



Lux Mundi

45:1 May 2026

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



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The Netherlands: Developments in the CGK

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Reformed Churches



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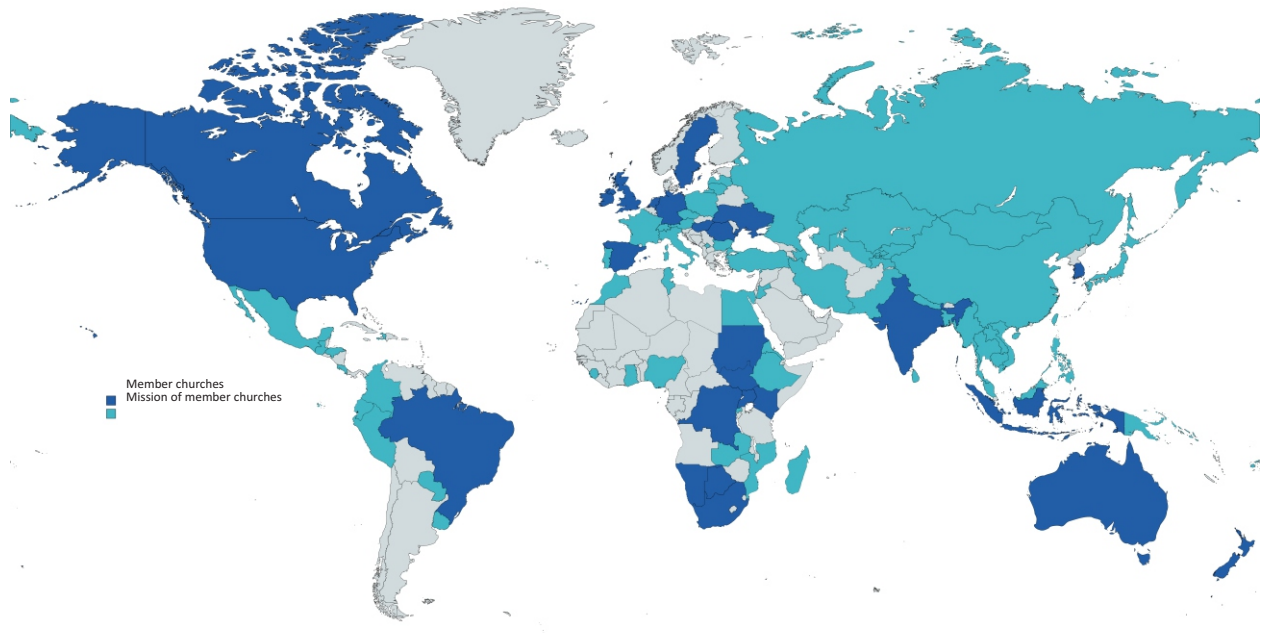
All Sorts

Our world is very much in turmoil as nations engage in warfare with economic impact around the globe. That trip to Korea later this year for ICRC 2026 has suddenly become more expensive. May the Lord grant wisdom to those in authority as justice and peace is sought. May God's Kingdom come in all its fulness, to usher in the time of true Peace. May the work of the ICRC be instrumental and furthering God's cause.

Following the devotional, we open with some ecumenical news items. NAPARC functions as the North American equivalent of a regional ICRC, hence we publish its Press Release in Lux Mundi. Next is an overview of the most recent Synod 2026 of the GKSA (Reformed Churches in South Africa). We then head over to The Netherlands, with a report (from North America) and article (from The Netherlands) about the situation in the Christian Reformed Churches

there. We close with a bit of self-examination by a Canadian Reformed minister who entered the ministry in Korea. We move on to the world of Missions. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has been blessed with a new secretary for foreign missions. Then there's the blog post by a Canadian Reformed mission worker in Mexico about the need to read the Bible. In the world of Diaconal aid we print the report of a minister in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe (that's the kind of name that makes you want to use acronyms) reflecting on four years of war in the Ukraine. Finally two articles of a more theological nature. The first is on Confessional Commitments from within the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. The second is on the Psalms from within the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

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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God's Authority and Justice

Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him (Isaiah 40:10).

In this profound verse from Isaiah, we are beckoned to “behold” the manifestation of God's greatness and power and might. This world is often marked by the uncertainty of war, conflicts, hunger, epidemics and pandemics. This verse calls to witness the mighty nature of our Lord and is both a comfort and a directive.

God's might is not merely a concept but it is vividly displayed in His sovereign rule over creation—including my country and community, as well as yours. His love, care, and faithfulness are always present. As we meditate on God's might, we recognize that He approaches us not as a distant deity but as an intimate, powerful God and as a loving Father. Reflect on the many instances in Scripture, from the parting of the Red Sea to Christ's resurrection, that illustrate God's ability to intervene in the impossible. I recall how Reformasi faced many seemingly insurmountable challenges as we prayerfully considered the takeover of a local Roman Catholic university which today is a well-respected Reformed university with a biblical vision and mission located in the midst of a dominantly Muslim society. The strength given to us by God reassured us and continues to reassure us that no challenge we face is beyond His power.

“His arm shall rule” implies authority and governance. In a society rife with turmoil, we are reminded that God remains the ultimate ruler and controller over all things. This verse invites us to submit our personal struggles and challenges—whether they be fears, doubts, anxieties, or decisions—under His divine authority.

Moreover, Isaiah speaks of “His reward and recompense.” Here, we discover the dual nature of God's justice and mercy. While we may face trials and challenges in this life, God promises an ultimate restoration and reward for faithfulness.

As you reflect on this passage, you should embrace the truth that our God is mighty, ruling justly, and rewards faithfulness. Let this understanding fill you with hope and instill peace in your heart, knowing that your life is held in the hands of a powerful, mighty, and loving God. His faithfulness is evident in the Lord Jesus Christ as Immanuel God and in the Holy Spirit who dwells in His people. This should also comfort and strengthen you in the face of challenges and struggles in your life. Praise be to the Lord who is with us in his power and love.

Prayer Points:

- Pray that, as Christians, we will recognize God's might in our everyday circumstances.
- Pray that we will find peace in God's justice and control over all things.
- Thank the Lord for His mercy in promising ultimate restoration and a reward for faithfulness to His children.



A Reformed Church on Roti Island, Indonesia

NAPARC 2025

The 50th annual meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) convened on Tuesday afternoon, November 11, 2025, and continued until noon on Thursday. It was hosted by the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America at the Hope Community Reformed Church in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania and on the neighboring campus of Geneva College. The outgoing Chairman, Rev. Bruce Parnell, led the opening devotions.

Officers

One of the first orders of business was the election of officers. Elected as Chairman was Rev. Joel Dykstra of the United Reformed Churches. Rev. Benjamin Glaser, of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, was elected Vice Chairman. Rev. Ralph Pontier was elected to an eighth term as Secretary, and Mr. Danny McDaniel of the PCA was elected to a third term as Treasurer. The chairmanship and vice-chairmanship rotate annually among the Member Churches following an alphabetical listing.

Members

NAPARC is a Council of thirteen confessionally reformed Member Churches (listed at naparc.org) which has a twofold purpose described in its constitution as first, providing a *“fellowship that enables the Member Churches to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another”* and secondly, *to hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.”* NAPARC has defined “organic union” as, *“two or more NAPARC Churches joining their diverse gifts, heritage and calling on the basis of the Scriptural mandate (Ephesians 4:1–16; Acts 15:1–16:5; John 17; 1 Corinthians 12:12–31) to form one church by uniting together in theology, polity and ministry. This would require the eventual integration of church courts and administrative and legal structures.*

Unity

In observance of the 50th anniversary of NAPARC, an open discussion was held regarding the objective of organic union, evaluating past efforts and commenting on the prospects of organic union in the future. The discussion revealed that all were thankful for the many ways NAPARC has fostered cooperation with one another in many areas, but few were hopeful of organic union in the foreseeable future, as defined by NAPARC. Some commented that if such unions between Member Churches were to occur, they must come from the bottom up, not imposed from the top down, noting that some

Author: Rev. Ralph Pontier

Ralph Pontier serves as Secretary of the North American Presbyterian And Reformed Council (NAPARC)

church union efforts in the broader church have been destructive of both the Gospel and church unity and have weakened theological foundations through compromise. Nevertheless, the assembly was encouraged to continue to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Since the Spirit has made us one, it is needful to strive, regardless of how difficult, to establish a bond of peace which is a bond of reconciliation – a bond that seeks to remove all sinful causes of division between Christians and churches.

Orations

On Tuesday evening, a devotional service was led by Dr. David Whitla, professor of church history at Reformed Presbyterian Seminary, Pittsburgh, PA. He spoke on the theme “With One Mind and One Mouth” based on Paul’s prayer in Romans 15:5-6. [Editor: The Lord willing a future edition of *Lux Mundi* will share the text of this sermon]. On Wednesday evening, a 50th anniversary dinner was held in the Geneva College Fieldhouse followed by an after-dinner keynote speaker, Dr. Chad Van Dixhoorn, professor of church history and theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC. More than a hundred guests joined the delegates to hear Dr. Van Dixhoorn urge the assembly to follow the “ministry maxim” of John the Baptist that Christ must increase and he must decrease. Van Dixhoorn quoted John Arrowsmith, a 17th century Puritan pastor and member of the Westminster Assembly, “True ministers set up Christ in their ministry. They are content, themselves, to stand in the crowd and to lift up Christ upon their shoulders, content not to be seen themselves so Christ would be exalted.” Van Dixhoorn then asked, “Is that not what we want for ourselves and our churches? He added, “Let us pray this will be a NAPARC ambition . . . and NAPARC legacy.”

Reports

The bulk of the time at NAPARC’s annual meetings is spent in Member Churches giving oral reports about what the Lord is doing in their midst, and in praying for one another after each report. Reports were heard of both spiritual blessings and the struggles of ministry.

Topical Discussions

After the reports and prayers, five topics of discussion were taken up. Each topic was suggested by a Member Church in their written report contained in the docket distributed prior to the meeting.

Fasting and Prayer. The first, from the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, was a “call for prayer, fasting, and days of

humiliation regarding the rise in ministerial clergy/member sexual misconduct in NAPARC churches.” In response the assembly approved a motion that NAPARC recommend to its Member Churches the observance of a day of humiliation, prayer and fasting in response to the too frequent cases of unfaithfulness by church officers. Wednesday, April 22, 2026, is a suggested date. Prayer is urged that all church leaders would honor Christ in faithful service to him.

Position Papers etc. The second topic of discussion, requested by the Canadian Reformed Churches, asked for clarification from Member Churches regarding their policies on the function and authority of position papers and statements of pastoral advice adopted by major assemblies. For most, such position papers and pastoral advice do not have confessional status but remain subordinate to the confessions.

Biblical Counselling. The Heritage Reformed Congregations sought permission to establish a consultation (a separate meeting of representatives from Member Churches) on biblical counseling. Such consultations are held annually for NAPARC mission agencies and diaconal agencies and are part of the first purpose of NAPARC, to foster cooperation between Member Churches in various areas. The HRC was granted permission to organize a consultation on biblical counseling. No date was set, but the date of the next joint mission agencies and diaconal agencies consultation is scheduled for September 15-17, 2026, at the OPC administrative offices in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania.

Privileges of Fraternal Delegates. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church asked, “What privileges should be accorded to fraternal delegates from other NAPARC churches at major assemblies? Most responded that fraternal delegates were given an advisory voice but not permitted to vote. They are generally permitted to remain present during executive sessions.

Gospel Guidance. The United Reformed Churches in North America asked, “How do we ensure that doctrinal purity and personal piety are grounded in and guided by the gospel?” That is how can we avoid doing the right thing merely out of custom or tradition? How can we avoid falling into legalism? Discussion focused on keeping Christ and the Gospel central in both one’s personal life as well as the corporate ministry of the church.

In Closing

The NAPARC schedule runs from Tuesday afternoon to Thursday noon and provides many time slots for bi-lateral meetings between the inter-church or ecumenical committees of the Member Churches. These smaller meetings have proven fruitful for Member Churches to grow closer together and manifest more fully their oneness in Christ.

The minutes of the Council, along with NAPARC’s Constitution, Bylaws, and other resources, can be found at NAPARC’s website: naparc.org. The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for November 10-12, 2026, to be hosted by the URCNA at the First United Reformed Church in Oak Lawn, Illinois.



NAPARC 2026 group photo



GKSA General Synod 2026

The General Synod of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) in 2026 took important decisions that will shape the future direction of the church denomination. The Synod addressed a wide range of matters, including ecumenical relations, theological training, church governance, youth ministry, missions, and church growth.

Worldwide Church Unity as Encouragement

A notable feature of the Synod was the presence of delegates from various parts of the world. Their participation provided a tangible experience of the unity of the church in Christ.

Representatives from North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Africa conveyed greetings from their churches and reported on the state of the church in their respective countries. While some churches, such as the United Reformed Churches of North America and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, encouraged the GKSA and maintain strong ties, concern was also expressed about certain developments in Europe.

In particular, tensions are visible within church bodies in the Netherlands, especially regarding the role of women in office and views on Scripture. As a result, the GKSA decided to terminate its unity with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and to maintain only a looser form of ecumenical contact.

Despite these challenges, the global testimonies carried a strong message: God preserves and builds His church, even amid difficult circumstances.

Clear Guidelines for Theological Training

Theological training occupied a central place in the discussions. The Synod confirmed that the training of ministers rests on three core structures: the Theological School Potchefstroom (TSP), the Reformed Theological Academy (RTA), and the Curatorium.

The historic role of the TSP was reaffirmed, while the RTA is being developed as the future accredited training institution. The Curatorium remains responsible for oversight and for maintaining quality and unity in training.

Since the RTA is still in a developmental phase, provision has been made for students to study temporarily at Mukhanyo Theological College. Cooperation with North-West University also remains important for maintaining academic standards.

Decision on Women in Office

One of the most sensitive matters was the issue of women serving in the office of elder. The Synod reaffirmed the existing decision that women may not serve in the office of elder or minister.

The Synod noted that some congregations do not adhere to this decision. The Synod therefore established a clear process whereby such congregations are given one year to reverse their decisions. If they fail to comply, it will be regarded as a self-imposed separation from the denomination.

This decision was taken with a view to obedience to Christ and the preservation of church unity, and is accompanied by a serious call to self-examination and repentance.

Growth and Equipping of Young People

The Deputies for Youth Ministry have made significant progress in developing spiritual resources for young people. Various Bible study books have been published in both Afrikaans and English and are made available free of charge.

Publications play an important role in equipping young members. These materials are also distributed electronically, making them widely accessible.

New Structure for Namibian Churches

An important organizational development is the establishment of the National Synod Namibia (NSN). The Namibian churches now function as an independent synod, enabling them to give more focused attention to local challenges and their specific calling.

This new structure promotes greater independence and more effective ministry within the Namibian context.

Missions Remain a Core Calling

The Synod reaffirmed the importance of mission work. The Deputies for Missions have already developed a mission's order and continue to work toward improving cooperation between churches.

Although attempts to establish a central mission fund have not yet been successful, missions remain a priority. A key challenge is improving communication between churches and the mission office.

Focus on Healthy Congregations

The work of Expando has focused on promoting healthy congregational life. Various webinars, training events, and guidance processes have been presented.

More than twenty congregations have already received support, and there has also been a focus on training ministers and elders. These initiatives contribute to the spiritual growth and sustainability of congregations.

Liturgy and Doctrine

The Synod also gave attention to expanding the church's hymnody, particularly with songs focusing on Ascension and Pentecost. In addition, work has been done to harmonize Afrikaans and English confessions and liturgical forms.

This contributes to unity and clarity in both the doctrine and worship of the church.

Conclusion

The General Synod of 2026 has provided clear direction for the GKSA going forward. Amid various challenges, the focus remains on faithfulness to the Word of God, the preservation of unity, and the expansion of the church's ministry.

The Synod bears witness that Christ governs and preserves His church, and that He continues His work worldwide to the glory of His Name.



Hosts for and guests at GS 2026



Author: Mr. John P. Elliott
*John Elliott is a writer with
Christian Renewal*

Division in the CGK Imminent

The slow motion breakup of the Dutch Christian Reformed Churches (Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken – CGK) just kicked into high gear. On November 29th, 2025, 60 CGK congregations meeting in Veenendaal agreed to hold a convention to organize a denomination. The convention will be held on March 21, 2026, in Rijnsburg.

In an interview with the *Reformatieisch Dagblad*, ruling elder Johannes Hoogendoorn from Rijnsburg said he expects 60 churches to attend the March meeting. 40 will be sending delegates while 20 others will attend as observers. The convention will be followed by the calling of a general synod. The meeting in Veenendaal follows gatherings in June and October of 2025 called by the confessional wing of the CGK. The inability of the previous general synod to resolve the issue of women in church offices caused the confessional wing to move towards secession.

About 25% of the 183 congregations in the denomination have ordained female deacons and elders even though it goes against the church order. The CGK has 66,000 members. After the CGK's last general synod closed in early June of 2025, the CGK appeared to be heading for a disorganized collapse. That synod failed to name a local congregation to call the next synod.

The confessional wing then met in Rijnsburg later that same month declaring it would move to form another denomination. But the dynamics changed when the CGK congregation in

Broeksterwoude filed a lawsuit in civil court. The judge then ordered the CGK to follow its church order and designate a church to organize a synod. As a result, the CGK will be calling a general synod in Hoozevee sometime in late 2026. By that time, the CGK will probably be divided into two denominations.

Legal and financial experts on both sides of the question agree that the confessional wing will be setting up a new entity. The denomination's church office, the missionary funds, the pension funds and the theological seminary in Apeldoorn will remain the property of the old denomination. Given the history of the CGK, there is every reason to expect an amicable separation and resolution of the legal and financial issues. For example, the confessional wing of the CGK has already agreed to continue to pay denominational dues through 2027. The CGK has always been a church with factions that have tried to get along. Pastor W.J. van Gent emphasizes that individual churches will choose their own tempo as they make their choices. A bitter break up like the Reformed Churches experienced in 1944 is unlikely.

Editorial comment: See also the following article, authored from within the confessional wing, often referred to as the "Rijnsburg Groep".

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Ecumenics

CGK: The Way Forward

Editorial comment. The issue dividing the CGK, women ordination, is one that impacts its eligibility for ICRC membership. In keeping with the ICRC's position, what follows has been drawn from an official website of those in the CGK who oppose the ordaining of women. The English translation is the responsibility of Lux Mundi editor Karlo Janssen.

The responsibility [of convening a synod] is being taken up through the 'Rijnsburg' initiative. At the General Meeting of March 21, 2026, the call for humility, prayer and faithfulness was sounded. Churches that want to remain *Christelijk Gereformeerd* as they have always been, together form

classes-in-formation. Every congregation that wants to adhere to "the fourfold" [editor: of Scripture, confessions, church order, and assembly decisions] is invited and called to commit to it and to restore church life together.

To meet again as a synod in Hoozevee was no longer possible. Of course, the question can be asked whether churches should not have gone 'another mile'. But that question ignores the fact that in recent years a lot of extra miles have already been travelled and the last synod had to draw the conclusion that things had come to a standstill. This happened because synod decisions are knowingly ignored, and have been for years, despite conversations and admonitions at church assemblies.

When all attempts to find a solution failed at the last synod, it had to conclude that there was no longer a common way forward. Therefore, the synod had no choice but to acknowledge that it could not carry out its mission and decided to return its responsibility to the local churches. For that reason, synod did not appoint a convening church for the next synod. That was not an accident, but a deliberate and conscious decision: the church federation no longer functioned, the ecclesiastical route had broken down.

This is the starting point for the way forward: churches jointly take on their calling to restore church life. The General Meeting of March 21, 2026 pointed out a clear direction for the future of the churches.

The Rijnsburg initiative must be understood in that light. It is not a break with the past, but a conscious choice to continue church life on the existing basis. This is intended to remain what the churches were: a community that lives from Scripture and is therefore bound by the confession based on that Scripture, and by the church order and the synodal decisions that flow from it. Precisely because this basis has come under pressure, it has proved necessary to embrace it explicitly again.

The coming period is therefore dominated by rebuilding. First of all, this means that churches are reconnecting with each other. This connection is not without obligation, but takes shape in mutual recognition, accountability and joint responsibility. Churches that want to stick to “the fourfold” seek each other out and express that they want to hold on to each other in doctrine and life.

An important means of this is the formation of classes-in-formation. Classes are the heart of church life. This is where supervision, mutual care and cooperation take concrete shape. In the coming period, work will be done on the construction of these classes, so that they can function sustainably in accordance with the applicable church order.

In addition, the joint responsibilities of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken also require attention. Tasks that go beyond the level of the local churches – such as the Theological University, missions, support of pastors and financial responsibilities – must be carefully safeguarded. This requires joint agreements and coordination, also with congregations that do not go along with Rijnsburg's initiative. In

doing so, we are looking for forms that fit the current situation.

The General Meeting of March 21, 2026, took an important step in this direction. It did not function as a classical general synod, but as an assembly that, with a restricted agenda, can make decisions for the participating churches. The committees appointed by this meeting have an important task in the further elaboration of the decisions.

Every local congregation that wants to abide by “the fourfold” is invited to the General Assembly. This invitation also applies to the classes-in-formation. In this way, local congregations are actively involved and included in this development. There is plenty of room for the local congregation's own pace. Clear communication, careful explanation and pastoral guidance are necessary to support church councils and congregation members in this process. It is important that not only church councils, but also members themselves are involved in this joint choice and calling.

The spiritual dimension remains decisive. The call to self-examination, humility, prayer and faithfulness is not a formality, but essential for the way forward. The restoration of church life is not just an organizational task, but requires conversion, dependence, and renewed devotion to God's Word. Only in that way can there really be restoration and blessing.

The way forward is a path of joint responsibility. Not each for himself, but together. Not apart from God's Word, confession, church order and decisions, but back to what binds. In that way it is possible, under the blessing of the Lord, to restore church life. In doing so, the connection is also sought with churches and church federations that stand on this same basis.

Republished from www.cgkblijven.nl



CGK and OPC delegates at ICRC 2022



Author: Rev. Kwangyoung Park
Kwangyoung Park serves as a minister within the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Fresh Eyes: What a New Pastor Sees in the Canadian Reformed Churches

At a Canadian Reformed pastors' symposium this past January, I was invited to reflect on the Canadian Reformed Churches with what was described as "fresh eyes." At forty-three, I am not sure how fresh my eyes truly are. Yet in another sense, much of life and ministry in the CanRC still feels new to me. I did not grow up in the CanRC, nor did I graduate from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. As a result, many aspects of this federation continue to strike me as both distinctive and instructive.

I am thankful for the opportunity to share these observations also now in *Clarion*—not as an outsider looking in, but as a brother among brothers. It is a privilege to reflect on what the Lord has given to this federation, and to do so with gratitude and humility.

BACKGROUND

I was born and raised in South Korea as the son of a pastor in the Kosin Church. I completed my seminary education there and was ordained in that denomination. The Kosin Church has been deeply influenced by the continental Reformed tradition, particularly by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt—GKv*). Dr. Gootjes, who was sent by the GKv and later taught at CRTS, served as a professor at our Kosin seminary in the 1980s. While I did not study under him personally, many of my teachers were shaped by his work, especially in redemptive-historical preaching. I sometimes joke that I am his theological "grandson."

In 2019, I came to Canada to pursue doctoral studies with no intention of serving in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Yet, in God's providence, I received a call from Toronto Bethel CanRC in 2022 and now serve there as a minister. I am convinced that the Lord had his reasons for bringing me here, and I am thankful to stand alongside fellow workers and fellow soldiers in the gospel within this federation.

BLESSINGS TO APPRECIATE

Trusting the ordinary means of grace

One of the first things I noticed in the Canadian Reformed Churches is a deep trust in the ordinary means of grace. In many churches today, that trust has weakened. There is often a growing emphasis on extraordinary spiritual experiences, creative innovations, or emotional and

experiential elements as the primary ways through which grace is expected to work, particularly in the context of evangelism. When ministry becomes dominated by questions such as "How do we move people?" or "How do we make grace felt?" it quickly becomes exhausting. When the burden of ministry rests primarily on human creativity or effort, discouragement easily follows.

What struck me in the CanRC was a markedly different posture: a quiet confidence that Christ himself works through the ordinary means of grace—the faithful preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and prayer.

In my work as a missions pastor at Bethel, I have seen unbelievers drawn to faith not through emotionally driven special programs, but through the steady ministry of the Word, persistent prayer, and sincere Christian fellowship. This reflects a deep trust in the sovereignty of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Grace does not depend on our ingenuity, but on God's faithfulness to his promises.

Covenant consciousness

If I were to name one word I have heard most frequently since entering the CanRC, it would be "covenant." The covenant is not treated merely as a theological concept, but as a living reality—God's faithful promise to his people—known, confessed, and cherished. This covenantal emphasis shapes the entire life of the church: infant baptism, catechism instruction, preaching, the sacraments, congregational singing, and the work of council and consistory. It is one of the great strengths of our federation. This covenant perspective has also deeply shaped my understanding of mission. When I meet with newcomers for Bible study, I teach the gospel through the lens of the covenant. Evangelism is not the presentation of certain formulas, but the proclamation of God's sovereign faithfulness—his promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ, from creation to the new heavens and the new earth.

I have heard repeatedly from newcomers—both those from other church backgrounds and new believers—how meaningful and grounding this covenantal understanding has been for them. Many have expressed gratitude for coming to the Canadian Reformed Churches, having tasted the peace and rest that the covenant brings.

Intergenerational faithfulness

A third blessing is the way the CanRC has sought to pass on the covenant faithfully across generations. The well-known “threelegged stool” of family, church, and school is not a theoretical ideal, but a lived reality in many congregations. There are few church federations where these three institutions stand together so intentionally, shaped by the same theological convictions and bearing shared responsibility for covenant instruction.

In many parts of the world, churches are deeply concerned about losing the next generation. Scripture, especially Deuteronomy 6, calls parents to teach their children to love the Lord in every aspect of life. Yet without the support of church and school walking alongside the family, this calling becomes exceedingly difficult.

Faithful Christian schools, a teachers' college, catechism instruction, and deeply rooted practices of instruction within the home are profound blessings in our federation. My prayer is that the CanRC would continue to strengthen this inheritance, even in an increasingly secular society and in an age shaped by rapid technological change.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

The richness of these gifts does not mean that they come without tension, fatigue, or failure. We know well that preserving and passing on this heritage is often costly and demanding. With that in mind, it is worth asking together where the Lord may be calling us to grow.

Guarding a distinctive Reformed heritage

As someone who did not grow up within the CanRC, I have been struck by how rare and precious its living Reformed heritage is. Many churches today confess Reformed theology, but far fewer live within an integrated Reformed culture that shapes worship, education, family life, and daily rhythms of faith. No tradition should ever be idolized, and everything must be tested by Scripture. Yet this heritage has often served as a protective framework for faithful belief and covenant life. I hope we will be careful not to set it aside simply because of cultural pressure or a desire to resemble other churches.

Those who have grown up within the CanRC may not always realize how unusual and valuable this inheritance is. My hope is that it will be guarded—not out of fear or nostalgia, but out of gratitude and faithfulness, refined by the Word of God, and passed on to future generations and to those whom the Lord brings into our communities. This calls for

careful discernment, patient teaching, and a renewed confidence in the value of what has been entrusted to us.

Carrying the heritage across cultures

The Canadian Reformed Churches were shaped largely by Dutch immigrants, and through them God preserved a rich Reformed faith and heritage. This has been a great gift. Yet the Reformed faith itself is not bound to any single culture. It is not a “Dutch faith,” but the gospel of Jesus Christ confessed and lived within a Reformed confession.

Today, God is gathering his people into the Canadian Reformed Churches from many cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This invites us to ask an important question: are we carrying forward a Reformed faith that is confined within inherited Dutch cultural forms, or a Reformed faith that can be faithfully shared and embraced across cultures?

Over the past four years at Bethel, a growing number of people from non-Dutch backgrounds have come to faith, received baptism, and embraced the Reformed confession. This has not required fundamental changes to worship, liturgy, or church life. Believers from diverse cultural backgrounds have joyfully received the Reformed confession as their own. This, I am convinced, is the work of God's sovereign grace through the power of his Word and sacraments. Our task is to walk together across cultural differences with sincere love, concrete fellowship, patient teaching, and a shared willingness to grow in faith.

The opportunity before us, then, is not to preserve a culturally enclosed version of the Reformed faith, but to cultivate a truly Reformed culture in Canada—one that is confessional and rooted, yet able to be shared and owned by believers from many backgrounds. Such a church bears witness to the power of the gospel: uniting diverse people in one faith, one Lord, and one confession. This will require intentional discipleship, long-term patience, and a willingness to learn from one another under the authority of Scripture.

Moving from welcome to belonging

Finally, we must ask an important and searching question: do those who come from different cultural backgrounds experience not only a warm welcome among us, but also true sense of belonging?

Welcoming is something we can do, but belonging is something God creates. Acts 13 offers a striking picture of such belonging, as the church in Antioch—marked by remarkably diverse leadership—listened together to the

Holy Spirit and was shaped into one body. The New Testament church was deeply multicultural, and in Christ, God created one new humanity. Belonging was no longer grounded in shared heritage, language, or custom, but in union with Christ.

For the church today, moving from welcome to belonging requires more than hospitality. It calls for a willingness to receive those from other cultures as full members of Christ's body, to engage in genuine dialogue, to listen and learn, and to recognize and cultivate leadership among them. This process requires sensitivity, humility, and at times real sacrifice—especially from those who form the cultural majority.

Encouragingly, as more pastors, elders, and deacons come from diverse backgrounds, a growing sense of belonging is being experienced among those from non-Dutch backgrounds within the Canadian Reformed Churches. When a church walks in step with the Holy Spirit—patiently, prayerfully, and obediently—it becomes a living testimony to the gospel: one body in Christ, diverse yet united,

bearing witness to the reconciling power of God's grace. Such belonging does not emerge automatically, but through prayerful obedience to the Spirit over time.

GROWING TOGETHER

I remain deeply thankful to belong to the Canadian Reformed Churches and to learn alongside brothers who have walked this path faithfully for many years. Despite differences in background, language, or appearance, we are brothers in Christ, called by the same Lord. May the Lord grant us grace to cherish, preserve, and pass on the precious heritage he has entrusted to us—across generations and cultures—and to carry out our shared calling faithfully. I am deeply eager to see what the Canadian Reformed Churches will look like ten years from now, as the Holy Spirit continues to shape and form his church according to his will.

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Toronto-Bethel Canadian Reformed Church



Author: Mrs. Judith Dinsmore

Judith Dinsmore serves as managing editor with New Horizons, the OPC church magazine

Gospel Ambition, Real Humility as New General Secretary

This month (April, 2026), Benjamin Hopp, OP regional foreign missionary, will be installed as the new general secretary for the Committee on Foreign Missions.

One Sunday last fall when Ben and Heather Hopp were home in Florida and considering this big change, they went, as usual, to church, where in the morning and evening sermons Ben found the precise expression of his own longings.

First, in the morning, the Hopps' pastor, Joel Fick, preached from Romans 15 on Paul's gospel ambition to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

"I have that sense," Ben said. "The [general secretary] work really excites me, in terms of just seeing what God is doing spiritually around the world." The Hopps had just come from Africa, where Ben lived in Uganda but traveled regularly to multiple countries to meet with churches, build relationships, and teach. He witnessed the Lord's work in areas that the OPC has yet to labor but where there are exciting opportunities. "We have to have this gospel ambition so that it just pushes us forward by the Spirit's power," Ben explained.

Then came the evening service. A guest preacher opened Exodus 4, where God is calling Moses. Moses responds that it is too much, that he can't speak well, and would God please send somebody else. "This [the call as general secretary] is a huge job and responsibility," Ben reflected. He feels, with Moses, that he can't do it on his own. Working as regional foreign missionary had been humbling as well as exciting—when you travel to multiple cultures and try to communicate in languages not your own, "you are constantly making mistakes."



The Hopp Family

On that Sunday, Ben saw Paul's gospel ambition and Moses's sense of inadequacy mirrored in his own experience. "It was good for me to see that. We need to desire big things and pray that God would do big things, but there is a real humility that is needed," he concluded.

God's preparation in Haiti

Ben, as well as the committee, sees that God has been at work to prepare him for the call. Growing up in an evangelical home in Canada—you can still hear his accent—Ben went to Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and was ordained in 2003. Four years later, the OPC's Committee on Foreign Missions called him to be a missionary evangelist to Haiti, where the Hopps labored for almost twenty years.

As he looks back at the years in Haiti, one of the lessons that Ben predicts will serve him well as general secretary is flexibility. "As you work on the mission field, things are always changing," he said. Daily schedules are in flux because life is just more unpredictable: "Cars don't start. Boats don't run. People don't always show up."

More seriously, political landscapes can shift. Readers of this magazine will be familiar with the downward spiral into gang control that has overtaken Port-au-Prince and other areas of Haiti. Many Haitian believers are at risk even in traveling to church, and it was no longer advisable for the Hopps to continue living there—a deeply challenging turn of events.

"That need to be flexible, even though I didn't always like it, has prepared me for this new role," Ben reflected. Not only must the committee pivot as needed based on changing circumstances, but the general secretary also needs understanding for the missionaries and church plants doing the same.

Another aspect of ministry in Haiti has prepared Ben for service as general secretary: responding to diaconal needs. He spent a third of his time there responding to diaconal requests that came either through the church or through chance encounters and people in need coming to their gate.

"I hope I've learned something from all those decisions over the years, some of them good and some of them bad: how to balance out the compassion side of diaconal work and the wisdom side," Ben said. As the OPC receives diaconal requests from various churches and denominations through its foreign missions work, he will need the discernment he learned as a missionary.

Working in Africa

When the Hopps arrived in Africa from Haiti in 2024, the transition was challenging. But immediately he and his family were also struck by the similarities between the two. Much of Haiti's population is of West African descent, captured and enslaved during the French colonial era. Many cities that they visited in Uganda felt not so different from Haiti—minus the Creole language. “As my daughter said, Uganda is like Haiti dubbed into English,” Ben said. Over the last two years, Ben has led several conferences for pastors and elders in Ethiopia; visited with ARP missionaries in Rwanda; made contacts in Malawi; encouraged church leaders in South Sudan; and networked in Kenya. Through it all, the Lord has given him a real passion for Africa.

Memorably, in October Ben and Heather traveled from Uganda to Ethiopia to teach at a three-day conference: Ben with the pastors and elders, and Heather with the women.

“Connecting as women, regardless of culture or color, and as sisters in Christ as we studied the glorious themes of the book of Ruth together was such a blessing,” Heather wrote in an email. Logistics were challenging:

they needed a second venue, the attendees traveled great distances from several churches in the denomination, and a female interpreter had to be found. But the Lord provided.

“Eden, my interpreter, was outstanding! She tracked with me and got very excited about communicating the content to her Ethiopian sisters. Because Eden was a woman, the ladies at the conference felt comfortable to address challenging topics for women: widowhood, loneliness, childlessness,” remembered Heather. “There were many tears as the Lord comforted, encouraged, and ministered hope to these sisters who have persevered through very challenging situations.”

“We put so much effort into training pastors and giving them what they need, but their wives are really an important part of their ministry, so they need [teaching] as well,” Ben pointed out. And practically, “Women sometimes need another woman to talk to.”

That's true not only of local believers but of missionaries and missionary families as well. Knowing as they do firsthand the challenges and blessings of missionary service, including raising children on the field, the Hopps are ready to offer “prayer and encouragement,” as Heather put it, to our OP missionaries.

The missionary shortage and the new fields

Ben's connections through his work as regional foreign



Preaching at All Nations in Mbale, Uganda

missionary over the last three years may open new fields for the OPC. “We need to continue to support what we're doing,” Ben said, meaning the faithful labors of missionaries in Uganda, Uruguay, Ukraine, Haiti, and Asia. But the prospect of new fields may help with the committee's biggest material limitation: a lack of missionary candidates.

“When you put in front of people the possibility of working in a new field, that creates a sense of excitement. We're not doing it just because it's new but because there are places where the gifts of our church can be used.”

Those OPC gifts Ben sees as doctrinal faithfulness, and teaching and church planting. Some regions, he explained, need pioneer missionaries who can go out and start something from scratch. But that is not the only scenario. “There are other places where there might already be some churches where they really need their pastors and elders to get a firmer and better biblical and doctrinal basis,” Ben said. That's particularly where he thinks the OPC can be of service to the global church.

Ben also hopes to realize what has been a longtime goal of the committee: sending at least two missionaries to each field, rather than having one labor alone. “If somebody is thinking of going into mission service, we should ask, who is somebody you could take with you?” Ben said. Maybe it's a ministry colleague, or friend from seminary. Ideal would be a relationship of one older and one younger candidate.

Working in new fields may include more cooperative agreements with other NAPARC denominations—a partnership like that which the Hopps experienced firsthand in Haiti with Octavius and Marie Delfils, missionaries in Port-au-Prince with the PCA. Thanks to that fruitful working relationship, “I hope I have some understanding to help people work through those team dynamics. It can be done well, and it can work well,” Ben said.

Ben Hopp will serve jointly with the current general secretary, Douglas Clawson, for six months, during which they will visit the OP mission fields together.

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Women's Conference



Author: Mission Worker Scott Bredenhof
Scott Bredenhof serves as a mission worker in Queretaro, Mexico, for the Canadian Reformed Churches.

I Guess I Need To Read My Bible

I was afraid the small, rickety chair would collapse at any moment. I was pretty sure it was at least as old as I was and it wobbled considerably as I gestured about and shifted my weight back and forth. But, thankfully, and surprisingly, the chair did its job and I was able to finish my conversation without ending up on the floor in a heap.

The conversation I was having was with an elderly lady who lives nearby – we'll call her Gabriela. Her adult son was also present – relaxing on a nearby bed, shirtless and looking at his phone. But he was listening in.

I had asked Gabriela if she had a Bible and she had pulled out a small catholic Bible with small print which she could hardly read. Frustrated, she got up again and pulled out a gigantic, catholic bible. It was illustrated with many pictures, including pictures of the Virgin of Guadalupe and other saints. She explained that many years ago people from the nearby catholic church had knocked on her door and sold it to her. Except they never came back to actually collect the money. She had also never read it.

We opened the big, fat bible to Paul's letter to the Galatians. Gabriela often repeated the maxim that all churches (religions too?) were basically the same, they just had different ways of doing things. The apostle Paul of course would not agree and he had some particularly strong words in the first chapter of Galatians for those who preached a "different gospel". When I

pointed this out, Gabriela immediately thought of her neighbours – Jehovah's Witnesses who are constantly inviting her to their "church". Gabriela told me that she always declines their invitation because they "believe some different things". "Exactly!" I replied. "It's a different gospel."

We continued reading several verses from Galatians which clearly present the "true" gospel – *"This was so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no human being will be justified."* (Galatians 2:16)

As I stroked the head of a kitten that had poked its head out from under the bed, I again emphasised to Gabriela that there are false gospels. These false gospels do not save and they confuse the true gospel. In like manner, there are false churches which do not preach, teach, and live the true gospel. Looking over at the large crucifix hanging on the wall, I asked her if she thought the Roman Catholic church taught the true gospel – the gospel that we read about in the Bible.

Gabriela thought about it for a while, not sure how to answer. Finally, she said: "I guess I need to read my Bible to find out the answer."

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The Fountain Church – Queretaro, Mexico



Author: Rev. Imre Szoke

Imre Szoke serves as a minister with the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Central and Eastern Europe

After Four Years

Feb. 24, 2026

Dear Brothers, Praying and Supporting Friends,

This new 'anniversary' newsletter was not among my plans, as I had hoped that this war would be over. But it didn't turn out that way, so I have to give you a brief update on Ukraine. This war has been going on for four years, and one can get tired of it even if he is not directly involved or affected. I can hardly imagine what it must have been like to live, for example, during the Thirty Years' War without domestic tranquility for decades – since even four years seems to me so unbearable.

As I started writing this letter, I was shocked to realize that this war is the longest Europe has seen in the last 80 years, since World War II. It is also by far the war claiming the highest number of casualties on the old continent since WW2. Where are we heading to? What will the final figures be?

The value and purpose of peace

Indeed, peace is important. My heart was burdened again with a desire for peace, especially when seeing the tremendous costs average citizens are paying in these dire times. But then a quote from Dr. Martyn-Lloyd Jones came to my attention. It was a big wakeup call; a new perspective, a theological re-set for me. I will share here his thoughts for your benefit. He wrote this at the outbreak of WW2 to people on the brink of despair:

“Why do we expect God to prohibit war? Or why should God prevent war? Apart from the theoretical reason that God should prevent war because it is sinful... there can be no doubt that the real reason why people expect God to prevent war is that they desire a state of peace and feel that they have the right to live in a state of peace. But that immediately raises another question, which, in a sense, is the fundamental question with respect to this whole matter. What right have we to peace? Why do we desire peace? How often, I wonder, have we faced this question? Has not the tendency been to take it for granted that we have a right to a state and condition of peace? Do we stop to ask what is the real value and purpose and function of peace?... It is not enough that we should desire peace merely that we may avoid the horror and suffering of war... Man's chief business in life is to serve and to glorify God. That is why the gift of life has been given to him. That is why we are here on earth. All other things are subservient to this—all the gifts and the pleasures which God gives us so freely... But is that our reason for desiring peace? Is that the real motive in our prayers for peace?... Do we deserve peace? Were we justified in asking God to preserve peace

and to grant peace? What if war has come because we were not fit for peace, because we did not deserve peace, because we by our disobedience and godlessness and sinfulness had so utterly abused the blessings of peace? Have we a right to expect God to preserve a state of peace merely to allow men and women to continue a life that is an insult to His holy Name?”¹

This quote reminded me of spiritual realities and the relation mankind has with God. We are at war with Him and consequently with each other. Unless He intervenes, we are lost. Therefore, when we enjoy peace, we should not take it for granted; rather as a gift from God. Peace is a time of opportunity, and we should use it to proclaim the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15) and to be ambassadors of the God of peace (Rom 16:20). This is a strong reminder to all of us about our calling. (Mt 28:18-20)

Reasons for thanksgiving

Amidst these sobering realities, there is room for thanksgiving. This is the will of God in Christ Jesus after all (1Thess 5:18). Here are three noteworthy aspects:

1) Since my last prayer letter, we have been able to organize two more evangelistic services for Ukrainian refugees stuck in Miskolc. Both times, the preaching was in Ukrainian. This means that over 150 refugees heard the Gospel preached in their native language. We hope to organize a fourth event later this year. Each time, we distributed food packages to them as well.

2) Our only pastor left in Ukraine – in the city of Beregovo – got a special permit which allows him to leave his house and travel to preach within the country. In theory, this guarantees that he will not be taken into the army. But this permit is valid only for one year.

3) Beside distributing food, we tried to focus on targeted assistance. We are so thankful that we have been able to help several times in critical situations. To give just two examples. One man we got to know (who is a teacher in Beregovo), due to the constant stress had a severe stomach hemorrhage. He almost died, but thanks to our swift financial intervention, he was hospitalized. One lady who is a refugee in Miskolc, had serious difficulties in providing for herself. We helped her three times with funds. Now she has a job and the crisis has been ameliorated.

As I close, here are several prayer items:

1) Pray for peace and also for the post-war times. Those who survive this war will be traumatized for the rest of their life. I am sure that PTSD cases will appear on a large scale. You may have seen videos of soldiers who had been



on the front for 2-3 years and seem to have aged 10 years. I heard of one case when the family ran away from home when the father returned. He has become a different man; recovery won't be easy.

2) Pray that God's people would use these opportunities to encourage and evangelize people. After peace settles in, there will be a new beginning for Christian ministries: evangelism and diaconal work.

3) Pray for safe travel as I hope to return to Ukraine later this year. Crossing the border is becoming stricter; border checks are more rigorous and include scanning your mobile phone, photos and emails, social media contacts, etc. – and entry might be denied.

4) Pray that the Lord might provide whatever we need in the future to carry on this ministry. Also to give us both spiritual and physical strength to continue.

Thank you for being such a faithful partner during these years. May the Lord bless you for this!

In His service,

Rev. Imre Szoke

Miskolc/Hungary

¹ Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Why Does God Allow War?, 1939, p. 89-92

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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

The Value of Confessional Commitments

As office bearers in the Reformed and Presbyterian Church, the Lord has blessed us with a wealth of riches. First and foremost, He has blessed us with His Word. And the Bible is, as Christians and as church officers, our ultimate authority.¹ There is no higher standard than His Word, and it is to be, as our own Confessional Standards declare, “The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined.”² All this to say, if we are going to be officers in Christ's church, we need to be Bible men.

The Lord has also gifted us with the benefit of church history, and with the confessional formulations of the church through the ages. This perhaps reached its zenith in the seventeenth century with the publication of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and its subsequent catechisms.³ Our denomination has adopted as its confessional statement the Westminster Standards, and we hold these standards to be an excellent summary of the truths of Scripture which has not been surpassed even today. The Standards have lost none of their relevance, and even as the challenges of today have changed, they still form a coherent and biblical response. Indeed, as the Standards were expertly crafted by men sitting under the Scripture who prayed and wrestled and debated over their formulations, the value of these formulations still shine through today.

Paul tells Timothy to “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.” (2 Timothy 1:13-14, *English Standard Version*) One of the ways in which we hold fast to the pattern of truth set forth in the Scripture and “guard the good deposit” is by formulation of our doctrines and holding to those formulations. The Lord, we hold, has preserved His Word through the ages, and as He has given to His church men to pour over that Word, He has in His providence gifted us with churchmen to form consensus documents such as our Confession of Faith and its Catechisms.

We hold that the Confession is not the Scripture, and it is not infallible. Certainly if Scripture were to correct us in regard to something in the Confession, we would be

conscience bound to amend the Confession. However, even after a few hundred years, the Confession is still seen as a faithful summary of Christian and biblical truth.

Though I doubt this is a controversial statement in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, I would argue that holding to our Confessional Standards (though, of course, this is subservient to the Word of God) helps us to keep the main thing the main thing. As the Confession sets forth clearly Scripture's teaching on important doctrines from the doctrine of Scripture, to the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of the church and of the last things, etc... this keeps us grounded in Scripture's teaching. It keeps us from drifting into man-made doctrines and distinctives, and it keeps us God-centered. Cornelius Van Til rightly said, “Our theology should be God centered because our life should be God centered.”⁴ The Christian life, in other words, ought to have a vertical, Godward orientation; so too does Christian theology have a Godward orientation. Our Confessional commitments far from hampering our commitment to the Scripture actually help us to stay connected to the Scripture as it has come about as the fruit of biblical reflection. So too, our Confessional commitments help us to remain fixed on God and to keep away from manmade and man-centered distinctives.

This is highly important, as it is often a temptation to drift toward our own opinions more so than what has been revealed to us in the Bible. It can also be our tendency to craft new forms of legalism, from whatever side of the “rightward” or “leftward” perspective and drift from the Gospel message. As the Gospel message is central to the Bible, as we vow to uphold the Westminster Standards, we are also by implication vowing to uphold the centrality of the Gospel message as it is set forth in the Scripture.

Again, the Westminster Standards are not the Bible, and they are not inerrant or infallible. It is only the Scripture which is said to be “breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) The Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible and sufficient Word

Author: Rev. James Ritchey

James Ritchey is a minister serving with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (US).

of God. It was out of a desire to formulate and systematize precisely the doctrines of the Scripture from which the Westminster Standards came. And it is out of a desire to preserve the “pattern of the sound words” in the Bible within our denomination and churches that we adhere to the Westminster Standards.

We are always growing in our understanding of Scripture, but again, our Standards remain a faithful and relevant exposition of the teaching of the Scripture even in this age. Certainly, its teaching on the Scripture presents a counter to the epistemological commitments of our day. Its teaching on the nature of man has much to say to the present day confusion over identity. Its teaching on Christ and salvation presents a counter to the universalistic ideas of salvation and calls us once more to embrace the One who is “the way, and the truth, and the life.”

In closing, I think these words from John Murray present to us good summary of why the Standards are valuable today: Oftentimes it is pleaded that the Christian message must be adapted to the modern man. It is true that the message must be proclaimed to modern man, and to modern man in the context in which he lives and in language he can understand. But it is much more true and important to plead that modern man must be adapted to the gospel. It is not truth that the doctrine of the Confession is irrelevant to the modern man. It is indeed meaningless to him until he listens to it. But when a man today becomes earnest about the Christian faith, when he gives heed to Scripture as the Word of God, when he faces up to the challenge of unbelieving ways of thought and life and demands the answer which Christianity provides, he cannot rest with anything less than the consistency and vigour which the Confession exemplifies. Unbelief is potent and subtle, and the believer requires the truth of God in its fullest expression if he is to be furnished to faithful witness and confession.⁵

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Endnotes

¹ This is simply to echo what is set forth in *Westminster Confession of Faith* chapter 1. For example, WCF 1.4 tells us the origin of Scripture's authority over us: “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author

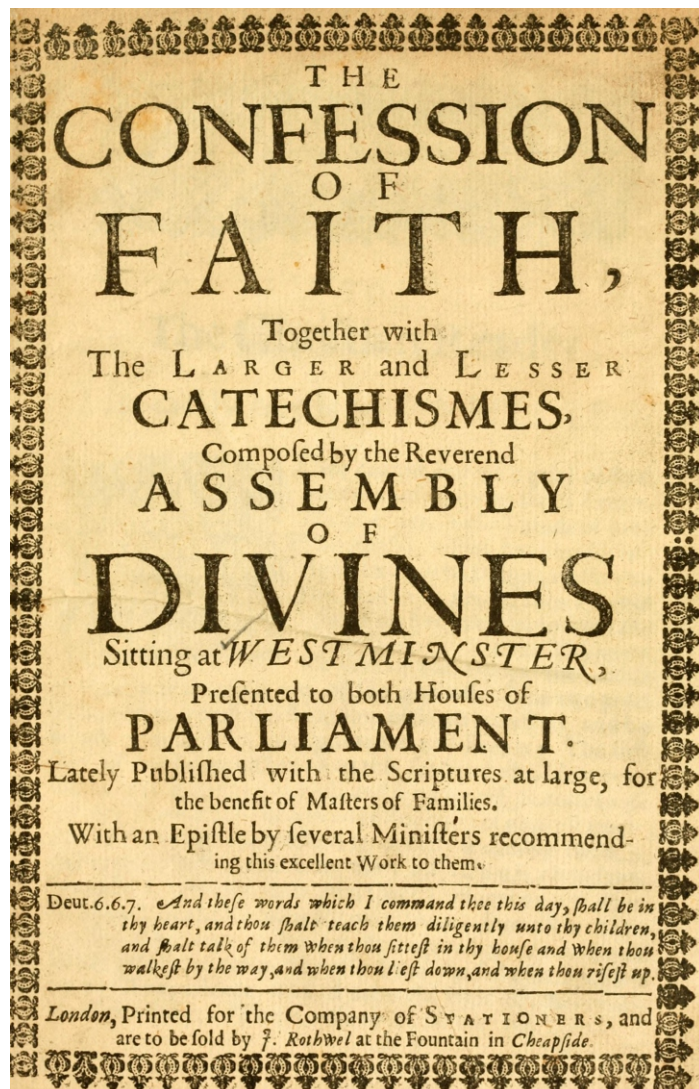
thereof: and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.”

² WCF 1.10.

³ We also greatly benefit from other confessional standards such as *The Three Forms of Unity*.

⁴ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ, 1979), 1.

⁵ John Murray, “The Importance and Relevance of the Westminster Confession,” found in *The Collected Writings of John Murray: Vol. 1: The Claims of Truth* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976, 2015), pgs. 316-322; quote taken from pg. 322.





Author: Rev. Nathaniel Rademaker
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The Flow of the Psalms

Charles Dickens wrote in his 1859 book, 'A Tale of Two Cities' a famous opening line, "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times." This sentiment is expressed throughout the book of the Psalms. The main reason the Psalms are dear to God's people is they live in reality alongside us as a truthful, loving, encouraging Word from God in all we experience in life.

As Paul Tripp wrote, "The Psalms are in the Bible to keep us honest. Biblical faith isn't presented as being comfortable, pleasant, and easy. Rather, the more you examine the shocking honesty of the Psalms, the more you see how messy, chaotic, and question-riddled the life of faith actually is."¹

The Psalter has an apt Psalm which provides an accurate lens to properly view each circumstance of life. The Psalms are used by God to orient us time and time again to Himself who is the First Mover, the Causal Cause, the One who is sovereign over all life and who uses unique joys and sufferings in each of our lives to strengthen and maintain us in our faith in Jesus Christ all the way to glory.

While not telling us everything we ought to do amid them, they sit with us in our grief or they rejoice with us. Reading the Psalms reveals to us the varied realities we may face throughout life and leads us to praise God in everything.

The Challenge

As a teenager, I tried for a long time to get a general idea of the flow of the Psalms and found that it was an impossible mission. I certainly saw it as a good and godly aim, however, not seeing the forest for the trees, I ended my initial attempts in failure. Perhaps you have had the same experience in your attempts to have a good grasp on the Psalms?

The Macro: The Overall Picture Painted by the Psalms

To make sense of and understand the book of Psalms, we need to have an awareness of the overall structure of the book, otherwise we will miss its total message.

While one *overall* book, the 150 Psalms are divided into five books within the one book, and intentionally so. This is highlighted for us in O. Palmer Robertson's book, *The Flow of the Psalms*,² to whom I am deeply indebted for my understanding of the Psalms.

The design is wonderful when you see how the Psalms are divided into 5 sub-books:

- Book I (Psalms 1-41): Confrontation
- Book II (Psalms 42-72): Communication
- Book III (Psalms 73-89): Devastation
- Book IV (Psalms 90-106): Maturation
- Book V (Psalms 107-150): Consummation

a. Who designed the Psalms like this and for what purpose?

The order of the Book of Psalms in these five sub-books occurred over many years. There are several different authors whose Psalms, or poems, circulated amongst the Israelites in smaller collections prior to being collated. It was over hundreds of years, through the work of anonymous post-exilic Jewish editors (redactors), that the Psalms were organised into the five books we have today. The Psalms are not placed in chronological order, but instead, by placing similar Psalms together in each book, they are woven together to help smooth their flow.

Just so we are clear, the rearranging of the Psalms in the Bible does nothing to alter the fact that they are divinely inspired and properly belong in our Bibles as the very Word of God to us.

Robertson explains how the law in Psalm 1 and messianic message in Psalm 2 provide us with the basic major themes developed throughout the Psalter. So while each of the five books within the Psalter have individual emphases, they all develop an interconnected and unified story.

b. The Five Sub-Books of the Psalms

Book I's (1-41) emphasis is King David *trying* to establish God's Kingdom of righteousness and peace while being *confronted* by many enemies.

Book II (42-72) shows a significant change in that the Psalmist refers to God by His more general name of '*Elohim*,' rather than God's covenant name of '*Yahweh*' that he used in Book I. The significance of this, is it indicates a change has occurred in their relationship with God. So, God *communicates* with Israel and the surrounding nations, calling them to obedience and faithful repentance for sin.

This then leads us to Book III (73-89) revealing the coming *devastation* where God will judge His people for their lack of faith and repentance.

Then in Book IV (90-106) you gain an awareness of a restoration of the relationship between God and His people again. The Psalmist once again uses '*Yahweh*,' the covenant name for God. This covenant name for God is closely connected in these Psalms to the Hebrew word for '*king*,' and highlights to Israel that following God's judgement on their sin, God will restore His Kingdom. King David tried and failed, but God as King will not fail. Our faithful covenant God will bring His Kingdom into this world and firmly establish it. Earthly kings may fail, but God as King will not fail.

Book V (107-150) then gives us a taste of the completion of

God's redemptive Kingdom work. The Psalter concludes with five beautiful Psalms, Psalms 146-150 which sing praise of Hallelu-YAH! Praise to the covenant God of Israel for accomplishing the establishment of His Kingdom on Earth, which points forward to certain consummation of that Kingdom in the future! As New Testament Christians, we know that Jesus Christ is the divine King of God's people who has established God's Kingdom on Earth. In this Kingdom millennium, even as we still suffer the effects of sin and Satan, we can certainly know God's gracious rule in our lives as we look forward to the day when His and our enemies are fully done away with. In the meantime, God's victory on our behalf through King Jesus won, we can exclaim the Psalms of praise in song to God for His grace and goodness to us.

So, what is the total message of the Psalms in a nutshell? An earthly King over God's people is not sufficient to inaugurate and maintain His Kingdom through to completion. Only God can do that! All must turn to God in faith and trust in Him alone!

The Micro: How to Understand Individual Psalms

Now we turn our attention to how you can read, interpret, apply and have a deeper appreciation of each individual Psalm. To do this you need to keep in mind the various types of poems contained in the Psalms. Poems of joy, lament, thanksgiving, confidence, remembrance, wisdom, or royal Psalms.

Even if you don't like poetry, it is useful to understand something of what makes a poem a poem. As one writer states, "To appreciate a lovely poem found in the Psalms and written by a skillful Hebrew poet requires at least a basic knowledge of what makes Hebrew poetry poetry. And the more you appreciate the poetry of the Psalms, the more you will get their message. Key to interpreting the Psalms is understanding and appreciating their poetic features."³

Hebrew poetry is literature that conveys its message by frequently using parallelism and imagery. Maybe you know your poetry and wonder, 'Why haven't you mentioned rhyme or meter?'

We tend to like rhyme and meter in our English poems because we grew up hearing poems like "Jack and Jill went up the hill..." So, it is important to be aware that Hebrew poetry typically does not rhyme, and if it does, as in Psalm 121:3, the rhyme is not intentional but incidental. Let us now consider the *parallelism* and *imagery* in Hebrew poetry.

a. Parallelism

Tremper Longman said this about parallelism: "parallelism refers to the correspondence which occurs between the

phrases of a poetic line" (line = a basic unit of Hebrew poetry separated by a colon).

Parallelism in Hebrew poetry means each line of the poem is closely related to the next line; one line flows into the next.

The relationship between each cola can occur in a variety of ways. Sometimes you can see the relationship between each cola grammatically or in their meaning.

Without getting too complicated, how *parallelism* works is defined by Futato, who said, "Parallelism is the art of saying something in both cola, or line, but with a difference added in the second colon."

A good example of Hebrew poetic parallelism is in Psalm 29:1:

*"Honour the LORD, you heavenly beings;
Honour the LORD for His glory and strength."*

The Psalmist repeating "Honour the LORD" links the two cola together while at the same time adding a difference. In the first colon the Psalmist teaches us who is to give honour to the Lord - the angels. The second colon answers the question 'What must the angels honour the Lord for?' Specifically, the angels are to honour the Lord for His glory and strength.

I hope you can see that Hebrew *parallelism* is the art of saying similar things in cola with the second colon adding something different, whether it is a small or great difference. When you next turn to the Psalms I hope you read it slowly and try to find the difference in the second parallel line. Please do this, because if you do, it will enrich your experience of reading and hearing God speak to you through the Psalms.

b. Imagery

The next thing to notice in Hebrew poetry is the beautiful word images that are painted in each poem. A number of commentators have said, "Imagery is the most basic building block of poetry." Leland Ryken changed that maxim a little by saying, "poetry is the language of images."

This gives you a good sense of the importance of imagery in poetry, doesn't it? The reason imagery is so important in poetry in general is because words that invoke imagery engage your intellect and your emotions at the same time. In this way, the Psalms really are, as John Calvin put it, "an Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul."

Imagery is a powerful tool in poetry because it grabs hold of your emotions, you sense their meaning before your mind grasps it.

In trying to ascertain what is being taught in the imagery of the Psalms, it is important to keep in mind that imagery in

poetry is so rich that it can have multiple meanings, not just throughout the Psalms as a whole, but even within the one Psalm.

Because we are somewhat removed from the time and place of the authors and audience of these poems, the imagery does not always hit us with its intended meaning or force unless we have some understanding of the immediate context of the Psalm.

Once you understand the context of each Psalm, search for “the timeless truth” it teaches. For example, in Psalm 3, King David's physical enemies Absalom and his fellow rebels, are not your enemies today. The timeless truth taught in Psalm 3 is: “When threatened or suffering you can have confident hope in God for deliverance.” This enables you to see links between Psalm 3 and New Testament passages. For example, 2 Corinthians 12:7. Paul is suffering some difficulty, and yet, Paul, like Israel, like us, can trust in the Lord's will. Just like Jesus Christ did in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-44). Jesus cried out in anguish at the thought of His Father forsaking Him upon the cross: “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him.”

As you find “the timeless truth” in the parallelism and imagery of each Psalm, then link it to New Testament passages, and on to Jesus Christ, you will recognize how He is the answer and fulfillment to each Psalm.

Conclusion

There are beautiful and meaningful patterns you can trace through the flow of the Psalms. So, do not be content to read the book of Psalms as a random collection of poems. Rather, read the entire Psalms regularly to fully benefit from them throughout your life. Doing this will help you see the Psalms' beauty in all their God-glorifying arrangement. Strive to utilise them more meaningfully in prayer. For the Psalms show you that, as a child of God's grace, no matter what happens to you in life, you are never in a place where God's grace cannot find you and minister to your need. So, whether you need comfort, encouragement, understanding, or something more, God's Word in the Psalms will help you glorify God all the way to glory!

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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 evening, October 14
to
Wednesday evening, 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). Arrangements have been made for three presentations, one theological (on the history of the Presbyterian Church in Korea), one diaconal on diaconal ministry, and one missional, on outreach and cross-cultural communication. 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 borne by the church, not by the ICRC.