will be shared only in the third step. The good deeds in steps one and two go along with sharing the Gospel, testifying why we feel the urge to help.

What do I do now with the fellow that asks for a few bugs in the parking lot? I can give him the address of a church and tell him that people who join there, their lives get better, spiritually and physically. That is far better to give money. You don't know him at all. You have no guarantee whatsoever that he won't use that money for drugs. In that case, your well-intentioned donation will become a curse.

I hope that this article has helped a little with the challenges regarding poverty we so often encounter. May the LORD make us generous in this, but also wise.

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"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."
Colossians 3:17

ICRC Seminarians From Around The World . Meet Together

In June 2025 about 40 people, representing about 12 different seminaries around the world and 14 different denominations, met in Grand Rapids, Michigan to discuss common and pressing aspects of seminary life. What constitutes a seminary? How can we do this better? How can we maintain and improve the necessary standards were some of the questions being addressed for three days, from June 11 to June 13. It all took place on the fine campus of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids. The Conference was organized and sponsored by the Theological Education Committee of the International Conference of Reformed Churches. The members of this Theological Education Committee are, Dr. Douw Breed (South Africa), chair, Mr. Jim Beeke (Canada), vice-chair, Dr. Gerhard Visscher (Canada), secretary, Dr. Tony Curto (USA), Dr. Matthew Ebenezer (India), Dr. Jae Youn Kim (Korea), and Dr. Philip Scheepers (Australia).

Keynote Address

They were exhausting days, but ever so good. The conference started with our keynote speaker, Dr. Davi Gomes, the International Director of the World Reformed Fellowship, addressing the topic “The Challenges of Reformed Education in the Twenty-First Century.” In his estimation, probably the biggest challenge of the century will be that posed by AI, artificial intelligence. How do we in this age protect ourselves from a new onslaught of the evil one posed by computer intelligence? Dr. Gomes referenced the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 which needed to deal with what was probably the biggest Identity crisis in the early Christian church, namely, what is to come of the church which has always been Jewish with all these Gentiles gaining access? He pointed out that in order to address the issues, the council needed to consider the matter from normative, situational, and existential perspectives with an overriding eschatological motive, and by prioritizing love for the church. The same approach will be needed again. Using pizza as an example (which comes in different forms around the world with different toppings, etc, is still recognized around the world for what it is: pizza! So too, on so many points, seminaries will be different around the world, but each one will be recognized as a seminary because of its universally appealing message, basic structure, loving roots, missional manner, recognizable love, and eschatological motive.

Author: Rev. Dr. Gerhard. Visscher

Gerhard (Jerry) Visscher is a minister with the Canadian Reformed Churches, having served as professor New Testament at CRTS. He is currently serving as secretary of the ICRC Theological Education Committee.



Topic 1: Education

Next, the undersigned presented a brief address on “Key Elements of Theological Education”. He briefly outlined the various subject matters addressed by the several theological departments of every seminary. Attention was paid to the need for practical aspects of church life to be added to the core curriculum and how eventually also the matter of spiritual formation became highlighted in North America and around the world. There certainly was agreement in the room about the need for these various aspects. What occupied our attention the rest of the day was how all of this would and could be contextualized around the world: seminary education does not need to be the same around the world. These issues were explored by way of a panel discussion and breakout groups.

The next morning the discussion continued in much the same vein, but now Dr. Adriaan Neele and Dr. Brian DeVries described how both PRTS of Grand Rapids and Mukhanyo College of South Africa had managed to effectively multiply themselves and their institutions in many areas of the world and continent by partnering with other schools as well as satellite campuses. Very gratifying to hear about how Reformed education can proliferate into other areas. A wonderful presentation was then made by Ms. Laura Ludwig, a librarian at PRTS, about the many digital resources available around the world. During this session, Dr Phil Scheepers of the Reformed Theological College in Melbourne, Australia and Dr. Brian de Vries from Mukhanyo Seminary of South Africa also spoke, both about contextualization challenges in different areas of the world.

Topic 2: Accreditation

What are the common standards seminaries need to maintain? How can they monitor and improve these?

In addressing this issue, reference was made to the way in which most north American seminaries are accredited through the Association of Theological Schools. ATS puts seminaries through a rigorous process which circles around the questions: 1. what constitutes a seminary? And 2. Of what does an M.Div. degree consist?¹ Not surprisingly, there was again unanimity in the room, but it became clear that accreditation happens in different ways and through different means (sometimes governmental) in different areas of the world. The degree to which the Theological Education Committee of the ICRC might be helpful or involved in this area was discussed to some extent.

During this session, Dr. Phil Scheepers (above) and Dr.

Jonathan Beeke from PRTS also spoke re different accreditation models. And as an effective bridge to the next topic, Dr. Maarten Kater from Apeldoorn TU spoke to us about the use of heart (adaptive) language throughout the curriculum; one of his main points was that not only chapels and sermons but also seminary lectures should and can be more devotional in nature.

Topic 3: Formation

“Spiritual Formation” has become a popular term in this century in the seminary world. ATS, for example, has done a convincing job showing us that in order for students to graduate with a suitable pastoral disposition and approach more is needed than just an extensive knowledge of many books and facts. The student needs to consider from the outset of the program which kind of challenges, weaknesses, difficulties might hinder him from becoming an effective and fruitful minister of the Word. In most seminaries then, a mentorship program is set up to assist the students on a personal basis to identify and address the issues.²

On the last day, Dr. Albert Coetzee of South Africa addressed us on this issue. Again, unanimity was met also when different models were discussed. It was also agreed that more work needs to be done and thought given to the area of Leadership Formation. An appropriate pastoral character and approach alone do not necessarily make for good leadership. How do we, more specifically, assist young men to become effective and blessed leaders in the churches they serve?

All in all, during these three days we were blessed beyond measure. One evening, we also enjoyed a meal together at the Prince Center along with a devotional dinner message from Dr. Joel Beeke. We would be remiss if we did not thank Dr. Douw Breed, the chair of the TEC, for his able leadership and PRTS for permitting us to use their facilities at no charge, and for freely providing so many services (schedules, recording, name tags. Many families also billeted conference attendees. The sharing and fellowship, the presentations on significant topics, the international contacts and fellowship we enjoyed, all meant that we returned to our respective homes charged up and ready to continue to serve in the Kingdom with new energy, enthusiasm, and vigor. We laid a foundation for much more contact, partnership, and dialogue. Our hope was that especially smaller, struggling seminaries in difficult areas of the world would be encouraged to persevere; the result was that we were all so encouraged. To God be the glory and the praise. For all those who are interested, speeches delivered at the conference can be found at www.icrconline.com.

Rev. Gerhard H. Visscher, Ph.D.

Secretary, Theological Education Committee
International Conference of Reformed Churches

¹ For more on this, see G. H. Visscher “The ATS Accreditation of the Seminary” in *Your Word is our Light: Celebrating Fifty Years of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary*. (Edited by C. Van Dam and J. Van Vliet.

² See T.G. Van Raalte, “Training through Mentorship” in *Ibid.*, 276-297.



A Proposed Resolution to a Justification Controversy

A controversy in Reformed churches about whether or not the active obedience of Christ is imputed to believers for their justification has persisted for centuries, and the debate has received attention once again in North America since the 1980s. In this context active obedience has a special meaning. It does not just mean that Jesus actively and willingly fulfilled his mission on earth. It refers to keeping God's moral law. The discussion is about what part this active obedience has in how believers are justified. In what follows a proposal is offered for ways in which some of the classic differences regarding justification can be overcome. It is no more than a proposal asking to be tested by the Reformed community.

The controversy is wrapped up with the question whether the covenant which God made with Adam at creation should be regarded as a covenant of works or, at least, whether it was on the basis of merit that perfect obedience on Adam's part would lead to eternal life and that this was a matter of justification. It seems that the idea of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ entered Reformed theology in the 1550s and that the term "covenant of works" was first seen in print in the last decade of the 1500s. According to the early Reformed view, even before the fall into sin, man merited nothing from God. The later view speaks of covenant merit and a principle of works and of the imputation of Christ's active obedience as earning the everlasting inheritance.

The Differences

To understand the differences, we can start in Eden. Created in the image of God, Adam was righteous from the beginning and was called to live a life of holiness, gratitude, perfect obedience, and joy in all God's gifts, including the gift of the promise of enjoying God's eternal rest in the future. By nature, man can never merit anything from God; that is, man can never do something for God that requires God to pay him back. The early view is content with this truth. The later view holds that, although man can naturally not merit anything, God gifts Adam with a covenant by which man can merit eternal life through works.

In the early view, God made man fully righteous, and his obedience showed that he continued to be upright. To be righteous is to not be unrighteous, to not break the law. In the second view, man's obedience was the ground for his righteousness. Righteousness is produced by human work and is an accomplishment that makes him justified.

The differences carry over into the understanding of how we are justified after the fall. For the early view, after Adam's

disobedience the problem is sin. Righteousness is lost because of sin, and justification consists in the forgiveness of the guilt of sin (Rom 4:6–8). Forgiveness is made possible by Christ's sacrifice, which atones for both the wrongs we do and the failure to perform the right we should do. Theologians call Christ's suffering and death his passive obedience. "Passive" is derived from the Latin verb "to suffer."

The later view holds that more is needed. Christ's death only removes guilt, but there also must be positive righteousness in order to merit eternal life. This is supplied by the imputation of Christ's active obedience in keeping the law during his life on earth.

A Way Forward

In this proposal the early view is maintained regarding how we have right-standing with God only through the forgiveness of sin; then it proposes that the obedience that leads into God's eternal rest is not the attainment of righteousness but the righteous completion of the stewardship of the earth.

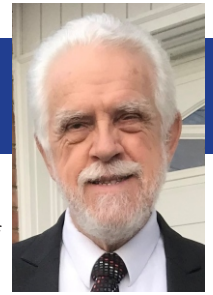
Merit?

In general, Reformed theology holds that, having been created by God and being altogether dependent on him, man merits nothing from him. God does not owe him anything in return for work done (Luke 17:7–10; Rom 11:35–36; 1 Cor 4:7). Early Reformers consider Christ's atonement to be meritorious. That makes sense, because it pays the penalty of our guilt and earns restoration to right-standing before the law. However, does the Bible teach that God promised eternal life to Adam as wages for remaining righteous?

Man's work is worthy, God-honoring, and meaningful, but it does not earn eternal life, which can be received only as a gift. Remember that, in the classical sense, something is meritorious if it needs to be repaid because of its inherent value; that is, something of worth is exchanged for something of equal value as payment of a debt owed.

Defining Justification

To help resolve the differences it is better not to include heirship to eternal life as a part of the definition of justification. It is more accurate to understand justification simply as judging that a person is law-abiding. While it is true that everyone who is justified in Christ has eternal life and that justification is absolutely necessary for entrance into that life, it is not the cause or ground for receiving the inheritance. Rather, this gift of eternity with the Lord is based on God's covenant promise in Eden.



Author: Rev. Ralph Boersema

Ralph F. Boersema is a retired Canadian Reformed missionary and honorary president of the International Reformed Theological College, an online college that teaches in Portuguese.



Understanding God's Covenants

God's covenants are sworn bonds of loving union and communion between him and his people. The Lord swears to be with his people as their God. They swear to be faithful to him as his people, upon penalty of eternal death for disloyalty. God expresses his unmerited and loving covenant loyalty in blessings, promises, gifts, and protection for his children. They show their faith and faithfulness in their loving respectful obedience to his commandments, thus glorifying him and delighting in him and his bounty. In these covenants, under the threat of death for disobedience, being righteous must prevail, that is, the righteousness supplied by the Lord himself: first in creation and then in redemption. God gives righteousness, and man is called to walk in it and not turn away from it.

Justification and Works

If Adam's approbation as righteous came before any works of obedience to God's law, one might ask why we will all be judged according to works (see, e.g., Eccl 12:14; 1 Cor 3:12–15; 2 Cor 5:10). Shouldn't man rather be judged according to either the righteousness of his heart (Adam before the fall) or the righteousness of Christ imputed to repentant sinners? The judgment about whether one is righteous is indeed about a person's heart, but judgment is based on evidence (Matt 12:33–37). Works are the fruit and evidence of the condition of the heart. This is true not only of redeemed sinners who express their repentance and faith in Christ through their works (Jas 2:14–26), but also of Adam and Eve before the fall and of righteous Jesus Christ.

Christ's Death and Resurrection

Jesus Christ's death and resurrection are the only hope for the justification of sinners. Jesus was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Rom 4:25). Christ made atonement for our sins, so that we might be justified by the forgiveness of all our sins (Heb 9:25–27).

Christ's resurrection established our justification, adoption, and sanctification (Rom 4:25; 6; 8:14–17). He is the firstfruits of the new creation, having immortal eternal life, in which there is neither sin nor the possibility of sinning (Rom 2:6–7; 1 Cor 15:20; 2 Tim 1:9–10). His resurrection brought the fulfillment of the Lord's promises made in the Garden of Eden. This glorification is the consummation into which the Lord God leads his people from Eden to the new heavens and the new earth, as he promised in the Sabbath ordinance and the tree of life (Gen 2:2–3, 9). According to this proposal, the basis for this fulfillment, which is only for the righteous, is not justification through the merit of works, but God's promise of gifts, rewards for completion of the stewardship and dominion to which Adam and his descendants were called (Gen 1:28; 2:15). It was not justification, because in Eden man was reckoned as righteous before doing any work. The

accomplishments were not meritorious, because nothing in this creation has value comparable to the glory of the new creation. In their union with Jesus Christ, redeemed sinners have entrance into the same eternal life Christ received, and this through his accomplishments, not theirs.

Imputation of Christ's Righteousness

After the fall into sin, it is only possible to be counted as righteous on the basis of having Christ's righteousness imputed to us when, by his grace, we are united to him, and he becomes our Head. By his death on the cross, Jesus righted a serious wrong. Our sin against the Almighty deserved the penalty of eternal death, and Jesus suffered that death to pay the legal debt we owed. This obedience of suffering was righteousness, and it is imputed to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

Essential to justification (and to our complete deliverance) is union with Christ. In union with him, we are identified with him. As he is judged to be righteous, so are we. The guilt of our sins and sinfulness are imputed to him, and his righteousness is counted as ours (2 Cor 5:21). His righteousness, his holiness, the righteousness of his person, is imputed to us together with his priestly work for the removal of our guilt. Note that this righteousness of Christ is his legal status and his holy nature, not the performance of works of the law.

Christ's Obedience for More Than Justification

At this point the proposal focuses on the issue that the imputation of Christ's active obedience for justification is meant to address. It suggests another way to view how we receive the eternal inheritance. It comes to us through union with Christ: "In him we have obtained an inheritance..." (Eph 1:11). An inheritance is, of course, not purchased. It is a benefit of sonship. As Christ is the Son of God, we are adopted children in him and share in his inheritance (Gal 4:1–7), which is a promise to the children of God from the beginning (Matt 25:34; Titus 1:2). Adam was entitled to receive the eternal inheritance before he sinned, but he did not yet have possession of it. It was promised to him in the Sabbath sign and in the tree of life.

Our Lord and Savior does much more than justify and save us. The second Adam also binds the strong man, Satan, establishes the Kingdom of God, and fulfills the original dominion and stewardship mandate that the first Adam failed to accomplish. The Father "put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:22–23). It is in fulfillment of the Genesis mandate to man that "our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil 3:20–21).

Conclusion

The first covenant that the Lord God made with man was one of loving, undeserved favor. It contains a historical dynamic that leads human beings from earthly glory to heavenly exaltation and entrance into God's eternal rest, that is, eternal life. In that covenant history, the Good Shepherd leads his sheep in the path of righteousness, for his name's sake. Regarding righteousness, we observe the following points: (1) Justification should be understood to refer only to being counted as having right-standing before God and his law. (2) Adam was created in the image of God and was therefore righteous from the beginning, as God's doing, not man's (Eph 4:23–24). (3) Adam was not called to attain righteousness, but to remain righteous. By continuing in obedience, man expressed his righteousness and so continued to be counted as righteous until he sinned, making

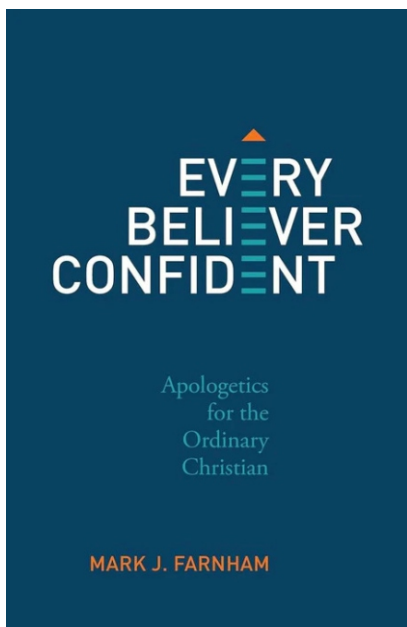
him and us unrighteous. (4) Justification is governed by principles of justice, which are different from those of labor. To be righteous is a matter of justice, while doing righteous work is labor. (5) Right-standing with God comes before works, since one needs to be righteous to be able to perform obedience. (6) In union with Christ, sinners are counted as righteous as he is, because he made satisfaction for their sins (through unified obedience), and his righteousness is imputed to them to acquit them from guilt. (7) Along with justification, Christ restores the eternal inheritance to believers through adoption and leads them into this eternal rest by establishing the Kingdom of God, fulfilling the original mandate of filling the earth and subduing it, guarding it from evil, preserving it, and cultivating it in filial stewardship. For a lengthier version of this proposal please see <https://icrconline.com/resources/library/>





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An Easy Introduction to Reformed Apologetics



Every Believer Confident:
Apologetics for the Ordinary Christian, Mark J. Farnham.
 Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2025. Softcover, 199 pages.

The Bible tells us in 1 Peter 3:15 that every believer should be prepared to give reasons for the hope they have in Jesus Christ. The problem is many believers don't feel prepared at all. When asked for reasons about why they believe what they do, they don't have the confidence to speak clearly, boldly, and biblically. That's a problem this book seeks to address. It's a book giving a basic introduction to apologetics, the defence and promotion of the Christian faith.

The author is the founder and director of Apologetics for the Church. This organization, according to its website, exists "to equip ordinary believers to effectively and confidently share the gospel." Farnham is also a professor of apologetics at Lancaster Bible College and Capital Seminary. He holds a Ph.D. from Westminster Theological Seminary, where he studied the Reformed apologetics method pioneered by Cornelius Van Til.

Fresh Elements

Many Reformed apologetics books have been published since Van Til's time, including some basic introductions. What makes this one worth our attention? For starters, it's up to date on the latest developments in the field. For example, when explaining different approaches to apologetics, Farnham includes Minimal Facts Apologetics. That one was new to me.

Each chapter concludes not only with "Questions to Ponder," but also a case study. For example, Chapter 5 provides a case study involving someone attracted to Wicca. What would you say to someone who says, "I started attending a gathering of witches to learn more about amplifying the voice of nature in my life. I am not a witch myself, but I love their connection to nature, their holistic treatments for all kinds of ailments, and their access to the latent power in the universe"?

Chapter 9 has a noteworthy approach to "Logical Mistakes to Avoid." Many apologetics books will address informal logical fallacies. They'll often provide examples of unbelievers using fallacious reasoning. Farnham goes one step further and gives examples of how Christians sometimes use such reasoning. He gives the example of begging the question: "I believe the Bible is the Word of God because I just know it to be so." To say that is just to assume it is true without proving it.

Growing Our Confidence

A final noteworthy feature is how Farnham reminds Christians that they know more than they think they do: "The truth is that the average mature Christian knows more about the ancient Near Eastern world of the Old Testament and the first-century world of the New Testament than the average unbeliever—simply from hearing sound, biblical preaching in church" (p 97). Combine that with the fact that many people have not thought too deeply about what they believe, and we should be encouraged to be more confident in sharing and defending our faith. I can recommend this one to anyone interested in learning about apologetics. But specifically, *Every Believer Confident* would be a great resource for high school Bible classes or profession of faith classes. The next time I teach apologetics to a pre-confession class, Farnham will definitely be the textbook. Biblical, practical, and clear, it's ideal for teaching the next generation.

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The Lord willing
the next
General Meeting
of
the International Conference of Reformed Churches
hosted by
the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea
will take place in
Seoul, Korea
from
Wednesday October 14
to
Wednesday, October 21

Besides regular business, such as the admission of new member churches and reports from and appointments to committees, the Conference will provide ample time for ICRC member churches and observer churches to meet bilaterally. Time has been set aside for churches in the various regions of the world (Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia-Pacific) to meet together as well (a mini-regional conference). Plans are in place for three presentations, one theological, one diaconal, and one missional. On Sunday conference members will worship in, and may even preach in, various local churches.

Attendance at this conference is by invitation only, as approved by the ICRC Coordinating Committee. Churches that are not ICRC member churches may request such an invitation by emailing secretary@icrconline.com. Please be aware that for non-member churches, costs for travelling to the conference and lodging at the conference are born by the church, not by the ICRC.